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Presto interview - Anna Bonitatibus on Semiramide



by Katherine Cooper. 25th June 2014

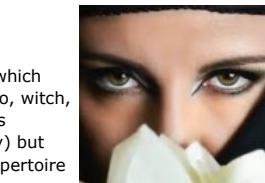
The ancient Babylonian queen Semiramide is surely rivalled only by Cleopatra in terms of the myths, legends and conflicting narratives which have grown up around her. Represented variously as goddess, virago, witch, warrior, seductress and matriarch, she has inspired dozens of operas (proving a particularly popular subject during the eighteenth century) but only Rossini's *Semiramide* (1823) has established itself as part of the core operatic repertoire today.

The Italian mezzo Anna Bonitatibus's fascinating new project seeks to redress this balance, taking us on a journey which begins with Porpora and ends with Rossini (unearthing rarities by Caldara, Traetta, Meyerbeer and many others along the way) and exploring the many contrasting faces of the character and different versions of her story.

Almost all of these arias are world premiere recordings, and range from virtuoso fireworks to hauntingly simple laments. The two-CD set also comes with a series of illuminating essays by Anna on Semiramide, her myths and her music; you can also watch a rather fabulous short film-trailer, shot on location in Italy, via the link on the product-page below.

Anna's long been one of my favourite bel canto and baroque singers, and so it was a particular pleasure to pick her brains on this project a few days ago...

Photograph @Consonarte: Frank Bonitatibus


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Semiramide is such a fascinating, multi-faceted character - when did you first fall under her spell, and how did you set about researching her story and her music?

It was one of my wishes to work on a new project that could recount just how important Music, Opera, and Art in general is to our lives today more than ever despite those who think that opera is near to an end and recordings are just a question of marketing and business. Semiramide appeared extremely fascinating and perfect for this reason. Since my first researches, I found she was misunderstood as a queen and especially as a woman, which to me, is not a matter of a century or a millennium, is a point of strength and also a point of reference. We introduce her true story first and then we continue with the layers of myth surrounding her.

As these two discs testify, she was one of the most popular subjects for operatic composers during the baroque and early Classical period - why do you think she was so attractive to composers at this point in time?

Opera was in history always a fruit of a balance of many aspects: enterprise, creativity, art, but also entertainment, interpreters, venue of rendezvous, ideas, mirror of society and of course much more. It was a specialty of classicism to create "opera seria" with subjects from the ancient world and Semiramide represented one of the most interesting story and legend at the same time. In fact, it was a subject that was particularly successful since audiences knew the story so well that in some of the representations of the libretto became a topic for "opera buffa." When translated in modern terms, is similar to a satire about a politician or a famous person: the true temperature of the success of a subject.

There's definitely something of the Amazon about Semiramide, with strong masculine and feminine elements to her character - were any of these roles written for castrati, or were they all intended to be sung by female singers?

Yes, there are a few written for "evirati cantori," but let me note here that depending in which state Operas were performed, women were banned from stage (remember Italy was only recently united in 1861!). This is the case of our *La morte di Semiramide* by Nasolini, a very famous composer in his time, in which the role of Semiramide was interpreted by Giovanni Spagnoli for the premiere in Roma (Stato Pontificio at the time) as well as Paisiello's version *La Semiramide* in villa premiered in Roma whose first interpreter was Fedele Venturi.

How much variety in characterisation is there across the works on the disc? Do different composers place different emphasis on her many roles as mother, warrior, seductress etc..?

This is specifically the reason for this recording. I invite everybody interested in this fascinating story to discovery each aspect. I tried to propose with special care this path.

Apart from the Rossini setting, most of these operas are completely unknown today - can you tell us whether you have plans for staged revivals of any of the works on the disc?

This would be a dream. I think that the purpose of recording today is the discovery of treasures that can enlighten new programs but also represent new inspiration for the music of the future. I declare here (smiling..) my complete disposal for any institution that would like to continue our work and represent on stage an entire opera between the copious titles dedicated to Semiramide.



Semiramide - La Signora Regale

Arias & Scenes from Porpora to Rossini

Semiramide - La Signora Regale is out now on Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, and features arias from operas by Caldara, Porpora, Rossini, Meyerbeer and others.

[Watch a video trailer](#)

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Other recordings featuring Anna Bonitatibus



Haydn: **L'Infedelta costante**

Operatic Arias and Overtures

Released in 2011, this disc with Alan Curtis and Il Complesso Barocco includes the dramatic solo cantata *Arianna a Naxos* and arias from operas on fidelity and infidelity, including *La vera Costanza*, *La fedeltà premiata*, *L'infedeltà delusa* and *Orlando paladino*.

 [Watch a video trailer](#)

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Rossini: **Un Rendez-Vous**

Ariette e Canzoni

One of the most acclaimed Rossini singers around at the moment, Anna is joined here by pianist Marco Marzocchi for a selection of sacred and secular solo songs, from the relatively well known 'Mi lagnerò tacendo' (in six different settings!) to rarities such as 'L'amour à Pékin' and 'La Légende de Marguerite'

This product is no longer available

Cavalli: **La Didone**

Anna sings the title-role in this critically-acclaimed 2011 production from Théâtre de Caen with Les Arts Florissants under William Christie; the recording was both a *Gramophone Editor's Choice* and a *BBC Music Magazine* DVD Choice in late 2012, with *Gramophone* praising her 'impassioned but dignified' Queen of Carthage.

 [Watch a video trailer](#)

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