

Opera



Neil Fisher gets acquainted with Anton Rubinstein's epic Moses:

'The dominant metre is the gentle throb of Mendelssohn – and his pulsing choral climaxes – with a dash of Wagner' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



Alexandra Coghlan hears a Caesar-inspired album from Raffaele Pe:

'The stylistic span is broad, and we move from crisp Baroque rhythms to melting Mozartian grace' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**

Bellini



Norma

Sondra Radvanovsky *sop*..... Norma
Joyce DiDonato *mez*..... Adalgisa
Joseph Calleja *ten*..... Pollione
Matthew Rose *bass*..... Oroveso
Michelle Bradley *sop*..... Clotilde
Adam Diegel *ten*..... Flavio
Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera, New York / Carlo Rizzi

Stage director **Sir David McVicar**

Video director **Gary Halvorson**

Erato © 2 DVD 9029 56297-6;

© 9029 56297-5 (169' + 15' • NTSC • 16:9 •

1080i • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, October 7, 2017

Includes synopsis



This is the third filmed version of *Norma* to have appeared in the past year and, for me, the best – at least in musical terms.

Unlike its main rival, from Covent Garden, it features not only a compelling Norma but also an Adalgisa in danger of stealing the show as well as her man. In Sondra Radvanovsky and Joyce DiDonato the Met production has two singers at the height of their formidable powers.

Radvanovsky admittedly makes a bit of a slow start – you'll hear more seamless and melting 'Casta divas' elsewhere – but the voice only grows in authority as the evening progresses: firm and focused, and big and beautiful. And it is backed up by a formidable technical arsenal allied to the sort of grand, old-school artistry we see too rarely these days. DiDonato's artistry here is no less impressive and she's profoundly moving as a gamine, innocent and big-hearted Adalgisa, the voice, distinguished by a hint of quick vibrato, employed with imagination and a wonderful sense of *bel canto* style.

Beside these two, Joseph Calleja's Pollione (also heard on the Covent Garden film) offers virtues of a less subtle sort, perhaps, and he tires during the course

of his big Act 1 scene with Adalgisa.

The voice itself, bright and open and also characterised by a quick vibrato, is on a robuster form than elsewhere recently, and there's enormous pleasure to be had from singing of such generosity and ardency. Matthew Rose is on noble form as Oroveso, and watch out for Michelle Bradley's moving Clotilde, sung in an impressively rich and steady mezzo. Carlo Rizzi's love for the score comes across in every bar; he conducts the Met Orchestra superbly and they play gloriously for him.

David McVicar deserves praise for bringing out such moving acting from Radvanovsky and DiDonato in particular but the production itself is less satisfying. Robert Jones's set – a fantasy forest under which is hidden a vast fake-looking hut for Norma's home – resembles something out of *Lord of the Rings*, and the director piles in too many of the snarling, overacting extras of which he is so fond. Less here would certainly have been more, and the prosaic production adds little to the poetry of the singing – especially at the close. The camerawork for Met relays seems to be getting ever more tricky and over-elaborate, too. Happily, though, none of this significantly detracts from some glorious central performances, conducting and playing. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Pappano (OPAR) (1/18) DVD OAI247D;

ABD7225D

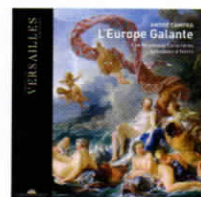
Campra

L'Europe galante

Caroline Mutel *sop*.....
Vénus/Une Espagnole/Olímpia/Roxane
Isabelle Druet *mez*.....
La Discorde/Doris/Une femme du Bal/Zaïde
Heather Newhouse *sop*..... Une Grâce/Céphise/
 Une Espagnole/Une femme du Bal
Anders Dahlin *ten*..... Philène/Dom Pedro/Octavio
Nicolas Courjal *bass*.....
 Silvandre/Dom Carlos/Zuliman
Jérémy Delvert *bar*..... Le Bostangis

Les Nouveaux Caractères / Sébastien d'Herin
 Château de Versailles Spectacles © 2 CVS002
 (123' • DDD)

Includes libretto and translation



Incredibly, this is the first complete recording of Campra's innovative *opéra-ballet*

L'Europe galante (1697); La Petite Bande and Gustav Leonhardt recorded only extracts in 1973. It is one of several flagship releases launching the new label of Château de Versailles, where Les Nouveaux Caractères' spirited performance was recorded. Sébastien d'Herin directs with optimal attention to effervescent small details, occasionally at the expense of broader brush-strokes – from time to time the quick-paced momentum of the music-making could afford to relax in the service of gentler gracefulness. The vividness of the orchestral playing guarantees manifold colours and moods, although there are a few numbers in which the trigger-happy percussionist might have valued discretion as the better part of valour (a Canaries dance towards the end of the prologue sounds like a pantomime donkey has clattered on to the stage).

In the prologue, Discord bickers superciliously with the offended Venus's insistence that love is to be found all over the nations of Europe. The first entrée (France) is a pastoral depiction of the transient amorous loyalties of fickle shepherds – Nicolas Courjal's ardent Silvandre arranges a divertissement to entertain the immune Céphise, whose dulcet beauty is given instant credence by Heather Newhouse's silken singing of her entrance air (bemoaning that she is heartily fed up with all the attention she gets every few days from different men). It transpires that only two days earlier Silvandre had sworn undying love to Doris – who concludes the entrée with a heartbroken soliloquy sung touchingly by Isabelle Druet. The second entrée is a pair of quixotic Spaniards singing their night-time serenades under the balconies of their respective mistresses; Dom Pedro's sensual *sommeil* is sung mellifluously by Anders



Norma from the Met: Sondra Radvanovsky and Joyce DiDonato give glorious performances as Bellini's central characters

Dahlin, accompanied by melancholic strings and soft flutes (this chaconne alone is worth the price of admission), whereas under a nearby balcony Dom Carlos (not that one) sings an impassioned love song of a broodier character. It is unsurprising that castanets make a noisy appearance in the Spanish dances – clearly the whole street is going to be awoken – but a little Spanish song sung ‘by a lady musician’ is delivered by Caroline Mutel with impeccable translucence.

The third entrée is a Venetian masked ball: Olimpia rebuffs the jealous Octavio, who pretends to murder his rival but is then despondent upon witnessing her grief. Assorted little airs with chorus refrains and chaconnes for the masqueraders feature excellent contributions from the woodwinds. The last entrée is set in a Turkish seraglio; the slave Zäide (not that one) and Roxane compete for the attention of the sultan Zuliman; after Roxane attempts to stab her rival, the sultan opts decisively for Zäide (whose opening soliloquy professing her unrequited love is sung eloquently by Druet). The celebration of the triumph of love culminates in a lively succession of songs, choruses and dances for the

Ottoman imperial guards, including a janissary band of percussion that is performed spicily. Having been an obvious lacuna in the discography for so long, this is essential listening for all admirers of French Baroque opera. **David Vickers**

Korngold

Das Wunder der Heliane

Annemarie Kremer *sop* Heliane
Aris Argiris *bar* Ruler
Ian Storey *ten* Stranger
Katerina Hebelková *contr* Messenger
Frank van Hove *bass* Gatekeeper
Nutthaporn Thammathi *ten* Blind Judge
György Hanczár *ten* Young Man
Oper Freiburg Chorus; Freiburg Bach Choir;
Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Fabrice Bollon
 Naxos ® © 8 660410/12 (162' • DDD)

Includes synopsis



A new recording of *Das Wunder der Heliane* is, by definition, an event.

The premiere recording in 1993 marked the launch of Decca's seminal Entartete Musik series, and to some extent lifted the

jinx on the opera that Korngold considered his masterpiece, and whose troubled birth in 1927 blighted his later career. A massive, allegorical drama of love's triumph over evil, composed in a style that is (to quote Michael Haas) 'not so much post-romantic as hyper-romantic', *Heliane's* opulence, mysticism and vaulting ambition makes *Die Frau ohne Schatten* look like *Hänsel und Gretel*.

This new release from Naxos is only the second complete recording: a venture which, whatever its strengths and failings, deserves respect. First impressions are good, with Fabrice Bollon conducting the heavenly-chorus prelude in a warm, sculpted sweep of music, the Freiburg forces clearly unfazed by the multi-layered intricacy of Korngold's orchestral writing. The story concerns a tyrannical Ruler, his unhappy wife Heliane and a compassionate, Christ-like Stranger, and *Heliane* really stands or falls on these three roles.

The original 1927 production featured Lotte Lehmann and Jan Kiepura, no less; the concert performances from which this recording was made have altogether less star-power. Which is not to say that the singing is unattractive, though taken as a whole it's on the pale side. You do sense