

Valentino Fioravanti
LE CANTATRICI VILLANE
(The Village Singers)

Alda Noni	Rosa
Ester Orell	Agata
Fernanda Cadoni	Giannetta
Sesto Bruscantini	Don Bucefalo
Franco Calabrese	Don Marco Bomba
Agostino Lazzari	Carlino

Orchestra of the
Alessandro Scarlatti Society of Naples
Mario Rossi
Public performance at the Teatro di Corte, Napoli
11 October 1951

Cimarosa
LE ASTUZIE FEMMINILI

Graziella Sciutti	Bellina
Sesto Bruscantini	Don Giampaolo
Franco Calabrese	Don Romualdo
Luigi Alva	Filandro
Renata Mattioli	Ersilia
Anna Maria Rota	Leonora

Chamber Orchestra "A Scarlatti"
Alessandro Scarlatti Society RAI Naples
Mario Rossi
Stage performance at Teatro di Corte, Naples
25 September 1959

Cimarosa: **IL MAESTRO DI CAPPELLA**
Giuseppe Taddei
Orchestra of RAI – Rome
Ettore Gracis
4 March 1953

& **MOZART** *Don Giovanni*: *Madamina* (Bruscantini); *Batti, batti* (Noni). **BELLINI** *La Sonnambula*: *Vi ravviso o luoghi ameni* (Bruscantini). **DONIZETTI** *L'elisir d'amore*: *Quanto amore* (Noni, Bruscantini). *Don Pasquale*: *Signorina, in tanto fretta* (Noni, Bruscantini) (all with Nino Sanzogno, RAI Turin O, 12/3/1951). **CIMAROSA** *Il matrimonio segreto*: *Udite, tutti uditre* (Bruscantini; Manno Wolf-Ferrari, cond; Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, 1950)

Review by Colin Clarke

Fanfare November / December 2019

Part of Immortal Performances' *Opere buffe* series, this is a wonderful coupling of Valentino Fioravanti's delightful *Le cantatrici villane* (The Village Singers) with Cimarosa's *Le astuzie femminili* (The Cunning Women); with, of course, a few of those oh-so-special fillers that have become such an unmissable part of the Immortal Performances experience.

The Fioravanti is heard in a music adaptation and orchestral arrangement by Renato Parodi, with the libretto adapted by Corrado Pavolini. Conductor Mario Rossi leads a vital account of the Orchestral Introduction. The opening Trio, between Rosa, Agata, and Giannetta, who all want to be prima donnas, is delivered with the lightest of voices, while Don Bacefalo, taken by Sesto Briscantini and sung in Neapolitan dialect, is beautifully accurate in its agile line. The trio which begins with Agata's "Io dirò" is a delight of Mozartian leanings, its contrasts here beautifully honored.

In the story, while the ladies might not be operatically trained, they certainly know what it means to be a diva. If things go awry, it can be the librettist's fault, or the conductor's fault: certainly, not theirs. Anything and everything goes when they are let loose on actual music, with malapropisms and chaos everywhere. And then there is Rosa's long-lost husband, Carlino, who arrives in military disguise (and, to make things worse, is not aware that he is presumed dead anyway) and the old Don Marco, in love with Rosa. A row about a harpsichord plays a part. That Fioravanti brings this all together in a sparkling score is miraculous. Somehow, there's a happy ending (facilitated by a bit of police bribery). Opera companies should remind themselves of this repertoire: In the UK, it would perhaps be perfect for the likes of Opera Holland Park, and I am sure there would be plenty of opportunities in the States. One hopes someone with some clout is reading this.

This is an ensemble piece at heart, and the stars here work beautifully together, act II particularly successful in this regard. The surprise for this writer was the honeyed lyricism of Agostino Lazzari as Carlino: his "Oh, sospirate mura" is a delicious outpouring of lyricism, with virtuoso elements surfacing as the piece progresses. There is something undeniably lovable about Franco Calabrese's Don Marco Bomba.

The transfer is expert; we hear so much orchestral detail. The original release was on a Cetra- Soria New York, a two-LP release. The

orchestra is ready to fizz over at a moment's notice in this performance, so the detail we are gifted with via the excellent transfer is essential, while tripping woodwind add delight. The score is beautifully constructed by Fioravanti. The first disc ends with no less than five bonus tracks, all taken from a Martini and Rossi Concert that united Bruscantini and Noni. A "Catalog Aria" from *Don Giovanni* by Bruscanini is as suave as can be, with each and every word audible, and with a core of lyricism later. Sanzogno is a fabulous accompanist. The "Batti, batti" from Noni is notable for its vocal beauty and sense of space. This is old-style Mozart, and not always absolutely together in the orchestra, but provides an amusing bonus. The move to Bellini is a good one: Bruscantini's "Vi ravviso" (*La Sonnambula*) has a line spun from silk, and we conclude with "Signorina, in tanta freta" from *Don Pasquale*. Fans of Immortal Performances will remember with relish the 1940 Met *Don Pasquale* with Baccaloni, Sayão and Brownlee, conducted by Fritz Busch. How lovely to hear the duet "Signorina, in tanto freta" here, as affectionate as you like. And to explore more Fioravanti? Well, there is a performance of *I virtuosi ambulanti* on Bongiovanni. And for a more modern performance of the present opera, again there is Bongiovanni, with a performance conducted by Roberto Tigani and reviewed in *Fanfare* 17:4, where David Johnson has some choice things to say about Cetra's edition.

And so, on to Cimarosa—and it is not *Il matrimonio segreto*, but instead *Le astuzie femminili* (The Cunning Women). Given that Cimarosa penned around 60 operas, it is high time some of the others got into the limelight. This opera was premiered in 1794, two years after *Il matrimonio*. The version we hear here is by Barbara Giuranna. The plot is of course paper thin, and that is being generous: A young couple foils the plot of a lecherous older man. It is of course luxury casting to have the young lovers sung by Graziella Sciutti (Bellina) and Luigi Alva (Filandro), while Bruscantini once more triumphs as the wonderfully named Don Giampaolo Lasagna, Bellina's prospective husband. The tape for *Le astuzie femminili* was provided by Gianni Simone. How wonderful it is to hear so much detail, the strings nicely balanced with no cruel top on the violins and the tight bass. As so often from this source, the transfer is beyond criticism.

Tempo changes are expertly managed by Rossi, who has a clear internal compass for this territory. Alva's ardent "Addio per sempre" is beautiful. Bruscantini is in fine voice: His "Son curioso di vedere" is a miracle of its kind. Graziella Sciutti is in fine voice: her "Sono allegra," shows her best attributes of pitch accuracy, glowing, sparkling voice, and perfect assumption of character. There is a wonderful section sung only to "la" that is utterly captivating. Cimarosa's balance of ensemble against solo arias reveals his fine

craftsmanship. As Erseilla, Renata Mattioli is a full-voiced interpreter, her "D'amor la face" not perhaps what we might these days call the epitome of style, but that's all part of the fun. Bruscantini is fabulous in "Stordito, ohime!," almost a patter song at times; his sense of drama is excellent. A word is due for the orchestra, and again it is the winds and horns that excel (there is a lovely clarinet solo before Luigi Alva's golden entrance in "Qui dolcemente spira"). The oft-repeated trope that Cimarosa's music is vapid and forgettable is dismissed by the lovely duet "Un palpito atroce" for Alva and Sciutti, while Anna Maria Rota finds great tenderness in the final stages of that second act. The solo string contributions in this act make for gorgeous textural contrast, especially against the beautifully illustrative string strokes in Bruscantini's beautifully burnished "Le figliore che son de vent'anni," an aria with the most suave melody. As the piece nears its end, Cimarosa starts to build momentum towards the end in a way that is not embarrassed by comparison to Mozart himself in his operas. One feels the sheer joy of invention, and additive invention at that. The climax here is a jubilant Russian dance, complete with stomping, and the enthusiasm here is infectious.

Il maestro di capella is separated from *Le astuzie femminili* by a single aria, "Udite, tutti udite" from act I of *Il matrimonio segreto*, with Bruscantini in typically charming form with the Orchestra of Maggio Musicale Fiorentino under Manno Wolf-Ferrari, a nephew of the Wolf-Ferrari. The performance of Cimarosa's *Il maestro di capella* originates from Radio Italiana Roma in March 1953. It is an intermezzo, premiered in 1793, and works supremely well as an entr'acte (as it has done on many occasions). It opens with a typically Cherubini clean-cut Overture, with cheeky, spiky woodwinds. Giuseppe Taddei, at the time only 36 and at the very height of his *buffo* powers, is the Maestro: The piece illustrates him rehearsing his players. The recording is miraculous in conveying the quality of Taddei's voice and its sheer commanding power, even more so than in revealing the orchestral nuances. The piece was also recorded by Fernando Corena in 1960. There are some uncredited but lovely violin and double bass solos. This is a remarkable release. I fervently hope to see more and more *opere buffe* from this source.