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Opera Overtures, Choruses and Duets

Nicolai · Smetana · Humperdinck · Wagner · Verdi · von Reznicek · von Suppé
Strauss, Sohn · Bizet · Mascagni · Leoncavallo · Mozart · von Flotow
Gounod · Weber · Donizetti · Lortzing

Opera Overtures, Choruses and Duets

CD1 Overtures 67'39

Otto Nicolai 1810-1849

1. Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor /
The Merry Wives of Windsor 8'33

Staatskapelle Berlin
Bernhard Klee *conductor*

Bedřich Smetana 1824-1884

2. Die verkaufte Braut /
The Bartered Bride 6'23

Engelbert Humperdinck 1854-1921

3. Hänsel und Gretel 7'47

Staatskapelle Dresden
Otmar Suitner *conductor*

Richard Wagner 1813-1883

4. Der fliegende Holländer /
The Flying Dutchman 11'29

Gewandhausorchester Leipzig
Franz Konwitschny *conductor*

Giuseppe Verdi 1813-1901

5. La Traviata 3. Akt / *Act 3* 4'08

Staatskapelle Dresden
Guisepppe Patané *conductor*

Emil Nikolaus von Reznicek 1860-1945
6. Donna Diana 4'15

Dresdner Philharmonie
Herbert Kegel *conductor*

Franz von Suppé 1819-1895

7. Dichter und Bauer /
Poet and Peasant 9'14
8. Leichte Kavallerie /
Light Cavalry 7'09

Staatskapelle Dresden
Otmar Suitner *conductor*

Johann Strauss, Sohn 1825-1899

9. Die Fledermaus / *The Bat* 7'56

Bamberger Symphoniker
Manfred Honeck *conductor*

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CD2 Opera Choruses 66'30

Giuseppe Verdi 1812-1901

1. Otello – Fuoco di gioia /
Fire of Rejoicing 2'42

Georges Bizet 1838-1875

2. Carmen – Les voci la Quadrille! /
*There she comes, they're
dancing the quadrille* 4'05

Richard Wagner 1813-1883

3. Der Fliegende Holländer – Summ
und brumm, du gutes Rädchen /
*Humm, humm, spin my
little wheel* 3'38

Pietro Mascagni 1863-1945

4. Cavalleria rusticana - Ah! Gli
arancio lezzano /
*The green meadows are
fragrant with oranges* 7'08

Ruggero Leoncavallo 1858-1919

5. Pagliacci – Don din dan / *Dong-
dong calls the bell from yonder* 2'38

Richard Wagner

6. Lohengrin – Treulich geführt ziehet
dahin / *Faithfully guided, come
to this place* 4'41

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart 1756-1791

7. Die Zauberflöte –
O Isis und Osiris 2'35

Otto Nicolai 1810-1849

8. Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor –
O süßer Mond /
Oh lovely Moon 3'53

Friedrich von Flotow 1812-1883

9. Martha – Mädchen brav und treu /
Maidens good and true 2'48

Giuseppe Verdi

10. Aida – Gloria all'Egitto /
Glory to Egypt 6'57

Charles Gonoud 1818-1893

Margarete

11. *Vin au bière / Wine and beer* 5'04
12. *Gloire immortelle /
Eternal Glory* 2'51

Carl Maria von Weber 1786-1826

13. *Der Freischütz – Was gleicht wohl
auf Erden dem jägervergnügen /
What pleasure on earth can
compare with the hunter's* 2'35

Gaetano Donizetti 1797-1848

14. *Don Pasquale – Che interminabile
andirivieni /
What an interminable coming
and going* 3'48

Richard Wagner

15. *Tannhäuser – Freudig begrüßen
wir die edle Halle /
Joyfully we greet the noble hall* 6'37

Giuseppe Verdi

16. *Nabucco – Va, pensiero, sull'
ali dorate /
Fly away, free thought,
on the wings of yearning* 4'21

Chor der Deutschen Staatsoper Berlin
Ernst Stoy *chorus master*
Kinderchor des Philharmonischen Chores
Dresden (2)
Wolfgang Berger *chorus master*
Staatskapelle Berlin
Otmar Suitner *conductor*

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CD3 Duets from famous operas 50'52

Bedřich Smetana 1824-1884

1. *Die verkaufte Braut – Komm, mein
Söhnen, auf ein Wort / Wer in Lieb
entbrannt (Duet Kezal – Hans)* 7'52

Charles Gronoud 1818-1893

2. *Margarete – Ich bin da!
Was soll das Estauern?
(Duet Mephisto - Faust)* 7'26

Georges Bizet 1838-1875

3. *Die Perlenfischer – Am Abend war's
/ Der Tempel Brahmas strahlt
(Duet Zurg – Nadir)* 6'07

Giuseppe Verdi 1813-1901

4. *Die Macht des Schicksals –
Die Stunde is heilig
(Duet Alvaro – Carlos)* 4'11

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart 1756-1791

5. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail –
Vivat Bacchus, Bacchus lebe
(Duet Pedrillo – Osmin)* 2'02

Albert Lortzing 1801-1851

Undine

6. *Ich war in meinen jungen Jahren /
Im Wein ist Wahrheit
(Duet Hans – Veit)* 4'39
7. *Was seh' ich? Ihr seid glücklich
wider da / O wie köstlich ist das
Reisen (Duet Hans – Veit)* 6'46

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Die Zauberföte

8. *Die Weisheitslehre dieser Knaben
(Szene Tamino, Stimme,
Priester)* 6'19
9. *Bewahret euch vor Weibertücken
(Duett Zwaiter Priester –
Sprecher)* 0'51
10. *Pamina, wo bist du
(Duett Tamino – Pagageno)* 3'40

Peter Schreier *tenor*

Theo Adam *bass*

Staatskapelle Dresden

Otmar Suitner *conductor*

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Sometime in the mid-18th century, the operatic overture evolved from a multi-movement piece entirely independent of the opera it preceded into music that was linked with and designed to evoke the atmosphere or content of what was to follow, sometimes but not always drawing on material from the opera itself. Some composers simply strung together the principal numbers in a pot-pourri of its “greatest hits”, others selected elements of the opera to create a symphonic impression of the whole. The overture to Otto Nicolai’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1846-7) takes most of its material from the Act 3 chorus *O süßer Mond* (which is performed on track 8 of CD 2) and the music depicting the children disguised as fairies to fool Falstaff, themes which are then blended with the lilting melody associated with Anne Page and blundering motif of the fat knight himself. Smetana on the other hand used very little actual material from *The Bartered Bride* (1866) in its overture, probably because he composed it before he began work on the opera itself or even knew full details of the libretto. Thus it does not include any of the dances for which the opera has become famous but instead evokes in breathless fashion the confusion and intrigue of the plot. Engelbert Humperdinck, one of Wagner’s assistants at Bayreuth, preferred to describe the music which opens *Hansel and Gretel* (1893) as a *Prelude* rather than an overture, a Wagnerian term which is certainly appropriate to it. Although the opera is full of catchy tunes, the *Prelude* focuses on the solemn melody of the *Evening Prayer* which Humperdinck blends with a snatch of the Witch’s “hocus pocus” theme and the triumphant peroration in which all her victims return to life to create a musical tapestry reminiscent of and surely a homage to the *Mastersingers* overture.

The overture to Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman* (first version 1841) is perhaps the most striking example of a symphonic condensation of an opera’s essence. The thrilling representation of the Dutchman’s storm-tossed ship (based on Wagner’s own experience of a rough crossing of the North Sea) is followed by the motifs representing Senta (taken from her *Ballade*) and the Dutchman, doomed eternally

to sail the seas until he finds a woman who will pledge herself to him. These are developed with the jaunty Norwegian sailors’ dance and “redemption” motif with the closing pages following the opera’s ending exactly (and each time Wagner made changes to this, he also modified the corresponding passages in the overture, to keep it closely aligned to the music of the opera). The bleak character of the final act of Verdi’s *La Traviata* (1852-3) is prefigured by an orchestra pared down to sixteen violins which initially reprise the music of the Act 1 introduction before embarking on a yearning melodic line. It rises to a passionate climax before dying away, as the curtain rises to reveal the bedroom where Violetta lies close to death.

While these overture are still heard in the context of the operas for which they were written, the following survive only as concert pieces. The classically constructed overture to *Donna Diana* (1894) is the only work by which Emil Nikolaus Freiherr von Reznicek, composer, conductor and military bandmaster is now remembered and gives no hint of the opera’s Spanish setting. Franz von Suppé (or Francesco Ezechiele Ermenegildo Cavaliere di Suppé-Demelli to give him his full name) was one of the pioneers of the Viennese operetta although *Poet and Peasant* (1846) from beginning of his long career was not much more than a comic play with songs. The overture had in fact been used twice before by Suppé and so has absolutely no connection with it (like the much re-used overture to Rossini’s *Barber of Seville*). Although the romantic plot of *Light Cavalry* (1866) does involve a troop of Hungarian Hussars, the “light cavalry” of the title was in fact a ballet troupe. The overture however sticks to the military theme with its fanfares, Hungarian melodies and famous gallop. Johann Strauss II built the overture to *Die Fledermaus* (1873-4) from tantalising snatches of music from the opera, some of which make only fleeting appearances in the work itself. The opening outburst which appears once in Act 3 is followed by the striking clock which signals the end of the Act 2 party, then the principal waltz from earlier in that Act and Rosina’s lament from Act 1. Thus while creating a satisfying introduction of the work and one which can be enjoyed as an independent

piece, Strauss keeps many of his musical “aces” up his sleeve to be discovered in the opera itself.

While an opera chorus can be nothing more than a vehicle for thrilling vocal display, it can also be used to set the scene, comment on the action or advance the storyline. Choruses such as *Fuoco di gioia* from Act 1 of *Otello* in which the people of Cyprus sing and dance around their fires after welcoming Othello to the island and *Was gleicht wohl auf Erden dem jägerevergnügen* from *Der Freischütz* where the huntsmen sing of the joys of the hunt, provide colourful atmosphere but are not intrinsic to the storyline. *O süßer Mond* from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* sets the scene for the nocturnal events in Windsor Forest and these choruses from *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci* help to create a happy, carefree atmosphere - villagers greeting the spring day and processing to church respectively - soon to be dispelled when the turbulent events of the plots result in murder. *Martha* takes place in England during the reign of Queen Anne, and its plot line is set in motion at the Richmond Fair where servant girls traditionally find employment for the following year. The crowd encourages them to advertise their particular skills and talents and when an aristocratic lady thinks it fun to masquerade as a one of them, she ends up being hired by a farmer.

Some choruses are used to set the scene for or accompany the action: in Gounod's *Faust* students, soldiers and townspeople carouse at the kermesse before Faust has his fateful first meeting with Marguerite, and later soldiers sing as they return from the war, bringing her brother Valentin who will confront Faust and be killed by him. In *Les voïci* from *Carmen*, the crowd greets the matadors and toreadors as they parade into the bullring; the chorus of bridesmaids sing to Elsa as she goes to her wedding with Lohengrin (an event which does not end happily for her although this unfortunate association has not prevented the melody from accompanying brides down the aisle ever since); in *Freudig begrüßen wir die edle Halle* the guests of the Landgrave of Thuringia process into the great hall of the Wartburg before the song contest between

Tannhauser and Wolfram; and in what is perhaps the most famous processional chorus of all, the people of Egypt acclaim Radames as he leads his victorious army and their Ethiopian prisoners across the stage in Act 2 of *Aida* (1872).

More closely integrated into the plot is the spinning chorus from *The Flying Dutchman* in which the Norwegian women talk of their lovers as they spin, provoking Senta to sing her ballad of the legend of cursed sea captain whom she is just about to meet; in *Oh Isis und Osiris* Sarastro and his priests ask the gods to guide and support Tamino and Pamina as they are about to undergo their trials by fire and water (in this recording it is sung by the chorus alone); and the servants of Don Pasquale provide a running commentary on all the problems their master is experiencing as an old man recently “married” to a young wife (although the marriage in fact a sham). One of the most celebrated of all opera choruses is *Va pensiero* from *Nabucco* (1842) in which the exiled Israelites sing of their lost homeland. It was to become the anthem of the Italian Risorgimento, the movement which sought to free Italy from foreign rule and unify the various Italian states into a nation. When Verdi died in 1900 the crowds lining the route of his funeral procession spontaneously began singing it in grateful remembrance of Italy's greatest composer.

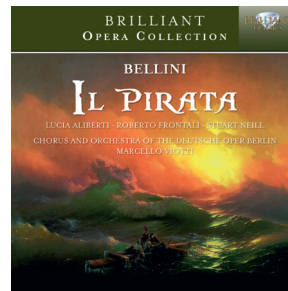
Given the generally romantic nature of operatic plots, most duets involve a man and a woman. There are however several examples for the male voice and CD3 contains a selection of those for tenor and bass performed here by Peter Schreier and Theo Adam (some of which are taken from operas featured elsewhere on this set): between Kecal the marriage broker and the reluctant bridegroom Jeník from *The Bartered Bride*, Mephistopheles and Faust in Gounod's opera, the rival lovers in Bizet's *Pearl Fishers* – perhaps the most famous male voice operatic duet of all (sung here like the previous number, in German); the sworn enemies Alvaro and Carlos from Verdi's *The Force of Destiny*. Also included are the duet between Hans the cellarman and Veit the Squire from Lortzing's little known supernatural opera *Undine* and Osmin and Pedrillo's celebration of wine drinking from *Die Entführung*.

Schreier and Adam also perform Tamino's exchanges with the Speaker from Act 1 and the duet for the two priests from Act 2 of *The Magic Flute* and end the set with a rarely heard number associated with that opera, *Pamina wo bist du* whose authenticity is suspect and usually omitted in performance, but which is a charming piece nonetheless.

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Cover: Concert given by Cardinal De La Rochefoucauld at the Argentina Theatre in Rome (1747), by Giovanni Paolo Pannini or Panini (1691/2-1765). Louvre, Paris, France

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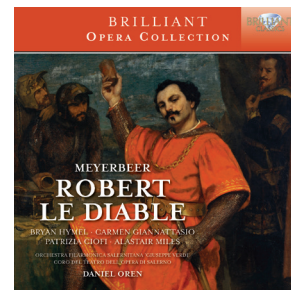
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