

restrained in 'Lascia ch'io pianga', ornamenting the repeats tastefully, and brings a flirtatious lightness of touch to Cleopatra's entrance aria 'Non disperar', bafflingly placed several tracks after 'Se pietà'.

In two of Handel's most poignant duets Yoncheva rather outguns mezzo Karine Deshayes, who sings well enough but finds the tessitura of the Theodora duet, especially, uncomfortably low. Here, as in 'Se pietà', the mournful counterpoints of the single bassoon (Handel prescribes two) are too faintly balanced. Paid-up fans of the glamorous-voiced soprano, not so much fast-rising, as the blurb has it, but fully risen, will ignore any provisos. Others should enjoy this disc as long as they are happy to hear Handel's slower arias refracted through a *bel canto* prism.

Richard Wigmore

Mozart

La clemenza di Tito

Kurt Streit *ten*Tito
 Karina Gauvin *sop.* Vitellia
 Kate Lindsey *mez.* Sesto
 Julie Boulianne *mez.* Annio
 Julie Fuchs *sop.* Servilia
 Robert Gleadow *bass-bar.* Publio
 Ensemble Aedes; Le Cercle de l'Harmonie /
 Jérémie Rhorer
 Alpha ② ALPHA270 (133' • DDD • S/T/t)
 Recorded live at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées,
 Paris, December 16, 2014



By all accounts, Denis Podalydès's updated production of Mozart's late

opera seria in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, set in a 1930s hotel, was an agglomeration of modern directors' clichés. But, as so often, the music was far better served, as we can hear in this live recording. Jérémie Rhorer confirmed his Mozartian sympathies in his recent *Entführung* (9/16); and except for the odd controversial tempo at both ends of the spectrum (as in the hell-for-leather end of Sesto's 'Parto, parto'), conducts Mozart's score with an acute feel for its distinctive *tinta* and rhetoric. Rhorer is alive to the serene, classical beauty and nobility that made *Tito* one of Mozart's most popular works in the decades after his death. Yet from the moment the Overture tumbles into the dialogue between the hopelessly smitten Sesto and the overwrought Vitellia, we sense that this will be a performance of life-and-death intensity. Recitatives, in particular, are as alive as in any recording I know,

animated by the swirling, smouldering fortepiano, which, like the even more flamboyant continuo in René Jacobs's recording, becomes a hyperactive commentator on the drama.

Much of the success of *La clemenza di Tito* hinges on the performances of the singers playing Vitellia and Sesto. Karina Gauvin and Kate Lindsey do not disappoint. Both present credible, vulnerable characters, vivid both in their soliloquies and their interaction. Gauvin may lack the sulphurous chest notes and dangerous sexual allure of Alexandrina Pendatchanska for Jacobs, yet her Vitellia, balancing neurotic hauteur with a sense of classical style (never Pendatchanska's forte), is superbly sung and powerfully acted (though I could have done without the cackles of derisive laughter in Act 1). Few sopranos in the role match her combination of agility, vocal grandeur and subtle phrasing, not least in the tender, rueful opening of her final scena, 'Non più di fiori'. If Lindsey, with her supple, glowing mezzo, is stretched by the precipitate tempo at the close of 'Parto, parto' (where the superb obbligato clarinet is unfazed), hers is another finely sung, intensely 'lived' performance. Both her big scenas, poignantly charting each phase of Sesto's anguished vacillations, rightly bring the house down.

Vastly experienced both as Idomeneo and Tito, Kurt Streit's lyric tenor still sounds sweet when he sings softly, as in his opening aria, though it now grows tight under pressure. It is always a challenge for the singer to make much of the character of Tito, as much a symbolic ideal as an individual. But Streit convincingly embodies both the Emperor's innate goodness and his agonies over the conflicting duties of office. The minor but crucial roles of Annio and Servilia are well taken by the rich-toned Canadian mezzo Julie Boulianne (deeply touching in Annio's plea to Tito to spare Sesto's life) and the crystalline soprano Julie Fuchs. Fuchs's exquisite shaping of Servilia's 'S'altro che lagrime' – music poised between Zerlina's 'Vedrai carino' and the *Adagio* of the Clarinet Concerto – makes this aria the true Mozartian moment of redemptive grace. The orchestral sound is a shade dry, and you'll have to put up with intermittent stage noise. Yet while Jacobs's thrilling performance – too eccentric for some, I know – would still be my first choice, Rhorer's is a vivid, dramatically compelling addition to the impressive *Tito* discography. **Richard Wigmore**

Selected comparison:

Jacobs (6/06) (HARM) HMC90 1923/4

Mozart

Così fan tutte - Ei parte...Per pietà, ben mio; Temerari! Sortitel...Come scoglio; Una donna a quindici anni. *Don Giovanni* - Ah fuggi il traditor; In quali eccessi...Mi tradi quell' alma; Non me lo credi?... Batti, batti, o bel Masetto. *Le nozze di Figaro* - Overture; Giunse alfin il momento...Deh vieni non tardar; Non so più cosa son; Porgi amor; Voi che sapete. *Bella mia fiamma...Resta, oh cara*, K528. *Misera, dove son!*, K369

Anett Fritsch *sop*

Munich Radio Orchestra / Alessandro De Marchi

Orfeo © C903 161A (61' • DDD • T/t)



Anett Fritsch's Mozart is a sheer delight. This is no bland essay of the usual suspects painted in anonymous colours but a vivid portrait gallery of characters that Fritsch has actually played on stage. She presents multiple characters from the three da Ponte operas and they're all beautifully variegated, all coming across as living, breathing individuals. Fritsch's is a light soprano – not unlike Maria Bengtsson's, whose Mozart disc I reviewed last month – but she does so much more with the text and characterisation.

Her Cherubino is breathless with hormonal excitement ('Voi che sapete' wonderfully ornamented in the repeat), her Countess aches with pain. Fritsch does marvels with the text, clearly understanding every word. Her Susanna is coquettish, with rolled Rs in 'dolce susurro' making my heart skip a beat.

Donna Elvira is tormented and slightly unhinged, allowing touches of bluster into her coloratura, whereas Zerlina is all sweetness and innocence, demonstrating plenty of agility in the closing phrases of 'Batti, batti', which is taken at a sprightly pace. High notes are coloured imaginatively. Fiordiligi's 'Per pietà' is earnest, verging on desperate, while there's a stoic, impassioned quality to 'Come scoglio'. Even Despina – who I usually find an irritant – is irresistible here, a saucy minx determined to liberate *Così*'s sisters. Fritsch follows this up with two superb concert arias. Perhaps I'm being greedy, but I'd have loved a souvenir of her Pamina too.

From the very first bars of the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, with punchy 'historically informed' woodwinds and bristling strings, the playing of the Munich Radio Orchestra under Alessandro De Marchi instantly makes you sit up and listen. A jewel of a disc.

Mark Pullinger