

GREAT SOPRANO ARIAS II

PUCCINI • VERDI • TCHAIKOVSKY • MASSENET
CILEA • OFFENBACH • AND MORE

Richardson • Queensland Symphony Orchestra
Kamirski



GREAT SOPRANO ARIAS II

- GIUSEPPE VERDI 1813-1901
- 1** **Pace, pace, mio Dio** (Peace, O my God) from *La forza del destino* (The Force of Destiny) 5'09
- WILLIAM WALTON 1902-1983
- 2** **How can I sleep** from *Troilus and Cressida* 4'25
- JACQUES OFFENBACH 1819-1880
- 3** **Elle a fui, la tourterelle** (She has flown, your turtledove) from *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (The Tales of Hoffmann) 4'04
- JULES MASSENET 1842-1912
- 4** **Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux** (Weep mine eyes) from *Le cid* 4'53
- GUSTAVE CHARPENTIER 1860-1956
- 5** **Depuis le jour** (Since the day) from *Louise* 4'45
- ENRIQUE GRANADOS 1867-1916
- 6** **La Maja y el Ruiseñor** (Maja and the Nightingale) from *Goyescas* 6'20
- LUIGI DALLAPICCOLA 1904-1975
- 7** **Signora Fabien's Scene** from *Vole di notte* (Night Flight) 7'32
- GIACOMO PUCCINI 1858-1924
- 8** **O mio babbino caro** (O my beloved father) from *Gianni Schicchi* 2'01
- FRANCESCO CILEA 1866-1950
- 9** **Io son l'umile ancella** (I am the humble handmaid) from *Adriana Lecouvreur* 2'58
- 10** **Poveri fiori** (Poor flowers) from *Adriana Lecouvreur* 2'31
- PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY 1840-1893
- 11** **Tatjana's Letter Scene** from *Eugene Onegin* 12'49
- Total Playing Time 58'10

Marilyn Richardson soprano

Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Vladimir Kamirski conductor

Verdi's four-act opera *La forza del destino* (The Force of Destiny) is a truly international affair. Set in 18th-century Spain, but sung in Italian, it was premiered in the far-away Russian city of St Petersburg. Early in the opera, Donna Leonora di Vargas takes up the life of a hermit after her lover Alvaro has accidentally killed her father. Towards the end of Act IV, she sings **Pace, pace, mio Dio**, meditating on the effects of this horrible mischance, which has not only taken her father from her, but also estranged her from her lover. Verdi later revised the opera for Milan in 1869, by which time he considered that it had become rather old-fashioned, especially in comparison with his recent *Don Carlos*, an opera less reliant on popular set pieces as this one.

Though immediately successful when premiered at Covent Garden in 1954, Walton's only full-length opera *Troilus and Cressida* has not been so widely performed subsequently as other British operas of the time, notably Britten's *Billy Budd* and Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*. Set in Troy, around the 12th century BC, Christopher Hassall's libretto is an imaginative reconstruction of the love affair between Troilus, Prince of Troy, and Cressida, daughter of a traitorous high priest. While the character of Troilus is based on a figure from antiquity, the story itself and the character of Cressida are medieval inventions, popularised in the work of Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare. At the beginning of Act II, Cressida is alone late at night in her chamber. In her soliloquy **How can I sleep?**, she realises, against her better judgement, that she is in love with her admirer, Troilus. Though once she vowed never to love again, and has long been protective of her freedom, she acknowledges herself to be one of the warrior prince's spoils-of-war: 'I surrender, bear me away, Troilus, friend and foe, Troilus, my conqueror'. Later in the opera, Troilus is to die at her traitor-father's hand, and Cressida – bereft – suicides.

Jacques Offenbach left his most famous opera, *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (The Tales of Hoffmann), partly unfinished upon his death in 1880. All he was waiting for, to tidy up a few last details of the work, was word that Paris's Opéra Comique had scheduled it for staging. As he wrote to the Comique's director, Carvahlo: "Hurry up and stage my opera. I haven't very much time left, and my only wish is to attend the opening night." Unfortunately, his wish was not fulfilled. Offenbach died months before the premiere, and the orchestration of the third act and epilogue had to be completed by Ernest Guiraud. At the beginning of Act III, the invalid Antonia is sitting at a harpsichord, singing this *romance*, **Elle a fui, la tourterelle** which is about her love for Hoffmann and wondering if he is keeping faith with her. Antonia's father (yet another of the opera world's

well-meaning but misguided parents) has parted from her lover, locking her away in the belief that Hoffmann had a part in her illness, which (oddly, given this exquisite piece) is supposed to have deprived her of her beautiful singing voice.

Set in Spain in the 11th century, Massenet's seldom performed opera *Le Cid* tells the story of the heroic knight Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar. To defend the honour of his own family, Rodrigo is forced to kill the father of his betrothed, Chimène. Later, while awaiting punishment for this deed, he is ordered to the battlefield to fight for the King. To open Act III, the still grief-stricken Chimène sings the lament **Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux**, for her dead father. However when, at its end, the murderer Rodrigo appears to farewell her, perhaps for the last time, she is forced to admit that she still loves him, despite everything.

Charpentier was a prize-winning student of Massenet at the Paris Conservatoire in the 1880s. While living in bohemian Montmartre, he conceived his first major operatic success, *Louise*. Its premiere followed closely on the heels of Puccini's *La bohème*, another work which eschewed opera's hitherto regular lineup of mythic plots and ancient heroes, for a *verismo* preference for ordinary characters and present-day scenarios. Indeed, *Louise* could easily have been the story of one of Charpentier's own Montmartre neighbours. The heroine, Louise, leaves her respectable but embittered working-class family to live with Julien, a poor artist. In her famous Act III aria, **Depuis le jour**, Louise sings of the unalloyed delight which her love has brought her. Only later is her happiness to be clouded by disputes with her family, notably her father.

Granados's last opera, *Goyescas*, was premiered in New York on 26 January 1916 to great acclaim. The composer himself saw it as opening up 'a whole world of ideas' which he hoped to explore in the future. However, on the return sea trip to Spain, his boat was torpedoed by a German submarine. He was picked up in a lifeboat, but when he saw that his wife was still struggling in the water, he dived in to save her. Both of them were drowned. Granados, who always saw his life as a reflection of his art, could not have imagined a more romantic death. The opera, which is partly based on music from Granados' successful piano suite of the same name, tells the story of one of the *majas*, or flashy young women, to be found in the paintings of the Spanish artist Goya. Granados gives her the name Rosario, and in the Third Tableau we find her in her garden by

moonlight, wondering if the grief of which the nightingale sings can be as great as her own (**La Maja y el Ruiseñor**). Her lover, Fernando, is about to fight a duel on her behalf, and she seems to know that he will die in his attempt to win her hand.

Luigi Dallapiccola's first opera, the one-act *Volo di notte*, had the extraordinary misfortune to be premiered only three weeks before Italy's fascist regime entered the Second World War. However, the fact that it made it to the stage at all now seems equally extraordinary, for the opera is a barely disguised protest against the evils of dictatorship. The work is set entirely in the offices of Buenos Aires airport, where the dictatorial Rivière, a hard-nosed airline director, risks the lives of his pilots by forcing them to fly at night. Early in the opera one pilot barely escapes death. Later another, Fabien, calls in to report he is in serious trouble. A radio operator repeats his last words to the audience as his plane falls into the sea. Fabien's wife appears in this moving scene to try and convince the implacable Rivière to change his murderous policy (**Signora Fabien's Scene**). At the time he produced *Vole di notte* (based on a novel by the French novelist Saint-Exupéry) Dallapiccola was deeply interested in the music of the Second Viennese School, particularly Berg, whom he was lucky enough to meet shortly before the Austrian's death in 1935. His second opera *Il prigioniero* (The Prisoner), completed after the war, is his best-known work.

Gianni Schicchi is the last of Puccini's 'Il trittico', a triple-bill of one-act operas premiered at New York's Metropolitan Opera in 1918. In this, perhaps the most famous aria in all of the three operas, Schicchi's daughter Lauretta tells her 'beloved father' that she is in love with the handsome and well-heeled Rinuccio (**O mio babbino caro**). Unfortunately, Rinuccio's family despises her peasant origins, and so she must rely on her cunning father to ingratiate himself somehow with the relatives. How does he do this is the gist of the opera's antic plot. However, in the meantime, to ensure compliance, Lauretta warns Schicchi that she is prepared to throw herself off the Ponte Vecchio if he fails to bring about her marriage.

These days Francesco Cilea is remembered almost solely for his four-act drama *Adriana Lecouvreur*, premiered in Milan in 1902. Adriana is a principal actor at Paris' Comédie-Française in 1730. In her first aria **Io son l'umile ancella**, she describes herself as a vessel for the creator spirit who 'gives me speech'. Later, love rather than art is on her mind. In her Act IV aria **Poveri fiori** she discovers a

bunch of violets which she had given to her lover Maurizio, the previous evening. Now wilted, they seem to represent the dying of Maurizio's love for her.

Tchaikovsky himself was partly responsible for the libretto of *Eugene Onegin* which is based on the verse-novel of the same name by Pushkin. Tatjana's famous letter scene is one of the opera's early highlights. A romantically inclined young woman, Tatjana has fallen secretly in love with a stranger, the elegant Onegin. In her Act I Scene 2 soliloquy, **Tatjana's Letter Scene**, she writes him a letter telling him how she feels. Her fears of rejection (soon to be realised), together with her embarrassment at baring her soul before him, fuel an inner conflict which is the real subject of the scene. Tchaikovsky's dramatic and volatile treatment takes the form of a succession of continuous episodes which range freely from recitative to aria-like passages.

Graeme Skinner



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Recording Engineer Robert Hobson

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