

# Opera on Video

## A Personal Review

The accessibility of opera has increased markedly in the decades since video recorders became available in the home. It seems appropriate to essay this highly personal review of the materials to which I have access. My definition of “opera” has been broadened to include any work generally so classified whether staged or not, and any classical vocal work presented in a staged performance. I have included concert performances of operas and stagings of oratorios. The reviews reflect my personal opinions and should not be taken as more. I hope that they provide you with enough information to select among performances or to seek out items of interest.

The intent of the Evaluation entry is to provide a one-word summary opinion of the recording.

Excellent	Solid representation of the work in all significant respects; flaws may be noted in the text.
Very Good	Recording adequate for appreciation of the opera by one not familiar with it.
Good	Fundamentally valid reading lacking significant elements; not recommended for novices.
Fair/Adequate	Tolerable performance with elements worth seeing but not satisfying overall.
Inadequate	Although unacceptable overall, acceptable if no alternative is available.
Poor	Unacceptable performance overall; elements may be worth seeing.

Other terms such as Unique and Idiosyncratic apply to performances of particular value in specific senses but which should not be regarded as generally representative of the opera. Those recordings should be sampled before purchase; traditionalists may find them unacceptable, but those new to opera in general or to the particular work may find them revelatory.

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# Nixon in China

## Adams

Conductor: DeMain  
Company: Houston

Nixon: Maddalena  
Pat: Page  
Mao: Doykers  
Chou: Sylvan  
Mme. Mao: Craney  
Kissinger: Hammons

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Large

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Definitive

### PRODUCTION

World premiere live staging. Sets are literal and natural in size. Costumes and makeup are slight exaggerations of literal form and color. As usual with Sellars' stage work, the totality is more effective than its components; less common is elaborate (though fitting) production. Enunciation is clear.

### PERFORMANCES

DeMain propels the neo-classical score with clarity and dynamism. Chorus and orchestra seem comfortable with the idiom and effective in presenting it. Maddalena and Sylvan shine vocally and dramatically. Doykers and Hammons seem accurate and act well, but their voices do not project effectively and their vocal portrayals seem artificial and effortful. Page looks and acts well but could use more voice to carry the part. Craney's shrill style and tone may be desired but clash painfully with the mood of the work.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is brilliant and without flaw. Sound is clear throughout but presents little imaging of orchestra or stage. Video direction is superb, of course. If Adams' music or the idea of the opera is appealing, this performance is to be sought out.

# Aspern Papers

## Argento

Conductor: Rescigno  
Company: Dallas

Juliana: Söderström  
Tina: von Stade  
Lodger: Stilwell  
Sonia: Ciesinski  
Aspern: Rosenshein  
Barelli: Halfvarson

Broadcast  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

World premiere production of a very live performance. Sets are literal and appropriate, with substantial variation induced by lighting. Costumes are unimaginative: effective in the real world, purified in the dream world, and helpful throughout. Stage direction is superb and the performers appear to satisfy the director's intentions comfortably.

### PERFORMANCES

Evaluation must be done in a vacuum, lacking both comparative performance and score. Nevertheless, Rescigno clearly leads well-drilled orchestra and soloists in a committed reading. Söderström is magnificent—comfortable in voice and riveting as an actress. Von Stade is close behind, handling a relatively easy vocal line comfortably and portraying a colorless character well. The other soloists play their parts easily despite awkward vocal lines. The integration of the performance is remarkable under Söderström's lead, so even the term "soloist" seems inappropriate.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent, though somewhat less sharp in longer shots (even those representing real time) than the best modern work. Audio is impeccable. The camera is an active participant in the show, providing a made-for-television experience rather than one in the opera house. Some of the staging is clearly aimed at the house so that one frequently wishes either a wider shot or tighter staging. However, those criticisms are minor in an outstanding overall experience—depending only on one's affection for the musical idiom.

# Johannes-Passion

## Bach

Conductor: Hacker  
Company: Fenice

Jesus: Prey/F  
Evangelist: Vandersteene  
Mary: Zimmermann

LaserDisc  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Cavassilas

Date: 21 December 1984  
Evaluation: Unique

### PRODUCTION

Fully and dramatically staged live performance. The single set provides a framework which is church, intimate gathering place and Golgotha. Costumes are traditional for the biblical era. The performers' commitment and passion cannot be questioned; they make of this normally static work a dramatic and dynamic experience — presumably the result of the care of designer/director Pier Luigi Pizzi.

### PERFORMANCES

Hacker's rich, romantic concept falls to his lack of mechanical skill on the podium. The orchestras offer warm tones, but sloppy execution; the chorus is on pitch but ragged. As singers, none of the soloists is of the first rank; Vandersteene would be such except for numerous, noticeable near-disasters and a few which go across the line. This is a sumptuous, romantic reading which fails its musical objectives due to sheer lack of performing ability.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and well focussed. The warm sound balance fits the dramatic concept and well-balanced in maintaining the sense of reality. Direction is fluid, though camera angles seem constrained by the audience and some shots are awkward. Overall, the technical accomplishments are more than adequate to preserve and to communicate this extraordinary dramatic experience. Those seeking authenticity or refined musicianship should look elsewhere.

# Abduction of Figaro

## Bach, PDQ

Conductor: Schickele  
Company: Minnesota

Dofonso/Pasha/Papa: Lehr  
Susanna/Mama: Krueger  
Pecadillo: Ford  
D2: Brustadt  
Blondie: Lloyd  
Opec: Ferrante

LaserDisc  
English (mostly)  
Director: Lavine

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Incomparable

### PRODUCTION

Live production before an audience ill-prepared to respond rationally. A minimal set does not do justice to the opulent - nay, grandiloquent - concept. Costumes are traditional for the era. Acting is simultaneously natural in the modern style and conventionally operatic; the result is, again, a unique expression not unlike that achieved by one drinking milk when finally appreciating a punch line.

### PERFORMANCES

It seems unfair even to assess Schickele as a conductor since the eminent musicologist and discoverer of the composer is deservedly ignored for those skills. The orchestra, chorus and corps de ballet set new standards for provincial opera. The soloists should be discussed in detail, but that pleasure must be reserved for the viewer, not the critic. Suffice it to say that fans of Bruce Ford and John Ferrante, the only ones who have had major careers, will find them in suitable company.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Clean, clear video and audio permit each nuance of this subtle interpretation to shine through. It may be necessary to attribute some directorial and technical lapses to the difficulty of doing a serious job while rolling on the floor, laughing. The only serious criticism to be made of this unique recording is that it goes on rather too long. Well before the two and three-quarter hours are over, the joke has worn thin and only the gags survive. Still, it must be recommended for its unique achievements.

# Antony and Cleopatra Barber

Conductor: Buckley  
Company: Chicago Lyric

Cleopatra: Malfitano  
Antony: Cowan  
Cæsar: Trussel  
Charmian: White  
Enobarbus: Halfvarson

Broadcast  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Simplified staging of a simplified score. Setting is established by rear projection and a few token props before it. Costumes are colorful but not specific to the era; the modified contemporary dress of the chorus clashes inexplicably. Stage direction is generally convincing, except for Malfitano's posturing and exaggeration (though that might well have been fitting in the house).

## PERFORMANCES

Buckley leads an abridged score in a brighter, more comfortable reading than that of the Met premiere. Both orchestra and chorus come close to the score without settling into it. Malfitano sings reasonably well, but overacts and frequently pushes her instrument. Cowan excels both vocally and dramatically; he conveys the relative barbarism of Rome in Egypt. Halfvarson's Enobarbus is another substantial asset, singing well as he portrays a valid character. The lesser rôles are well covered.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio achieve the highest objectives. Browning's camera work is unobtrusive and unhampered by the presence of the audience. Lighting is ample. This performance is a strong argument for the work in its reduced form. If the libretto were more graceful, the music and production might suffice to make the work a success.

# Vanessa Barber

Conductor: Keene  
Company: Spoleto USA

Vanessa: Meier  
Erica: Ciesinski  
Anatol: Price  
Doctor: Densen  
Baroness: Garrott

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Browning

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Intimate live performance. The single set is traditional and appropriately subdued. Period costumes are worn comfortably by a well-prepared cast. While stage direction is clearly aimed at the live audience, Browning's skill brings it vividly into the home.

## PERFORMANCES

Keene both feels and understands the score. The orchestra lacks polish and is somewhat undersized, but it is competent for the score's modest demands. Meier sounds comfortable and acts with facility, but even with the assist of video does not eclipse Steber. Ciesinski and Price look and sing well, acting in character throughout, but with only outward signs of involvement. Densen's doctor is a joy, and the minor rôles are filled with distinction.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review copy suffers from soft and noisy video. However, a good copy should approach modern quality since lighting was adequate and video direction was capable. Pre-hifi, monaural sound is adequate. Even with its limitations, audio conveys the enunciation clearly enough that one seldom misses subtitles. Camera movement is primitive, and many high shots seem to have been forced by the presence of the audience. Nevertheless, this performance is recommended for its musical and dramatic values.

# Bluebeard's Castle

## Bartok

Conductor: Solti  
Company: film

Judith: Sass  
Bluebeard: Kovats

LaserDisc  
Hungarian / English subtitles  
Director: Szinetar

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Spectacular film interpretation. Sets are massive; some appear to be from a true castle, others fantastic sound stages. Costumes are unique. Movement is appropriate and fluid from two fine performers. Lip sync is quite poor, often detracting from the drama.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti illuminates the score with an intense, dynamic reading. The London Philharmonic is wonderfully in sync with his reading. Kovats provides a darker, fuller sound than most, yet finds the rôle comfortable vocally. Sass is excellent, barring an edge to her tone that is more than compensated by her spectacular good looks and fine interpretation.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is disappointing: less than crisp and with faded colors even where inappropriate. In this case, the general fog appears to be a failing, not the director's intent. Audio is outstanding, with no problem traceable to the analogue original tape. Film direction is excellent, maintaining attention on the most significant musical element at all times without jumping among cameras or angles. This performance is highly recommended and would be indispensable if the work were more accessible and if video processing and lip sync were better.



# Bluebeard's Castle

## Bartok

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Bluebeard: Ramey  
Judith: Norman

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Large

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Immense, unique, contemporary representation. Grandness of scale, forced by the size of the house, is made to fit the music. Although the work will take moderate or even small-scale interpretation, this version makes a strong case for treating it as grand opera. The single, massive, modernist setting works wonderfully. Curious costumes may have been dictated by the size of the soprano and the athleticism of the bass.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine's interpretation is lyric and powerful. The orchestra is almost routinely accurate. Ramey's enunciation is not sufficient to make up for the lack of subtitles; his singing is accurate and unforced; his acting is oversize. Norman portrays an impassioned Judith with beautiful sound and grand gesture; the libretto and score call for a more demure (Melisande) character she does not attempt to represent.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is superb, preserving the ambience of the hall while showing remarkable detail. Video is also excellent within the constraints of the production's lighting which concentrates on the singers and suppresses the background. The camera work emphasizes that focus effectively and seems unimpeded by the presence of the audience. Given the scale chosen for the performance, its only substantial failing stems from difficulty in understanding the text.

# Fidelio

## Beethoven

Conductor: Mehta  
Company: Orange

Fidelio: Janowitz  
Florestan: Vickers  
Pizzaro: Wilderman  
Rocco: Adam  
Marzelline: Richmond  
Jaquino: Raitzine

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Jourdan

Date: 1977  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Festival performance audio with composite video from multiple performances, rehearsal, and other sources (including the Ganz *Napoleon* during the overture). Setting is the amphitheater without decoration; it works ideally. Costumes are strictly traditional and satisfactory. Acting is excellent with persuasive characterization. The atrocious lip sync characteristic of this series frequently distracts attention.

### PERFORMANCES

Mehta's interpretation is dynamic, attractive, and unusual. The orchestra and chorus respond with a bright color suited to that reading. Janowitz lacks power in the climaxes, but is persuasive throughout and attractive to watch. Vickers' lyricism fits the interpretation and the rôle. Wilderman handles the aria well but his dry tone and unsteady support prove hard to accept elsewhere. Adam excels, but Richmond lacks the vocal grace she needs. Other parts are capably filled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear, bright and well lighted, but not as sharp as one might hope. Audio is only marginally acceptable: noisy, distorted at forte and above, and of limited tonal range; stereo separation is ineffective. Camera work is fine and the merger of disparate sources shows only in the failures of lip sync. Overall, this is the best performance on video to date, overcoming the technical limitations by unmatched musical, vocal, and dramatic values.

# Fidelio

## Beethoven

Conductor: Rother  
Company: Berlin

Fidelio: Ludwig  
Florestan: King  
Pizzaro: Berry  
Rocco: Greindl  
Marzelline: Otto  
Jaquino: Vantin

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: Apr 1962  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Solid but vital live performance. Poor lip sync in closeups shows that that video was intercut from a rehearsal where the cameras would not interfere with the audience. Sets are rudimentary but effective. Costumes are of the appropriate era but are less theatrical outfits than normal dress for ordinary people. Nothing is exaggerated in this production and underplaying works wonderfully. Stage action is traditional and somewhat in the formalized olden style.

### PERFORMANCES

Rother approaches perfection in a reading well balanced between adherence to the page and freedom for the singers; best of all, he makes clear the unique sound of Beethoven. The orchestra is precise and effective; the chorus, appropriately ragged. Ludwig's singing is outstanding even in the aria; her portrayal of a young man is effective, in part through clipping the lines of dialogue. King pushes painfully in his aria, but manages the rest of the rôle with apparent ease and a free voice with which he expresses anguish and joy with comparable art. Greindl sings the part and applies no buffoonery since he need not cover vocal weaknesses. Berry may be the best Pizzaro on any recording. Otto is surprisingly imprecise. One is thankful that Jaquino has so little to sing, though Vantin does not destroy the ensembles. The minor rôles are covered adequately.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is excellent: uniformly and sufficiently lighted to show detail in both highlights and shadows. Monaural audio offers limited tonal range but is clear, nearly noise-free, and sufficient to show both vocal and orchestral detail. Camera work is simplistic and sufficient. Video direction is unobtrusive and attention is always focussed on an appropriate part of the stage.

# Fidelio

## Beethoven

Conductor: von Dohnanyi  
Company: Royal

Leonore: Benackova  
Florestan: Protschka  
Rocco: Lloyd  
Marzelline: McLaughlin  
Pizzaro: Pederson  
Jacquino: Archer

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Bailey

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance curiously lacking in liveliness. Sets are more confined and less traditional than usual, more or less translating the work to recent times. Costumes are drab and of ill-defined date and style. Ensemble is good throughout and stage movement is fluent. Many performances seem addressed to the cameras, disrupting any illusion of attending a performance, but enhancing overall communication.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Dohnanyi chooses slower tempi than usual but generally manages to maintain the weight throughout; however, that weight holds the performance to earth where it might have soared. The orchestra is also hard pressed to sustain the breadth of the reading and intonation fails occasionally. The chorus is competent, but not up to Dohnanyi's reading. Benackova makes a sound if dispassionate Leonora, hard pressed (and occasionally unpleasant to hear) at the tough spots. Protschka is excellent: lyric timbre with both the range and dynamic for the role. Pederson is younger and more persuasive than most, Lloyd is witty without hamming, McLaughlin is nondescript, and Archer is adequate though underpowered for the ensembles. The lesser rôles are covered capably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp with good focus and color, but lighting is not augmented so shadows are murky and contrast is excessive. Sound is very good, resolving the orchestra well (if not specifically to a place in the house) and conveying each detail of the score.

# Fidelio

## Beethoven

Conductor: Bernstein  
Company: Vienna

Fidelio: Janowitz  
Florestan: Kollo  
Marzelline: Popp  
Rocco: Jungwirth  
Pizzaro: Sotin  
Jaquino: Dallapozza

Broadcast  
German  
Director: Schenk

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Acceptable

### PRODUCTION

Larger than life, live performance. Sets are oversize, enlarging the stage to institutional proportions. Costumes are traditional and drab, relieved only by a suggestion of storm troopers in Pizzaro's forces. Nothing in the production provides vitality or creativity to compensate for the musical limitations. Overall, the acting is solid and convincing.

### PERFORMANCES

Bernstein is inconsistent and provides no focus for the music. The orchestra makes wonderful sounds, but cannot compensate for the lack of leadership on the podium. The chorus provides the best singing—on tempo and on pitch—in the performance. Janowitz's modest instrument is used with skill and seldom pushed beyond its limits; unfortunately, that implies that the music is scaled to her abilities. Kollo is also beyond his vocal limits, showing the stress by barking instead of singing. Jungwirth is in character, but off pitch and out of time. Sotin and the supporting characters provide surprisingly fine singing and acting under the circumstances.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review tape suffers from video problems including a noisy, soft image. Audio is monaural and pre-HiFi, so barely suggests the sound that seems to have been captured on the original tape. Lighting is sufficient, and camera work is routine. Were the performance as riveting as was hoped, those limitations would have been tolerable.

# Fidelio

## Beethoven

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Glyndebourne

Fidelio: Söderström  
Florestan: de Ridder  
Pizzaro: Allman  
Rocco: Appelgren  
Marzelline: Gale

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Heather

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Bright, lively staging before an enthusiastic audience. Sets are less than literal and more than simply representational. Costuming is literal and effective. Unfortunately, the production is crammed onto an inadequate stage and the performers stuff a grand reading into a cramped space.

### PERFORMANCES

Haitink leads a bright, lyric interpretation with enthusiasm. Neither the undersized orchestra nor the sketchy chorus is up to his standards with sloppy entrances and muddy dynamics. Söderström is vastly beyond her resources, conveying the character effectively, but unable to sing the music. De Ridder's instrument is a basically dull lyric tenor; he cannot plumb the required depths either vocally or dramatically. Allman's wobble almost covers his approximation of the notes, and Gale is too mature in style and voice for the simple Marzelline. Appelgren and Caley (Jacquino) are the only bright spots among the soloists.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Outstanding video and good (monaural) sound might be more effective on commercial tape. Lighting is bright, and camera work is fine. It seems a shame to waste those virtues on a performance so poorly sung and so far short of the scale of the music.

# Fidelio

## Beethoven

Conductor: Vernon  
Company: Pacific Opera

Fidelio: Gaynor Jones  
Florestan: Donaldson  
Marzelline: Sereda  
Rocco: Garrard  
Pizzaro: Turgeon  
Jaquino: Schade

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Nicodemus

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Modest, minimalist, live performance. Settings are suggested by a minimum of props, clever lighting, and backdrops. Costumes are essentially contemporary, simple and unremarkable. Stage movement is not quite stilted, but conventional for a small stage.

### PERFORMANCES

Vernon brings nothing to the score except a steady and appropriate beat and reasonably solid control of his forces. The orchestra and chorus are a bit ragged and distinctly undersized, but they seem to make up in enthusiasm for their limitations in talent. Jones lacks the volume but has the timbre for her rôle and brings it off with ease. Donaldson is more strained, but generally simply scales the music back to the limitations of his instrument. Garrard is a model Rocco, adequate of voice and comfortable in action. The other parts are filled rather tentatively but without major flaw. Enunciation throughout is clear enough to convey the text without subtitles.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clean though short of the best contemporary standards. Monaural audio is clear. Lighting is harsh and seems unaugmented for video. Camera work is conventional and limited by the presence of the audience. Yet overall this is more than a noble effort. It is a valid, small-scale realization of the opera which benefits from the enthusiasm of all participants.

# Norma Bellini

Conductor: Gavazzeni  
Company: Scala

Norma: Caballe  
Adalgisa: Troyanos  
Pollione: Lamberti  
Oroveso: Zardo

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Bolognini

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Stark live performance with overwhelming impact. Representational rather than conventional staging works exceptionally well. Sets are massive, modern, and minimalist; costuming is traditional. Both establish a stage for a remarkably integrated performance.

## PERFORMANCES

Gavazzeni holds the forces together with real impulse throughout; the result is more vital than any audio-only recording. The chorus provides a solid foundation of sound. The orchestra is faithful to exceptional direction. Caballe is convincing dramatically and magnificent vocally. Troyanos is superb. Lamberti gets through the notes, but lacks the weight for the role. Zardo and the supporting characters are capable.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Broadcast video and (monaural) audio are barely acceptable. Lighting is adequate, but camera work is primitive. Since this performance is probably harder to find even than the superior version from 1974, its commercial release need not be given priority.



# Norma Bellini

Conductor: Bonyng  
Company: Australia

Norma: Sutherland  
Adalgisa: Elkins  
Pollione: Stevens  
Oroveso: Grant

LaserDisc  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Sequi

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Conventional staging of moderate scale. Settings are dark and gray. Costumes are conventional but suggest a Nordic rather than British milieu. Movement is minimal and archaic. Overall, the production is stilted and static, the performers (except Dame Joan) seem in awe of the opportunity.

## PERFORMANCES

Bonyng offers no surprise, no drama, and no discrete failing. Orchestra and chorus are as stolid as their leader and many choral entrances are ragged. Sutherland is in good voice (though not what one would have heard a decade or so earlier). Elkins is marginal technically and is a poor vocal match for Sutherland. Stevens has a dramatic timbre, but is otherwise woefully inadequate. And though Oroveso is an almost sure-fire winning rôle for the bass, Grant does nothing with it.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but not as crisp as a modern taping would have provided; some failings are attributable to the director, others (e.g., misregistration) to careless production. Sound is good but lacks impact, separation, and brightness; preecho is a serious problem at times, and sync between video and audio is inconsistent. Lighting is excellent and the camera moves without hindrance from the live audience. Direction does nothing to open the confinement of the staging, but is generally unobtrusive and therefore sufficient. Some cinematic effects are used to little positive effect. This performance exists because of Sutherland, whom it serves reasonably well. As such, it is a desirable record of this most remarkable Norma of our day.

# Norma Bellini

Conductor: Patané  
Company: Orange Festival

Norma: Caballe  
Adalgisa: Veasey  
Pollione: Vickers  
Oroveso: Ferrin

LaserDisc  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Jourdan

Date: 20 July 1974  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live staging in an outdoor arena. Settings are dark and like the costumes seem oriented to any ancient land; they would be almost equally fitting for a *Nabucco* or an *Elektra*. Movement is not overly stilted, but this performance gains its drama from the singing, not the acting.

## PERFORMANCES

Patané conducts one of the great dramatic operas, with occasional acknowledgement of its bel canto components. In response to that lead, the orchestra, chorus and soloists all provide a feeling of prime Verdi in the style and sound. Caballe's technical limitations are significant in both solos and duets, but she provides vocal and dramatic fire. Vickers makes Pollione live with the requisite ring and sufficient control in the passagework. Veasey complements Caballe and sounds wonderful. Ferrin uses a good voice to excellent effect.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is adequate, but shows its age in excessive contrast and numerous film scratches. Sound is surprisingly good: limited in range and dynamic, but with little distortion and good stereo separation. Lighting is marginal and shadow detail is left to the viewer's imagination. Camera movement is free and a bit busy, but does not distract from a riveting performance.

# Puritani Bellini

Conductor: Boncampagni  
Company: Montreal

Elvira: Serra  
Arturo: Kunde  
Enrichetta: Lavigne  
Riccardo: Charbonneau  
Giorgio: Cappecchi

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Montsouri

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance fully capturing the score. Sets are minimal (and economical). Costuming is traditional and stage movement uneventful. Colors are generally dull, but the music and performances more than compensate. Overall, this is at least as satisfying a reading as any of the commercial audio-only versions.

## PERFORMANCES

Conducting is solid and reasonably permissive. Orchestra and chorus are well schooled. Serra portrays Elvira almost ideally; her colorature is not spectacular, but seems to be a natural expression of the person. Kunde manages all the reasonable notes and approximates the weight of the rôle; his performance is far from ideal, but may be as close as we could come today. The other parts are well served, with Cappecchi outstanding in spite of his age.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, though contrasty lighting exaggerates the simplicity of the sets. Audio is compromised badly by the Canadian engineers, but it remains listenable. Camera work is clearly restricted by the presence of an audience, with few effective closeups in key scenes. Even with its limitations, this performance deserves broader dissemination.

# Sonnambula

## Bellini

Conductor: Bartoletti  
Company: RAI (Milano)

Amina: Moffo  
Elvino: Vega  
Rodolfo: Clabassi  
Teresa: Anelli  
Lisa: Galli

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Lanfranchi

Date: 19 December 1956  
Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Film apparently shot to a continuous audio track. Elementary and conventional sets for a small theater match Sunday-go-to-meeting costumes. Stage movement is contrived and excessive, frequently provoking inappropriate laughter.

### PERFORMANCES

Bartoletti's interpretation is less *bel canto* than romantic, but he propels the music effectively. Orchestra and chorus are competent. Moffo is spellbinding vocally and visually; Clabassi is little less than ideal. Vega's vague reading and minimal voice provide a stark contrast not only to Moffo and Clabassi but also to the minor characters who are portrayed well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is taken from a kinescope of the film; it ranges from poor to unwatchable. Sound at best approaches AM quality; at worst, it is virtually inaudible. Direction is reasonable except when the *auteur* improvises action irrelevant to the opera or when a change in camera angle rearranges the performers on stage. The result is an amateur production with some superb singing, hence the "problematic" rating.

# Lulu Berg

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Lulu: Migenes-Johnson  
Geschwitz: Lear  
Alwa: Riegel  
Schon: Mazura  
Acrobat: Carlson  
Schigolch: Foldi

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1980  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Drab but not decadent interpretation. Settings are impressed into segments of the stage and emphasize dark earth colors. Costuming is surprisingly dull as well, with only occasional spots of intense color. Stage movement is very limited, presumably to allow the performers to concentrate on their difficult vocal lines.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine's conducting and control are inspired. The orchestra may never have sounded better, and certainly shows no difficulty with the score's complexity. Migenes (as she is now known) is superb in the rôle, although she is less than precise in managing the notes; that failing is lost in a mesmerizing performance, one which makes her dominance of the characters around her seem inevitable. Lear is the one sound of decadence, reflecting the ravages of time on her instrument though she, too, portrays her part almost ideally. Riegel is effective both vocally and in handling his limited dramatic demands. The other soloists sing effectively and look their parts.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The (monaural) sound is good, though lacking the brilliance of modern HiFi recording and suffering an unbalance in favor of the orchestra. Video is only fair due to lighting inadequate for cameras of the era. Camera positions are severely limited and often provide a view from below the stage. Nevertheless, Levine's and Migenes' commitment to the music make the recording important and valuable to any aficionado.

# Wozzeck

## Berg

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Vienna

Wozzeck: Grundheber  
Marie: Behrens  
Drum Major: Raffeiner  
Andres: Langridge  
Captain: Zednik  
Doctor: Haugland

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Outstanding

### PRODUCTION

Brutally, painfully brilliant live performance. Settings are somewhat abstract with flat, realistic foregrounds set against strong, representational distances. Costumes are flamboyantly realistic, rough for Wozzeck and Marie, all but gaudy for the other principals. Stage movement is masterfully choreographed and capably realized by the entire cast.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado creates an intensely human aura, but keeps everything true to the composer. The orchestra is absolutely in sync: overwhelming when called for, almost chamber music in the intimate scenes. Grundheber may not be able to handle conventional rôles with his dry, stressful sound, but he conveys the anguish and conflict of Wozzeck perfectly. Behrens seems a strange choice for a part which has been undertaken by such brilliant artists as Farrell and Horne, but again depicts the person superbly in both voice and acting. The other parts are handled impeccably if not brilliantly, but the total performance is greater than the sum of its excellent parts. While the opera may not be for everyone, anyone interested in Berg must see this recording.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are brilliant and uncompromising. Lighting appears unaugmented, but is never limiting. The camera is surprisingly unhindered by the presence of the audience, and every shot seems ideal for the dramatic situation. Technically, this recording may be regarded as a standard for non-traditional opera on video, somewhat as the Scala *Aida* is for the conventional.

# **Benvenuto Cellini**

## **Berlioz**

Conductor: Fedoseev  
Company: Maggio Musicale

Cellini: Merritt  
Balducci: Bastin  
Fieramosca: Braun  
Pope Clement: Ferrin  
Teresa: Gasdia  
Ascanio: Zilio

VHS copy  
French  
Director: Catani

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Tolerable

### PRODUCTION

Live festival staging giving access to a worthwhile rarity. Sets are conventional and literal, but cleverly designed to fit the small stage comfortably. Costumes are literal. Stage movement is minimal and rehearsal seems to have been barely sufficient to get the music on track.

### PERFORMANCES

Fedoseev's reading seems bright and well balanced. The orchestra is underpowered for the score; the chorus is similarly small in scale and comparably competent if uninspired. Merritt is at his best, using his upper extension to good advantage while displaying unaccustomed quality of tone in the normal registers. Gasdia has the tools (and looks attractive), but is overmatched by the vocal demands and frequently has problems locating the intended pitch. The "lesser" rôles are also demanding and are capably filled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review copy is many generations removed from the original broadcast; if a commercial release should become available, reevaluation would be justified. Video is approximate, with faded colors and saturated whites. Noisy monaural sound is tolerable at best, but adequate to give an idea of the music. A commercial release would be justified since no better performance of this fascinating work is likely. In its present form, this performance can be recommended only to musicologists and fans of Merritt.

# **Damnation de Faust**

## **Berlioz**

Conductor: Baudo  
Company: Philadelphia

Faust: Rayam  
Mephistopheles: Morris  
Marguerite: Denize

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Skog

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Marginal

### PRODUCTION

Idiosyncratic live performance. Action is set (?) as a drug-induced dream in a contemporary asylum where Faust writes with a quill pen before being chemically restrained. Costumes and makeup are inexplicable and distracting. Staging is uniformly dark, with only representation of sets, not actual constructions. The viewer should consider turning the video off before auditioning this performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Baudo's reading is taut and effective, but lacks dynamic range. The orchestra seems hard pressed by the score and the chorus is grossly overmatched. Rayam is not credible physically, but sings well and in good style. Morris' instrument lacks the roundness of tone the rôle requires and he rather hams his way through it, as though he were caught in the Boito setting instead of the Berlioz. Denize sings reasonably well but avoids acting altogether, looks too old, and is at best detached from the goings on. One might believe that the artists are embarrassed by the production. The lesser parts are well filled vocally, though the singers have even less contact with the style than do the principals.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and effective, assuming that the uniformly dark staging was the intention. Sound quality is very good, with reasonable stereo for the orchestra. Lighting is stark in a manner that suggests it is the director's objective. Camera work is fine. More effective audio-only performances are readily available; this video version cannot compete audibly and offers nothing of visual value.



# Enfance du Christ

## Berlioz

Conductor: Ledger

Company: Film

Mary: Kimm

Joseph: Shimell

Narrator: Rolfe Johnson

Herod: van Allan

Ishmaelite: Luxon

Broadcast

French / English subtitles

Director: Woods

Date: 1985

Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Film interpretation of a problematic work. Settings and photography are intermingled, with special effects used to integrate the performance. The result seems overproduced and a bit exaggerated, but it is undeniably effective. Without this sort of production, the work could not be considered “opera” at all; as done here, that is perhaps as useful a categorization as any. In many respects, this reading is reminiscent of the legend operas of the 17th century.

### PERFORMANCES

Ledger's interpretation enhances the drama of the score at some cost in its supernatural values. The orchestra's fullness of sound is therefore appropriate, and it is left to the well-schooled chorus to brighten the tone. With few exceptions, the soloists portray their parts well and sing with precision if not with feeling. The two standouts are positive: Rolfe Johnson's narration illuminates both with the brightness of his tone and the precision of his delivery; Luxon makes much of his small rôle. No soloist is less than good vocally, and all are well cast physically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is strangely soft and distorted, as though shot through a diffusion filter (which is possibly the way it was done). Electronic effects abound and become clichés rather quickly — and never to the advantage of the performance. Sound quality is quite good, although poor broadcast engineering defeated the attempt to record it stereophonically. Lighting and camera work are gimmicky, again distracting attention from the music and the basically sound production.

# Troyens Berlioz

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Aeneas: Domingo  
Cassandra: Norman  
Dido: Troyanos  
Coroebus: Monk  
Narbal: Plishka

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 8 Oct 1983  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Immense live performance. The scale of the production persists in sets, costumes, casting, and movement: everything reflects a grandeur which could be approached in few houses. Sets are massive and somewhat representational, rather than literal. Costumes are conventional models of the ancient world. Movement is stilted and minimal.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine maintains cohesion of the massive forces without the control to point detail. Orchestra and chorus are surprisingly responsive. Domingo's declamation is respectable, although one might long for the seemingly limitless resources of a Vickers. Norman's Cassandra is overwhelming; one is hard pressed to imagine anyone else in the rôle after this performance. Troyanos is more human than regal as Dido, but sings well and moves capably. Smaller rôles are handled surely.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is a bit problematic, switching between the breadth of the grand stage and the intimacy of soloists at moments that seem more dictated by the existence of the audience than by any dramatic requirement. Audio is excellent, as always, reflecting the sound of an ideal orchestra seat. Lighting emphasizes the production and appears unaugmented. Camera work is invisible except as noted above. This is a grand recording of a grand performance of a grand opera; as such, it would be hard to match.

# Candide Bernstein

Conductor: Bernstein  
Company: ad hoc (London)

Candide: Hadley  
Cunegonde: Anderson  
Pangloss: Green  
Old Lady: Ludwig  
Governor, etc.: Gedda

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Burton

Date: 13 December 1989  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Concert performance of an augmented score. Lacking sets, costumes and staging, it communicates the comedy and the action at least as well as a staged production. Performers are uniformly expressive at their music stands. (They appear to take their choreographic direction from the conductor as he dances through the score.) Enunciation is superb and titles would be superfluous.

## PERFORMANCES

Bernstein conducts and (occasionally) narrates with authority and spirit. The orchestra manages to combine sonority and flexibility. The chorus may be oversized and marginally less articulate than ideal. Hadley is wonderfully cast for voice and appearance; if an occasional low note is approximated, it may be forgiven. Anderson lacks the ideal color and precision but has the right range and appearance. (Adolph) Green reads well but does not even approximate the modest singing requirements. Ludwig and Gedda characterize and vocalize well and seem to be having a ball. Ollmann's Maximilian and narration are superb and he, too, looks the part. The minor characters are sung beautifully.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not ideally sharp and has excessive contrast. Sound is spectacular, exploiting each detail of the score and imaging the stage and orchestra. Video direction is surprisingly busy, focussing at almost all times on the individual singer even in ensembles. This performance makes a convincing case for the work as opera; despite cuts, the original-cast audio recording proves that it is also viable as musical comedy.

# Candide Bernstein

Conductor: Bergeson  
Company: New York

Candide: Eisler  
Cunegonde: Mills  
Pangloss: Lankston  
Paquette: Darr  
Maximillian: Reeve  
Old Lady: Costa-Greenspon

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Browning

Date: 12 November 1986  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live staging strongly arguing for the work as operetta. Sets and costumes are buffo cartoons in keeping with the music and the production style. Acting is appropriately exaggerated. All performers look and portray their rôles ideally. Enunciation is clear enough to obviate the need for subtitles.

## PERFORMANCES

Bergeson's concept is a bit more serious than either Bernstein's own or the Broadway version, but it is effective and convincing in its own right. The orchestra and chorus are completely responsive and in sync with his ideas. Eisler sings the hero convincingly and without apparent effort. Mills lacks the abandon ideal in her rôle, but projects the quasi-heroine well. Lankston is a delight, and while other soloists seem more careful than one would wish, each is at least satisfactory. (To fault a performer for not being the historically "right" one would be fatuous.)

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is very good but would benefit from brighter lighting to avoid loss of shadow detail. Audio is very good without exploiting stereo to represent the sound stage. Camera work is severely hampered by the audience; their heads are frequently intrusive and late arrivals block the view of the stage. The reality of taping at a live performance interferes more in this performance than in any other of the period and frequently destroys the comic-book atmosphere the production establishes so well.

# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: Dervaux  
Company: Paris

Carmen: Berganza  
Jose: Domingo  
Micaela: Ricciarelli  
Escamillo: Raimondi

LaserDisc  
French / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Babel

Date: 14 May 1980  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Lyric, underplayed live performance. The unit set and understated costumes follow through effectively. The device of Jose's flashbacks works because it is used in moderation. Acting is restrained but realistic. Many small production felicities illuminate characters and ideas. The use of dialogue instead of recitative is particularly felicitous.

### PERFORMANCES

Dervaux offers rapid tempi and fresh ideas but cannot keep the forces together, failing even with the rather ragged orchestra. The choruses vary: the men are weak, the women adequate, the children excellent. Berganza sings and portrays Carmen wonderfully within a framework of a mature, rational seductress. Domingo's Jose persuades visually and vocally. Raimondi handles the aria well but is less successful in the remainder of the rôle. Ricciarelli begins well but suffers virtual vocal collapse before her aria. The smaller parts are wonderfully realized.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good for the era, but soft and occasionally flawed by modern standards. Sound is less than brilliant but uses stereo to good effect and conveys the voices well. Camera work *per se* is good, but direction is choppy and distracting, sometimes switching viewpoints in consecutive measures and occasionally producing dizzying effects by trying to track action too closely. Overall, this is a most satisfying and lyric reading despite its failings and is highly recommended.

# Carmen Bizet

Conductor: Mehta  
Company: Royal

Carmen: Ewing  
Jose: Lima  
Micaela: Vaduva  
Escamillo: G. Quilico

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Gavin

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Brilliant, literal, traditional staging with spoken recitatives. Acting is superb and imagery is precise; stage movement seems choreographed in every detail. This is an eminently lyrical and civilized performance, thoroughly satisfying in its way, but not as earthy as some may prefer. One must, however, note an especially “earthy” Act IV with a slightly stylized rape and death by convenient meat hook; one suspects that the incongruously empty stage might reflect good judgement by the Spaniards.

## PERFORMANCES

Mehta’s reading is conventional and taut. The orchestra and chorus are comparably solid, with the children being unusually accurate yet natural. Ewing suggests sexuality rather than forcing it on the audience. Lima looks and acts the part particularly well. Vaduva seems to be prime Cotrubas in every way; Quilico is believable as the dashing young matador though his instrument is taxed to its limit. All sing accurately and lyrically, sacrificing some dramatic force and tension for beauty of sound and movement.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Superb video with no visible effects of the audience. Sound is brilliant and transparent, but gives little stage image and ping-pongs stereo effects. Camera work is sound, though somewhat busier than necessary and lacking in medium shots to balance breadth of view and detail of the soloists. Overall, this fine reading is admirable in itself and as a complement to the Migenes film.

# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: film

Carmen: Migenes  
Jose: Domingo  
Escamillo: Diaz  
Micaela: Esham

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Rosi

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Verismo in French. The film is well made in many respects, but reflects no traces of Bizet's style or of grace. Settings seem to be a Spanish Sicily and costumes are ragged and drab. Within that context, the performance is well integrated and movement is constantly attractive.

### PERFORMANCES

Maazel plods through the score, but keeps the forces together. Chorus and orchestra are responsive without adding significant attractive elements. Migenes' soprano is used lyrically; her body is used seductively, and the contrast is distracting. Domingo declaims the rôle, lacking the grace Bizet wrote into it. Even Esham's Micaela seems perfunctory, failing to exploit the simplicity of the score. Diaz blusters through Escamillo, while lesser parts are handled capably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Picture is a bit flat and color processing seems chosen to emphasize the drab settings. The audio is excellent throughout. Film production is sound but not up to the standards of Ponelle and his ilk, to say nothing of Bergman. This is an acceptable version overall except for the distortion imposed by its crudeness. [A version without subtitles has been shown on CBC but does not appear to be available.]

# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Salzburg

Carmen: Bumbry  
Jose: Vickers  
Micaela: Freni  
Escamillo: Diaz

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: von Karajan

Date: 1967  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Opulent film derived from live performance. Sets are brilliant if traditional. Costumes are colorful and lavish. Movement is dramatic and effective. Unfortunately, the performance is dull, with the inexplicable exception of the interpolated flamenco dance in Act II. Poor lip sync is frequently distracting as well.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan is precise, deliberate, and dull. The orchestral sound is lush, the chorus is oversize but accurate. Bumbry looks good, moves well, and sings precisely; unfortunately, that does not make for a Carmen. Vickers is excellent though he sounds more primitive than the gypsies; still, it is a pleasure to hear his dramatic instrument fined down to amorous *mezza voce*. Freni is a delight. The very young (and handsome) Diaz makes the toreador believable, though his vocal problems are audible. The supporting cast is excellent.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and fully satisfactory despite its age. Stereo is limited in both tonal and dynamic range and has occasional, inexplicable changes in level and in ambience. Lighting is ample and camera movement is unhampered by audience or any other constraints. Overproduction and excess precision here make the whole less than the sum of the parts, wasting a fine opportunity and a potentially superb cast.



# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Carmen: Baltsa  
Jose: Carreras  
Micaela: Mitchell  
Escamillo: Ramey

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance collecting star turns under the ægis of an opera. Sets are grand and effective. Costumes are conventional except for Carmen's rather modest outfits. The principals act as though each has his or her bit to do independently of the others and of the conductor.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine's reading is dynamic and should have been inspiring. The orchestra and chorus are superb as usual. Baltsa is more often the petulant child than any form of Carmen; she sings the notes and leaves the music alone. Carreras is dramatically overmatched and (atypically) seems detached from the character and the production. Even Mitchell provides some unpleasant sounds in her usual approximation to the notes. Ramey is fine, making the modern case for a basso Escamillo. Many of the supporting artists are superior to the principals.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are up to the highest standards of the Met or of anyone else. Camera usage is superb, unhampered by the audience and provided with apparently ample lighting. Overall, the performance reminds one of the worst of the modern Met and of an earlier era in Europe: singing adequate or less and stars dropping their standard rôles into a current production.

# Carmen Bizet

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Carmen: Meier  
Jose: Domingo  
Micaela: Gheorghiu  
Escamillo: Leiferkus

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Halvorson

Date: 1997  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

The usual assemblage of live performances into a reasonably consistent whole. Staging and costumes provide an unusually posh and crowded interpretation of the traditional setting. Soloists appear to move capably, but independently of one another. All singers appear reasonably comfortable in French, though none seems to savor the language. For those seeking a summary of the opera on a grand scale, this performance may be a candidate. For those who remember that it is an *opera comique*, it will be unsatisfactory.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine's apparent lack of inspiration communicates all too well to the well-drilled orchestra. The chorus is adequate, though far short of the standard of the previous telecast. Meier is uncomfortable in the rôle, providing no indication of a persona behind the words - which, admittedly, she sings as written. Domingo has more difficulty in some passages but remains effective. Gheorghiu's instrument is used to good advantage, but she is no more persuasive than her blonde wig and clashes as effectively as her green dress does with the blue specified in the text. Leiferkus was an unfortunate choice unredeemed by any virtue in performance. The smaller rôles are filled far more effectively than the principal ones; unfortunately, that does not redeem the performance.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is bright, contrasty and in every way a standard for operatic recording. Sound is clear, but stereo is used only slightly for the orchestra and no stage image is attempted. Camera work is fluid and unaffected by the audience. Direction would deserve high praise in a more dynamic performance in eschewing closeups in favor of medium shots. In this case, it exaggerates and extends the dreariness of the performance - and this one does not need any added longeurs.

# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: Plasson  
Company: Verona

Carmen: Cortez  
Jose: Lamberti  
Micaela: Sighele  
Escamillo: Ghiuselev

Broadcast  
French  
Director: Partesano

Date: ~1981  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in the huge amphitheater. The single set is an exterior street scene converted to other uses with a few props. Costumes are nonspecific and unrelated to the text. Stage action is conventional but not unduly stilted. Incidental characters are always busy, distracting attention.

### PERFORMANCES

Plasson tries to lead a reasonably brisk if traditional interpretation but the soloists drag the tempo. Chorus and orchestra are in sync with his baton. Cortez is tall, lovely, and vocally adequate, but portrays no particular character. Lamberti's nondescript lyric tenor is neither accurate nor especially pleasant. Sighele is acceptable but hardly the simple country maiden of the tale. Ghiuselev blusters with a voice too dark to make Escamillo come alive. Minor characters are at best competently portrayed.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and severely underlighted; as a result, detail is lost and colors are exaggerated. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate to represent the voices fairly but cannot do justice to the score. Camera work is free and effective, unhampered by the audience, yet not over-busy. Even with the generally weak competition, this performance (without subtitles) cannot be recommended.

# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Glyndebourne

Carmen: Ewing  
Jose: McCauley  
Micaela: McLaughlin  
Escamillo: Holloway

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Hall

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance demonstrating that *Carmen* does not work at Glyndebourne. Sets are uniformly dull and drab (if literal) in earth tones. Costumes are similarly lifeless. Apart from Ewing, acting is negligible; most performers seem overwhelmed by the opportunity and are all but frozen in conventional attitudes and minimal movements.

### PERFORMANCES

Haitink's reading is dreary, rising to dull on occasion. The orchestra and chorus are faithful to the concept but lack the numbers to exploit the score. Ewing is expressive physically and vocally without the depth of range needed to introduce drama. McCauley has the right timbre and the trill and sings well below the staff; unfortunately, as soon as the line rises, his instrument collapses. McLaughlin is accurate but lifeless, apparently without the resources to characterize. Holloway blusters instead of singing, approximating the notes but not even hinting at the rôle. The other soloists are adequate, but insufficient to carry the performance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent, with ample lighting and sharp imagery. Audio is better than one might wish, revealing each painful detail impeccably. Camera movement is all but ideal, maintaining attention on the action of the score in spite of the inertia on stage. Would that these technical efforts had been expended on a worthy production.

# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: Keene  
Company: New York

Carmen: Vergara  
Jose: Trussel  
Micaela: Christos  
Escamillo: Hale

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance of the Opera Comique version. For no apparent reason, action is moved to the Spanish Civil War; the story of frustrated love therefore becomes Politically Significant. Unfortunately, instead of revealing great truths of human nature, the transposition simply makes elements of the score unfathomable. However, the move may have saved costs in costumes, which appear in many cases to have originated at the Salvation Army. Notable properties of the production are the (generally) poor French, vulgarities incidental to the action, and static renditions by the principals.

### PERFORMANCES

Keene's reading is straightforward and reasonably conventional. The orchestra is accurate and responsive; the chorus is ragged but acceptable. Vergara's Carmen is neither gypsy nor Royalist but some bland intermediate; her singing is approximate and her portrayal of character is invisible. Trussel is not particularly objectionable (and his French is recognizable) but his instrument is not up to the demands of the rôle. Christos seems to have confused Micaela with Lulu dramatically but is usually reasonably close to pitch if not to style. Hale is hardly an ideal toreador, but in the present company stands out for competence at least. The other parts are covered adequately, though they offer some of the worst butchery of the language.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is about par for the era, so tends to underexposure and excessive contrast with loss of shadow detail. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is barely adequate, which would be unfortunate in a better performance. Camera work appears unhampered by the audience. Since this performance does not reach the depths of that from Vancouver, it lacks even the virtue of providing a horrible example; it is hard to imagine anyone outside the principals' immediate families watching it all the way through.

# Carmen

## Bizet

Conductor: Kleiber  
Company: Vienna

Carmen: Obraztsova  
Jose: Domingo  
Micaela: Buchanan  
Escamillo: Mazurak

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Zeffirelli

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance lacking in spirit but providing almost everything else one would wish. Sets and costumes are conventional and drab. Except for Obraztsova, movement is fluid and appropriate, with everyone portraying people, not merely operatic stereotypes.

### PERFORMANCES

Kleiber conducts a bright, vivid reading. The orchestra is at its considerable best and displays spirit belying the frequency with which they must have performed the score. Obraztsova is the major problem; while she sings all the notes impeccably, she conveys none of the fire of Carmen the woman. Domingo is at his best as the noncom from the provinces, singing with fervor and accuracy and using *mezza voce* appropriately. Buchanan is capable but hardly memorable; Mazurak is loud and not altogether wrong for the toreador. Smaller rôles are filled admirably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is superior to the standard of the day, with adequate lighting conveying the feel of the production. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is problematic; except for Obraztsova's quieter passages everything is audible, but balances feel very wrong. Cameras move erratically so ensembles are often chaotic or focussed on the wrong performer(s). If one can imagine a personality (and a dancer) instead of Obraztsova, one would rank this performance much higher.

# Carmen Bizet

Conductor: Bakels  
Company: Vancouver

Carmen: Stilwell  
Jose: Trussel  
Micaela: Collins  
Escamillo: Fox

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Gilbert

Date: 1987?  
Evaluation: Disastrous

## PRODUCTION

Misconceived, poorly executed, live performance. The single set is more or less a circus tent; the chorus, onstage continuously, includes freaks and performers doing inexplicable things with unrecognizable props. The text has been “corrected” to fit the conception of the stage director, Pintilie, who apparently is unfamiliar with the original story, the music, and the idea of an opera.

## PERFORMANCES

Bakels’ reading is bright and enjoyable if one ignores the production. The orchestra responds well although it would benefit from a bigger sound and fuller tone. The chorus is ragged, physically and vocally. Stilwell sings rather well though she is shrill, but substitutes lewd poses for dancing. Trussel and Collins are lyric and manage the notes well, but seem confused by the production and convey no personality, Fox's Escamillo/Elvis is so rife with modifications to the score that evaluation is inappropriate; it may be sufficient to say that he seems to contribute nothing to its failure.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is contrasty and generally underlighted, exaggerating colors and forcing attention on some of the worst irrelevancies. The effect is enhanced by camera work that emphasizes such standard elements of the opera as the ringmaster and the midget flautist. Monaural sound is very good, and conveys the clear enunciation of most singers so that one can understand most of the rewrite better than one would wish. The resulting travesty offers no redeeming virtue other than a prime candidate for worst production of a standard opera.

# Carmen

## Bizet et al.

Conductor: Constant  
Company: film

Carmen: Delavault  
Jose: Hensel  
Micaela: Host  
Escamillo: Gardner

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Brook

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Film abridgement and adaptation traceable to Bizet and to Merimee. Brook's film exists in four variations (different casts get slightly differing treatments), each of which reworks score, plot, and lyrics for dramatic purposes in about ninety minutes. The results are little closer to the original than *Carmen Jones* but because of the approach may be treated as opera. Any of the versions is worth seeing once, but none is a substitute for Bizet's work. Some of the ideas work well in context, but many distort the plot beyond recognition. [For example, Carmen sings her final apostrophe to Escamillo, not to Jose, then is slain after mourning the toreador's death in the ring.] Lip sync is fairly good.

### PERFORMANCES

Constant's conducting is as choppy as the abridgement, and his interpolations clash with the style of the original music. The orchestra and chorus are capable and responsive. Because of the variant casts (of which the above listing is for Version 2), an overall summary of solo work is sufficient: the acting and character portrayal are fine, but the singing is never more than adequate. The results work well as film, but poorly as opera.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, but not as impressive as the film milieu would have permitted. Audio is adequate, with prominence to the voices occasionally masking the overall sound. Camera work is dramatic and lighting is generally flat. The total effect is a bit tedious, but intriguing.



# Mefistofele

## Boito

Conductor: Arena  
Company: San Francisco

Mefistofele: Ramey  
Faust: O'Neill  
Margherita/Elena: Benacková

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

“Post-modern” and incomprehensible live performance. Images are striking if not overpowering, but few can be related to either text or music. Sets are oversize but quasi-realistic; costumes are approximately mid-18th-century with an admixture of other eras and concepts. Fantasy and reality are intertwined and imagery is forced on the viewer, invoking referents (e.g., the raked disc of Bayreuth) without apparent purpose. The significance of Mefisto going shirtless throughout is similarly mysterious. Perhaps they reflect acquired tastes.

### PERFORMANCES

Arena holds the forces together adequately, but in no way relieves the longeurs of much of the score. The orchestra follows with some notable exceptions; the adult chorus is competent, but the children are even less capable than in most productions. Ramey is loud and accurate, but provides none of the suavity that Boito wrote into the part; his is a brutish devil, and Faust's tolerance of him is a mystery. O'Neill sings barely within the limits of his modest instrument in much of the score. Benacková is neither simple enough for Margherita nor forceful enough as Elena; however, she makes some lovely sounds and looks good. Only the Marta both looks and sings the part as intended.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are brilliant, so that each production quirk and missed entrance may be recognized instantly. Camera work is idiosyncratic to match the stage production: the views of the proscenium during the overture and the angles chosen for the garden scene are dizzying. The overall effect is missing; one suspects that even the experienced Brian Large could not integrate the disparate elements adequately for home viewing. On the other hand, we are unlikely to find a better performance in the foreseeable future, and should perhaps be grateful for this one.

# Prince Igor Borodin

Conductor: Provatorov  
Company: Kirov

Igor: Kiniayev  
Yaroslavna: Milashkina  
Tokarev: Noreika  
Konchak: Nesterenko  
Galitsky: Malyshev  
Konchakova: Bogacheva

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Tikhomirov

Date: 1969  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Film using actors who do not sing. Settings are actual scenes, interior and exterior. Costumes and makeup emulate the medieval warriors in traditional ways. Action is boisterous and realistic. Subtitles are disturbingly in frame and often lost despite the wide screen and ample room for them below the active image. When lip sync is attempted it fails miserably.

## PERFORMANCES

Provatorov has all the notes played and sung with remarkably little inflection or spirit; even the famous dances fail to come to life. The orchestra and chorus seem responsive if unremarkable. Kiniayev sounds rather like a fine dramatic tenor managing a lyric baritone rôle well. Milashkina's tone is in the Slavic style: shrill but accurate. Nesterenko provides a true Russian black bass. Malyshev's performance of the only recognizable aria is surprisingly weak, with neither gusto nor depth of tone. The other soloists are quite respectable if uninspired.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is adequate: moderately sharp and well photographed. Unfortunately, the disc is made from a faded, worn release print with the typical poor balance of Sovfilm color. As the print reduces visual impact, audible effect is severely compromised by monaural sound of limited dynamic and tonal range with pronounced distortion. Cinematic direction is excellent, though not as inspired as Stroyeva's work of the fifties. If the source material is good enough, a quality transfer of this film would be worthwhile.

# Prince Igor Borodin

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Royal

Igor: Leiferkus  
Yaroslavna: Tomowa-Sintow  
Vladimir: Steblianko  
Konchak: Burchuladze  
Galitsky: Ghiuselev  
Konchakova: Zarembo

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Burton

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance strangely lacking in vitality. Sets are literal in detail but representational overall. Costumes are elaborate and traditional. Stage movement is choreographed effectively for the most part, though massed scenes are clumsy in their simplicity. Fine enunciation from the soloists contrasts with approximations from the chorus. Some staging is pointlessly objectionable, though it is more diverting than the musical performance.

## PERFORMANCES

Haitink's monochromatic approach makes the work overlong; he maintains an almost invariable forte volume and an unrelenting tempo that pall rather quickly. The orchestra is superb; the chorus handles its substantial demands awkwardly. Leiferkus is effective if not inspiring. Tomowa-Sintow's mezza voce needs release in a forte she cannot manage. Neither Burchuladze nor Ghiuselev makes his solo memorable, though neither commits an overt error. Steblianko's spinto is heavy for the rôle and he substitutes falsetto for mezza voce. Zarembo's rich mezzo would prove more satisfying if it were more varied in its expression. The smaller rôles are taken particularly well, with Webster's Polovtsian Girl standing out vocally.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is colorful and well defined, though it lacks contrast. Audio is resonant and well separated, though without surround effect. Burton's direction is oddly episodic: medium shots succeed each other without continuity, providing some visual diversion not reflected in the music. Overall, this is a recording to study, but not one in which one can delight.

# Albert Herring Britten

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Glyndebourne

Albert: Graham-Hall  
Lady Billows: Johnson  
Florence: Palmer  
Sid: Opie  
Nancy: Rigby  
Mrs. Herring: Kern

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Hall

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Enjoyable live performance conveying both immediacy and fun. Settings are realistic, with video effects added for scene transitions. Costumes are realistic and as comfortable as the era's styles would have permitted. Movement is entirely appropriate. Enunciation is a problem for some singers due both to the musical idiom and to their technique.

## PERFORMANCES

Haitink's reading lacks some sparkle, but is absolutely true to the score. The orchestra is just right in size and in sound. Graham-Hall looks ideal in the part, though one might wish for a freer voice in its upper range. All other singing is fine, with special notice for van Allan as the Inspector. Similarly, acting is appropriately broad throughout; Sid and Nancy emerge as full participants instead of caricatures thanks to Opie's and Rigby's skills. Even the children are well drilled vocally and dramatically.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video could be more brilliant, but it is more than adequate. Sound is clean but unspectacular. The delight of the performance is somewhat limited by difficulty in following the text without subtitles. Overall, this is an excellent, literal realization of a delightful score.

# Albert Herring

## Britten

Conductor: Moriarty  
Company: St. Louis

Albert: Hoback  
Lady Billows: Tinsley  
Florence: Gerber  
Sid: Dickson  
Nancy: Petros  
Mrs. Herring: Christin

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Large

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Buoyant

### PRODUCTION

Very live performance. Settings are Victorian candy box, not opulent but rich in color and detail. Even the intermezzi are fun to watch, but the joy of the performance is contagious from stage to audience and even to the home viewer. The production and casting make the characters people, not caricatures, and attention to acting is no less than that to singing. Even enunciation is generally superior so that subtitles are not greatly missed.

### PERFORMANCES

Moriarty leads a serious but infectiously enjoyable performance. The orchestra is good enough not to be noticed. Hoback's voice is fine for all but the lowest notes, and his portrayal is outstanding. Tinsley is a bit shrill and pushes her instrument, but looks and acts the part to a turn. All the other soloists integrate well into a delightful whole. Even the children are effective without becoming cute.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is outstanding for its era, with none of the usual limitations of recording before a live audience. Pre-HiFi mono sound is limited but does not detract from overall enjoyment. Large's handling of the cameras is as remarkable here as ten years later at the Met. Whoever has the rights to this performance should be cajoled or threatened into a commercial release.

# Billy Budd

## Britten

Conductor: Atherton  
Company: ENO

Billy: Allen  
Claggart: Langridge  
Captain: van Allan  
Bosun: Howlett

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Albery

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Spectacularly living performance, not merely “live.” If they moved the stage, the realism might make the audience seasick. Settings are dull and murky, and most costumes are similarly colorless. Movement is confined and rather more stilted than necessary.

### PERFORMANCES

Atherton conducts solidly, but without inspiration. The orchestra and chorus are generally reliable, but have ragged moments (which are less distracting in the singers). Allen sings well, but looks rather older and less naïve than the part calls for. While all the other singers are capable, none is fully comfortable in his part, and they produce a sameness of sound which makes the opera seem overlong. Given the all-male cast, the risk of monotony is substantial; it can be relieved with a standout performance by Billy, or by selecting unique voices for other rôles. Those solutions were not found here.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are brilliant and impeccable. Lighting is generally very contrasty by design; performance for television obviates the need for uncomfortable angles without requiring lip sync. The result is a vivid realization of a rather flat performance. Enunciation is not always good enough to obviate the desire for subtitles.

# Death in Venice

## Britten

Conductor: Jenkins

Company: Glyndebourne

Eschenbach: Tear

various: Opie

Apollo: Chance

LaserDisc

English

Director: Lough

Date: 1990

Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Mostly live performance without an audience. Sets are highly representational, simple and suitable for the touring company; they often appear inspired by Dali and entail components requiring study to integrate. Costumes are formal and conventional. This is a fully unified performance without dramatic or interpretive flaw. There are a few passages which could use subtitles, but enunciation and recording quality are fine enough that even one who does not know the work is better served without them.

### PERFORMANCES

Jenkins' reading is bright, dynamic, and superior to any audio-only version. The orchestra and chorus are exceptionally accurate without a trace of pedantry. Tear can be faulted in only two respects: he is more British than German, and he isn't Peter Pears; he is, however, perfectly cast vocally and dramatically. Opie fills all of his rôles beautifully, characterizing each persona clearly. Chance is effectively supernatural, if not superhuman, singing well in the stratospheric realm of his rôle. There are no minor soloists; the other singers with solo parts fill them with distinction.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are exemplars of the best of modern video recording. Even the stage is preserved in sonic image. Some easing of the stark shadows might be preferred, but the director's dramatic intent may be better served as recorded. This recording provides a superb realization of a relatively minor work with limited appeal.

# Gloriana

## Britten

Conductor: Elder  
Company: English National

Elizabeth: Walker  
Essex: Rolfe-Johnson  
Frances: Rigby  
Mountjoy: Howlett

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Bailey

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Unacceptable

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with many merits destroyed by intolerable audio engineering. The single underlying set is adapted to various scenes with simple and effective drops or architectural additions. Costumes are all in earth tones and seem to emphasize the dreariness of the score. Subtitles would help some soloists and the chorus in conveying the weighty import of the extensive text.

### PERFORMANCES

Elder has firm control of all the forces and a sound understanding of the idiom; that the result fails to capture the viewer seems Britten's fault alone. No fault can be found with the orchestra; the chorus' only problem is intelligibility. Walker is superb, carrying the weight of the entire opera with apparent ease and displaying an excellent instrument and fine dramatic sense. Rolfe-Johnson sings beautifully, as usual, and provides sufficient drama for the limited demands of the rôle. The other parts are filled with all the distinction possible. This is Elizabeth's opera, with the chorus a distant second in importance; those principal rôles are handled superbly.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is quite acceptable despite the era, with ample lighting and good detail. Audio is hopelessly distorted by the broadcast engineers and is generally painful even in first generation. While a better copy might raise the assessment of the performance, it would be unlikely to relieve the work's *longeurs*. However, a fan of Britten or *Gloriana* is unlikely to find a better production or performance and should seek out a copy with acceptable sound.



# Little Sweep

## Britten

Conductor: Bedford

Company: film

Sam: Adams

Rowan: Bullock

Miss Baggott: Forrester

Broadcast

English / English subtitles

Director: Coleman

Date: 1989

Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Film made for television without lip sync. Sets and costumes are bright and realistic. Movement is natural as well, placing a viewer in an English country home as the silent observer of a dramatic day.

### PERFORMANCES

Bedford's reading is bright and true to the score. The orchestra is in perfect sync with their leader. The children form an ensemble rather than a conventional chorus and sing and move comfortably. All the singers seem characteristically British: a bit shrill and nasal, but precise in enunciation and phrasing. Adams is a characteristic treble with a tendency to sharpness but a delightful portrayal. Bullock's work is fine, but would benefit from a somewhat warmer (more compassionate) tone. Forrester's voice is no longer sure, but it is used well in service of the rôle.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and bright. Monaural sound is good despite the Canadian engineers; tonal and dynamic ranges are admirable and appreciation of the work relies on the clear audio recording. Direction is unobtrusive. Unfortunately, technical problems in capturing the broadcast interrupt the review copy; a commercial release would be well worth promoting—and not only for children.

# Midsummer Night's Dream Britten

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Glyndebourne

Bottom: Appelgren  
Oberon: Bowman  
Hermia: Buchan  
Tytania: Cotrubas  
Lysander: Davies  
Demetrius: Duesing  
Helena: Lott

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Heather

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Magical, fantastic live performance. Settings use color intensely but sparingly to offset the prevailing darkness. Costumes are exaggerated in their fairyland fantasy and in their human rusticity. Stage movement is fluid, but occasionally pushes the performers beyond their dancing skills, bringing the whole performance down to earth at times when ideally it would soar.

## PERFORMANCES

Haitink is precise and sure in the pit, but does not evoke the magic of the score. The orchestra is responsive and appropriately small. The singing must be dealt with as the ensemble that it is, rather than in terms of individual voices. All of the singers are capable and render the score faithfully. The chorus is admirable, and all forces are well balanced and consistently under Haitink's command.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is outstanding, fully reflecting the sound of the small hall without gimmicks or effects. Video is effective, exploiting technology to provide sharp images throughout despite lighting that seems unaugmented. Camera work is excellent. Unfortunately, direction is somewhat choppy, and some scenes are disrupted by changes of perspective, including overhead shots having no relationship to the scene in the house. Enunciation is not quite good enough in places, and one wishes for subtitles to follow details of the text.

# Peter Grimes

## Britten

Conductor: Davis

Company: Royal Opera

Grimes: Vickers

Ellen: Harper

Auntie: Bainbridge

Hobson: Tomlinson

Swallow: Robinson

Balstrode: Bailey

LaserDisc

English

Director: Vernon

Date: 30 June 1981

Evaluation: Outstanding

### PRODUCTION

Murky but vivid live performance. Sets and costumes are unrelieved from dark grays and browns. Stage movement is absolutely natural, but very limited in accord with the demands of the score. Perspective places the viewer in an ideal seat in the house, peering into or participating in an almost intimate occurrence.

### PERFORMANCES

It is appropriate to compare this video reading with the composer's own audio recording. Neither is clearly preferable to the other. Davis is more precise, if somewhat less grand, than Britten. The audio-only orchestra lacks the precision but more fully realizes the intensity of the score. The choruses are both impeccable. Vickers' Grimes is restrained at all times, bursting forth even at the climaxes with what is obviously only a fraction of his power; in contrast, Pears is always impassioned and near his limits. Harper is ideal as Ellen, where Watson offers marginally more power, but substantially less commitment. All other rôles are cast at least as well on the video as on the audio version.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is limited by the technology, but is consistent throughout with the atmosphere of the book and music. Audio might be more brilliant, but is again an ideal evocation of the score's warmth and richness, without sacrificing detail. Enunciation is sufficient so that one does not miss subtitles.

# Peter Grimes

## Britten

Conductor: Britten  
Company: BBC

Grimes: Pears  
Ellen: Harper  
Auntie: Bainbridge  
Hobson: Rippon  
Swallow: Brannigan  
Balstrode: Drake

VHS  
English  
Director: ?

Date: 1971  
Evaluation: Superb

### PRODUCTION

Television production of the highest order. Sets are rustic and literal on a small scale; they exploit projections for sky and for the interludes. Costumes are appropriate for the era in subdued colors. Naturalism extends to the acting by every member of the cast. Subtitles would only detract thanks to superb enunciation even from the chorus.

### PERFORMANCES

Britten conducts a transparent yet sonorous reading that points each element of the score. The London Symphony Orchestra is pressed in the interludes but supports the singers admirably. The Ambrosian Opera Chorus is ample, unified, and fully up to its requirements. Pears cuts a more modest figure than Vickers, but is every bit as convincing and more tragic. Harper's instrument is a bit brighter here than in the commercial recording; her interpretation is fully formed. The supporting characters are outstanding.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft but clear; sync is very poor in the first scene but fails only occasionally thereafter; some artifacts of conversion are visible, including disturbing banding. Monaural sound is remarkably good; while stereo would be appreciated, the tonal and dynamic ranges are sufficient and the overall quality does not limit the viewer's enjoyment of the performance. If a better source is available, it should see commercial release despite the availability of another outstanding video recording.

# Turn of the Screw

## Britten

Conductor: Davis  
Company: Royal Opera

Miss Jessel: Harper  
Governess: Donath  
Quint: Tear  
Mrs. Grose: June  
Prologue: Langridge

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Weigl

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Murky, mystical film. The atmosphere dominates even the music, creating a fascinating movie with singing instead of speaking parts. Note that none of the singers appears in the film; the actors are all Czech, and perform admirably. Integration of all elements is superb, and it seems clear that Weigl's objectives are fully satisfied. Whether or not that satisfies the viewer may be problematic.

### PERFORMANCES

Davis' reading of the score is outstanding—bright and luminous throughout, yet managing full sonority from small forces when called for. The orchestra is so well integrated that its fine contribution is unnoticed. Heather Harper makes the pivotal rôle her own. All other parts are cast beyond their demands, so that the moderate vocal difficulties are handled with ease.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is transparent even when the settings are murky (i.e., almost all the time). Video is apparently as the director intended, so that the lack of sharpness and vagueness of focus are not necessarily flaws. The effects become oppressive over the extended length of the work; scenes of relative sharpness provide welcome relief. Note that the story and the music are consonant with the mystical treatment. Enunciation is excellent, so that subtitles are not missed.

**Adriana Lecouvreur**  
Cilea

Conductor: Masini  
Company: Lirica Italiana (Tokyo)

Adriana: Caballé  
Maurizio: Carreras  
Princess: Cossotto  
Michonnet: d'Orazi

Broadcast copy  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 20 September 1976  
Evaluation: Excellent

PRODUCTION

Live performance before a well-behaved but enthusiastic audience. A minimum of staging and period costumes do not fully establish the scene, but are sufficient. A close relationship between Caballé and Carreras is evident; otherwise, acting is perfunctory and exaggerated. (This is the famous performance with the lost earring.)

PERFORMANCES

Masini leads a straightforward reading with no particular insight. The orchestra is well schooled and without evident flaw; the chorus is a little less comfortable, but not a drawback. Caballé is magnificent, spinning the lines with glorious tone and style; Cossotto is a perfect counterpart, matching the quality of tone when desired, yet biting out the appropriate lines. Carreras is at his considerable best despite the rôle being heavier than ideal for his lyric instrument. d'Orazi and the supporting characters are capable, if a bit rough in the otherwise illustrious company.

TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is underlighted and less than ideally sharp, though not bad for its era. Sound is quite good, though without significant stereo. Camera work is no more than adequate, clearly avoiding interference with the audience at some cost to the television viewer. Direction is capable. This opera relies on singing and acting for its effect, and both are in the highest class. Here is another performance demanding commercial release; no alternative comes close to 'selling' the work as this does.

# Adriana Lecouvreur

Cilea

Conductor: Simonetto

Company: RAI

Adriana: Pobbe

Maurizio: Filacuridi

Princess: Barbieri

Michonnet: Borgonovo

Broadcast

Italian

Director: Enriquez

Date: 1954?

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Kinescope for Italian television. Sets are undifferentiated, more Italian flats and drops than any suggestion of Paris. Costumes are conventional. Acting is exaggerated in the usual operatic style of the era, but not objectionable. The singers generally look their parts and stay in character instead of heading for the apron for their arias. Lip sync is as weak as usual for this series.

## PERFORMANCES

Simonetto holds things together and leads a solid but unexceptional orchestra in a solid reading. Pobbe looks and acts very well, but lacks the special qualities that would make her performance memorable. Filacuridi is reliable if not always accurate in intonation. Borgonovo tries to create a buffo character, thereby missing the point; his voice may not be sufficient to do any more with the rôle. Barbieri is a delight, singing effortlessly and effectively and conveying more in a glance than the others manage with grand gesture. The minor characters are sung and performed very well.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is typically soft and ill-defined for kinescopes of the era. Monaural sound conveys the overall picture adequately but cannot show orchestral detail. Camera work is reasonably good despite occasions when foreground objects interfere with sight lines. Direction is erratic, but not more so than is expected of such early work. In all, the performance is far superior to the alternative and fairly represents the opera.

# Adriana Lecouvreur

Cilea

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Australia

Adriana: Sutherland  
Maurizio: Austin  
Princess: Begg  
Michonnet: Shaw

VHS  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Davison

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Conventional live performance. Sets are minimal but sufficient. Costumes are traditional and bright. Stage movement is stylized in the olden style. Everything is in place to frame the grand Dame.

## PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé's reading is of high drama and he controls adequate choral and orchestral forces in a well-drilled realization. Sutherland sings all the notes but none of the music; she is surprisingly unsteady, but dead on pitch—of course. Austin's tenor lacks character, but he sings well enough to be the *de facto* vocal star. Begg scoops oddly in a basically unattractive voice. Shaw lacks the vocal resources to capitalize on the opportunities his rôle offers. The minor characters are no more capable than the principals.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft but adequately lighted. Audio is well defined without sparkle; whether that is the fault of engineering, acoustics, or interpretation cannot be determined. The cameras are overly busy; one wishes the director had been willing to leave a serviceable shot alone. Were there a well-cast alternative, this performance would be ranked lower. It is hard to imagine a passionless Adriana, but one may hear and see it on this tape.



# **Matrimonio Segreto**

## **Cimarosa**

Conductor: Griffiths  
Company: Schwetzingen

Carolina: Resick  
Elisetta: Daniels  
Paolino: Kübler  
Count: Nicolai  
Fidalma: Szirmay  
Geronimo: Feller

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in a lovely, intimate house. Sets and costumes are unfortunately drab for so light a comedy; they are literal representations of the era. Acting is a strong point of the performance, with appropriate doses of ham and mildly exaggerated passion. Subtitles are used sparingly, but they are sufficient.

### PERFORMANCES

Griffiths does not exploit the exuberance of the work, but does provide a literal reading with a small and accurate orchestra. There is no chorus per se, but the characters combine for well integrated ensembles. Resick and Daniels are eminently suited to this interpretation, lacking brio but singing beautifully and accurately. Kübler could use some ring, and a bit of spirit would help, but he, too, manages all the notes without effort. Szirmay and Feller are stronger on characterization than on vocal polish. Nicolai is both spirited and vocally capable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but suffers severely from inadequate and poorly distributed lighting. Sound is very good, though not enough to enliven the studious reading. Camera movement appears unhampered by the audience, but overall direction tends to random changes of camera and angle and to other indulgences the work does not demand.

# Tender Land

## Copland

Conductor: Copland  
Company: Michigan

Laurie: Hunt  
Martin: Sandor  
Ma Moss: Bible  
Top: Roe

Broadcast  
English  
Director: ?

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Authoritative live staging in a small theater. Sets are simple, rustic props against appropriate, simplistic backdrops. Costumes are timeless and rustic (with some anachronisms). Acting is excellent, resembling a fine Broadway reading more than an opera. Enunciation is admirable.

### PERFORMANCES

Copland's reading can hardly be questioned—or faulted. The orchestra is small and unobtrusive; attention is always focussed on the text. Hunt has a well-trained voice that sounds natural and is used with ease. Sandor's instrument is problematic: a dark tenor not yet secure in its upper register, which leaves him tentative in approaching the climaxes. Bible is more conventionally operatic than ideal, but she and the rest of the singers are outstanding vocally and dramatically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp for the era; presumably, the master tape would be less saturated and would show more detail than the review copy. Pre-HiFi monaural sound would be more than acceptable except that most of the first act and some of the third are afflicted with serious speed instability; when no problem is audible, the singers and orchestra are clear and accurately captured. This performance is more than the sum of its admirable parts—an integrated whole demonstrating the value of the opera and the desirability of its revival.

# Ghosts of Versailles

## Corigliano

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Marie Antoinette: Stratas  
Rosina: Fleming  
Samira: Horne  
Bégearss: Clark  
Figaro: G. Quilico

LaserDisc  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Large

1992  
Evaluation: Unique

### PRODUCTION

Grand, live, world-premiere staging of a unique work. The sets are immense when appropriate, almost intimate (and even reminiscent of chamber opera) at times. Costumes are brilliant, traditional, and occasionally exotic, even ludicrous — but always appropriate. Staging overall is clearly definitive in this commissioned original work. Above all, the wit of the score and the libretto are amply realized by the production.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine seems to enjoy himself leading the usual grand forces through a contemporary work. The score is relatively straightforward, and both orchestra and chorus seem to relish its challenges. In a real sense, there are about twenty major solo rôles, all of which are handled capably. Stratas portrays her part with conviction and wit. Horne exults in the sounds required and conveys the persona with enthusiasm. The men are no less satisfying, notably Hågegard and Quilico. Of course, under the circumstances one is hard pressed to guess whether a fault is intended by the composer or is the performer's error, but everything sounds just right.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent, of course, but leaves one wishing to see the staging in the house. The problem is that the scenes appear to entail both grandeur and intimacy at one time. Large wisely minimizes shifts of perspective to maintain continuity, but thereby loses the impact of live performance. Sound is ideal. Lighting seems exactly right, though again that judgement has no referent. If contemporary comedy — not buffo, but with wit — is to your taste, this performance will not disappoint.

# Pelléas et Mélisande

## Debussy

Conductor: Boulez  
Company: Welsh National

Mélisande: Hagley  
Pelléas: Archer  
Golaud: Maxwell  
Arkel: Cox  
Geneviève: Walker  
Yniold: Burkey

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Stein

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance without audience approaching chamber in scale. Staging is stylized and simplified but provides an image for each element required in the scene. Costumes are of varied eras from mediæval armor through bustles, presumably (and effectively) suggesting that the story is told outside of time. The young cast moves well and acts physically to more effect than vocally. Despite video framing, the subtitles are in frame and often distractingly bright.

### PERFORMANCES

Boulez emphasizes the mystery of the mellifluous score. The orchestra is not precise, but its errors are unobtrusive. All of the singers are accurate; none penetrates the rôle substantially. Hagley is lovely to watch yet never sacrifices tone for dramatic effect. Archer is superficial but sincere—something of a ninny. Maxwell's strong reading unbalances the work somewhat. Cox lacks vocal authority and precision; Walker is effective. Burkey's treble is satisfactory, and in this staging a female soprano would be out of place.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp but with excessive contrast, apparently using unaugmented stage lighting. Audio is brilliant, with substantial use of stereo but not of rear channel for ambience. The wide format is effective in recreating the stage experience, especially with the dynamic staging. Video direction is clean and unremarkable. Camera work is fluid and appropriate. Overall, this is a commendable reading with almost all desired virtues except dynamics from the singers.

# Pelléas et Mélisande

## Debussy

Conductor: Gardiner

Company: Lyon

Mélisande: Alliot-Lugaz

Pelléas: le Roux

Golaud: van Dam

Arkel: Soyer

Geneviève: Taillon

Yniold: Golfier

LaserDisc

French / English subtitles

Director: Jung

Date: 1987

Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in a unique Strosser production. The set is a massive castle hall, which works well in many but not all scenes. Dress is appropriate for the wealthy of the era of composition. Golaud is the dominant figure of this production; it is not clear that any artist but van Dam could make it work. All other characters are shadows of his memory or perception. Movement, singing, expressions and all other aspects of performance are integrated into the concept so that where it works, it is stunning; where it does not, it is frustrating.

### PERFORMANCES

Gardiner leads an excellent orchestra in an infinitely lyric and dreamlike reading. Alliot-Lugaz vocally and dramatically portrays the *naïf* to perfection; other aspects of the persona are suppressed. Le Roux's Pelléas is similarly shallow. The other portrayals are consonant with the concept, though Soyer's voice and age are too similar to van Dam's to be ideal. Van Dam operates in another universe of artistry and cannot be analyzed.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and often poorly focussed; lighting is low with excessive contrast. Though lacking in imaging, stereo sound is fine except for a brief recording overload. Fluid camera work becomes perceptible when focus faults force it on the viewer. Unimaginative direction strays occasionally to present the obvious in closeup or to dolly and zoom for feeble effect, but it is seldom distracting. Overall, this recording should be seen by anyone seeking a radical view of the work and by everyone for van Dam's characterization, movement and vocalizing. However, I cannot recommend it as one's first or only version.

# **Village Romeo and Juliet Delius**

Conductor: Mackerras

Company: *ad hoc*

Vreli: Field

Sali: Dlouhy

Manz: Mora

Marti: Dean

Fiddler: Hampson

LaserDisc

English

Director: Weigl

Date: 1989

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Film with actors who do not sing—and Thomas Hampson, who does. Natural settings and timeless country clothing fit the tale well. Acting is cinematic and effective, with no significant concern about representing singing but good lip sync to the text. Both enunciation and complexity of the lines would make subtitles welcome.

## PERFORMANCES

Mackerras seems more respectful than taken by the score, playing it so carefully that its passions are chilled. The orchestra (ORF) is of modest size and notable sonority. The young lovers are beautifully acted and competently sung, though it seems odd to hear lower voices in the roles. Dean stands out for his sonorous bass, Hampson for his seductive lyricism. The Schonberg Choir and the lesser soloists are fine.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is intentionally diffuse and evenly lighted, with stark contrast for brilliant exteriors. Sound is superb, fully exploiting digital technology and imaging pit and chorus well. Cinema direction is outstanding as well.

# Anna Bolena

## Donizetti

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: *ad hoc*

Anna: Sutherland  
Richard: Hadley  
Jane: Forst  
Henry: Yurisich  
Smeaton: Clarey

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live concert performance. No sets, costumes or movement are used; in all likelihood, staging would have detracted from the musical experience. While most of the singers are content to stand and deliver, Forst and Clarey convey personality and character through both voice and expression.

### PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé leads a largely consistent and dynamic performance slowing only when Sutherland or Hadley needs time for ornamentation. The orchestra of City Opera is brilliant and expressive; the chorus is solid if unremarkable. Sutherland displays most of the technique of earlier decades except for tedious precision in the colorature. Hadley has most of the required elements for the rôle but is at his limits much of the time and suffers from awkward phrasing around the register break. Forst is a pleasure though she does not effectively decorate her lines. Yurisich approximates the notes with a distinctive instrument. The other soloists are sufficient, except for Clarey whose rich yet flexible mezzo is a notable delight.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and detailed. Audio is brilliant and beautifully resolved. The audience forces high camera angles and wing vantages that are not always ideal but they are effective. Indeed, “effective” is an appropriate word for the whole performance.

# Don Pasquale

## Donizetti

Conductor: Rescigno  
Company: Met

Norina: Sills  
Ernesto: Kraus  
Pasquale: Bacquier  
Malatesta: Hagegård  
Notary: Castel

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Staid, reverent live performance capturing Sills' Met farewell. Sets are oversize and unimaginative. Costumes are formal and traditional. Overall, the production could be applied to a dozen or more operas of the period, having no particular character. Acting is pro forma, but sufficient.

### PERFORMANCES

Rescigno is straightforward and provides accuracy rather than *brio*. The orchestra and chorus are well schooled and efficient. Sills portrays a rather mature heroine with little sign of vocal aging. Kraus is suave, elegant, and accurate. Hagegård and Castel play their roles straight and sing well; Bacquier hams rather more than necessary, but less than was the older habit.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video shows its age with less than sharp images due to inadequate lighting. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is muffled and adds to the already excessive weight of Rescigno's reading. Browning directs impeccably, of course, so that having only this one version of the work is more than acceptable; certainly, a finer cast or performance is unlikely today.



# Don Pasquale

## Donizetti

Conductor: Erede  
Company: RAI

Norina: Noni  
Ernesto: Valletti  
Pasquale: Tajo  
Malatesta: Bruscantini  
Notary: Ercolani

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Bironi

Date: 1955  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Film created for RAI television. Cardboard candy-box sets barely suffice, while elaborated costumes threaten to reduce the comedy to farce. Enunciation is not sufficient to allow a listener fluent in Italian to follow the text. The acting is more restrained than expected (Tajo's mugging aside), so that the threatened excess never quite materializes.

### PERFORMANCES

Erede leads a conventional and competent orchestra in a conventional and competent reading. Noni sings with precision and charm, but does not characterize at all. Valletti lacks Schipa's elegance, but otherwise is superb. Bruscantini exercises only a fraction of his resources in a rollicking reading with little excess. Tajo sings the old fool superbly, though his acting is excessive.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is surprisingly good for the era, suggesting a print at least a generation earlier than the other operas in the series. Monaural sound is more constricted than one would hope, further dulling the instrumental sound and robbing the higher voices of brilliance. Camera work is quite prosaic but effective. This is a singers' opera, and the cast makes the most of it.

# Elisir d'Amore

## Donizetti

Conductor: ?

Company: Cincinnati

Adina: Blegen

Nemorino: Garrison

Dulcamara: Patrick

Broadcast

English

Director: ?

Date: 5 January 1980

Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Delightful, flamboyant, live and lively staging without an audience. Moved to the American West, everything works. The single set is straight out of the B movies; costumes and stage movement are brilliant. Amazingly, the text is communicated beautifully, thanks both to a fine translation and to excellent enunciation.

### PERFORMANCES

All praise is due the conductor for a brilliant yet faithful reading of the score. Orchestra and chorus are small and enthusiastic; that they are also responsive to a delightful reading is a further treat. Blegen dropped a dozen years for this performance and is competitive with the best alternatives. Garrison looks and sings like a hero, not a wimp. Comedy may be a bit overplayed, but everything serves the composer and translator well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, reflecting fine studio work of the era. Mono audio is pre-HiFi and barely suffices to convey the pleasures of the performance. With a proper transfer from a (presumed) master in someone's vaults, this would be an exemplar of opera for modern times — and could be recommended without hesitation to anyone, novice or jaded old opera hand. Somebody should be forced to bring this out commercially!

# Elisir d'Amore

## Donizetti

Conductor: Rossi  
Company: RAI Milan

Adina: Noni  
Nemorino: Valletti  
Dulcamara: Taddei  
Belcore: Capecchi

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Brissoni

Date: 23 December 1954  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Kinescope of film for Italian television. Timeless costumes and universal set of a small Italian town fit the modest production beautifully. Acting is delightful if slightly on the broad side by modern standards. Enunciation is precise and makes following the Italian a delight. The scale is modest and everyone on stage seems to be having as much fun as the viewer does. Lip sync is frequently very poor.

### PERFORMANCES

Rossi leads a straightforward and unremarkable reading. The chorus is ebullient; the orchestra, accurate but unremarkable. Noni decorates the written line slightly with a voice capable of much more; she performs the rôle with grace and beauty. Valletti has the right mix of commitment and passion to combine with a voice that fits Nemorino to a tee. Capecchi is a more blustery Belcore than necessary, but sings freely. Taddei approaches perfection. The only complaint is with a rather quivery Staner as Giannetta — a problem of the least significance imaginable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is typical of the series: unsharp and imprecise. Audio is a bit less good than in many, with no highs to speak of (excepting some distortion of Noni's top notes); it is sufficient and seems better than it is once the listener is caught up in the performance. Direction is good except for some heads chopped off; that, too, proves irrelevant. This performance captures everything one could hope from a Donizetti comedy. If it is less than one would hope technically, no slick modern recording approaches it overall.

# Elisir d'Amore

## Donizetti

Conductor: Pido  
Company: Lyon

Adina: Gheorghiu  
Nemorino: Alagna  
Dulcamara: Alaimo  
Belcore: Scaltriti

PAL VHS  
Italian / Norwegian subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: December 1996  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Ebullient live performance set between the World Wars. The single set is adapted with props and flats to serve all scenes. Costuming avoids exaggeration - as do most aspects of the lively production. Acting and movement is fluid and natural except for a stiff reading by Gheorghiu. Brief spinet inserts nicely fill lacunae between some scenes. The resulting comedy verges on slapstick at times and lacks true wit - but it **is** fun.

### PERFORMANCES

Pido leads a fine, small orchestra at a brisk pace. The small chorus makes up in enthusiasm for what it lacks in precision. Alagna offers much pleasure, a few moments of pain, and unrelenting comedy. Gheorghiu's voice is a bit dark and somewhat strident on top. Alaimo is rather more dry than one may like, but effervescent to a fault. Scaltriti's voice and style may be faulted, but his tall, handsome figure and full, dark tone are a delight which almost makes his braggaddocio fitting.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is brightly lighted and admirably clear and sharp. The review copy's monaural sound was excellent for a broadcast source; presumably, a commercial release will offer state-of-the-art stereo. Large's direction is far from his best: essential action is lost to closeups; incidental action is exaggerated by close attention; and more attention is faced on details (including unpleasant ones, including Scaltriti's singing consistently from the left side of his mouth) than can be justified artistically. Overall, this is a performance to recommend to a newcomer to opera: full of vitality and comedy, well sung, imaginatively staged. Only those seeking grace and style will be dissatisfied.

# Elisir d'Amore

## Donizetti

Conductor: Rescigno  
Company: Metropolitan

Nemorino: Pavarotti  
Adina: Blegen  
Belcore: Ellis  
Dulcamara: Bruscantini

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: ~1981  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live from the Met, a curiously comic grand opera (or a strangely grand comic opera). Sets are simple and caricatured, nicely scaled to present a small town on the vast stage. Costumes are peasants' Sunday best with exuberant excess from the visitors. Action is largely in the old style from the male soloists, with Blegen and the chorus brightening the scene with visible personalities.

### PERFORMANCES

Rescigno seems torn in his conducting, leading a pointlessly heavy, even dreary interpretation. The orchestra sounds full and lush, hardly attributes one would normally seek in this work. Pavarotti is at his very best, bright and lyric with fine style. Blegen is also superb, trying to pull the performance into a life Rescigno seems to deny it. Ellis looks fine but blusters crudely and completely out of style. Bruscantini's voice had all but left him before this performance; he makes do with decades of experience.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably good thanks to supplemental lighting. Pre-HiFi monaural sound limits one's enjoyment of the score's delights, especially in this heavy reading. Camera work is a bit less polished than Large accomplished in other operas but is still essentially undistracting. The result is thoroughly enjoyable with fine ensemble and its best moments at the expected high spots.

# Elisir d'Amore

## Donizetti

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Adina: Battle  
Nemorino: Pavarotti  
Dulcamara: Dara  
Belcore: Pons

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: December 1991  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Conventional but oversize staging. Costumes and sets are bright and literal. Stage movement is appropriate throughout. The men ham their way through the action, but Battle and the chorus are relatively restrained.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine exaggerates tempi and phrasing, while leading a generally sound reading. The orchestra is as fine as always, but the chorus is somewhat ragged. Battle is delicious visually and vocally, though she is sloppier than usual in portamenti and in colorature. Pavarotti shows fraying of the voice and is hardly credible, but handles the big moments with aplomb. Dara is fine; Pons is excessively loud and inaccurate.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Superb video and audio quality with the usual freedom from audience effects. Overall, the performance lacks the spirit that can illuminate and delight. One must regret that the Met chose this work for recording that season when, for example, Battle's Cleopatra would have been so much more valuable.

# **Favorita** **Donizetti**

Conductor: Barlucchi  
Company: Film

Eleanora: Lazzaro  
Fernando: Sinimberghi  
King: Silveri  
Baldassare: Colella  
Ines: Tamantini

PAL copy  
Italian  
Director: Rucci

Date: 195?  
Evaluation: Inadequate

## PRODUCTION

Film for RAI with aria accompaniment. Much of the music - perhaps 75 minutes' worth - is included with narrative connecting the segments. Appropriate settings and costuming is more or less Spanish and often consistent with the usual operatic version of the era. Presumably, the actors are not singing for the most part; at least, there is no significant credible effort at lip sync.

## PERFORMANCES

Rucci has little to work with, but acquits himself competently; the orchestra, ballet and chorus are adequate. Lazzaro is quite satisfying in tone, though hardly a bel canto artist. Sinimberghi is light but capable; Silveri satisfies fully. The lesser rôles are covered well enough.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is sharp and detailed. Monaural audio lacks impact and range, but does convey the voices adequately. Direction is almost a parody of cinematic style, but is less distracting than the fragmentation of the score. In all, this is a curiosity marginally preferable to having no *Favorita* on video at all.

# Fille du Regiment Donizetti

Cond.: Wendelken-Wilson  
Company: Wolf Trap

Marie: Sills  
Tonio: McDonald  
Sulpice: Malas  
Marquise: Costas-Greenspon

VHS  
English  
Director: ?

Date: 1974  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance in the open air displaying more exuberance than Gallic style. Sets are simplistic drops sufficient to convey an impression of the scene. Costumes are simplified and traditional caricatures. Movement is conventionally exaggerated to the point of parody but enjoyably vivacious. Subtitles are missed since enunciation is often deficient.

## PERFORMANCES

Wendelken-Wilson holds the forces together without providing audible interpretation. The chorus is fine in all incarnations and the orchestra seems serviceable if undistinguished. Sills seems so conscious of her stardom (and her cuteness) that her fine vocalism is almost incidental. McDonald lacks the spirit but almost has the voice for Tonio. Costa-Greenspon maintains the ham standard nobly with adequate vocal resources. Malas blusters through the role about as well as in later years but does not exploit his fine instrument.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

For its age, video is surprisingly good: reasonably sharp and always well focussed. (Note, though, that the commercial release is heavily encoded against copying and may be muddy and unstatisfactory on some receivers.) Monaural sound is more problematic, tubby and inflicted with a persistent bass rumble (wind noise?) that demands substantial use of tone controls. Camera work is sound and lighting is ample; their impact on the audience must have been substantial. If American Donizetti is to your taste, this performance can be recommended. Sills describes her rôle as “[I Love] Lucy with high notes;” if you buy that, try this tape.



# Fille du Regiment Donizetti

Conductor: Basile  
Company: Trieste

Marie: Kovicz  
Tonio: Benelli  
Marquise: Maccianti  
Sulpice: Mariotti

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: de Quell

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Very good

## PRODUCTION

Joyous film using real settings and appropriate costumes. Abridged to one hour playing time, recitatives are omitted, the language is wrong (and both the Italian and its English translation demonstrate the problem), but Donizetti is well served.

## PERFORMANCES

Conducting is brisk and propels orchestra, chorus, and soloists. All are responsive and accurate. Kovicz is lovely to see but a bit shrill. Benelli is comfortable with the style, but not with the high notes. The comic characters are portrayed, not caricatured. Everything serves the music except the abridgement.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and effective. Pre-HiFi, monaural audio is adequate. If only for its style, this performance deserves wider distribution. With its limitations, this summary would delight the newcomer to opera, or the tyro who knows Donizetti from *Lucia* alone.

# Fille du Regiment Donizetti

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Australia

Marie: Sutherland  
Tonio: Austin  
Marquise: Begg  
Sulpice: Yurisich

VHS  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Butler

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Tedious

## PRODUCTION

Meticulous, plodding, reputedly live staging. Sets and costumes are bright and traditional. Stage movement is stately and formal—rather less than comical. The French is generally acceptable and the subtitles are clear and fitting.

## PERFORMANCES

Although Bonyngé's tempo is occasionally apt, his reading is unaccented and dull. The chorus is ragged; the orchestra is responsive. Sutherland is incomprehensible and portrays Marie as the Fantasia hippos did ballerinas: without grace, but never out of step. Austin's Tonio is a Turiddu short on top notes. Begg seems the reincarnation of Clara Butt: loud and inappropriate. Yurisich sings well and in style, and acts with restraint!

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft; perhaps on disc it would be acceptable. Audio is reasonably accurate, conveying the solemnity and solidity Bonyngé offers in grand manner; detail is inaudible. Lighting is very flat. Camera work is fluid and fitting, showing little influence of the audience. Those in the hall found no occasion to laugh at the performance; the home viewer is unlikely to do any better. This performance is recommended only to Yurisich's fan.

# Lucia di Lammermoor Donizetti

Conductor: Cillario  
Company: Rome

Lucia: Moffo  
Edgardo: Kozma  
Enrico: Fioravanti  
Raimondo: Washington  
Arturo: di Vietri  
Alisa: Segatori

Beta  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Lanfranchi

Date: 1971  
Evaluation: Fair

## PRODUCTION

A potentially fine film concept destroyed by its implementation. Settings and costumes are 17th-century Scotland. They work perfectly whenever the director permits them to — i.e., rarely. Scene changes are sudden and illogical; characters appear and disappear as if ghosts; visual continuity is nonexistent. Cuts are more extensive than usual, some twenty minutes more than is lost in the Met's truncated version.

## PERFORMANCES

Cillario leads a romantic, traditional, conservative performance. The orchestra is responsive and well drilled; the chorus is ragged. Moffo performs Lucia — creating a remarkably whole person while singing quite capably and beautifully. Kozma acts competently, looks okay, and uses a somewhat nasal voice without imagination. Fioravanti does well in the aria, then coarsely approximates the part. Di Vietri's tremolo is painful (even in his short part); the other rôles are handled well.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is barely tolerable: murky, lacking highs and lows, limited in dynamic range, but not overly distorted. Video is better, though many limitations may reflect the director's misconceptions. Lighting and camera work are extremely erratic. Lip sync ranges from fair to ludicrous. Even the subtitles are occasionally inadvertently humorous.

# Lucia di Lammermoor Donizetti

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Metropolitan

Lucia: Sutherland  
Edgardo: Kraus  
Enrico: Elvira  
Raimondo: Plishka  
Arturo: Stamm  
Alisa: Bybee

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 13 Nov 1982  
Evaluation: Very good

## PRODUCTION

Lavish, conventional live production. Settings are stark and literal. Costumes are rich but subdued. Stage movement is minimal, with emphasis on vocalization not drama. Conventional cuts are made, depriving us of the Wolf Glen scene.

## PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé conducts a weighty reading with no surprises. The orchestra is full and lush; the chorus is relatively bright and responsive. Sutherland is a bit past her best, but still incomparable vocally; dramatically, she moves stiffly through the rôle and emphasizes old-fashioned histrionics. Kraus sings beautifully but without ornamentation and acts simply and effectively. Elvira blusters loudly. Plishka sounds right and looks officious. The minor characters are capably handled throughout.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is excellent as usual, projecting the effect of an ideal seat in the hall. Video is good for the era, though short of contemporary standards. Lighting is augmented to harsh effect and camera work is often compromised by the live environment. Nevertheless, a world-class voice is captured near its best, with capable accompaniment and acceptable imagery.

# Lucia di Lammermoor Donizetti

Conductor: Previtali  
Company: RAI Milan

Lucia: Moffo  
Edgardo: Filacuridi  
Enrico: Dondi  
Raimondo: Berti  
Arturo: Blaffard  
Alisa: Mazzoli

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Lanfranchi

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Film for Italian television. Sets are conventional and feature real horses! Costumes are overly elaborate and appear rather more French than Scottish. Except for Moffo, the singers' acting needs forgiveness rather than appreciation. For reasons beyond my understanding, this performance is less coherent than the others in the series; it seems to be a collection of disjoint pieces without an underlying concept.

## PERFORMANCES

Previtali demonstrates why he was regarded as a *routinier*, with reasonable tempi reasonably maintained and solid, consistent, uninspired performances all around. Orchestra and chorus are adequate. Moffo is a delight to see and to hear, though she eschews the highest options that she took on other occasions. Filacuridi is rather heavier than we hear today but gets around the music capably if rather brashly. Like the singers in smaller parts, Dondi provides a competent Enrico, but no more.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is up to the finest (monochromatic) standards of the era with good resolution and focus throughout. Monaural sound levels are very low on the review copy but adequate to appreciate the voices if not the orchestra. Moffo's physical and vocal beauty are the only justification for this recording which is otherwise routine for the era. Nothing is wrong, but nothing 'clicks.'

# Lucia di Lammermoor Donizetti

Conductor: Santi  
Company: Geneve

Lucia: Anderson  
Edgardo: Dvorsky  
Enrico: Miller  
Raimondo: Ferrin  
Arturo: Greager  
Alisa: Stamenova

LaserDisc  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 16 September 1983  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Ultimately bleak live performance before a spirited audience. Pizzi's sets are massive, dull and representational. Costumes are drab traditional; Lucia's one gown is in three colors and serves as nightdress, too. Blocking is crude and the term 'acting' seems inappropriate, though it is perhaps more fitting than 'choreography' for the dancers. The Wolf Glen scene is restored and appreciated rather more than the appearance of Lucia's corpse on the ground in the finale.

## PERFORMANCES

When permitted by the soloists, Santi chooses sepulchral tempi and refuses to inflect them. The orchestra begins badly and improves only slightly; the chorus is less objectionable. Anderson's lovely tone is aided by relatively good intonation and one true trill. Dvorsky is excellent with a robust sound free throughout its range. (Lajos) Miller leads a remarkably fine male contingent with solid tone, good precision, and few concessions to bel canto style. Fortunately, Stamenova cannot be heard in the sextet.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft at best, occasionally out of focus, and afflicted with such poor and inconsistent lighting that some scenes are all but invisible. Sound is clear with good stereo separation and imaging; unfortunately, the frequency and dynamic ranges are quite limited. Overall direction is poor with heavy concentration on moderate closeups (not always of the most appropriate element) so that one relies on sound to locate the artists on the stage. Overall, this performance is recommended only for its soloists.

# Lucia di Lammermoor Donizetti

Conductor: Somogi  
Company: New York City

Lucia: Rolandi  
Edgardo: McCauley  
Enrico: Ellis  
Raimondo: Hale

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Fair

## PRODUCTION

Leaden live performance. Settings are all but invisible in the general gloom; when they can be seen, they appear to be traditional but minimalist. Costumes are comparably drab and uninspired. Dramatic intent is often admirable, but so stilted by some performers that any illusion is destroyed.

## PERFORMANCES

Somogi leads an inert and tedious interpretation. Orchestra and chorus manage to drag along accurately. Ronaldi has a lovely instrument and looks good but makes nothing of the rôle. McCauley looks fine and gets most of the notes out in no recognizable style. Ellis has a fine instrument but lacks any understanding of the distinction between Enrico and Rigoletto. The minor characters do nothing to establish an illusion.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp, though so underlighted that little can be seen in the murk. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is inferior even to the standards of the era, tubby and ill defined. Camera work is somewhat more lively than usual, adding at least a trace of vitality to the performance. While the singers get out all the notes, the stage director and conductor ensure that nothing more than vocalism can be detected.

# Lucrezia Borgia

## Donizetti

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Royal

Lucrezia: Sutherland  
Gennaro: Kraus  
Orsini: Howells  
Ferraro: Dean

VHS  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1980  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Very live production capturing Sutherland and Kraus as nearly at their peaks as any video recording. Sets are massive, conventional, and unimaginative. Costumes are colorful and traditional. Stage action is irrelevant to the work and apparently to the director.

### PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé is steady and uninspiring as usual. The orchestra and chorus are dutiful and accurate. Sutherland pours forth magnificent sound in the Donizetti style, displaying complete facility and apparent delight in her vocalism. While less exuberant and less fanciful, Kraus is just as well suited to his part and delights the listener. Howells has sufficient voice and looks the part, but lacks accuracy and flexibility to fit well in this company. Dean and the supporting cast are sufficient, but no more.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review is less than an adequate transfer from European to American standards. Video is unsharp and lighting is marginal. Pre-HiFi monaural sound has limited range, but it does let the glorious vocalism come through. Television direction is appropriately static. The result is a tantalizing delight for the lover of singing but a frustration for almost anyone else. If a master with good video and superior stereo sound exists, we all deserve its commercial release!



# Lucrezia Borgia

## Donizetti

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Australia

Lucrezia: Sutherland  
Gennaro: Stevens  
Orsini: Elkins  
Alfonso: Allman

PAL  
Italian  
Director: Charles

Date: 1977  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Showcase live performance for Sutherland. Costuming is conventional Italian of the era, contrasting with cardboard representational sets. Acting is minimal and occasionally ludicrous. Even the Italian pronunciation leaves something to be desired.

### PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé's interpretation is invisible; the music seems to lie there without his intervention. An adequate orchestra outshines the flaccid, erratic and undersized chorus. Sutherland excels vocally with an unusually lustrous lower register. Stevens has everything needed for the rôle except the higher notes; at forte from the *passagio* up, the voice drops agonizingly back into the throat. Elkins is wonderful dramatically and vocally; Allman is little short of that standard. The smaller parts are covered adequately.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is quite good for the era, suffering only rather more contrast than ideal. Stereo separation and imaging are negligible and the tone is occasionally strident, but overall sound is good. Camera work and direction are unobtrusive. In all, this performance is almost recommendable. If the tenor or the conducting or the choral/instrumental contribution were just a little better, it might be considered a fair representation of the work.

# Maria Stuarda

## Donizetti

Conductor: Mackerras  
Company: English National

Mary: Baker  
Elizabeth: Plowright  
Leicester: Rendall  
Talbot: Tomlinson  
Hannah: Bostock  
Cecil: Opie

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Butler

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Traditional live performance in a full-size hall. Sets and costumes are literal and effective. Movement is fluid for the soloists but awkward for the chorus. Nothing in the production adds significantly to the drama, but nothing detracts from the singing.

### PERFORMANCES

Mackerras is surprisingly sloppy, but the musical ideas are communicated clearly. The orchestra follows accurately and plays in good unison. The singers fare less well, with sloppy entrances and frequent distortions of the line. One is tempted to blame the lack of dramatic impact on the conducting. Baker sings superbly, though she shows only the pitiable side of Mary, not the aspect of leader of the opposition; her final scene has no root in her earlier work. Plowright is effective and appropriately aloof, displaying none of the passion which may also be read into Elizabeth. Rendall is accurate but petulant and lacks the resources to enliven the rôle. Tomlinson approximates the notes, but the other minor parts are well covered.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, apparently unhampered by the audience. Audio is unimpressive but clear, with little stereo separation and no audible recreation of the stage. Direction is weak; frequent diversions through arbitrary change of viewpoint interrupt the dramatic flow. Overall, the impression is of insufficient rehearsal for all forces except the principals and the orchestra. No better performance is likely to become available for any of Donizetti's histories, and no better portrayal than Baker's can be postulated, so this version is recommended.

# Roberto Devereux

## Donizetti

Conductor: Rudel  
Company: Wolf Trap

Elizabeth: Sills  
Roberto: Alexander  
Sara: Marsee  
Nottingham: Fredricks

VHS  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1974  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Live performance on an outdoor stage. Sets are simple and literal; costumes are traditional for the period; details of jewelry, makeup and props are effective in establishing the scene. Sills' stunning performance contrasts with traditional acting by the other forces.

### PERFORMANCES

Rudel conducts inconsistently: an impressive overture is followed by a chaotic first scene. However, he and the orchestra settle into a generally solid and stolid reading while the chorus remains spotty in its slight contribution. Sills' performance is vocally and visually overwhelming. The other principals are admirably accurate and in style, though they provide no competition to Sills in her dominance of the stage. Lesser roles are filled competently.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is remarkably fine for the era, though not as sharp as in the best modern recordings. Audio is badly flawed, with distracting flutter even on the HiFi commercial tape, limited high frequencies, and substantial distortion from overrecording of the peaks; stereo is used well in isolating elements of both orchestra and stage. Camera work and angles are generally fine, though the back of the conductor's head is occasionally in frame and distracting. Browning's direction is a bit busier than some may prefer, but he eschews extreme closeups and usually focusses on the appropriate subjects. Overall, this is a stunning record of Sills near her best with capable supporting forces in an important work. Highly recommended on all counts except sound quality.

# Rusalka Dvorak

Conductor: Elder  
Company: English National

Rusalka: Hannan  
Prince: Treleaven  
Princess: Cannan  
Water Spirit: Macann  
Jezibaba: Howard

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Bailey

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live, fairy-light staging of Dvorak's fairy tale. Sets are minimal and representational, allowing the imagination to supply the fantastic images induced by libretto and score. Costumes are literal for humans and quasi-human spirits, fantastic for the fantasy elements. Acting is convincing. One major flaw is that only about half of the dialogue can be followed easily, and no subtitles are provided.

## PERFORMANCES

Elder makes the most of the score, stressing its romantic roots rather than its fantasy. The orchestra is not large enough to evoke post-Wagnerian sound and is sometimes ragged. Hannan manages her *falcon* rôle quite well, though she is short on top and bottom and can't quite manage the climaxes. Treleaven has the needed style and voice to convey the noble lecher convincingly. Macann is excellent. Howard's contralto is in the best British tradition of plummy tone and dedication. Every solo part is handled with both dramatic and vocal ease.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp, but lighting is inadequate to capture the apparent brightness of the staging. Monaural sound is clear, but the score demands far more. Camera angles are often poorly selected and do not consistently focus on the heart of the image; ENO's earlier practice of recording a stage production without audience would have served this one well.

# Johnny Belinda Fenwick

Conductor: Fenwick  
Company: *ad hoc* (Canada)

Belinda: Hancox  
Doctor: Cole  
MacDonald: McManus  
Maggie: Mawson

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1976  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Live staging without audience of a work arguably musical, operetta, or folk opera. Set in a stylized but essentially literal fishing village in the late 18th century, period costumes fit with natural acting and enthusiasm. Enunciation is excellent and subtitles are unnecessary. Occasional lapses of lip sync confirm that the recording was not done at a single staged performance.

## PERFORMANCES

Conducting and orchestral playing are light and dynamic. Cole reminds one of Howard Keel in voice and style. McManus and Mawson act and speak enthusiastically but the performance would benefit from more sumptuous and more accurate voices. The other singers are pleasant to hear, and all move gracefully, whether nominally dancers or singers. Hancox is extraordinarily expressive without uttering a sound.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Adequate video is noisy in the review copy. Pre-HiFi monaural audio is remarkably recorded to capture the orchestra and the singers without compromise. Camera work is brisk in keeping with the vibrant tale and its telling. Note that the music, while accessible and tuneful, is complex and rich, fully meriting at least light-opera production.

# Faust Eternal

## Fiser

Conductor: Belfin

Company: film

Faust: Judrak

Mefisto: Berman

Marketka: Cejkova

Broadcast

Czech / English subtitles

Director: Jires

Date: 1985

Evaluation: Extraordinary

### PRODUCTION

Film with dual cast of actors and singers. Sets are stunningly realistic, theatrical, and metaphysical. Costumes are brilliant and appropriate, whether stylized for any era, folk, or street. The performance is a direct and dramatic communication using every aspect of the arts (painting, singing, instruments, dance, ...) to convey the message and the feeling. Lip sync sometimes fails in dramatic scenes, but it does not interfere with enjoyment of the whole. NOTE: The production exploits the eroticism of the material and is not recommended for the unprepared.

### PERFORMANCES

With no referent, no evaluation of the components is meaningful. Everything works together to leave the impression that there can be no other performance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and brilliant. Monaural sound is clear and transparent. Direction is overwhelming except for some special effects for which the illusion cannot be maintained. Whether one calls this opera or not, it should be experienced as a uniquely accessible work of contemporary art.

# Willie Stark Floyd

Conductor: DeMain  
Company: Houston

Willie: Nolan  
Anne: Conwell  
Judge: Garrard  
Jack: Kays  
Sadie: Curtis

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Large

Date: 1980?  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance without an audience. Sets are simplistic but effective in conveying the Depression era in the American South. Costumes are clothing of the day unadorned and natural. Stage action is natural and fluid, invoking the drama to perfection. Some choral work would benefit from subtitles, but most soloists enunciate clearly.

## PERFORMANCES

As the premiere production, this performance must be assumed to be as intended by the composer/libretticist. DeMain leads the Houston orchestra and chorus in an engrossing reading. Nolan is an exceptional communicator with a fine lyric baritone. Cowell would be a bit artificial were she not cast so well as the belle. The other performers are also superb for their rôles, with voices more than adequate for the modest demands and with skill both to characterize and to differentiate their parts.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good despite its age, sharp and well defined, though lacking detail due to low lighting. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is acceptable (a stereo source was available for simulcast) but muffled by recording technology and afflicted with hum in the review copy. While hardly a great work of American opera, this performance does capture a fine and historic realization and should be more widely available.

# Blue Monday

## Gershwin

Conductor: Andrae  
Company: Italian Swiss Radio

Joe: Haskin  
Vi: Williams  
Tom: Washington  
Mike: Bazemore

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Freeman

Date: 1980  
Evaluation: Unique

### PRODUCTION

Made for television staging recorded live without an audience. Set and costumes are American of indeterminate date (minor characters are costumed as flappers). Acting is persuasive and believable.

### PERFORMANCES

Andrae's interpretation may be overblown for some tastes, but this is opera (however brief, and even in a non-white idiom) and the interpretation appears true to Gershwin's intent. The orchestration is also a bit overdone but effective and carried off well if unidiomatically. Haskin sounds as though his instrument has been pushed down from a natural tenor, but it is used effectively. Williams also communicates well with a fine voice on the heavy side for the part. The rest of the cast sings (and plays) well and conveys the work effectively.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is contrasty, sharp and clear. Sound is bright and effective but would benefit from stereo resolution. Camera work is somewhat more busy than necessary. Overall, this is a satisfying record of an unusual minor work.



# **Porgy and Bess**

## **Gershwin**

Conductor: Rattle  
Company: Royal

Porgy: White  
Bess: Haymon  
Crown: Baker  
Sportin' Life: Evans

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Nunn

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Solidly operatic studio performance. Sets and costumes are realistic in concept but uniformly colorless. Acting is outstanding and enunciation is brilliant. Unfortunately, lip sync ranges from fair to poor and is often distracting (e.g., Crown is still singing as he drinks his beer). Other anomalies include Caucasian cast members, putting Porgy on crutches instead of a rolling cart, and other details insignificant to those new to the work. While the score is complete, liberties are taken (e.g., giving “Summertime” to Bess).

### PERFORMANCES

Conductor and singers treat the opera seriously—arguably, too seriously. Rattle plays through the syncopation and otherwise strips the score of its folk elements in favor of purity of tone; where that may be ideal in Verdi, Wagner or Massenet, the relative simplicity of the score makes the approach tedious. The orchestra is full and rich, fully supporting and almost justifying the concept. Chorus and singers are superb, though similarly uninflected. Physically and vocally, the cast is excellent; none stands out except the convincing, exciting crab man.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but adds no sparkle to the drab staging. Sound is exceptional, including even effective surround information to establish an ambiance which expands the stage to emulate the scene. Lighting is ample but flat, continuing the unaccented tone of the performance. Camera work and overall video direction are excellent, exploiting the studio opportunity without losing focus on the heart of the action.

# Andrea Chenier

## Giordano

Conductor: Rudel  
Company: Royal

Chenier: Domingo  
Maddalena: Tomowa-Sintow  
Gerard: Zancanaro

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Burton

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in an olden style lacking only an Italian feel for a higher rating. Sets are grand but drab. Costumes and makeup are traditionally uninspired. Stage action is geared for the large house, not for the small screen, but work well in an older idiom.

### PERFORMANCES

Rudel leads a solid, stolid interpretation which cannot be faulted—unless one seeks inspiration. Chorus and orchestra are superb. Domingo is similarly sound and effective except for lacking the ring of voice and of conviction. Tomowa-Sintow is overripe for the role but sings well if without inflection. Zancanaro has all the requirements for Gerard and brings the rôle off well. The minor soloists are unusually well cast and effective.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and satisfying. Sound is clear, with good stereo resolution of the orchestra but no imaging of the stage. Camera work is fine, maintaining attention on the essential action despite the audience. If one could add *brio*, this performance would be recommended highly.

# Andrea Chenier

## Giordano

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Scala

Chenier: Carreras  
Maddalena: Marton  
Gerard: Cappuccilli

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an appreciative audience. Sets are highly stylized with a revolutionary flavor. Costumes are exaggerated to the point of apparent discomfort, but may be more realistic than conventional versions. Stage action is formalized in the stand-and-deliver style.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly's reading is brighter and more idiomatic than expected. The orchestra and chorus are accurate and in time. Carreras is almost ideal for the part: bright voice, convincing style, and dedication. Marton not only looks wrong but is neither accurate nor in good voice. Cappuccilli is loud and accurate but conveys nothing of Gerard's character. Minor characters are caricatured instead of portrayed, significantly detracting from the overall effect.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but lighting is insufficient to show detail. Audio is reasonably good but the stereo provides no imaging and at least in the review copy instrumental detail is blurred by distortion. Camera work is superb, of course. This performance has style and excellent conducting, but too much of the singing is deficient for a positive recommendation.

# Andrea Chenier

## Giordano

Conductor: Gardelli  
Company: RAI Milano

Chenier: Corelli  
Maddalena: Casapietra  
Gerard: Cappuccilli

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: ?

Date: ~1976  
Evaluation: Acceptable

### PRODUCTION

Surprisingly uninspired film. Traditional sets are imported to a relatively small sound stage. Costumes are less flamboyant than usual but uninspired. Lip sync is so poor that it appears not even to have been attempted. The actors are ringers rather than the singers; they are attractive and characterize well.

### PERFORMANCES

The unnamed conductor leads a staid and conventional reading which the orchestra and chorus follow easily and accurately. Corelli no longer offers the ringing tone that characterized the years when he dominated in the role but is generally acceptable. Casapietra is convincing and lyrical, though she, too, seems to lack the force to make her role persuasive on stage. Cappuccilli provides a pleasantly lyric reading yet has the voice quality and volume for the climaxes. Minor rôles are filled without distinction.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, though the review copy has the shortcomings expected from its early origins. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is minimally acceptable. Film production is conventional and satisfying. Overall, this performance offers no advantage over any of the modern readings.

# Andrea Chenier

## Giordano

Conductor: Questra  
Company: RAI

Chenier: del Monaco  
Maddalena: Stella  
Gerard: Taddei

VHS  
Italian  
Director: Landi

Date: 1958  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Filmed (black-and-white) stage performance of no special merit. Settings appear to have been lavish and traditional. Costumes are sufficient, although the meaner ones are never credible. Movement is minimal and negligible. Lip sync is intolerable.

### PERFORMANCES

Questra plods through, barely holding the forces together and contributing nothing to the experience. Neither chorus nor orchestra is better than he requires. Del Monaco declaims the rôle rather than singing it. Stella looks pretty enough, but is dull and imprecise. Even Taddei bleats, and the minor characters are barely covered.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are unacceptable. The picture is inadequately transferred from the European original, with poor contrast and substantial smearing. Audio is maintained at a uniform level, distorting on louder passages and suffering hiss on softer ones. Even with the limitations of the alternatives, this recording cannot be recommended.

# **Fedora**

## **Giordano**

Conductor: Gavazzeni  
Company: Scala

Fedora: Freni  
Loris: Domingo  
Olga: Scarabelli  
de Siriex: Corbelli

VHS Copy  
Italian  
Director: Puggelli

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Intense live performance. Sets and costumes are literal, colorful and restrained. Acting is committed but not overdone - except for Freni, whose style approaches that of a conventional diva. Some stage business is diverting; it is otherwise fine.

### PERFORMANCES

Gavazzeni's direction is crisp and focussed, maintaining the thrust and pulse of the music. The orchestra is responsive and accurate, the chorus is fine. Freni's voice betrays years of use in moments of discomfort, but overall her intensity and commitment shine through. Domingo has never sounded better and is dramatically convincing. The other solo parts are covered capably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Despite its second or third generation, the review copy displayed clean video with sharp focus. Non-HiFi monaural sound does not do justice to the rich score but proves adequate once the drama is under way. Camera work is fluid with more movement and fewer abrupt cuts than usual. Direction is unobtrusive, though one often wishes for tighter framing and more medium shots. In all, one can scarcely hope for a more persuasive presentation of a work deserving of more frequent presentation.

# Fedora Giordano

Conductor: Abbado/R  
Company: Metropolitan

Fedora: Freni  
Loris: Domingo  
Olga: Arteta  
de Sirieux: Croft

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1997  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Composite of live performances geared to Freni's farewell at the last performance. Sets and costumes are traditional but unremittingly somber. Acting is fluid and credible except for Arteta and, to a lesser extent, Freni who are more operatic than theatric in this production.

## PERFORMANCES

Roberto Abbado finds no special inspiration in the score but leads the always impressive orchestra and adequate chorus soundly. Freni sings only occasionally and declaims with more force than grace. Domingo is as reliable as always in acting and singing. Arteta lacks the lyric tone that would set her off well from our Fedora, but conveys the content of the part capably. Croft's voice is fine but his Italian is surprisingly approximate. The minor rôles are poorly cast and approximations to the score are the rule, not the exception.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The characteristic sight and sound of modern Met telecasts are evident: sharp, well-lighted images; clear, well-balanced audio with little stereo and no imaging of the stage. Superb camera work and reliable direction have become givens in these broadcasts and this one is no exception. Solo spotlighting against the dark staging is quite effective and reduces the need for the closeups which disturb some viewers. In a work such as this, routine performance and uninspired staging make it seem far longer than it is.

# Satyagraha Glass

Conductor: Davis  
Company: Stuttgart

Gandhi 1: Goeke  
Gandhi 2: Harster  
Gandhi 3: Danninger  
Tolstoy, Tagore: Greiwe

Broadcast  
Sanskrit  
Director: Kach

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Live performance seen from all angles. Sets are a variety of props against the stage and a background of infinite space. Costumes are occasionally representative, more often shapeless white coverings. Movement is choreographed, obviating acting per se.

## PERFORMANCES

Analysis of performance seems superfluous here; the work is an audio-video experience classifiable as any form, none, or its own. The sounds of the work seem individually appropriate and fully integrated with each other. It is likely that a home viewer would have a more effective experience of this work than one attending the performance.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is problematic: insufficiently lighted to show detail at the best of times, therefore inadequate to show any contrast with the darker scenes. Monaural sound is effective, but stereo spread would have helped both to immerse the viewer and to allow focus on details. Nevertheless, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* effect is achieved and the experience is dramatic.



# Orfeo ed Euridice

## Gluck

Conductor: Leppard  
Company: Glyndebourne

Orfeo: Baker  
Euridice: Speiser  
Amore: Gale

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Greenberg

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Imaginative, fantastic staging reflecting the revolutionary properties of the work. Sets are simple but effective. Costuming is generally drab except for such as the infernal spirits, where excess is appropriate. Choreography is effective and stage movement is fluid for singers as well. Nevertheless, the effect is of an ordeal by boredom, not of a viable, dynamic work.

### PERFORMANCES

Leppard conducts an authentic performance that never takes off. The orchestra is precise without ever dancing with the score. Choral work is similarly careful and accurate. Baker is committed and sings well, but needs more fervor and more tonal richness to make the most of the rôle. The other singers are capable, but not memorable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is excellent, maintaining audience perspective yet showing each detail of the score. Video is remarkably good for the era; one presumes that the nearly continuous fog is the director's intent. Lighting seems appropriate for the production, yet does not seem to limit camera work. Imagination characterizes the recording, but does not redeem the longueurs of the performance.

# Orfeo ed Euridice

## Gluck

Conductor: Haenchen  
Company: Royal

Orfeo: Kowalski  
Euridice: Webster  
Amore: Budd

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Hulscher

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Unique

### PRODUCTION

Extraordinary live abridgement directed by Kupfer. The sets are glass panels whose movement and reflections integrate into and contrast with the drama. Pprops pose as many interpretive problems as insights. Several dramatis personae also confuse: a blindfolded figure exchanges jackets with Orpheus; two boys combine to portray Amor. Costuming is modern informal dress with flashes of formal garb, of period dress, and of fantasy. The dramatic action is choreographed and danced rather than blocked and acted. The running time has been cut to about eighty minutes and three acts are compressed into one.

### PERFORMANCES

Haenschen conducts a taut, crisp reading on modern instruments. The orchestra's richness complements the stark scoring. The large chorus is precise and balances well from the pit. Kowalski's billing as a male alto seems inappropriate; his sound is more soprano though the instrument does not range as high. While basic vocal color is excellent, he cannot modulate it effectively. As a result, many will find his sound odd at first but tiresome by the end. Webster excels as Euridice, though at times her voice is almost indistinguishable from Kowalski's. Budd's treble is rather less sharp than most and is used effectively.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear throughout and well lighted. Audio quality is excellent, though stereo imaging is ineffective. Video direction is choppy; one suspects that it is consistent with the Kupfer's desires. With more than half the running time cut, this performance is an experience markedly different from any other known on audio or video. If only to appreciate one direction of contemporary staging, at least one viewing is highly recommended.

# Guarany Gomes

Conductor: Neschling  
Company: Bonn

Pery: Domingo  
Cecilia: Villaroel  
Don Alvaro: Haddock  
Don Antonio: Tien

VHS copy  
Italian  
Director: ?

Date: June 1994  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Very live performance before an involved audience. Modest sets and costumes invoke colonial South America sufficiently, if unimaginatively. Acting suffices in this relatively static work. Note that the review copy reflects heavy cuts; I suspect that many were made in the performance as well.

## PERFORMANCES

Neschling provides a steady pulse and clear if uninspired direction. The orchestra sounds capable; the chorus sonorous, though not precise on entrances. Domingo is near his best in a solid, spinto rôle with few demands on the topmost notes. Apart from some intonation problems, Villaroel is effective. Haddock is acceptable throughout and far more in his aria. Tien's resonant bass delights both in ensembles and in his solo moments. Smaller parts are well filled.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is some generations removed from a hand-held recorder; it cannot be judged beyond saying that the outlines and general shapes are visible. Monaural sound is limited as expected but still adequate to convey the richness of the score. It seems particularly inappropriate to discuss camera motion or direction in this case. Overall, this is a persuasive performance of a work deserving of wide recognition; the musical suggestion of *Il Trovatore* is strong - and that is surely not a negative criticism. Apart from the 'exotic' locale, the plot resembles standard opera fare closely: basso father wants soprano daughter to marry her baritone peer, not the ill-suited tenor hero whom she loves; suitor survives trials with her aid, then wins her. The music sounds much like late Donizetti and early-to-middle Verdi, though at times it can be pretentious. Still, cast as well as this performance it should hold a place on the operatic stage.

# Faust Gounod

Conductor: Prêtre  
Company: Chicago

Marguerite: Freni  
Faust: Kraus  
Mephistopheles: Ghiaurov  
Valentin: Stilwell  
Siebel: ?

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director:

Date: ~1977  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Rich and satisfying live staging. Sets are grand in scale, but representative rather than literal. Costumes are traditional and unimaginative. Stage movement is appropriate but underplayed, losing some opportunity to realize the visual contrast suggested by the text and the score.

## PERFORMANCES

Prêtre's knowledge of the score is impressive, yet he makes even the most stodgy components fresh and bright. The chorus and orchestra are accurate if not inspired. Freni slides through the technical demands, but conveys Marguerite's passion poignantly. Kraus is simply the finest exponent of the French repertoire since Gedda retired. Ghiaurov embodies the demonic majesty of the fallen angel, rather than being an embodiment of evil alone. Support is excellent throughout.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

This recording shows its age painfully. Video is flat and encumbered by restricted camera movement due to lighting and the audience. Pre-HiFi mono sound is adequate to represent the interpretations, but does not do justice to the score or to the performance. If there is a quality master tape somewhere, let us all hope for its incarnation on a modern LaserDisc; Gounod and opera lovers deserve it!

# Faust Gounod

Conductor: Mackerras  
Company: Paris

Marguerite: Freni  
Faust: Gedda  
Mefistofeles: Soyer  
Valentin: Krause  
Siebel: Auphan

LaserDisc  
French / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1975  
Evaluation: Problematic

## PRODUCTION

Live, idiosyncratic production. A single Busby Berkeley set is distracting. *Fin du siècle* costuming and staging divert without explaining the sheets in Marguerite's garden or a thousand other absurdities. The production dominates the positive virtues. Except for Freni, all singers are comfortable with the language. The subtitles are unusually large and ill placed.

## PERFORMANCES

Mackerras seems at a loss in the score, flattening it of all emotion and dragging tempi. The orchestra follows well, but the chorus often misses timing. Gedda sings beautifully and easily; he seems leader of the group seeking a usable tempo. Unfortunately, none of them can provide the spirit and grace stripped from the performance by the conductor and the stage director. Freni provides more lyricism than in the later recording, but lacks the drama needed in the last act. Soyer's baritone does not a Mefistofeles make but he cuts a fine figure visually and vocally. Krause is outstanding save for a couple of effortful top notes. The other singers are capable if unremarkable.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and details are lost to insufficient lighting, but the image suffices to detail the staging and the singers' attempts to communicate. Audio suffers surprisingly, with erratically compressed dynamic range and a frequency range comparable with AM radio. Camera work is generally good, though occasional attempts to provide unusual viewpoints exacerbate production features one would prefer to keep hidden. The primary drawbacks of the performance are not technical, but musical (Mackerras) and dramatic (the production). Nevertheless, the vocal delights make it worth auditioning.

# Faust

## Gounod

Conductor: Baudo  
Company: Philadelphia

Faust: Vanzo  
Marguerite: Masterson  
Mefistopheles: Morris  
Valentin: G. Quilico

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance mixing idioms almost randomly for very limited success. Sets are stylized and essentially cheap. Costumes are traditional with some odd variants for simplicity. Stage movement is stylized, perhaps by intent of the director.

### PERFORMANCES

Baudo seems uncomfortable with the idiom and provides a more Italian than French reading. The orchestra is sound and the chorus is enthusiastic. Vanzo's timbre is right but he struggles with the notes and produces many unpleasant sounds. Masterson is fine, though a bit short on both drama and colorature. Morris sings the notes in a rather unpleasant voice without involvement. Quilico is a pleasant if light-voiced Valentin. Other soloists are similarly mismatched to this essentially French work. The whole does not integrate well into a performance, but remains a set of disjoint solo turns of relatively little merit.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent for the era and lighting is sufficient if not exemplary. Although the broadcast was in stereo, only a monaural copy was available for review; the sound is problematic, losing Vanzo and Quilico at odd moments and often distorting balances. Camera angles and movement seem unaffected by the audience and overall direction is fine. The result is an overheavy and disjoint performance with little to recommend it.

# Romeo et Juliette

## Gounod

Conductor: Mackerras  
Company: Royal

Juliette: Vaduva  
Romeo: Alagna  
Mercutio: Le Roux  
Tybalt: Clarke  
Capulet: Sidhom

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1994  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live staging before a responsive audience. Sets are conventional, but somewhat sparse and low on color. Costumes are simplified traditional, seeming to be comfortable without distracting the audience. Stage movement flows easily and naturally, though the two lovers tend to silent-movie gesturing at dramatic moments.

### PERFORMANCES

Mackerras puts no particular stamp on the performance with a steady beat and no Gallic color or feel. The orchestra is sonorous and accurate; the chorus handles the language particularly well and shows excellent preparation. Vaduva lacks the colorature for the Waltz Song but is otherwise excellent. Alagna delights the newcomer to the work with his appearance and voice; the experienced listener will find more to complain about in errors of style and oddly misplaced tones. Le Roux is a delight; the other rôles are handled capably if not memorably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sharp, well-focussed video may be little noticed in the relatively drab staging. Sound is excellent with good stereo spread for the orchestra but little imaging. Camera work is effective if unremarkable and Large's direction is of the standard we have come to expect. Overall, this recording is recommended as a fair representation of the work without major flaw. It is well short of the standard of the best audio recordings, but is unlikely soon to be surpassed with modern forces.

# Romeo et Juliette

## Gounod

Conductor: Lewis  
Company: Montreal

Juliette: Soviero  
Romeo: Cupido  
Mercutio: Laperriere  
Tybalt: Kunde  
Capulet: Legendre

Broadcast  
French  
Director: ?

Date: ~1985  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with typical Canadian economy. Sets are simple but effective; costumes are colorful and traditional. Performers move easily and naturally. Their French is generally good, which is hardly surprising in that milieu.

### PERFORMANCES

Lewis' interpretation is gratifyingly idiomatic but never distorts the line. The orchestra is fine and highly responsive. The chorus is also accurate and moves particularly well to make the opening scene effective. Soviero is past her Juliette days, as evidenced by pinched top notes and occasionally visible effort. Cupido is young and looks good; unfortunately, he sings under the note and seems unfamiliar with both the language and the style. (It seems likely from the evidence here and in other broadcasts that we might have been better served if he had traded rôles with Kunde.) The many other solo rôles are filled capably, barring an occasional missed note or ill-turned phrase.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is generally good, although underlighted as seems usual for the Canadian broadcasts. Monaural sound is excellent. (However, there are periods of overmodulation on the review copy which remind one of the usual product from Montreal.) Camera angles are restricted by the presence of the audience and therefore never let one feel as involved as would have been the case in the house. Despite the limitations of this performance, it is deserving of wider distribution, especially given the paucity of French opera on the market.



# Giulio Cesare

## Handel

Conductor: Smith  
Company: Sellars

Caesar: Gall  
Cleopatra: Larson  
Cornelia: Westbrook-Geha  
Sesto: Hunt  
Achila: Maddalena  
Tolomeo: Minter

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Sellars

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Superb

### PRODUCTION

Brilliant transposition of an eminently live performance to modern times. The primary set offers bright colors and varied lighting. Costumes begin are within the range of contemporary American dress. Above all, the performance is stunning: characters are always credible, and sing so well that their skills are hard to detect. As faithful as the performance is to the score, it is also dramatic and humorous and exciting—a unique musical and video experience.

### PERFORMANCES

Neither Smith nor his orchestra emulates historic practice in this modern performance of an opera for all time. Nothing in the conducting or playing stands out. Gall is a delight if not a revelation: while tonal quality may not suit all tastes, the colorature is superb and the portrayal is convincing. Larson's Cleopatra is older and more deliberate than usual, but fully realized in its way. The physical and emotional contrast provided by Westbrook-Geha is persuasive, with precision instead of personality. Hunt not only portrays but personifies Sesto; Minter's Sellars impersonation never interferes with superb singing and acting; the list extends to almost all performers. A bit more facility with colorature from some singers would be gratifying, but none can truly be said to be deficient.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are impeccable, realizing the stage in sound. Camera direction is notable especially when the setting could be boring; occasionally, the performers move briefly out of frame and the camera must catch up. If you feel Handel wrote museum pieces, stay away from this performance. However, if you want to understand how he could compete with the popular shows of his day, run for a copy. Do it now, before it goes out of print.

# Giulio Cesare

## Handel

Conductor: Mackerras  
Company: ENO

Caesar: Baker  
Cleopatra: Masterson  
Cornella: Walker  
Sextus: Jones  
Ptolemy: Bowman

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Phillips

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Apparently, a recording of a stage production made without an audience. Settings are sparse, suggestive rather than literal. With rich and credible costuming, the result is fully satisfying (while presumably keeping costs reasonable). Movement is stilted, but no more than fits *opera seria*.

### PERFORMANCES

Mackerras is sound but does not illuminate the score as one would hope. The orchestra sounds right: large enough for majesty, small enough for precision. Choral work is capable. Baker's reading is superb throughout, better in the dramatic recitative than in the showpiece arias where she strains to ornament the lines. Masterson is more than competent and partners Baker well, but lights no fire and offers little beyond the written score. Of the other performers, only Bowman stands out: his countertenor fits the character and the music well, and he creates a real character in a problematic role.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are impeccable. The advantages of both film and live recording seem to have been exploited well, allowing ample lighting and capable camera work without introducing problems of lip sync or the artificiality of unstaged settings.

# Giulio Cesare

## Handel

Conductor: Hickox  
Company: Australia

Caesar: Pushee  
Cleopatra: Kenny  
Cornella: Gunn  
Sextus: Campbell  
Ptolemy: Dalton  
Achille: Bennett

VHS  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Butler

Date: 13 July 1994  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an appreciative audience. No concept is detectable behind occasionally audibly moving panels, dangling props, and undefinable costumes. Dancers appear and move or eavesdrop unpredictably. Most acting is of the most primitive, set-chewing sort.

### PERFORMANCES

Hickox conducts with as little focus as Negrin directs. He leads orchestra and chorus efficiently and they are adequately responsive in reacting to the musical moment. Kenny is wonderful in all respects and should be regarded as a national treasure. Pushee begins weakly, but soon slips into the rôle vocally and physically. In contrast, Bennett defines pitch as poorly as character; Campbell's voice is shrill and forced; and Gunn's mezzo is melds trill into sustained tone and excessively dark. Dalton's manic vocal and physical portrayal may not be his fault.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is compromised by copy protection (?) with poor sharpness, limited luminance range, excessive color contrast and nonuniform brightness. Audio was reviewed in non-HiFi monaural, where it lacks dynamic and tonal range. Camera work and angles are well chosen without apparent interference from the presence of the audience; unfortunately, direction is erratic, literally switching cameras with every bar at times. Combined with the apparently random movement of the set and unpredictable appearance of extraneous characters, one gets visual confusion, not to say chaos, as if to apologize for a work perceived as static. Sellars contradicts that perception, of course, where ENO exploits it. This recording is recommended only for Kenny's and Pushee's contributions.

# Giulio Cesare

## Handel

Conductor: Schreier  
Company: Berlin

Caesar: Adam  
Cleopatra: Casapietra  
Cornelia: Wurmeister  
Sextus: Buechner  
Ptolemy: Voegel

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese Subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before a silent crowd. The single Roman-ish set adds a quasi-Egyptian throne in some scenes. Costumes are Roman except for one Cleopatra outfit of indeterminate origin. Stage movement is fluid and acting is rather more natural than operatic. Roles are transposed to more conventional, less Handelian voices; the result may be easier for some audiences but do not do justice to the score. The score itself is highly abridged - less than two hours total or little more than half the work.

### PERFORMANCES

Schreier conveys a balanced interpretation—more baroque than romantic, but not by much. The orchestra is sonorous but clean. Except for Buechner, no singer is without pitch problems. Adam is generally acceptable and pleasant to see but aspirates badly. Casapietra has some pleasant soft singing, but is otherwise a disaster. Buechner's performance is creditable; the others' are not.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not sharp, but is sufficient and reasonably well lighted. Sound is clear, weak in the highs, and not exploitative of stereo. Camera work is refreshing, with many long and medium shots and no extreme closeups. However, nothing in this performance recommends it over the competition; it cannot be said fairly to represent the opera as Handel wrote it.

# Theodora Handel

Conductor: Christie  
Company: Glyndebourne

Theodora: Upshaw  
Didymus: Daniels  
Valens: Olsen  
Septimius: R. Croft  
Irene: Hunt

PAL VHS  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Sellars

Date: 1996  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Live, dramatized interpretation of the oratorio. Setting is established by movable, oversize shapes in blown glass — and stunningly effective lighting. Costumes are brilliant and contemporary. Except for formalized, stilted positioning, movement and acting are fluid and appropriate. The result retains much of its static character but still is riveting to the audience both in the house and on video.

## PERFORMANCES

Christie's concept projects clearly through the brilliance of both orchestra and chorus. Upshaw is the ideal heroine: pure of voice and demeanor. Daniels' countertenor fits the rôle and the music equally well. Olsen and Croft would stand out in any less remarkable cast and production; here, they simply maintain the high level. Larmore disappoints slightly, lacking the sonority and authority one might wish, but singing accurately and acting effectively.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but lacks crispness, notably in the darker scenes. Stereo sound provides imaging and clear representation of each voice and each instrument. Camera work is fluid, but direction is a serious problem, at times changing view with each bar and occasionally focussing so closely on a soloist's face that one sees little more than nose and mouth. Overall, the reservations that must be levelled with respect to excesses of production and direction and with the idea of dramatizing the oratorio succumb to enthusiasm over the performances.

# Xerxes Handel

Conductor: Mackerras  
Company: English National

Xerxes: Murray  
Romilda: Masterson  
Artamenes: Robson  
Amastris: Rigby  
Atalanta: Garrett

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Phillips

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Vital but confusing live staging. An enveloping set is varied with colorful props and devices of various eras and purposes (not all of which can be recognized). Costumes are similarly varied in period, function and color for reasons which elude the viewer. Enunciation is generally clear from soloists but subtitles would have assisted substantially for the chorus and for some arias. Acting is enthusiastic and appropriate.

## PERFORMANCES

Mackerras provides a detailed, delightful reading which leaves the opera's humor to the production. The chamber orchestra is brilliant and exuberant. The chorus is surprisingly muddy in intonation and weights the performance more than the drama requires. Murray sings beautifully but is unconvincing and offers insufficient contrast with Robson. Masterson begins superbly but seems to tire and is inaccurate both in tone and in ornamentation in the latter acts. Robson's dry instrument is adequate though a true trill is sorely missed. Garrett and Rigby are vocally weakest but dramatically superior; the other singers are capable given the modest demands.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but would have been more brilliant with a bit more light on the stage. Audio is outstanding, differentiating voices and instruments in excellent stereo and true fidelity to the brilliant sonorities. Camera work is not hampered by the audience, with high angles seeming natural and appropriate. Video direction is fine. Overall, this idiosyncratic performance is well sung and fails only in favoring slapstick over wit.

# Hänsel und Gretel

## Humperdinck

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Vienna

Gretel: Gruberova  
Hänsel: Fassbänder  
Witch: Jurinac  
Mother: Dernesch  
Father: Prey

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Everding

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

A film production closely related to a stage version, somewhat in the vein of Bergman's *Zauberflöte*. Settings are appropriately exaggerated and brilliant. Costumes are traditional. Movement is only occasionally awkward.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti conducts superbly, maintaining the substance of the music without losing the fantastic elements. The orchestra is comparably respectful and playful. Gruberova and Fassbänder are convincing dramatically and pleasant vocally, though neither has the voice to make the most of the score. Jurinac's presence is problematic: clearly, she is a major attraction for Europeans, but she adds nothing to the performance. Dernesch and Prey are outstanding as the parents. The minor rôles are competently played.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent. Editing is a bit choppy, altering point of view more often than the action demands. Cinematography is excellent. Overall, the technical qualities match the vocal ones: a bit rougher than would be ideal, but hard to fault otherwise. Lip sync is fairly good.

# Hänsel und Gretel

## Humperdinck

Conductor: Fulton  
Company: Metropolitan

Gretel: Blegen  
Hänsel: von Stade  
Witch: Elias  
Mother: Kraft  
Father: Devlin

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Browning

Date: 25 Dec 1982  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Typical Live from the Met for its era. A grand and exaggerated reading in oversize fantasy sets. Most costuming is realistic, but movement is exaggerated.

### PERFORMANCES

Fulton conducts routinely, preserving neither the fantasy nor the complexity of the score. Blegen is a bit long in the tooth to convince as a child, but sings well if with little inflection. Von Stade is a delight vocally and dramatically. Elias makes much of the witch's part, never pushing or exaggerating, but always preserving a non-human menace. The other rôles are covered routinely.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

This recording suffers from the limitations of the Met stage and the relatively early live recording. The constraints of lighting and audience force long shots and poor vantages. One is almost always conscious of the physical stage, so the viewer is never transported to a fantasy world. Sound is excellent, capturing the feel of the house without losing detail.



# Hänsel und Gretel

## Humperdinck

Conductor: Elder  
Company: English National

Gretel: Pope  
Hänsel: Robinson  
Witch/Mother: Palmer  
Father: Bailey

Broadcast  
English  
Director: ?

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Enjoyable, fantastic live performance. Scene is an English town in the 20th century. The results are satisfactory, but some problems do not resolve. It may be that the witch scenes are intended to be a dream; otherwise, one is hard pressed to understand that the gingerbread house is the children's home (complete with sleeping father) and the witch is their mother. The gimmickry of the sets seems appropriate, and the odd casting works in its way, but the result is more interesting than fitting. Enunciation is fine and subtitles are not missed.

### PERFORMANCES

Elder favors a middle road, neither the weight of pre-Wagner nor the lightness of a children's opera. The orchestral work is fine if unobtrusive. The children's chorus is rather more ragged than usual. Pope is satisfactory vocally and effective dramatically. Robinson is outstanding—an absolutely convincing boy in voice and appearance. Palmer sings well, eschewing the ranting of a conventional witch, but seeming more convincing as the hooker/Hexe than as the Mother. Bailey makes less of the Father than one would have hoped, but the sheen is gone from his voice and he does what he can with the balance. The down-and-out sandman and dew fairy are well cast.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is very good but could have benefitted from a bit more light throughout. Audio is excellent, revealing all details of the performance and providing some stereo spread. Camera work is notable for using overhead shots to support the evolving scenery (interiors and whole houses emerging from and disappearing into the stage). Overall, the effect is seamless. While idiosyncracies of the production will divert an adult, a child may be entranced.

# Hänsel und Gretel

## Humperdinck

Conductor: Behr  
Company: New York City

Gretel: Gruber  
Hänsel: Marquette  
Witch/Mother: Karpatova  
Father: Hepler

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1997  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with apparently uninvolved audience. Sets and costumes by Maurice Sendak are imaginative as expected but not unconventional. Extraneous stage action may be attractive to the kiddies but is at best distracting and at worst contrary to the text; Peter is impoverished and cannot support his two children - so what are the menagerie and the orphanage full of tikes doing sharing his hovel? Acting, especial from the title characters is overbroad, again perhaps to appeal to the small ones. Overall, this production attempts to scale down the opera to children's fare and finds that impossible - as usual.

### PERFORMANCES

Behr leads an unusually clear and clean reading with good support from the orchestra and some raggedness from the chorus. Gruber provides a pleasant if rather vacuous Gretel, while Marquette seems to play at being a boy rather harder than necessary; both sing well enough and act fluidly. The other singers are capable if undistinguished and the music is well served aurally.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and well focussed. Effective stereo for the orchestra has good tonal balance. Camera work is fluid and apparently uninhibited by the audience. The missing element here is one's choice of either true brightness or the serious music of the score. Overall, the performance can best be described as bland.

# Hänsel und Gretel

## Humperdinck

Conductor: Rubenstein  
Company: Northwestern

Gretel: Bates  
Hansel: Nelson  
Hexe: Kraus  
Mother: Klein  
Father: Rensink

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Carter

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live student performance without an audience. Sets are brilliantly colored and relatively simple. Most costumes are colorful and traditional; the witch is exceptionally ill-clad and horrifyingly made up. Acting is exaggerated and simplistic, betraying the youth of the cast and an interpretation of the work as a kiddies' opera.

### PERFORMANCES

Rubenstein leads a small and reasonably accurate orchestra in a bright, even hasty interpretation which should keep the children entertained. The chorus is approximate but sufficient. Bates' pleasant, lyric soprano is well schooled and used with feeling. Nelson is not always dead on pitch or time, but provides some character portrayal. Kraus is as ugly to hear as to see. The other soloists have vocal problems which one can only hope were overcome before they left school.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is primitive but well lighted and sufficient for the purpose and for its age. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is minimally acceptable for the voices but does not permit appreciation of the orchestra. Video direction is admirable, retaining focus on the essential action without undue busy-ness. Video effects (witch's ride, arrival of sandman) are well handled.

# Hänsel und Gretel

## Humperdinck

Conductor: Allers  
Company: film

Hänsel/Gretel: Brigham  
Witch: Russell  
Mother: Dunnock  
Father: Rogier

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Paul

Date: 1954  
Evaluation: Diverting

### PRODUCTION

Cleverly animated film of a permutation of the story using portions of the music. The storytelling is delightful, but reworking the opera to fit even the lovely tale (written by Padraic Colum) is hard to justify. About a third of the music is dropped, including all of the dew fairy's contribution; narration is overlaid on the music; and many transformations are made (the prayer is taken from the children) which may help move the story for a very small child but don't do the music justice.

### PERFORMANCES

Conducting and orchestral tone are appropriately light and bouncy. The chorus sings well, but is more cloying than usual. Brigham sings a fine Gretel and speaks Hänsel's part comfortably. Anna Russell is the reason for this film, and she applies her wit effectively and winningly. Rogier is excellent, Dunnock acceptable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent despite the age of the material; a Technicolor print would be welcome. Audio is quite poor, with distortion from a poor (monaural) optical track and high noise level. Lighting is notable for making the most of the stop-action animation. Overall, this performance may divert a small child, but can be recommended only as Ms. Russell's sole filmed "serious" singing.

# **Cunning Little Vixen**

## **Janacek**

Conductor: Bergeson  
Company: New York City

Vixen: Rolandi  
Forrester: Cross  
Fox: Pelle  
Schoolmaster: Lankston  
Priest: Sullivan

Broadcast  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Brilliant, imaginative live performance directed by Corsaro with fantastic sets and costumes by Sendak. Choreography is entertaining and relevant. This performance is a delight to see and must have been even more enjoyable on stage.

### PERFORMANCES

Bergeson is capable, but brings out little of the wit in the score. Neither orchestra (essential) nor chorus (incidental) is precise, but both are adequate. Rolandi sets a standard of accurate singing within a total performance far beyond precision. Pelle is brilliant in all respects, though her brilliance of tone becomes a bit tedious. Cross seems to tire by the third act and misses some higher notes. The other soloists and the lesser characters characterize and sing their rôles almost ideally.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent throughout. Stage lighting is insufficient, resulting in unrelieved darkness and some excessive contrast. Camera work is good, but some focus errors and other distractions are notable. Some effects for the stage (e.g., the scrim in the final scene) are counterproductive in video. The subtitles are unnecessary, given the clarity of the singers' enunciation, and are distracting when they vary from the sung text. While this may not be a "keeper" for all viewers, it is a performance which every aficionado should seek out.

# Cunning Little Vixen

## Janacek

Conductor: Mackerras  
Company: Chatelet

Vixen: Jenis  
Forrester: Allen  
Fox: Minutillo  
Schoolmaster: Hajna  
Priest: Novak

Broadcast  
Czech / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1995  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance emphasizing ballet over opera. Sets and props are mystifying and confusing representations. Costuming of the human characters is traditional, but the animals are flamboyant and grotesque. Stage business is clearly Symbolic in ways the viewer is unlikely to decipher. Acting is effective and restrained but dancing is excessive, distracting and simplistic. Subtitles are below the wide frame.

### PERFORMANCES

Mackerras leads a lightly inflected and transparent interpretation which he handles accurately but without particular lift. Jenis is excellent vocally and visually. Allen is surprisingly weak in the lower range and tends to declaim where singing is appropriate, but is generally fine. Minutillo and the supporting cast are excellent in voice and in style where the production permits.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Review copy (PAL duplicate of broadcast) is well lighted with good video. Monaural HiFi sound is crisp but a bit lacking in the tonal extremes. Camera work is excellent and appears unimpaired by the presence of the audience. Large directs with his accustomed skill, tending more toward the longer shots of his Mariinski work than the extreme closeups he applies for the Met, Royal Opera and other venues. Those who like or at least are not disturbed by the production will find this performance preferable to that of the NYCO for conducting and for singing. Others will be distracted by the staging and find the result less enjoyable.

# Cunning Little Vixen

## Janacek

Conductor: Neumann  
Company: Komische Oper Berlin

Vixen: Arnold  
Forester: Asmus  
Fox: Hopp  
Schoolmaster: Enders  
Priest: Burgwinkel

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Mielke

Date: 1965  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Monochrome film of a staged production by Felsenstein. Sets are subtly fantasized variations on reality; costumes are wonderful evocations of the beasts in contrast with conventional dress for the humans. Acting is excellent, yielding an ebullient hundred minutes of comic theatre. Lip sync is generally quite noticeable.

### PERFORMANCES

Neumann draws from a fine, medium-sized orchestra the full dynamics of the score; the chorus is superbly drilled. Asmus' shrill voice may fit the character but is hard to take in the central rôle. Hopp manages the tenor transposition well. The other performers tend rather to declaim than to sing their roles. The inevitable result is an aural trial and a visual joy.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is less than sharp, low in contrast and often prohibitively dark. Monaural audio is satisfactory. The camera work varies substantially; at its worst (hand-held with a long lens) it is highly disturbing; at its best, unobtrusive. Otherwise, direction is competent. Overall, this is a performance to be seen often and heard once.

**Excursions of Mr.  
Broucek  
Janacek**

Conductor: Balkwill  
Company: Indiana University

Broucek: Pressler  
Malinka: McNair  
Mazal: Walker

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Byrd

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Very good

PRODUCTION

Fantastic live staging of a striking comedy. Sets are fabulous or realistic as appropriate for the scenes on the Moon and in Prague (20th and 15th centuries). Color is used graphically as cleverly as Janacek used it musically; the post-romantic sounds seem as right as the literal and creative staging. Everything about the production and the acting is thoroughly professional.

PERFORMANCES

Balkwill propels the music without rushing it. The orchestra is remarkably accurate and while the chorus finds some of the lines difficult, they convey their other-worldly reality effectively. Pressler is a fine actor with an adequate if unsteady voice. All other principals double their rôles—or more. Sylvia McNair has gone on to bigger things, but handles her difficult lines well and her lyric ones beautifully. Walker finds the line more difficult and suffers phrasing problems, but is at least satisfactory. The other solo parts are well filled.

TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is fine. Sound is good, but engineering of the broadcast degraded what seems to have been a fine original with distortion and limited dynamic and tonal ranges. Lighting is problematic and uneven, costing detail and shifting attention from the primary focus dictated by the music. Camera work is solid but relatively busy. Most importantly, the fun of this presentation is well conveyed by a professional production with a commendable student cast.



# **Makropolous Case**

## **Janacek**

Conductor: Klobucar  
Company: Montreal

E. M.: Sundine  
Gregor: Clark  
Vitek: Marguson  
Kolenaty: Orth  
Prus: Opthof  
Kristina: Brett

VHS  
Czech / English subtitles  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Modest but effective representation. Sets vary from literal (Act I) to representational (Act II); they are uniformly fitting and establish the scene well. Costumes are bright, traditional, and apparently comfortable. Stage movement is fluid and a major contribution to the integrated overall effect.

### PERFORMANCES

Klobucar provides a marvelous lead, maintaining coherence and impulse in the complex and superficially inhospitable score. Sundine is the show, and carries the burden well: she is occasionally imprecise in the notes, but always dead on dramatically. She is spectacular to watch, and it becomes almost impossible to see the other characters when she is on stage—which is most of the time. All of the other artists are capable musically (though Clark is occasionally overmatched by the range) and well cast for appearance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft but adequate; comparison with a broadcast tape shows that the fault is in the transfer, not in the brilliant master. Audio is very good, with effective stereo, but is overrecorded; the monaural broadcast sound is more satisfying in many respects. Lighting is a bit harsh, yielding more contrast than would be ideal. Camera work is primitive, with many distant overhead shots that interfere with the dramatic continuity. Nevertheless, the musical and dramatic essentials are so well conveyed that the performance can be recommended despite its limitations.

# Treemonisha

## Joplin

Conductor: DeMain  
Company: Houston

Treemonisha: Balthrop  
Ned: Duckens  
Monisha: Ivory  
Remus: Rayam

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Smith

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Exuberant

### PRODUCTION

Joyous, brilliant live staging. Corsaro's set is imaginative and just sufficient to prepare the stage; costumes are bright and conventional. Choreography is enthusiastic and exciting. Singing is operatic, although the work and production straddle the line between opera and Broadway in much the style of *Porgy and Bess*. Note that the work is abridged to less than ninety minutes.

### PERFORMANCES

DeMain is solidly committed to the score and conducts it solidly; he seems to miss the stage spirit, but may have been hampered by the orchestra. The chorus is more an ensemble of solo singer/dancers than a conventional one, and is superb. Balthrop is lovely to see and to hear with apparent ease in handling the modest demands of the rôle. Duckens would be a real find if his physical presence were less imposing; his voice and style are ideal for Ned. The other principals are fine, characterizing their parts vocally and dramatically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Excellent video captures the enthusiasm of the performance. Sound is up to the best modern analog standards but does not exploit stereo. Camera work is sound but not as fluid as Large and a few other video directors achieve. Lighting is sufficient; the performers are radiant to supplement the bulbs.

# Deseret Kastle

Conductor: Adler  
Company: NBC Opera

Ann Brice: Raskin  
Captain Dee: Alexander  
Brigham Young: Smith

VHS Copy  
English  
Director: Browning

Date: 1961  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Live performance without an audience of a world premiere. The single set (except for the introduction) is a literal interior of a fine house in Deseret - Salt Lake City. The costumes are period. Enunciation is superb and all movement is unforced and effective. The principles and the three supporting singers are physically and vocally ideally suited to the work.

## PERFORMANCES

Without a referent, one can only say that Adler propels the work effectively; the score is short on conventional melody and on substantial invention, so dynamic conducting is essential to keep interest. Raskin is lovely to see and to hear, managing the lines and the drama convincingly. Alexander's free top is much in evidence and his singing is superb. Kenneth Smith offers the right timbre and stature for Young, but has an occasional problem with the top notes. The supporting trio is more than capable.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Picture and (monaural) sound are excellent for the era. Light scoring allows voices and orchestra to be heard to advantage within the limitations of the medium. Camera movement is slight and the static image combines unfavorably with the static and talky score. Browning's direction seems as capable as the limitations of the early color cameras permitted. While this is not a work demanding wide circulation, this performance would be hard to match in any era and should be available to anyone considering performance of an accessible, recent American opera.

# Higglety Pigglety Pop Knussen

Conductor: Knussen

Company: Glyndebourne

Jennie: Buchan

Plant, Baby, M. Goose: Rees

Pig, Ash: Gallacher

Cat, Ash: Jenkins

Rhoda, Mother: Hardy

Lion: Richardson

LaserDisc

English

Director: Swann

Date: 1985

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Sendak's show throughout, with wonderful creatures in exaggeratedly realistic settings. Costuming is spectacular, and stage business rightly steals attention from the music. Text is delivered clearly and stage business is delicious.

## PERFORMANCES

Knussen seems to conduct as Knussen the composer wants: a light and transparent sound lacking in sprightliness. The orchestra seems both accurate and responsive. Neither voices nor actions can be isolated from the totality of so integrated a performance.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Outstanding video and audio capture the ambience of the tiny theater. Lighting is natural for the stage. Camera work appears unhindered by the live milieu, switching viewpoint fluidly and appropriately.

# Where the Wild Things Are Knussen

Conductor: Knussen

Company: Glyndebourne

Max: Beardsley

Mama, Tzippy: King

Moishe, Goat: Hetherington

Bruno: Munro

Emile: Rhys-Williams

Bernard: Gallacher

LaserDisc

English

Director: Swann

Date: 1985

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Sendak's show throughout, with wonderfully fantastic creatures roaming relatively realistic settings. Costuming is spectacular, and stage business rightly steals attention from the music.

## PERFORMANCES

Knussen seems to conduct as Knussen the composer wants: a light and transparent sound lacking in sprightliness. The orchestra seems both accurate and responsive. Beardsley sings well in a relatively simple rôle; her fluid movement is appropriate and contrasts well with the clumsiness of the wild things. The other performances are vocally fine; they seem to be acted as intended.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Outstanding video and audio capture the ambience of the tiny theater. Lighting is harsh, but probably as Sendak intended. Camera work appears unhindered by the live milieu, probably because the dominant long shots are entirely appropriate for the work.

# Lustige Witwe

## Lehar

Conductor: Alcantara  
Company: San Diego

Hannah: Sills  
Danilo: Titus  
Valencienne: Fowles  
Camille: van Way

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Browning

Date: 1977  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Fine live staging on an intermediate scale. Settings are rich in color and style, though done with a few simple elements to set the mood. Costumes are conventional and brilliantly colored. The performers move fluidly through their rôles, never seeming to be choreographed but always in the right place. The English translation is enjoyable even if one knows the German text well.

### PERFORMANCES

Alacantara lacks *Gemütlichkeit*; his style would be fine for Victor Herbert, but the Viennese lilt is sadly missed. The orchestra is similarly out of the style and occasionally out of sync with his baton. The small chorus is well prepared and integrates well into the action. Sills is unconvincing but sings well—perhaps too well, since she seems unwilling to instill any style but overaged cuteness into her rôle. Titus is excellent vocally, though he seems even more out of place in Paris than Sills. Fowles handles her lyric material well but without any of the flippancy one would hope to hear. Van Way is overmatched by the lyric demands though he does sing well in *mezza voce*. The lesser parts are well handled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review copy suffers from very poor video unrelated to the broadcast. A clean tape should be quite satisfying for the age of the performance, with adequate lighting and reasonable camera work given the live audience. However, some inconsistency in the stage lighting results in distracting shadows and occasional loss of detail in key areas. Sound is adequate for pre-HiFi monaural but no orchestral texture is audible.

# Lustige Witwe

## Lehar

Conductor: Sander  
Company: New York

Hannah: Thorngren  
Danilo: Hayes  
Valencienne: Johnson  
Camille: Scibelli

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Browning

Date: 26 March 1996  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance weighted by Johansson's stage direction. Sets are ornate and of the era. Costumes parody the period in cartoon colors. The text is rewritten substantially to no particular advantage; the extended comic dialogue lacks wit and contrasts with the flavor of the production. Enunciation is admirable and titles are not missed. Stage movement is farcical and witless.

### PERFORMANCES

Sander evokes the Viennese spirit admirably with brilliance and brio. The orchestra is fine; the chorus seems underrehearsed and occasionally misses an entrance badly. Thorngren is adequate, offering some lovely tones but often visibly works to sing accurately. Hayes may be a bit short on spirit but sings well and moves fluidly. Johnson lacks the insouciance needed for the rôle; Scibelli is grossly miscast, with none of the free upper register required. The lesser rôles are more hammed than played and are certainly not well sung where sung at all.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but surprisingly poorly lighted in key moments. Sound is rich but no stereo separation or effect is audible; some extraneous stage thumping is, though. The effect is to concentrate focus (aided by the camera work) and to intensify the failings of individual performances. In all, the result is a pleasant song-and-dance only slightly correlated with either *fin de siècle* Vienna or Lehar's Hungary.

# Zarewitsch

## Lehar

Conductor: Mattes  
Company: film

Zarewitsch: Ochman  
Sonja: Stratas  
Mascha: Bruck  
Iwan: Junhke

PAL  
German  
Director: Rabenalt

Date: 1973  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Lush film interpretation. Sets and costumes are elaborate and literal. Acting is superb throughout. Lip sync is frequently but not disturbingly poor. Effective choreography and outstanding enunciation complete this joyous trip to Moscow and Florence.

### PERFORMANCES

Mattes' interpretation remains as effervescent and buoyant as his definitive audio recording a decade earlier. Orchestra and chorus are fine. Ochmann does not stand up to comparison with Gedda, but apart from a few strained notes handles the rôle capably. Stratas, like her partner, has problems with some top notes; nevertheless, she is a treat to see and to hear. The servants sing and horse around effectively and the speaking parts are well served.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is rich and well lighted. Stereo sound is excellent with good use of surround. The opulence of the score is well matched by the production and recording. Apart from a few devices used to hide the double for Stratas, direction is effective and unobtrusive. For any failing (unmussed outfits after the tryst) a positive touch (staging of the servants' reconciliation) more than compensates. While this is not a 'definitive' operetta recording, it comes closer than any of its competition.



# Pagliacci

## Leoncavallo

Conductor: Prêtre  
Company: Scala

Canio: Domingo  
Nedda: Stratas  
Tonio: Pons  
Beppe: Andreoli  
Silvio: Rinaldi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Zeffirelli

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Imaginative, characteristic Zeffirelli film: lush and romantic. Settings are generally credible as small-town, rustic Italy; some scenes show evidence of a sound stage, but most look real. Costumes are appropriately rough or showy. Movement is absolutely convincing.

### PERFORMANCES

Prêtre's reading is expansive and accurate. The orchestra and chorus are outstanding. Domingo sings with commitment and fine voice, though a bit more ring would be welcome. Stratas is superb dramatically, although one may wish for a richer tone in the ballatella. Pons is brash and effective. The minor rôles are handled routinely.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent, as one would expect from a Zeffirelli film. Some lighting effects (notably, in the play-within-the-play) are distracting; even they are appropriate for the production. Cinematography is superb — of course. Lip sync is good.

# Pagliacci Leoncavallo

Conductor: Simonetto  
Company: RAI

Canio: Corelli  
Nedda: Micheluzzi  
Tonio: Gobbi  
Silvio: Puglisi  
Beppe: Carlin

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Enriquez

Date: 1958  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Monochromatic film with little relationship to a real production. Sets derive largely from a staging, with odd, disconnected moments. Costumes are tamed considerably from the usual excess but still conventional. Acting is surprisingly fine. Lip sync is ludicrous.

## PERFORMANCES

Simonetto provides a straightforward and lyrical reading. Orchestra and chorus are solid but unspectacular. Corelli is wonderful to watch and to hear, though not convincing as the aging husband. Micheluzzi's voice and style are more than adequate, though not remarkable. Gobbi shows us a pitiable man as Tonio, not a caricature. Unfortunately, Puglisi is grossly incompetent; his faults downgrade the otherwise excellent film substantially.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is consistent and reasonably clear. Sound quality resembles AM radio: limited in frequency response and dynamic range. Camera work is erratic and seldom credible. Overall direction is often hopelessly confusing. Technical faults, weak direction and, above all, the Silvio keep the performance from being rated as highly as the other performances merit.

# Pagliacci

## Leoncavallo

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Canio: Domingo  
Nedda: Stratas  
Tonio: Milnes  
Silvio: Monk  
Beppe: Atherton

VHS copy  
Italian  
Director: Browning

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance falling short of the best of the species. Sets and costumes are consistent with Zeffirelli's realization in the Scala film. yet the scale seems somehow wrong. Acting is excellent but focusses a bit more on the podium than on the singers' colleagues.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine provides a solid but uninspired, almost uninflected reading. The chorus is superb; the orchestra cannot be evaluated fairly from this copy. Stratas seems ill at ease and both intonation and timing are imperfect. Domingo, too, has problems throughout suggesting uncertainty rather than any inherent difficulty with the rôle. Milnes provides ample volume without characterization; this Tonio is entirely without redeeming qualities. Monk is excellent vocally and visually and Atherton handles his modest part well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is delightfully clear and well focussed for the era. Sound cannot be evaluated fairly in this pre-HiFi monaural copy. Camera placement and movement fall short of ideal; this uninspired production would benefit from more life in the recording. Overall, the performance seems more cautious than dynamic, an effect exacerbated by its following an exception *Cavalleria Rusticana* that evening.

# Pagliacci

## Leoncavallo

Conductor: Sloane  
Company: New York City

Canio: Barasorda  
Nedda: Geyer  
Tonio: Cowan  
Silvio: E. Perry  
Beppe: Blanchet

Italian / English subtitles  
Broadcast  
Director: Browning

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance transposed to Little Italy. Staging and costuming are consistent with the milieu, and the transformation does little to harm (or to help) the work; presumably, it did help keep costs down, which may well be sufficient justification. The artists are very comfortable with the dramatic demands and convey the brutality and reality impeccably. The urban setting is a bit at odds with the text, as becomes most apparent in comparison with the film.

### PERFORMANCES

Sloane is able to keep most entrances and intonations consistent, though he lacks the command to convey much depth behind the surface gloss of the music. The orchestra is capable and the chorus' errors seem fitting to the rustics they are supposed to represent. Barasorda has the timbre for his rôle and makes much of the dramatic opportunities. No negatives apply to Geyer's reading either, though it is neither as lightweight nor as lyrical as some Nedda's we encounter. Cowan blusters rather more than necessary as Tonio, but subtlety is not a feature of this production and one should certainly not look for it in Tonio. Perry is disappointing, apparently due to carelessness, and Blanchet contributes little beyond rather conventional bleating; both characters would be better served by singing more and emoting less.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio and video are excellent, conveying the immediacy of the production. Camera work is fine, less restless than in Cavalleria. Lighting is again low and contrasty, suggesting that the entire work occurs at night in contrast with the text. Like other liberties (e.g., the final line coming from Canio rather than Tonio), it is incidental to the overall success of the performance.

# Pagliacci

## Leoncavallo

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Scala

Canio: Vickers  
Nedda: Kabaivanska  
Tonio: Glossop  
Silvio: Panerai  
Beppe: Lorenzi

Italian / English subtitles  
LaserDisc  
Director: von Karajan

Date: 1968  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Film with more promise than product. The unit set is a village square; the duet is sung on relatively elegant stairs. Costumes are upscale conventional; Nedda's gown provides an extreme example. Lip sync is never more than adequate. Acting is inconsistent; Glossop's caricature contrasts with Kabaivanska's extreme coolness. With the usual exaggerations, the play within the play succeeds rather more than the rest of the opera.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan draws out detail rarely heard and balances forces well; the chorus and orchestra display their usual precision and sonority. Vickers sings well but lacks passion and even anguish. Kabaivanska is shrill and without grace or simplicity. Intonation problems aside, Glossop is acceptable. Panerai is a shade gruff for the Lothario, but sings and acts fittingly. Lorenzi and the minor characters are adequate.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are crisp and uncompromising. Medium closeups become tiresome, but direction is otherwise competent if uninspired. LaserDisc packaging is poor with an ill-chosen side break and no option to buy either Cav or Pag without the other. Only the Vickers completist will find this recording essential.

# Pagliacci Leoncavallo

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Canio: Pavarotti  
Nedda: Stratas  
Tonio: Pons  
Silvio: Croft  
Beppe: Chester

Italian / English subtitles  
Broadcast  
Director: Large

Date: September 1994  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live Zeffirelli production showing its years to some disadvantage. The single set is colorful and conventional. Costuming the townspeople as middle class and the clowns nearly in rags seems hard to justify. Extraneous stage business intrudes on the music and characters irrelevant to the opera monitor stage business. Stratas' mobility contrasts with static portrayals from Pavarotti and Pons.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine keeps all forces together. The orchestra is as admirable as always; the chorus is notably ragged, though some flaws may be intentional in suggesting a disorderly crowd. Pavarotti's first stage assumption of Canio provides only superficial characterization and limited dynamic range, though with lovely sounds. Stratas belies her age in a vivacious performance. Pons acts only in gross, with overdone comic elements. Croft provides the best singing of all and is appropriately attractive to watch. Chester strains at times in an unmemorable portrayal.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear, though the night setting throughout does not allow it to be as crisp as technology would support. Audio is exemplary, with excellent imaging of the orchestra and some stereo effect from the stage. Video direction emphasizes closeups, but provides enough context to satisfy. Overall, the film catches Stratas and Pons at a more favorable stage of their careers, provides a superior Canio, and is technically more polished; those virtues substantially outweigh the advantages of live performance in this case.

# Pagliacci

## Leoncavallo

Conductor: Morelli  
Company: film

Canio: Masini  
Nedda: Fineschi  
Tonio: Gobbi  
Silvio: Gobbi  
Beppe: Sinimberghi

Italian  
PAL copy  
Director: Cosla

Date: 195?  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Film of the play (with an added spoken introduction) using most of the opera instead of dialogue. The verismo character of the story allows the approach to succeed, though with limitations. Setting appears to be Sicily and attire is appropriate, if rather cleaner than seems likely in the real world. Except for Gobbi, the principle singers are replaced visually by actors, but little effort is made to synchronize, so it hardly matters.

### PERFORMANCES

Morelli does a creditable job, though one without particular spark or life. The chorus and orchestra are serviceable. Masini should have been ideal, but proves short on squillo and generally uninteresting. Gobbi's dual rôles are a curiosity, but not an altogether successful one; he is uncomfortable with the vocal demands of both parts. Fineschi makes an excellent Nedda; Sinimberghi is adequate.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is crisp and well lighted but contrast is high. Monaural sound is serviceable for orchestra as well as singers. Direction is routinely cinematic in keeping with the overall presentation. In all, this is not a bad film, though it is hardly recommended as a presentation of the opera.

# **Cavalleria Rusticana**

## **Mascagni**

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Santuzza: Troyanos  
Turiddu: Domingo  
Alfio: Shinall  
Lucia: Kraft  
Lola: Jones

VHS copy  
Italian

Director: Browning

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before a most appreciative audience. The set and costumes constitute a warm realization of an Italian town. Stage action is generally fine with rather more attention to the podium than one might hope. Zeffirelli's direction calls for almost continuous background motion but never seems to interfere visibly. Enunciation could be more crisp and Italianate, but that quibble may be forgotten in the passion of the performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine seems to surprise all on stage with modest but significant shifts of tempo. The chorus is superb, as expected; I cannot judge the orchestra from the review copy. Troyanos is wonderful to see and to hear, never pressing yet always rising to the occasion; some will find her pronounced vibrato disturbing. Domingo's performance must be ranked among his finest in all respects. Shinall's bass-baritone and Kraft's and Jones' warm mezzo tones lend an overall darkness to the sound which may not be to all tastes.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is well lighted and consistently sharp. Audio cannot be assessed from the monaural, pre-HiFi review copy; suffice it to say that the balances are fine. Camera movement and angles show no impact of the live audience and Direction is excellent, as usual in Met telecasts. While the Scala film has minor advantages in some respects, this is clearly one of the great live performance recordings and demands to be released commercially.



# **Cavalleria Rusticana**

## **Mascagni**

Conductor: Prêtre  
Company: Scala

Santuzza: Obraztsova  
Turiddu: Domingo  
Alfio: Bruson  
Lucia: Barbieri  
Lola: Gall

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Zeffirelli  
  
Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

A characteristic Zeffirelli film: rich and realistic. Settings are impeccably real (though probably a great deal cleaner than the true Sicily of the day). Costumes are a bit fancy even for Easter in the area, but convincing. While the principals emote heavily, the rest of the cast moves easily and comfortably through the staging.

### PERFORMANCES

Prêtre conducts reliably, even where a lighter touch might be preferable. The chorus and orchestra are superb. Obraztsova's voice is right, but she seems outcast in her style as well as due to her rôle. Domingo is committed and sings impeccably, but would benefit from more lyricism and sheer tonal beauty. Bruson is excellent in voice and acting. Barbieri is a special delight, almost stealing the show! Gall is capable and attractive.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

A beautiful film beautifully photographed and impeccably transferred, this literal reading is a visual treat. Sound is excellent, with no significant penalty attributable to its analogue origins. Lighting and cinematography are impeccable, of course. Lip sync is satisfactory.

# **Cavalleria Rusticana**

## **Mascagni**

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Scala

Santuzza: Cossotto  
Turiddu: Cecchele  
Alfio: Guelfi  
Lucia: di Stasio  
Lola: Martino

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Falck

Date: 1968  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Overproduced but musically satisfying film. Lovely but irrelevant nature scenes complement the unit set of a village churchyard. Costumes are conventional. Acting is overbroad by modern standards but restrained by those of thirty years ago. Lip sync is no more than adequate.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan's lean approach provides musical detail missing from other video performances. The chorus and orchestra cannot be faulted. Cossotto's passion is restrained but her acting and vocalism are excellent. Cecchele sounds and looks far better than his reputation would suggest. Guelfi may be a bit refined for the rôle, but more than compensates with his voice. While it is hard to fault the other women vocally (and they look and act their parts admirably), the three mezzos provide a uniformity of timbre that detracts from the drama.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and crisp throughout. Sound is fine, but slightly lacking in highs, even compared with the contemporary *Pagliacci*. Concentration on closeups even in crowd scenes is more than distracting and overall direction gets no more than a passing grade. Except for that direction and the unvarying sound of the three women, this recording would be evaluated as Excellent and would at least equal the Zeffirelli/Prêtre overall.

# **Cavalleria Rusticana**

## **Mascagni**

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Ravenna

Santuzza: Meier  
Turiddu: Cura  
Alfio: Gavanelli  
Lucia: Tramonti  
Lola: di Micco

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Cavani

Date: 1996  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in a classic opera house. Set and costumes are idealized and slightly modernized versions of conventional; everything seems a bit too clean and neat even for Easter. Acting is a bit oversized, suitable for modern live performance. As a production, this performance lacks only imagination, hardly a fault in a work where the music is so dramatic.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti's reading varies from the traditional in phrasing, tempi and balance; some may find that distracting, others will call it imaginative. Chorus and orchestra are responsive and rich, though the chorus is not always precise. Meier is a shrill, shrewish Santuzza. Cura sings admirably, acts well and looks ideal - a major hope among tenors. Gavanelli wanders in intonation and tempo but is marginally acceptable. The other soloists are competent if little more; Lola and Lucia sound more like Santuzza in timbre than one would prefer.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear, well focussed and well lighted. Sound is good, with stereo imaging of chorus and orchestra. Camera work is quite professional throughout, with angles unimpaired by the audience. Direction is particularly fine, exploiting long takes and medium shots while keeping focus on the most significant elements of the scene. With a more sympathetic Santuzza, this performance would be ranked excellent and recommended particularly as an introduction to the opera; one hopes for commercial release and state-of-the-art sound.

# Cavalleria Rusticana

## Mascagni

Conductor: Veltri  
Company: Montreal

Santuzza: Lorange  
Turiddu: Donaldson  
Lucia: Taylor  
Alfio: Fredricks  
Lola: Beaupre

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Robidas

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Colorful, solid, live performance. The single set is bright and open. Costumes are traditional, though Santuzza's is somewhat overdone and her makeup is excessive for the intimacy of home viewing. Stage action is well directed and the principals are reasonably proficient in their movement. Additional stage business is well thought out and establishes the scene effectively.

### PERFORMANCES

Veltri is generally effective, though he indulges soloists' apparent preference for slower tempos in some sections. The orchestra is strangely unbalanced, with weak strings and emphatic winds. Choral work is well designed, with apparently deliberate imprecision under good control. Lorange sings well: little individuality or style but a pleasing instrument used with skill. Donaldson is a pleasure to hear with a bright voice and good style, *a la* Gigli. Fredrickson is fine, as are the supporting voices. Except for overall weakness of characterization, it is hard to fault the performances.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent with ample lighting and a good image. Monaural sound is only moderately distorted, not as crisp as one might prefer, but acceptable. Camera movement is severely limited by the presence of an audience; it is dominated by a high, wide view eased by closer shots at less than optimal angles. Overall, technical limitations detract only slightly from enjoyment of a fine performance.

# **Cavalleria Rusticana**

## **Mascagni**

Conductor: Sloane  
Company: New York City

Turiddu: Sirianni  
Santuzza: Graham  
Alfio: Wittges  
Lola: Sonnenberg  
Lucia: Reyes

Italian / English subtitles  
Broadcast  
Director: Browning

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance transposed to Little Italy. Staging and costuming are consistent with the milieu, and the transformation does little to harm (or to help) the work; presumably, it did help keep costs down, which may well be sufficient justification. The artists are very comfortable with the dramatic demands and convey the brutality and reality impeccably; unfortunately, they or the producers seem to feel that brutish singing is also required.

### PERFORMANCES

Sloane cannot maintain coherence of the forces, let alone convey an image of the work as a whole. Sloppy entrances and variance among orchestra, chorus, and soloists are frequently distracting. Apart from issues of precision and intonation, the orchestra is not bad; the chorus is comparable, slurring the vocal lines. Sirianni's voice is loud and less than pleasant, and it is used without grace. Graham is less objectionable and more accurate, but the registers break so badly that many tones are harsh. Neither Wittges nor Reyes exploits the showcase opportunities, and neither is accurate or fluid enough to compensate. Sonnenberg sings and moves well, but Lola does not make a *Cavalleria*.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio and video are impeccable and convey every nuance of the production. Unfortunately, the imprecision is communicated with equal care and the performance faults seem magnified as a result. Camera work is somewhat busy, but that may be a matter of taste. Lighting is very stark and suggests that the entire opera is set at night; that contradicts the text, and since it seems to be a feature of the production not of the demands of television, is hard to excuse.

# Cendrillon

## Massenet

Conductor: Bernardi  
Company: Ottawa

Cendrillon: von Stade  
Prince: Wallis  
Fairy: Welting  
Godmother: Forrester  
Pandolfe: Quilico

Broadcast  
French  
Director: ?

Date: ~1986  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an appreciative audience. Sets are imaginative, yet relatively simple; some seem borrowed from other works without detriment. Costumes are both clever and colorful. Stage movement is always natural and fluid and all performers seem more focussed on presenting their characters than in simply making beautiful sounds.

### PERFORMANCES

Bernardi seems dead on in everything he does; the orchestra, chorus, and soloists respond in kind. Von Stade's warm timbre is fine and her phrasing is outstanding. Wallis seems short of the *falcon* which would be ideal, but manages the part capably. Welting's magic does not extend to perfect pitch, but she conveys the desired sense of wonder. Forrester, Quilico and the other soloists seem to delight in their rôles and carry them off superbly.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good but some detail is lost in the low lighting chosen for many scenes. Augmentation for television would have been preferable. Monaural sound is excellent. Whatever limitation the audience may have imposed on camera movement escapes the viewer. One does miss subtitles in so unfamiliar a work, especially because its four acts tend to drag if one is unfamiliar with the text. Overall, wider distribution would be warranted for this fine performance. No alternative interpretation is required to enjoy the work.

# Manon Massenet

Conductor: Rudel  
Company: New York

Manon: Sills  
des Grieux: Price  
Lescart: Fredricks  
Comte: Ramey

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 18 Oct 1977  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live staging from Tito Capobianco. Lush, romantic sets and costumes offer brilliant colors and natural movement. Scaling in the City Opera seems perfect, preserving intimacy where appropriate yet allowing sweep when fitting.

## PERFORMANCES

Rudel is stodgy and dull, leading a performance with every note in place but lacking in the grace and charm which are the *sine qua non* of the opera. The orchestra and chorus are studied and careful. Sills is at her considerable best vocally and dramatically, yet fails to convince as the frivolous naif. Price looks good and has the right sort of voice, but is totally out of style. Fredricks blusters appropriately while conveying no concern for his sister. Ramey is admirable in a part elevated by his performance. Minor rôles are handled well, but not notably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is warm and often muddled. Picture quality is good for the era, but far short of our expectations of later recordings. Dull sight and sound are unable to enliven a graceless performance. Lighting is often harsh and camera work is primitive. With little prospect of a superior performance in the foreseeable future, this recording can be recommended as a routine run-through featuring accuracy rather than style.

# Elijah Mendelssohn

Conductor: Bertini  
Company: *ad hoc*

Soprano: Auger  
Alto: Zakai  
Tenor: Hollweg  
Baritone: Weikl

Broadcast  
German  
Director: Zemach

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Bewildering video pastiche built on a live performance. Most choral segments are presented on a contemporary outdoor stage against the ancient walls of Jerusalem; many solos are superimposed on stills of the Negev and the Israeli countryside— with abominable lip sync. Soloists are in appropriate formal dress; chorus and orchestra are in summer semi-formal attire.

## PERFORMANCES

Bertini provides a nondescript reading, never achieving grandeur, never approaching intimacy. The orchestra is enthusiastic if somewhat ragged; the collection of choruses is much the same. Auger is lovely to see and to hear, projecting character admirably. Zamir looks and sounds fine but manages nothing beyond the notes on the page. Hollweg is competent in a rôle that demands ring and conviction. Weikl portrays well with a fine instrument but is not always precisely on pitch.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is generally satisfying but the many effects show distracting seams. Monaural sound is clear for soloists and chorus although the orchestra is not adequately miked. Video direction is erratic and muddled, bouncing the viewer among viewpoints, wiping and fading among images and settings apparently at random. Overall, this is an attractive audio performance compromised by video gimmickry.



**Amahl and the Night  
Visitors  
Menotti**

Conductor: Lopez-Cobos  
Company: film

Mother: Stratas  
Amahl: Sapolsky  
Melchior: Tozzi  
Kaspar: Castel  
Balthazar: White

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Brown

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Very Good

PRODUCTION

Film supervised by Menotti to excellent effect. The set is simple and appropriately drab; costumes are conventional. Lip sync is good but its failings are frequently intrusive. Action is fluid and natural. Quality of performance and the use of color justify this version as a replacement for the original (1951).

PERFORMANCES

Lopez-Cobos enlivens the score by emphasizing its lyricism and (relatively) underplaying its soap-opera qualities. The orchestra is responsive and accurate. Stratas is a delight to see and to hear, occasionally approaching shrewishness but always in character. Sapolsky's treble is surprisingly accurate and he performs well. The three kings are marvelous in character and voice; Castel surprises because one is tempted to judge him by his comprimario rôles at the Met.

TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is bright and colorful, appropriately for film. Audio is crisp and unobtrusive, although the review copy suffers from pre-HiFi monaural sound. Camera work is ideal, never distracting from the stage action and always clearly focussed on the appropriate elements of the scene. With improved sound and sync the performance would be recommended more highly. At this quality, its suitability depends on the viewer's taste for the extended but saccharine tale.

# Goya Menotti

Conductor: de Burgos  
Company: Washington

Goya: Domingo  
Duchess: Vergara  
Queen: Huffstadt  
Zapatec: Otey

Broadcast  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Irrelevant

## PRODUCTION

Live production of the premiere performance. It is the *de facto* standard both because it is the premiere directed by Menotti himself, and because it will almost certainly never again be produced. Sets and costumes are lavish and can be reused with little effort in *Don Carlo*, which is certainly to be preferred to reviving *Goya*. Since Menotti directed, the lack of acting is presumably consistent with his intent.

## PERFORMANCES

Frühbeck de Burgos must be responsive to Menotti's intentions, in which case his weighty, static reading must be "correct." The orchestra and chorus seem compliant, even earnest in attempting to overcome the weight of the score. Domingo sings well but cannot enliven the character. The same applies to the other soloists. It seems probable that the same cast in a work with some imagination, melody, or musical content would be admirable.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp if insufficiently lighted for best effect. Audio is quite clear and maintains a consistent image for the ear. Camera work is somewhat hampered by the audience, but never interferes with appreciation of the staging. This performance effectively captures an ideal exemplar for any critic who wishes to deprecate Menotti.

# Medium Menotti

Conductor: Schippers  
Company: RAI

Flora: Powers  
Monica: Alberghetti  
Toby: Coleman

Beta  
English  
Director: Menotti

Date: 1950  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Stark, monochrome film, presumably definitive since Menotti wrote, composed, and directed the performance. Exterior Italian street translates into the tawdry, overstuffed room. Costumes are conventional. Acting is cinematic in the best sense. Sound is synchronized quite well, but occasional lapses are evident. Enunciation is superb and each word is clear.

## PERFORMANCES

Schippers leads a dramatic and dynamic interpretation. The orchestra is appropriately small and precise. Powers' *sprechgesang* is captivating, although it probably would pall in a longer work. Alberghetti is wonderful to see and to hear. Coleman's performance appears overdone and less than human as a result. The clients are prominently (and effectively) portrayed in the film, which would have been unlikely on stage.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The image is rich and benefits from the severity that monochrome forces. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is excellent, barring an occasional overmodulation and lack of real highs. Camera work is fine throughout, again in cinematic rather than operatic style. Video and audio effects are used freely to good advantage.

# Medium Menotti

Conductor: Armenian  
Company: Stratford (Canada)

Flora: Forrester  
Toby: Calagias  
Monica: Farrell

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Moriu

Date: ~1978  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Stage production recorded without an audience. The set is simple but effective. Costumes are traditional and simple. Color is used to good effect, but both its intensity and the general darkness of the staging interfere with enjoyment on a small screen. Action is outstanding and each performer solidly captures his or her character.

## PERFORMANCES

Armenian and his orchestra convey the score accurately. Forrester makes the opera, portraying the medium as memorably as Marie Powers and bringing to it a sumptuous instrument used with consummate skill. Farrell's portrayal of her daughter is up to Forrester's standard vocally and dramatically. Calagias looks like the young Tony Perkins and conveys the mute's passion effectively. The three visitors are on the same plane; this may have been Gino Quilico's first international exposure.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent although somewhat darker than would be ideal. Audio is clear, but the review copy suffers from both pre-HiFi sound and a pervasive hum. Camera movement is overly busy, forcing the viewer to follow action which is not necessarily at the musical focus. Those technical limitations tend to be lost as one is trapped in a compelling work of musical theater ideally captured for the home screen.

# Telephone Menotti

Conductor: Serebrier  
Company: film

Lucy: Farley  
Ben: Smythe

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Newman

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Apparently live recording made for television. Sets are paradoxically late-40's gaudy and contemporary — for no apparent reason. The brilliant scene is complemented by Farley's costume and makeup, with Smythe appropriately drab. Enunciation is fine and subtitles are not missed.

## PERFORMANCES

Serebrier leads the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in a dynamic if unidiomatic reading. Farley disappoints both in overacting for the small screen and in a shrillness of tone that goes beyond Menotti's requirements. Smythe is better cast, with a smooth baritone that conveys Ben's character accurately.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are superb, up to the finest contemporary standards. Stereo is effective in reproducing the orchestra but does not reflect the singers' positions or movement, precluding any effective imaging of the stage. Lighting is brilliant, camera work is a bit busy and focus occasionally wanders, but overall direction is fine.

# Africaine Meyerbeer

Conductor: Arena  
Company: San Francisco

Selika: Verrett  
da Gama: Domingo  
Nelusko: Diaz  
Inez: Swenson  
High Priest: Devlin

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Grand, live staging. Montsouri conveys a rich if conventional concept with relatively modest resources. Settings are grand in scale and costumes are rich, if unrealistic. Stage business is very limited, as is the drama of the story and music.

## PERFORMANCES

Arena leads a stolid performance, which makes three hours plus seem interminable. (Fortunately, in one's home one need not take the work in a single sitting.) Both orchestra and chorus are solid. Verrett is committed and sings well. Domingo lacks the ring one hopes for in da Gama, but every note is in place and his performance conveys the usual passions and his emotional conflict. Diaz is marginally able to get through the notes of his rôle, but he projects none of the animal elements of the score. Swenson is superb; one wishes the part were more extensive. The other characters are well represented both vocally and dramatically.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is excellent and conveys the feel of the house. Video is excellent, consistent with a recording date in the late 80's. Lighting is harsh and sometimes insufficient to show the detail of the production, but it is effective throughout. There is little visible compromise attributable to recording while an audience is watching. A better production or performance is unlikely, and this one has few notable failings.

# Huguenots Meyerbeer

Conductor: Soltesz

Company: Berlin

Valentin: Peacock

Marguerite: Denning

Raoul: Leech

Marcel: Blasius

Urbain: Cappaso

LaserDisc

German / Japanese subtitles

Director: Large

Date: 1991

Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

## PRODUCTION

Unique live staging by John Dew. The scene is a generic modern fascist realm with the focus largely moved from religious to political conflict. Staging is memorable in use of flats and props to create scenes disturbingly real and uniquely fantastic; costuming similarly conveys multiple impressions from a bag lady to contemporary bathing suits to exaggerated period costume. The soloists are proficient and credible actors with appropriate voices; their presentation of the revised story is riveting. Cutting has substantially altered both the plot and the flow of the music; many will be offended by the results.

## PERFORMANCES

Soltesz reads a surprising amount of operetta into the score which he directs brightly rather than grandly. The orchestra is capable; the chorus is ragged and without the desired sonority for the big moments. None of the soloists stands out except Blasius, who is significantly overparted. The rest manage the notes, frequently short on timbre but with true commitment.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear in wide-screen format—with subtitles blessedly out of frame. Audio is surprisingly dull and takes no advantage of either surround or even stereo imaging. Voices are generally well captured but occasionally lost in apparent dead spots on the stage. Large directs superbly with ample use of long and medium shots for integration of the scene. A few camera angles from below the stage are a bit disconcerting, but no better solution would have been available without substantially interfering with the audience. Overall, this is a remarkable and valuable experience of opera as theater, but not a fair representation of this classic Grand Opera.

# Huguenots Meyerbeer

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Australia

Valentin: Thane  
Marguerite: Sutherland  
Raoul: Austin  
Marcel: Grant  
Urbain: Johnston

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Lumsden

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Inadequate

## PRODUCTION

Live performance marking Sutherland's retirement. Sets and costumes are elaborate and literal. The singers prove to be competent as actors, somewhat caricaturing instead of characterizing, but at least making an attempt at the drama. Unfortunately, they are unable to do as much for the music.

## PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé is at his best in the grand French style: lyric and accurate. The orchestra and chorus are capable and follow accurately. Each of the principals gets close to pitch most of the time. Austin lacks style, ring, and top. Grant lacks the coloratura and the low notes. Thane is bland and technically deficient. Sutherland is beyond her days of Marguerite de Valois—or almost anything else one can think of; nevertheless, she provides the only vestige in this production of the voices for whom the work was written. Johnston is pert and offers nice tone.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp, although not up to the standard one would have expected (or that one sees in the stills before each act). Lighting is excellent and details are preserved. Stereo is reasonably well used except when a channel is lost; oddly, a reasonable stage image is presented but the orchestra is barely resolved into its major voices. Camera work is somewhat busier than necessary and relies on high and low angles to minimize interference with the audience. Not all the singers are so bad as to ruin the performance, but nothing except its rarity redeems it.



# Joruri Miki

Conductor: J. Rescigno  
Company: St. Louis

Awa-No-Shojo: Wentzel  
Yosuke: Brandstetter  
Otane: Esham  
Visitors: Freeman

LaserDisc  
English / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Nirasawa

Date: 15 November 1988  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Stunning live record of the second Japanese performance. The set is an assemblage of screens on a rotating stage. Costumes are traditional, timeless Japanese kimono. Acting is superb and committed so that the parallels and differences of the puppet world and reality are brought forward clearly. Diction is excellent and the Japanese titles become almost an element of the design.

## PERFORMANCES

Absent a referent, one can only say that Rescigno conducts dynamically and that the orchestra (Tokyo Symphony) performs without recognizable flaw. Solo instrumentalists do not stand out from the total sound either in volume or in style. Wentzel's old man has the authority of Wotan and lacks only the last bit of solidity in the low register. Brandstetter and Esham cannot be faulted. Freeman and the three Assistants make star turns of their brief but highly exposed moments.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, but apparently unaugmented lighting causes some smearing of the stark highlights into the shadows. Audio is exceptional, localizing the instruments and the soloists and ensuring comprehension of the text. Camera placement is limited, but exceeds expectations within those limits. The superb direction features slow zooms to concentrate and to expand the viewer's perceptions; the only fault is some unsteadiness at long focal lengths. Overall, the performance can be recommended to anyone wishing to explore a highly accessible and highly derivative work of theater. Few things in the opera other than the concept can be called adventuresome; little but the staging and interpretation can be considered memorable.

# Cadi Dupé Monsigny

Conductor: Wallez  
Company: ?

Cadi: Orliac  
Zelmire: Pena  
Nouradin: Carico  
Fatimee: Frager

Broadcast  
French  
Director: ?

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Delightful

## PRODUCTION

Ebullient live performance of an *opéra bouffon* of 1761. Set is a caricature of an Algerian city; it is placed within the great hall of a palace. Costumes caricature the dress in brilliant color and style. Action is dynamic and exuberant.

## PERFORMANCES

Wallez leads a chamber orchestra and vocal ensemble in a vivacious but unhurried interpretation. The orchestra is fully in the spirit, though it has some problems with articulation especially in the closing pages. All the singers ham outrageously and persuasively, yet none ever sacrifices the vocal line to histrionics. Orliac may not remind the viewer of Journet, but his very Gallic and very lyric bass voice is admirably flexible and projects well. Pena is delightful to see and to hear. Carico is somewhat underpowered, but is comfortable with both the colorature and the range. Frager is the least subtle of the soloists, but more than compensates for vocal limitations with her dramatic style. The lesser rôles are comparably well handled.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is only fair, reflecting a probable recording date in the late 1970's. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is similarly limited, although the small forces make resolution easy and rewarding. Camera work is far busier than needed, shifting viewpoint too often to allow the viewer to revel in the performance. Interestingly, Gluck's version of the story dates from the same year; it would be an intriguing companion piece, though its sole audio recording does not suggest that it is musically superior.

# Incoronazione di Poppea Monteverdi

Conductor: Harnoncourt  
Company: Zurich

Poppea: Yakar  
Nerone: Tappy  
Ottavia: Schmidt  
Ottone: Esswood  
Drusilla: Perry  
Seneca: Salminen

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Outstanding

## PRODUCTION

Exciting, lusty, dramatic, bawdy, comic film. As in the rest of the series, the setting is a great hall in the mid 17th century. Costumes are appropriate attire for the great and lesser people of the day, with fantastic elements for the nonhuman roles. Acting is superb, with spirit and enthusiasm unlike any other opera performance—even including Ponelle's other Monteverdi films. One negative is frequent lack of sync between voice and movement and between physical and vocal expression.

## PERFORMANCES

Harnoncourt leads a small band of ancient instruments in a most exciting yet remarkably accurate romp. There is no chorus per se, but only an ensemble of soloists in smaller rôles. Yakar is a soprano Dalila with technical and dramatic skills of the first order. Tappy is remarkably heroic in tone, yet monomaniacal dramatically. Esswood illuminates Ottone with a fluid countertenor; remarkably, two other skirt roles are taken effectively by men and Amore is ideally sung by a treble. There is no vocal or dramatic weakness in this cast.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well focussed throughout. Sound is outstanding, with excellent balance between voices and orchestra. Direction is superb, of course. This performance is entertainment of the highest order; as released, it is essential to any serious opera library.

# **Incoronazione di Poppea Monteverdi**

Conductor: Leppard

Company: Glyndebourne

Poppea: Ewing

Nerone: Bailey

Ottavia: Clarey

Ottone: Duesing

Drusilla: Gale

Seneca: Lloyd

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Hall

Date: ~1982

Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance preserving a museum piece. Sets are stylized and simplistic; like the costumes, colors are drab. Costumes are more or less upper-class 17th century. Acting is awkward, with confusion or embarrassment seeming to influence the performers.

## PERFORMANCES

Leppard provides a straightforward reading in 19th-century style, albeit with a small, precise orchestra. Like the soloists, the chorus is over-rich with vibrato. Ewing is straightforward and effective, but hardly seductive. Bailey's voice is dry and unattractive. Duesing's baritone is used routinely and ineffectively. The other soloists manage most of the notes well enough though none is in touch with the idiom.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp, but lighting is substantially below the level required to show detail. Monaural sound is unbalanced, undervaluing the orchestra and losing detail. Video direction is satisfactory in that it does not contribute to the feeling of separation between the audience and the music.

# Orfeo Monteverdi

Conductor: Harnoncourt  
Company: Zurich

Euridice: Turban  
Orfeo: Huttenlocher  
Music/Hope: Schmidt  
Apollo: Hermann  
Messenger/Prosperina: Linos  
Pluto: Gröschel

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

A film representing a performance in a great baroque hall. Scenery is conceptually simple and straightforward, but extravagantly colorful. Costumes are similarly rich and ornate. Stage movement is fluid and dramatically appropriate. Opera of this era was more masque (dance) with sung text than that we know from Mozart and his successors; that flavor is brilliantly preserved. However, do not look for even the roots of 19th-century opera in this work.

## PERFORMANCES

Harnoncourt is a wonder, making the viewer forget the stylized form and limited challenge of the work to delight in its drama and movement. The orchestra is small and precise, pointing each phrase precisely. The performers excel in vocally undemanding rôles, dancing through the parts in a thoroughly convincing manner. There are some major voices in the performance (Araiza, Boesch) among the shepherds and spirits. The performance is beautifully unified.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The visual image is presented impeccably, the sonic one with remarkable clarity. They lack full integration, never establishing a sound stage to match the physical one. Lighting is brilliant to exploit the colors. Some special effects (e.g., backlighting) are overused. Nevertheless, any or all of the Monteverdi operas in this series can be recommended without hesitation.

# Orfeo Monteverdi

Conductor: Corboz  
Company: Lyons

Orfeo: Quilico. G.  
Euridice/Hope/Echo: Michael  
Apollo: Tappy  
Messenger: Watkinson  
Proserpine: Borst

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Goretta

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Unusual film that appears to have been created on a sound stage and recorded live without an audience. (Otherwise, it is an outstanding job of lip sync.) The set is a lovely sylvan glen deriving variety from changes of camera position rather than from props or backdrops. Costumes are in classical Greek style. A second feed from CBC Montreal offers French subtitles.

## PERFORMANCES

Corboz leads a dramatic and highly romantic reading. The orchestra is small and superb, but uses modern instruments and technique. The chorus matches the orchestral sound and style. Despite the nymphs-and-shepherds staging, the performance is robust. Quilico is wonderful, graceful in voice and movement. Michael is a bit heavier than ideal for Euridice, but is pleasant to watch and to hear; whether tripling rôles is meaningful, convenient, or distracting is up to the individual viewer. The other singers maintain the high level and dramatic style of the interpretation.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft, apparently by design. The master may be in stereo, but limitations of Canadian engineering made monaural recording mandatory. Audio quality is very good, though a fuller high end would have brightened the sound constructively. Camera work and lighting are excellent as one would expect from a film unhampered by an audience. This performance conveys none of the baroque components of Monteverdi's music, but does make a strong case for the work as viable opera on today's stage.

# Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

Conductor: Harnoncourt  
Company: Zurich

Penelope: Schmidt  
Ulisse: Hollweg  
Telemaco: Araiza

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

The least successful of Ponelle's films of Monteverdi. The basic set is the familiar great hall in the 17th century, but the modern effects for the Olympians clash. Similarly, costuming does not maintain an image of era. Acting is committed, but not ebullient.

## PERFORMANCES

Harnoncourt is effective in enlivening the score with his well schooled and responsive chamber orchestra. Schmidt is merely competent vocally and insufficiently attractive (especially as costumed) to inspire the drama. Hollweg is underpowered and occasionally imprecise, though he creates a fine image; fortunately, he also provides enough contrast with Araiza's sound to make the distinction meaningful. The other singers range from capable to outstanding, whether in their solo capacities or as members of the chorus.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and sharp despite its age. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is excellent, with admirable balance between singers and instruments. Lighting is adequate and video direction is superb. More than the individual weaknesses of specific performers, this film is limited by its lack of spirit. While that may be attributable in part to a libretto without wit, it does make this the least of a great trio.

**Ritorno d'Ulisse in  
Patria  
Monteverdi**

Conductor: Leppard  
Company: Glyndebourne

Penelope: Baker  
Ulisse: Luxon  
Eumete: Lewis  
Telemaco: Caley

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Heather

Date: ~1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

PRODUCTION

Intriguing live production in a suitably small hall. Sets are minimal, with a few props on a nearly bare stage to establish a mood. Costumes are drab and stylized, but evocative of no specific era. Acting is similarly sketchy, leaving the emphasis almost entirely on the music.

PERFORMANCES

Leppard's small band is thoroughly in sync with him and with the music in his studied interpretation of 17th-century style. There is no chorus per se, but the many soloists form an effective ensemble. Baker stars vocally and dramatically, making Penelope the centerpiece of a musically moving experience. Lloyd is miscast vocally, both as a baritone in a tenor part (regardless of transpositions) and as a singer lacking both the heroic ring and the technique required. The other singers are capable and in sync with the style.

TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is less sharp than it should have been for the era. Stereo is effective and overall sound quality is superior, though balances tend to favor the stage over the pit. Direction is quite good, apparently unhindered by the presence of the audience and not afflicted with excessive camera shifts.



# Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

Conductor: Tate  
Company: Salzburg

Penelope: Kuhlmann  
Ulisse: Allen  
Telemaco: Ramirez

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance combining modest symbolism with Ye Ancient Style. Sets remind the viewer of the Glyndebourne, resembling a court theater of the 18th century. Costumes tend to the elaborate in a similar style. Stage movement is formalized and preserves the museum-piece concept. Note that “free adaptation” is attributed to Hans Werner Henze; whether of the text alone or of text and score is not clear either from the credits or from the performance. Presumably, his effort focussed on the resolution of open musical issues of notation and performance.

## PERFORMANCES

Tate directs a formal, heavy reading betraying few of the properties one now expects of baroque opera. The oversize orchestra (ORTF) offers little grace or precision. The choruses are also large and cumbersome. Kuhlmann offers no particular insight but manages the style; her resemblance to Te Kanawa is startling, not only in appearance but also in drama and voice. Allen is excellent, clearly the best of the available protagonists and the reason for desiring this performance. The rest of the cast is studded with stars— to no great advantage. The alternatives offer greater style and spirit, though they lack superficial grandeur of production and of names.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and well lighted. Audio is crisp but lacking in the extremes of range; stereo must be present but is unrecognizable in the result. Camera work is fluid and relevant, though occasionally limited to poor angles by the presence of the audience and sometimes introduces a brief irrelevancy. Direction is capable if unremarkable. Overall, Allen’s masterful presentation is the primary reason for recommending this performance, which is otherwise competent.

# Clemenza di Tito

## Mozart

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Vienna  
Tito: Tappy  
Sesto: Troyanos  
Vitellia: Neblett  
Annio: Howells  
Servilia: Malfitano  
Publio: Rydl

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle

Date: 1980  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Ponelle's film makes a sound case for opera seria as spectacle. Settings are in the paradoxically decayed grandeur of the Roman Empire. Most of the costuming is 18th-century, but harmonious elements may be reminiscent of Roman era or be contemporary or non-representational. Ponelle manages to create a dramatic whole of it all, with Levine's exemplary assistance. However, a viewer not caught up in the drama may well find objectionable diversions in the idiosyncratic production.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine presents Mozart as grand opera—and it works. The orchestral and choral work are on the same scale and maintain the effect. Tappy is outstanding as the emperor, singing with apparent ease and conveying his conflicting feelings and responsibilities without distorting the line. Troyanos is effective and poignant, and sings her relatively straightforward music capably. Neblett manages all the notes, but has too little in reserve to make much of the underlying music; still, no better choice comes to mind. All other rôles are handled in the grand style, and are sung and acted well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

As expected in a Ponelle film, there is no technical fault. Sound is excellent and conveys the grandeur of Levine's reading. Video is excellent and uncluttered; all the production effects are realized well. Lip sync is very good and errors are never intrusive. The work could be presented equally well in a different style (e.g., smaller in scale, more authentic), but on its own terms this recording is impeccable.

# Clemenza di Tito

## Mozart

Conductor: Östman  
Company: Drottningholm  
Tito: Dahlberg  
Sesto: Poulson  
Vitellia: Soldh  
Annio: Hoglind  
Servilia: Nilsson, P.  
Publio: Arvidson

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Olofsson

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in the candy-box court theatre. Simple staging and costumes of Mozart's day (for the orchestra as well as the singers) produce a gem of *opera seria*. Acting is excellent and singing little short of that level.

### PERFORMANCES

Östmann maintains a brilliant reading through the lengthy recitatives, yet does not rush the solos. The chorus and orchestra are precise and committed. All of the principals acquit themselves well if not spectacularly; only Arvidson is deficient in intonation. However, this performance excels in integration of the forces rather than in any particularly fine solo turn.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Picture and sound are excellent, though little imaging is realized in the sound stage. Video direction is superb, maintaining focus on the relevant image through long takes and substantial use of balanced, medium-range shots. Fortunately, one can find both this gem of courtly performance and Levine's grand-scale, filmed realization in excellent recording.

# Cosi fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Smith  
Company: Sellars

Fiordiligi: Larson  
Dorabella: Felty  
Ferrando: Kelley  
Guglielmo: Maddalena  
Despina: Kozma  
Alfonso: Sylvan

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Sellars

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

### PRODUCTION

Italian comedy of manners mis-set in upstate New York. Despite interesting ideas, the production so interferes with and contradicts both the music and the text that the performance cannot be recommended. The single set is Despina's diner, honestly represented and suitably appointed. Costumes are tawdry but colorful. The idea of focussing on Alfonso and Despina is viable and balances the six characters beautifully.

### PERFORMANCES

Smith disappoints here, with leaden tempos and no trace of wit. Even with little to do, the chorus is a deficit. Larson's Fiordiligi is a delight to hear, but her performance fits Sellars, not Mozart or da Ponte. Felty is almost as good vocally, and less objectionable dramatically. Neither Kelley nor Maddalena has as fluid an instrument as one would like, but they are capable. Sylvan and Kozma are superb dramatically and pleasant vocally.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Brilliant video and audio convey every nuance of the production and all that Sellars allows of the musical invention. Camera work seems somewhat overactive, especially since the production is so busy already. This performance may be enjoyed often for the singing, but should be seen only once, and then simply to provoke thought about Sellars' ideas.

# Così fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Fiordiligi: Dessi  
Dorabella: Ziegler  
Despina: Scarabelli  
Fernando: Kundlak  
Guglielmo: Corbelli  
Alfonso: Desderi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 15 April 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Bright, Italianate live performance. Sets are conventional but bright and upbeat. Costumes are similarly unsurprising and almost colorless. Stage movement is well choreographed and pleasant.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti approaches perilously close to Rossini; slower material labors a bit and some entrances for chorus and orchestra are sloppy. The orchestra provides 19th-century playing, albeit of high order. Dessi is too careful producing notes to convey the spirit of Fiordiligi fully and disputes tempo with Muti in “Per pietà”. Ziegler more nearly suits her rôle though she lacks technical facility. Kundlak’s technical weaknesses make one wish that more than the traditional cuts had been made—although his tone quality and characterization are pleasant. Corbelli and Scarabelli are fine and Desderi both sings and characterizes with facility. The ensembles are consistently far more successful than the arias.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but soft and inconsistent. Sound is excellent, resolving voices and instruments easily without sacrificing ensemble and imaging the pit. Video direction is adequate except when Muti is superimposed on the stage image. Taken as a 19th-century, Italian transposition of Mozart, this is a more than satisfying performance.

# Così fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Fiordiligi: Vaness  
Dorabella: Mentzer  
Despina: Bartoli  
Fernando: Hadley  
Guglielmo: Croft  
Alfonso: Allen

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1996  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Composite of live performances; uncharacteristically, some of the seams between segments are readily visible. Production is drab and somewhat representational but essentially conventional. Acting is excellent and characterization is clear. Production anomalies abound and tend to divert the viewer from the substance of the opera; frequently, one or more characters will be visible in the background - and sometimes in motion - without justification in the score or text.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine leads an outstanding orchestra in a brisk, uncluttered reading. Vaness appears somewhat old and frumpy for the rôle but sings accurately. Mentzer adds superficial drama to good vocalism. Bartoli is effective and attractive in her debut rôle at the house. Hadley manages the colorature more effectively than the written notes and simulates passion rather weakly. Croft is admirable on all counts, while Allen conveys the character well despite varying from the score on occasion.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear despite the dark production; even the joy of the 'wedding' is diminished by gloomy illumination. Sound is excellent and offers elements of surround from the audience. Camera work is impeccable, but video direction is worse than erratic. Large exploits reaction shots (especially of Bartoli) to distract the viewer from those who are singing and switches among closeups even more frequently than usual. Some of that hyperactivity may cover switching among performances, but it is still bothersome. Since the playing and most of the singing is so fine, one must rate this recording highly despite problems of vocal characterization, production and video direction.

# Cosi fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Wiener Staatsoper

Fiordiligi: Frittoli  
Dorabella: Kirchschlager  
Fernando: Schade  
Guglielmo: Skovus  
Despina: Bacelli  
Alfonso: Corbelli

Broadcast  
Italian / German subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Buoyant live performance at the intimate Theatre an der Wien. Sets are bright components of the era that move with an open curtain for a minimal representation. Costumes are (overly?) varied and unsurprising. Innovation in direction usually works, sometimes confuses. Overall, a rather more farcical treatment than most, even to vernacular subtitles. Accents vary among the singers. Direction makes the sisters virtual twins; their voices are so similar that it almost works. The only significant cut is "Ah lo veggio". The wide-screen presentation allows subtitles to be out of frame.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti leads a solid, somewhat romantic reading. The orchestra is Mozartean in size but not in sonority or style. All of the singing is solid, though Corbelli's intonation is unreliable. Both Frittoli and Schade show signs of tiredness in their second arias.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

From the PAL master, the picture is clear and reasonably sharp. Monaural sound is fine. Solid camera angles are changed rather more frequently than ideal, but do not significantly distract. Large does not enlarge the intimate theatre to reduce the viewer's feeling of cramped quarters. Overall, this is a thoroughly satisfying reading with good singing and emphasis on farce.

# Così fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Harnoncourt

Company: film

Fiordiligi: Gruberova

Dorabella: Ziegler

Despina: Stratas

Fernando: Lima

Guglielmo: Furlanetto

Alfonso: Montarsolo

LaserDisc

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Ponelle

Date: 1984

Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Overdone, undersung film. Sets are exterior garden and interior of a period manor, beautifully conceived and implemented. Costumes are also period and eschew the extremes for the Armenians and for Despina seen in alternatives. Movement in general is reminiscent of silent films: exaggerated and simplistic. The production makes the opera into *buffo*, ignoring its designation as *giocosa* (as in *Don Giovanni*) and the drawing-room comedies that it anticipated. Lip sync is unusually fine, even for Ponelle. The device of leaving the wagger in view works well even when the viewer's attention is not drawn to it.

### PERFORMANCES

Harnoncourt is surprisingly heavy-handed, playing Mozart as minor Rossini. The orchestra is not large but seems ponderous in following his direction. Gruberova is imprecise in phrasing, though accurate in pitch. Ziegler's attributes are similar. Lima and Furlanetto have more substantial voices than their counterparts, but lack both the style and the technique for their rôles. Montarsolo is particularly crude in his reading. Stratas has the best comic material and both plays and sings it superbly; she provides the only true grace, style, and wit in the performance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and well lighted so all visual detail is preserved. Audio quality can be faulted only for a bit of muffling which further contributes to the overall dullness of the performance. Camera work and video direction are superb, maintaining concentration on relevant elements without excessive changes of viewpoint. Stereo is used to excellent effect, with elements of surround when appropriate and with good imaging of both stage and pit. One can only regret that the performance is not up to the technology.



# Cosi fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Robinson  
Company: Australia

Fiordiligi: Kenny  
Dorabella: Janes  
Fernando: Hobson  
Guglielmo: Black  
Despina: Illing  
Alfonso: Pringle

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Butler

Date: 28 March 1990  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Problematic live performance. Sets are highly representational; costumes, unkempt of the era. Production concepts and oddities continuously divert attention without creating an impression for the audience. The singers seem often at a loss to make any sense of their movement, so tend to freeze or to act in accordance with the music instead of by the direction others are following.

### PERFORMANCES

Robinson directs a straightforward and mirthless reading; the orchestra is accurate, but without crispness or bite. The chorus is rather ragged. Kenny lacks the dramatic skills and lower register for the rôle, but pleases the ear with both tone and fioriture. Janes is less fleet, but presents more of a character. Illing is a cipher, doing nothing wrong, but leaving this luscious part empty of personality. Hobson gets the notes out in good form but poor style and excessive effort; Black is sonorous and acceptably agile. Pringle's caricature is neither excessive nor well sung.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are crisp and clear, though stereo is not exploited. Camera work appears severely limited by the audience and leads to odd angles, though not enough to be a serious problem. Butler eschews closeups, but uses shots wide enough to lose the performers in a stage made to seem oversize for the work and the production. In all, the enjoyable parts of the recording do not compensate for a general lack of true energy, wit or fun.

# Così fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Robinson  
Company: film

Fiordiligi: Putnam  
Dorabella: Rigby  
Fernando: Rolfe-Johnson  
Guglielmo: Hampson  
Despina: Ashe  
Alfonso: Rawnsley

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Miller

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Unique, apparently live performance filmed without an audience. Sets either constitute or emulate beautifully a real villa in bright sunlight. The costumes appear to be 18th-century British, rather than Italian, but work well. Acting is outstanding, giving the feeling of a persuasive stage play with music. Enunciation is reasonably good, but not enough to replace subtitles in the arias and ensembles. Editing is somewhat more severe than customary, cutting all the men's arias except for *Un'aura amorosa*.

### PERFORMANCES

Robinson's reading is stodgy and conventional, but without substantial specific flaw. The orchestra is romantic in size and style, the chorus is overloud in its brief stints, and neither conveys the feel of Mozart any more than the conductor does. Putnam is visually delightful but vocally no more than adequate, approximating the range and technical demands and lacking the requisite dramatic fire. Rigby's instrument is darker and more plummy than desirable, but she does complement Putnam rather well. The men sing what music is left to them adequately and act quite naturally. The ensembles are a pleasure to see and to hear.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is well lighted and in sharp focus except for a pointlessly murky wedding scene. Stereo is hardly used at all, but the broadcast sound suffered from excessive expansion, so that quiet sounds are inaudible, loud ones overwhelming. Direction is excellent, with admirable framing and camera movement. Overall, the performance is a frustrating mix of successful translation and inadequate enunciation; satisfying singing and sluggish conducting; delightful video direction and marginal audio.

# Cosi fan Tutte

## Mozart

Conductor: Östman  
Company: Drottningholm

Fiordiligi: Biel  
Dorabella: Höglind  
Fernando: Tibell  
Guglielmo: Linden  
Despina: Severin  
Alfonso: Florimo

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Olofsson

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Unacceptable

### PRODUCTION

Candy-box presentation at the court theater. Concept is the only similarity to Bergman's *Zauberflöte*, which might have been the intended model. Sets and costumes are uniformly dull in earth tones brightened only by an occasional flash of intense blue. The performers appear to be reciting lines and make little effort to move (though they pose regularly).

### PERFORMANCES

Östman probably bears most of the blame for a colorless, dull reading of an inherently spritely work. The orchestra seems leaden, with modern sounds from a small band compounding the stolid interpretation. The fragment of choral work is well handled in the same vein. None of the singers is notable in a positive sense; in general, they sing the indicated notes without style or inflection. Fiordiligi and Dorabella are vocally indistinguishable, Fernando and Guglielmo very nearly so. Severin's wobble provides (unpleasant) distraction, while Florimo makes Alfonso a lout with his dry instrument and simplistic reading.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is flat in tone, but sharply focussed. Sound is too good, exposing the dull performances through clear reproduction. Lighting is quite uniform so that there is as little visual as audible contrast. Camera work is routine. This performance is a fine opportunity missed due to lack of talent all around. Until this recording, an uninteresting *Cosi* would have seemed unthinkable; now it is in hand.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Furtwängler  
Company: Salzburg

Giovanni: Siepi  
Leporello: Edelmann  
Anna: Grümmer  
Elvira: della Casa  
Ottavio: Dermota  
Zerlina: Berger

Beta  
Italian  
Director: Czinner

Date: 1954  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Historic live staging. Sets and costumes are strictly traditional, preserving a generation of performance no longer accessible otherwise. Acting is exaggerated in the style of that earlier era. Lip sync is often quite poor, confirming that the images were recorded without an audience while the sound was captured during a live performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Furtwängler's concept antedates the modern effort to be authentic; it derives from a century or so of performance practice that established Don Giovanni as the masterwork of the all-time master of music. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable. Siepi has the voice, elegance, and style of the Don, not a swaggering oaf but a self-assured nobleman. Edelmann sings reasonably well but makes Leporello a buffoon; he cannot be believed when he impersonates Giovanni. Grümmer is definitive in every way. Della Casa lacks Elvira's fire but sings well. Berger sounds ideal and moves beautifully, but is in fact some decades too old for the rôle; it doesn't matter: she's perfect. Dermota is good enough for the usual unimaginative interpretation; the supporting soloists are superb—as they should be when Masetto is taken by Berry and Ernster provides the sepulchral sounds of the Commendatore.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video shows its age despite augmented lighting. Monaural sound is quite good, although fidelity is not sufficient to show the orchestra to best advantage. Film direction is fine. A LaserDisc transfer might well make this recording indispensable.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Smith  
Company: Sellars

Giovanni: E. Perry  
Leporello: H. Perry  
Anna: Labelle  
Elvira: Hunt  
Ottavio: Freeman  
Zerlina: Zhu

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Sellars

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

### PRODUCTION

Unique contemporary interpretation set in Harlem. Using identical twins for Giovanni and Leporello and making the “nobility” that of the ghetto creates an extraordinary reading. There is little joy in this version, but a great deal to think about. The characters generally become logical and meaningful (e.g., Ottavio) where weak in conventional readings. Setting is overly compact and depressingly dreary. Costumes fit the concept. This version must be seen to be loved—or despised.

### PERFORMANCES

Smith’s reading is consistently heavy, in agreement with the concept but leading to a difficult evening. The orchestra is well drilled and compliant; the chorus is often ragged. The brothers Perry sing and act superbly; Freeman and Patterson (Commendatore) are excellent. Labelle is provocative, where Hunt is more petulant; both sing well enough. The Masetto is vocally weak, and Zerlina could use a bit of sparkle to offset the gloom.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Again, a stage production without an audience seems almost ideal. There is evidence of some lip-sync, but it is subtle and does not interfere with the viewer’s enjoyment. Subtitling is idiomatic, but appropriate to the production. Video is generally excellent with occasional smearing; audio is impeccable.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Ludwig  
Company: Berlin

Giovanni: Fischer-Dieskau  
Leporello: Berry  
Anna: Grümmer  
Elvira: Lorengar  
Ottavio: Grobe  
Zerlina: Köth

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 24 Sep 1961  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Historic live performance. Sets are minimal but literally consistent with the text. Costumes are conventional and minimize class differences. Stage direction (Ebert) has little character, though the individual singers move easily and appropriately with little posing except in the set pieces. The German translation does not violate the flow of the music, but is more than a little distracting.

### PERFORMANCES

Ludwig has problems, especially early on, getting entrances and tempi to conform to his wishes; the appearance is of his changing interpretation between rehearsal and performance. The orchestra responds to him more precisely than the singers and phrases impeccably. Fischer-Dieskau's Don is more mischievous youth than licentious adult; that it is exquisitely sung and ideally phrased goes without saying. Berry eschews buffoonery (cf. Edelmann in the Czinner film) for genuine singing of admirable quality and no mannerisms. Grümmer disappoints, but only in comparison with her own better recordings; some high notes are ill focussed and pressed at forte and above, suggesting vocal indisposition for this performance. Lorengar lacks fire but is audibly distinct and makes beautiful sounds. Grobe is conventional, with admirable technical skill and good tone. Köth is lovely but shares with Lorengar a wider vibrato than we expect in such rôles. Greindl's Commendatore is solid if not commanding; Sardi makes as much of Masetto as can be expected.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is brilliant and fully detailed. Monaural audio retains every detail and is virtually free of noise. There are a few places with what appear to be poor splices, including one at which pitch instability is briefly serious. Lighting is ample and camera work is simplistic but sufficient. Overall, this recording is a fine alternate reading, differing essentially from every other encountered to date in each respect. Of those differences, language may be the least significant.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Giovanni: Ramey  
Leporello: Furlanetto  
Anna: Vaness  
Elvira: Mattila  
Zerlina: Upshaw  
Ottavio: Hadley

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Reasonably lively live staging from the Met. Sets are effected primarily with backdrops and fragments of architecture; the effect is satisfying if a little odd for that literal venue. Costumes are strictly traditional. Acting ranges from burlesque from Ramey and Furlanetto to static from the other major players to effective from the minor characters and chorus.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts studiously and accurately. Orchestra and chorus are precisely in sync with that reading. Ramey conveys neither nobility nor sensuality, but sings accurately. Furlanetto blusters through the role with pleasant sounds. Vaness and Matilla are almost indistinguishable by voice or style, while Upshaw lacks the spirit and wise simplicity of the peasant girl. Everyone sings so well one feels guilty at faulting the lack of spirit.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is fine, though the broadcast would have benefited from augmentation of the stage lighting. Audio is up to the usual superb standards of the house. Video direction is exemplary. Overall, it is painful to recognize this characterless reading as the best of the modern options.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Sanzogno  
Company: Naples

Giovanni: Petri  
Leporello: Bruscantini  
Anna: Moscucci  
Elvira: Ligabue  
Zerlina: Sciutti  
Ottavio: Alva

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Zefirelli  
Date: 1958  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Kinescope from a live performance. Flimsy drops replace sets; costumes and production are literal and unremarkable. Acting is of the notorious olden style: exaggerated posing and thrashing. Enunciation is clear.

### PERFORMANCES

Sanzogno's reading is accurate but lacks Mozartean flair. The orchestra and chorus are romantic in proportion and style. Petri's *basso cantante* becomes as clumsy as his movements on a stage that seems smaller than he is. Bruscantini hams the impudent servant and seems troubled by the low line. Moscucci is dramatic and vocally nondescript. Ligabue's Elvira and Alva's Ottavio are admirable in all respects. The minor parts are covered capably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is typical of kinescopes of the era, fuzzy with excessive contrast. Monaural sound conveys the voices well and the orchestra better than expected, but does not do the performance justice. Video direction is fluid despite high camera angles. Overall, there are many recordings that surpass both the vocal and technical merits of this one without being so overtly italianate.



# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Giovanni: Allen  
Leporello: Desderi  
Anna: Gruberova  
Elvira: Murray  
Zerlina: Mentzer  
Ottavio: Araisa

DVD  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Battistoni  
  
Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before a satisfied audience. Sets are slightly stylized but basically conventional; costumes are staid; the women should sue for tolerable makeup and wigs. Acting is overbroad in the style of the 1950's or worse. Stage devices are ludicrous.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti has drained all charm from this very correct reading. The orchestra sounds resigned; the chorus moves well. Allen is dry but accurate. Murray and Gruberova might have exchanged rôles to the advantage of all. Araiza labors more than most, but to reasonable effect. Mentzer and the basses are quite acceptable if not memorable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Picture and sound would be hard to fault. No advantage of the DVD format is offered except avoiding changing sides; breaks for the purpose are in the video as are unalterable subtitles. The director does little to illuminate action or score, but eschews the common faults. All in all, this reading is dull musically and vocally with overacting poor compensation. The whole is less than the modest sum of the parts.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Molinari-Pradelli  
Company: RAI

Giovanni: Petri  
Leporello: Bruscantini  
Anna: Stich-Randall  
Elvira: Gencer  
Zerlina: Sciutti  
Ottavio: Alva

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Vaccari

Date:  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Monochrome film shot on an opera stage. Sets, costumes and production are literal and unremarkable. In all respects, this may be the most elegant and least exaggerated performance on video. Acting is somewhat stilted, but only in the sense appropriate for a period work of theatre. Lip sync occasionally becomes intrusive.

### PERFORMANCES

Molinari-Pradelli's reading is surprisingly Viennese. The orchestra and chorus are romantic in style. Petri's *basso cantante* is as well suited to the rôle as is his tall, youthful appearance. Bruscantini portrays the impudent servant without exaggeration and with excellent vocal and dramatic technique. Stich-Randall is superb, though less dramatic than some might prefer. Gencer's Elvira is more the Lady than the firebrand, but she is convincing and a pleasure to hear. Alva may be even better here than in the Giulini audio recording. The minor parts are taken by major artists who lavish great care and affection on them.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is quite good for the era, though compromised further by being taken from a kinescope rather than from the original film. Monaural sound conveys the voices and some of the orchestra, but does not do the performance justice. Video direction does not cope well with busy staging and there are occasions when irrelevant foreground action blocks significant activity behind it. Overall, this delicious performance ranks with the Salzburg in drama, singing and conducting; its technical faults may be more than some viewers can tolerate, however.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Bernardi  
Company: Montreal

Giovanni: Monk  
Leporello: Pola  
Anna: Pusar  
Elvira: Soldh  
Ottavio: Power  
Zerlina: Bokor

Broadcast  
Italian / French subtitles  
Director: Dormeyer

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with unaccustomed brio. Sets are large, simple, and effective although too dark. Costumes are colorful and help to differentiate the characters; the peasants are overdressed, but stylistically differentiated from the nobility. Staging is more active than usual, approximating Verdi style rather more than Mozart, but not unpleasantly. Some oddities of stage business are irrelevant and therefore somewhat distracting.

### PERFORMANCES

Bernardi is surprisingly brisk and Mozartean. The orchestra and chorus almost follow him and provide rich, romantic sound. Monk provides a lyric and effective Don. Pusar handles both the dramatic and technical demands particularly well. Pola sings (well) instead of hamming his rôle. Soldh's instrument is raw, so she conveys Elvira's fury better than her tenderness. Except for excessive vibrato, Power would be an outstanding Ottavio. Bokor is shrill and Rouleau inaccurate, but they and the rest of the cast sing well enough and characterize admirably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear though lighting needed augmentation to be sharp and to show detail. Monaural sound is good except when overmodulated by the Canadian engineers. Video direction is a bit busy, but generally sound and unobtrusive. In all, this is a fine performance without significant failing.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Metropolitan

Giovanni: Morris  
Leporello: Bacquier  
Anna: Sutherland  
Elvira: Varady  
Ottavio: Brecknock  
Zerlina: Tourangeau

VHS copy  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 16 March 1978  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Early and very live performance from the Met. Sets consist of drab drops and flats. Conventional costuming contributes little to setting a style — but neither does anything else. Acting is perfunctory and definitely of the old school. Diction and accents wander to compound the impression of a collection of star turns rather than a performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé does nothing with an orchestra that responds beautifully and a chorus that is accurate if leaden; most of the soloists compete with him for choice of tempo and usually win. Morris is brusque and matter-of-fact. Bacquier hams instead of singing and his intonation fails on occasion. Sutherland's voice cannot be faulted, but only the most obvious gestures convey any of Anna's temperament. Varady sings well but seems lost in the production. Only Brecknock makes the rôle his own with tasteful ornamentation and apparent ease over Mozart's long lines. The other singers seem to be in several different operas concurrently.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video cannot be judged fairly from the review copy, but appears to be reasonably sharp and well lighted; monaural sound is adequate for voices only. Direction favors long to medium shots and moves fluidly with the action.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Glyndebourne

Giovanni: Luxon  
Leporello: Dean  
Anna: Branisteanu  
Elvira: Yakar  
Ottavio: Goeke  
Zerlina: Gale

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Heather

Date: ~1985  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Dark, brooding live performance. Sets are sketches of nondescript buildings. Costumes approximate 18th century British and are remarkably drab to match the sets. The performers move well enough, but in a formalized, static production that gives them little to do.

### PERFORMANCES

Haitink impels the score effectively but provides no clearer musical image than Hall does a dramatic one. The orchestra is responsive and of intermediate size. The chorus is small and accurate. Luxon is inaccurate and almost devoid of personality. Dean is more attractive physically and vocally, though his anachronistic vibrato approaches tremolo in the aria. Branisteanu provides some colorature in a voice of moderate size and brittle character. Yakar is miscast, lacking the fire but amply supplying the voice of Elvira. The supporting cast traverses the strange production competently.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably clear and well defined, but low light levels combine with dark, dull staging to obscure any details. Audio is competent, emphasizing the stage over the pit and providing no resolution of detail. Video direction is capable, but special effects seem out of place; they do provide some life to the visual experience. Overall, this is a curious and competent production recommended to lovers of umbrellas (which appear inexplicably, shading the protagonists from neither sun nor rain).

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Salzburg

Giovanni: Ramey  
Leporello: Furlanetto  
Anna: Tomowa-Sintow  
Elvira: Varady  
Ottavio: Winbergh  
Zerlina: Battle

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live, non-festive festival staging. Sets are representational and airy, but lighting is so dark that they cannot be exploited. Costumes are basically traditional, but with oddities that divert the attention. Acting is conventional and stilted except where it becomes buffo.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan seems distant from the music, leading a stock performance with neither color nor style. The orchestra and chorus are precise and careful. Ramey walks and prances through the rôle without apparent involvement. Furlanetto caricatures Leporello and growls half of his lines. Tomowa-Sintow is accurate and haughty. Varady sings accurately and moves well, but provides no character at all. Even Battle, with an ideal instrument and fine technique, cannot enliven her part. The other characters seem uniformly intimidated into doing almost nothing, hence nothing wrong.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and well focussed, but so badly underlighted that even major elements of the action are lost. Sound is clear and provides some imaging of the stage as well as resolving orchestral detail. Camera work is routine and unobtrusive. Were it not for the Furtwängler, this performance might be a contender in a weak field; as it is, it can be recommended only to von Karajan's devotees.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Maag  
Company: Canada

Giovanni: G. Quilico  
Leporello: L. Quilico  
Anna: Vaness  
Elvira: Yakar  
Ottavio: Outland  
Zerlina: Brown

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Inadequate

### PRODUCTION

Live staging before an appreciative audience. Set and costumes are strictly conventional. The single set is used cleverly so it does not seem monotonous. Acting is in a more nearly contemporary style but is hardly convincing.

### PERFORMANCES

Maag is tediously correct, without inflection or drama. The orchestra is competent but far from international standards (or its own); the chorus manages its bits well enough. Gino Quilico is admirable vocally, physically, and athletically. His father leaves much to be desired, demonstrating that a singer who eschewed Mozart in his prime is unlikely to acquire the needed skills approaching retirement. Vaness is a fine if petulant Anna. Yakar disappoints with sloppy technique and lackluster interpretation. The other soloists approach competence at best.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and spotlighted elements are clear; unfortunately, the contrast is excessive and there is no detail in the shadows. Monaural sound is clear, emphasizing the singers and harpsichord. Video direction is good. Engineering is completely out of hand, with video overmodulation that disrupts the picture almost continuously and distortion from excessive audio level. One might seek corrective measures if the performance were better, but this one hardly justifies the effort.

# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Vienna

Giovanni: Raimondi  
Anna: Studer  
Elvira: Mattila  
Leporello Gallo  
Ottavio: Blochwitz  
Zerlina: McLaughlin  
Masetto: Chausson  
Commendatore: Kotchergera

VHS Copy  
Italian  
Director: Lesonsky

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance enjoyed by the audience for reasons unclear from the video. Sets and costumes are abstract and inconsistent, mixing eras and concepts mercilessly. Stage movement is fluid when a reason for it is comprehensible.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado leads a stodgy but conventional reading. The orchestra and chorus are capable. Raimondi's gross approach is complemented by his approximate singing. Studer sings well though without commitment; Mattila is surprisingly approximate; McLaughlin makes nothing of the rôle. Only Blochwitz offers Mozart style and technique. The ensembles work as they must thanks to Mozart.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video on the review copy is dark and unsharp, which has the advantage of hiding some of the more distracting production anomalies. Adequate monaural sound provides clarity only for voices. Camera work and overall direction are capable, although some angles are clearly constrained by the need to adapt to the audience.



# Don Giovanni

## Mozart

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: Paris

Giovanni: Raimondi  
Leporello: van Dam  
Anna: Moser  
Elvira: Te Kanawa  
Ottavio: Riegel  
Zerlina: Berganza

LaserDisc (videotape)  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Losey

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

A film that inadvertently approaches parody of opera. The setting is a bawdy 18th-century Spain, which is well represented in the scenery. Costuming also appears authentic if unimaginative. Losey's conceits are so numerous as to be ludicrous, and his exaggeration of the story is inexcusable. Given the vocal limitations and dramatic vagueness, it may be preferable to wonder at the visual absurdities rather than to dwell on the audible ones.

### PERFORMANCES

Maazel leads a dull, overblown, exaggerated performance without redeeming virtue. The orchestra and chorus are well drilled. Raimondi is crude and essentially unattractive in voice and person. Van Dam stands out for style and voice, making a more effective Don when they switch cloaks than the "real" one. Te Kanawa and Moser are both accurate and dull; neither even rises to substantial petulance. Riegel's Ottavio is well sung; dramatically, he is a cipher. Berganza is vocally and visually a decade beyond the rôle, although she commits no overt error. Minor characters (both da Ponte's and Losey's) merge into the general murk.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is impeccable, pointing every detail of the heavy, uninspired reading. Video is frequently fogged for incomprehensible effect; otherwise it is satisfactory. The format is "letterboxed" to show all of the unimportant peripheral detail. Subtitles are in-frame (for no discernible reason), and are frequently illegible; the jacket calls them "undistracting." Van Dam's and Riegel's singing are the only discernible virtues of the recording.

# Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart

Conductor: Stein  
Company: Salzburg

Konstanze: Nielsen  
Belmonte: van der Walt  
Blondchen: Watson  
Pedrillo: Zednik  
Osmin: Rydl

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Schaaf

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Lusty, faithful, ebullient live performance. The single set is sparse with occasional illogical props; some are anachronistic, others diversionary. Costumes are colorful and of mixed eras and styles, appropriate for a timeless work. Stage movement is natural and fully coordinated with the music and the text. Especially notable is the abundance of wit and appreciated humor, while slapstick and gross effects are missing.

## PERFORMANCES

Stein does not pull the forces together in a concept, but does lead an accurate and coordinated performance. The orchestra and chorus are bright and accurate. The soloists are uniformly well cast; each is notable for performing the rôle fully while singing accurately and passionately. It is superfluous to note their individual virtues beyond that generalization. The contrast with the Solti, relying on much the same cast, is dramatic and probably largely attributable to the small house, the bright production, and a responsive audience.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are models of modern recording: bright, clear, and well captured. Lighting is ample except where deliberately inadequate in the abduction scene. The cameras are somewhat more active than might be preferred, but overall direction is satisfying. One might hope for more precise intonation from singers and orchestra in places, but no more enjoyable realization of the opera as a whole is likely to appear.

# Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart

Conductor: Blomstedt  
Company: Dresden Staatsoper

Konstanze: Smith-Meyer  
Belmonte: A. Uhde  
Blondchen: Sternberger  
Pedrillo: Peper  
Osmin: ?

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1976  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Ebullient, small-scale live performance with synced singing. Kupfer's simple sets and costumes fit the clean, lyric style to a T. Acting is fluid and comic, rarely slapstick. The dialogue is modified in reasonable ways; two arias (Konstanze's "Welcher Kummer/Traurigkeit" and Belmonte's "Ich baue ganz") are dropped; the resulting running time is just two hours. The many unusual production ideas are fitting and are used well and without overemphasis.

## PERFORMANCES

Blomstedt conducts briskly, pointing forward toward operetta rather than back to *opera seria*. The orchestra is small and bright. Smith-Meyer has a bit of trouble with the German dialogue but has the right weight for this small-scale production. Uhde could be a bit more noble. Sternberger and Peper are well-nigh perfect. Osmin's intonation is off in the first Act, but his acting is satisfying in compensation.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is consistently sharp and well lighted. Sound is good with occasional lapses and overmodulation and little use of stereo. Camera work is unhampered by the audience and involves some unusual (and effective) angles. Direction is superb and all but invisible. This is an infectious performance which one is likely to play again as soon as the final bows are taken. The whole of the recording is greater than the sum of its parts.

# Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart

Conductor: Böhm  
Company: Munich

Konstanze: Gruberova  
Belmonte: Araiza  
Blondchen: Grist  
Pedrillo: Orth  
Osmin: Talvela

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Hundorf

Date: 1980  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Studious, joyless live performance. The single set features movable, indeed excessively motile, structures which individually represent elements of the scene and collectively set it well. Costumes are traditional but relatively subdued. Stage business tends to the cute and diverting (e.g., Osmin's onstage bath) but cannot enliven the overall effect. Acting is generally in the worst tradition: static most of the time, slapstick on occasion.

## PERFORMANCES

Böhm is precise but conveys little of the delight in the score. The orchestra is large and romantic in sound; the chorus is small, precise, and admirable. Gruberova is dramatically at a loss and vocally hard pressed; she does manage all the notes, but clearly strains at many of them and is underpowered for the climaxes. Araiza is fine, with a bright sound and a free instrument; his passionate reading of the notes does not fully compensate for the lack of colorature, but it is admirable in itself. Grist is a delight visually and vocally. Orth is better than average, but is the most earthbound of the quartet of lovers. Talvela is disappointing both in failing to reach all the notes and in avoiding even an attempt at the written colorature. One begins to wonder whether the ornamentation that only Grist provides is truly essential to brightening the score, and whether Böhm might not have preferred it on the heavy side.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp and always in focus. Sound is accurate but heavy, perhaps because of interpretation, perhaps due to recording quality. Lighting appears not to have had augmentation that might have filled in shadows and otherwise brightened the scene. Since there are performances that combine precision with wit, this reading is particularly disappointing.

# Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Royal

Konstanze: Nielsen  
Belmonte: van der Walt  
Blondchen: Watson  
Pedrillo: Magnusson  
Osmin: Moll

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Burton

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Essentially conventional live performance which gives the impression of being cramped on the stage. Staging and costumes are in an 18th-century style. Settings and business often divert attention from the music; some of the more athletic moments become involving in themselves. Those effects may work better in the house than in the home.

## PERFORMANCES

Solti leads a heavy but fully satisfying reading. The orchestra is well drilled and responsive; the chorus is occasionally ragged. Nielsen is overmatched by the rôle and makes no significant attempt at colorature. Van der Walt is insecure, but basically good as Belmonte and does occasionally make a pass at the ornaments. Watson is fine dramatically and vocally; she alone finds it unnecessary to chew the scenery although her part would encourage it. Magnusson is pleasant to watch, but not up to the vocal demands. Moll handles all aspects of the rôle well if with a heavy hand; inevitably, he dominates his scenes inappropriately, if inadvertently. Other parts are competently covered.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Excellent, transparent sound is the great asset of this recording, capturing Solti at his mature best. Video quality is very good throughout. Lighting appears exaggerated, underlining subtleties which Solti integrates into the whole. Camera work is confined by live performance; some angles are odd enough to be distracting. The video direction overall is distracting and ineffective.

# **Finta Giardiniera**

## **Mozart**

Conductor: Östman  
Company: Drottningholm

Sandrina: Aruhn  
Belfiore: Croft  
Arminda: Pilat  
Ramiro: Skoglund  
Serpetta: Biehl

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Olofsson

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in the style of an 18th-century court. Sets and costumes are drab and dark. Movement is generally admirable except when buffoonery takes over. Given the absurdity and simplicity of the libretto and the beauty and quality of the score, that sort of confusion might be expected.

### PERFORMANCES

Östman leads his small, period band with his usual neutral correctness. The chorus does its bits competently enough. The singers collectively and individually manage the score well enough without particularly illuminating it. Each would have significant problems competing against the members of a major cast, but that contest is unlikely to be offered.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but so underlighted that most detail (and many major elements) must be inferred. Sound is reasonably clear but somewhat dull for the small forces and late recording date. Direction is unobtrusive and effective. Overall, this is a satisfactory video introduction which should whet one's appetite for a more satisfying performance.

# Idomeneo Mozart

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Idomeneo: Pavarotti  
Ilia: Cotrubas  
Electra: Behrens  
Idamante: von Stade

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 6 November 1982  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Unique, immense, live staging. Sets are stylized, relying on drops and a massive staircase for all scenes. Costumes are commingled ancient Greek and eighteenth century. Somehow, it all works in its way to create Grand Opera a century or so before it really arrived.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine directs a quasi-romantic Mozart performance on a scale the composer would never have recognized. The orchestra and chorus are oversize and overloud, but not for that house. Pavarotti is grossly miscast, distorting the line in timbre and style while producing lovely, inappropriate tones. Cotrubas and Behrens sing and act superbly in unaccustomed rôles. Von Stade makes a mezzo Idamante seem right in a way that tenor portrayals do not; in particular, the contrast with Idomeneo is natural and credible. “Minor” roles in the hands of such as John Alexander are served superbly.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent for the era and acceptable by any standards. Sound is remarkable for the era, even to providing surround signal for dramatic impact. Camera work is superb, using the immensity of the stage without compromising characterization. While the house and some singers’ styles are inappropriate for the work, the performance’s many virtues compensate.

# Idomeneo Mozart

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Glyndebourne

Idomeneo: Langridge  
Ilia: Kenny  
Idamante: Hadley  
Electra: Vaness

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Swann

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Reverent live performance. Sets are highly stylized with minimal elements to frame the action. Costumes are brilliant and ornate, identifiable only as elements of an abstract, graphic staging. Action slightly transcends the minimalist but hardly disrupts the mummified atmosphere Nunn has created.

## PERFORMANCES

Haitink leads a romantic reading, studiously faithful to the notes. The orchestra and chorus sound larger than they are and far more resonant than Mozart dictated. Langridge is weak in style and voice with excessive vibrato. Kenny is plaintive if empty but sings well. Hadley is fine but makes little of the rôle vocally or dramatically. Vaness shines with fury and plaintive tone. The other soloists are capable but no more appropriate in style.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is quite good for the era although shadow detail is lost due to lighting limitations. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is muffled, compounding the heavy reading. Camera movement is effective and uninhibited by the presence of the audience. It is odd to see a musical treatment as if preserved in a museum with a completely modern and nearly abstract physical production.



# Idomeneo Mozart

Conductor: Östman  
Company: Drottningholm

Idomeneo: Kale  
Ilia: Biel  
Idamante: Kuebler  
Electra: Soldh

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Olofsson

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance approximating what Mozart might have seen. The court theater is the right size for authenticity and the simple sets (essentially defined by drops) seem appropriate for a court performance. Costumes (for orchestra as well as on-stage performers) are of the period. Action seems just right: stilted as *opera seria* would demand.

## PERFORMANCES

Östman's reading is heavier than the forces and the work demand, but is consistent and never offends. The period instruments are played in modern style, losing some of the potential virtues. However, the orchestra and chorus are quite accurate and well balanced and are of appropriate sizes. Kale is adequate vocally with no attempt to ornament his part. Biel's voice is slightly edgy, but she has the knowledge and resources to make more of Ilia than any other current interpreter. Kuebler is accurate and uses a nice instrument with skill; he even provides some ornamentation in appropriate style. Soldh seems to be a local favorite for reasons which are neither visible nor audible; she chews the scenery and lacks many of the requisite vocal resources. The minor rôles are filled capably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is consistently dark but sharp and enjoyable. Audio is very fine although the stage image is not projected; it seems likely that the lack of brilliance from the orchestra is a fault of the acoustics, not the engineering. Video direction is good using camera movement sparingly and seeming to suffer few ill effects of the live audience. Of all the Drottningholm efforts to date, this is the most successful.

# Mitridate, Re di Ponte Mozart

Conductor: Harnoncourt  
Company: *ad hoc*

Mitridate: Winbergh  
Aspasia: Kenny  
Sifare: Murray  
Farnace: Gjevang  
Ismene: Rodgers

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Date: 1986

Director: Ponnelle  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Another Ponnelle/Harnoncourt film attempting to reawaken interest in classical opera—and another success. The setting is a classical theater which might well have been used for such a work in Mozart's day. There are no sets *per se*, but a few scrimms and props augment the beauty of the architecture. Costumes are the stiff formal dress of the middle of the 18th century. Stage action is probably substantially more dramatic than in any previous production, but still static. Lip sync is excellent throughout, although occasional errors can be caught by the critical viewer.

## PERFORMANCES

Harnoncourt is more indulgent than in the Monteverdi operas, probably necessarily so given the vocal complexities. The orchestra is impeccable and all but unnoticed in this pure singers' opera. Winbergh is overmatched by the fioriture and the range of the King; perhaps Gedda could have handled the tessitura and technical demands twenty years earlier, but a better Mitridate is unlikely to come along. All four women are outstanding in their roles; if Kenny's and Murray's voices are a bit more flexible than Rodgers' and Gjevang's, they must be to handle the more demanding music.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is somewhat better than in the substantially earlier Monteverdi series, although not truly as crisp as one might hope. Lighting is excellent throughout. Audio is fine in most respects, but orchestral sound is a bit muddled and stereo is not well used in locating either orchestra or singers. *Mitridate* is a remarkable musical achievement for a boy of fourteen; while the music may not reach the level of Haydn, it clearly is on a par with any other of Mozart's adult contemporaries. It is not obvious that video adds significantly to the enjoyment of the performance; since no better recording is available in any format, this one can be recommended highly as an historic, if not a dramatic experience.

# Mitridate, Re di Ponte Mozart

Conductor: Daniel  
Company: Royal

Mitridate: Ford  
Aspasia: Organosova  
Sifare: Murray  
Farnace: Kowalski  
Ismene: Watson

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Date: 1993

Director: Bailey  
Evaluation: Poor

## PRODUCTION

Live performance before an apparently perplexed audience. Sets and costumes are garish and inexplicable. Some Symbolism in the staging seems, at best, misguided. Most attempts at acting and most vocal production are from the Romantic era or later and stand in contrast with the music. Adding to the grand gestures of the soloists, the chorus of tin soldiers is in ludicrously bad close-order drill. Somehow, the stage director (Vick) seems to have commingled *seria* and *buffa* — more than a century before Strauss' *Ariadne*.

## PERFORMANCES

Daniel provides neither line nor pulse though he is able to follow his better soloists; he and many of the singers have no feel for the Mozartean line or *cantabile*. The orchestra is overly rich and rather sloppy, but not unpleasant. Aspirates aside, Ford has a nice sound in the arias but his recitatives are weak. Organosova is a delight and Murray is even better than in the Ponelle version. Kowalski suffers because his masculinity is hidden in the costuming and he sounds like a mediocre mezzo — which, arguably, is what he is. The rest of the cast is adequate at best.

## PRODUCTION

Video is brilliantly clean and well recorded; the frequent solid black 'sets' with shocking costumes come through ideally. Audio is crisp with no significant imaging; it is impossible to determine whether the lack of highs is from the recording or the sound of the orchestra. Camera work seems no more disjoint than the production, so may be appropriate. Overall, the recording could not be recommended if it were the only choice, and certainly is inferior to the equally available alternative. Fans of Organosova and Murray will find it justified, but few others.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Paris

Figaro: van Dam  
Almaviva: Bacquier  
Susanna: Popp  
Rosina: Janowitz  
Cherubino: von Stade  
Marcellina: Berbié  
Bartolo: Moll

LaserDisc  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1980  
Evaluation: Superb

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in the old style. Sets are traditional with simple backgrounds and essential props. Costumes are straightforward and conventional. Fluid acting between the arias contrasts with rigid posturing when a soloist owns the stage. Stage direction is incidental and irrelevant except in emphasizing buffo elements and adding some effects.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti leads a slightly heavier reading than usual and seems content to play Mozart rather than his “interpretation.” The orchestra is ragged in slower passages but never unacceptable; the minor choral contribution is acceptable. Van Dam is delicious and far more noble than most; in another version, he would have been an admirable Almaviva. Popp’s Susanna is more efficient and insightful than cute or pert. She sings flawlessly, of course. Janowitz is the finest Rosina recorded, with more richness of sound but the same precision and depth Schwarzkopf offered. Bacquier is heavy handed and more aged than might be ideal, but within the parameters of the production no fault can be found. Von Stade never sang Cherubino better on recording, and lesser rôles are filled to perfection—although with the likes of Berbié, Moll, and Sénéchal to fill them, the parts are smaller only quantitatively.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Both video and audio show their age, with less than contemporary brilliance of image and sound and minimal use of stereo. Lighting is sufficient where the spots hit, but they are not always in the right place for the cameras and there are occasional lapses of focus. Direction is excellent, with longer takes than usual so that the singers are always the focus, not the director. Even if the buffo approach to *Nozze* is not your first choice, this recording is so nearly flawless that your preferences may be altered.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Böhm  
Company: Vienna

Figaro: Prey  
Almaviva: Fischer-Dieskau  
Rosina: Te Kanawa  
Susanna: Freni  
Cherubino: Ewing

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle

Date: 1976  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Ponelle film completely consistent with his *Barbiere*: cinematic and dynamic. This is a movie of the story, with excellent singing to complement natural scenery and realistic costumes. The result is a dramatic delight.

### PERFORMANCES

Böhm leads a reading of larger scale than is often encountered, but the anachronistic result is both enjoyable and frequently revelatory. The orchestra and chorus are outstanding (of course). Prey and Fischer-Dieskau are very nearly ideal visually and vocally. Freni is correct, but stodgy. Te Kanawa is correct but superficial; the viewer simply doesn't care. Ewing is correct but so petulant as to eliminate the joy of the rôle. The other characters are well cast.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is confined but rich; with its limited use of stereo, it is almost dull. Video is also a bit soft, but not so severely as to interfere with enjoyment of the recording as a movie. Lighting and camera work are impeccable; lip sync is excellent throughout. Overall, the production, performances, and technical realization are excellent though far from brilliant.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Vienna

Figaro: Gallo  
Almaviva: Raimondi  
Susanna: McLaughlin  
Rosina: Studer  
Cherubino: Sima  
Marcellina: Lilowa  
Bartolo: Mazzola

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Large

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live but less than festive festival performance. The persistent earth tones of strictly conventional sets and costumes add no zest to a most careful reading. Except for Raimondi, the principals are appropriately young; all move easily and act persuasively. Stage business tends to be gimmicky, but it never intrudes on significant moments. Nevertheless, one is bound to wonder why Almaviva's palace is in disrepair, or where the hound and its prey came from or why no exteriors are used—even for the fourth act, set in a garden.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado's interpretation is sound and notably Italianate; it lacks only the comic spirit and wit of the score and libretto. The orchestra is superb; the chorus handles its minute part capably. Gallo is reserved and careful, but sings well. Raimondi is less forceful than usual; otherwise, his Almaviva is remarkably like his Scarpia. Neither McLaughlin nor Studer makes much of her rôle beyond producing pleasant, accurate tones; surprisingly, they offer no ornamentation and seem pressed by even the minimal demands for colorature. Sima and the supporting cast are similarly accurate without distracting from the music by any show of personality.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is brilliant in its HDTV format (16:9). Audio is superb and both exploitation of stereo and detailing of orchestra and singers are exemplary. Contrasty, generally dark lighting appears unaugmented. Large capitalizes on the widescreen format in framing the ensembles, which are in every respect the finest segments of the performance. It is heretical to ask for a bit of ham in *Nozze*, but even that might generate a spark to fire the performance. This respectful, academic reading will reward the student of Mozart, but not the opera aficionado.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Pritchard  
Company: Glyndebourne

Figaro: Skram  
Almaviva: Luxon  
Rosina: Te Kanawa  
Susanna: Cotrubas  
Cherubino: von Stade  
Marcellina: Condo  
Bartolo: Rintzler

Beta  
Italian  
Director: Heather

Date: 1973  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Intimate live performance in an intimate house. Static elements (staging, lighting, and costumes) are low key. Colors tend to neutral, enhancing the brilliance of the music and action. The best description of stage action may be that it is brilliantly choreographed, with each movement underlining the play. This is an old-fashioned reading of an eternally young opera.

### PERFORMANCES

Pritchard leads an old-style, unauthentic, delightful romp through Mozart's music. The orchestra and chorus are small and responsive, but not always together with the conductor; the soloists occasionally lose sync with his reading, suggesting (improbably) insufficient rehearsal. Skram is a joy as Figaro, portraying a clever young man with a passion for his Susanna. Cotrubas is simply delicious as the maid who makes things happen. Luxon is appropriately pompous and mellifluous, though occasionally slightly off pitch. Te Kanawa makes us care about the Countess, a capability she seems to have lost with the stardom of the last decades. Von Stade is delightful, far more convincing and far more joyful than in her many later readings. The lesser rôles become great in the masterful hands and voices of their interpreters. Nothing is exaggerated, nothing is downplayed.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Unfortunately, both video and audio show the age of the recording. The sound varies from adequate to poor, with distortion from overrecording and sudden changes of volume. Lighting is insufficient, so images are neither sharp nor adequately contrasty. Camera work is primitive, so a shot from the wings shows furniture appearing to slide down the raked stage. With limited dynamic and tonal ranges of mono sound and primitive imaging, this recording cannot be recommended. Unfortunately, no comparable live performance in modern sight and sound can be offered as an alternative.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Smith  
Company: Sellars

Figaro: Sylvan  
Almaviva: Maddalena  
Rosina: West  
Sussana: Ommerlé  
Cherubino: Larson  
Marcellina: Kozma  
Bartolo: Evitts

LaserDisc  
Italian/English subtitles  
Director: Sellars

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

### PRODUCTION

Unique, exciting, and problematic. The setting is moved to contemporary New York City: the penthouse of Trump Tower is made to work, sometimes easily but often by stretching matters. Cast movement is fluid and appropriate throughout, conveying the wit of text and score impeccably. Subtitles are free and highly idiomatic. Overall, this version will inspire sincere love, hate, or both; indifference is impossible.

### PERFORMANCES

Smith's reading is direct and graceful, but lacks brilliance. The orchestra and chorus are unobtrusive and unremarkable. Sylvan conveys a sound, thoughtful Figaro as chauffeur with sufficient voice, a bit of appropriate ornamentation, and a great deal of spirit. Ommerlé would have been delightful as Susanna a decade or so earlier; many of her lines and some of her movements are unworkable at her age. West sings with uninspired accuracy. Maddalena is gruff but more than adequate; Larson is delightful, an absolutely convincing youth mad with overactive glands. Kozma's Marcellina is admirable and Evitts makes Bartolo viable — both of which are distinct assets in a production where their rôles are pivotal.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The best of both worlds is approached here, with a full production filmed live without an audience. Video is crisp and sound is transparent. Lighting and camerawork are impeccable. Do not miss this performance as a counterpart to traditional versions; it may not be your first choice, but it is a fascinating one.



# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Figaro: Raimondi  
Almaviva: Allen  
Rosina: Vaness  
Susanna: Battle  
Cherubino: von Stade  
Marzellina: Taillon  
Bartolo: Korn

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Oversize but traditional interpretation. The Ponelle staging fills the Met's dimensions if not Mozart's. All factors—sets, costumes, and movement—are scaled to the large house. They would probably work better there than on the home screen, but there is little to fault even on a small set.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine is lighter in his handling of *Nozze* than in most classical material. The Met orchestra provides the clarity of a chamber group; the chorus is commendable in its small contributions. Raimondi is even cruder than Allen, and neither fits the gentle humor of the score. Vaness reads little into the role, but sings well. Battle is superb visually and vocally. Von Stade's Cherubino is a bit mature and a bit hackneyed, but generally good. Minor parts are handled confidently, and a surprising unity prevails—unusual for the Met and all the more welcome for that.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are impeccable. Lighting seems natural, though somewhat flat, so that it does not highlight the action. Camera work is unobtrusive and apparently unhampered by the audience.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Bergenson  
Company: New York

Figaro: Peterson  
Almaviva: Stone  
Rosina: Hynes  
Susanna: O'Flynn  
Cherubino: Gamberoni  
Marzellina: Marsee  
Bartolo: McKee

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 25 September 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Surprisingly intimate feel in a live performance from Lincoln Center. Sets seem scaled to Glyndebourne despite the large theater. Costumes and stage movement are strictly traditional.

### PERFORMANCES

Bergeson leads a reading on the light side of conventional. Orchestra, chorus, and soloists are all responsive and careful, but no spark is struck. None of the major soloists is memorable for positive or negative contribution; overall, this is a solid but forgettable performance. Unfortunately, it appears that the cast must enjoy so witty an opera for the home audience to have fun with it.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Fine video quality for a live performance. Audio seems lacking in higher frequencies, perhaps contributing to the lack of sparkle as we listen. Camera work is fine, though it appears to have been blocked at Glyndebourne. Nothing in this performance stands out; in a work less frequently performed and recorded, that might be an asset.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Gardiner  
Company: Théâtre du Châtelet

Figaro: Terfel  
Almaviva: Gilfry  
Rosina: Martinpelto  
Susanna: Hagley  
Cherubino: Stephen  
Marcellina: McCulloch  
Bartolo: Feller

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Mille

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance of a unique but ultimately unsatisfying staging. Sets consist of drops changed in full view to depict a uniquely dreary and shabby palace; props are few and occasionally problematic. The contrast with conventional costuming makes the viewer tend to ignore the setting altogether. Subtitles are prominent in frame despite the widescreen format. Acting on the small stage is overbroad and stylized, creating slapstick from wit.

### PERFORMANCES

Gardiner's handling of the score is simplistic; it neither sings nor dances. The period orchestra contributes well. Terfel's vocalism is good (barring weakness in the lower register he shares with Gilfry), but he appears to be playing Papgenio, not Figaro. Hagley has a catch in her tone which makes her seem to be singing Despina; any volume above piano suffers from it. Gilfry's youth and suave tone cover a shallow reading and clumsy portrayal. Martinpelto and Stephen offer pleasant instruments but no character delineation. The lesser parts are positively objectionable for singing, hamming, and distraction.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not sharp and many scenes are so dimly lighted that characters cannot be resolved at all. Sound is good with reasonable depth in stereo but almost no imaging. Choppy camera work leaves the viewer intrigued with process rather than content. Further disrupting things are bad side breaks on the LaserDisc instead of the conventional ones between Acts. Yet, overall, the recording must be seen as a modest success. In part, that should be attributed to the unique version and its unusual presentation; perhaps more significant is the chance to hear some artists in their youth who will undoubtedly develop into substantial interpreters over the years.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Östman  
Company: Drottningholm

Figaro: Samuelsson  
Almaviva: Wahlgren  
Rosina: Lindenstrand  
Susanna: Resick  
Cherubino: Biehl  
Marzellina: Mang-Habshi  
Bartolo: Saeden

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Olofsson

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

The concept of Bergman's "*Zauberflöte*" gets lost in a plodding, pedestrian reading. Sets are candy-box, and costumes are traditional. Stage movement is very light and joyful.

### PERFORMANCES

Östman leads a competent but poorly disciplined chamber orchestra. The chorus' small contributions are fine. Samuelsson is a mewling, wimpy Figaro; Wahlgren is a dashing blusterer. None of the women can redeem the heavy-handed tone, although Biehl is visually most convincing. Minor roles are handled very well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and quite warm-toned with saturated colors and low contrast; the overall effect could be charming, but in practice combines badly with leaden performances. Sound is good but not up to contemporary standards. Camera work is wooden, but keeps the focus on appropriate elements of the scene. Because of the staging, one viewing of this performance can be recommended. However, repeated visits will not reward the viewer.

# Nozze di Figaro

## Mozart

Conductor: Rother  
Company: *ad hoc*

Figaro: Domgraf-Fassbaender  
Almaviva: Ahlersmeyer  
Rosina: Lemnitz  
Susanna: Berger  
Cherubino: A. Müller  
Marcellina: Klose  
Bartolo: Fuchs

VHS  
German  
Director: Wildhagen  
  
Date: 1945  
Evaluation: Frustrating

### PRODUCTION

Half of *Nozze* as Singspiel on (monochrome) film. Domgraf-Fassbaender and Ahlersmeyer are the only singers who appear as actors. Sets and costumes are conventional and irrelevant. Arias are omitted; ensembles fade out; dialogue (replacing recitative) is butchered to create an alternative play with incidental Mozart music. Lip sync is frequently laughable; enunciation is clear, but given the textual alterations subtitles would be appreciated.

### PERFORMANCES

Rother's concept sparkles where the singers permit, but the men overact vocally to distort the line. The orchestra and chorus are solid but cannot be evaluated adequately on the transfer. Domgraf-Fassbaender plays Figaro well despite being older than one would prefer for the rôle; his singing is sufficient. Ahlersmeyer seems unsure whether the Count is Ochs or the Wanderer but never commits egregious error. Lemnitz applies an ideal voice to the Mozart line impeccably, providing as fine a Countess as on any recording. Berger is no less admirable as a vocal artist and has a perfect Susanna voice, though uncharacteristic vibrato distracts; it may be an artifact of the recording and transfer technologies. Müller is over her head in this company (who would not be?); be prepared for a shock when the male actor sings as a light mezzo. Minor parts are solidly filled; the cuts reduce them to vocal insignificance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is inadequate though not truly painful except when it breaks up. Monaural sound is sufficient to appreciate the voices, but not enough to enjoy what's left of the music. Lighting and camera work are sound if unimaginative. Film direction is colorless and irrelevant. Despite the abridgement and the technical limitations, this recording should be sought out for extraordinary singing; in that, it is highly recommended. The waste of this film is exemplified by having Lemnitz as the Countess and dropping both "*Porgi amor*" and "*Dove sono!*"

# Re Pastore Mozart

Conductor: Marriner  
Company: Salzburg

Aminta: Blasi  
Elisa: McNair  
Alessandro: Hadley  
Tamiri: Vermillion  
Agenore: Ahnsjö

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance on the small stage of Salzburg. Highly stylized as it might have been at its premiere, this “Serenata” uses props to represent the scene. The single set is of the great hall and the “archduke” is on stage throughout. Costumes are conventional 18th-century dress. The result provides a unique experience of a delightful, extended pastorate.

## PERFORMANCES

Marriner’s reading is light and fluent, but does not quite dance as Mozart would have wished. The orchestra sounds a bit full, but articulates beautifully. Blasi is quite good, but never convinces dramatically or delights vocally. McNair is lovely to see and to hear, with excellent technique and delicious tone. Hadley conveys the music well but is hard pressed, occasionally sings under the note, and never convinces as the heroic Alexander. Vermillion and Ahnsjö are effective in context and sing well enough, although neither is comfortable with the idiom.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft but well focussed. Audio is surprising: usually clear with good dynamic and tonal range, occasional distortion, and no effective imaging of the stage or the orchestra. Camera work is appropriately tranquil and unobtrusive; Large’s direction ranks with his very best. The result is a unique and delightful musical experience.

# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Ericson  
Company: Sweden

Sarastro: Cold  
Queen: Nordin  
Pamina: Urilla  
Tamino: Köstlinger  
Papageno: Hagegård  
Papagena: Eriksson

LaserDisc  
Swedish / English subtitles  
Director: Bergman

Date: 1974  
Evaluation: Indispensable

### PRODUCTION

Ingmar Bergman's almost perfect opera film. The stage is a recreation of an 18th-century Swedish opera house. Every aspect underscores the fantasy of the story and the humanity of the characters. Settings are delectable, costumes seem natural and comfortable. Even the intermission is a delight. Among the innumerable marvels: Bergman's daughter and the rest of the audience reacting to the music; the animals responding to the flute; the singers' diversions between acts; the Swedish-language signboards spelling out each moral as it is sung. There are some dramatically viable reorderings of scenes, which may be even more disturbing than the Swedish text to purists.

### PERFORMANCES

Ericson is solid and conventional on the podium, but offers no special insight. The orchestra and chorus are in absolute sync with him and with the production. Each character looks perfect in the part; Nordin, Cold, Hagegård and Eriksson approach vocal perfection as well. Urilla is quite good; Köstlinger sings adequately but no more. The lesser parts are handled superbly. Even with those fine elements, the whole is greater than the sum of the excellences.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Produced for television by one of the greatest film makers, no fault can be found with the lighting or camera work. Sound and picture quality are excellent throughout, although the brilliance of some more recent recordings is missing. Lip sync is very good. Without the picture, this would be a competitive recording of the opera's sound; without the music, it would be a fine film.

# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Sarastro: Moll  
Queen: Serra  
Tamino: Araiza  
Pamina: Battle  
Papageno: Zednik

Broadcast  
German / English titles  
Director: Large

Date: 9 February 1991  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Fantastic live staging directed by Hockney. Simple, colorful, abstract sets define an imaginary Egypt at an indeterminate time. Costumes approximate the conventional with brilliant color to aid in distinguishing the characters. Acting is credible and appropriate. Titles are distractingly above or below the center of the screen, apparently to minimize impact on graphic appreciation.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine leads a straightforward, literal interpretation with less joy than one would hope, but with no serious error. The orchestra has occasional lapses as though soloists forced unplanned tempo changes. The chorus is fine. Araiza is at his best, correct in style and precise in voice; if he lacks something of the heroic ring and appearance, one must not ask too much. Battle is an ideal Pamina: plangent of tone and lovely to see. Moll and Serra are both accurate and overcareful, treading delicately around the vocal pitfalls and thereby missing the essence of their characters. Zednik is delightful except in the arias, where his tenor timbre distorts the line. Other solo rôles are filled with style and ample resources.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp, equalling the best live recording to date. Sound is impeccable as well, lacking only an image of the stage. Lighting appears sufficient at all times; low levels are clearly intended in some places for dramatic effect. Video direction is up to Large's usual standard of excellence. This performance overall is somewhat more restrained than ideal, but it is a worthy live alternative to Bergman's film.



# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Östman  
Company: Drottningholm

Sarastro: Polgar  
Queen: Frandsen  
Pamina: Biel  
Tamino: Dahlberg  
Papageno: Samuelson  
Papagena: Larssen

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Olofsson

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from the tiny Swedish theater. A set of earth-tone drops and a few props and 18th-century court costumes with peasant characters in corresponding attire set the theme. Several soloists slip into Swedish phrasing and pronunciation; the effect is curious, but not seriously distracting. Vagaries of production occasionally intrude on the continuity, in part simply by distracting the viewer from the music to the attempt to understand their Significance.

### PERFORMANCES

Östman leads a stodgy, steady reading which does justice to the score but does not inspire. He permits moderate and appropriate solo decoration, but some entrances are sloppy, suggesting rehearsal deficiencies. Both orchestra and chorus are small in size but relatively thick in texture. Polgar's instrument is a fine *cantante*, but lacks the authority ideal for the character. Frandsen is accurate but both shrill and erratic in tempo to make the more difficult lines accessible. Dahlberg and Biel are reasonably attractive in both voice and appearance, though neither turns the aria into a memorable experience. Samuelson sings well but overacts an already overdone contrast of his simplicity with court behavior. The supporting characters are well cast vocally and physically and provide good ensemble acting.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp but so badly underlighted that detail is lost. Audio lacks tonal extremes but is adequate to convey voices and orchestral sounds. If the sound is in stereo, the fact cannot be determined by its effect in the home. Direction is excellent, maintaining attention on the center of action, yet supplying variety of angle and field of view. Overall, the style here fascinates and informs the viewer, underplaying the fantasy and emphasizing the maturity of the opera. The singing is always capable if seldom exciting; the production is intriguing; the recording is well worth adding to one's collection as a complement to the Met's Hockney production.

# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Comissiona  
Company: New York City

Sarastro: Stapp  
Queen: Rosales  
Tamino: Garrison  
Pamina: Esham  
Papageno: Dickson

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live staging with good ideas and faulty style. Sets are simple, dark, and nonspecific. Costumes are ornate and grossly exaggerated. Action and ensemble are very nearly absent. Even the subtitles are unduly intrusive.

### PERFORMANCES

Comissiona maintains a bright tempo and a transparent sound from an orchestra of full size and little flexibility. Garrison looks the hero and offers good tone and timbre; he misses phrasing and style, but not by much. Esham is farther from Mozart, offering a mini-Tosca instead of a maiden. Stapp is a pleasant surprise, with voice and stature to make a Sarastro if his tremolo can be controlled. Rosales comes close to the problematic Queen, with dramatic timbre and secure top, but uncertain colorature and inconsistent intonation. Dickson has some fun with his rôle and sings well throughout. Other rôles are filled without distinction, but without serious flaw.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video would be sharp if lighting permitted us to see it. Not only is there no boost for television, but the camera angles chosen to keep from interfering with the audience ensure that often we are looking at the shadowed instead of the spotlighted elements. Sound is clear but overbalanced to voices; stereo is not exploited and there is no sonic image of the stage. Video direction is reasonably good but occasionally loses track of the center of attention. There are few gross flaws in this performance, but little to endear it to the viewer.

# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Arena  
Company: Montreal

Sarastro: Garrard  
Queen: Christman  
Tamino: Power  
Pamina: Cuccaro  
Papageno: Melbye

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance rendered almost unwatchable by broadcast engineering. Sets are uniformly dark, giving an impression of massiveness which could not have been achieved in the house. Eighteenth-century costumes combine with fright makeup to create a fantastic image combining fairy tale, children's opera and parody. Acting is minimal and stage business is hopelessly contrived.

### PERFORMANCES

Arena leads a studied reading minimizing fantasy and action in favor of precision. Orchestra and chorus are similarly pedantic. Power sings well in Mozart style but hardly looks the part. Cuccaro satisfies the modest vocal demands without musical inflection. Garrard is an asset with voice and demeanor to dominate his scenes. Christman is similarly effective, though she cannot quite manage the colorature in tempo. Papageno sings well and seems uncomfortable with his absurd stage business. The other performers seem more tolerant of the buffoonery that distorts their vocal lines.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp when visible through the engineers' overmodulation. The severe underlighting muddies what can be seen. The grotesque staging is compounded by the director's erratic camera work and shift of attention to elements of the backdrop or other irrelevancies during arias and ensembles. Stereo sound has little spread but good resolution and unusual clarity. The result becomes a vocally serviceable performance lost to technical and production vagaries.

# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Sawallisch  
Company: Bavaria

Sarastro: Moll  
Queen: Gruberova  
Pamina: Popp  
Tamino: Araiza  
Papageno: Brendel  
Papagena: Sieber

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Windgassen

Date: Sep. 1983  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Conventional live performance without the special virtues of Bergman's film. Staging is imitation 18th-century, with contemporary touches such as addressing the audience directly. Costumes are conventional; movement is stilted.

### PERFORMANCES

Sawallisch leads a notably light performance, but bends to the soloists' requirements at unfortunate points. The orchestra is superb; the chorus is sound. Moll becomes Sarastro in appearance and voice. Gruberova is far too light and has no menace, but manages the notes well. Popp is adequate; Araiza is strained vocally and ludicrous dramatically. None of the other performers is memorable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is outstanding; video is as fine as 1983's technology permitted. Lighting is harsh but usually adequate especially in longer shots. Camera work is stilted and constrained by the live milieu. It is unlikely that one could find a better performance on any stage today, and therefore this recording is commendable. On technical grounds and for some of the singing, this disc would be recommended more highly if the Bergman film were not available.

# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Salzburg

Sarastro: Talvela  
Queen: Gruberova  
Pamina: Cotrubas  
Tamino: Schreier  
Papageno: Boesch  
Papagena: Sieber

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Ponelle's idiosyncracies create a confused, single-set non-solution. The massive castle background is used capably, but various devices in front of it are distracting. Overall, sets and costumes are ponderous and ineffective. Stage movement is conventional and does not lighten the tone.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine keeps forces together by plodding through the score. Orchestra and chorus seem Wagnerian in scale and sonority. Talvela's tone is hollow, Schreier is surprisingly pressed by the vocal demands. Both Cotrubas and Gruberova would have served the music better a decade or so earlier, though Gruberova's light instrument could never have conveyed the menace of the rôle. Boesch is a moderately bright element, though he cannot lift the production by himself. Other parts are cast beyond their demands and sung very well indeed.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is marginal, essentially due to inadequate lighting. Audio is acceptable, though the stereo separation is negligible. The precision of the performance makes it suitable for study, but dreariness of staging and singing precludes enjoying the theatrical experience. This is a most unmagical reading.

# Zauberflöte

## Mozart

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Glyndebourne

Sarastro: Thomaschke  
Queen: Sandoz  
Tamino: Goeke  
Pamina: Lott  
Papageno: Luxon  
Papagena: Coubert

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Heather

1977  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Overwhelmingly, Hockney's show to the audience's delight. Sets and costumes are candy-box: brilliant, simplistic, witty, and appropriate. Stage direction seems confused, with many performers occasionally moving against the flow of the scene. This production shows many influences of Bergman's film, though it ultimately lacks the magic of that extraordinary recording.

### PERFORMANCES

Haitink is conducting the wrong opera—at least by the production's standards; its wit contrasts painfully and fatally with his solemnity. The orchestra sounds grand in scale, and the chorus is accurate. Thomaschke and Luxon are simply wrong for the rôles, the bass lacking authority of sound, the baritone unable to appear simple. Goeke and Sandoz look their parts and generally sound right, though he drifts into the notes and she is overmatched by the lyric elements of her first aria. Lott is outstanding, looking, sounding, and acting Pamina with apparent ease. The other parts are handled effectively, though not remarkably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monaural sound is quite muffled on the review copy, which may reflect Haitink's wish for grandeur but does not do the score justice. Video is sharp and effective. Lighting is brilliant and effective, but camera selection is overbusy and concentrates on closeups which lose the fantastic aspects of the production. Neither production nor conducting is wrong, but they are so completely mismatched that the performance cannot be recommended.

# **Boris Godounov**

## **Mussorgsky**

Conductor: Nebolsin  
Company: Bolshoi

Boris: Pirogov  
Dmitri: Nelepp  
Fool: Kozlovsky  
Pimen: Mikhailov  
Varlaam: Krivchenya  
Marina: Avdeyeva

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Stroyeva

Date: 1954

Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Spectacular film which exceeds the sweep available in any house. Settings appear to be consistently real, not merely realistic; they are richly, vividly engrossing, even detracting occasionally from the sweep of the music. Costumes vary from the elaborate robes of the czar to the rags of the fool, but all appear viable in real life. Action is highly cinematic and always appropriate. The score is edited and the fool's scene closes the opera.

### PERFORMANCES

Conducting is excellent, deserving of a personal credit. The orchestra is solid and responsive; the chorus is incredible. Pirogov is a conventional and adequate czar. Kozlovsky is unbelievably fine: mad and wise, spectacular to watch and to hear; since the other principals are relatively undistinguished, Kozlovsky and the chorus carry the performance to heights unapproached in any other performance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is adequate, far superior to any theatrical release. (Finally, the picture has overcome most of the limitations of the Soviet film stock.) Sound is muddy and limited in dynamic and tonal range, but not excessively distorted. With tight direction, the sweep of the movie and the brilliance of the chorus brush away most of the technical limitations. Nevertheless, those failings keep the performance from reaching the highest levels.

# **Boris Godounov**

## **Mussorgsky**

Conductor: Gergiev  
Company: Kirov

Boris: Lloyd  
Dmitri: Steblianko  
Fool: Solodovnikov  
Pimen: Morosov  
Varlaam: Ognovenko  
Marina: Borodina

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Burton

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance of Tarkovsky's Covent Garden production in St. Petersburg. Sets are highly stylized and built on grand concepts that may or may not work for any individual viewer. Costumes anchor the sense of time and place in their sumptuous and conventional design. Stage direction is intended to be Meaningful rather than explicit, but is effective whether or not the concepts are clear and meaningful to the viewer. Unsophisticated acting is the rule, and Lloyd's physical interpretation is consonant with that of the Russians.

### PERFORMANCES

Gergiev's reading offers dynamics without dynamism; little pointing or detailing is evident. The orchestra is sumptuous and accurate. The chorus lacks the ultimate integration of sound that marks the Bolshoi recordings. Lloyd is impressive and effective, though his non-Slavic tone and slide up to pitch require acclimation. Borodina and Steblianko are very fine, at least as good as any competition. Leiferkus is outstanding, and Solodivnikov would stand out in any comparison except that with Kozlovsky. The other supporting rôles are filled competently, but not as well as might be hoped or as they are in the Bolshoi film.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is brilliant and fully satisfying in color and in detail. Sound quality offers limited use of stereo and lacks surround; dynamic and frequency ranges are exceptional, barring a few overloads on fortissimi. Ample lighting where appropriate effects a good balance with the deliberately dark scenes. Camera work is sound if a bit overactive where a single, sustained shot or continuous movement would be more effective. Overall, this recording offers fine singing and a stimulating production readily recommended for a modern performance.



# **Boris Godounov**

## **Mussorgsky**

Conductor: Lazarev  
Company: Bolshoi

Boris: Nesterenko  
Dmitri: Piavko  
Fool: Fedin  
Pimen: Vedernikov  
Varlaam: Eizen  
Marina: Sinyavskaya

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Bailey

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with spectacular use of an immense stage. Sets are elaborate and magnificent. Costumes are brilliant and suitably exaggerated for the stage (hence, overdone for home viewing). Movement is apparently dictated by firm Soviet tradition; scene by scene, it is essentially the same as that of the 1954 film. Most of the score is preserved, and the opera ends with Boris' death. In contrast with the tight editing of the older film, this production drags and becomes something of an ordeal.

### PERFORMANCES

Lazarev's reading is routine and stolid. The orchestra is impeccable and responsive. The chorus seems to bog down in the routine of yet another performance. Nesterenko sings the notes correctly, but with little inflection. None of the other soloists surpasses him, but all are adequate. Except for Nesterenko and Fedin, they are comparable with their predecessors, but those two rôles are central to the work, and their comparative weakness mitigates against this performance as drama.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are superb. The sound is exceptionally transparent even in the heaviest passages. The images are always crisp and colorful, with no limitations attributable to recording in an opera house. Blocking appears very similar to that of the film, so it does not quite work: one has neither the feel of a dramatic film, nor that of the house. The result is a sight-and-sound spectacular which is more enjoyable in excerpts than in the totality. Note that disc and videotape use different performances, but they are essentially similar in all respects.

# **Khovanshchina**

## **Mussorgsky**

Conductor: Gergiev  
Company: Mariinski

Dosifey: Okhotnikov  
Igor: Minjelkiev  
Marfa: Borodina  
Andrei: Marusin  
Galitsin: Pluzhnikov  
Shaklovity: Trofimov

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from St. Petersburg. Sets and costumes are traditional, though less opulent than those of the Bolshoi. Dramatically, one finds precision of placement rather than passion. Subtitles are extensive and largely out of frame.

### PERFORMANCES

Gergiev, the orchestra and the chorus provide remarkable impulse to the performance. Okhotnikov and Minjelkiev approach their limits to closely to be effective and authoritative. Marusin's vocal fervor contrasts with the tame work of the other soloists. Borodina's voice is light for Marfa but she uses it both artfully and effectively. Pluzhnikov is rather hammy as the scribe but nondescript as Galitsin. Tselovalnik's Emma is shrill but accurate and effective.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are state of the art for clarity and impact. Large exploits the wide screen to advantage to retain context even in his relatively few closeups. This performance complements the old film with its fine singing and commitment but weak technology; and the Scala with admirable authority and technology but some vocal weaknesses.

# Khovanshchina

## Mussorgsky

Conductor: Abbado

Company: Scala

Dosifey: Burchuladze

Igor: Ghiaurov

Marfa: Semtschuk

Adrei: Atlantov

Galitsin: Marusin

Shaklovity: Kocherga

LaserDisc

Russian / English subtitles

Director: Large

Date: 1989

Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Stylized live compression of an epic onto the stage. Sets are representational and often indecipherable. Costumes are nearly traditional, but elements are exaggerated or confusing. Still, it is a well conceived and superbly sung performance. Acting is perfunctory despite exaggeration from the soloists. The chorus plods through its dramatic scenes and postures oddly in its static ones. Even the subtitles are just a bit off, with faulty phrasing and spelling.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado's direction is clean and straightforward, but compresses the dynamic. The orchestra is responsive and generally accurate; the chorus is accurate in pitch but painfully erratic in phrasing and entrances. Burchuladze effects a black bass well; Ghiaurov's age and gruffness add to his authority. Kocherga sounds fine but portrays Iago rather more than Shaklovity. The three tenors are distinctive in timbre and all sing effectively. Semtschuk accomplishes her task without the solid lows needed to be most effective. Poschner-Klebel (Susanna) and Borowska (Emma) sound capable and carry on the major players' style of minimum dramatic involvement. The many smaller rôles are filled exceptionally well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is generally clear and crisp. Audio is fine but the sound appears to be monaural. The lack of dynamic range might have been mitigated with better recording dynamics and exploitation of stereo; the result is a less inspiring overall effect than the music should inspire. Video direction is flawless and invisible, as one expects from Large. Overall, this is a sound performance beautifully sung and capably staged. It is highly recommended but leaves the field clear for a full dramatic realization.

# Khovanshchina

## Mussorgsky

Conductor: Svetlanov  
Company: Bolshoi

Dosifei: Reizen  
Marfa: Leonova  
Ivan: Krivchenya  
Galitsyn: Petrov  
Shaklovity: Kibkalo

VHS  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Stroeva

Date: 1959  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Spectacular film conveying the drama and excitement of the opera. Sets are massive and realistic. Costumes are timeless peasant outfits with brilliant contrast in the nobility. Action is dramatic and relevant. Subtitles are cryptic and confusing; lip sync is often ludicrous.

### PERFORMANCES

Svetlanov drives an abridged performance with emphasis on the dramatic components. The orchestra and chorus epitomize the traditional Russian values of grandeur and sonority. Reizen is authoritative in voice and appearance. Petrov and Kibkalo were noted Boris's as well, and provide vocal and dramatic quality. Leonova's Marfa is routine. The supporting characters are superbly portrayed; with Kozlovsky among them, that is hardly surprising.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is acceptable with a wider screen than normal and some horizontal compression; color balance is inferior, probably due to the Sovfilm stock. Monaural sound is sufficient to represent the music but not to revel in it. Direction is generally fine although tracking is deficient during some action scenes. This is an outstanding performance adequately captured on film. LaserDisc transfer is clearly in order.

# **Khovanshchina**

## **Mussorgsky**

Conductor: Simonov  
Company: Bolshoi

Dosifei: Nesterenko  
Marfa: Arkhipova  
Ivan: Vedernikov  
Galitsyn: Raikov  
Shaklovity: Romanovsky

VHS  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Hedlund?

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live staging of moderate scale. Sets consist of substantial architectural elements against backdrops suggesting immensity. Costumes are Sunday-best peasant wear and rich attire for the nobility. Action is limited to a few formalisms.

### PERFORMANCES

Simonov provides a grey interpretation, lacking drama and fire despite the passion of score and libretto. The orchestra plods with him; the chorus is surprisingly ragged at times, though always sonorous. Nesterenko need not dominate the work as in *Boris*, so his passion suffices where his voice is lacking. Vedernikov's limitations are similar, leaving one longing for relief. Arkhipova is ageless and delightful, but her rôle is not sufficient to offset the men's weaknesses. The supporting characters provide little character and less voice.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent, limited only by tape capability and significant chroma saturation. Excellent monaural sound provides detail of orchestra and singers. Camera work is conventional and unobtrusive. In sum, the Bolshoi has provided a perfectly serviceable record of a routine performance.

# Barbe Bleue Offenbach

Conductor: Voigtmann  
Company: Komische Oper Berlin

Bluebeard: Nocker  
Boulotte: Schlemm  
Bobèche: Enders  
Clémentine: Schob-Lipka

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Felsenstein

Date: 1973  
Evaluation: Magnificent

## PRODUCTION

Ebullient, effervescent film. Sets and costumes are exaggerated versions of the style of the times. Staging and acting cannot be surpassed; one feels that the cast is having more fun than the audience. Lip sync is hopeless - bad enough to cease to distract within minutes of the opening. However, one must be prepared for a non-Gallic reading, Offenbach as though he were Viennese, perhaps.

## PERFORMANCES

Voigtmann's ease with the operetta idiom gleams at every turn. His orchestra is undistinguished, but the small chorus shines. Nocker somehow manages to go far over the top in every way but his voice, which is ideal for the rôle. Schlemm is a perfect partner, though seeming somewhat mature for the part. The other singers range from excellent to incomparable. Admittedly, the music does not demand great voices; nevertheless, it benefits from their mastery.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and crisp. Although the sound track is identified as stereo, separation is never audible; what is provided is clear and undistorted, a pleasure to hear if somewhat short of the state of the art even in 1973. Direction is magnificent, ranking with Bergman's *Magic Flute* as the finest film realization of an opera. Dreamlife has also been kind enough to provide many chapter stops (although the interior documentation is all in Japanese). Read a synopsis first, then make sure your chair is on a soft surface; you are likely to be rolling on it before the work is over.

# **Brigands**

## **Offenbach**

Conductor: Gibault

Company: Lyon

Falsacappa: Trempont

Fiorella: Chevalier

Fragoletto: Alliot-Lugaz

Pietro: Cassinelli

Duke: Maurette

LaserDisc

French / English subtitles

Director: Hubert

Date: 1989

Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Confusing live staging with an appreciative audience. The single set provides an art-deco interior which serves about half the operetta reasonably well. Like the colorful costumes, the staging represents the (nineteen) twenties for no apparent dramatic reason. However mystifying the staging may be, however odd it may be to have Hemingway on stage in Offenbach, the cast and audience seem to thrive on the production. Jacket notes provide some necessary clues to stage action which one cannot glean from watching the performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Gibault is a delight; her control and insight are brilliant, and she leads the small orchestra through a wondrous romp. The chorus is also fine except for inexplicable raggedness at the entrance of the carabinieri, and some confusion in the third act, perhaps due to the orchestra and conductor being behind many of them on the stage. [The orchestra pit represents a swimming pool.] Trempont is fine, with some vocal limitations more than covered by outstanding acting and spirit. Chevalier is a bit less brilliant than the conventional Offenbach heroine, but no less delightful for that. Alliot-Lugaz is capable with a fine spirit, but is often a bit short of voice to make an effective young man. The other soloists are uniformly fine portrayers of their rôles with more than sufficient voices.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is only fair, apparently insufficiently lighted for sharpness and occasionally out of focus. Audio is outstanding, clearly defining the stage and resolving each orchestral voice. Camera work is capable, but the director seems to lose track of the location of the action and allows the view to wander. Overall, this performance is wonderful to hear and confusing to see.

# Contes d'Hoffmann

## Offenbach

Conductor: Beecham

Company: film

Hoffmann: Rounseville

Olympia: Bond

Giulietta: Grandi

Antonia: Ayars

Nicklausse: Sinclair

Villains: Dargavel

LaserDisc

English

Directors: Powell, Pressburger

Date: 1951

Evaluation: Spectacular

### PRODUCTION

Fantastic ballet with operatic soundtrack. The color and imagery are overwhelming, while the singing is no more than acceptable. Sets and costumes vie with extraordinary dancing and makeup to entrance and to overwhelm the viewer.

### PERFORMANCES

Beecham drives a brilliant reading which the orchestra and singers follow accurately. Rounseville's voice is dry and unattractive. The principal ladies manage the notes without inflection or style. Sinclair is effective. The chorus and the other soloists are adequate.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The restored video of the LaserDisc is impeccable, surpassing any version available for decades. The mono audio track is only acceptable. The version of the score here is greatly truncated, then supplemented for dance needs. We have a wonderful film derived from the opera without pretense of fidelity to Offenbach. The result may be more faithful to the spirit of *Hoffmann* than any stage version.



# Contes d'Hoffmann

## Offenbach

Conductor: Prêtre  
Company: Royal Opera

Hoffmann: Domingo  
Olympia: Serra  
Giulietta: Baltsa  
Antonia: Cotrubas  
Niklausse: Powell  
Lindorf: Lloyd  
Coppélius: Evans  
Dappertutto: Nimsgern

LaserDisc  
French  
Director: Large

Date: 2 January 1981  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Conventional, colorful live performance. Settings are spacious. Costumes are colorful as appropriate, subdued in the Prologue and Epilogue and in the Antonia scene. Stage movement is fluid; action is consistently restrained. Nothing in the production particularly enhances the fantasy or distracts from the realism of the work.

### PERFORMANCES

Prêtre is outstanding in maintaining the lilt without reducing the work to operetta. The result is full-scale opera in a very French style. Orchestra and chorus are finely drilled and enthusiastic. Domingo is excellent in voice and style. Serra's Olympia is outstanding; Baltsa is adequate but uninteresting; Cotrubas is dramatically at her limit. Lloyd does nothing with Lindorf, Evans emotes (but sings well), and Nimsgern is adequate. However, individual performances are less significant than their integration into an enjoyable whole.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is excellent. Video is less defined than in more modern recordings, but not so faulty as to present a problem. Lighting appears enhanced, but is still less than ideal to provide a crisp image in closer shots. Thanks to the staging, moderate closeups are viable and are used with taste and skill. Camera work overall is reliable and enhances the feeling of the viewer participating in a live performance.

# Contes d'Hoffmann

## Offenbach

Conductor: Dutoit  
Company: Metropolitan

Hoffmann: Shicoff  
Olympia: Bradley  
Giulietta: Troyanos  
Antonia: Alexander  
Niklausse: Quittmeyer  
4 villains: Morris

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 8 January 1988  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live from the Met in all senses. Sets are familiar and conventional, using the stage well. Costumes are similarly uninspired but effective. The drama is particularly well presented throughout, with all singers conveying involvement. However, stage business is overdone and overbusy for appreciation of the music. Direction is idiosyncratic for no apparent musical or dramatic reason.

### PERFORMANCES

Dutoit is no more successful than most in supplying Gallic *elan*, but does lead a brisk, coherent interpretation. Orchestra and chorus are as fine as expected. Shicoff portrays the hero well, singing easily and acting with confidence. Morris is effective in all of his rôles, though he does little to differentiate them vocally. Bradley approximates the music and hams excessively; Troyanos and Alexander sing and act superbly. The other rôles are well handled as expected, with Quittmeyer and Laciura particularly notable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is adequate but surprisingly low light levels obscure all but the central action. Sound is handled in the usual manner of this series, clearly and accurately representing an ideal orchestra seat. Camera work is exemplary. Overall, this is a fine alternative to the Domingo readings, lacking in stage direction and lighting but well conducted, sung, and acted.

# Contes d'Hoffmann

## Offenbach

Conductor: Guingal  
Company: Madrid

Hoffmann: Kraus  
Lindorf: Bruscantini  
Olympia: Lloris  
Antonia: Gonzalez  
Giulietta: Orcirani

VHS copy  
French / Spanish subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance reviewed in a poor copy. Staging is simplistic with drops and a few props. Costumes appear to be more Victorian era than conventional. Acting is simplistic or 'cute' with Kraus' athleticism and the others' silent-film dramatics palling quickly. The score is cut without obvious reason.

### PERFORMANCES

Conducting is overly flexible, speeding and slowing to adapt to the singers' preferences. The orchestra seems competent; the chorus, less so. Kraus would be a fine Hoffmann with more discipline; his interpolations would also be acceptable if they were in context instead of dumped onto the score whenever possible. The Olympia postures beyond the merely cute, but sings without precision. Giulietta and Antonia are capably portrayed and the Nicklausse is a positive pleasure. The male rôles (except for Kraus' Hoffmann) are covered less than competently.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Neither video nor audio is acceptable in the review copy, but the faults cannot be apportioned between the duplication and the original recording. Camera work is primitive, with full-stage shots predominating so that one could not recognize performances even if the video were clean. In all, this recording cannot even be recommended to Kraus' fans. (Note: Casting information is uncertain.)

# Des Contes d'Hoffmann Offenbach

Conductor: Nagano  
Company: Lyon

Hoffmann: Galvez-Vallejo  
Villains: van Dam  
Henchmen: Bacquier  
Frantz: Verzier  
Olympia: Dessay  
Antonia: Hendricks  
Giulietta: Vernet

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Cavassilas

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

## PRODUCTION

Unique interpretation of elements of *Contes d'Hoffmann*. The setting represents an asylum, with rubber walls that occasionally have elements of human bodies stretching them toward the inmates. Dress appears to be early twentieth century. Acting is exaggerated, but not excessively for the fantasies of the caricature residents. About half the music is presented, but the context bears little relationship to that of Offenbach's opera.

## PERFORMANCES

Nagano leads a steady, substantial reading lacking superficial gloss. The orchestra is sonorous, the chorus is inconsistent, but apparently by design. Galvez-Vallejo sings cleanly but overacts vocally and physically. Van Dam is an evil genius who stresses the genius with an extraordinary style and fine voice. The women are both accurate and expressive. Lesser rôles are handled stylishly whether they call for outrageous or subdued expression.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

While a brighter stage might be more attractive on the home screen, the effect seems to be as desired by the stage director. Sound is exceptionally fine, although the stage is not imaged. Camera work is clean and unobtrusive, with direction favoring long and medium shots over closeups; given the unique staging, the effect is just right. In all, the same forces in a conventional production might have been even more satisfying, but this unique "take" on the tales lacks nothing on its own terms.

# Vie Parisienne

## Offenbach

Conductor: Ossonce  
Company: Lyon

Bobinet: Verzier  
Raoul: Sivadier  
Metella: Delavault  
Baron: Chatalais

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Cavassilas

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Lively, stylized staging before an occasionally enthusiastic audience. Settings are simply suggestions; some need contrast in lighting or color. Costumes are strictly traditional. Stage business is simple but more vulgar than the music demands. Action tends to the frenetic and inexplicable, with much moving of furniture, occasional lengthy pauses full of insignificance, and other activity unrelated to the score. The actors are outstanding, moving lightly and easily and only rarely exaggerating the humor into buffoonery.

### PERFORMANCES

Ossonce leads a solid, bright interpretation, avoiding excesses of frivolity and seriousness. The orchestra responds accurately and brightly; there is no chorus *per se*, but the soloists combine voices with style. Unfortunately, vocal technique is seriously lacking in all the major singers except Delavault. No errors are obvious, but pitch is approximated and graceful flourishes devolve awkwardly. The music is witty, but not simple; Offenbach asked actors to handle the vocal demands; they do not do it here.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is excellent except for the effects of stylized lighting. Audio is crisp and accurate, with good stereo spread and no exploitation of surround effects. Direction confounds rather than enhances the performance; some choices are clever, others divert the listener from the musical point. For example, it would seem reasonable to show at least a glimpse of the dancers during the Alpine dance. The work is disjoint in itself and could do without the fussiness provided by stage and television directors. Overall, the performance has the essential *elan* but little else to recommend it.

# Gato Montes

## Penella

Conductor: Roa  
Company: Los Angeles

Seleá: Villaroel  
Ruiz: Domingo  
Juanillo: Diaz

Broadcast  
Spanish / English subtitles  
Director: Halvorson

Date: 1994  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance of a work intermediate between zarzuela and opera. Sets are simplified and open except for the final scene which uses a black background and props alone. Costumes are traditional. Acting is superficial and operatic in the negative sense. Stage movement is good except where action stops for the big moments, especially those of Villaroel.

### PERFORMANCES

Roa leads a bland but effective reading with assurance. Orchestra and chorus are steady without apparent flaw. Villaroel's instrument is harsh especially when pushed and she hardly conveys the image one would imagine appropriate. Domingo is ardent and accurate if no longer convincing as the flamboyant torero. Diaz is inaccurate but persuasive in tone and movement. The many lesser rôles are carried off extremely well, with several fine voices and no weak performances.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well lighted. Audio is fine with good stereo for the orchestra but little imaging of the stage. Camera work is fine much of the time but occasional zooms showing the audience and orchestra disrupt any image of "being there." One can imagine a more fiery and exciting performance; until it arrives, the present recording will do quite nicely.

# Gioconda

## Ponchielli

Conductor: Fischer  
Company: Vienna

Gioconda: Marton  
Enzo: Domingo  
Barnaba: Manuguerra  
Laura: Semtschuk  
Alvise: Rydl  
Cieca: Lilowa

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Kach

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live recording compressed onto a stage too confining for it. Settings are traditional and colorful. Costumes are also conventional, although the principals' outfits seem deliberately less bright than the chorus'. Stage movement is stilted and awkward; the opera almost becomes a collection of static set pieces, *opera seria* style.

### PERFORMANCES

From his conducting here, our ignorance of Adam Fischer is richly deserved; orchestra and chorus are reasonably together in a thoroughly pedestrian reading. Marton is mechanically correct, and her ample instrument is well suited to the technical demands. She cannot and does not involve the viewer in the performance. Domingo is impassioned by comparison and sings with unaccustomed ring. Semtschuk manages her material competently, but carries through the non-acting theme set by Marton. Manuguerra is a distinct liability, inaccurate in pitch, forcing an adequate instrument beyond its limits, and plodding through the rôle like a caricature of a silent-film villain. Rydl joins Domingo in truly singing and acting. Lilowa provides adequate contrast with Semtschuk, both in vocal value and in attention to stage business.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent, conveying the life of the performance. Lighting appears unenhanced, yet is ample for the recording. Camera positions are constrained so few closeups are employed at logical places; those that are used seem dictated by the availability of easy shots, rather than any dramatic necessity. Video direction seems little more than random.

# Gioconda

## Ponchielli

Conductor: Bartoletti  
Company: San Francisco

Gioconda: Scotto  
Enzo: Pavarotti  
Laura: Toczyska  
Barnaba: Mittelman  
Cieca: Lilova  
Alvise: Furlanetto

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 16 September 1979  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Probably the most over-hyped live broadcast and certainly among the least satisfying. Sets fill the stage with rich color and conventional realism. Costumes are similarly elaborate and colorful. Activity is unceasing but acting is minimal. Even the subtitles intrude.

### PERFORMANCES

Bartoletti never again achieves the dynamic of the orchestral opening once the singing begins. The orchestra and chorus are well drilled and effective. Scotto demonstrates that what is left of her lyric instrument does not substitute for a dramatic one. Pavarotti gets out all the notes with ease, but fails to provide even a hint of the character. Toczyska and Lilova both sing effectively. Mittelman is usually within a semitone or two of his target; Furlanetto does substantially better despite persistent tremolo.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent: well defined and amply lighted. Pre-HiFi monaural sound diminishes the enjoyment of the more complex pages; the review copy is afflicted with hum. Direction is capable, apparently unhindered by the presence of the audience.



# Dialogues of the Carmelites Poulenc

Conductor: Fournet  
Company: Canada

Blanche: Welhasch  
Old Prioress: Forrester  
Constance: Blackwell  
New Prioress: Vaness

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Durector: Campbell

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Stark, literal, and eminently live performance. Sets and costumes are conventional and colorful where possible to set off the starkness of the nuns' physical environment. Action ranges from conventional to overwhelming in a production that seems choreographed throughout.

## PERFORMANCES

Fournet caresses the score. The orchestra and chorus are superb and completely in sync with his reading. Welhasch is vocally, physically, and dramatically adequate, but does not make Blanche the centerpiece she might be. Forrester is overwhelming and unforgettable, defining the rôle. Blackwell contrasts ideally with Forrester, displaying the nuns' spectrum as in no other performance. Vaness is fine, but not memorable in this company. The other rôles, even including the men, are superbly cast.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but suffers from the overmodulation that characterizes Canadian broadcast engineering. Monaural sound is quite good, although separation of the rich sonorities would add clarity and some climaxes are overrecorded. Lighting is a bit darker than one would like, but within the acceptable range. Camera work is outstanding for a performance constrained by the audience. A commercial release with quality video and high fidelity stereo would be rated Indispensable.

# Dialogues of the Carmelites Poulenc

Conductor: Rosenthal  
Company: Metropolitan

Blanche: Ewing  
Old Prioress: Quivar  
Constance: Norden  
New Prioress: Norman

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Large

Date: 4 April 1987  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live staging embodying much of the best and some of the worst of Met productions. Sets are notably representational and colorless even where conventionally used for contrast; their symbolism is effective in large measure because of their simplicity. Costumes are literal and again drab. Acting is particularly convincing and committed. Enunciation is sufficient to follow the text.

## PERFORMANCES

Rosenthal's interpretation is somber and slow, but consistently and effectively so. The orchestra and chorus seem pressed to extend the lines as he wishes and some are distorted as a result. Ewing is particularly effective and touching, handling the modest vocal demands with grace and ease. Quivar's years sit well on her; her parlando is effective even in her charge. Norden provides the simplicity needed yet offers ample voice. Norman is spectacularly effective, contributing perhaps her best performance. The minor rôles are well cast and effectively sung.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp but severely underlighted, diminishing the effect the staging could have produced. Sound is clear with a good orchestral image. Video direction is excellent, with the higher angles emphasizing the advantages of a balcony seat and the virtues of a synoptic view of the stage. Overall, this is a fine if somber reading, lacking only ultimate drama and contrast.

# Dialogues of the Carmelites Poulenc

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Australia

Blanche: Buchanan  
Old Prioress: Koppel  
Constance: McDonald  
New Prioress: Sutherland

VHS  
English  
Director: Prokop

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Live staging lacking drama and grace. Sets are clever and sufficient at minimum cost. Costumes are strictly traditional. Acting is surprisingly fluid and effective. Enunciation varies among the performers but is generally sufficient to obviate subtitles.

## PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé conducts a somber religious rite. The orchestra is sonorous and responsive; the chorus handles its tasks soberly. Buchanan sings the notes accurately but leaves the viewer uninvolved. Koppel whines her anguish, weakening the critical charge to her successor. McDonald lacks the precision and the simplicity one would wish. Sutherland is completely miscast, providing beautiful tone in place of clarity. The men and the minor characters are adequate.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is dark and contrasty, but generally sharp and well focussed. Stereo spread is minimal and provides little imaging of either stage or orchestra—although it does help resolve the textures and more complex sounds. Camera work is exceptionally intimate, suggesting that the audience would have been disrupted significantly, but we are the beneficiaries. Overall direction is excellent, comparable with Ponelle's films.

# Voix Humaine

## Poulenc

Conductor: Serebrier  
Company: film

Woman: Farley

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Lough

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Apparently live performance without an audience. The single set is traditional and dark. The costume is a flapper dress with a trench coat as periodic cover.

### PERFORMANCES

Serebrier is precise and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra is brilliant and responsive; unfortunately, the result lacks the poetry of the very French original. Farley has a fine voice for the work, but her French is very much out of the schoolroom and cannot do justice to either Cocteau or Poulenc; her emoting is similarly out of style and exaggerated for the work, especially on a television screen.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are brilliant and up to the finest contemporary levels. The orchestra is imaged well in stereo, but there is no stage ambience for Farley. Lighting levels are low but never obscure the action. Farley's limited dramatic contribution is balanced by active and involved camera movement to maintain interest.

# Voix Humaine

## Poulenc

Conductor: Angnost  
Company: film

Woman: Armstrong

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Karp

Date: ~1979  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Vastly overproduced film. Settings are varied: her room, his home, the park, etc. Costumes for the extraneous characters are conventional and period; Armstrong wears the towel from her bath. Enunciation is clear and subtitles are not missed. Physical acting is overdone; vocal portrayal is superb. Lip sync is poor despite the relatively simple demands in the short takes.

### PERFORMANCES

Angnost provides a *hochdramatisch* reading and manages to evoke playing in that style from a subset of the American Symphony. Armstrong is superb, placing each note ideally and differentiating mood with phrasing.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video failings seem restricted to the review copy; the master should have clear and well-focussed images. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is murky, offering few of the musical joys of the score but preserving Armstrong's interpretation accurately. Direction is prohibitively busy, representing the woman's thoughts with explicit images and introducing characters visually who are fully represented by the music and text.

# **Amour des Trois Oranges Prokofiev**

Conductor: Haitink

Company: Glyndebourne

Ninetta: Alliot-Lugaz

Prince: Davies

King: White

Truffaldino: Benelli

Farfarello: Hammond-Stroud

Broadcast

French / English subtitles

Director: Greenberg

Date: 1982

Evaluation: Delightful

## PRODUCTION

Live staging of a lively Corsaro/Sendak interpretation. The set is a cartoon appropriate to a fairy tale told in a candy box. Costumes are brilliant and fantastical. Acting is ebullient; even the French is well enunciated.

## PERFORMANCES

Haitink leads an accurate but breakneck performance; the London Philharmonic follows him with a rich sonority, yet seems to share the glee. The chorus is brisk and articulate. Alliot-Lugaz is lovely to see and pleasant to hear. Davies is similarly expert in his part. Neither is pressed by the vocal line; both are delightful. The other soloists are no less suited to their rôles, but their individual performances are less relevant than the pleasure of the whole.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is well focussed and accurate. Sound is clear and stereo is used to good effect in capturing the spread of the production. Lighting is ample and camera movement is restrained.

# Amour des Trois Oranges Prokofiev

Conductor: Nagano  
Company: Lyon

Ninetta: Dubosc  
Prince: Viala  
King: Bacquier  
Truffaldino: Gautier

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Jung

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Film of a vibrant stage production. The set consists of a collection of triangular pillars which rotate and move selectively; opera boxes flank the basic set to provide a variant reality. Costumes are early 20th century, in black, whites and occasional brilliant colors. Acting should be termed choreography and is as delightful as the music. Subtitles are slightly colloquial and out of the widescreen frame. Lip sync is generally good, but some lapses distract the viewer's attention.

## PERFORMANCES

Nagano leads a clean, crisp reading a bit short on charm but not enthusiasm. Orchestral detail is satisfying when audible. The chorus is admirable for intonation, articulation and spirit. All singing and portrayal is wonderful; to single out Bacquier, Viala and Bastin (the Cook) is merely to cite the most visible excellences. For one who has to find fault, Ninetta's intonation is a bit short of ideal and Linetta is not convincing as a wire walker; since they are conscious for only a few minutes in the whole opera, their limitations count for very little.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video lacks the brilliance of the score and the production but is more than acceptable. Audio presents more serious problems, with enough overmodulation to make analogue sound preferable to digital, underemphasis on the orchestra, and a lack of frequency extremes. Direction is problematic, never providing integrating shots to relate the action in the boxes to that on the stage and diverting attention at unwelcome moments especially due to erratic changes of camera and angle. The widescreen format is used well on the subtitles, but seldom helps in perceiving the opera. Overall, the performance is outstanding for singing, acting and *esprit* but significantly deficient on technical grounds.

# Fiery Angel

## Prokofiev

Conductor: Gergiev  
Company: Mariinski

Renata: Gorchakova  
Ruprecht: Leiferkus  
Mephistopheles: Pluzhnikov

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: September 1993  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Stunning, sparse staging before a stunned(?) audience. Sets are sparse and representative inanimate elements and omnipresent dancers as Renata's demons; if they are not part of the *mise en scene*, it is not clear how they should be described. On the 4-to-3 screen, the subtitles prove intrusive. The singers' acting would appear even better than it does if it were not constantly superimposed on the dancers' graceful movements. The full frontal nudity in the final scene adds to the musical and dramatic shock—although some will find it excessive.

### PERFORMANCES

Gergiev impels the score relentlessly and wonderfully. The orchestra seems to revel in producing the required sounds. Gorchakova pours out marvels of legato in a ravishing piano; her topmost notes tend to be brittle at forte and above, but this lovely singer and actress is a joy despite that quibble. Leiferkus is scarcely less impressive, though his voice is occasionally lost in the thicker orchestral textures. Pluzhnikov is simply the most visible of the outstanding cast of singers in smaller parts. These are outstanding portrayals, semiprecious gems setting off the brilliant diamonds at the ceter of the casting.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is consistently crisp and sharply focussed. Audio is superb, with clear highs and solid lows. Stereo is fine for the orchestra, but it occasionally provides a false location for a soloist on stage. This is a compelling performance which should delight the aficionado, persuade the skeptic, and shock all viewers visually, sonically, and dramatically.



# War and Peace

## Prokofiev

Conductor: Gergiev  
Company: Mariinski

Natasha: Prokina  
Andrei: Gergalov  
Bezukhov: Gregoriam

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Burton

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Superb

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an appropriately enthusiastic audience. Sets are minimal, representational and stunning. Costumes are conventional (and appear rather cheap). The result works thanks to superb, imaginative and integral lighting design. The performers do not act their parts - they live them and are cast so superbly that one comes to believe the rôles were written for them.

### PERFORMANCES

Gergiev works his usual wonders, though a bit more acid would fit this epic opera. Excepting a few brief and irrelevant lapses, chorus and orchestra shine. If Gergalov is more effective as the lover than as the hero, that is not inappropriate in the part. One cannot single out any other excellence among the brilliant performances and virtually perfect production of each artist down to the smallest solo. Artists in secondary and bit parts here would star in another venue.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but not consistent; a few shots are washed out, others have faulty color balance. Sound is consistently fine though slightly lacking in impact and offering only minimal imaging of the stage. The whole exceeds its many excellences and few flaws in presenting a riveting performance and a thrilling evening (or two) of theatre. I can think of alternative one-word evaluations for this recording: stunning, indispensable and overwhelming for starters.

### FOOTNOTE - SFO PERFORMANCE

The same production and principals were seen in an SFO performance. Unfortunately, it is in every way inferior to the recording from St. Petersburg reviewed here.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Gardelli  
Company: Royal

Mimi: Cotrubas  
Rodolfo: Shicoff  
Musetta: Zschau  
Marcello: Allen  
Colline: Howell

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Large

Date: 16 Feb 1982  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Thoroughly conventional and eminently live production. No imagination was exercised in settings or costumes, and stage movement, while fluid, provides no surprises. The production is as comfortable as possible, dropping one into the conventional Paris of the era. Since the singing and conducting follow through (at least with respect to the Italians' image of Paris), a totally realistic scene is set for this classic melodrama.

### PERFORMANCES

Nothing in Gardelli's conducting surprises, but everything is enjoyably in place. The chorus and orchestra are also on very familiar ground, yet the performance "takes off" as though the work were fresh to them all. Cotrubas is ideally vulnerable, but not simplistic. Her singing is limpid, and never forced. Shicoff is ardent and impassioned, and while his instrument is more brilliant than warm, it combines well with and stands out from the others in the ensemble. Allen's reading is consonant with Shicoff's—more aggressive than most Marcello's. Zschau is an intelligent as well as a cunning Musetta; she also sings and moves well. Howell is an asset, and the lesser rôles are capably handled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio quality is excellent despite the relatively early date. Stereo is subdued, but does help establish the stage ambience. Video quality is also good, but suffers in some scenes from low light levels. The perspective is generally distant; closeups may have been limited due to placing cameras during live performance. Any augmentation of lighting for the recording is unnoticeable. Overall, this is an excellent, lively, and honest reading of the opera. It is neither lush nor sentimental, but it is a joy on its own terms.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Mimi: Stratas  
Rodolfo: Carreras  
Musetta: Scotto  
Marcello: Stilwell  
Colline: Morris

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 16 January 1982  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Surprisingly modest, conventional live performance staged by Zeffirelli. Solidly traditional sets work well even in the vast spaces of the Met. Costumes are traditional. Stage action is superb, with fluid, natural movement and full realization of the characters by all concerned. It is impossible to watch this performance without becoming involved in its beauty and tragedy.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine's reading is bright and accurate, belying the staleness associated with this warhorse. The orchestra and chorus are up to their usual standards of excellence. Stratas is superb dramatically and sings with accuracy and feeling; if her instrument is not the most beautiful, it is always responsive and pleasing. Carreras is similarly committed and effective, though he has occasional problems with phrasing and high-lying passages. The other soloists are superb in ensemble and never less than adequate vocally. Individual failings might be noted, but the overall rightness of the performance obviates such quibbling.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video suffers from the age of the broadcast; it is sufficient for enjoyment of the totality, but never enjoyable. The sound is surprisingly good. Lighting is insufficient for the cameras' limits and results in excessive contrast. Camera movement is excellent.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Kleiber  
Company: Scala

Mimi: Cotrubas  
Rodolfo: Pavarotti  
Musetta: Popp  
Marcello: Saccomani  
Colline: Nesterenko

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Battistoni

Date: ~1981  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in an authentic tradition. Sets are modest by Zefirelli's standard (although he uses the split-level Act II), and strictly traditional. Costumes break no new ground and acting is oversize—scaled to the house, not to the television screen. Occasional problems with lip sync suggest that not all video is from a single performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Kleiber implements a highly dramatic interpretation with little traditional indulgence. The chorus and orchestra are full in sound and accurate in response to his lead. Cotrubas presses a bit, but approaches the ideal of the frail and lovely maid (with an ideal voice). Pavarotti is surprisingly rough except in the high spots, where his relatively fresh instrument rings out beautifully. Popp lacks the weight and insouciance for an ideal Musetta, but sings well and overacts enthusiastically. Saccomani and the other Bohemians are adequate if unspectacular and the supporting cast does its job professionally.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is very dark and less than critically sharp, as expected from its era. Pre-HiFi monaural sound conveys the voices and the outlines of the orchestral sound adequately, but more details would be welcome. Video direction is uncertain, but camera work appears unfettered by the audience. Except for video and audio limitations, this performance would be recommended highly, and certainly as Pavarotti's best.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Mimi: Scotto  
Rodolfo: Pavarotti  
Musetta: Niska  
Marcello: Wixell  
Colline: Plishka

VHS copy  
Italian  
Director: Browning

Date: 15 March 1977  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

The first performance "Live from the Met". Sets are oversize, simple and drab. The costumes match (except in size). Acting is conventional but neither stale nor stilted; the performers move persuasively and emote rather less obviously than usual. The new production (fourth performance) and consistency of the cast show to advantage.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine contributes little but maintains a steady and appropriate pace. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable. Scotto shows her age and tends to overdramatize, but sings easily and well. Pavarotti is somehow unsatisfying, less comfortable with his voice than in alternative versions. The rest of the ensemble acquits itself well, though the ideal blend is lacking. One is tempted to suggest that the occasion affected the performance as a whole more than the artists individually.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is surprisingly sharp and well managed for the era; only some motion blur betrays the limitations of the cameras. Pre-HiFi monaural sound (and multiple generations before the review copy) limits enjoyment of the audio, but voices are represented adequately. Camera angles are often ill-chosen, probably because of the influence of the audience. The image is always moving, often distractingly zooming, panning or switching cameras; the effect is rather disturbing and the practice was not carried over to later performances. Choppy direction combined with lack of ensemble keep this from being a performance one needs to hunt down.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Smith  
Company: Australia

Mimi: Barker  
Rodolfo: Hobson  
Musetta: Douglas  
Marcello: Lemke  
Colline: Rowley

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Nottage

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with occasional sync problems suggesting video was drawn from more than one evening. Setting is the 1950's but with little effect. Sets, except for an inexplicable third act, are essentially conventional with special effects, neon lighting, and other devices superimposed on an essentially standard concept (by Luhrmann). Costumes are brilliant, but, like the staging, convey no special feel for the alteration of era. Stage action is superb, exploiting a youthful cast to provide physical exuberance and athleticism to compensate for lyric weakness. The Italian is sung precisely, though with little inflection.

### PERFORMANCES

Smith's steady baton lacks inflection and notable insight. The orchestra more nearly manages the modest demands than does the ragged chorus. Barker has a clean, unremarkable instrument used with accuracy and taste. Hobson's vibrato is broad, but the instrument is well produced and used with taste and skill; like Barker, he is healthy and hearty, reducing the credibility of their poverty and her illness. The other bohemians are reasonably capable though not always accurate in pitch or phrasing. Douglas provides a conventionally shrill and overplayed Musetta; her reading fits less well in the modern setting than do the others'. Smaller parts are adequate vocally and satisfying dramatically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but notably underlighted; sound is similarly accurate without stereo imaging. Camera movement is fluid and appropriate with rather more use of closeups than most directors and many viewers prefer. Overall, the performance is worth experiencing for the solo singing, not for the production which appears to be its nominal claim to fame.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Manahan  
Company: New York

Mimi: Riddle  
Rodolfo: Fowler  
Musetta: Thorngren  
Marcello: R. Perry  
Colline: Matthews

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1997  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Traditional staging before a live but rather cool audience. Overall, this is a perfectly acceptable, thoroughly unimaginative reading without major flaw or virtue.

### PERFORMANCES

Manahan finds nothing to say about the opera, but says it reasonably well, barring some idiosyncratic tempi. The chorus and orchestra are sufficient. Riddle evokes no personality but sings effectively. Fowler's reading does offer some temperament and a pleasant if unmemorable voice. The other principals offer nothing more, though Matthews' rich tone and easy manner suggest substantial potential. The soloists seem unusually wary of the pit, yet for all their care do not consistently synchronize with Manahan.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and well lighted. Stereo sound offers only hints of surround, but is not overcompressed or excessively favoring the voices. Camera work occasionally hits a snag, but that may be due to Fowler replacing the scheduled tenor at the last moment. Direction is unobtrusive and less intimate than others (notably, Brian Large) seem to prefer. Overall, it would be hard to find a reason to replay this performance unless one knows one of the artists.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Armenian  
Company: Montreal

Mimi: Kincses  
Rodolfo: Raffanti  
Musetta: Nazzario  
Marcello: Baerg  
Colinne: Charbonneau

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Robidas

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Routine, economy-scale live performance. Sets and costumes are traditional and minimal. Acting is nominal and irrelevant.

### PERFORMANCES

Armenian leads a routine performance without major problem. The orchestra is reasonably in sync with him, but the chorus (especially the children's component) is short on drill. Kincses provides lovely sounds without particular dramatic relevance, and is not credible as a consumptive. Raffanti sings quite well and conveys more conviction than his peers. The other voices are at least adequate.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good but not remarkable. (Monaural) sound is less bad than some Canadian efforts, but never more than adequate. Lighting is barely sufficient and occasionally limits the visibility of the scene. Camera work is primitive, offering many views from high above an audience sight line and few appropriate shots on medium scale. The technical problems may derive in large measure from the presence of the audience, although other directors have more capably addressed that problem.



# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: de Fabritiis  
Company: Philadelphia

Mimi: Guimaraes  
Rodolfo: Pavarotti  
Marcello: Sioli  
Musetta: Johnson  
Colline: Polgar

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with young singers and Pavarotti. Sets are somewhat simplified conventional. Costumes are traditional with spots of color to enliven the scene. Movement is of the stand-and-deliver philosophy for arias, but fluid and natural otherwise. Menotti's stage direction contributes nothing.

### PERFORMANCES

DeFabritiis' ability to maintain the score's dynamic despite the soloists' tendency to exaggeration seems astonishing; he also brings out colors and voices in orchestration usually elided by more popular conductors. The orchestra and chorus needed more rehearsal to follow him effectively. Guimares is miscast, with an accurate but brittle style and tone that miss the point. Pavarotti is enlivened over his norm. The other soloists are a small step above provincial performance: generally accurate and effective without contributing to the performance overall. An exception is Johnson, whose Musetta is dramatically and vocally admirable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but insufficiently lighted so that detail is lost. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is unusually good thanks in part to good balance between stage and pit. Camera work is fine, marginally busier than necessary but maintaining focus on the appropriate center. With the abundance of better performances, this one may be skipped without loss.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Rigacci  
Company: Canada

Mimi: Hong  
Rodolfo: Wilson  
Musetta: Terrell  
Marcello: LaPerriere  
Colline: Cox

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Campbell

Date: ~1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Light, lively live staging. Sets are traditional in concept but unusually bright and colorful. Costumes are similarly bright, though appropriately shabby and worn. Stage movement is brisk and appropriate.

### PERFORMANCES

Rigacci maintains coherence in an exceptionally brisk and youthful reading. Orchestra and chorus are occasionally ragged but always enthusiastic. Hong's voice is sturdier than that of most; lovely tone and vulnerable appearance make the part her own. Wilson's tenor is brilliant and committed rather than suave. The other bohemians continue the theme of youth and enthusiasm, somewhat weakening the final tragedy but exploiting that side of the score.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and very well lighted, although fill lights would have softened some of the shadows to advantage. Monaural sound would be excellent but is badly distorted by inadequate broadcast engineering. Camera work and overall video direction are excellent as is video engineering. Overall, this is a most un-Italian interpretation: bright and ebullient with a minimum of sentiment and a maximum of realism. If a copy with good sound can be found, it would be highly recommended.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Severini  
Company: San Francisco

Mimi: Freni  
Rodolfo: Pavarotti  
Musetta: Pacetti  
Marcello: G. Quilico  
Colline: Ghiaurov

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Inconsistent, ineffective live performance. Sets are conventional, oversize and dull. Costumes are exaggerated but not original. Acting varies from purely nominal for Freni and Pavarotti to exorbitant for Pacetti and appropriate for the others.

### PERFORMANCES

Severini's reading is erratic: often rushed, languorous (somnolent?) for the big solos. The orchestra manages to follow his tempi; the chorus almost keeps up as well. Freni emotes and produces lovely tones, but does not make a Mimi. Pavarotti stands foursquare or more and supplies seductive sound without personality. Quilico's lyricism and characterization provide a pleasant contrast; Pacetti overplays without compensatory tonal beauty.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and almost without contrast. Essentially monaural sound is constricted, of limited range, and moderately distorted. Camera work and direction are excellent, but do not compensate for the technical mess surrounding them. Overall, this performance is an oddity enlivened by Quilico and Ghiaurov and by the tonal beauty of Freni and Pavarotti.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Scala

Mimi: Freni  
Rodolfo: Raimondi  
Musetta: Martino  
Marcello: Panerai  
Colline: Vinco

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Krien

Date: 1967  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Beautifully finished, unsentimental film. Sets are conventional in concept but not confined to the stage and more effective in setting the dramatic mood. Costumes are strictly traditional but hardly suggest the bohemians' poverty. Acting is cinematic and effective. Lip sync is often distracting.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan provides a lyric but unsentimental reading, allowing time for the soloists' expansions but not for exaggeration. The orchestra and chorus are perfectly drilled. Freni sings magnificently but is less than convincing dramatically. Raimondi is unyieldingly brusque but accurate; Panerai makes a comparable impression, which does not aid the drama. Martino looks wonderful but sings only adequately and expresses more petulance than fire.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not particularly good for a film; it is not as crisp and colors are not as well defined as modern technology permits. Monaural sound is adequate; the lack of HiFi recording on the review copy does not appear to be significant. Camera work is not as polished as one would hope in a film even of this era, but is never distracting.

# Boheme

## Puccini

Conductor: Conlon  
Company: film

Mimi: Hendricks  
Rodolfo: Carreras  
Musetta: Blasi  
Marcello: G. Quilico  
Colline: d'Artegna

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Comancini

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Idiosyncratic film interpretation moved to the 1920's. Sets and costumes are extremely realistic realizations of the era. However, license taken in adapting the score to the film requirements is distracting at best, offensive at worst. Enunciation is exemplary, movement is fluid and natural. Note that an actor replaces Carreras on screen and the modest letterboxing is not used to hold the subtitles, which are not always fully visible against a white background. Lip sync is generally good but occasionally disturbing.

### PERFORMANCES

Conlon leads an odd reading, frequently indulgent toward the soloists, occasionally rushed for no dramatic reason. Hendricks sings precisely and with lovely tone, but seems vocally uninvolved. Carreras has problems with some higher passages but is otherwise characteristically involved and expressive. Blasi stands out as Musetta dramatically and vocally. The other rôles are capably filled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and well focussed. Monaural sound is strangely weak, limited in tonal and dynamic range and occasionally shrill. Voices are unnaturally prominent. Cameras are ideally positioned throughout. However, direction is peculiar, often contradicting the text and score. Those peculiarities are too numerous to detail and seriously compromise this performance for anyone who pays attention to the libretto.

# Boheme - excerpts

Puccini

Conductor: Saccani

Company: Philadelphia

Mimi: d'Amico

Rodolfo: Pavarotti

Musetta: Pacetti

Marcello: Mattsey

Colline: Servile

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Browning

Date: 1989

Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

About half of a live performance—which appears to have been about half alive before cutting. Sets and costumes are conventional. Action alternates between static and frenetic and is never made significant to the performance. Voice-over narration provides some of the continuity lost in cutting but does not contribute to enjoying the music.

## PERFORMANCES

Saccani indulges the principals shamelessly and tediously; his reading of the broad expanses of the music is lost in the abridgement. The orchestra sounds fine. D'Amico is potentially excellent with ample voice and plaintive tone stretched hopelessly by the conducting. Pavarotti is at his largest but far from his best with no trace of seduction left in the sound. The bohemians are a ragtag lot vocally as well as physically.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but lighting is insufficient. Sound is captured well, with good imaging of the orchestra. Video direction is impeccable. If the performance were worth capturing, the technical effort would be up to the task.

# Fanciulla del West

## Puccini

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: Scala

Minnie: Zampieri  
Johnson: Domingo  
Rance: Pons  
Nick: Bertocchi  
Sonora: Salvadori

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Phillips

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Excellent ... but

### PRODUCTION

Clean, brisk live performance of a Jonathan Miller staging. Sets are appropriate in style and in drabness; costumes are similar and highly credible. Even the chorus moves and acts superbly, maintaining the dramatic illusion. To quibble, the subtitles are sparse and some worthwhile material may be lost.

### PERFORMANCES

Maazel's dynamic reading works consistently; no performer is pressed as the music maintains its drama and drive. The orchestra and chorus provide a solid underpinning for the solo work, making for a near-Wagnerian integration. Domingo provides his finest Ramerrez; enough said. Zampieri is a serious problem, approximating the beat (usually ahead of it) and the pitch (usually above it); dramatic conviction provides a poor replacement. Pons is outstanding as the sheriff, gruff and boorish, yet credible as a suitor for Minnie. The smaller rôles are filled admirably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video would be hard to better in any respect. Audio is fine with excellent separation and substantial stereo imaging. Phillips' direction is sound otherwise, but frequently breaks the dramatic illusion with artifacts such as the steeply raked stage. Closeups are not excessive and medium shots maintain context and focus. Overall, this performance is highly recommended - but **only** if Zampieri's vocalism is acceptable to you.

# Fanciulla del West

## Puccini

Conductor: Santi  
Company: Royal

Minnie: Neblett  
Johnson: Domingo  
Rance: Carroli  
Nick: Egerton  
Sonora: Rawnsley

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Vernon

Date: 12 November 1982  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Literal interpretation of the 19th-Century American West—in Puccini's fantasy. Sets are pseudo-realistic and the action fits them comfortably. Costumes appear more real than the sets. Colors tend to be subdued, which seems fitting for the setting. Stage movement is fluid and well rehearsed.

### PERFORMANCES

Santi's reading is thoroughly conventional and fully satisfying. Orchestra, chorus, and soloists are in sync with his reading, and the performance hangs together. Neblett is comfortable vocally, but would have benefitted from a bit more experience before trying to make Minnie even minimally credible. Domingo is ideal for Jack Rance, looking suitably rugged, singing and moving with commitment, and generally owning the rôle. Carroli does nothing but bluster in a part which would profit from some personality; Milnes and others have shown that there is substance available if one wishes to mine it. The minor rôles are in good hands, augmenting the overall impression.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are very good, neither enhancing nor diminishing the performance. Lighting is problematic; apparently augmentation was used, so contrast is enhanced and some detail is lost. Closeups are few and the effect is of distance — perhaps an orchestra seat, but no opera glass. Camera angles also appear constrained by the live-performance milieu. The result is realistic, consistent with the staging.



# Fanciulla del West

## Puccini

Conductor: Slatkin  
Company: Metropolitan

Minnie: Daniels  
Johnson: Domingo  
Rance: Milnes  
Nick: Laciura  
Sonora: Josephson

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Satisfying live performance. Del Monaco's staging is traditional, approaching old fashioned. Costumes are similarly conventional. Acting is fluid from principals and supporting cast. The overall effect is of a conventional opera, with little exploitation of the dramatic potential.

### PERFORMANCES

Slatkin's conducting is prosaic, approaching the tedious. As usual, chorus and orchestra are well prepared and effective. Daniels is reasonably comfortable in the rôle, but no longer provides the flow of lovely tones that was her principle asset. Domingo is seen to better advantage in the Royal Opera production, but sounds much the same in both. Milnes is up to the modest vocal demands of Jack Rance and looks fine in the part. Minor rôles are filled rather better than major ones, although the whole does not integrate well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio excel throughout, without noticeable flaw. Perspective is of a prime orchestra seat. Lighting and camera work are unhampered by the presence of the audience. Overall, this is a valid choice for those preferring stock presentation to more adventurous ones.

# Gianni Schicchi

## Puccini

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Schicchi: Bacquier  
Lauretta: Scotto  
Rinuccio: Ciannella  
Zita: Taillon

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 14 November 1981  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live and lively staging from the Met. The set is traditional but suitably elaborate, ideally representing a wealthy landowner's city house. Costumes are appropriately colorful and distinguish the characters without deviating from convention. An admirable ensemble and fluid movement convey sensuality and wit.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine supplies humor with neither sentimentality nor slapstick. The orchestra is as polished and effective as always. Bacquier's interpretation is a delight; though his voice could be richer and steadier, his portrayal is ideal. Scotto overacts shamelessly and cannot manage even the can't-miss aria. The Buoso family members are individually fine and collectively delicious vocally and dramatically, though none offers a world-class voice.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and lighting is sufficient despite the early date. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate for the score, though more detail in so fine a reading would be appreciated. Video direction is superb and camera work appears unhampered by the audience. With a youthful, lyric Lauretta this performance would be recommended highly.

# Gianni Schicchi

## Puccini

Conductor: Votto  
Company: Levine

Schicchi: Cappecchi  
Lauretta: Ribetti

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Majano

Date: 1955  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Kinescope of film made for television. The intimate set and the costumes are conventional. Acting is a bit overbroad but stays short of farce. Cappecchi's portrays a younger Schicchi than most, not over forty; otherwise, all performers are appropriate in appearance and style. Enunciation is clear even when accents or vocal stylings are invoked.

### PERFORMANCES

Votto leads a straightforward performance with a competent orchestra. Cappecchi shows his buffo side but sings well when he eschews caricature. Ribetti and the Rinuccio are pleasant to look at and do nothing wrong, but hardly offer either vocal styling or characterization. The other relatives are almost caricatures of themselves and stylization is sometimes excessive.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is muddy and unsharp as expected. Monaural sound is no more than adequate. Camera work is deft and direction is capable, though almost everything is shot at medium scale. Overall, the technical limitations leave this performance below the standard one might have hoped.

# Gianni Schicchi

## Puccini

Conductor: Gavazzeni  
Company: Scala

Scicchi: Pons  
Lauretta: Gasdia  
Rinuccio: Marusin  
Zita: Jankovic

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Dull staging before a live audience. The single set is simple and literal - a great open room with the bedchamber at one side, hardly befitting the owner's wealth and position. Like the costumes, it is drab in grays and dun. Movement is lively and fitting.

### PERFORMANCES

Gavazzeni is both efficient and effective, leading a well drilled orchestra and capable supporting forces in a bright but hardly witty reading. Gasdia makes nothing of her aria or her rôle. Pons is unsubtle but acceptable. Marusin's bright tenor finds the notes without strain, but is strangely out of tempo. The comprimarii sing well for the most part and act very well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft but effective; audio is limited in range. Lighting is relatively flat but sufficient. Camera work and angles are excellent, apparently unhindered by the presence of the audience.

# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: Gatti

Company: Metropolitan

Cio-Cio San: Malfitano

Pinkerton: Leech

Suzuki: White

Sharpless: Croft

Goro: Lefèbvre

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Large

Date: 1995

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance before a well-behaved audience. The set is limited to the exterior of the house but is otherwise colorful, detailed, and conventional. Traditional costumes work well even without Asian makeup. All principals move appropriately; Croft's stilted acting fits the consul's persona effectively.

## PERFORMANCES

Gatti conducts a solid, conventional reading with the expected richness and precision of orchestra and chorus. Malfitano is more than a bit mature for the part; it shows in vocal shortcuts and occasional effort and in closeups, but not in the overall portrayal. Leech's instrument sounds dry and occasionally strained, but he uses it with skill and commitment and looks good in the rôle. White and Croft are the vocal standouts, but the other soloists in smaller parts fill them with distinction.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio follow the usual, high standard set in so many Met telecasts: clean, bright, honest presentation of the scene. Stereo is used only to spread the orchestra and there is no evidence of surround. Direction confirms Large's superiority in the medium, with ample use of medium shots to set the stage and clear concentration on the essence of the action. Overall, this is competitive with the Ponelle/von Karajan film for the finest Butterfly on video and should see commercial release.

# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Vienna

Cio-Cio San: Freni  
Pinkerton: Domingo  
Suzuki: Ludwig  
Sharpless: Kerns  
Goro: Sénéchal

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponnelle

Date: 1974  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

A film of unique beauty and problems. It is in soft focus, similar to a photographer's portrait lens, which produces an effect that drags before Act II. Blurring also makes visual effects weak in the dream sequences; even reality seems a dream. Costumes are traditional Japanese, settings are pseudo-Japanese, and staging is purely cinematic. The literal elements seem always to work; the abstractions' success varies from satisfying (love duet) to problematic.

## PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan is in absolute control and leads a warm, Italianate reading. Orchestra and chorus are responsive and together. Freni is a delight to hear, though (inevitably) long in the tooth visually. In contrast, Domingo looks and acts fine, but is a bit less lush of voice than one would prefer; von Karajan's choice of Pavarotti for the audio recording makes perfect sense, as does his preference for Domingo for video. Ludwig is wonderful as Suzuki; fortunately, there is less effort to make her look oriental than Freni suffers. Kerns is sufficient as Sharpless. Sénéchal is vocally fine, but so costumed and directed on stage as to be both ridiculous and diverting. The minor rôles are excellently handled.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video would be fine without soft-focus. Audio needs no apology, with excellent engineering realized beautifully on the disc; one really cannot detect its analogue origins. Ponnelle appears to achieve everything he attempts, but some of those attempts seem misguided. For example, the lighting is quite flat throughout, augmenting the dreaminess of the soft focus, but reducing the viewer's understanding. Overall, there is no better performance or recording available at this time (or in prospect), so one must learn to like the idiosyncracies.

# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: Gomez-Martinez

Company: Chicago

Butterfly: Zylis-Gara

Pinkerton: Dvorsky

Suzuki: Zilio

Sharpless: Stilwell

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Greenberg

Date: 1989

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Large-scale, clever live performance. The set is the Pinkerton home on a turntable; the device of its motion is overused, but it suffices to scale and to set off the work. Costumes are essentially traditional, overdone in many cases but not distractingly so. More seriously limiting is an excess of stage business, approaching the pop-up population in the last act of *Rosenkavalier*.

## PERFORMANCES

Gomez-Martinez directs a brisk, effective performance on a grand scale; one hopes to hear more from anyone who can breathe life into this familiar score. The orchestra is a delight; the chorus a bit less due to murkiness. Zylis-Gara is substantially past the years when her Cio-Cio-San would have been credible and her voice has developed an unmaidenly tremolo; nevertheless, the notes are all in place and many phrases are turned beautifully. Dvorsky is fittingly brash and unobtrusive, looks the part, and is more than serviceable. Zilio contributes neither pleasure nor pain with a pleasant voice but none of the insouciance that can enliven her rôle. Stilwell makes Sharpless a real participant. The other characters tend to caricature and many are minor liabilities vocally.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is exceptionally fine, brightly lighted, crisp through substantial depth of field. Audio is also exemplary, even providing imaging of some stage effects while accurately representing both orchestra and voices. Camera work appears unaffected by the audience; direction is outstanding as well, using devices in real time that ease emotional transitions.

# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: Keene

Company: New York City

Butterfly: Haddon

Pinkerton: Hadley

Suzuki: Christin

Sharpless: Titus

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Browning

Date: 1982

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Committed live performance. Sets consist of the garden before Cio-Cio-San's house in Act I and the interior for Act II. Costumes are essentially conventional and unexaggerated, notably eschewing artificiality such as Western dress for Goro. Generally, acting is admirable. Distracting stage business serves little dramatic purpose. Why are Pinkerton's crew on hand at the opening? Did we need to have Goro wave a miniature American flag?

## PERFORMANCES

Keene drives a solid reading which occasionally leaves orchestral and stage voices out of sync. Instrumental and choral work are fine. Haddon is an accurate but uninvolved heroine. Hadley provides an admirable, brusque, attractive Pinkerton; his singing is excellent. Christin's performance is fine but not remarkable. Titus seems underage for the consul, but not undervoiced. Minor roles are handled with distinction.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is marginal: lighting is so low that few details are visible and images are seldom sharp. Pre-HiFi sound conveys voices well but muddies the already imprecise ensemble work. Video direction is overactive given the difficulty in seeing the images. There is little wrong with this performance overall, and the many virtues include the men's performances.



# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: Conlon

Company: film

Butterfly: Huang

Pinkerton: Troxel

Suzuki: Liang

Sharpless: Cowan

Goro: Fan

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Mitterrand

Date: 1995

Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

## PRODUCTION

Film of the Belasco play with Puccini's music. 1904-1907 Nagasaki appears to come alive as the attractive cast enacts the melodrama with enthusiasm and skill. A major drawback is that sound, acting and interpretation maintain an almost uniform dynamic level, extending the night interlude to the day after - and the years before. Details of the production are confusing, distracting or worse. Lip sync is generally poor and titles are badly translated and located in the wide frame. There are cuts and rearrangements of the music which defy explanation on the basis of what appears on screen; similarly, inventive imagery such as the flying trinity centering on the Bonze adds mystery without insight.

## PERFORMANCES

Conlon directs a bland but satisfactory reading for an orchestra and chorus able to maintain that consistency. Huang's emotionless but attractive voice and appearance maintain the theme. Troxel is similarly appealing and would be tiresome if he had more to do. Liang is fine within the limits of rôle and overall interpretation and Cowan is acceptable. Fan is cited because his rôle is more significant than in most productions; he carries it off effectively. Minor soloists are adequate.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Widescreen video is used effectively with subdued color and lighting but sharp imagery. Audio is clear but limited in both dynamic and tonal range with little use of stereo and no detectable surround. Camera work is superb, but direction is erratic and inexplicable on screen. Overall, this may be an excellent way to introduce a fan of modern television to opera, but it is not a representation of the opera itself.

# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: Deslauriers  
Company: film (Canada?)

Butterfly: Pellegrini  
Pinkerton: Duval  
Suzuki: Forst  
Sharpless: Turgeon

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Seale

Date: ~1983  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Film apparently derived from a stage production. Set is built on a stage house in an artificial garden. Costumes are strictly conventional. Movement suggests that all participants are old hands at the opera but willing to respond to capable direction; it is fluid and effective on the small screen. Subtitles are oversized and intrusive.

## PERFORMANCES

Deslauriers leads a highly dramatic reading to which the orchestra responds with good tone and dynamics. Choral work is routine. Pellegrini is an effective, dramatic, and mature Cio-Cio-San. Duval's Pinkerton is bland and competent. Forst's Suzuki is exceptional: knowing, caring, and beautifully sung. Turgeon uses parlando to good effect; while singing would be preferred, this Sharpless is viable. Minor characters are well portrayed and competently sung.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and colorful, even brilliant. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate for the voices; the orchestra suffers from audio limitations and from lack of emphasis in the recording. Camera work relies on film effects for much of its impact and often diverts attention from the primary focus; for one who already knows the music, the dramatic effects may be constructive.

# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: Maazel

Company: Scala

Butterfly: Hayashi

Pinkerton: Dvorsky

Suzuki: Kim

Sharpless: Zancanaro

LaserDisc

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Bailey

Date: 1986

Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Inconsistent, overdone live staging. The set is an oversize, single-room Japanese house in a sterile garden; shilouettes and other devices are superimposed to create an Oriental atmosphere. Costumes are traditional and colorful. Stage movement is highly conventional and overstated.

## PERFORMANCES

Maazel's interpretation is strangely unformed, lacking overall purpose and producing no impression at all. The orchestra and chorus seem dutiful rather than committed. Hayashi's instrument is not fully developed for the rôle and uneven in scale; she makes some lovely sounds and portrays vulnerability, but is not a Cio-Cio-San. Dvorsky seems unfamiliar with his rôle and persuades only in the few big moments. Kim sings well and uses a pleasant, nearly contralto voice to good effect. Zancanaro blusters his way through a solid reading. The minor characters are all too evidently Italian, but are not incompetent.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and accurate in color. Stereo sound is variable, usually too thin to allow texture to be heard although voices often seem accurately represented. Camera work is fine and not seriously affected by the audience, but direction is frequently busy enough to intrude on the performance. Overall, this performance exploits sentimentality but never develops passion.

# Madama Butterfly

Puccini

Conductor: Arena  
Company: Verona

Butterfly: Kabaivanska  
Pinkerton: Antinori  
Suzuki: Jankovicz  
Sharpless: Saccomani

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Poor

## PRODUCTION

Live production in a Japanese garden embedded in the vast amphitheater. The setting is made to feel comfortable through clever design. Costumes are strictly traditional and colorful. The vast chorus of Cio-Cio-San's relatives is almost ludicrous, but no other variants are noted from the conventional approach to production.

## PERFORMANCES

Arena provides solid, uninflected direction which the orchestra and chorus follow accurately. Jankovicz's Suzuki is neither Japanese nor Italian, but it is well sung and unmannered. Kabaivanska provides an unsteady Marschallin in Japanese attire. Antinori's parody of an Italian tenor would be effective if he did not occasionally phrase a line well. Saccomani is not loud enough to compensate for his crude approximation to the rôle. The smaller solo parts are not handled as well as the principal ones.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Despite the era, video quality is admirable. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate. Lighting is sufficient and camera work is superb; Large's skill is evident from the first moments and never fails his audience. One can only imagine the reaction of the audience in the vast arena to so intimate a production. For better or worse, the home viewer almost certainly gets a better appreciation of the performance.

# Manon Lescaut

## Puccini

Conductor: Sinopoli  
Company: Royal

Manon: Te Kanawa  
des Grieux: Domingo  
Lescaut: Allen  
Geronte: Robinson

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Burton

Date: 17 May 1983  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Live action on a grand scale appropriate to the music. Costuming is traditional. Settings are colorful and frequently conventional, with some simplifications and abstractions that help, rather than diminish, the score. Direction is unobtrusive and effective, and stage movement is conventional.

### PERFORMANCES

Sinopoli's reading is surprisingly fresh for all its superficial conventionality. The inn scene is ebullient, Paris is elaborate, and the finale is somber but never static. The orchestra and chorus are particularly responsive and well drilled. Te Kanawa sings beautifully, but seems uninvolved. Domingo is passionate, but never at the cost of vocal production. One might hope for more ring in the voice, but this as an admirable performance overall. The other rôles are not exploited, but neither do they interfere; in particular, Allen could have made more of a person of Lescaut, but sings and moves capably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is well defined and fully satisfactory, though it lacks some brilliance compared with recent, digital recordings. Video is very good. Lighting appears to be enhanced and somewhat more contrasty than would have been seen in the house. Camera work is good, but favors long shots when attention might better be focussed on a soloist or two. The result is uninspired but impeccable.

# Manon Lescaut

## Puccini

Conductor: Silipigni  
Company: Montreal

Manon: Tokody  
des Grieux: Lindros  
Lescaut: Vanaud  
Geronte: Charbonneau

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Picard

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Enthusiastic live performance. Sets are conventional in warm tones and only moderate complexity. Costumes are similarly straightforward and unimaginative. Acting is generally natural for theater, relatively free by operatic standards.

### PERFORMANCES

Silipigni conducts effectively and routinely. The orchestra and chorus provide more enthusiasm than precision but are never objectionable. Tokody persuades dramatically and sings very well though she shows some breaks of intonation suggesting that a few more years' development would be needed for her best portrayal. In contrast, Lindros is past the years when he could persuade, but sings a des Grieux comparable with Pertile's. Vanaud provides a pleasant surprise: young and enthusiastic with a fine instrument. Charbonneau is sound as expected; unfortunately, the other smaller rôles are inadequately (though not disastrously) handled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video would be sharp if the engineers had not overmodulated it hopelessly. The portions that can be watched with pleasure are well lighted with good direction. Monaural sound is relatively undistorted and very bright, losing some of the orchestra's sonority in favor of detail. This performance is bright and committed.

# Manon Lescaut

## Puccini

Conductor: Prêtre  
Company: Scala

Manon: Sass  
des Grieux: Domingo  
Lescaut: Romero  
Geronte: Capocchi

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Faggioni  
Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance breaking no new ground. Sets are massive, dark, and relatively simple. Costumes are conventional with some anomalies (e.g., Manon's elaborate travelling dress). Action is of the old school.

### PERFORMANCES

Prêtre maintains Puccini's pace and style despite occasional efforts by the soloists to stretch things out; nevertheless, there are occasional failures of synchronism. Chorus and orchestra are exemplary. Sass is beautiful to see; her voice grows shrill and loses precision on high climaxes, but is lovely in the lyric sections. Domingo's robust appearance matches his sound in his best des Grieux. Romero is inadequate: wobbly and overacting. The other solo voices are capable and action is credible throughout.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp but prohibitively dark. Apparent reluctance to supplement theater lighting loses all shadow detail and muddles the image. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate for the voices but obscures orchestral sound. Camera angles are predominantly from below stage level but are otherwise well chosen for the action.

# Manon Lescaut

## Puccini

Conductor: Questa  
Company: RAI Milan

Manon: Petrella  
des Grieux: Prandelli  
Lescaut: Sordello  
Geronte: de Taranto

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Wallmann

Date: 1957  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Film for television. Sets and costumes are traditional and seem to have been the models for the Royal Opera production. Acting reminds one of early sound films: not nearly as stilted as traditional opera, less assertive than silent film, but far short of *verismo*. Enunciation is generally good. Lip sync is often intrusive.

### PERFORMANCES

Questa, orchestra and chorus are remarkably unremarkable. Petrella's soprano would be right for the rôle without the shrill top; her appearance and acting are fine. Prandelli approximates a larger-voiced Carreras, with passion substituting inadequately for voice. The other rôles are handled well if without distinction.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is typical for early kinescopes: soft with excessive contrast. Monaural sound has the expected limited range (both dynamic and tonal), but suffices for the voices. Camera work is good, but direction is often distracting. Overall, this is a technically poor record of what would have passed for a reasonably good evening in the provinces. It is not worth considering even for a single viewing since far better alternatives are available without the technical faults.



# Manon Lescaut

## Puccini

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Manon: Scotto  
des Grieux: Domingo  
Lescaut: Elvira  
Geronte: Capecchi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 29 March 1980  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Conventional, solid production by Menotti—surprisingly lacking in imagination. Settings are literal and colorful; costumes are traditional and unimaginative. Nothing is remarkable, but nothing can be faulted.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts routinely and seems almost uninvolved. The orchestra and chorus are, as always, both accurate and responsive. Scotto is hard to take as Manon, even in 1980; she offers none of the youthful simplicity wanted in the first act, no acquired grace and maturity in the middle acts, and whining instead of despair in the last. She appears accurate, but her instrument lacks tonal beauty. Domingo is in excellent voice, with ardor and ringing tone. Elvira is loud and gruff in a rôle for which those parameters are fitting. Capecchi is, as always, a delight to see and hear, belying his decades on the stage. Other parts are capably handled, with particular credit to Isola Jones for fittingly memorable moments.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is excellent in conveying the feel of the house and sound from a fine seat. Video shows its age and the live performance. Despite obvious enhancement, lighting is insufficient to show detail and there is some smearing during motion. Camera positions are obviously constrained, and angles are dictated by the presence of an audience.

# Rondine

## Puccini

Conductor: Priestman  
Company: Film

Magda: Stratas  
Ruggiero: Vrenios  
Prunier: Walker

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1975  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Film combining superb performance with brilliant staging. Sets are colorful and ornate, evoking Paris of *Gigi* or a comic *Traviata*. Costumes are conventional 19th-century attire worn without affectation. Acting is fluid and unaffected. Lip sync is excellent and even the translation is admirable!

### PERFORMANCES

Pristman approaches this Italian operetta as chamber music and proves to be correct. The unnamed orchestra is small and precise. Stratas is a delight visually and vocally, with enough *tristesse* to persuade but never so much as to evoke Violetta. Vrenios provides both the needed ring and a convincing style. The other performers look, sing, and act superbly.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and sound-stage lighting is ample. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is unacceptable on the review copy, shrill and overmodulated. Direction is unimaginative and effective. This performance surpasses any audio-only version, to say nothing of its minimal video competition; demand a quality transfer to disc and tape so it can be appreciated and restored to its proper place in the home, if not in the repertoire.

# Rondine Puccini

Conductor: Siciliani  
Company: New York City

Magda: Knighton  
Ruggiero: Garrison  
Prunier: Eisler

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Lush, formal live staging. Sets are large in scale and rich in texture and color. Costumes are elaborate. Like sets and costumes, acting is appropriate for *Traviata*: elaborate, conventional, and substantial. Unfortunately, the work is simple, charming, and frivolous.

## PERFORMANCES

Siciliani exploits the sentimentality with a rich, sonorous reading. The orchestra is also full in tone and accurate in response to his clear, uniform beat. Garrison's appearance and tone are more round and full than in his salad days, but he easily satisfies the modest vocal demands. Eisler rather hams his way through the poet's part but sings competently. The minor characters all sing well and exaggerate both their dramatic and their vocal portrayals. Knighton presents a problem: beautiful tone and ample expressiveness, but somehow devoid of charm; Magda without charm is a contradiction in terms. This sparrow cannot fly.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent: sharp, well focussed, and amply lighted. Sound is as fine as analogue and tape can provide: full tonal and dynamic range with clear articulation and substantial imaging. Video direction is excellent, maintaining shots through their dramatic relevance and providing context with judicious zooming. If only the spirit were appropriate, this would be a valuable performance.

# Suor Angelica

## Puccini

Conductor: Veltri  
Company: Montreal

Angelica: Kincses  
Principessa: Taylor

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Robidas

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Lifeless live performance. The set is conventional, but erratically and insufficiently lighted. Costumes are traditional, as is the bulk of the staging. Except for Kincses, the cast acts effectively; her Angelica is of an earlier, more static era, with grand gesture and little conviction.

### PERFORMANCES

Veltri seems bogged down in the sentimentality of the work. The orchestra follows his stolid reading and the chorus seems to wallow in it. Kincses' instrument is fine, but it is used without grace or commitment. Taylor makes more of her lesser resources, and the other rôles are filled effectively, if without distinction. A lighter baton at the beginning, more dramatic content in the confrontation, and some passion in the finale would have served the lovely sounds well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good except where lighting weaknesses create problems. Monaural sound is adequate although solo voices are sometimes quieter than they must have sounded in the theater. Camera work is limited by the audience and the lighting, but is never intrusive. Video effects are overused and exaggerate the sanctimonious interpretation. The overall effect is to justify the criticism the work often suffers.

# Suor Angelica Puccini

Conductor: Gavazzeni  
Company: Scala

Angelica: Plowright  
Principessa: Vejzovich

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Dead staging and performances before a live audience. The set is oversize, consisting of a backdrop and a chair. Like the costumes, it is in shades of grey, with only Angelica's lipstick providing a touch of color! Movement is minimal and stilted.

## PERFORMANCES

Gavazzeni is efficient and seems to want to put some drive into an uninflected performance. Plowright sings all the notes, emotes visually, but is incapable of evoking even a trace of compassion. Vejzovich occasionally approaches the pitch among her barks. The supporting women are excellent in style and voice.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and sound is limited in range. Lighting is low but sufficient, and camera work is excellent.

# Suor Angelica Puccini

Conductor: Levine

Company: Metropolitan

Angelica: Scotto

Principessa: Taillon

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Large

Date: 14 November 1981

Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Live performance ideally realized but inadequately sung. The single set of the cloister yard uses architectural elements to excellent effect. Costumes are somber and traditional. Action is irrelevant—which is fortunate since no acting is employed.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine's straightforward reading would benefit from some sentiment, even sentimentality. The chorus and orchestra are impeccable. Scotto chews the scenery and wails; neither singing nor portrayal is within her range at this stage. Taillon sings the notes adequately but conveys no image of the haughty Principessa. Even Kraft's abbess is unsympathetic, but the nuns are well represented.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and effective, remarkably so for its date. The sound is clear (often more so than one wishes) despite the pre-HiFi, monaural technology. Camera work is excellent. One is tempted to overlay a competent audio recording (Tebaldi/Simionato?) on this fine video record to obtain a superior performance.

# Tabarro Puccini

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Giorgetta: Stratas  
Michele: Pons  
Luigi: Domingo

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: September 1994  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Dark, dreary, aged live production. The set is a conventional view of the barge. Costumes are uniformly dark except for Giorgetta's brilliant red, a lady of the evening, not a wayward wife. Acting is fine throughout since Pons is not required to move. Stage business is handled well, but distracting elements (a white book of matches; Giorgetta's high heels) become unduly prominent.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine holds the forces together without illuminating any element of the score. The orchestra is flawless in responding to him. Stratas' maturity would be more acceptable in the rôle if camera work did not so insistently focus on its visible signs; her initial breathiness soon yields to the expected fine vocal portrayal. Pons provides a monochromatic and uninteresting Michele with the notes usually in place but not connected to portray the character. Domingo excels in his first portrayal of Luigi, satisfying all vocal and physical requirements although with some loss of credibility due to his evident age. Quivar stars vocally as Frugola, but the other smaller rôles are covered with minimal margin.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is severely compromised by inadequate lighting, resulting in an image notably inferior to the previous telecast a dozen years earlier. Sound is outstanding, with clear imaging of the orchestra and hints of a sound stage to match the visible one. Camera work concentrates on closeups which distract painfully from the action and focus on the signs of age in the principals. Nevertheless, Stratas, Domingo, and Quivar combine to illuminate the drama and to provide the best representation of this gloomy one-acter to date.

# Tabarro Puccini

Conductor: de Fabritiis  
Company: RAI (Milano)

Giorgetta: Petrella  
Michele: Tagliabue  
Luigi: Picchi

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Brissoni

Date: 1957  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Monochrome film for Italian television. Traditional staging and costumes establish the Paris scene effectively. Acting is unusually cinematic and effective. Clear enunciation and stress make the lack of subtitles acceptable. Care has been taken with lip sync and it seldom distracts the eye.

## PERFORMANCES

De Fabritiis provides a youthful (!) lift and lilt to the score, scaling everything intimately. The orchestra is fine but understressed. Petrella looks and sings well, though with an edge to the voice which may disturb some. Tagliabue is superb — a basically lyric husband overburdened by the fates, his finances and his wife's dalliance. Picchi lacks brilliance and weight, but commits no significant error. None of the other characters stand out, but all are comfortably "in" their rôles.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear for its age; monaural sound satisfies expectation despite tubbiness. Camera work is cinematic and effective; direction could be a model for operatic films. Had this performance received the technical benefits of those of three or more decades later, it would have been a clear choice. As it stands, the price of limited monaural sound and monochromatic kinescope may be more than the average viewer will be willing to pay.



# Tabarro Puccini

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Giorgetta: Scotto  
Michele: Macneil  
Luigi: Moldoveanu

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 14 November 1981  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live from the Met after its best years. The single, massive set follows every convention in drab colors and literal treatment. Costumes are similarly colorless. Action is in the ancient style: direct and non-relational.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine enlarges the dramatic content without allowing the pace to lag. The orchestra performs at its usual admirable level. Scotto's shrill voice and dowdy appearance cannot enhance the rôle, but are not unacceptable. Macneil looks and acts the part well and his rough tone and sloppy technique are acceptable. Moldoveanu offers neither subtlety nor grace in a role that demands neither. The supporting cast manages the same style with superior voices.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is better than its age would suggest, aided by augmented lighting which makes details clear. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate for the straightforward reading and blunt singing. Video direction is outstanding. In all, this performance is superior to the Scala, but far short of the work's modest potential.

# Tabarro Puccini

Conductor: Gavazzeni  
Company: Scala

Giorgetta: Sass  
Michele: Cappuccilli  
Luigi: Martinucci

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Simple staging in a modern style before a live audience. The “set” is a minimal painted backdrop with a view into the cabin and enough props to break the monotony. Costumes are literal and ignorable. Both are drab and colorless. Stage direction is elementary in the most conventional style.

## PERFORMANCES

Gavazzeni is efficient and maintains good balances throughout. The orchestra is accurate. Sass is effective, barring a screech or two and strange register breaks. Martinucci matches her in those characteristics, but is too light in timbre and volume for the role. Cappuccilli approximates pitches throughout his range. All look fine and move well, though even careful staging leaves Sass too tall for Martinucci.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not crisp, and sound is limited in range. Lighting is very soft, continuing the drabness of the staging. Camera work is effective throughout and is unhampered by either lighting or audience.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Bartoletti  
Company: film

Tosca: Kabaivanska  
Cavaradossi: Domingo  
Scarpia: Milnes  
Sacristan: Mariotti  
Angelotti: Luccardi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: de Bosio

Date: 1976  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Filmed in the “actual” settings, with realistic costumes. The production is less effective than other films that eschew simulating stage performance, probably due to the routine contribution of de Bosio. However, individual scenes are beautiful to see, and nothing is allowed to distract the viewer from the music.

## PERFORMANCES

Bartoletti leads a routine performance. The orchestra and chorus add nothing to his direction, but do respond effectively. Kabaivanska makes lovely sounds without demonstrating any involvement with the character; she is also more mature both chronologically and in style than can be credible. Domingo is solid and effective, never inspiring. This may be Milnes’ best role in video, with his voice in its sonorous prime and his portrayal mixing nobility and brutality in the best manner of Gobbi. The other rôles are capably handled. The performance is good enough to make one long for inspiration—preferably with a more appropriate soprano and a more fiery tenor.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are as fine as one would expect from a well-crafted film of the period. Some camera angles are unusual; they contribute the only surprises in the performance. Cinematography and lighting are otherwise excellent. Lip sync is good, but errors are noticeable in most solo work. There is little truly wrong with this recording, but one wishes it were better.

# Tosca

## Puccini

Conductor: Mehta  
Company: film (Rome)

Tosca: Malfitano  
Cavaradossi: Domingo  
Scarpia: Raimondi

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Griffi

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Unique film accompanying a collection of live performances. Sets are the locations of the three acts. Costumes are more rational than most that literally represent the period. Acting is exceptionally natural, almost fitting for the play instead of the opera. Lip sync is superb.

### PERFORMANCES

Mehta hardly interprets at all, letting the music flow with some minor tempo adaptation by the singers. The orchestra and chorus are responsive and lush in sound. Malfitano supplies a lovely, lyric Tosca, more effective in the first act than in the later two. Domingo's years make him physically less than ideal and one misses the *squillante* top and Italian style, but his portrayal is honest and the notes are in place. Raimondi's noble, cynical, autocratic Scarpia is true and persuasive, although intonation fails occasionally. Minor characters are well cast vocally and dramatically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent, barring some ill-chosen lighting and related effects. The images seem conceived in wide screen, so disc may be necessary for best effect. Superlative sound preserves the image of orchestra and chorus without attempting to reproduce the ambience of the individual settings. Camera work is dramatic, profiting from the absence of an audience. This novel performance proves persuasive for the style of production and may be the finest Tosca on video.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Patané  
Company: Stuttgart

Tosca: Tebaldi  
Cavaradossi: Tobin  
Scarpia: London

VHS  
Italian  
Director: ?

Date: 3 June 1961  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance before an appreciative audience. Minimal sets and conventional costumes suffice to frame the action. Acting is stereotypically operatic, with singers rarely addressing each other. Some characterization rings untrue: Angelotti's neat outfit and Spoleto portrayed as Scarpia's monkey stand out.

## PERFORMANCES

Patané leads a conventional reading to which his orchestra responds generally well, though with some sloppiness at the start of Act III. Tebaldi produces effective tone throughout the range; however, there is no persona behind the character. Tobin is adequate throughout. London dominates the scenes in which he appears and his presence seems to radiate through those from which he is absent; both his voice and his manner epitomize one interpretation of the Baron - the one of absolute, unmitigated power and lust. Supporting characters are sufficient.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is surprisingly clear, though occasional flaws remind the viewer of its age. Monaural audio is quite poor, with artifacts which sound as though a good original was played on faulty or misaligned equipment. Camera work is again surprisingly professional except when it collapses in momentary failures that cannot be overlooked. Direction is unimaginative but competent. Overall, this is the only performance known of Puccini's *Scarpia*, a worthy alternative to the better-known *Tosca*.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Conlon  
Company: Metropolitan

Tosca: Verrett  
Cavaradossi: Pavarotti  
Scarpia: Macneil

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 19 December 1978  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Somber, traditional, live staging. Sets are conventional if oversized. Costuming is rigidly traditional. Acting and stage movement are up to the worst practice of major houses around the world.

## PERFORMANCES

Conlon's reading is on the stodgy side of average. Orchestra and all singers follow with precision. Verrett is accurate and elegant, but both harsh in tone and dull in interpretation. Pavarotti is far from convincing, but this may be his best video recording. Macneil offers only traces of the excitement of the previous decade. Corena's sacristan is acted delightfully, although he can no longer quite manage even this rôle's modest demands. The other minor rôles are adequately filled.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate to convey this performance's modest musical accomplishments. Video is hampered by the extra lighting needed for the cameras of the day. Camera work is sound throughout. This is another in the collection of sound, solid video versions of the opera, but need be sought out only by Pavarotti fans.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Vernizzi  
Company: RAI Turin

Tosca: Olivero  
Cavaradossi: Misciano  
Scarpia: Floravanti

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Lanfranchi

Date: 13 March 1960  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Film for Italian television. Sets and costumes are solidly traditional. Acting is fervent but above the usual standard for these films. Enunciation is less precise and more difficult to understand than in most, but is never objectionable; unfortunately, lip sync is as poor as always and intrudes frequently on the drama.

## PERFORMANCES

Vernizzi conducts by the book with an orchestra and chorus who know that book by heart. Olivero's portrayal is fascinating; her voice has a pronounced vibrato that will disturb some listeners but otherwise fits the character as well as her appearance and movement do. After a poor start, Misciano proves an adequate Cavaradossi - and offers matinee idol looks to improve the overall impression. Fioravanti plays Scarpia as more crass villain than sly nobleman; he sings well in all respects. Other rôles are handled with more than competence and Badioli's Sacristan is a pleasure to see and to hear.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is better than in most kinescopes but still less than enjoyable. Audio is more consistent than was characteristic of the era but only approaches the sound of AM radio. Direction is notably good, with fluid camera work and a consistent maintenance of context even during closeups. As a record of the early work of the remarkable Olivero, this film is worth seeing; as a performance of the opera, it cannot be recommended.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Oren  
Company: Verona

Tosca: Marton  
Cavaradossi: Aragall  
Scarpia: Wixell

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Surprisingly effective embedding of intimate opera in the amphitheater. The restrictions of that stage on the production are handled with reasonable skill, and one gets at least a vague impression of a church or a Baron's chambers at appropriate points. Costumes are traditional; stage movement is exaggerated and irrelevant.

## PERFORMANCES

Oren is deservedly unknown; he keeps the forces together most of the time and beats time without excessive mannerisms. Chorus and orchestra deliver flat, routine performances. Marton is not Tosca by the standards of any era, offering volumes of bleat instead of characterization or interpretation. Aragall might have been worth seeing as Cavaradossi a decade earlier and in a house where he did not have to scream to be heard. Wixell is a perfectly competent and perfectly dull Scarpia. The other parts are handled routinely.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is quite acceptable and audio is better than in any earlier effort from the amphitheater. Again, Large has substantially overcome the problems of size to convey some of the intimacies of the score. Unfortunately, the principals are unable to match his effort and convey only a gross approximation to the music. Nothing can be recommended in this performance, however weak the competition.



# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Bradshaw  
Company: Canada

Tosca: Evstatieva  
Cavaradossi: Polozof  
Scarpia: Opthof

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Deliberate live performance. Sets are simplified but entirely on traditional terms. Costumes are also conventional but more colorful and elaborate than the staging. Acting is *pro forma*: stilted poses and overt expression of sentiments not always reflected in the singing.

## PERFORMANCES

Bradshaw is deliberate, approaching tedious. The orchestra and chorus conform accurately and richly to that lead. Evstatieva is loud and accurate. Polozof is loud with a distinctly non-Italian style and an unsteady tone. Opthof's instrument is dry and strained; he seems to be playing a base Iago instead of a noble Scarpia. The minor characters tend to overact even more significantly and contribute no vocal pleasures.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but has excessive contrast so that a figure not in the spotlight is almost invisible. Monaural sound is quite acceptable with good stage/pit balance; unfortunately, the review copy suffers from distortion due to poor broadcast engineering. Camera movement is fluid, but many angles are awkward in an apparent attempt to minimize impact on the audience. Superior performances are more readily available, so only fans of Evstatieva need hunt for this one.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Sinopoli  
Company: Metropolitan

Tosca: Behrens  
Cavaradossi: Domingo  
Scarpia: Macneil

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning?

Date: 31 March 1985  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Live performance from the Met at the wrong time. Sets are forbiddingly dark in conventional style.

Period costumes are relative y subdued. Acting is conventionally overdrawn with little penetration of the character.

## PERFORMANCES

Although essentially conventional, Sinopoli's reading is substantially more drawn out than most. The orchestra follows dutifully and accurately. Behrens provides ample and precise singing with little inflection and no warmth. Domingo delivers a routine performance. Macneil's portrayal is fine, although his voice is dry and his pitch is imprecise. The minor roles are capably taken.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Thanks to some augmentation, video is adequate despite the uniformly dark staging. Monaural sound is bright and accurate. Camera work is surprisingly weak, with many shots from low angles; the effect seems unnatural and distracting, especially when the camera tracks a performer in motion. Given the superior alternatives, this performance is irrelevant at best.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Veltri  
Company: Montreal

Tosca: Slatinaru  
Cavaradossi: Dominguez  
Scarpia: L. Quilico

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Inadequate

## PRODUCTION

Live performance emphasizing commitment. Sets are simplified from a literal reading but fully represent the various scenes. Costumes are traditional. Action is stilted and theatrical, but the production makes few demands so the minimal effects are probably in accord with the director's intent.

## PERFORMANCES

Veltri leads a standard interpretation on the brisk side of conventional. The orchestra responds effectively; the chorus is somewhat less coordinated than ideal, but is also effective. Slatinaru's instrument is dramatic and rather harsh; precision is not her strong point, but worse performances are available commercially. Except for a tendency to sing under the note, Dominguez is vocally fine. While Quilico could no longer offer voice, he is generous with the Puccini style; the tradeoff is unlikely to satisfy the viewer. The smaller parts are filled adequately with every opportunity to emote exploited to the full.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is continuously disrupted by overmodulation; it would otherwise be commendably sharp and focussed. Monaural sound is acceptable, providing good resolution of voices and orchestra without attempting to provide a sonic image. Video direction is good but apparently underrehearsed in that framing is often imperfect and extraneous production elements appear in scene. Without the engineering problems, this performance would be recommended with reservations.

# Tosca Puccini

Conductor: Ozawa  
Company: Paris

Tosca: Te Kanawa  
Cavaradossi: Veronelli  
Scarpia: Wixell

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: ?

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Poor

## PRODUCTION

Live staging appreciated by the audience in the house for no recognizable reason. Strange, oversize sets dwarf the pedestrian performances. Costumes are reasonably traditional as is what substitutes for acting. Stage business is filled with distractions, perhaps simply to remove the focus from the sounds. For example, Act I occurs in an unfinished chapel; ultimately, walls open, spin, and move aside to expose the church and the outdoors.

## PERFORMANCES

Ozawa plods through a tedious, obese reading; if one cannot picture the Te Deum as a disordered, dispiriting dirge, one can hear it in this performance. Orchestra and chorus seem content to trudge through the score. Te Kanawa proves yet again that a lovely voice and musical precision do not a Tosca make. Veronelli's virtues escape the viewer—except that he is usually close to pitch. Wixell is vocally effective if uninvolved. The minor characters are more caricatures than performers.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and unaugmented lighting is inadequate. Pre-HiFi monaural sound emphasizes the stage and records the voices with unfortunate accuracy. Camera movement seems uninhibited by the audience, but does not hold focus long enough on any one shot. The result at least provides a bit of the action the production lacks.

# **Tosca - Act II**

## **Puccini**

Conductor: Cillario  
Company: Royal

Tosca: Callas  
Cavaradossi: Cioni  
Scarpia: Gobbi

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director:

Date: 9 February 1964  
Evaluation: Essential

### PRODUCTION

Incandescent live performance. The set is literal and compact, far from Zeffirelli's later excesses. Costuming is conventional. Cavaradossi and the henchmen move simply and operatically. Callas and Gobbi burn up the stage with chilling authority. The dynamic of this performance is all but incredible.

### PERFORMANCES

Cillario is admirable, propelling the music in response to the principals, making the whole act into a trio. The orchestra is fine, though one is hard pressed to pay attention to what they are doing. Callas' voice is in fine shape, a few intonation problems notwithstanding. Gobbi is at his best vocally and dramatically. Cioni does nothing overtly wrong, and in no way detracts from the overall performance. The other characters sing and act conventionally and unobtrusively.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video has been restored to acceptable condition, sufficient to see details of expression and the overall setting despite lack of resolution. For that reason, otherwise excessive use of closeups is desirable; without it, the play of emotion would be invisible. Audio is of limited tonal and dynamic range, of the order of that on AM radio; it is low in noise and distortion and reproduces the voices clearly. None of the technical or vocal faults can be recognized once Callas and Gobbi begin to interact.

# Tosca - Act II

Puccini

Conductor: Sebastian

Company: Paris

Tosca: Callas

Cavaradossi: Lance

Scarpia: Gobbi

LaserDisc

Italian

Director: Benamou

Date: 19 December 1958

Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Callas' Paris debut – very live and with a very live audience. Sets and costumes are perfectly conventional and unimaginative. Acting is natural and effective except for Lance's apparent paralysis: he seems in shock, not merely in awe.

## PERFORMANCES

Sebastian's reading conveys nothing more than standard accompaniment for the soloists. The orchestra makes no overt errors and sounds adequate on all counts. Callas is the *raison d'être* of this disc, and does not disappoint; the voice is shrill and less than steady, but the performance is riveting and convincing despite the surrounding hoopla. Lance gets most of the notes out without squalling, but is merely part of the accompaniment. In contrast, Gobbi is the perfect foil for this Tosca: noble and determined; sarcastic and suave; rich and accurate in voice. His sycophants move easily through their incidental parts.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and only suggestive of the scene. Lighting was obviously inadequate initially, but the disc image has been improved electronically to extract as much pleasure as possible. Monaural sound is adequate for the stage, which is overemphasized, and gives little concept of the orchestral performance; under the circumstances, it is fine. Camera angles and video direction are primitive, with erratically changing perspectives and strange viewpoints to minimize audience impact. This historical record is essential regardless of its flaws. While it presents only a ghost of the live experience, that shadow proves more substantial than any of the supposedly live alternatives available.

# Turandot

## Puccini

Conductor: Arena  
Company: Verona

Turandot: Dimitrova  
Liu: Gasdia  
Calaf: Martinucci  
Timur: Vinco  
Altoum: Manganotti

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Primitive and generic staging in the vast amphitheater. Settings are minimal and only slightly suggestive of the Orient. Costumes are simplistic. Stage movement is exaggerated and unsophisticated. Nevertheless, nothing intrudes on the music and the explicit visual delights of the Met's Zeffirelli production are replaced with the viewer's imagination.

### PERFORMANCES

Despite occasional lapses, Arena keeps the forces coherent and allows the music to flow. Orchestra and chorus are competent and few entrances are missed. Dimitrova is quite effective in Act II, but contributes nothing to the lyric elements of III. Gasdia is quite acceptable as Liu, providing musicianship to compensate for a fundamentally uninteresting voice. Martinucci manages Calaf gruffly, matching Dimitrova's straightforward, blustery style. The lesser roles are filled capably. Overall, Puccini's musical values are well served in the performance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is rather better than usual from Verona, and audio is acceptable stereo (with minimal separation and no sonic image of the stage). Camera work is remarkable, the earliest example extant of Brian Large making the amphitheater work as a video venue. Overall, a satisfying performance competently captured.

# Turandot

## Puccini

Conductor: Levine

Company: Metropolitan

Turandot: Marton

Liu: Mitchell

Calaf: Domingo

Timur: Plishka

Altoum: Cuenod

LaserDisc

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Large

Date: 1988

Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Immense, magnificent Zeffirelli show. Settings are oversized and brilliant to match the concept. Costumes are conventional and elaborate. The grandeur of the work is captured spectacularly, and stage movement is both fluid and appropriate.

### PERFORMANCES

Remarkably, even Levine cannot hold the work together; entrances are sloppy and rhythms are approximated. None of the principals avoids pitch problems, often on the most exposed notes. Marton is hopelessly outmatched by the demands (even with one's best efforts to forget Nilsson). Domingo is generally acceptable but loses focus and pitch on sustained declamation. Mitchell's lovely instrument is used coarsely and Plishka seems mired in delivering a routine performance of his limited role. Only the ancient Cuenod brings his part to life. The other soloists are marginally capable, and neither orchestra nor chorus comes up to the expected standard of the Met.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are extraordinary, delivering an impact unlikely to be matched in the house. Camera angles are ideal and technical accomplishments are seamless and invisible. Lighting appears exactly as intended by Zeffirelli, and the technical team must be commended for an exceptional achievement. Unfortunately, the musical assemblage is neither individually nor collectively up to that standard.



# Turandot

## Puccini

Conductor: Runnicles  
Company: San Francisco

Turandot: Marton  
Calaf: Sylvester  
Liu: Mazzaria  
Timur: Langan  
Altoum: Frank

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Brilliant live staging. Sets are spectacularly colorful, yet both sparse and effective in establishing the milieu. Costumes are also brilliant and fantastical, enhancing the fairy-tale properties of the work. Stage movement is stilted and conventional for the principals, fluid for the lesser soloists, and minimal for the chorus; the result precludes dramatic coherence.

### PERFORMANCES

Runnicles projects no overall image of the work, perhaps because of limitations of his forces. The orchestra is underpowered but sufficient; a larger chorus would help the overall sound, but as it is they can only be considered clumsy and plodding. Marton's voice hardly reminds one of its better years (even in the Met *Turandot*) with its bleating top and unsteady middle. Sylvester has the ring and most of the heft one would seek, but his appearance and acting fall short of the ideal. Mazzaria seems taxed by the rôle's vocal demands, but makes many pleasant sounds and may mature to become an effective Liu. Langan is fully satisfying vocally, dramatically and physically. The smaller solo parts are well handled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well, even brilliantly lighted; indeed, the lighting contributes essentially to the production and to the success of the video presentation. Monaural sound on the review copy is clear and adequate, but does not help to brighten the performances. Camera work stands out with long takes and constant focus on the center of attention, yet full exploitation of the production's imagery. This performance deserves to be seen, if not heard, for its fresh and persuasive approach to an opera that is now established in the repertory.

# Turandot

## Puccini

Conductor: Previtali  
Company: RAI

Turandot: Udovick  
Calaf: Corelli  
Liu: Mattioli  
Timur: Clabassi

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Lanfranchi

Date: 1958  
Evaluation: Fair

### PRODUCTION

Television film without an audience. The single set is cramped and barely functional. Costumes are chinoise without style or taste. Acting, choreography and lip sync are ludicrous. However, the principals look their parts (except for Clabassi - too young and too capable for the old, blind Timur).

### PERFORMANCES

Previtali's direction is uninspired but effective. His chorus lacks impact but sings capably; the orchestra is adequate barring a few sour notes and weak strings. Udovick looks more imperious than she sounds but manages the rôle adequately. Corelli is fine but uninvolved. Mattioli brings nothing to Liu and offers too heavy and monochromatic a voice. The other rôles are handled capably but without distinction.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is poor, apparently taken directly from a worn print that loses sync and suffers from unstable brightness and contrast in some places. Monaural sound is quite good, though without either bass or treble and lacking dynamic impact. Camera angles are well chosen and effective, but overall direction favors gimmicks and turbulent masses over imagery of the staging. Only a fan of Corelli will find anything in this recording worth the time of viewing, let alone the cost of purchase or rental.

# Turandot

## Puccini

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: RAI

Turandot: Marton  
Calaf: Carreras  
Liu: Ricciarelli  
Timur: Bogart

VHS copy  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Greenberg

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Fair

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an enthusiastic audience. The production is a fantasyland of steep stairs, constructions, robes and masks, none of which is comprehensible from the score, though presumably Peter Hall had a Concept in mind for it. Movement on the stairs is appropriately cautious and tentative; otherwise, all is confusion. Ensemble appears to be a word lacking in the vocabulary of those responsible for this performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Maazel leads a ponderous reading which is followed reasonably well by the orchestra, less well by the rich-sounding chorus, and very poorly by the soloists who try to maintain a singable tempo. Marton is in excellent voice and does tolerate Maazel's timing. Carreras does remarkably well given that his voice is markedly less than needed to be effective - on occasion, the score has been adapted to his limitations. The other singers are capable; further assessment is impossible against the opposition of the conductor. Rydl's Mandarin deserves special mention, however.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Lighting is presumably consistent with Hall's wishes and is adequate to see the flashes of sequins against the dark. Video is clear and sound, while displaying little effect of stereo, is quite acceptable. Camera work seems somewhat limited by the audience and the long shots which predominate do not help to sort out the production. Video direction appears as confused as that on the stage.

# **Dido and Aeneas**

## **Purcell**

Conductor: Hickox  
Company: Collegium Musicum

Dido: Ewing  
Aeneas: Daymond  
Belinda: Evans  
Sorceress: Burgess

Broadcast  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Manura

Date: 1995  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Film produced as High Drama. Settings (rather than sets) seem darkly suggestive of Ancient Greece; costumes mix modes with the same apparent intent. Singers look appropriate and move effectively, but seem to be showing off a museum piece rather than performing an opera. Lip sync is quite good with few exceptions.

### PERFORMANCES

Hickox's conducting seems appropriate to Purcell's style; his small ensembles follow fittingly. Ewing is grossly out of her element with a broadly 'operatic' instrument amid the chamber performances; the other principles are less obviously in a similar position. Either approach might work, but a period orchestra and chorus with 19th-century soloists presents more conflicts than congruences.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and brilliantly lighted. Sound is cinematic: instruments and chorus spread for stereo with solo voices prominent and centered. Camera positions are clearly numerous and unusual; unfortunately, the director switches among them and varies them (pan, zoom, etc.) in an ecstasy of technology without dramatic or musical justification. When a competent production is made available, one hopes that this one will be discarded. Frankly, in the local broadcast it seemed fitting that voice-over interrupted the postlude — there was no peaceful passing of this performance.

# Enfant et les Sortileges Ravel

Conductor: Rosenthal  
Company: New York Ballet

Child: Tramon  
Mother: Shauliss  
Fire, Nightingale: Welting

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Ardolino

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Dance performance made for television—and very well, too. Sets are ultimately simplified but effective both for their fantasy and for avoiding intrusion on the dance. Fantastic costumes often appear impractical, yet they all work, each in its intended way. Balanchine's concept and direction work beautifully on the small screen, where special effects are exploited to the viewer's advantage. Lip sync is fine where it is attempted. Translation and enunciation are excellent so subtitles are unnecessary.

## PERFORMANCES

Rosenthal inspires the orchestra to dance every bit as much as the performers on stage. A few eminently suitable singers double and triple roles to fill the cast. Tramon makes a treble sound right for the part with an accurate if uninspiring voice. Welting stops the show with precise, stratospheric articulation. The other singers are excellent. And the dancers seem as well matched to their rôles as the singers.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is adequately sharp and well focussed. Pre-HiFi monaural sound suffices thanks to excellent engineering. Lighting is substantially less than one would have hoped or expected, perhaps from an ill-judged effort to emulate the theater experience. This performance should be satisfying to almost any audience: children, dance fans, opera nuts, or those who need a lift.

# **Enfant et les Sortilèges Ravel**

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: Netherlands

Child: Ogeas  
Collard  
Berbie  
Rehfuss  
Senechal

Broadcast  
French  
Director: Hulscher

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Dance interpretation with apparently prerecorded sound track. Simple set integrates a cave with the child's room. Costumes are fantastic and colorful. Movement is ebullient and athletic; occasionally one wishes for more grace, but the enthusiasm shown is fully satisfactory. None of the dancers pretends to sing, which is distracting for the first few moments but quickly becomes natural.

## PERFORMANCES

Maazel conducts a flashy interpretation well suited to the dance style. The singing is exemplary throughout. The Paris Orchestra seems to revel in the music and follows Maazel enthusiastically. The chorus sounds small but rich in tone. Marly Knobens dances the child with precise abandon, an apparent contradiction that proves delightful and right. The other dancers are graceful and/or dramatic as appropriate. Kylian's choreography seems ideal.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably clear but far too dark to show even highlights well. Stereo is used to help define the instrumentation rather more than to image the stage. Camera work is overbusy for so dynamic an interpretation; nothing is at rest, so the effect can be dizzying.

# Enfant et les Sortilèges Ravel

Conductor: Rattle

Company: Glyndebourne

Child: Buchan

Mother, Cat: Kimm

Tom Cat, Clock: Walker

Armchair, Tree: Loup

Fire, Nightingale: Christie

LaserDisc

French / English subtitles

Director: Gutteridge

Date: 1987

Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Sendak and Corsaro at less than their best. Costuming is excellent and spirited. Settings are consistently dark and fantastic. Movement is exaggerated throughout. The composite effect is to overwhelm the delights of the score. Where restraint is most needed (especially for home viewing), exaggeration is the rule.

## PERFORMANCES

Rattle's conducting is superb: bright and fluent, emphasizing the fantastic aspects of the score. Chorus and orchestra are sprightly in response. Buchan's child whines petulantly; one is hard-pressed to care whether she redeems herself. All of the other singing is capable, with Christie notable for standing out when the score calls for it. Except for Buchan's rather primitive acting, all of the other performers are up to the dramatic demands of their rôles and the staging.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are outstanding. Some special effects are enhanced over what would be seen in the house, but not to the extent that they look unduly artificial in this stylized production. Lighting is generally dark and contrasty, suppressing overall impressions and unduly focussing on the key action. Some stage gimmickry may be more effective from the audience's viewpoint than from the video viewer's. Camera positions vary improbably, detracting from the illusion on which the work depends. Better video performances lack live action, relying on audio recordings merged more or less successfully with film; still, one wishes that this recording had more fully realized the potential of the music and of Sendak and Corsaro.

# Enfant et les Sortilèges Ravel

Conductor: Blanchard  
Company: film (France)

Child: Perre  
Berbie  
Eda-P ierre  
Mesple  
Demigny  
Hamel

Broadcast  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Kahane

Date: ~1981  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Film heavy on morality and cinematic effects. Sets are essentially natural: modern room and garden with stage simulation and abstract scenes for dance elements. Costumes tend to the contemporary with fantasy outfits for some dancers. Choreography is relatively simple but crowded and chaotic. Subtitles are often lost in the video confusion.

## PERFORMANCES

Blanchard presents a sober morality play with little spark or wit. The orchestra is correspondingly oversize and thick-textured. All the singers are comfortable with the idiom and the tempo; only Mesple is recognizable for her agility and accuracy. None of the dancing stands out; the choreography often appears derivative of Fosse, not of classical concepts.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft in the review copy, probably due to broadcast engineering and the early date. Lighting is contrasty by design, but still hard to deal with on the small screen. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate for this reading, adding weight to a sober interpretation. Given the French origin of the program, one wonders whether the performance may be “correct;” it certainly is not fun.



# Heure Espagnol

## Ravel

Conductor: Edwards  
Company: Glyndebourne

Concepcion: Steiger  
Ramiro: le Roux  
Torquemada: Corazza  
Gonzalve: Dran  
Inigo: Loup

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Heather

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Sendak's imagery and Corsaro's movements are perfectly integrated to exploit a delightful minor masterpiece. The single set is brilliantly colored; movement is sprightly and supportive of the music.

### PERFORMANCES

Edwards conducts a straightforward reading, neither underlining nor diminishing Ravel's score. The orchestra (London Philharmonic) is precise and fully responsive to his direction. Steiger is delicious as the *señora*, although somewhat taxed by the vocal line. Le Roux manages the physical and vocal requirements easily. Dran's vocal strain and awkwardness seem fitting for the flamboyant Gonzalve. Corazza and Loup are ideal as the wronged(?) husband and the supercilious official.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent. Lighting appears unenhanced, but is quite sufficient. The camera operates exclusively from the audience's perspective, but mixes angles and scale appropriately—and invisibly. The resulting performance is magical.

# Lear Reimann

Conductor: Albrecht  
Company: Munich

Lear: Fischer-Dieskau  
Fool: Boysen  
Goneril: Dernesch Regan: Shane  
Coredelia: Varady

VHS copy  
German  
Director: Ponnelle

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Live staging as striking visually as musically. Sets are stark and minimal representations of the scenes. Costumes are outlandish, brilliant exaggerations. Stage movement overemphasizes the characters' personalities.

## PERFORMANCES

Albrecht's conducting cannot be faulted in the absence of a referent; it seems right throughout in emphasis and in tempo. The orchestra provides both chamber precision and appropriate sonority. Fischer-Dieskau sings rather than declaims the demanding line with beauty, poignancy, and authority at appropriate moments. Dernesch is uncharacteristically warm and sympathetic in interpretation. Shane handles an impossible line with apparent ease and Varady provides both beauty of tone and contrast in timbre. Boysen and the other men satisfy their relatively modest demands.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video was poorly recorded originally, then transferred inadequately from European to American standards. As a result, the review copy suffers flicker as well as the usual multicopy problems. In addition, the staging is clearly conceived on a wider screen than television provides. Monaural sound is adequate, though the resolution of stereo is sorely missed. Camera work is fine, concentrating attention on the key elements at all times without excessive movement. This performance supplies a unique record of a major contemporary work and should be made available commercially.

# Mlada

## Rimsky-Korsakov

Conductor: Lazarev  
Company: Bolshoi

Mlada: Ananiashvili  
Yaromir: Kulko  
Voislava: Gavrilova  
Mstivoy: Nikolsky  
Morena: Borisova

LaserDisc  
Russian / English Subtitles  
Director: Gavin

Date: June 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Grand live performance. The single basic set is varied with powerful lighting and drops. Costuming is a confusing mix of styles - servants in livery and ancient peasant dress; garish headdresses and outfitting for a witches' coven. The dancing in this unique work is a mixed bag: Ananiashvili moves with exceptional grace and fascinates the viewer; the other dancers seem mechanical in the more tranquil scenes and inspired only in Hell. Malkhassiants as the witch is captivating.

### PERFORMANCES

Lazarev moves the score emphatically throughout. The orchestra and chorus seem flawless. Kulko disappoints in a basically heroic rôle, blustering and bleating, but on pitch and not altogether unacceptable. Gavrilova turns in a fine performance, never letting her passion interfere with good production. Nikolsky and Borisova are capable if not memorable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clean and well focussed if lacking the crispness of the best modern recordings. Sound is superb in stereo which conveys the dimensions of the stage and the pit. Camera work is adequate at most times, but the director frames badly; one is not usually interested in seeing the back of a dancer blocking the active one before her, or watching a performer leap out of frame. In concerted passages, he often switches between cameras on the different soloists. In a work as unconventional as this, one is disappointed that the direction makes following the action even harder than the script and concept call for.

# Sadko

## Rimsky-Korsakov

Conductor: Gergiev  
Company: Kirov

Sadko: Galusin  
Vokhova: Tsidipova  
Libava: Tarassova  
Viking Guest: Minhelkiev  
Venetian Guest: Gergalov  
Indian Guest: Grigorian

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1994  
Evaluation: Superb

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from the Mravinskii. Sets range from the spectacularly literal to projections and generalizations. Costumes are traditional and stylized Russian - elaborate and charming. It is more appropriate to speak of the soloists as dancing, rather than acting their rôles, since the staging is essentially choreographed throughout. Some technical effects, including video devices and the Pilgrim's echo chamber, interfere with appreciation of the performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Gergiev ideally contrasts the brilliance of the human scenes with the lyricism of the supernatural. The orchestra is spectacularly responsive; the chorus seems a bit underpowered, though admirably accurate. Galusin's spinto is used with skill throughout and he is capable of sustaining his lengthy rôle without strain on either the singer or the listener. Tsidipova's voice and appearance are wonderful; one cannot imagine any other performer in the part. The remaining rôles are filled very well (Gergalov) to superbly (most of the rest).

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and clear throughout, even allowing detail in the deliberately diffuse scenes. Audio quality is outstanding, imaging the stage moderately and the orchestra quite well; some ambience can be recovered, but false information in the surround channels is distracting and surround decoding cannot be recommended. Large's direction in this widescreen presentation is even more fluent than in the usual format. Overall, this is a brilliant, fully satisfying performance of a work one is unlikely to encounter at all in the West—and almost certainly will not experience in a better performance.

# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Scala

Rosina: Berganza  
Figaro: Prey  
Almaviva: Alva  
Bartolo: Dara  
Basilio: Montarsolo

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponnelle

Date: 1972  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

A film with no pretensions of stage performance. Ponnelle uses realistic settings and costumes of the period. Movement is fluid and natural and the images are so right that they are unnoticed. Some idiosyncratic staging (especially in the finales) enlivens essentially static text, but even those moments flow easily from the realistic elements.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado leads an essentially romantic performance with true *brio*. The orchestra and chorus are highly responsive and delightful. Berganza is problematic: a few years past her best for Rosina, but still “right” for the rôle in timbre and stage business. Alva suffers similar limitations, but joins Berganza for fioriture which elaborates and finishes the lines Rossini wrote. Prey’s Figaro is ebullient and vocally impeccable. He may be accused of underplaying the part, but that is hardly a failing in a recording to be watched repeatedly. In contrast, Dara indulges in broad humor, but never at the cost of vocal production. Montarsolo is a routine Basilio, and minor rôles are handled with similar competence.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is characteristic of a film directed by a master: sharp and well defined, with excellent choice of lighting and outstanding camera work. Sound is also fine, though a shade muffled and without any effort to localize action through stereo imaging. Lip sync is excellent, with flaws noticeable only on occasional closeups in solos. This recording can be recommended without hesitation overall, although other performances offer standout moments lacking in this beautifully integrated reading.

# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Ferro  
Company: Schwetzingen

Rosina: Bartoli  
Figaro: G. Quilico  
Almaviva: Kuebler  
Bartolo: Feller  
Basilio: Lloyd

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Small-scale live performance in an ideal house. Sets are drab but enlivened with lighting. Costumes are conventional but dull with contrasting, even jarring devices. The staid production is disrupted by exaggerated color or business to break its spell and inspire belly laughs. Still, the wit of the score and text comes through, thanks to the ability of the principals to play off one another. Above all, this is a comic drama with excellent singing. The score is cut rather more than usual, blessedly truncating the rôles of some of the minor soloists.

### PERFORMANCES

Ferro leads a standard performance; whether the orchestral faults are attributable to his small band or to his leadership cannot be determined. The tiny chorus is neither precise nor objectionable. Bartoli is Rosina in voice and temperament; she may well develop still further in the rôle, but is already among its finest exponents. Quilico's barber is right physically and stylistically, but he reaches for the high notes. Kuebler has similar problems but is so comfortable with the idiom that the flaws may be neglected. Feller is an ideal guardian. The smaller solo parts are bare;u covered, with Bertha and Fiorello notably deficient.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is the best yet from Schwezingen, though not up to the best discs from the larger houses. Audio is excellent in most regards, though recorded at substantially lower level than usual; one would also have hoped for better use of stereo to capture action on the small stage. Camera work is generally good, but the director chooses rather often to focus on incidentals in bouncing among images during longer pieces. Overall, this is a fine realization of the work dramatically and vocally, though far from ideal; the Spumante is just a bit flat.

# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Morelli  
Company: RAI

Figaro: Taddei  
Rosina: Corradi  
Almaviva: Tagliavini  
Bartolo: de Taranto  
Basilio: Tajo

VHS copy  
Italian  
Director: Costa

Date: ~1950  
Evaluation: Exceptional

### PRODUCTION

Film generated for television broadcast. Sets strictly represent reality in style and scale. Period costumes are simple and timeless. Lip sync varies from distracting to painful. Editing is brutal and inexplicable.

### PERFORMANCES

Morelli's interpretation is stock for the period: too fast for the comedy; too slow for the showpieces; no dramatic relevance. The orchestra is surprisingly light in weight and predictably old-fashioned in style. Taddei is young, dashing, and a personification of the attractive, ebullient entrepreneur; a few notes are out of place, but the performance is magnificent. Tagliavini is hardly dashing or romantic, but provides singing of an era missing ever since. Unfortunately, Corradi does nothing right except sing the notes of a mostly soprano version correctly and look lovely. Tajo hams outrageously and the other characters overdo what remains of their parts.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is barely sufficient to indicate stage action; it is well transferred from the European standard, but has little detail. Monaural sound is adequate for the voices. Camera work is very stilted and limited, which may be a blessing. Overall, this is a record of an era barely captured in video and not even well documented in audio. Apart from historical value, the voices are incredible.

# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Giulini  
Company: RAI

Figaro: Panerai  
Rosina: Pastori  
Almaviva: Monti  
Bartolo: Cortis  
Basilio: Cadoni

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Enriquez

Date: 23 April 1954  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Film for Italian television. Sets and costumes are traditional if a bit higher in class than the norm. Acting is overbroad but seldom stoops to slapstick. Lip sync often distracts, but not as severely in other performances in the series. Casting shows attention to physical suitability: Rosina, Almaviva and Figaro are all young and credible. The usual cuts are observed. Rossini's arias are sung instead of replacements in the lesson scene and for "A un dottor".

### PERFORMANCES

From the first notes of the overture, Giulini has it right: much wit, brisk tempi that never seem hurried, a bit more indulgence of the singers than is common today. Orchestra and small chorus are comfortable if unremarkable. All the principals are able, but none stands out from the norm of the era. All sing accurately in the set pieces, but there is notable sloppiness in recitative. Minor rôles are filled more capably than usual.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is unusually sharp and well lighted for the era. Sound on the review copy is at a low level so that hiss and noise compound the limited range of the original. In all, the result is more than an historical record, but less than a preferred performance given the quality of the modern competition.



# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Zedda  
Company: Holland

Figaro: Malis  
Rosina: Larmore  
Almaviva: Croft, R  
Bartolo: Capecchi  
Basilio: Alaimo

VHS copy  
Italian / Norwegian  
Director: Huscher

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance on a stage of the right size before an appreciative but somewhat befuddled audience. The production, by Darius Fo, never loses an opportunity to add characters and business, though few serve dramatic purpose. For example, it takes three dancers to shave Figaro during “Un idea,” where other productions find no excuse in the score for him to be shaved at all. The characters seem uniformly ottocento Italian; the sets are clever in their modest scale, but everything is movable and everything which can move, does. The performers are at times confused, at times fearful of all that motion, but they survive the experience.

### PERFORMANCES

Zedda finds a stolid path through the score, leaving time for the stage business. The orchestra is a bit round in tone for modern taste, but plays well; the chorus is fine. Larmore handles the rôle more nearly *come scritto* than she might today and does not convince, but she sings well in her unique voice. Apart from one problem in “Qual trionfo,” Croft is on top of his role (except when he's on top of a moving table or the like). Malis sings well but does nothing with the part. Alaimo booms in the neighborhood of the pitch. Capecchi revels in his rôle, skipping as he might have forty years before. If his voice lacks the luster of his youth, it serves us all well. Schoons as Berta and Sweets as Fiorello are far better than usual.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and monaural audio are up to modern standards without standing out. Camera work is good, with no apparent effect of the audience. If one likes closeups, the direction will be unsatisfactory; otherwise, the only fault is that the staging offers only unhappy choices: miss the stage business which draws the audience's attention; cover only one singer at a time in the ensembles; bounce back and forth intolerably; or take an extremely wide shot in which the performers become indistinguishable. From time to time, each choice is selected, but none truly works. Overall, this is a far better performance to hear than to see and otherwise is recommended only to those with a taste for bizarre staging.

# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Caldwell  
Company: New York City

Rosina: Sills  
Figaro: Titus  
Almaviva: Price  
Bartolo: Gramm  
Basilio: Ramey

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles

Date: 1976  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

A bright, live performance stressing slapstick above comedy. Staging is bright with cutaway sets and flamboyant costumes. In combination with the large theater, the broad effort at humor often falls flat. Stage movement is effective, though, again, frequently overdone especially when seen on television. In the house, the excesses might have been less distracting.

### PERFORMANCES

Caldwell conducts traditionally and the orchestra and chorus are solidly with her. Sills justifies a soprano Rosina by her fluency; her credibility in the rôle is low because of her evident maturity. This ward could never even pretend to being “*docile*” let alone “*obediente*.” Price looks good and sings correctly, but is not up to the florid line. Titus is better heard than seen; he exaggerates the comic elements of a production which needs no elaboration. Gramm is remarkably fine as Bartolo, the only fully satisfactory embodiment in the performance. Ramey’s early performance shows little sign of the fame that was to come.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Despite its age, this recording stands up well technically. Sound is fine throughout. Video is a shade less sharp than on the best modern discs, but is up to the quality of contemporary tape. Lighting is adequate, though camera positions and angles are often awkward. Overall, this is a good performance which records Sills’ technical mastery.

# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Weikert  
Company: Metropolitan

Rosina: Battle  
Figaro: Nucci  
Almaviva: Blake  
Bartolo: Dara  
Basilio: Furlanetto

LaserDisc  
Italian/English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: February 1989  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

A clumsy, heavy-handed production that inflates *Barbiere* to *Guillaume Tell*. Staging is grand in scale and concept; costumes are modest and relatively dull. All the singers move well, but their portrayals are inconsistent, leading to a disjoint whole. In a word, the production lacks grace.

### PERFORMANCES

Weikert is direct and steady, but generates a mass of sound where lightness would be preferred. The chorus and orchestra are well drilled, but similarly lacking in spark. Battle is coy, approaching the cute rather more often than many will like. Her ornaments are appropriate; voice and movement delight. Nucci's crudeness is an unwelcome contrast, with bluster in place of Rossini style. Blake's voice is dry and his ornamentation, while tasteful, is clumsy. Furlanetto joins Nucci in loud declamation. Dara is at least as fine as in the film.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Both picture and sound are excellent throughout. Some color shifts are exaggerated, perhaps as artifacts of requirements for the live audience. Distribution of the singers across the huge stage mitigates against optimum camera work; as a result, there are many abrupt cuts among closeups and between closeup and sparse ensembles. The technical achievement only underscores the limitations of this production and performance.

# Barbiere di Siviglia

## Rossini

Conductor: Cambreling  
Company: Glyndebourne

Rosina: Ewing  
Figaro: Rawnsley  
Almaviva: Cosotti  
Bartolo: Desderi  
Basilio: Appelgren

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Heather

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Inconsistent, live parody of the opera. Sets are representational, using drops and a minimum of furniture to present an image of no particular time or place. Costumes are exaggerated in style and color. Movement is well integrated and natural.

### PERFORMANCES

Cambreling seems to be at the heart of the problem, leading a lethargic, heavy-weight reading in a candybox. The orchestra is light for that interpretation but accurate. The chorus is well schooled and hard to fault. Ewing is not “in” to the rôle but sings well in mostly-mezzo keys; she looks young and acts clever, but sounds as earthbound as her fellows. Rawnsley blusters in the old Italian style and sings only as a last resort. Cosotti tries for some colorature with limited success; his voice is pleasant and promising but not enough to carry the performance. Desderi is light for the role and lacks the range needed, but attempts to provide Rossini style. The other soloists are comparable with Desderi in exaggerating the faults of old-style performance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably good, although limited by the technology of the era and insufficient lighting. Audio is clear and stereo is reasonably well used; however, the dull sound adds further weight to a leaden reading. Camera work is capable and video direction is without serious flaw.

# **Cambiale di Matrimonio Rossini**

Conductor: Gelmetti  
Company: Schwetzingen

Fanny: Hall  
Edoardo: Kuebler  
Slook: Rinaldi  
Tobias: del Carlo

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: May 1989  
Evaluation: Serviceable

## PRODUCTION

Clear live recording on a small stage in a small opera house. The single set is functional and appropriate, with a painted drop to suggest the Thames waterfront. Costumes fit the period. Movement and stage business are smooth and support the flow of the libretto. The cast appears to be having as much fun as the audience. This piece of fluff is enjoyable to the viewer because the production is enjoyed by the participants.

## PERFORMANCES

Gelmetti allows Rossini's music to stand for itself, even where it would benefit from a conductor's lift and lilt. The chamber orchestra is reasonably together and solo turns are handled well if unspectacularly. Hall is pleasant, but makes no effort to decorate the lines that are meant to soar with fioriture. Kuebler is similarly capable but earthbound. Rinaldi eschews buffoonery and provides the vocal highlights of the performance although, again, without embellishment. Del Carlo is suitably boisterous, but his pitch is imperfect and his comedy is heavy-handed.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The analogue origin of the sound track barely shows; audio quality is good, but imaging is fuzzy. Video is crisp. Lighting is ample although it appears unenhanced. Camera work is capable, but the viewer's vantage point sometimes wanders; there is no visible penalty from recording during live performance.

# Cenerentola

## Rossini

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Salzburg

Angelina: Murray  
Ramiro: Araiza  
Dandini: G. Quilico  
Magnifico: Berry  
Alidoro: Schone

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Medium in scale but buoyant in execution. Staging is ornate but not gaudy and never intrudes into the performance. Costumes are bright, flamboyant, or subdued as appropriate to the character; Angelina's outfit for the ball is striking against the exaggerated colors of the others. Movement about the modest stage is well choreographed.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly captures the serio-comic character of the work ideally. It is neither inflated into grand opera nor degraded to buffo. The orchestra is responsive to the nuances, and choral work is solid. Murray's Angelina would have been regarded more highly before Simionato and Horne; she sings well, but lacks the flamboyance that we have come to expect of Rossini's female leads. Araiza sings well, but cuts a comic figure where his character should be the "straight man." Gino Quilico's Dandini is delicious: beautifully sung and depicting his youthful vitality and impatience to a "T." Unfortunately, Berry overplays the buffoonery of Magnifico, and Schone cannot make Alidoro appropriately kindly and wise. The sisters are well cast, and do not overplay their parts.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is particularly fine, conveying every detail with commendable clarity. Audio is very good as well, although it could be more detailed. Lighting is brilliant or subdued as appropriate, and appears to be unenhanced from normal performance. Camera work is conventional, but does not exploit the small stage to show closeup detail.

# Cenerentola

## Rossini

Conductor: Campanella  
Company: Houston

Angelina: Bartoli  
Ramiro: Gimenez  
Dandini: Corbelli  
Magnifico: Dara  
Alidoro: Pertusi

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1997  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Overdone live performance before an appreciative audience. Set is an imposing structure vaguely representing a residence; costumes are conventionally cartoon in flavor. The wide screen suggests HDTV recording with titles out of frame for conventional viewing. Much of the acting is in the worst operatic tradition.

### PERFORMANCES

Campanella belabors the score with alternating pomposity and frivolity. Neither orchestra nor chorus finds the result difficult. Bartoli's voice and manner would be ideal for the work if her stage business were not so fiendishly cute. The men and the sisters similarly overdo the business and undersing.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are exemplary under the assumption that painfully dark and contrasty lighting are the designer's intention. Some camera angles are awkward or worse and Large does not display his accustomed skill in wide format. While there are few extreme closeups, the cuts between views are both frequent and distracting. In all, there is much to recommend in Bartoli's performance but one must turn to another recording for fair representation of the opera. Nothing in this performance suggests the wit and joy of the score.

# Cenerentola

## Rossini

Conductor: Salesky  
Company: New York City

Cenerentola: Marsee  
Ramiro: Blake  
Dandini: Titus  
Magnifico: Billings  
Alidoro: Bassett

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Galtiero

Date: 6 November 1980  
Evaluation: Inadequate

### PRODUCTION

Absurd cartoon presented to an appreciative audience. Sets are modest in size and sketchy in concept. Costumes and makeup are exaggerated in saturated colors. Stage direction parodies the worst of classic opera.

### PERFORMANCES

Salesky holds the forces together and indulges them with exaggerated changes of tempo. The orchestra is well drilled, but the chorus is ragged and often looks bored, disgusted, or both. Marsee sings well in a rather old-fashioned style. Blake is somewhat less self-centered than in more recent times and displays comparable facility and a more noticeable register break. Titus is excellent despite his outlandish costuming; occasionally, he even manages to convey a person through relatively restrained acting and inflected singing. Billings' concept is the crudest and most objectionable of all and is expressed in inaccurate notes. The other performers are vocally competent or better.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Pre-HiFi monaural sound is good, perhaps better than the performance merits. Video is not sharp, but is well focussed. Lighting is sufficient. Camera movement is busy, but provides a bit of relief from the depression on stage. The performance can be recommended for fans of Blake or Marsee only.



# Cenerentola

## Rossini

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Scala

Cenerentola: von Stade  
Ramiro: Araiza  
Dandini: Desderi  
Magnifico: Montarsolo  
Alidoro: Plishka

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Another impeccable Ponelle film; this could get to be a (delightful) habit. Sets and costumes are colorful and conventional. There are few belly laughs in this performance, but the score's wit and strength are evident in every aspect of the production. It is an admirable companion piece to Ponelle's *Barbiere*, though the very different solo casts make for very different Rossini experiences.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado is in his element, leading a solid and thoroughly professional performance. If it lacks something of the potential sparkle, it is also without overindulgences that mar many productions. The chorus and orchestra are as fine as one expects of La Scala: impeccable. Von Stade seems physically ideal, though she lacks ultimate brilliance for the fioriture. Araiza has all the right ideas as usual, but lacks the resources to carry off the more difficult ones. Desderi could be more graceful and comes close to hamming his rôle in places, but is vocally sufficient. Plishka could be a bit more elegant, Montarsolo mugs for the camera, and none of it matters in a winning overall spirit and an honest reading of Rossini.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are up to Ponelle's standards: impeccable. Framing and camera work are superb, of course. Only lip sync falters: its imperfections and the fact of filming never intrude on the pleasures of the performance. There are other fine readings of this score on video, and there is room for improvement over this one. Yet it will probably remain the baseline against which alternate versions are measured for some time. It seems unlikely that a better overall performance will show up in the foreseeable future.

# Cenerentola

## Rossini

Conductor: Renzetti  
Company: Glyndebourne

Cenerentola: Kuhlmann  
Ramiro: Dale  
Magnifico: Desderi  
Alidoro: Kennedy

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Vernon

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Tasteful, light-hearted, live and lively staging. Sets are straightforward and fitted to the small stage. Costumes are conventional, but more evocative of England than of Italy. Both are predominantly in earth tones, where some touches of bright color might have added variety. Stage direction is exemplary: never busy, but never stilted either. The performers are well cast for appearance and acting ability as well as for voice.

### PERFORMANCES

Renzetti strikes an excellent balance, preserving the wit and humor of the score without exaggerating it to farce. The chorus and orchestra are more enthusiastic than accurate (as are several of the soloists), but the fun of the work comes through clearly. Kuhlmann is well cast, with a voice approaching the contralto yet flexible enough to make the colorature sound natural. Dale is less comfortable with his rôle and lacks technical polish, yet he so looks the part and so clearly has committed himself to it that those failings become tolerable. Desderi is ideal: witty, humorous, always musical. The other singers are well fitted to their rôles and to the production.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Broadcast audio is monaural and well balanced. Video is sharp, but noisy in the review copy. Lighting is ample, emphasizing the warm tones of the production. The cameras are used routinely. Overall, this performance provides a pleasing and eminently musical view of a minor masterpiece.

# Donna del Lago

## Rossini

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Elena: Anderson  
Uberto: Blake  
Douglas: Surjan  
Rodrigo: Merritt  
Malcolm: Dupuy

VHS Copy  
Italian  
Director: Catani  
  
Date:  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an apparently uncertain audience. Sets are large and literal, but so dark as to be beyond evaluation. Costuming is probably intended to be period but is, instead, distracting or worse. Stage movement is minimal.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti leads a straightforward performance in which few indulgences are allowed. The orchestra plays steadily but with no sign of enthusiasm. The chorus is unexpectedly ragged. Anderson is fine except for her usual errors of pitch; while one looks for more drama and more solidity over the extended range, she does handle the passagework easily. Neither Blake nor Merritt brings voice to his rôle, but both attempt heroic stature. Only Dupuy shows feeling for the Rossini style and sings well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is acceptable except that lighting levels are so low that detail is indistinguishable. The monaural, non-HiFi review copy provides sound adequate for the painful details of the singing. Video direction is unobtrusive but camera selection tends heavily toward the very long shot. Overall, one should probably be grateful for the existence of this recording; otherwise, one could have nothing but criticism.

# Ermione Rossini

Conductor: Zedda  
Company: National Zarzuela

Ermione: Caballe  
Pirro: Merritt  
Andromaca: Zimmermann  
Oreste: Gonzalez

VHS copy  
Italian / Spanish subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance in a small house. Sets are simple but effective representations of the scenes, suggesting size they do not have. Stage direction provides a reasonable representation of the drama and the soloists supply a modicum of relevant movement and emotion. English subtitles are sorely missed.

## PERFORMANCES

Zedda provides a brisk, effective interpretation with only token concessions to the soloists' desires for expansion. The small chorus and orchestra are precise and responsive. Caballe lacks the flair for the colorature, but supplies a dramatic reading with good intonation. Merritt revels in the vocalism with token effort at credibility. Gonzalez is exciting if not always precisely on pitch. Zimmermann would need to be Horne to exploit her rôle, but she sings acceptably. The supporting rôles are filled with competence, although none is vocally notable.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video gives signs of good quality, although the review copy is far from sharp. Monaural sound is adequate to represent voices and orchestra; the review copy is afflicted with hum. Lighting needs more augmentation to fill in the shadows, but it is adequate. Camera work is simple and effective despite using high and low angles to minimize interference with the audience. This is a dramatic reading of an interesting work and would benefit from English subtitles and commercial distribution.

# Gazza Ladra

## Rossini

Conductor: Bartoletti  
Company: Cologne

Ninetta: Cotrubas  
Fernando: Ellis  
Giannetto: Kuebler  
Fabrizio: Feller

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Montes-Baquer

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Small-scale and literal representation of this “opera semi-seria.” Colors are bright but not obtrusive. Staging is simple (perhaps, simplistic) but effective. It is also totally lacking in character.

### PERFORMANCES

One cannot attribute this recording’s lack of sparkle and lack of spark to any one performer. Certainly, Bartoletti’s stolid direction contributes more than his fair share. The orchestra is appropriately small, but inappropriately ragged. The chorus is much more “together” and fully satisfactory. Cotrubas sings only the notes that are written; while she does so quite well, she thereby cheats the score of the sounds that Rossini intended. Ellis tries for a bit of decoration, but is defeated by the limitations of his voice. This performance is cold pasta and flat spumante.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio quality cannot be faulted. Lighting is brilliant, although it shows no sign of augmentation for video. Camera operation is unusual in that the viewer is put onto the stage in a live performance. (What it looked like in the house can only be imagined, but we are the beneficiaries of the audience’s inconveniences.) In short, the mechanics of this recording enjoy all the brilliance that the performance lacks.

# Guillaume Tell

## Rossini

Conductor: Gelmetti  
Company: Pesaro

Tell: Pertusi  
Arnold: Kunde  
Mathilde: Dessi  
Walter: d'Arcangelo

Broadcast  
French  
Director:

Date: 12 August 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before a surprisingly restrained audience. Sets are minimal but sufficient. Costumes seem to be nearly random but do not clash with each other or the performance. The overall tone of dark earth colors combines with low light levels to produce a visually flat impression. Overall, the performance on a less-than-grand scale of a quintessentially Grand Opera works quite well on its own terms. The singers act persuasively and the greatness of much of the music is apparent.

### PERFORMANCES

Gelmetti leads a solid, straightforward reading. His orchestra and chorus, while light in weight, are effective. Pertusi has more to act than to sing, but accomplishes both soundly. Kunde lacks the weight, vocal size and top notes for an ideal Arnold, but he does not distort the rôle into a lyric exercise. Dessi and the other soloists are more than capable but less than memorable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review copy is a PAL duplicate and suffers the expected faults compounded by inadequate lighting in the original. Similarly, the monaural sound suggests rather than displays the glories of the score. Direction is capable but shifts unpredictably whenever more than one singer is active - which is most of the time in this opera. Camera movement appears significantly limited by the live audience, so that some views are awkward and some singing is aimed in odd directions. However, a capable performance such as this must not be deprecated for such minor faults. In all, it joins the Berlin *Huguenots* as a solid representation of a class of opera now beyond most theaters.

# Guillaume Tell

## Rossini

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Tell: Zancanaro  
Arnold: Merritt  
Mathilde: Studer  
Walter: Surjan

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ronconi

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance with audience. Sets are dominated by often-moving projections that distract and confuse (rapids in the lake?). Costumes are nondescript and drab with tents for Studer and Merritt. Movement through the raked pews representing most props is rarely comprehensible. No acting was committed in making this recording. The dancing is fine and well integrated into the action.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti seems to suffer from inadequate rehearsal except in the big moments. Chorus and orchestra suffer specific faults and overall blandness. Merritt offers his unique sound in about a dozen notes; otherwise, he is effective and "O muto asil" is a highlight. Studer's high piano is excellent but low notes are lacking and forte tends to squall. Zancanaro's wooden portrayal does not do the rôle justice and he lacks weight in low notes. Felle's Jemmy and d'Indio's Edwige are capable; smaller rôles are left to marginal singers.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is inconsistent: color balance shifts markedly, image softens with camera, and blacks soften to grey. Sound is excellent throughout, even to providing sonorous low drone when the stage machinery operates. Camera work is marginal with confusing angles; where stage imaging is notable in stereo, radical viewpoints make audible and visible images conflict. Direction is grossly inadequate, with infusions of Muti during singing supply the most egregious fault. Others include shifting camera with every phrase, random zoom, and focussing on the vast irrelevancies of the projections during solos and small ensembles. If an alternative were available - such as the Pesaro - this distortion of the masterpiece should be retired ignominiously.

# Italiana in Algeri

## Rossini

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Isabella: Horne  
Lindoro: Ahlstedt  
Taddeo: Monk  
Ali: Malas  
Mustafa: Montarsolo

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Oversize live staging lacking grace and style. Sets are immensely cute and cozy. Costumes, makeup, and masks are caricatures. Acting is somewhat exaggerated, but less so than Rossini tradition is taken to require.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine propels the work steadily if uninspiringly. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable, of course. Horne is past the stage when her Isabella is credible, but she still makes her spectacular. Ahlstedt confuses Rossini with Beethoven and squalls Florestan instead of singing Lindoro. Monk offers grace and style, though his technique falls short of one's hopes. Malas and Montarsolo overplay the bawdy and buffo elements. Other parts are more or less adequately cast, but none is represented by a stylist and some are painful.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and amply lighted. Audio is clear and provides the usual sound image of a fine orchestra seat. Camera work is unobtrusive and effective; Large approaches perfection as closely as usual. For Horne and for a visual representation of this confection, one must be grateful. But one must also be forgiven a "what-if" or three.



# Italiana in Algeri

## Rossini

Conductor: Weikert  
Company: Schwetzingen

Isabella: Soffel  
Lindoro: Gambill  
Taddeo: Serra  
Ali: Hartmann  
Mustafa: von Kannen

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Static performance before a live audience. Sets and costumes are bright and traditional without reaching the farcical level often encountered. Concentration on the conductor is so intense that there is little contact among the singers or between them and the audience. Movement is derivative and minimal, diminishing the joy of the buoyant score.

### PERFORMANCES

Weikert's reading can best be termed stodgy, altogether lacking in brio and zest. The orchestra seems to plod and the chorus blurs text and notes. All soloists are overcareful of the notes, leaving the spirit behind. Soffel manages well enough in spite of staging that tries to make her both coy and sophisticated. Gambill achieves much but seems to try overhard and lacks both grace and exuberance. The other singers manage more or less well, with only von Kannen significantly below the level of routine.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and bright. The fine sound and notable separation lack only brilliance that may stem from the performance rather than the recording. Camera work is capable, but direction is so erratic that the mind is constantly distracted from the performance to the characters, staging, and other elements. Overall, this may be the least relaxed and least comical of the Rossini comedies from Schwetzingen and a substantial disappointment.

# Mosé in Egitto

## Rossini

Conductor: Accardo

Company: Scala

Pharaoh: Pertessi

Moses: Scandiuzzi

Osiride: Blake

Amaltea: Scalchi

Elcia: Devia

Mambre: Cossutta

VHS copy

Italian

Director: Bronzetti

Date: ?

Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live staging before a moderately responsive audience. Simplistic staging serves the semi-sacred work well; costumes are wearable interpretations of dynastic art. Movement is minimal, again in keeping with the quasi-operatic construct.

### PERFORMANCES

Accardo lacks inspiration, but is effective in controlling the forces and rises to the climaxes. Both orchestra and chorus are unusually sloppy, especially in the opening pages. All singing is capable. None of the soloists is truly accurate in pitch or style; nothing is painful, but the great sweep of drama and the climaxes of vocalism are lost. Each singer is at or near his/her limit much of the time. Blake and Devia, who have moments when they move beyond the written notes, are often pressed by the score on the page.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and adequately lighted. The review copy's non-HiFi monaural sound conveys a sense of the richness of scoring and orchestration, but does not realize it. Video direction is admirable, maintaining attention consistently in appropriate places and using medium and long shots to establish context. Overall, one is unlikely to find a finer performance of this masterpiece.

# Otello Rossini

Conductor: Pritchard  
Company: Pesaro

Otello: Merritt  
Desdemona: Anderson  
Rodrigo: Blake  
Iago: de Cesare

VHS copy  
Italian  
Director: Catani

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance of a Rossini rarity. Sets are simplistic apparently to minimize cost. Costumes are conventionally indeterminate. Stage action is minimal and made irrelevant by a production whose only values are vocal. Since the story varies considerably from Shakespeare's, subtitles are sorely missed.

## PERFORMANCES

Pritchard leads what appears to be a pedantic runthrough of an interesting score. The orchestra is undersized; the chorus is underrehearsed and sloppy. Merritt sings a remarkably difficult line effectively if dispassionately. Anderson is imprecise as usual and appears to do little with the fioriture, but is a pleasure to see and the best Desdemona around. De Cesare and Blake lead the many significant supporting rôles with solid vocalism and adequate posturing.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is very poor on the review copy, but sufficient to show that the lighting needed augmentation for a clear recording. Monaural sound is no more than adequate but does give a clear idea of the voices and allows one to ignore the orchestra. Camera work is simplistic with abrupt transitions. The work is of sufficient interest to merit a more effective staging and a commercial recording.

# Rossini at Versailles

## Rossini

Conductor: Abbado

Company: *ad hoc*

Caballe

Horne

Araiza

Ramey

Raimondi

Broadcast

Various / English subtitles

Director: Burton/Hubert

Date: 1985

Evaluation: Essential

### PRODUCTION

Concert emulating a performance for Rossini during his retirement. Sets are a theater and scenes of the Palace. Period costumes are rich and brilliant. Surprisingly, acting is admirable if unrestrained. The kitsch can be ignored since the music is so impressive.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado revels in the opportunity, indulging the singers without distorting the composer's line. The European Chamber Orchestra and the small chorus are bright and precise. Caballe has not acquired the colorature one would hope, but more than compensates with enthusiasm and rich, dramatic sound. Horne is in her element and at her remarkable best. Araiza is overmatched by the company and the vocal demands, but is always on pitch and in character. Ramey makes lovely sounds without providing characterization. Raimondi hams and bellows, but provides necessary comic relief. The other soloists respond to the relatively modest demands capably, though they seem overawed by the company they are keeping—for good reason.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is brilliant and sharp, with ideal lighting in all settings. Sound is spectacular, albeit with some emphasis on the stage over the pit. Stereo is used effectively for the orchestra, minimally for the singers. Direction is invisible. Were there nothing in this performance but the Horne/Caballe duet, it would still be essential; with the other pleasures and diversions, it is also a delight.

# Scala di Seta

## Rossini

Conductor: Gelmetti  
Company: Schwetzingen

Giulia: Serra  
Lucilla: Bunnell  
Dorvil: Kuebler  
Germano: Corbelli

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Live and lively staging in a single set. The setting is simple and appropriate; the costumes are bright, traditional, and fitting. Stage movement is fluid and generally undistracting, although it is occasionally busy for home viewing. Some business seems superfluous to the opera, more nearly fitting *commedia dell'arte*.

### PERFORMANCES

Gelmetti conveys the music as well as the notes: a brilliant and delightful reading well realized by the small but sonorous orchestra. It is Serra's show, and she sings and moves in keeping with the Rossini verve. She and Corbelli make the fioriture seem natural to their rôles, and both make consistently pleasant sounds, barring a couple of uncertain top notes. Kuebler manages the notes and the action with some difficulty. The other men offer little but overacting in their minor parts.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, though a bit soft. Sound is excellent, lacking only the ultimate bite and brilliance. Lighting is inconsistent and occasionally leaves a singer in shadow. Similarly, an occasional error creeps into the microphone placement and some lines are lost. But minor technical flaws and limitations of voices do not interfere in the overall enjoyment of this characteristic farce.

# Semiramide

## Rossini

Conductor: Conlon

Company: Metropolitan

Semiramide: Anderson

Arsace: Horne

Idreno: Olsen

Assur: Ramey

Azema: Shin

Oroe: Cheek

Broadcast

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Large

Date: 22 December 1990

Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Exorbitantly cast live staging. Sets are huge and brilliant, though relatively simple and presumably inexpensive. Rich and timeless costumes could be applied to any ancient work. Stage movement is negligible and irrelevant in a performance which focusses on singing exclusively.

### PERFORMANCES

Conlon provides steady direction and ample room for the singers to develop their arias; no overall concept can be recognized. Orchestra and chorus are even more sonorous than usual, which would overbalance soloists of lesser magnitude. Anderson is more accurate than usual, though still imprecise in pitch and approximate in colorature. Even with her best years behind her, Horne is the second-best Arsace recorded; first place is Horne two or three decades ago, to whom she does not now compare. Ramey is at his very best: sonorous, flexible, and bare-chested. The other soloists sing with comparable skill and sufficient instruments; like the principals, they provide fitting, modest ornamentation.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp in its wide-screen format, implying high definition and potential disc release. Sound is brilliant and both pit and stage are imaged well. Large applies his substantial experience to the new format for camera work as appropriate and as static as stage direction. There is no chance of a better performance or a better record of Semiramide than this one; cherish it!

# Signor Bruschino

## Rossini

Conductor: Gelmetti  
Company: Schwetzingern

Sofia: Felle  
Florville: Kuebler  
Gaudenzio: Corbelli  
Bruschino: Rinaldi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in a suitably small house. The set is the usual representation of a drawing room, this time with a pastoral background. Period costumes are worn comfortably during the conventional and committed acting.

### PERFORMANCES

Gelmetti treats the score fairly but does not exploit its *brio*. The small orchestra is accurate and enjoyable. The ensemble never seems quite together, whether due to conducting or to insufficient rehearsal one cannot tell. Felle is capable in the rôle, but does little with it and lacks the fioriture that would enliven it. Kuebler would be ideal but for an excess of vibrato by modern standards. Corbelli is less of a ham than one fears, but is neither accurate enough nor comfortable enough with the line to stand out. The minor soloists are similarly capable without exploiting the opportunities.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and benefits from superb lighting. Sound is excellent with good resolution of the modest forces despite some emphasis on the stage over the pit. Camera work is excellent, apparently uninfluenced by the audience. Direction is busier than necessary, often interfering with the continuity of music and action by abrupt changes of viewpoint. Nevertheless, this is a well directed, capably sung, and enjoyable performance of a *farsa giocosa* with stress on *giocosa* and little overplaying of the *farsa*.

# Tancredi

## Rossini

Conductor: Gelmetti  
Company: Schwetzingen

Tancredi: di Nissa  
Amenaide: Bayo  
Argirio: Gimenez  
Obrazzano: d'Arcangelo  
Isaura: Bak  
Ruggiero: Piscitelli

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Viller

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Live performance on a modest stage and scale. Set is a raised platform and minimal colonnade, drops, and a few props. Costuming from a somewhat later period does not clash with the 9th-century plot; one outfit per singer except for Argirio who gets two. Movement is stilted but not objectionably so. The alternative (happy) ending is included and is clearly preferable to modern audiences who find the tragic finale overlong. Some inexplicable stage directions prove distracting, as when figures who appear to overhear a solo disappear without their eavesdropping serving any dramatic purpose.

### PERFORMANCES

Gelmetti smoothes over the dynamics, making the work seem longer than it is. The orchestra is not large and plays precisely; the chorus is not well polished. De Nissa is outstanding—a true contralto who blends smoothly into the musical whole though her trill is weak. Bayo provides ravishing tone with admirable agility, though her forte high notes are shrill and insecure. Gimenez is capable, though lacking heroic timbre to would fill out the part. D'Arcangelo and Bak are exciting beyond their small rôles; only Piscitelli disappoints.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but severely underlighted with obscuring shadows. Audio is clear and presents voices well, but the underpowered orchestra is further hampered by lack of bass; stereo is almost undetectable. Camera movement and angles are well chosen in general, though occasional poor vantages divert attention from the singing and action. Despite specific flaws, the overall effect is fully satisfying, verifying that the Rossini style is alive and well in modern times. No superstar is needed to give this recording the highest recommendation.



# Turco in Italia

## Rossini

Conductor: Rudel  
Company: New York City

Fiorilla: Sills  
Selim: Gramm  
Zaida: Marsee  
Poet: Titus  
Narciso: Price

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Browning?

Date: ~1977  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Cute, colorful live staging. Sets are brilliant yet simple. Costumes are conventionally colorful. Stage movement by the principals is fine, but Capobianco has decorated the scene with supernumeraries flitting about essentially without dramatic purpose. While the potential for the work in sarcastic wit and exuberant fun is not exploited, the candy-box style works quite well.

### PERFORMANCES

Rudel is unfortunately leaden with the baton, but keeps the forces together effectively. The orchestra is methodical and reasonably accurate. The chorus is appropriately small and precise. Sills clearly enjoys the rôle and sings flamboyantly; unfortunately, she is no longer at ease with the fioriture or with the simple demeanor the part requires her to put on. Gramm cannot be bettered dramatically and offers beautiful sound with capable ornamentation, lacking only sepulchral bottom notes to be ideal. Price has the right ideas and a fluid instrument, but can't quite handle the rôle's demands. Titus is surprisingly dry and strained.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good for its age, but suffers from oversaturated color. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is surprisingly good and conveys both the overall impact and most nuances. Lighting is generally good but might have been augmented to fill some intrusive shadows. Camera work is excellent, moving attention properly among the singers and between closeups and wider shots. One would hope for a brilliant reading of a score so seldom presented, but this rendering is sound and satisfying.

# **Turco in Italia**

## **Rossini**

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Scala

Fiorilla: Devia  
Selim: Pertusi  
Zaida: Banditelli  
Poet: Antononi  
Narciso: Kelly

Broadcast copy  
Italian / Italian subtitles  
Director: Protasoni

Date: 1997  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before a respectful audience. Sets are minimal and costumes suggest various eras and places. Acting is formal and stilted with slapstick interjections that seem pasted onto a stilted substrate.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly leads a steady and uninflected performance which his orchestra follows dutifully, the chorus less precisely. Devia sings crisply and looks fine, but offers no spark or sparkle. Pertusi is fully satisfying and Banditelli is a distinct asset. Kelly attempts some very high alternatives with mixed success; however, even his misses fit comfortably in his foppish characterization. The other roles are capably sung.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Clear, well-lighted video is somewhat compromised by the copy quality; monaural sound is full in range and dynamics. Camera work is good in itself, but direction is erratic, often focussing tightly on irrelevant elements. One is tempted to blame the stage director for the performance's inability to take flight. Regardless of who is responsible, the result is almost an academic exercise.

# Italian Straw Hat

## Rota

Conductor: Armenian  
Company: Rome

Fadinard: Benelli  
Elena: Mazzuccato  
Anaide: Martelli  
Baroness: Cortez

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Gregoretti

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Elaborate film of operetta trivia. Sets vary from those for the stage to cartoon insertions. Costumes are literal and simple. Acting is ebullient and exaggerated within the bounds of farce. Lip sync often distracts, especially in closeups.

### PERFORMANCES

Armenian does not fully capture the lightness and humor of the score, but is always appropriate. The orchestra and chorus fill their modest requirements capably. Benelli is excellent, combining conventionally handsome appearance with efficient singing. Mazzuccato looks magnificent and sings well—when she finds the note. Martelli's instrument is less attractive and she suffers similar inaccuracy. Cortez' fire leaves something to be desired, but not her voice. The supporting characters, including such as Zancanaro and Basiola, sing and act particularly well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is adequate on all counts, with sufficient lighting and sharp images for the era. Pre-HiFi monaural sound favors the singers substantially, but clearly represents them and the score. Film direction is peripatetic, adding visual chaos to the madcap tale.

# Samson et Dalila

## Saint-Saëns

Conductor: Rudel  
Company: San Francisco

Dalila: Verrett  
Samson: Domingo  
Priest: Brendel  
Abimelech: Voketaitis

LaserDisc  
French / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

A curiously choppy and inconsistent production overall. Staging and costuming are traditional, stressing the operatic rather than the biblical components. Colors and images are brilliant and memorable. Sets tend to be oversized but fitted to a stage of reasonable proportions; the effect is to expand the horizon within the house without losing the singers.

### PERFORMANCES

Rudel is workmanlike, but not fully able to control the forces under him. The orchestra is ragged at times and seldom provides the single, sonorous underpinning needed to support the singers. The Bacchanal is chaotic rather than melodic. Verrett retains much of the seduction of her earlier years, but is no longer convincing in the rôle. Domingo declaims well and is always musical. None of the other soloists makes a significant impression, with the exception of Kevin Langan as the Old Hebrew.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent, showing the flaws and virtues of the performance in almost painful detail. Lighting is excellent, and the camera seems unhindered by the demands of live performance. If the performance were up to the technical qualities, this recording could be recommended far more highly.

# Samson et Dalila

## Saint-Saëns

Conductor: Davis  
Company: Royal Opera

Dalila: Verrett  
Samson: Vickers  
Priest: Summers  
Abimelech: Tomlinson

LaserDisc  
French  
Director: Vernon

Date: 6 October 1981  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Somewhat abstract interpretation which stresses the solemnity of the opera's biblical roots. Settings are non-literal; costumes are relatively subdued. Some of the stage decoration detracts from the musical flow, especially striking images which demand interpretation while the focus belongs on the sound. Nevertheless, it is a rich staging which wears well on repeated viewing.

### PERFORMANCES

Davis is outstanding in conveying the flow and pulse of the music. His orchestra is reasonably responsive, though lacking in the sonority one would have hoped to hear. Choral work is excellent, a major factor in this work. Verrett sounds younger than her years and seduces Samson and the audience with equal facility. Vickers dominates the stage, not only in the great declamations, but throughout. He conveys the strength and the weakness of the character perfectly, and the seemingly limitless power of his voice makes him seem truly comfortable in the rôle. None of the minor characters approaches the standard set by the principals, but none detracts from the overall flow.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is marred by soft focus, probably intended for effect, but becoming tiresome after a while. It is as though several scrimms are left in place on the stage even when inappropriate. Audio seems compressed in dynamic range, robbing the Bacchanal of much of its force; sound quality is more characteristic of audio engineering in the 50's than in the 80's. Lighting is flat in much of the work, although it is used to good effect in highlighting soloists at appropriate times. Camera work is uninspired. This recording is as technically weak as it is musically strong.

# Erwartung Schönberg

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Woman: Norman

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Chamber opera on a grand scale. The single set is a unique, dark blend of literal and obscure. The costume is similarly dark, but rich with gems. The result justifies the scale to some extent. How Schönberg would react to the production is certainly open to question; he would have to have been delighted with the musical aspects.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine and the orchestra are precise, but the sound is oversize. Norman is accurate and involved, moving with surprising ease in a production clearly scaled to her.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video involves the viewer with technical perfection and outstanding camera work. Audio is impeccable, but by preserving the fullness of the sound emphasizes the problems of scale. Lighting seems responsive to production design, suggesting rather than showing the props and set while concentrating on Norman. If this music belongs in as large a house as the Met, this production is the way to present it.

# **Bartered Bride**

## **Smetana**

Conductor: Levine

Company: Metropolitan

Marenka: Stratas

Janek: Gedda

Vasek: Vickers

Kecal: Talvela

Broadcast

English

Director: Browning

Date: 21 November 1978

Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Exuberant and eminently live staging. Sets are minimal, but allow the imagination to fill in the Bohemian countryside. Costumes are traditional and colorful. Movement is marvelous, with comparable credit to the corps de ballet and the singers—and special appreciation due the director who integrated the performance so cleanly. The English translation is no better than one would expect; enough of it is understandable even with the audio limitations.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine leads a joyous reading that cannot quite transform this confection into a masterpiece. Chorus and orchestra are remarkably accurate even as they seem carried away with the spirit of the production. Stratas is as near to perfection as one could hope: fey and brilliant, depressed and resentful as the score and text dictate. Gedda lacks youthful exuberance, but has the voice and dramatic insight needed. Vickers is remarkably fine, and Talvela is (appropriately) the one true ham in the cast. Minor parts are capably if unremarkably handled.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio quality off the air are acceptable, but limited by the age of this performance. Pre-HiFi monaural sound hardly does justice to the music, while exaggerated lighting for the relatively demanding cameras impairs the stage image. Camera movement is often ill-judged, but rarely distracts. This performance demands LaserDisc transfer.

# **Bartered Bride**

## **Smetana**

Conductor: Kosler  
Company: Prague

Marenka: Benackova  
Janek: Dvorsky  
Vasek: Kopp  
Kecal: Novak

VHS (from PAL)  
Czech  
Director: Filip

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Film of a staged production. Sets and costumes are traditional, rich and brilliant. Acting is reasonably operatic in style, with little excess. Dancing is enthusiastic, if neither inspired nor spectacular. Unfortunately, someone forgot to synchronize video and audio and the discrepancies distract one's attention quite frequently.

### PERFORMANCES

Kosler maintains an upbeat if not joyous tempo with orchestra and chorus completely comfortable in the style and the idiom. Benackova is a delight to hear and to see; Dvorsky scarcely less effective. Novak's reading is more caricature than character, but like the other performers he acquits himself well in his way.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and crisp, though flat lighting becomes tiresome after a while. Non-HiFi monaural sound is restricted in dynamic and tonal range, muffling the brilliance of the score but allowing voices to be heard quite well. Camera work is erratic with particular problems when movement is required. The director seems enamored of closeups and quick switching between cameras, often giving a dizzying effect. Direction, audio, lighting and lip sync conspire to take the life from the work; oddly, there is no evidence of staleness from singers who must have done the opera dozens of times on stage.



# Louis Riel Somers

Conductor: Feldbill  
Company: Canadian

Riel: Turgeon  
Prime Minister: Rutherford  
Bishop: Rouleau

Broadcast  
English; subtitled French, Amer-  
ind

Director: Major

Date: 1989

Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Unique television production of a unique musical work. The opera deals with the political/religious/linguistic/cultural Canadian civil war and the remarkable leader of the rebels. The staging is derived from a theatrical production and is stark and representational. Costuming is literal for the era. Stage movement is fluid and natural.

## PERFORMANCES

Feldbill leads a dynamic reading which sounds right and impels the drama. Orchestral work appears impeccable and the chorus is appropriately accurate or ragged as the dramatic situation demands. Turgeon is a remarkable singing actor, using a fine baritone voice with taste and skill. Rutherford's pomp and Rouleau's sonority are exactly to the points of their characters. The numerous other solos are handled comfortably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp, benefitting from ample lighting and absence of audience constraints. Monaural sound is far beyond the usual Canadian standard, allowing easy resolution of the details of the score. Camera movement is generally good, but changes of sight line seem arbitrary and often distract from the continuity of music and text. The intermixing of languages becomes appropriate early in the work and ceases to disturb the viewer after the first scene. Treatment of side characters is simplistic (foppish Brits, noble savages, kind-hearted trappers, etc.) and serves to set off Turgeon's multidimensional rôle and performance to good advantage. With wider distribution, this performance could inspire interest in Somers' music and in tonal contemporary opera.

# Bayou Legend

## Still

Conductor: de Paur  
Company: Opera / South

Bazile: Burgess  
Aurore: Balthrop  
Clothilde: Potter  
Leonce: Lightfoot  
Lestant: Maiden

Broadcast  
English  
Diirector: Thomson

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Film derived from live performances. Instead of sets, exteriors are used in the open air. Costumes are overly clean and fancy in the style of the bayou. Acting is more theatrical than natural, but movement of the chorus and dancers is fluid. Enunciation is superb.

### PERFORMANCES

De Paur provides a reading which fully realizes the tonal underpinnings and the musical depth of the score. The orchestra and chorus are excellent and comfortable with the idiom. Burgess' instrument is a bit limited for the rôle, but he characterizes beautifully. Balthrop shows the tonal and dramatic qualities that led to her later accomplishments. Lightfoot offers a fine voice with a minimum of dramatic skill. The other singers are excellent and are superbly cast to realize their characters.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is fine for the era but shows limitations of the hardware used in some editing effects. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is not limiting, though the instrumentation and the sonorities would have benefitted from stereo spread. Camera work is excellent. This performance is a worthy introduction to an all but unknown major American composer.

# Arabella Strauss

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Royal

Arabella: Putnam  
Mandryka: Brocheler  
Zdenka: Rolandi  
Matteo: Lewis  
Adelaide: Sarfaty  
Waldner: Korn

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Cox

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Fitting, traditional staging on a scaled-down stage. The single set is well designed for the easy movement of the principals. Costumes are appropriate for the period and are worn comfortably.

## PERFORMANCES

Haitink is at home in this music, and brings it home to the viewer. Putnam's Arabella is ideal in itself, but she suffers with the rest of the cast from unfamiliarity with the essentially Germanic idiom. Brocheler's Mandryka is overly vehement and rather more declaimed than sung. Rolandi is lovely in voice and action. The rest of the cast is capable vocally and dramatically. There is an overall deficiency of spirit here, but not of fine singing.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The copy evaluated is no more than adequate in sound or picture, but that is probably due to its broadcast source. Camera work is excellent, benefitting from lighting and movement that seem unhampered by the presence of the audience.

# Arabella Strauss

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Vienna

Arabella: Janowitz  
Mandryka: Weikl  
Zdenka: Ghazarian  
Matteo: Kollo  
Adelaide: Lilowa  
Waldner: Kraemmer

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Treu

Date: 1977  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Film version without obvious roots in stage production. Sets are literal and elaborate. Period costumes are colorful and worn with ease. Action is cinematic without exaggeration. Lip sync is approximate at best, given up altogether on occasion.

## PERFORMANCES

Solti makes the most of the rich score. Needless to say, the orchestra is outstanding. Janowitz portrays a more mature Arabella than might be preferred, but sings and acts superbly. Weikl's gruff sound is fitting and his portrayal is true. Kollo has never sounded better and acts convincingly. The other singers are often carried away with vocal excesses that can grate and disrupt the lyric flow.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not as sharp as one would hope, but has no major flaw. Sound is excellent, with fine balance between singers and orchestra and good resolution, but no imaging of stage or pit. Cinema direction is appropriate and allows enjoyment of the scenes so carefully designed.

# Arabella Strauss

Conductor: Thielemann  
Company: Metropolitan

Arabella: Te Kanawa  
Mandryka: Brendel  
Zdenka: McLaughlin  
Matteo: Kuebler  
Adelaide: Dernesch  
Waldner: McIntyre

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1995  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live from the Met. Sets and costumes are traditional, ornate, and rather shabby—perhaps simply from age. Except for the veterans Dernesch and McIntyre, acting is rudimentary. Everything seems very proper and very dull.

## PERFORMANCES

Thielemann levels the dynamic of the score so that everything is in place and nothing inspires. The orchestra is fine (though overloud in the broadcast). Te Kanawa is too mature in appearance and in attitude, but sings everything quite well. Brendel is neither accurate nor comfortable. McLaughlin disappoints in appearance and in tone. Dernesch is imprecise and lacks weight in the lower register; McIntyre is more weary than necessary, but stands out positively in this “competition”. Kuebler is similarly fine as Matteo. Dessay’s Fiakermilli is underpowered but suitably exuberant. Minor rôles are handled particularly well, further emphasizing the limitations of many principals.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Except for some apparently deliberate softness, video is clear and well lighted. Sound is superior even to the Met’s standard, with ample separation and imaging of the orchestra and some ambience from surround. Camera work is up to the usual standard, complete with somewhat more emphasis on closeup than ideal. Production, performance and performers all seem tired and Strauss’ joyous romance becomes tedious melodrama.

# Ariadne auf Naxos

## Strauss

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Ariadne: Norman  
Zerbinetta: Battle  
Komponist: Troyanos  
Bacchus: King

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 12 March 1988  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Grand, literal representation scaled to the Met. Sets and costumes are conventional. Movement is formal where appropriate, fluid and even playful elsewhere.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine excels in all aspects of the score, giving a reading on a par with the finest audio-only versions. The orchestra lacks an ideal sound (Viennese?), but is accurate. Norman lacks only humanity to be superb in the rôle. Battle is wonderful except in the aria, where the technical demands are beyond her. Troyanos is fine but more busy than committed to the part. King is sufficient in a most taxing rôle. The other characters are well played and well sung by the Met supporting cast; even Dawn Upshaw's Echo does not stand out in the general excellence.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are impeccable. Camera work is generally fine, although one might prefer more sustained medium shots than such frequent shift of viewpoint from long to close; some extreme closeups become distracting as well. One is unlikely to encounter better cast, conducting, or production and this performance can be recommended without hesitation.

# Ariadne auf Naxos

## Strauss

Conductor: Leinsdorf  
Company: Boston Symphony

Ariadne: Watson  
Zerbinetta: Sills  
Bacchus: Nagy

VHS copy  
German  
Director: ?

Date: 1971  
Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Concert version without Prologue in the original version with no staging and little relevant movement. Dress is less than formal. This is a purely musical performance with no dramatic values except in Sills' performance. Fundamentally, that performance is the only reason to put up with the values of this recording.

### PERFORMANCES

Leinsdorf's conducting is almost uninflected, unlike his audio recording. The orchestra is both responsive and accurate. Watson lacks the lowest notes and true dramatic force, but produces lovely sounds with some expression. Sills reflects the rôle's humor and sings the fiendish version of the aria as written with apparent ease. Nagy's Bacchus is adequate. The rest of the *commedia del'arte* provides little *commedia* and scarcely more *arte*. The other women are superior, but even more noticeably lacking in language skills than the men.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are barely tolerable. The original appears to have been from primitive taping equipment at home, with a substantial gap when the reel ran out a little more than an hour into the performance. After at least two generations to the available version, one gets low fidelity, high wow, frequent loss of sync reaching total loss of signal at times, and all accompanying failings. For a few minutes of Sills, it may all be worthwhile.

# Capriccio Strauss

Conductor: Runnicles  
Company: San Francisco

Countess: Te Kanawa  
Count: Hågegård  
Flamand: Kuebler  
Olivier: Keenlyside  
La Roche: Braun  
Clairon: Troyanos

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Maniura

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Sumptuous live performance. The set is an ornate room of the palace, appropriately oversize and grand. Costumes are colorful and opulent. Stage movement flows naturally and the artists act as well as they sing. Subtitles are well selected, but many are lost in the backgrounds.

## PERFORMANCES

Runnicles' leadership is firm but understated; a bit more lift from the orchestra would benefit overall enjoyment. The orchestra is fine but underrecorded, so detail is hard to discern—beginning with a sextet that is all but inaudible from the strings in the pit. Te Kanawa is at her best vocally and dramatically; while she does not make the Countess a vital figure, she animates her adequately. Hågegård leads an admirable male cast with a true characterization. Troyanos disappoints with approximate pitch and phrasing and graceless acting. However, the ensemble is effective and except for Troyanos the voices integrate admirably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp with adequate lighting retaining detail even in the deliberate shadows. Audio is clear, undistorted, and with full range but stereo is not exploited. Camera work is relatively busy and shots are not always ideally chosen to retain the visual image of the sonic ensemble. The minor failings in each area pale in comparison with the superb overall realization of this performance. It catches the wit as well as the beauty of a unique work.



# Capriccio Strauss

Conductor: Stein  
Company: Salzburg

Countess: Tomowa-Sintow  
Count: Schöne  
Flamand: Büchner  
Olivier: Schmidt  
La Roche: Adam  
Clairon: Vermillion

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Schaaf

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Beautifully scaled, attractively staged live performance. The set is minimal and stylized, but it effectively frames the text and music. Costumes are disconcertingly ornate given the simplicity of the set and of the action. Stage movement varies from formal posing to sincere, even excessive dramatics. Serious effort seems to have been made to divert attention from the words and music themselves; given the nature of the opera, that effort seems ill-conceived.

## PERFORMANCES

Stein plays it straight, but for many tastes excessively so. One seeks passion from the interpretation and from the honest but uninflected orchestral performance. Tomowa-Sintow sings each note, but almost separately and certainly without the dramatic context. Schöne manages rather more expression with a basically uninteresting instrument. Neither Schmidt nor Büchner provides the transcendent commitment their elementary rôles demand. Adam and Vermillion sing and characterize beautifully. In part, the criticisms arise from the superb audio recordings which convey the fascination this video interpretation lacks.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and well lighted, providing stark contrasts where intended and rich detail throughout. Sound is good, with some stereo separation, but lacks brilliance and bite just as the production and performances do. Video direction is not up to the highest standards, with awkward camera angles and often inferior shot selection diverting attention from the essentials of the work. Overall, this recording catches a sound, honest, uninteresting performance honestly. One must ask forgiveness for wanting more.

# Elektra Strauss

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Elektra: Nilsson  
Chrysothemis: Rysanek  
Klytemnestra: Dunn  
Aegisth: Nagy  
Orest: McIntyre

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 16 February 1980  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Somewhat stylized settings to exploit the grand scale of the theater. Costumes are conventionally decadent. Stage action is appropriate if somewhat subdued, leaving most of the drive to the music. Movement is fluid but choreography is minimal—perhaps due to Nilsson’s limitations.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts with his customary command, but adds fire and brilliance not usually emanating from his baton. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable. Nilsson’s voice shows its age, but is still the only instrument capable of realizing the score on a stage of this scale. She dominates the stage and the performance with apparent ease. Rysanek is surprisingly lyrical, yet fully up to the scale Nilsson establishes. Dunn is more than adequate, but McIntyre adds nothing to a monochromatic recital of the notes in the score. The other parts are in capable, if unremarkable, hands.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound quality is outstanding, presenting the stage image in sonic form. Video is a shade less good, losing some detail due to camera limitations. Lighting seems enhanced over that designed for the live audience alone, but still is short of that needed for best images. Camera work is competent, but cannot catch expression while the soloists are moving. The totality is a fully integrated record of one of the major works of the century in one of its great, live realizations.

# Elektra Strauss

Conductor: Böhm  
Company: Vienna

Elektra: Rysanek  
Chrysothemis: Ligendza  
Klytemnestra: Varnay  
Aegisth: Beirer  
Orest: Fischer-Dieskau

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Friedrich

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

A film version emphasizing decadence in staging and costuming (in contrast with lyricism in the voices). Emphasis is on the characters rather than their milieu. Many of the visual effects are covered by camera effects, but they appear to be as intended by the director. Above all, this is a movie which demands (and survives) comparison with the *Salome* film.

## PERFORMANCES

Böhm stresses the power of the score with a straightforward, driving interpretation more appropriate for a young turk than for so mature a conductor. The orchestra is solid throughout. Rysanek provides an almost lyrical interpretation of the title rôle, never truly soaring over the orchestra except through the aid of the engineers. Ligendza is satisfactory, but offers less contrast with Rysanek than one might wish. Varnay is superbly horrible, vocally and physically; Beirer is a suitable if lesser foil for her. Fischer-Dieskau's Orest is definitive — lyric and seductive one moment, commanding the next. Lesser parts are well realized.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are good, but not as fine as the date and film origins would lead one to hope. Both are short on detail and definition. Lighting and camera work are fully under Friedrich's effective and knowing control. Overall, this is a magnificent horror of a film, recording a magnificent horror of an opera.

# Elektra Strauss

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Vienna

Elektra: Marton  
Chrysothemis: Studer  
Klytemnestra: Fassbaender  
Aegisth: King  
Orest: Grundheber

LaserDisc  
German  
Director: Large

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Devastating live performance. Kuper's stunning conception is almost perfectly realized. Performed on the colossal wreck of a statue of Agamemnon, costuming, lighting, acting, singing and playing integrate into a traumatic drama whose components cannot be isolated.

## PERFORMANCES

Abbado's taut, fleet reading propels the drama breathlessly. Orchestra and singers seem swept away by the occasion and take the audience along. I will not address individual soloists' contributions because while each is superb within the context, none can be assessed except in terms of this production.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is very fine but contrast would have been enhanced by later technology or more light. Stereo sound is brilliant, lacking slightly in the extreme lows and without any surround effect. Camera movement is admirable, showing no effect of the audience. Direction is among Large's finest, with focus maintained on the most telling element of the scene and extreme closeups used exactly where fitting. Although different from both the Levine and Böhm interpretations, this recording is their equal overall.

# Elektra Strauss

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Elektra: Behrens  
Chrysothemis: Voigt  
Klytemnestra: Fassbänder  
Aegisth: King  
Orest: McIntyre

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1994  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance of a new production. The drab, simple set shows confinement within the huge proscenium. Costumes are conventional but not as exaggerated as in most productions. Acting is exemplary throughout, aided by stage direction and video direction of exceptional quality.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine's reading is dynamically compressed, almost monochromatic. The orchestra is brilliant and the ensemble work (not truly choral, of course) is fine. Behrens' voice turns shrill at forte and above and she seems unable to color it at those levels; however, she is accurate and would shine against lesser competition. Voigt's reading is less conventional but fully consistent with her well-fed appearance and voice. Fassbänder is no less sinister for singing beautifully, if again unconventionally. King is exemplary; McIntyre is more gruff and less sonorous than in the Nilsson version.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp but not up to modern standards; very low lighting levels may be responsible. Audio is clear but again less impressive than other recent Met broadcasts. As usual, the image is clearly defined and well located in the hall. Direction is more varied than Large has chosen in the past, but never intrudes on the action. With less impressive competition, this performance would be recommended enthusiastically; even so, it is admirable and should be seen for its interpretive variations.

# Frau ohne Schatten

## Strauss

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Salzburg

Empress: Studer  
Nurse: Lipovsek  
Emperor: Moser  
Dyer's Wife: Marton  
Barak: Hale

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Vibrant live reading. Sets and staging are modern in style and sparsely realized. Costuming would be conventional in a lesser staging. Friedrich's imagination is justified by thought-provoking design, though occasionally it inspires laughter. Stage movement is exemplary, with all principals acting their parts easily and effectively. Subtitling is effective most of the time, despite a few misleading translations; placement within the frame is unfortunate.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti dominates this performance with imperative dynamics, though some lyric moments are understated. The orchestra is spectacular; the chorus, barely adequate. Studer excels in quality of sound and force, notwithstanding occasional pushing and some scooping. Lipovsek's voice turns shrill at full volume on high notes and lacks sonority in the lowest range, but it is used with skill, taste and accuracy in portraying the character. Marton manages the climaxes, but not the lyric components, producing a monochromatically detestable character. Hale excels as Barak, tackling the dynamics with apparent ease while conveying the image of the noble peasant. Moser is marginally acceptable, lacking the quality and top needed for an imperial effect. Excepting Lippert's, lesser parts are handled with even greater skill and art.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is outstanding except where lighting is low. Overmodulation in a few *tuttis* mars otherwise exemplary sound; stereo is used well but surround is not realized. The letterboxed image begins to approximate theater experience. Camera work and direction would match Large's best except for some overuse of superpositions, fades and other effects. Overall, this spectacular reading is recommended despite idiosyncratic production and some vocal weaknesses.

# Frau ohne Schatten

## Strauss

Conductor: Dohnanyi  
Company: Paris

Empress: Behrens  
Nurse: Dunn  
Emperor: Kollo  
Barak: Berry  
Dyer's Wife: Jones

Broadcast copy  
German / French subtitles  
Director: Hubert

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Inadequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance by a superb cast. Symbolic sets are dark initially, then lost in video murk. Elaborate costumes seem modelled on an early production and make no concession to contemporary approaches. Movement is surprisingly fluid and dramatic with little posing. Unfortunately, the subtitles offer complementary problems: they are too brief for the text they summarize and too intrusive to permit enjoyment of the picture.

### PERFORMANCES

Dohnanyi's reading is more romantic, even erotic, than moving, but well conceived on its own (and the singers') terms. The orchestra seems tentative but accurate. Dernesch is near her best with sumptuous tone and apparent ease, although she lacks full force for the climaxes. Dunn's rich sound seems frayed, but she sings the rôle instead of growling it and we are better off for that. Kollo lacks the authoritative tone and top notes, but suffices. Jones soars to the vocal demands and acts beautifully. One wishes Berry were less gruff in voice and demeanor. The other singers differentiate their characters well with admirable voices.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is all but unwatchable, with inadequate lighting compounded by faulty transfer to the American standard. Monaural sound reveals little of the work's texture, in part due to emphasis on the stage. In all, this potentially admirable performance is so badly recorded as to offer little pleasure.

# Intermezzo

## Strauss

Conductor: Kuhn  
Company: Glyndebourne

Christine: Lott  
Robert: Pringle  
Baron: Caley  
Anna: Gale

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Buckton

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Outstanding

### PRODUCTION

Nearly perfect live performance. Sets are straightforward and literal, seemingly as appropriate for a Noel Coward play as for the opera. Period costumes are perfectly appropriate. Movement is a delight, in keeping with the highest standards of any theater. Enunciation is excellent, but careful listening is necessary if the delightful Porter translation is to be appreciated.

### PERFORMANCES

Kuhn falls into none of the traps: the score is neither overblown nor trivialized, and precise performance never interferes with musical communication. The orchestra is small but sonorous and fully satisfies the modest demands. Lott is superb vocally, visually and dramatically; someone else must be able to do as well, but she drives all thought of comparison from the mind. Pringle is also outstanding, but other approaches could be taken: a bit more mature and suave, or even a bit sardonic might work. Caley is vocally fine, but could be more Prussian to enhance the inherent humor. Gale cannot be bettered. The supporting rôles are handled invisibly, which in this case is ideal.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well resolved although noisy in the review copy due to broadcast engineering. Monaural sound is excellent for the voices but understates the orchestra; stereo recording would solve all audio problems. Direction cannot be faulted because it becomes invisible almost instantly. This is not a perfect opera and not quite a perfect recording; it is as nearly a perfect performance as anyone is likely to encounter.



# Rosenkavalier

## Strauss

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Salzburg

Marschallin: Schwarzkopf  
Octavian: Jurinac  
Sophie: Rothenberger  
Ochs: Edelmann  
Faninal: Kunz

VHS  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Czinner

Date: 1956  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Brilliant, historic live performance. Sets and costumes are lavish if altogether conventional; the house appears just the right size for the production and the image of the court is ideal. However, it appears that the images and sound are from different performances so that lip sync fails noticeably at times.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan makes the music his own, faithfully conveying the score with rich personality and spirit. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable, of course. Schwarzkopf's performance illustrates her dominance in the rôle for our times. Jurinac would be ideal as the rose-bearer if her voice were not so similar to Schwarzkopf's. Rothenberger is fine dramatically (and a pleasure to see), but again does not provide a distinctive sound. Edelmann is more of a ham than the rôle demands, but sings and characterizes it so well that the exaggeration may be ignored. The other solo parts are taken by experts.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The age of the performance tells painfully in the video and audio quality. The picture is quite sharp but not as crisp as modern recordings would provide. Video appears to have been captured with ample extra light and without an audience (judging by camera placement and movement). Good monaural sound is well balanced, but still not clear enough to allow the listener to delight in the score. Unfortunately, at least some prints of the subtitled release have badly distorted sound; the earlier release in German only was undistorted. Certainly, this classic performance deserves loving transfer to disc to extract all of its delights. If done well, such a disc would rank with the greatest video performances of opera.

# Rosenkavalier

## Strauss

Conductor: Kleiber  
Company: Bavaria

Marschallin: Jones  
Octavian: Fassbaender  
Sophie: Popp  
Ochs: Jungwirth  
Faninal: Kusche  
Italian Tenor: Araiza

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Hundorf

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Live performance stressing characterization over vocalization. Sets are elaborate and authentic. Period costumes are seen to be eminently wearable and apparently comfortable.

### PERFORMANCES

Kleiber misses the ebullience of the score, making it more of a melodrama than a “farce.” The orchestra compensates partially by providing a chamber sound that somehow manages to preserve the impact and sonority needed for climaxes. Jones is delightful in the drama, though not fully successful when introspection is called for. Fassbaender is among the most successful portrayers of Octavian, lacking only an ideal tone for the ensembles. Popp disappoints, already showing some of the thickening of voice that cast her as the Marschallin a few years later. Jungwirth is rather more the boor than necessary but gets the notes out. Support is never less than competent and helps to integrate the production into a dramatic whole.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is a bit soft despite ample lighting. Sound is exemplary, especially for the analogue era, resolving the orchestra clearly and even providing some stage image. Camera work is overactive, moving among angles and changing field of view instead of letting the music and action keep things moving. Overall, this recording provides an outstanding if earthbound performance of the very highest rank.

# Rosenkavalier

## Strauss

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Marschallin: Te Kanawa  
Octavian: Troyanos  
Sophie: Blegen  
Ochs: Moll  
Faninal: Hammond-Stroud  
Italian Tenor: Pavarotti

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 7 October 1982  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from the Met. Sets are grand in scale and style, resembling an oversized version of the Salzburg production under von Karajan. Period costumes are strictly in accord with convention. Movement is well planned and implemented, providing more character delineation than the singing can effect.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine's efficient, unidiomatic reading lays the music out for one to appreciate, but not to enjoy. The orchestra is precise and well captured. Te Kanawa's rich instrument would be ideal for the rôle if its manipulator conveyed any sense of the woman behind it. Troyanos also makes lovely, appropriate sounds that fail to define the boy. Blegen is too cute and not quite accurate enough to be an ideal Sophie. In contrast, Moll cannot be bettered on video and is rarely equalled in audio. The supporting cast is fine; Pavarotti's star turn will please his fans.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is remarkably sharp and well lighted for the era. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is well balanced and accurate; it permits evaluation of the performance as an historical record, but does not enhance the pleasures some might seek from the opera. Video direction is excellent, though it favors low and high angles to minimize audience impact. Overall, this is a sterile, passionless performance lacking both humor and wit, but accurately recorded.

# Rosenkavalier

## Strauss

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Royal Opera

Marschallin: Te Kanawa  
Octavian: Howells  
Sophie: Bonney  
Ochs: Haugland  
Faninal: Summers

LaserDisc  
German  
Director: Large

Date: 14 Feb 1985  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Beautiful, traditional live performance with matching settings and costumes. All the pieces fit seamlessly and nothing interferes with the musical flow.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti leads a superb, dynamic performance which falls short of the Viennese spirit but conveys all the voices of the score in detail. The orchestra is well prepared and fully professional. Te Kanawa sings impeccably but does not involve the listener. Similarly, neither Howells nor Bonney is guilty of any error or of communicating the special beauty of the score. Haugland manages all the notes and adds the spirit of a rustic nobleman. The rest of the cast is polished but uninspired. Nothing is wrong with the performances, but their totality is less than in some vocally inferior recordings.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent. Camera work shows no negative influence of the live performance. Lighting is ample without appearing to have been augmented for video. If the spirit matched the technical merits, this recording would merit high recommendation.

# Salome Strauss

Conductor: Böhm  
Company: Vienna

Salome: Stratas  
Herodias: Varnay  
Jochanaan: Weikl  
Herod: Beirer  
Narraboth: Ochman

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Friedrich

Date: 1974  
Evaluation: Superb

## PRODUCTION

This film is characterized by opulent excess. It captures the spirit of decadence and horror of the play and the music, at the cost of the immediacy of live performance.

## PERFORMANCES

Böhm's conducting is true to both the spirit and the letter of the score. Stratas is seductive, beautiful, and horrifying; while she could not carry the score on stage, she is superb on film. Varnay's shrill, incisive Herodias is definitive; Beirer is little less as the vicious Herod, yet is human enough to make the final "*Man tötet dieses Weib*" absolutely valid. Weikl is sufficient as the Baptist, and all other roles are well handled. The dance is no terpsichorean delight, but is appropriately committed and decadent. The orchestra is superb.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is fine though it lacks the brilliance of the best digital recording. Video is slightly murky, perhaps as Friedrich desired for the atmosphere of the work. Lip sync is adequate. Due to production for film, camera positions and lighting are always appropriate. Direction is tight and never intrudes on the performance of the music. This is a *Gesamtkunstwerk* which conveys an overall impact far beyond the effect of its components. Be prepared: on good equipment, this disc is more a catharsis than merely an opera.

# Salome Strauss

Conductor: Downes  
Company: Royal

Salome: Ewing  
Jochanaan: Devlin  
Herodias: Knight  
Herod: Riegel  
Narraboth: Leggate

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Bailey

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance with many virtues and notable oddities. The Peter Hall production mixes the literal and the abstract with imaginative lighting. However, some features of the recorded performance introduced after staging conflict with the text. Dramatic casting is particularly felicitous, so that characters are identifiable by appearance and demeanor even before they begin to sing. Unfortunately, the results do not necessarily represent the best vocal options or ensure accurate rendering of the language.

## PERFORMANCES

Downes provides a monochromatic reading, suppressing dynamics of most of the score. The orchestra is accurate but balances are eccentric. Ewing is hard-pressed throughout and unsatisfactory vocally and interpretively until the dance which is remarkable and her final scene, while questionable interpretively, is effective. Devlin disappoints with a dry, imprecise instrument pushed to its limits. Knight and Riegel are outstanding, arguably the best interpreters of their rôles on video. Other parts are filled capably if unremarkably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and superbly lighted, although clearly without distorting the intended effect on the stage. Audio is less satisfying for so recent a recording, with limited highs and lows and odd balances throughout. Stereo is occasionally audible, even distracting, but most of the recording provides neither separation nor imaging. Camera work is excellent throughout, showing no effect of the live audience. However, direction is overly busy, especially in the first half where one is hard-pressed to locate the rapidly intercut closeups in the overall staging. In sum, this reading is worthy of viewing and studying, but cannot challenge the Böhm for overall impact.

# Salome Strauss

Conductor: Sinopoli  
Company: Deutsche

Salome: Malfitano  
Herodias: Rysanek  
Herod: Hiestermann  
Jochanaan: Estes  
Narraboth: Bieber

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: ~1990  
Evaluation: Very good

## PRODUCTION

Stark live performance. Minimal, modern sets and a light, transparent staging convey a lyrical reading of a work not usually considered lyric. That spotlight mitigates against depicting decadence, but stage detail is effective. The effect is of pornography rather than obscenity.

## PERFORMANCES

Sinopoli leads a bright reading of a heavy score, with more light than fury; for some tastes, more than Strauss intended. Malfitano's Salome is hard and calculating, not seductive. Rysanek does surprisingly little with a rôle that should have been ideal for her. Hiestermann is effective, though he wobbles. Estes is excellent in all respects; other performers are adequate and unobtrusive. A better live performance today is hard to imagine, but audio recordings and broadcasts demonstrate that more was achieved in the past.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Sound is clear but despite its digital origin lacks the overwhelming impact Böhm delivers; the fault is probably in the capability of the orchestra and the intent of the conductor. Video is excellent also, although the limitations of live performance sometimes keep camera positions and angles from conveying an ideal visual impact. Disc processing is excellent.

# Salome Strauss

Conductor: Decker  
Company: Montreal

Salome: L. Anderson  
Herod: Ingle  
Herodias: Meyrson  
Jokanaan: Wimberger  
Narraboth: Donaldson

Broadcast  
German  
Director: Landry

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Exotic live staging. The set is subminimal: the cistern and a flight of stairs complicated by an incomprehensible backdrop, art deco thrones, and other distractions. Costumes are oriental in a Turkish sense, hardly biblical or otherwise explicable. Stage movement is minimized but sufficient; as usual, the dance would be better left to the imagination. Production anomalies abound.

## PERFORMANCES

Becker's reading is straightforward with a minimum of tension added to that inherent in the score. The orchestra seems content with the idiom and the reading and commits no overt errors. Laila Anderson sings the rôle rather well but without notable fire or commitment; she is attractive physically and makes for a wise and self-aware seductress. Wimberger handles the notes well but rouses no passion in the audience to match that which Salome claims to feel. Ingle and Donaldson sing and characterize admirably. The other characters are well portrayed and well sung, though without distinction.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and well detailed; the high contrast may well be the director's intention. Monaural sound is somewhat distorted by broadcast engineering, but is generally tolerable if not satisfying. Camera work relies on high angles to reduce interference with the audience; the result is distracting at times, but only because one may seek diversion from the staid interpretation and anomalous production.



# Fledermaus

## Strauss, J.

Conductor: Tate

Company: Metropolitan

Rosalinde: Te Kanawa

Eisenstein: Hagegård

Adele: Blegen

Orlofsky: Troyanos

Alfred: Rendall

Broadcast

German / English subtitles

Director: Browning

Date: 27 December 1986

Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Exuberantly overblown live performance without a single credible character. Sets are massive, conventional and dowdy: just right. Costumes are brilliant period pieces to match the music. English dialogue is readily understood without subtitles. If it is necessary to find a fault, try the German diction.

### PERFORMANCES

Tate is unrestrained in exploiting the joys of the score and the skills of the singers. The orchestra is overwhelming and impeccable. The chorus bubbles as merrily as the champagne. Te Kanawa hams unashamedly and sings beautifully. Hagegard is an ideal Eisenstein vocally and dramatically. Blegen doesn't quite catch the spirit of Adele, but sings well. Troyanos is relatively restrained for Orlofsky. Rendall and the other singers are superb.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well focussed. Sound is brilliant, even providing an audible image of the stage to match that of the pit. Video direction is fine, although rather a lot of shots are taken from below stage level to avoid interference with the audience. Granted that this is a slapstick reading, it makes no pretense at anything else. Anyone who can avoid laughing at this performance should retire to intensive care immediately.

# Fledermaus

Strauss, J.

Conductor: Mehta  
Company: Royal

Rosalinde: Te Kanawa  
Eisenstein: Prey  
Adele: Heichele  
Falke: Luxon

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1977  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Live performance with more vitality than most. Sets are traditional and unimaginative. Period costumes are flamboyant and colorful, fitting the exuberant staging. Dialogue is well captured, rendering subtitles unnecessary for the English segments. Unfortunately, the subtitles that are provided are often out of sync with the text on stage. The Gala (Barenboim, Stern, Prey, ballet) is long but not tedious. Frosch's comedy seems overbroad and overdone.

## PERFORMANCES

Mehta is expansive and exploits the less subtle elements of the score. Both orchestra and chorus revel in the excess and do not disappoint. Te Kanawa is near her best vocally, physically and dramatically. Prey approaches a definitive Eisenstein, dapper and exuberant in voice and manner. Hillebrecht is delicious in style and voice. In contrast, the tenor Orlofsky is relatively restrained and vocally effective. Supporting roles are well cast physically and vocally; overacting is the rule, but not so broadly as to distort the line.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and dark and colors are exaggerated, but supplemental lighting does fill in shadows adequately. Pre-HiFi monaural sound favors the stage but adequately represents both voices and orchestra. Camera work is fine and overall direction maintains attention on the significant elements. In all, this is the best of Covent Garden's versions and among the best in any form. Two inferior performances from the company are on disc; this one has not even made it to tape!

# Fledermaus

## Strauss, J.

Conductor: Hirsch  
Company: Vancouver

Rosalinde: Knighton  
Eisenstein: Malis  
Adele: Woods  
Falke: Corbeil  
Orlofsky: Stilwell  
Alfred: Margison

Broadcast  
English  
Director: ?

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

### PRODUCTION

Hypermodern caricature in the guise of live performance. Stark, art deco sets contrast with colorful, stylized costumes more or less of the period. Action crosses the border of slapstick and general exaggeration. Enunciation is adequate in the spoken segments but completely obscures sung text. [Yes, that is a merry-go-round horse.]

### PERFORMANCES

Hirsch rushes through the performance as if seeking to minimize the pain of the production. Orchestra and chorus keep pace in time and style. Knighton is delightful vocally and physically; she joins in the general overacting with apparent glee, though she could clearly sing and characterize Rosalinde far better than she hams the part. Malis exploits the blatant humor despite an adequate voice. Margison is vocally notable, and one hopes to encounter him in less flamboyant lyric parts in the future. Stilwell is up to the hamming and to a handsome travesti portrayal with an attractive voice. Woods seems embarrassed by the goings-on but sings well enough; discomfort with the colorature converts the laughing song to a droll chortle. Minor rôles are filled capably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The engineers have wrought more than their usual havoc with both video and audio, overmodulating as shamelessly as the performers overact. Otherwise, the video is sharp and contrast is excessive, adding to the cartoon character of the staging. Camera work is somewhat busy, bouncing among angles with little dramatic purpose.

# Fledermaus

Strauss, J.

Conductor: Böhm  
Company: Vienna

Rosalinde: Janowitz  
Eisenstein: Wächter  
Adele: Holm  
Falke: Holecek  
Orlofsky: Windgassen  
Alfred: Kmentt

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Schenk

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Very good

## PRODUCTION

Well crafted film apparently far removed from the stage. The work is treated as grand comic opera rather than operetta. Sets are opulent and appear to be located in real buildings. Costumes are conventional and appropriate. Lip sync is adequate but never accurate enough to give the illusion of live performance.

## PERFORMANCES

Böhm is magnificent on the podium, directing a substantial reading with true Viennese lilt. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable. Janowitz sings beautifully but lacks the flair that made Schwarzkopf memorable. Wächter is outstanding with none of the problems marking his performance for Kleiber. All other rôles are superbly cast with Kunz (Frank) and Schenk (Frosch) outstanding. The choice of a tenor Orlofsky is not altogether successful, but Windgassen provides an exemplar of decadence.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent throughout, conveying the brilliant sets faithfully. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is surprisingly good; the original is in stereo and should be available somewhere on tape if not on disc. Camera work is unobtrusive. With an inspired Rosalinde and better sound, this performance would be recommended even more highly.

# Fledermaus

## Strauss, J.

Conductor: Kleiber  
Company: Bavarian Opera

Rosalinde: Coburn  
Eisenstein: Wächter  
Adele: Perry  
Falke: Brendel  
Orlofsky: Fassbänder  
Alfred: Hopferwieser

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Schenk

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Beautiful, literal presentation which conveys most of the joy and sparkle—the *Gemütlichkeit*—of the essential Johann Strauss. Staging is conventional, yet manages to convey both the intimacy of the Eisenstein home and the grandeur of Orlofsky’s palace. Perhaps the best summary is that the work’s wit is never sacrificed to comedy.

### PERFORMANCES

Kleiber (and his orchestra) star in this performance with a light, dancing reading that never cloys. The sopranos may be British, but their performances are Viennese. Wächter’s voice cannot sustain even the modest demands of the rôle, and his performance borders on the hammy. The other singers adorn the recording; except for Fassbänder’s delicious Orlofsky, none of them stands out. The result bubbles with the Prince’s champagne as reliably as Eisenstein’s marvelous watch.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio excel, with negligible compromises to the requirements of live performance. The technical qualities enhance the production in giving the viewer the feeling of being a part of the audience—albeit in a better seat than any in the house.

# Fledermaus

## Strauss, J.

Conductor: Domingo  
Company: Royal

Rosalinde: Te Kanawa  
Eisenstein: Prey  
Adele: Heichele  
Falke: Luxon  
Orlofsky: Soffel  
Alfred: O'Neill

LaserDisc  
German  
Director: Burton

Date: 31 December 1983  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Gala live celebration with opera accompaniment. Sets and costumes are traditional. Dialogue is in English and readily understandable without subtitles, though it makes for awkward transitions. Overall, grandeur inappropriate to Johann Strauss seems to characterize this production.

### PERFORMANCES

Domingo is effective in maintaining coherence and flow, if not a Viennese spirit. The orchestra and chorus are more schooled than inspired. Te Kanawa is her usual Rosalinde: cool, aloof, and correct. Prey has passed his best years for Eisenstein, substituting enthusiasm for voice but always enlivening the performance. Luxon is effective dramatically and vocally, giving his best video performance of the eighties. Heichele is studied and accurate. O'Neill disappoints, but the other soloists handle their roles easily and entertainingly.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good but lacks the crispness of later technology. Stereo sound is good but relative dullness shows analogue origin in recording and transfer. The gala has its moments and adds to the "event" of the cast and conductor.

# Fledermaus

## Strauss, J.

Conductor: Bonyngé  
Company: Royal

Rosalinde: Gustafson  
Eisenstein: Otey  
Adele: Howarth  
Falke: Michaels-Moore  
Orlofsky: Rowalski  
Alfred: Bottone

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Burton

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Three-star gala before a live audience sandwiched by a mundane live performance. Sets and costumes are traditional—just as in the Domingo reading of seven years earlier. Overall, the opera is presented as a routine, provincial performance with a cast comfortable with each other and with the staging. Text is sung and spoken well enough to make subtitles unnecessary, though they would help one not familiar with the work.

### PERFORMANCES

Bonyngé leads a surprisingly bright interpretation with ample spirit and pace; if not in Viennese style, it is enjoyable in itself. Chorus and orchestra are exemplary. Gustafson is a pleasure to see and hear. Otey is hard-pressed vocally and does not find the spirit of the rôle or its inherent humor. Howarth is a delightful and fitting counterpart for Gustafson. Michaels-Moore has both voice and style for the part. Rowalski's falsetto Orlofsky is a matter of taste and is unique among recorded performances. The smaller solo rôles receive facile interpretations from capable singers.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good, though not as crisp as the best of the era. Sound is fine with realistic stereo separation and clear representation of the stage. Lighting seems ample and camera work is unhampered by the audience. Overall, the opera performance would never be considered for commercial release, and criticism of Dame Joan's farewell to Covent Garden seems out of place here.

# Fledermaus - Act II

## Strauss, J.

Conductor: Rudel  
Company: New York City

Rosalinde: Sills  
Eisenstein: Fredericks  
Adele: Rolandi  
Falke: Titus  
Orlovsky: Carlisle

Broadcast  
English  
Director: ?

1980  
Evaluation: Unique

### PRODUCTION

Moderate but brilliant staging - a suitable backdrop for Sills' farewell. Setting is conventional though relatively cheap-looking. Costumes are traditional and unimaginative. The NYCO principals move comfortably through a well thought out and relatively stodgy staging, but the point of the performance is the gala, which requires (and receives) no production values at all.

### PERFORMANCES

If it is relevant (which one may doubt), Rudel holds the forces together without contributing anything detectable to the score. Sills is at less than her best, but still sings and characterizes without flaw. The other regular cast members are solid and move with ease through their parts; Rolandi does somewhat more vocally, though her lady's maid would have been hard to believe. But the performances to remember are those of the guests: Price, Scotto, Alexander, Domingo, Gramm, Milnes; Burnett, Farrell, Martin, Merman, Shore, Short — and on.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is remarkably good for the era, with ample lighting and well-placed cameras. The (monaural) sound is well balanced, though in a true performance of the opera one would prefer a bit more emphasis on the orchestra. This is a theatrical experience apart from the opera, and succeeds unstintingly on its terms.



# Flood

## Stravinsky

Conductor: Craft  
Company: Film

God: Reardon/Oliver  
Lucifer: Robinson

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Drupsteen

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Fascinating

### PRODUCTION

Exciting, contemporary film interpretation of a classic recording. Abstract imagery dominates the instrumental components with startling concepts and brilliant color. Sets for the human elements are comparably dramatic and abstract, but have enough physical reality to them to serve as metaphors. Costumes and makeup for the actors are contemporary. Movement is generally subdued. Lip sync is attempted sparingly, but is effective when applied.

### PERFORMANCES

Craft's reading is brisk and true to the score. The orchestra (Columbia Symphony) is small and precise. Narration and singing are elemental components of the music; text is given weight by the sound, not merely by its content.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is brilliant in acuity and color. Sound quality is excellent, with rather more emphasis on the singers and speakers than on the band. Video direction is captivating, often overwhelming the music. One cannot envision a stage presentation that would provide a comparable experience.

# Oedipus Rex

## Stravinsky

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Amsterdam

Oedipus: Rosenshein  
Jocaste: Palmer  
Creon: Desderi

Broadcast  
Latin / English narration  
Director: Hulscher

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Superb

### PRODUCTION

Live staging of unique impact. Set is a bare stage in black and white with a great portal for entrances. Costumes are silver, white and black robes, crowns, and masks. Soloists and chorus are made up in stark whiteface, further establishing the abstraction. Movement is not action but formal posing appropriate to the declamation. Despite capable narration, subtitles are missed.

### PERFORMANCES

Haitink provides a brisk, uniquely rich-textured interpretation which favors sonority over brilliance. The orchestra (Concertgebouw) is precise and articulate. The large male chorus sounds like a single multipart voice. Rosenshein articulates each word with tonal and textual precision. Palmer's rich sound is marginally thicker than precision would call for. Desderi is amazingly un-Italian and fitting. The other solo parts are comparably well cast. Notably, none of the singers ever seems to strain for a note or to produce an awkward phrase.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and adequately lighted, with excellent fill to control shadows. Monaural sound is clear and accurate, but stereo is sorely missed for the resolution it would offer. Video direction provides a needed sense of action without excessive busy-ness; the camera angles are well chosen to focus attention and to provide visual relief.

# Oedipus Rex

## Stravinsky

Conductor: Ozawa  
Company: Saito Kinen

Oedipus: Langridge  
Jocasta: Norman  
Creon: Terfel

Broadcast  
Latin / English subtitles  
Director: Taymor

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Overdone

### PRODUCTION

Massive live performance. Set is elaborate and indecipherable with symbolic props and devices lacking clear association with music or text. Costumes are grotesque. Stage movement is dominated by dancers and mobile props with indecipherable but undoubtedly grand intent. Japanese narration is also subtitled.

### PERFORMANCES

Ozawa leads a massive reading emphasizing mystery over classicism. The orchestra and chorus provide a romantic sound which exploits little of the acid in the score. Langridge strains at the declamation and lacks the precision one seeks. Norman pours out volumes of lush tone dead on pitch but without evidence of the conflict or pain of the character—except in the overwhelming aria. Terfel lacks the articulation for Creon's lines and has trouble with the range as well. The other soloists are comparably loud and content with approximating the line.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is brilliant and in wide screen suggesting a high-definition source and disc release. Sound is brilliantly recorded without recovering the clarity lost in the masses of tone. Camera angles and movement seem unconstrained by the (presumptive) audience and may signify that multiple performances were used for video; in that case, the lip sync is remarkable. A fundamental problem of this performance is that the symbolism dominates both text and music; if one understood and appreciated the production, one might find the performance valuable.

# **Pulcinella**

## **Stravinsky**

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: *ad hoc*

Pulcinella: Davies  
Pimpinella: Berganza  
Furbo: Shirley-Quirk

LaserDisc  
French  
Director: Hulscher

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Ballet (Scapino) interpretation of a classic pantomime/dance/opera. The single set is a simple representation of an Italian village scene. Costumes are those of classic pantomime and period village outfits. Choreography (Christe) is classically balletic and neither excessively athletic nor objectionally slapstick. No attempt is made at lip sync.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado provides a romantic interpretation lacking typical Stravinsky bite. The London Symphony supplies a correspondingly rich sound. Berganza's voice sounds darker and heavier than in her prime years, but her tone is luscious and her portrayal is clear. Davies' dry tone is out of sync with the overall sound but not inappropriate for the brash clown. In contrast, Shirley-Quirk provides both clear and accurate singing.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not as sharp or as bright as might be expected, but never obscures the comedy. Sound is fine but not well spread in stereo. Video direction is routine. Overall, this is a satisfactory presentation of a delightful work, but it needs more bite to reach the first rank.

# Rake's Progress

## Stravinsky

Conductor: Tabachnik  
Company: Toronto

Tom: Stewart  
Anne: Cuccaro  
Shadow: Monk  
Baba: Smith  
Truelove: Dodington

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance celebrating an undervalued work. Sets are representational but delightful; Hockney never did better for us. Acting is admirable in making the characters credible and the drama enjoyable. Most of the text is understandable, but subtitles would help the chorus and some soloists.

### PERFORMANCES

Tabachnik provides a bit more weight than ideal, possibly because of the size of the house. His affection for the score is shared by the orchestra; the chorus is a bit less up to the demands, but more than serviceable. John Stewart offers a pleasant tenor and winning appearance. Cuccaro is heavier than ideal but is comfortable with the line. Monk is nearly ideal as Shadow, never yielding to the temptation to caricature. The other solos are well handled and the performance is admirably integrated.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but somewhat underlighted, resulting in loss of detail. Monaural sound is good with some blasting on climaxes thanks to the Canadian engineers. Camera work is constrained by the audience, with strange angles. Unfortunately, Campbell seems reluctant to let the opera move on its own and keeps the viewpoint moving instead. The result is an overbusy and somewhat heavy interpretation which is nonetheless faithful to the spirit of Auden and Stravinsky.

# Cox and Box Sullivan

Conductor: Faris  
Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Cox: Smythe  
Box: Fryatt  
Bouncer: Lawlor

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Heather

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Collection of live segments without audience. The set is drab if conventional; the exterior fog appears to have settled permanently on the furnishings and decor. Enunciation is excellent and each word is recognizable and enjoyable.

## PERFORMANCES

Faris finds this more leisurely comedy to his taste and leads a fine reading. The orchestra is excellent. Smythe sings capably and acts (and speaks) ideally. Fryatt handles both vocal and comedic demands with apparent ease. Lawlor's voice is not up to the modest requirements and becomes painful; his hamming also seems excessive for the overall performance. Supporting parts are played deliciously.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp but lighting is inadequate. Pre-HiFi monaural sound suffices for enjoyment of words and music. Direction is very good, concentrating on the essential with imagination, but without excessive camera movement.

# Gondoliers

## Sullivan

Conductor: Lloyd-Jones  
Company: BBC

Grand Inquisitor: Langdon  
Marco: Brecknock  
Giuseppe: Allen  
Tessa: Wallis  
Gianetta: Livingston

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Hays

Date: 1972  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Brilliant, live studio performance without audience. Sets are cramped but effectively colorful and conventional. Costumes are also traditional and brightly colored. Enunciation of both chorus and soloists is admirable. Stage movement is somewhat exaggerated for the small screen but always natural.

### PERFORMANCES

Lloyd-Jones' reading lacks the *brio* of the d'Oyly Carte recordings, but is bright and fervent. The chorus and orchestra are accurate if similarly uninspired. The singing style reminds one of the Godfrey recordings for EMI: better sung than the standard, but lacking in style. The men stand out, with Langdon making a strong case for a singing bass rather than a cartoon character in the critical rôle of the Grand Inquisitor. The joint kings are exceptional singers; both Thomas Allen and John Brecknock went on to greater fame, but may never have sung better than here. The women do well with less demanding lines. The other rôles are handled routinely with routine voices.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is satisfactory, especially for the era. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is better than most material from the early seventies, thanks in large part to the studio environment. Lighting is harsh with excessive contrast. Camera work is simplistic and a bit busy; singers frequently interfere with sight lines, suggesting inadequate camera rehearsal. While the old d'Oyly Carte *Mikado* film better reflects the spirit of Gilbert and Sullivan, this performance is recommended as a modern rendering with admirable singing.

# Gondoliers

## Sullivan

Conductor: Faris

Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Marco: Egerton

Giuseppe: MacDonald

Gianetta: Christie

Tessa: Kimm

Alhambra: Michel

Duke: Shilling

Broadcast

English

Director: Heather

Date: ~1980

Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Cinematic assemblage of live segments without audience. Most sets appear to be from a stage production and are both practical and pleasant. Period costumes offer no surprises. Action and acting are scaled to film, but otherwise conventional. Enunciation is fine for the soloists and adequate for the chorus.

### PERFORMANCES

Faris seems rather more in touch with the wry comedy here than in the more boisterous works. The London Symphony is subdued as usual in this series. The Ambrosian Chorus is reduced to appropriate size and performs with enthusiasm. The principal quartet sing well in both an operatic sense and as Savoyards. The guest comedians sing rather less well and overact a bit more than the usual G&S nobility, but neither is a major liability. The other soloists are particularly fine; one suspects that they have sung their rôles before.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is the best in the series: well lighted and reasonably crisp. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is sufficient; quality stereo might help in understanding the chorus and might bring the orchestra forward. Direction is fine, suitable for release as a film. One wishes that this quality of casting and recording had been provided for the rarities, but it is a pleasure here.



# Mikado Sullivan

Conductor: Toye  
Company: d'Oyly Carte

Ko-Ko: Green  
Nanki-Poo: Baker  
Yum-Yum: Tulin  
Katisha: Willis

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Schertzinger

Date: 1939  
Evaluation: Classic

## PRODUCTION

Extraordinary film document. Sets are extravagant expansions of the classic d'Oyly Carte staging. Costumes are elaborately pseudo-Oriental. Stage movement is surprisingly tame and appropriate to the screen. An explanatory prologue has been supplied for no obvious audience or purpose. Enunciation is good and subtitles would be superfluous.

## PERFORMANCES

Toye cherishes the score with a reading that preserves its beauty and expansiveness without ever losing contact with its exuberance. The orchestra follows suit; the chorus is almost instrumental in its integration with the performance. Green is the modern ideal of the comic lead for reasons which are obvious at every turn. Baker is by far the best G&S lead in any medium. The female soloists are effective but don't match the men in their fit to their rôles.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Imagery is excellent for its era, though colors show the losses of faded Eastmancolor from Technicolor sources. Sound is distorted and monaural, barely sufficient to preserve the record. Cinema direction is professional and dramatic rather than operatic. Quality restoration and LaserDisc release are urgently required.

# Mikado Sullivan

Conductor: Godfrey  
Company: D'Oyly Carte

Yum-Yum: Masterson  
Ko-Ko: Reed  
Nanki-Poo: Potter  
Katisha: Palmer  
Mikado: Adams

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Burge

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Sober but satisfying assemblage of live performance segments. Sets are theatrical, presumably traditional for d'Oyly Carte, relying on drops and props to differentiate the scenes. Costumes are simpler than usually encountered, thus avoiding distraction from the opera itself. Acting is stilted and poorly focussed. Enunciation is clear and subtitles would be superfluous.

## PERFORMANCES

Godfrey's familiarity with the work and its tradition shows in a straightforward, evenly paced reading without flair. The orchestra and chorus are accurate without particular spirit. Masterson provides delightful overkill in outstanding singing. Potter is a characteristic but competent British tenor. Reed sings more (and better) and speaks less than the usual Ko-Ko. The supporting singers are perfectly at home in their rôles and sing them admirably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Despite the studio origin, video shows its age in high noise level and less than defined focus. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is sufficient if not as bright as would be needed for maximum enjoyment. Cinema direction is excellent, providing visual leisure to relish the text and the music.

# Mikado Sullivan

Conductor: Carriere  
Company: Stratford (Canada)

Yum-Yum: Baron  
Ko-Ko: Donkin  
Nanki-Poo: Ingram  
Katisha: James  
Mikado: Saks

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Spirited live performance compensating in enthusiasm for vocal and production limitations. The single set is a minimalist disc with giant fan. Costumes are conventional in earth tones. Dialogue is updated; slapstick is exaggerated; even the music is brought more in line with contemporary pop standards. The result is G&S for lovers of musicals. Enunciation is excellent and subtitles are never missed.

## PERFORMANCES

Carriere is surprisingly careful in his reading. The small orchestra and the chorus follow well, and the chorus bounces about the stage with almost the enthusiasm of the principals. Baron and the other young ladies are fine to hear and to see. Donkin offers good style and appearance, but is inaccurate and unpleasant to hear. Ingram's hero is credible and he sings no worse than the typical Savoyard. James is younger and more credible than the typical Katisha; she and the other solists are up to their vocal and dramatic requirements.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and well focussed. Sound is clear if unspectacular. Lighting is adequate and appears unaugmented. Camera work is fine throughout, maintaining attention on the most significant material without irrelevant changes of viewpoint. Overall, this is an exemplar for provincial production rather than a major contender in the field.

# Mikado Sullivan

Conductor: Faris  
Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Nanki-Poo: Stewart  
Ko-Ko: Revill  
Yum-Yum: Flowers  
Katisha: Collins  
Mikado: Conrad

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Greenberg

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Assemblage of live performances without audience. Sets and costumes are less extreme and less stereotypical than customary, with significant Western influence and anachronisms. Choreography and acting style are far from the d'Oyly Carte, embodying contemporary components for dynamics lost from the music.

## PERFORMANCES

Faris is efficient but seemingly bored; tempi are slow and the term *sforzando* seems unknown. The orchestra is unusually subdued but seems to play capably; the chorus is accurate. Stewart offers handsome appearance, breathy sound, and clumsy movement. Flowers is shrill and awkward. Revill speaks a rôle that demands singing and mugs excessively. The supporting cast seems to revel in unaccustomed rôles, but some restraint would have been welcome. Conrad makes no attempt to sing and is relatively restrained dramatically.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and seriously underlighted so that detail is lost completely. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is sufficient for the voices but not for the overbalanced orchestra. Video direction is capable but frequently misses the primary image or the preferred angle.

# Mikado Sullivan

Conductor: Robinson  
Company: English National

Yum-Yum: Garrett  
Ko-Ko: Idle  
Nanki-Poo: Bottone  
Katisha: Palmer  
Mikado: Angas

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Phillips

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Live performance moving the scene to an English seashore in the 1920's! The set approximates a hotel foyer in stark white. Costumes parody those of a Noel Coward comedy in generally subdued colors. Makeup is extreme, with flaming orange hair and many characters in whiteface. Enunciation is excellent and words are only rarely incomprehensible.

## PERFORMANCES

Robinson leads a brilliant, buoyant reading with responsive and joyous orchestra and chorus. Garrett and Bottone are unfortunately characteristic G&S lovers: imprecise singing with disturbing vibrato. Palmer, Angas, and van Allan (Pooh-Bah) are outstanding in voice, enunciation, and style. Idle offers insufficient voice for Ko-Ko, but a rich, fresh comic sense and dynamic performance that almost compensate. The supporting soloists are excellent. The dancing is accomplished well, but tends to overwhelm the singing and playing; it is made more disturbing to the viewer by video effects which would have been missed (fortunately) in the house.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is clear and stereo is used to good advantage. Video is problematic: clear and brightly lighted, but with substantial and inconsistent error in color balance which turns the characters not in whiteface magenta and occasionally sickly green. Camera work is at least as dynamic as the high-stepping dancers, which keeps the viewer's attention from dwelling on the music or the performances for more than a few seconds at a time. Overall, this broadcast embeds some fine performances and conducting in an exaggerated production. It reminds one of putting raisins in a Yorkshire pudding or truffles in a trifle.

# Patience Sullivan

Conductor: Faris  
Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Bunthorne: Hammond-Stroud  
Grosvenor: Fryatt  
Patience: Dugdale  
Jane: Collins

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Heather

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Made-for-television live performance without audience. Sets exploit the medium by mixing reality and staging; they are uniformly bright and appropriate. Costumes are as conventional and formal as the stage movement. Enunciation is clear and subtitles are not missed.

## PERFORMANCES

While Faris misses the spirit of fun, he does accurately and effectively convey the notes. The London Symphony and the Ambrosian Opera Chorus provide rather more spirit here than in other G&S. Hammond-Stroud does not let his fine voice and professional experience get in the way of a delightful reading. Fryatt provides a capable foil vocally and physically, though one wishes he were a decade younger. Dugdale and Collins look and act their roles superbly and sing quite well. The other solo parts are filled in the right spirit with good voices.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and reasonably well lighted. Monaural sound is bright and conveys voices quite well. Video direction is unobtrusive and effective. The only ground on which this performance can reasonably be faulted is critical: it never takes off!

# **Pirates of Penzance**

## **Sullivan**

Conductor: Carriere  
Company: Stratford (Canada)

Frederic: Hyslop  
Mabel: Tomlin  
Pirate King: Carver  
Ruth: Galloway  
Major-General: Chamberlain

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Campbell

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Delightful

### PRODUCTION

Exuberant live production on a modest scale. Sets are simple and literal. Costumes are conventional and appropriate. Enunciation is superb and every word is savored (including those of Gilbert, some added for the production, and a few inspired by accident of performance), Musical modifications are minor and fitting. The young performers are inspired in projection and propulsion.

### PERFORMANCES

Carriere is fully in touch with the spirit of the work but never sacrifices precision for interpretation. The small orchestra plays as precisely as any chamber group; the chorus is both sprightly and understandable. Hyslop's voice is thin and nasal but not unpleasant; his enunciation and enthusiasm more than compensate. Tomlin epitomizes Mabel with accurate fioriture and contrived simplicity. Both Carver and Galloway are sufficient vocally and look their parts; Chamberlain is a delight in all respects. The other solo rôles are handled superbly.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well focussed. Audio is clear and orchestral sound is well resolved in stereo. Lighting is sufficient and video direction is exemplary. Overall, this performance epitomizes a style of Gilbert and Sullivan that exploits tradition without being bound by it.

# Pirates of Penzance

## Sullivan

Conductor: Faris  
Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Frederic: Oliver  
Mabel: Kelly  
Pirate King: Allen  
Ruth: Knight  
Major-General: Michell

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Greenberg

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Peculiar but successful fusion of live performances. Sets are at variance with tradition in concept but not in style, beginning on Dover beach. Costumes are elaborate and colorful extensions of the traditional. Action is more precious than restrained. The pirates are prissy; the girls, dowdy. The result is an intriguing variant, but not the genuine Savoyard goods.

### PERFORMANCES

Faris begins with a brighter, lighter reading than is his wont; unfortunately, much of that variance is quickly lost. The orchestra is supple and delicate; the chorus is relatively direct. Oliver is less than accurate and hardly persuasive, but commits few blatant errors. Kelly invites (demands?) comparison with Julie Andrews by her vocal and dramatic style; she comes off a pleasant second in the competition. Michell is about average as the star comic character, with enough voice to get through the part. Knight supplies a pleasant surprise; the other soloists are capable if not notable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is satisfactory, though neither as sharp nor as well lighted as the studio venue should have generated. Sound is crisp with good stereo to resolve the intertwining voices. Direction is nearly unnoticed; a few imaginative shots might have brightened the performance at little cost.



# Pirates of Penzance

## Sullivan

Conductor: Elliott  
Company: Film

Frederic: Smith  
Mabel: Ronstadt  
Pirate King: Kline  
Ruth: Lansbury  
Major-General: Rose

LaserDisc  
English  
Director: Leach

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Elaborate, excessive film interpretation. Sets are expanded from conventional with outrageous props. Costumes are brilliantly literal. Gilbert's text has been "corrected" and extended to no apparent advantage. No style can be discerned overall, though some elements are persuasively British and others simply clash. Lip sync and enunciation are up to cinematic standards.

### PERFORMANCES

Elliott conducts the movie score capably, with no evidence of its operatic roots; none of the singers seems constrained by classical vocal requirements. Chorus and orchestra are thoroughly competent. Rex Smith earns fifth billing; he is boyish and spirited and sings occasionally. Ronstadt may not croon as well as Smith, but neither does she have half the cast swooning. Kline's pirate king buckles his swash effectively and makes no objectionable noises. Lansbury's overacting and simplistic singing at least approximate the tradition. Rose comes close to that standard as well, but is overwhelmingly cute and clever. The other singers manage the farce reasonably well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well balanced. Stereo sound is more than sufficient to disclose the minimal virtues of the performance. Camera work is routine but effective. Pop fans may enjoy this parody, but it will certainly offer no pleasure to one wishing to experience either Gilbert's words or Sullivan's music.

# Ruddigore Sullivan

Conductor: Faris  
Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Ruthven: Michell  
Rose: Duydale  
Despard: Price  
Dauntless: Treleaven  
Rose: Dugdale

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Gavin

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

A collection of live segments without audience. Sets are simplified cartoons of the conventional. Costumes are also in ye olde tradition. Action is neither fitted to the opera stage nor appropriate for the dramatic theater; the soloist superstars unblance the ensembles critical to any G&S. Enunciation is clear and subtitles are unnecessary.

## PERFORMANCES

Faris is more respectful than inspired, but holds the capable forces together at a reasonable, if hardly breakneck pace. Duydale and Treleaven seem comfortable with the idiom and sing and act superbly. Michell sings competently at best, hams shamelessly, and appears to have a ball. (Vincent) Price does his star turn with expected exuberance and predictably without voice. The other soloists seem to be Savoyards and ameliorate the extremes of Michell and Price.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp, though strangely underlighted in critical scenes. Sound is adequate, emphasizing the stage to the advantage of diction but not of music. Direction is oddly suggestive, bordering on the erotic. Camera work is competent, although under these ideal conditions, better should have been available.

# Sorcerer Sullivan

Conductor: Faris  
Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Wells: Revill  
Doctor: Kernan  
Alexis: Oliver  
Aline: Christie

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Heather

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Simplified, stylized live performance without audience. Sets are colorful and exploit the television medium by mixing stage images with flashbacks and changes impossible in real time. Costumes are brilliant and conventional. Stage movement is in the usual overstated style for G&S, providing physical comedy to match the verbal. Enunciation is sufficient; subtitles would be superfluous.

## PERFORMANCES

Faris provides precision without fire, leading a studied performance instead of a buoyant one. The London Symphony and the Ambrosian Opera Chorus seem content with such a static interpretation and provide sounds that match. Revill alone among the soloists lacks an operatic voice and hams naturally; despite Faris' indulgence, he can't make the tempo of the patter song. The lovers are young and attractive, the priest is suitably pedantic, and the minor characters take rather a more serious tone than one would like but sing and act reliably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and colors are accurate, but someone seems to have conserved electricity to the detriment of the picture. Monaural sound is adequate, but improved high frequencies might have brightened the mood somewhat. Overall, this is a solid introduction to the opera if not the delight one would have hoped.

# Trial by Jury

## Sullivan

Conductor: Faris

Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Judge: Howard

Edwin: Davies

Ann: Dawson

Angelina: Flowers

Usher: Bryson

Broadcast

English

Director: Bailey

Date: ~1980

Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Collection of live performances beginning in a set of superfluous bedrooms. The opera proper is set in a conventional courtroom with conventional costumes and uninspired action. Enunciation is good, but the chorus' essential contributions would be improved with subtitles.

### PERFORMANCES

Faris is accurate and uninspired, as usual. The orchestra is brighter than customary, the chorus more sonorous. Howard's substitute for singing is not compensated by his hamming. In contrast, Davies and Bryson are outstanding vocally and stylistically. Flowers' voice is paradoxical: a conventional lyric upper range with a strange, almost masculine lower register; her acting is more cute than necessary, but not objectionable. The other performers are unusually capable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is only moderately sharp and lighting is flat but sufficient. Although stereo sound was available, the review copy is in acceptable monaural; enunciation problems are not traceable to the audio recording. Direction is painfully busy, seeming to change viewpoint with every line of text.

# Yeomen of the Guard

## Sullivan

Conductor: Faris  
Company: *ad hoc* (London)

Elsie: Gale  
Fairfax: Hillman  
Phoebe: Powell  
Jack Point: Gray

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Heather

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Assemblage of live performances without audience. Conventional sets and costumes ring true; acting is unusually natural and appropriate. Stage direction is delightful and exploits the medium well. Enunciation is fine for the soloists but inadequate for the chorus.

### PERFORMANCES

Faris cannot find the fun in this work and occasionally fails to keep the forces coordinated. The orchestra plods along efficiently. The chorus seems larger than one would like, providing sonority instead of precision. Gale seems ideal visually and vocally; Powell is little less. Gray underplays the role, but is a pleasure as well. Hillman looks fine, but acts and sings less than the rôle calls for. The supporting cast is uniformly capable vocally but rather out of the action.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft but almost adequately lighted so detail is visible if not crisp. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is sufficient for the soloists, compounds the blurring of the chorus, and barely represents the orchestra. Direction is very good, using the cameras both cleverly and with restraint to lead the viewer through the opera.

# Tomorrow and Tomorrow Sullivan, T.

Conductor: Armenian  
Company: Canada

Woman: Neufeld

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Mak/Roland

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Film interpretation of a contemporary chamber opera. Sets are abstract and symbolic or idealized literal; special effects provide images consonant with the music but not realizable in the theater. Dress is realistic for each stage in the Woman's development. Enunciation is good, but far short of what would be needed to understand the words without assistance. Intercutting of "present" time and flashbacks is powerfully implemented.

## PERFORMANCES

One must assume Armenian's interpretation is the composer/librettist's; it certainly feels right. The reduced orchestra seems comfortable with the idiom but could use more *brio* in the realistic scenes. [Absent a score, the similarity of tonality to Stravinsky's is used as a basis for judgement.] Neufeld is also at home with the score and manages the relatively easy line with lovely tone and careful phrasing.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Broadcast engineering wreaks its accustomed havoc: saturated video causing breakup and distortions in an otherwise sharp and well-lighted image. Stereo sound also suffers from overmodulation and from the effects of video distortion on the HiFi recording. Direction is fascinating and creates a fullness the score alone cannot manage. A technically sound recording would make an attractive companion piece to *Voix Humaine* or *The Telephone*.

# Dangerous Liaisons

Susa

Conductor: Runnicles  
Company: San Francisco

Marquise: von Stade  
Vicomte: Hampson  
Tourvel: Fleming  
Volanges: Forst  
Rosemonde: Meier  
Danceney: Hobson

Broadcast  
English / English subtitles  
Director: Halvorson

Date: 1994  
Evaluation: Definitive

## PRODUCTION

Stunning, live premiere. The opening set resembles a Watteau interior; the remainder of the scenes use props against a neutral backdrop to suggest the scene. Costumes are literal for the period and attractive for all performers. The acting is so fine as to dominate the performance; the result approaches a play with musical accompaniment.

## PERFORMANCES

Runnicles holds all forces together effectively; with no referent, one cannot determine whether the lack of dynamics should be attributed to the score or to its reading. The orchestra is without audible flaw. Von Stade seems too young for her rôle, an illusion she sheds only in the later scenes; otherwise, she sings and acts impeccably. Hampson makes the perfect seducer physically and vocally. Fleming acts more awkwardly but sings superbly. The other characters seem ideal—rough around the edges due to youth or age as appropriate.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well lighted, suppressing irrelevant background detail. Audio is clean and up to modern standards, with good stereo separation and stage imaging. Camera work and overall direction are excellent though recognizably different from the work of Large, Browning and the other established directors. In short, if this music appeals, the present recording is essential.

# Transformations

Susa

Conductor: Brunelle  
Company: Minnesota

Women: Brandt  
Hardy  
Hunter  
Men: Myers  
Riley  
Sutton  
Wahman  
Wexler

Broadcast  
English  
Director: King/Balk

Date: ~1977  
Evaluation: Delightful

## PRODUCTION

Unique live staging apparently before a token audience. The “set” is a collection of panels serving as drops, props, beds, chalkboards, and a variety of other tools. Costumes are white, quilted sleepwear. The work is as much dance as opera, and choreography is essential to the telling of the revisionist fairy tales.

## PERFORMANCES

There is no referent for the performances, but both singers and orchestra sound comfortable in the idiom. The only antecedent for the work would seem to be Menotti’s madrigal, “*The Unicorn the Gorgon and the Manticore*,” though that relies on sarcasm instead of buoyant wit. Two of the men are not credited; none can or should be singled out for comment.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is diffuse and (on the review copy) noisy. Lighting is barely adequate, which is hardly surprising in so early a recording. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate. Video direction is capable, but abrupt transitions interrupt the flow of music and stories. Overall, this is a problematic, enjoyable, minor work given a fine performance. An enterprising student group might be inspired by the recording to try it on stage.



# Eugene Onegin

## Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Bartoletti

Company: Chicago

Tatiana: Freni

Olga: Walker

Onegin: Brendel

Lensky: Dvorsky

Gremin: Ghiaurov

Broadcast

Russian / English subtitles

Director: Browning

Date: 1985

Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Lush live production. Literal settings are compressed easily onto a relatively small stage. Costumes are brilliant and focus attention effectively. Action is well integrated to aid in the fusion of the performance into a fully enjoyable whole.

### PERFORMANCES

Baroletti's reading has great fervor and a clear beat; lack of a Russian style seems irrelevant. The orchestra is superbly consistent with the conductor, providing a rich underpinning for the singers. The chorus is admirable except in portions of the ball scene where they seem unable to see Bartoletti's beat. Freni is a gem, dropping decades of real age to portray Tatiana in one of her best performances. Brendel is a bit rough and approximate for Onegin, but projects the character well. Walker is a delightful and effective counterpart of Freni, a sister in quality of sound and in style. Dvorsky is on the heroic side of the Lensky spectrum but no less satisfying for that. Ghiaurov is ideal. While lesser rôles are not filled quite as well, none poses a dramatic or vocal problem.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and sharp though lighting does not quite fill in shadow detail. Audio is excellent, with effective stereo providing good stage imaging and facilitating resolution of the lush sound. Camera work cannot be faulted despite the presence of an appreciative audience. The result is a performance finer than its admirable components would suggest, one certainly worthy of commercial distribution.

# Eugene Onegin

## Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Khaikin  
Company: Bolshoi

Tatiana: Vishnevskaya  
Olga: Avdeyeva  
Onegin: Kibkalo  
Lenski: Grigoriev  
Gremin: Petrov

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Tikhomirov

Date: ~1957  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Lush and lovely film version of the opera. With one exception (Petrov), the actors do not sing. Lighting and camera work reflect expertise of the director and contribute to the beauty of the film as a scenic experience. The atmosphere and melodrama are conveyed impeccably. The film records an absolutely literal reading of the music in an entirely realistic staging.

### PERFORMANCES

Khaikin conducts a lyrical and delightful reading and the orchestra serves him well. Vishnevskaya is at her considerable best, and, like Kibkalo, is very much at home in the music and the rôle. Grigoriev is a substantial disappointment, especially since the similar and nearly concurrent audio recording offers Lemeshev's memorable Lenski. Avdeyeva complements Vishnevskaya well, and Petrov's Gremin is polished and comfortable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monaural sound is undistorted but very limited in both tonal and dynamic range. Video quality is fine, superior to recent film showings. Lip sync is given little more than lip service, but the disconnection is great enough to be satisfactory in its own way. Overall, this is an acceptable record of a fine performance (though perhaps a routine one) of a major work.

# Eugene Onegin

## Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Royal Opera

Tatiana: Kubiak  
Olga: Hamari  
Lensky: Burrows  
Onegin: Weikl  
Gremmin: Ghiaurov

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Weigl

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Film coordinated with fine audio recording. Literal, beautiful sets and costumes and a Czech cast of actors are effectively synchronized to the conducting and singing. Movement is formal where appropriate, but otherwise quite natural.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti leads brilliant chorus and orchestra in a stirring reading. Weikl is accurate and appropriately gruff in sound. Kubiak sounds too mature for Tatiana and lacks grace for the part. Burrows' Lenski is admirable in every way, though he does not attempt the sound of a Russian tenor. Hamari and Ghiaurov are excellent and the supporting cast is fine. Sénéchal's Triquet is delicious.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are superb. Film direction is unexceptionable, maintaining attention on the appropriate elements without distraction. Yet somehow one remains always aware that the singers are not acting; there is a resulting barrier between the viewer and the opera that precludes the sort of involvement one finds in the best live performances.

# Joan of Arc Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Bernardi  
Company: Canada

Joan: Vernon  
Dauphin: Duval  
Lionel: Edwards  
Dunois: Turgeon  
Archbishop: Gill

Broadcast copy  
English  
Director: Sutherland

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance of a new English translation. Sets are minimal and often inexplicable. Costumes fit the stylized interpretation of the period, although again with oddities such as a gown on a peasant. Movement is more theatric than operatic, with fine portrayals from soloists. Enunciation is not clear and solos, ensembles and choruses would all have benefitted from subtitles.

## PERFORMANCES

Bernardi's reading is nearly uninflected but both romantic and steady. The orchestra is fine but a bit smaller in scale and tone than would be ideal. The chorus is substantially smaller than the sound demands, but its contribution is not essential. Vernon supplies a rich spinto of moderate size and substantial inflection; her characterization and singing are admirable. Turgeon makes little of his modest opportunities, but offers fine declamation and relatively decipherable diction. Duval postures awkwardly while singing with distinction. Edwards' baritone is used with skill and art, but he hams shamelessly. Some supporting characters are vocally weak, others (notably Gill) brighten the performance considerably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality appears to have been good originally, though the review copy suffers losses due to duplication. Lighting is insufficient and neither backgrounds nor shadow detail can be resolved. Monaural sound is inherently very good but miking results in diffuse echoes confounding understanding the text. Direction is good, uncompromised by the audience and generally concentrated on the primary action. Overall, this is a solid, creditable performance of a significant rarity.

# Queen of Spades

## Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Davis

Company: Glyndebourne

Herman: Marusin

Liza: Gustafson

Countess: Palmer

Yeletsky: Kharitonov

Tomsky: Leiferkus

LaserDisc

Russian / English subtitles

Director: Maniura

Date: 1992

Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Stunning live performance. Dominating the set is an abstract background, colored appropriately for each scene and splashed with black streaks; some materials are abstract, some props are literal, leading to uncertainty as to whether the set is real or an artifact of Herman's madness. Costumes are strictly traditional; except for excess in the Countess' makeup, all other aspects are restrained but committed. Acting is superbly natural.

### PERFORMANCES

Davis leads a steady performance with a capable if unspectacular orchestra. The chorus is subdued but accurate. Marusin is vocally accurate and dramatically riveting. Gustafson's singing and appearance are beautiful but she fails to communicate desperation. Palmer and Leiferkus are ideal; despite his youth, Kharitonov suffers a vibrato that reduces his impact. Smaller rôles are handled capably. Unfortunately, much of the impact of the Russian text is lost through a smoothing of consonants by the British component.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear although the subdued lighting is frequently a hindrance; some augmentation for recording would have helped. Audio is superb with true stereo imaging but no surround effect. Camera work is fine in itself but video direction is erratic and occasionally disconcerting. The overall effect is even finer than the components. The word "riveting" cannot be avoided and the recording is recommended without reservation.

# Queen of Spades

## Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Gergiev  
Company: Mariinski

Herman: Grigorian  
Liza: Gulegina  
Countess: Filatova  
Yeletsky: Gergalov  
Tomsky: Leiferkus  
Pauline: Borodina

LaserDisc  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: April 1992  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in classic style. Sets and costumes are strictly of the period in all their color and glory. Passion is conveyed through the music rather than being embodied in histrionics. Acting balances toward conventional operatic posturing instead of modern dramaturgy. The wide-screen format permits most of the captions to be out of frame.

### PERFORMANCES

Gergiev's drive and the orchestra's sonority compel attention to the score at all times. The chorus is fine as well. Gergiev uses his lyric voice well in a rôle inherently too weighty for him; he does not distort the tone and so does not convey anguish. Gulegina seems at first too light for Lisa, but comes into her own magnificently. Filatova's instrument causes her to exaggerate the Countess' infirmity in a less-than-memorable performance. Leiferkus is superb, Gergalov is a bit overmatched, and the smaller solo roles are filled superbly. The luxury of casting Borodina as Pauline pays off handsomely.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent overall, but somewhat underlighted even in the opening scene. Sound is spectacular, even to effective surround. Unfortunately, the audio and video direction are not fully integrated; at times, action toward one wing is centered in the visual field but markedly offset sonically. Otherwise, direction is excellent. Rather more often here than in other Mariinski recordings, Gergiev's arms are visible above the floor of the stage; otherwise, camera work is impeccable. Overall, the Glyndebourne is a more compelling experience; this is the more suitable for study.

# Queen of Spades

## Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Simonov  
Company: Bolshoi

Herman: Atlantov  
Liza: Malashkina  
Countess: Obraztsova  
Yeletsky: Mazurok  
Tomsky: Grigorian

VHS Copy  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Semenov

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an audience which interrupts with applause. Sets are conventional but relatively sparse. Costumes are conventional for the period. The impression is of an economy production with a few stars. Primitive acting and general lack of imagination make the work seem overlong.

### PERFORMANCES

Simonov emphasizes the fine orchestra almost to the point of distortion of balances. Atlantov is excellent: fully human, expressing anguish *con forza* rather than by pressing his voice. Malashkina is shrill and staid, but not objectionable. Obraztsova is magnificent. The minor rôles are capably filled, but tend to blend into a nondescript background.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear in spite of the poor quality of the review copy. Monaural sound is not adequate to appreciate the orchestra, but conveys the voices clearly. Direction is solid with few closeups and few abrupt cuts. Overall, this performance is quite competitive with if not quite up to those of Glyndebourne and St. Petersburg.

# Queen of Spades Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Svetlanov

Company: Bolshoi

Herman: Andzhaparidze

Lisa: Milashkina

Countess: Preobrazhenskaya

Eletsky: Meldvedev

Tomsky: Nechipailo

Pauline: Avdeyeva

LaserDisc

Russian / English subtitles

Director: Tikhomirov

Date: 1960

Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Film unable to illuminate the dark story and music. It does faithfully convey Pushkin's and Tchaikowsky's work in a conventional (unimaginative) B movie. The grand scenes are grand, the exteriors and interiors are equally attractive as scenery.

## PERFORMANCES

Svetlanov provides a routine run-through of a standard work. The orchestra is uninspired as well. None of the singers is notable, none is objectionable. One wishes for some of the exceptional interpreters of audio recording even of that era.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The mono sound is limited but adequate. Video quality is sufficient and unobtrusive, far better than has been available in the film revival houses. Even to a Russian, this performance would serve more as a stopgap than as a treasure of the work. To most others, it will serve as a sufficient introduction — or as evidence that while Eugene Onegin was not Tchaikowsky's only opera, it may be the only one the viewer needs to know.



# Queen of Spades

## Tchaikowsky

Conductor: Nelsson  
Company: Philadelphia

Herman: Popov  
Lisa: Evstatieva  
Countess: Crespin  
Elensky: Miller  
Tomsky: Monk  
Pauline: Ciurca

Broadcast  
Russian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Careful, miscast live production. Sets are minimal, but not representational. Costumes are not balanced and seem to come from individual performers' trunks. Stage movement is often chaotic (chorus), sometimes posed (principal soloists), and never persuasive.

### PERFORMANCES

Nelsson appears to have a clear idea of his objectives, but is defeated by the singers. However, the orchestra is rich, even lush, and fully responsive. The chorus seems disconnected from the performance and provides little of its essential contribution. Popov is a bit light, but would be acceptable were he not so careful—and often short of top notes. Evstatieva is fine, but does not even approach Lisa vocally or dramatically. Crespin offers a relic of a great voice, but should not have presented it on an opera stage. Some lesser rôles are filled capably, but most soloists are plagued with vocal and dramatic problems.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is fairly good, with sharp images but inadequate lighting. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is problematic: frequency range and dynamics are not bad for the era, but erratic volume might stem from faulty combination of stereo channels. Television direction is distracting at best, arbitrary throughout, and occasionally demanding attention away from the score and the action. Simply put, the video devices ensure that neither an illusion of Czarist Russia nor a sense of presence in a theater can be maintained. This performance provides a whole which is less than the sum of its unimpressive parts.

# King Priam Tippett

Conductor: Norrington  
Company: Kent

Priam: Macann  
Andromache: Walker  
Paris: Haskin  
Hector: Ebrahim  
Achilles: Jenkins

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Lough

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Stark live performance made for television. Most sets are merely featureless drops and minimal props; some are relatively elaborate, forcing attention back to the physical world. Costumes mix modern and hypermodern and ancient dress for timelessness. Acting is superb vocally and physically. The male/female dichotomy is stressed in staging as well as in the music.

## PERFORMANCES

Norrington's lean, acerbic reading matches score and staging. The band is small and precise. Macann's baritone is rich and comfortable in the complex lines. Haskin has problems with the vocal line; it is simply beyond his reach on occasion. All of the other singing is remarkably precise and expressive in the atonal material. (In practice, the musical modality rapidly seems absolutely right and involving.) Hancorn's Patroclus is particularly notable for the quality and intensity of bass sound from so young and effective a performer. Ebrahim is comparable in physical and vocal representation; the women and the other men are impressive but not as clearly differentiated from one another.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but badly compromised by broadcast engineering in the review copy. Monaural sound limits appreciation of the orchestra but clearly and brightly conveys the voices. Lighting is ample throughout, and balances in complex scenes such as those with diffusion are well chosen. Video direction is uniquely for film, to the extent that one wonders how an effective stage presentation could be effected. Granted that Tippett's idiom will not appeal to all, this performance should be sought out by those who are not turned off by modern vocal music; it is exceptional.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: Scala

Aida: Chiara  
Amneris: Dimitrova  
Radames: Pavarotti  
Amonasro: Pons  
Ramfis: Ghiaurov  
King: Burchuladze

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Bailey

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Spectacular

## PRODUCTION

Spectacular staging from La Scala, Milan. Costumes and scenery are strictly traditional; special effects are appropriately grand and effective. This is a live performance essentially without flaw as a record of Aida in Verdi's style. The reading, staging, and production are literal and are honest to the composer.

## PERFORMANCES

Maazel conducts solidly and the orchestra performs with surprising vigor given the "warhorse" they are playing. Chiara is light and lyric for the role, but conveys much of it expertly. Pavarotti lacks the ring one might wish, but provides a lyrical Radames in the Gigli style. Dimitrova is imperious, steely, and accurate—virtually ideal. Pons and Burchuladze are capable; Ghiaurov is vocally trying. The ballet is somewhat less banal than usual and is well integrated with the staging.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is exemplary for live performance. Somehow, the camera work seems right throughout despite the limitations the stage would have imposed. Sound quality is superb. The overall effect is as grand as the production and the opera itself. The impact on the small screen with built-in speaker falls far short of the potential of this recording; the bigger the picture and sound, the better.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Toscanini  
Company: NBC Symphony

Aida: Nelli  
Amneris: Gustavson  
Radames: Tucker  
Amonasro: Valdengo  
Ramfis: Scott  
King: Harbour

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: ?

Date: 1949  
Evaluation: Exceptional

## PRODUCTION

Concert version of the opera, with neither staging nor costumes. Done on consecutive weeks (Acts I, II: 26 March; Acts III, IV: 2 April), Nelli's change of outfit is distracting. All others are in somber tones throughout.

## PERFORMANCES

Toscanini is the overwhelming force of the performance. The orchestra and vocalists are absolutely responsive to him and the score is presented with absolute fidelity yet with a remarkable freshness. Nelli's voice is less attractive than would have been many alternatives of the day, and neither Gustavson nor Valdengo will be remembered for contributions to their parts. Tucker's Radames is more than respectable. The other voices are fully acceptable and the choral work is exemplary. The reason for this performance is Toscanini; it does not disappoint.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio reconstruction is excellent, quite comparable with audio-only performances of the time. Video quality (monochrome) is far superior to previous releases, but suffers heavily from its age with smearing of bright lights, imperfections of the cameras, and poor resolution. Camera work is remarkably good, foreshadowing almost all modern techniques of concert video. One wishes for contemporary video and audio quality only until one is captured by a unique and extraordinary performance.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Schippers  
Company: Orange

Aida: Cruz-Romo  
Amneris: Bumbry  
Radames: Gougalov  
Amonasro: Wixell  
Ramfis: Ferrin  
King: Roni

LaserDisc  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Jourdan

Date: 1976  
Evaluation: Very good

## PRODUCTION

Live, continuous audio with video assembled from multiple performances. The amphitheater provides an adequate backdrop as a 'set'. Costumes are conventional. Acting ranges from wooden (Gougalov) through effective (Cruz-Romo, Wixell) to excessive (Bumbry). Several cuts mar the LD release: a few seconds of recitative before "Ritorna vincitor", some ballet music, and the first minutes of Act III are noticeable.

## PERFORMANCES

Schippers chooses brisk tempi which are beyond the Turin orchestra's limited resources. The chorus hangs in somewhat better. Cruz-Romo never sings above mezzoforte, but is fine within her dynamic range. Bumbry would be hard to fault if she offered more vocal and less physical passion. Gougalov lacks legato but sings all the notes adequately. Wixell and the other singers are more than up to their tasks.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is generally better than in Jourdan's other efforts at Orange and the other efforts of the era. Audio is problematic with erratic levels, frequent imbalance of the stereo, and echo effects which seem to stem from a misguided effort to 'correct' Verdi. Direction is so choppy at times as to be dizzying. Nevertheless, the recording works in its way and provides relief from overproduced and overemotional readings.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Guadagno  
Company: Verona

Aida: Chiara  
Amneris: Cossotto  
Radames: Martinucci  
Amonasro: Scandola  
Ramfis: Zardo  
King: Zanazzo

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Grand presentation in the immense amphitheater. Everything except the solo singing is scaled to the dimensions of the arena, but the staging is limited by the physical constraints (no stage or machinery, dominant staircase). Costuming and scenery are traditional and neither colorful nor imaginative.

## PERFORMANCES

Guadagno conducts a conventional and stodgy reading of the score. Chiara pushes a modest instrument beyond its limits and is altogether inferior here to the Scala. Cossotto is less stressed, but no more convincing. Neither Martinucci nor Scandola offers any virtue but volume, and neither is loud enough to get through the rôle without screaming at least occasionally. All other soloists are audible, if not memorable. The chorus is immense and adequately trained.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio quality is adequate given the environment, but provides neither impact nor transparency. Video is satisfactory also, but suffers severely from the limited lighting and impossible camera positions of the immense setting. There is no respect in which this version can be recommended over the Scala performance except for the vicarious experience of the amphitheater.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Aida: Millo  
Amneris: Zajick  
Radames: Domingo  
Amonasro: Milnes  
Ramfis: Burchuladze  
King: Kavrakos

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 7 October 1989  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Sumptuous, solid, stolid, and immense live performance. Staging emphasizes the vastness of the Met and loses any hint of intimacy. Costumes are traditional and brilliant. Stage movement is stilted.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine is strictly correct but cannot bring fire to the reading. The orchestra is well drilled; the chorus is fine, especially in its movement. Even the ballet is handled well. Millo sings perfectly, and is perfectly uninvolved. Domingo lacks ring and commitment, but both sounds and looks good. Milnes cannot manage even Amonasro competently at this stage. Zajick provides the best performance overall in a very old style. Lesser parts are handled better than the principal ones.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are (as always from the Met) superb. Lighting is somewhat less brilliant than might be desired, but apparently by design. Camera work is unobtrusive and effective, and has no responsibility for the viewer's lack of involvement. This performance may be recommended for study of the score, but not as a theatrical experience.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Navarro  
Company: San Francisco

Aida: M. Price  
Amneris: Toczyska  
Radames: Pavarotti  
Amonasro: Estes  
Ramfis: Rydl  
King: Langan

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Large

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Moderately scaled live performance. Sets are grand in concept but modest in execution; they are colorful and traditional in representing ancient Egypt. Costumes are simplistic and unimaginative. The individuals move through their rôles without relating to each other.

## PERFORMANCES

Navarro leads a dead standard interpretation. The orchestra and chorus are accurate and responsive. Margaret Price is grossly overmatched by the role; all sounds are lovely, but none conveys passion. Pavarotti seems afraid of his role, and is similarly overtaxed by its demands. Toczyska and Estes grasp their parts and bring suitable instruments to them; their interpretations are valid and well presented. Rydl sounds dry and uninvolved. The minor characters are capably portrayed.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is the equal of the finest contemporary product; sound is only a little short of that standard. Large also seems responsible for outstanding camera work, preserving the feel of the stage while focussing on soloists whenever there is hope of expression from them. The historical interest in Pavarotti's early Radames and Price's only(?) Aida make this a performance worth seeing. Its musical and dramatic limitations keep it from being one to cherish.



# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Tchakarov  
Company: Houston

Aida: Freni  
Amneris: Toczyska  
Radames: Domingo  
Amonasro: Wixell  
Ramfis: Ghiaurov  
King: Langan

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Stylish, representational, and minimalist staging before a large and responsive audience. Sets are brilliant though sketchy, establishing place effectively and economically. Costumes are conventional for the singers, imaginative for the dancers. Stage movement is on a smaller scale than usual, but it works well. There is an impression of insufficient rehearsal, showing as differing concepts of stage movements as well as lack of fusion in ensemble singing.

## PERFORMANCES

Tchakarov's direction is solid and effective, if uninspired. The chorus and orchestra try enthusiastically, but are not up to the demands of the score. Freni is over her head dramatically, but she uses her modest instrument with great skill and provides lovely sounds throughout—even when forceful ones are called for. Domingo is stolid as Radames: accurate, committed, and communicative. Wixell's voice is frayed and shows no evidence that it was ever the sound needed for Amonasro. Toczyska is excellent in all respects, though she tends to outshine Freni because she is so well suited to her role. Ghiaurov shows his age, but handles the rôle as well as anyone in a video performance; Langan is equally fine and his sound contrasts effectively with Ghiaurov's. Choreography is refreshingly different from the routine and appropriate for the production, but its performance is shabby.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent for the broadcast source, though there is little stereo separation or stage image in the sound. Lighting is generous and most effective in conveying the production. Camera work is exemplary, altogether without compromise from the presence of the audience. Musically, this performance cannot approach Toscanini's; dramatically, it falls far behind the standard established by Scala. Nevertheless, it should be seen and heard as a viable and lyrical alternative to traditional staging.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Aida: Price  
Amneris: Cossotto  
Radames: McCracken  
Amonasro: Estes  
Ramfis: Macurdy  
King: Kavrakos

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Historic

## PRODUCTION

Price's farewell to the Met. The staging is conventionally grand and effective, with literal sets and costumes in bright colors. Stage direction is minimal; the performers pose as they wish to emote in primitive fashion. Visually, this performance is a throwback to an earlier era of opera.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts effectively, neither overindulging the soloists nor forcing them to comply with his ideas. Orchestra and chorus are well drilled as always, yet seem to join Levine in a performance much more than routine. Price's tone is darker than in her earlier days and the top notes are unsteady; overall, she is more nearly "right" for the role than in her salad days. McCracken has the right timbre and once past an awkward *Celeste Aida* sings well. Cossotto harkens back to the over-ripe mezzos and altos of earlier decades: accurate notes and exaggerated intonation. Estes is outstanding as Amonasro, one of the finest on record. The other singers are accomplished in routine style and round out the evening effectively.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The sound is of the usual Met standard: full, rich, accurate, and representing the house experience. Video is excellent for the era, suffering only from exaggerated contrast due to lighting limitations. Camera movement appears unhampered by the presence of an audience, and Large's direction is as accomplished as always.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Morelli  
Company: film

Aida: Tebaldi  
Radames: Campora  
Amneris: Stignani  
Amonasro: Bechi  
Ramfis: Formichi  
King: Neri

Broadcast  
Italian / English description  
Director: Fracassi

Date: 1951  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Extraordinary bastardization of an opera film. Visuals are purely cinematic in a spaghetti-western sense with caricatures of Egyptian sets and costumes and a non-singing visual cast. The voice-over narration and extreme editing of the music (including some additions and 50% deletion) make this a curious and indefinable performance. Surprisingly, much of the lip sync is competent.

## PERFORMANCES

What Morelli has of a score is conducted competently but at breakneck pace. The orchestra and chorus seem reduced in size to manage the tempi. Tebaldi's ravishing tone is evident but there is too little of the rôle left for even vocal portrayal to be meaningful. Campora is better here than in his audio recordings, although hardly a Radames by the standards of the day. Stignani and Bechi provide moments of the best of Verdi in the good-old style. The supporting characters are capable of better, and one wishes that a modern performance could approach the virtues of this one.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The broadcast print is in poor condition but still colorful and suggestive of quality if the negative could be found. Monaural sound is adequate for voices only. Direction is competent but cinematic distractions abound. If a good transfer were available, it would be worth seeing at least once—and hearing often.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Capuana  
Company: Tokyo

Aida: Tucci  
Amneris: Simionato  
Radames: del Monaco  
Amonasro: Protti  
Ramfis: Washington  
King: Pagliuca

VHS  
Italian / English, Japanese  
Director: ?

Date: 13 October 1961  
Evaluation: Fair

## PRODUCTION

Confused, choppy live performance from Tokyo. Sets use limited space on the stage effectively despite fundamental simplicity, Costumes range from the primitive to the ludicrous, with Amonasro's Hottentot outfit especially offensive; they rival stage movement in inspiring mirth, though neither matches the chorus's and orchestra's futile attempts to apply their Japanese preparation to the ideas of the idiosyncratic Italian conductor. Acting is ludicrous throughout; no soloist appears ever to address another, and several seem to focus all movement on upstaging their colleagues. The simple choreography is carried off well.

## PERFORMANCES

Capuana rushes through the performance with virtually no inflection or expression. The orchestra seems to lack some of the instruments Verdi called for; more significantly it does not always agree with Capuana or the singers about entrances and such. The chorus's disagreements are far more frequent and are compounded by articulate but inaccurate Italian. Tucci sings every note and no emotion; her detached vocalism is appreciated by the claque but will be hard on the home viewer. Del Monaco is remarkably out of his element, seeming distracted and unable to manage the lower notes and the climaxes of the rôle. Simionato is an unalloyed delight. Protti is loud and crude, perhaps embarrassed by the production; Washington is capable, but neither Pagliuca nor the comprimarii achieve even that level.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochrome video is execrable, painfully underlighted throughout and never in focus. Monaural sound is somewhat noisier than AM broadcast but otherwise comparable with it in quality. Camera work is abominable when lighting permits the stage to be seen at all; one does not even consistently see a soloist alone on the stage. The failings vanish in Act IV Scene 1, when two great voices show what Verdi is about. Yet Act II Scene 2 shows that even the Triumphal Scene can be defeated when accurate solo voices are the only positive resources.

# Aida Verdi

Conductor: Capuana  
Company: Verona

Aida: Gencer  
Radames: Bergonzi  
Amneris: Cossotto  
Amonasro: Colzani  
Ramfis: Giaiotti

VHS  
Italian  
Director:

Date: 1966  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Film record of a live performance at the great amphitheater. No set is provided but the stadium itself; none is required to reflect the grandeur of the work. Costuming ranges from prosaic to ludicrous, with Amonasro's getup demanding more suspension of disbelief than one is likely to manage. Were acting relevant, it might be missed; instead, tonal oratory suffices with grandiloquent gestures in place of drama. Both the dancers and the dancing offer strong arguments for editing Verdi's score.

## PERFORMANCES

Capuana leads without coloration or inflection, but without error. The orchestra is up to the task throughout: loud enough to be heard clearly and seldom far enough from the note to be noticed. Gencer's reading will satisfy or offend depending on one's reaction to her unique sound; the weight is almost sufficient and her commitment is audible. Bergonzi's reading is paradoxical: fine intonation and phrasing, but lacking squillo and vocal credibility. Cossotto, like Gencer, will inspire enthusiasm from some, complaints from others; she tends to overdo everything, though without quite warping the balance out of shape. Colzani's blustering seems inspired by reading Amonasro as a savage rather than as a foreign king; in any event, its only asset is its volume. Giaiotti's bass fills the requirements capably; the other rôles are well cast, though one wishes the Celestial Voice were more celestial.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochromatic video suffers from low lighting and lacks the qualities of contemporary studio films. Audio is adequate in range and noise level but lacks the dynamics that might add excitement. Camera work is remarkably busy, seldom focussing on the essentials for any period of time; part of the problem may be the immense scale of the theater and the staging, but frenetic direction does not compress that stage. In the tradeoff between this performance's superior singing and the later Verona recording's superior technology, one is likely to get more satisfaction from the higher technical quality.

# Attila Verdi

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Attila: Ramey  
Ezio: Zancanaro  
Odabella: Studer  
Foresto: Kaludov  
Uldino: Gavazzi  
Leone: Luperi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Swann

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Spare but lively live performance. Sets are colorful but minimalist, just sufficient to represent the limited range of scenes effectively. The costumes are similarly bright and effective. Stage direction is efficient but does nothing to disturb the image of the work as a sequence of set pieces. The overall effect is to focus attention on the performances rather than the drama, which is quite appropriate in this case.

## PERFORMANCES

Muti remains within the bounds of the score, but seems to surprise the singers with his (arbitrary?, capricious?) tempo changes. Both chorus and orchestra are ragged, suggesting lack of familiarity with the music. Ramey is outstanding, conveying Verdi's image of the direct "king" (not to say brutal or barbaric) with both dramatic and vocal skill. Studer has most of the requirements for a very taxing rôle, but lacks the dramatic weight one would like in some climactic moments. Zancanaro approximates the notes with vigor. Kaludov lacks style, ring, and precision. Gavazzi is not up to even his minimal demands, while Luperi inevitably suffers by comparison with Ramey. Only the most rudimentary variations are provided in *da capo* sections. Even with those limitations, the spirit of the work is conveyed well.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Stereo sound is excellent but the focus is often too heavily on the orchestra, especially in the Prologue. The effect is a relatively thin stage sound, making the small chorus seem even less evocative of Attila's horde, for example. Picture quality is exemplary, with careful focus and apparently accurate representation of the scenes and characters. Lighting is ample and camera work maintains the focus on appropriate elements of the scene without undue busy-ness.

# Attila Verdi

Conductor: Santi  
Company: Verona

Atilla: Nesterenko  
Odabella: Chiara  
Ezio: Carroli  
Foresto: Luchetti  
Uldino: Memeo  
Leone: Brunelli

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Vast staging in grand style before a live audience. This is *Atilla* as the precursor of *Trovatore* where the Scala is post-Rossini. On its own terms, the production works well. Settings are sketchy grey coverings of the amphitheater features, leaving the different camps virtually indistinguishable from one another. Costumes are literal and similarly dull in shade, creating a heavy overall effect not consonant with the performances. Stage direction is minimal. Note that Scene 2 of the Prologue is cut, leaving some loose strands in the “logic” of the libretto.

## PERFORMANCES

Santi leads a middle-Verdi reading with little spark but solid effort. Orchestra and chorus are ample in sonority, though lacking in precision. Nesterenko is fine and authoritative, singing accurately if without fire. Chiara is overmatched in all respects, though her effort is valiant and her commitment shows; nothing she does is truly bad, but nothing illuminates or decorates the score. Carroli is staid, stodgy, and routine. Luchetti has the style and quillante tone the role demands, but his characterization is empty. Memeo is adequate; Brunelli’s Leone is ancient and toothless.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Surprisingly, Large is not truly in command of the *mise en scene*; the rear of props and some intended off-stage changes are visible. Monaural sound is no more than adequate, though a prerecorded version might be superior here. Video is generally accurate, but inadequate lighting and dull tones throughout mitigate against much visual enjoyment. Camera work is better than usual for Verona (though not up to Large’s accomplishments in *Trovatore*). This recording is an interesting alternative staging to the Scala, though overall not up to its level.

# Ballo in Maschera

## Verdi

Conductor: Patane  
Company: Metropolitan

Amelia: Ricciarelli  
Ulrica: Berini  
Oscar: Blegen  
Riccardo: Pavarotti  
Renato: Quilico

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 16 Feb 1980  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

A massive, characteristic Met staging, with traditional and unimaginative sets and costuming. It is well integrated and well directed in all respects.

### PERFORMANCES

Patane conducts capably, but briskly and unimaginatively; almost everything holds together and the soloists have full opportunity to strut their stuff. Pavarotti takes full advantage, and is in excellent voice. Ricciarelli manages an essentially lyric instrument well despite the dramatic demands of the rôle. Berini offers nothing of interest. Blegen is a positive element, though she rather walks through the role. Quilico is better than one might have thought, not yet suffering from the pitch problems of the rest of the decade. The chorus and comprimarii are admirable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft, showing its age compared with later performances. Audio is excellent, as always in the Met productions. Lighting is marginal, accounting for some of the video problems. Camera work is very fine, never intruding on the recording, but always illustrating the most significant elements of the scene. This is a sufficient, if not admirable, reading of the opera.



# Ballo in Maschera

Verdi

Conductor: Abbado

Company: Scala

Riccardo: Pavarotti

Amelia: Zampieri

Renato: Cappuccilli

Ulrica: Obraztsova

Oscar: Mazzucato

Broadcast

Italian

Director: Zeffirelli

Date: 1981

Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Generally conventional live performance more-or-less set in Boston. Sets are conventional; costumes suggest the Puritans, with Ulrica approximately an Amerind. Acting is well integrated and some characterization is visible as the singers move through their rôles.

## PERFORMANCES

Abbado's reading is on the light side of conventional, but is maintained consistently through the work. The orchestra responds well, although imperfections are noticeable. Choral work is more ragged than ideal, but not enough so to be disturbing. Pavarotti sings well, acts a bit, and is almost persuasive as the governor. Zampieri is surprisingly effective, singing well if without special character. Cappuccilli is less crude and closer to pitch than in later performances. Obraztsova is direct and effective, while Mazzucato is bright and pleasant. The lesser roles are capably filled.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is murky at best. Audio is clear, though limited by pre-HiFi mono recording. Camera work is very distracting, with superimpositions at moments of lyric beauty, arbitrary changes of viewpoint and scope of the image, and enforced focus on stage direction rather than on the music and the drama. Lighting is seriously deficient; Act II is little better than a black screen with occasional shadows drifting about more or less in time to the music.

# **Ballo in Maschera**

## **Verdi**

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Riccardo: Pavarotti  
Amelia: Millo  
Renato: Nucci  
Oscar: Blackwell  
Ulrica: Quivar

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Conventional, oversize Met live production. Sets and costumes are essentially traditional, but extraneous stage business intrudes. Movement is exaggerated in the usual manner for the huge stage. Everything is in the style of the old days – except the singing, which doesn't compensate as it did for Bjørling and Milanov (to say nothing of Caruso and Ponselle).

### PERFORMANCES

Levine enlivens much of the score, and controls all of it. The chorus and orchestra are as well drilled and as precise as usual. Pavarotti is in good voice with lovely sounds from an instrument fundamentally too light for the rôle. Millo sounds beautiful, emotes physically, and conveys no character at all. Nucci and Blackwell press, but satisfy. Quivar's mezzo is light, but effectively used.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are superb, conveying a real sense of sitting in a fine orchestra seat. Stereo is exploited well for stage and pit. Lighting seems natural. Camera work is impeccable, and seems uninhibited by the live audience.

# **Ballo in Maschera**

## **Verdi**

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Geneva

Riccardo: Pavarotti  
Amelia: Tomowa-Sintow  
Renato: Cappuccilli  
Ulrica: Dunn  
Oscar: Borst

Broadcast  
Italian / French subtitles  
Director: Bovon

Date: March 1984  
Evaluation: Fair

### PRODUCTION

Choppy, under-rehearsed live performance. Sets are omitted: a single, vast hall with a few props substitutes for settings and occasionally suggests a scene for the action. Costumes are slightly Bostonian in flavor but otherwise conventionally nondescript. Action is of the stand-and-deliver sort, with no significant contribution to the overall experience.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly's concept is bright and fluid; the orchestra and chorus are responsive to his lead, but the soloists destroy the effect consistently. Pavarotti is at his largest and most lethargic and sings with beautiful tone unhampered by inflection. Tomowa-Sintow sobs her way through the rôle with a devastating catch in her voice. Cappuccilli's sense of pitch had deserted him by this performance, although he is still loud and crude. Dunn is similarly beyond the era when she could have managed the fortuneteller's music, and her hamming does not substitute.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is generally clear enough, although the engineering (from French CBC) is marginal. Audio is muddled and distorted by the engineers. Camera work is arbitrary and distracting. Lighting is sufficient to illuminate the confusing staging. Even the subtitles distract in a blatant yellow and a stylized typeface that is hard to read and harder to ignore.

# Ballo in Maschera

## Verdi

Conductor: Buckley  
Company: Philadelphia

Riccardo: Pavarotti  
Anelia: Pierson  
Renato: Ruder  
Ulrica: Berry  
Oscar: Focile

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance much appreciated by the audience, set more or less in Sweden. Sets are simplified but adequate to establish the era. Costumes are traditional. Acting is considered on occasion, but never to the point where it would interfere with a star turn. Occasional diversions are introduced, presumably to keep the listener on his or her toes; they certainly contribute nothing to the opera.

### PERFORMANCES

Buckley is straightforward and effective, providing surprisingly little leeway to the soloists. The orchestra is more than up to his demands and to Verdi's; the chorus never quite gets into either. Pavarotti is at his most substantial and least credible physically and vocally. Pierson is young and attractive with a modest instrument overmatched by the rôle; bad vocal habits bode ill for her evolution. Ruder sounds grossly underprepared and makes Pavarotti appear dynamic. Berry has much to offer but needs seasoning and coaching to use her voice well. Focile is an unusual Oscar: a richer voice than most, used with taste and technique (while she looks and acts sprightly). The conspirators and other minor parts are handled rather well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well focussed. Audio is clear, although any stereo separation is undetectable. The cameras move fluidly and excessively around the stage. Apart from Pavarotti, the principals show promise which is less likely to be fulfilled after efforts such as this. Only the families of those soloists are likely to prefer this performance to any of the others available.

# Don Carlo

## Verdi

Conductor: Pappano  
Company: Chatelet

Carlo: Alagna  
Rodrigo: Hampson  
Philip: van Dam  
Inquisitor: Halfvarson  
Elisabetta: Mattila  
Eboli: Meier  
Tebaldo: Efraty

VHS copy  
French / French subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 27 Feb 1996  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Spartan staging of the full, five-Act French version before a live audience. Sets are stark and barely sufficient to establish the scenes. Costumes are conventional but spare; almost all are black. One cannot reasonably speak of the acting; the performers live their rôles with an honesty and conviction unknown elsewhere. Despite its length, this production is overwhelming and persuasive.

### PERFORMANCES

Conducting, orchestra, chorus and soloists approach but do not match the greatest available elsewhere. However, that detail is incidental to the ideal fit between the production and the casting. Both the tragedy and the grandeur of the work dominate and specifics about flaws (none of which is substantive) would be a waste of your effort and mine.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is fine even on a multi-generation copy. Audio suffers from one weak link in the chain of duplication: the result is monaural and limited in tonal and dynamic range. Since this performance demands commercial release, one can expect that those limitations will be overcome. Video direction is competent, rarely interfering with appreciation of the drama. This *Don Carlos* resembles the other versions of *Don Carlo* as an original work of art resembles its textbook reproductions: there are gross similarities, but no more. Find a way to see it.

# Don Carlo

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Carlo: Domingo  
Rodrigo: Quilico  
Philip: Ghiaurov  
Inquisitor: Furlanetto  
Elisabetta: Freni  
Eboli: Bumbry  
Tebaldo: Norden

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 26 Mar 1983  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

A conventional and traditional version of the opera in its conventional, abridged form. Although not staged in the grandest Met tradition, the scenery does frequently overwhelm the action. Arguably, that is appropriate for a work more related to Meyerbeer than to Donizetti.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine underlines rather than illuminates the score and keeps his state-of-the-art forces in sync without apparent effort. Domingo is in fine voice and justifies the Met's selection of this performance over that of the previous year. In contrast, Quilico is an argument in favor of the earlier broadcast though he is never truly unacceptable. Ghiaurov's voice is a bit frayed but still admirable. Freni is surprisingly able in a part more dramatic than her voice justified at that time. Bumbry is excellent both in her aria and in her character. The other parts are well handled if not exceptional. Choral and orchestral work are predictably fine.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is fine as expected and suggests the sound in the house. Video is not quite free of the limitations of house lighting, and camera work is often constrained by both lighting and recording during live performance. The result is a good representation of attending a performance from a good seat in the balcony, but with less than ideal opera glasses. Nevertheless, this is a fine record of the state of the house in the early eighties and a serviceable version of the work for home viewing.

# Don Carlo

## Verdi

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Carlo: Pavarotti  
Rodrigo: G. Quilico  
Philip: Ramey  
Inquisitor: Anisimov  
Elisabetta: Dessi  
Eboli: d'Intino  
Tebaldo: Laurenza

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Zeffirelli

Date: December 1992  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance lacking Fontainebleau scene. Sets are regal in scale and style; costumes are of the period. Acting is only occasionally credible, with only Dessi and Quilico showing significant involvement. The more common situation is that the participants in a duet are meters apart with an absolute minimum of contact between bodies or eyes.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti delivers an almost sterile, academic reading at a rapid pace which seems frequently close to a record. Both orchestra and chorus handle the demands capably. Pavarotti is substantially out of his league and provides beautiful tones virtually free of inflection. Quilico is limited at both ends of the range and has intonation problems, but does communicate well and knows how to deliver trills and other effects written into the score. Dessi cannot overcome some register problems, but her involvement and some lovely phrasing more than compensate. Ramey's unlovable King is sung well. D'Intino and the other soloists are capable and supportive; Nuccia Focile's Celestial Voice merits special mention.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Both video and audio disappoint. Lighting eccentricities mean that there are few true blacks, while whites in some scenes are boosted so that all detail is lost. I accept at face value the jacket's claim that the recording is in stereo, but cannot prove it by listening; nevertheless, the sound is quite acceptable in tonal range and tolerably compressed in dynamic range. Video direction is fine with no extreme closeups but many changes of angle that lose context. In sum, this recording provides a rather bloodless and uninspired but fundamentally honest interpretation.

# Don Carlo

## Verdi

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Salzburg

Carlo: Carreras  
Elisabetta: d'Amico  
Rodrigo: Cappuccilli  
Eboli: Baltsa  
Philip: Furlanetto

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: von Karajan

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Severely abridged live staging. Sets are traditional but well fitted to the modest stage. Costumes are rich and conventional. Acting is admirable, with fluid and effective movement and credible personalization.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan provides a lyrical interpretation with drama supplied by the chorus and the pit. The orchestra is sumptuous and generally accurate, with a few lapses that stand out. The chorus is rich in sound and ideal in size but imprecise. Carreras lacks the force one would like to hear from Carlo, but is accurate and committed. D'Amico needs dramatic force even more than Carreras and is less capable than he in conveying drama. Baltsa is fine within the lyric context. Cappuccilli is inaccurate and blusters. Furlanetto and Salminen (Inquisitor) provide good sound and human drama. Lesser roles are capably cast.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp in well-lighted scenes, but murky in others. Sound is excellent, with both pit and stage imaged clearly; textures are well defined in the stereo spread. Video direction is excellent, unhampered by the presence of the audience. Within the lyric concept and allowing for the abridgement, this performance is commendable.



# Don Carlo

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Carlo: Moldoveanu  
Elisabetta: Scotto  
Rodrigo: Milnes  
Eboli: Troyanos  
Philip: Plishka

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 21 February 1980  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Standard abridgement Live from the Met. Massive sets and period costumes fit with the strictly conventional and formal staging. Acting is irrelevant to most performers, with posing and vocalism replacing any trace of drama.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine is less in command than usual, losing sync with the soloists rather frequently and even occasionally allowing the orchestra to wander. Moldoveanu has the right timbre and tries for some of the colorature, but his success rate on climaxes and decorations is too low to be worth more than a mention. Scotto is not as painful to hear as in later work, but hardly wins the audience with her voice or her coyness. Milnes is excellent, far outshining the video competition and his own later work. Plishka's bland reading would be easier to take if Hines were not so impressive as the Inquisitor. Troyanos is young, lovely, and lyrical, making Carlo's choice of Scotto incomprehensible. Minor roles are filled with competent vocalism but do not contact the underlying characters.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Despite its age, the video record is fine: rich color and reasonable sharpness. Pre-HiFi monaural sound represents stage and pit well, with good balance between them; with so rich a score and so sonorous an orchestra, the loss of overtones and the absence of stereo resolution are unfortunate. Video direction is good, but somewhat compromised in minimizing audience impact; however, attention is consistently on the center of action so that the director does not interfere in enjoyment of the work. If this performance could have been merged with that of the following year, an excellent recording would have been possible.

# Don Carlo

## Verdi

Conductor: Haitink  
Company: Royal

Carlo: Lima  
Elisabetta: Cotrubas  
Rodrigo: Zancanaro  
Eboli: Baglioni  
Philip: Loyd

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance short on grandeur, long on style, and abridged as usual. Conventional sets loom darkly over the action. Costumes are lush and colorful. Action is refreshingly natural and fluid. In a word, all is as expected in a Visconti production.

### PERFORMANCES

Haitink reads the score straight, which may be less than it demands. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable. Lima looks the part and sings well, although he is neither as dramatic nor as flexible as the score demands. Cotrubas is still pleasant to see, but this would never have been her rôle and the years have not treated her voice well. Zancanaro blusters, Baglioni gets the notes out, and Loyd makes nothing of his material. In short, the performances are on the wrong side of adequate.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp but the unaugmented lighting renders detail obscure at best. Monaural sound is fine of its kind. Camera work is excellent, of course. The review copy has additional technical flaws, but limitations of the performance make it superfluous to seek a better copy for evaluation.

# Ernani Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Ernani: Pavarotti  
Elvira: Mitchell  
Carlo: Milnes  
Silva: Raimondi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: December 1983  
Evaluation: Poor

## PRODUCTION

Dark, brooding, overwhelming production. Sets are oversize but vanish into the looming depths of the stage. Costumes are lavish, even where inappropriate. Movement is minimal and stilted. The most noticeable action on stage is blowing draperies in Act I Scene 2.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts a straightforward, uninflected reading; chorus and orchestra are well drilled and responsive. Pavarotti is vastly overmatched by the dramatic demands of the score, but sings all of the notes with accuracy if not feeling. Mitchell cannot manage the lower register, approximates the colorature, and generally makes beautiful but irrelevant sounds. Milnes is inaccurate but dramatically effective. Raimondi is grossly off pitch and completely out of character. Overall, the best portrayal is the venerable Charles Anthony's Riccardo!

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is so damaged by the primitive lighting that it cannot be enjoyed or evaluated. Sound is excellent. Camera angles and movement are crude, apparently confined by both the lighting and the presence of the audience, but not helped by the staging. This production is entirely forgettable.

# Ernani Verdi

Conductor: Hetu  
Company: Montreal

Ernani: Mauro  
Elvira: Lorange  
Carlo: Quilico  
Silva: Charbonneau

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Robideau

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Concert version with few virtues but some interesting singing. It is worth noting that even without sets, costumes, or staging the interpretation is only slightly less dynamic than the Met's.

## PERFORMANCES

Hetu conducts a static, indulgent, competent reading. Orchestra and chorus manage to follow him and to make pleasant Verdian sounds, but little more. Mauro approximates the timbre but not the ring or power needed. Lorange is light for Elvira but knows the style and manages the drama and the colorature capably. Quilico's sounds approach the threshold of pain, but he is fully in tune with the desired style. Charbonneau is authoritative and accurate.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and amply lighted. Monaural sound is very good except when climaxes blast due to overmodulation. Direction is good, using camera variations to provide action lacking in the performance itself. Lacking sets, costumes, and subtitles, this performance is still preferable to the Met's staging.

# Ernani Verdi

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Ernani: Domingo  
Elvira: Freni  
Carlo: Bruson  
Silva: Ghiaurov

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Montell

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance on a human scale. Sets are reasonable in proportion if thoroughly conventional. Costumes are relatively drab but appropriate. Stage movement is generally well planned and effective. A broadcast was subtitled in English; the disc is not.

## PERFORMANCES

Muti overindulges the singers, or just prefers wide variations in tempo and broad phrasing. However, he holds the chorus and orchestra together quite capably. Domingo lacks the brilliance one would prefer in the rôle, but is accurate and inspired. Freni delights with her (expected) musicianship and (surprising) ease with the wide range of the rôle and its colorature; this performance will not erase memories of great Elviras, but is more than acceptable. Bruson is drab, stolid, and inaccurate. While Ghiaurov would have been better captured a decade earlier, his Silva is effective and generally well sung. Lesser parts are covered solidly.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is more than acceptable. Audio is not up to the best of the era, but is effective. Lighting is low but not objectionably so. Camera work is solid and unobtrusive. While far short of classic audio sources, this performance gives a fair representation of Verdi's work and is thoroughly exciting as a consequence.

# Falstaff

## Verdi

Conductor: Giulini  
Company: Royal

Falstaff: Bruson  
Ford: Nucci  
Fenton: Gonzalez  
Alice: Ricciarelli  
Nanetta: Hendricks  
Meg: Boozer  
Quickly: Valentini-Terrani

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 16 July 1982  
Evaluation: Superb

### PRODUCTION

Excellent, traditional production seen also in Los Angeles with much the same cast. Sets are sufficient without dominating the stage; costumes are appropriate and complimentary to the performers. Giulini's insistence on artists new to their rôles is fully justified in the freshness and brilliance of the result. The images complement the music and text, and the result is as fully integrated as any stage performance on video.

### PERFORMANCES

Giulini dominates the performance in maintaining the wit and joy of the score and the libretto. No soloist is ever allowed to dominate, but neither is any forced into an uncomfortable milieu. Bruson is jovial and fluent if not especially sumptuous of voice. Nucci is gruff and suitably straightforward. Ricciarelli and Hendricks are ideal in their rôles; Boozer and Valentini-Terrani are more than competent. Gonzalez is out of character and a bit strained. Comprimarii are capable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio quality are superb. Lighting and camera work are ideally transparent. There are moments when a bit more intimacy would benefit the home viewer; presumably, it was precluded by the need to record a live performance. Many of the images of this recording will become reference points for all other interpretations, in the theater or in the home.

# Falstaff

## Verdi

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Salzburg

Falstaff: Taddei  
Ford: Panerai  
Fenton: Araiza  
Alice: Kabaivanska  
Nanetta: Perry  
Meg: Schmidt  
Quickly: Ludwig

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: von Karajan

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Medium-scale, conventional live performance. Sets are storybook images of the period, bright and appropriate. Costumes are relatively tame and again consistent with the era. Apart from occasional intruding conceits, the production is as reliable and traditional as the performance. Everyone moves about the stage as actors in a fine comic piece for the theater; there is hardly a trace of operatic “acting” style.

### PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan is the star of this performance, leading a rock-steady yet witty reading. Orchestral work is superlative, precise and clearly articulated. The chorus is fine as well. Taddei cherishes the rôle, providing a human character with lovable excesses. Panerai is also effective in portraying humanity, though like Taddei he is less precise than one would wish. Kabaivanska’s portrayal is less aloof than usual, yet stronger and more restrained than many portrayals of Alice. The other women are fine, though none is ideal vocally: Meg might be lighter, Quickly deeper, and Nanetta more ethereal. Araiza also acts well but pushes his Mozartean instrument out of its range a bit. All of the singers, even those in lesser rôles, have major voices and handle the dynamics with ease.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good for the era, though short of the standards of sharpness in more recent recordings. Audio is outstanding, with excellent balance between stage and pit and wide dynamic and tonal ranges. Camera work is good, though not of the level routinely delivered by Large or Browning. Overall, the steadiness and ease of this performance and the graciousness of the staging make it a pleasure despite vocal limitations.

# Falstaff

## Verdi

Conductor: Pritchard  
Company: Glyndebourne

Falstaff: Gramm  
Ford: Luxon  
Fenton: Cosotti  
Alic: Griffel  
Nanetta: Gale  
Meg: Penkova  
Quickly: Condo

Beta  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Heather

Date: 1976  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Small-scale, traditional staging. Sets and costumes are conventional but combine with the small house to give an impression approaching chamber opera. Ponelle's hand in the design is well captured by Heather; nevertheless, the video result lacks the impact and continuity of Ponelle's own later work.

### PERFORMANCES

Not surprisingly, Pritchard reads the score almost as Mozart: it is bright, swift, and witty. Chorus and orchestra are barely large enough for the music, but maintain the conductor's spirit with enthusiasm. Gramm is the perfect knight for such a reading, seemingly enjoying every approaching triumph, yet rebounding from each realized catastrophe. Alone among the soloists, Luxon is pressed by his rôle, especially in the aria. The women are not memorable, but participate fully in the fun. Cosotti's voice is not ideal for Fenton, but he uses it well and looks dashing. Minor rôles are fully integrated into the whole.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video production is better than one would expect from such an early live recording. Lighting is adequate for settings which tend to be dark, and the singers' expressions are easily read. The monaural sound is restricted but adequate; engineering is poor and levels are not consistent. Overall, the technical values are adequate to convey this alternative to Giulini's interpretation.



# Falstaff

## Verdi

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Film

Falstaff: Bacquier  
Ford: Stilwell  
Fenton: Cosotti  
Alice: Armstrong  
Nanetta: Ilhoff  
Meg: Lindenstrand  
Quickly: Szirmay

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Friedrich

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Conventional production for film. Settings are traditional. Costuming and makeup are imaginative, but more distracting than illuminating. Stage movement is exaggerated as though in a live performance on a large stage; the potential of film is not exploited. The effect overall is of an under-rehearsed and incompletely integrated production.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti's reading is delightful, but restrained by the principals' limitations. The orchestra is responsive and plays as though of chamber dimensions. The chorus is impeccable. Bacquier exaggerates physically and contributes nothing special vocally. Stilwell labors through his aria but moves well. The ladies are sound without inspiration. There is little to fault in the handling of the other rôles.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is good, but does not exploit the opportunities of film. Audio is fine on this broadcast, but quality on a tape cannot be judged from the source reviewed. Camera work is stilted and erratic; less creativity here might have helped the poetry of Solti's interpretation. This performance is worth seeing — once — for Solti's contribution.

# Falstaff

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Falstaff: Plishka  
Ford: Pola  
Fenton: Lopardo  
Alice: Freni  
Nanetta: Bonney  
Meg: Graham  
Quickly: Horne

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Immense burlesque of a live performance. Zefirelli's sets are grand in scale but drab in color and style. Costumes are elaborate and ponderous to match. Action is flashy but unconvincing, full of grand gestures and cute incidents.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine exaggerates the sonority to match the outlandish performances on stage. The chorus is fine; the orchestra seems ponderous and thick, with little articulation of detail. The soloists all seem to have so much fun, despite many being past their best years for their rôles, that they forget little details like intonation and phrasing. Plishka is a prime example, who might well have done well with the jolly knight twenty years before but sings only most of the notes and little of the music. Freni's style is fine, but her mature vibrato hardly fits the vital young wife. Bonney lacks precision despite lovely tone. None of the others manages more than competence, and there are painfully many near misses as they stab at the notes.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp throughout and lighted as the director wished. Audio is excellent for the orchestra and adequate for the singers; one would have hoped for a stage image to resolve the intricacies of the vocal scoring. Camera work is somewhat more noticeable than Large's custom, with angles and movement chosen to enhance the already excessive onstage effects. This performance misses the grace and wit of the score, which may have been unavoidable given the huge house and the limitations of the singers.

# Forza del Destino

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Leonore: Price  
Preziosilla: Jones  
Alvaro: Giacomini  
Carlo: Nucci  
Guardiano: Giaiotti  
Melitone: Fissore

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 24 Mar 1984  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

A thoroughly traditional and enjoyable production on a large scale. Staging, scenery and costuming are elaborate and unexceptionable. This is clearly a record of an experienced cast in a well-rehearsed production.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine leads as usual: no exceptional insight, but a thoroughly clean and honest rendering of the score and an appropriate balance between the pulse of the music and freedom for the singers. Price is the *raison d'être* of the recording, and justly so; her instrument is somewhat frayed from its best years, but still demonstrates the glorious sound of which she gave so generously (and which Verdi assumed so cavalierly). Isola Jones is good enough for one to wish for the rest of her part. Giacomini is barely adequate as he walks through. Nucci is rather better than in any of his other recorded performances, although hardly memorable. Giaiotti is capable and offers the right quality of sound. The other rôles are handled competently, with a special nod to Anthony Laciura's delicious Trabuco.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Arguably, this is the earliest Met broadcast to reach contemporary standards of video production. Audio quality is, as usual, fully satisfying and representative of the sound in the house. Video quality is excellent throughout, and the camera avoids the limitations of live performance and (augmented) stage lighting. The recording in no way intrudes on the experience of the performance, and it can be recommended without hesitation, but also without great enthusiasm.

# Forza del Destino

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Leonore: Sweet  
Preziosilla: Scalchi  
Alvaro: Domingo  
Carlo: Chernov  
Guardiano: Scandiuzzi  
Melitone: Pola

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: March 1996  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Less than vital live performance. Sets are conventional but strangely confining even on the immense stage. Costumes are nondescript and unimaginative; the challenge Sweet offers is not met. Acting is largely in the modern style which comes across effectively on the tube. Except for Sweet, the singers move effectively. Stage business is sometimes confusing: is Alvaro limping from wounds in the last Act or is Chernov unaware of the impression he creates? More seriously, the singing, conducting and production conspire to strip the work of its thrill and to replace it with competence.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine, the orchestra and the chorus are reliable as always. Sweet produces no full-voice tone and approximates pitch quite often. Domingo's lack of *squillo* assumes major proportions here, but he is reliable as always. Chernov seems taxed by even the less demanding passages. Except for Tian's Marquis, the other rôles are inadequately filled; even Scandiuzzi disappoints with sloppy phrasing and poor intonation.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is superb, well lighted and precisely focussed. Stereo sound is good, but neither surround nor imaging of the stage can be recognized. Camera work is generally good, but video direction is far beneath Large's standards, notably in enhancing the impression of confinement conveyed by the sets. This may be the least useful addition to the Met series, surpassing the earlier performance only in the Alvaro and falling far behind it in many other respects.

# Forza del Destino

## Verdi

Conductor: Patane  
Company: Scala

Leonora: Caballe  
Preziosilla: Nave  
Alvaro: Carreras  
Carlo: Cappuccilli  
Guardiano: Ghiaurov  
Melitone: Bruscantini

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Puggelli  
Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance without special merit. Sets are oversize, dull, and brooding; some are eliminated altogether in favor of artistic drops. Costumes are conventional and acting is stilted. This is a routine performance with superior singing. The cuts are more severe than we see today, but are consistent with earlier performing convention.

### PERFORMANCES

Patane holds things together in conventional manner but takes every conventional and obvious opportunity for musical indulgence. The chorus and orchestra are superb. Caballe makes lovely sounds but portrays no character. Carreras is committed emotionally, but his lyric instrument is far short of the part's demands. Cappuccilli sings well and acts in accordance with the conventions. Ghiaurov clashes slightly in style, but sings superbly. The other soloists are reduced to caricatures and perform accordingly.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp, but so dark as to manage no more than a suggestion of most scenes. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is excellent, conveying the weight and texture of orchestra and singing accurately. Video direction is quite good and displays few artifacts attributable to the presence of the audience.

# Forza del Destino

## Verdi

Conductor: Arena  
Company: Montreal

Leonore: Evstatieva  
Preziosilla: Forst  
Alvaro: Marusin  
Carlo: Monk  
Guardiano: Cheek  
Melitone: Strummer

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Montsouri

Date: 1989  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Traditional but budget-conscious live performance. Settings are representational and minimal; one never loses track of the scenic elements, but they never stand out. Costuming is on the plain side of conventional. Movement is old-fashioned and almost irrelevant in the sweep of the occasion.

### PERFORMANCES

Arena holds the forces together and gives the soloists full freedom. The orchestra and chorus are a bit ragged, but seldom enough so to distract. Evstatieva conveys Leonore more effectively than any modern soprano: a true dramatic voice used with taste. Marusin is a spinto in the Russian tradition: brilliantly schooled, somewhat nasal, comfortable with the dynamics. Monk is pressed at times, especially in keeping up with Marusin; nevertheless, his warm baritone complements the other principals well. Forst's rôle should have been restored given the quality of her performance in its fragments. Cheek is quite fine; Strummer seems to be a local favorite without even the modest vocal resources Melitone requires.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is very fine throughout, benefitting from ample lighting and camera work apparently unhampered by the audience. Audio is better than usual from the Canadian engineers, but still far short of modern standards. This performance is so dynamic that limitations of engineering are easily overlooked.

# Forza del Destino

## Verdi

Conductor: Molinari-Pradelli  
Company: San Carlo

Leonora: Tebaldi  
Preziosilla: Dominguez  
Alvaro: Corelli  
Carlo: Bastianini  
Guardiano: Christoff  
Melitone: Capecchi

VHS  
Italian  
Director: ?

Date: March 1958  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance for RAI transferred via kinescope. Sets and costumes are nondescript and rudimentary, with no variation from the literal. Cuts are substantial, though traditional. Acting is rudimentary, with few instances of soloists addressing one another. Modern performers could take an enunciation lesson from these.

### PERFORMANCES

Molinari-Pradelli provides a steady, sturdy beat to which the soloists often take exception. The orchestra is underpowered but otherwise adequate; the chorus is less precise but more nearly appropriate in size. Tebaldi supplies lovely tones and an ideal spinto instrument; she moves better than the men and is often thrilling. Corelli does not press his essentially lyric voice in providing lovely sounds without insight into the character. Bastianini supplies the vocal and dramatic range one hopes for in the role, though more agility would help in his aria. Christoff's Guardiano is fine, Capecchi's Melitone almost ideal, and Dominguez handles her rôle with vocal ease and dramatic simplicity. Unfortunately, the individually fine elements do not fuse into a dramatic whole in large part due to audible battles over tempo; supplementing erratic timing, Tebaldi seems little concerned with precise pitch.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is execrable, worse even than in earlier RAI kinescopes; the failings are clearly those of the original film, not of the video transfer. Monaural sound is comparable with good AM radio: short on highs, lows, dynamics, and detail. Lighting is primitive, but video direction and camera work are excellent, especially for the era. Overall, the big moments of this performance are tributes to a great Italian tradition, but its representation of the work is inadequate. By all means experience this recording for its style and its singing, though you may well turn to another to experience the opera.

# **Giovanna d'Arco**

## **Verdi**

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Bologna

Giovanna: Dunn  
Carlo VII: La Scola  
Giacomo: Bruson  
Delil: Lefebvre  
Talbot: Spagnoli

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Herzog

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Problematic and quasi-traditional staging often intrudes on the music. Inexplicable business often distracts attention from the score and libretto. In a standard work, such imaginative efforts may illuminate; in the only production one is likely to see, they are difficult to tolerate. Specifics are so numerous as to be superfluous, and the Goya-esque horrors of war overbalance the lyricism Verdi and Solera emphasized. The small house and simple staging are sufficient to convey the imagery and ideas if only the director would let them.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly conducts brightly and stresses the Rossinian origins of the work rather than its premonition of the mature Verdi. Dunn is admirable except for a few pressured notes at full voice; she even acts the part. La Scola has all the notes, but not the requisite timbre. Bruson is past his best and manages only the surface of a potentially rich rôle without dynamic inflection — and with occasional moderate problems of pitch. The chorus is no more than adequate, and the other solo rôles are competently covered.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio quality are excellent throughout. Camera work is dominated by high angles as though one were suspended on the chandelier. Frequently, one wishes the image were less clear (and less confusing), but one always appreciates the clarity of sound.



# Lombardi all prima

## Crociata

### Verdi

Conductor: Gavazzeni  
Company: Scala

Giselda: Dimitrova  
Oronte: Carreras  
Pagano: Carroli  
Arvino: Bini  
Sofia: Bocca

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Large

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Promising live performance which disappoints in execution. Sets are representational, exploiting draperies and lighting to provide scene changes. Costumes are brilliant and conventional. Despite Carreras' commitment, there is neither credible acting nor visible movement. Subtitles are sorely missed in a work so rarely performed.

### PERFORMANCES

Gavazzeni leads a generally accurate but uninflected performance. The orchestra follows faithfully and accurately; the chorus, which sings superbly, cannot follow the *ritards* and other inconsistencies. Dimitrova is on pitch and out of style, shrill and unmoved. Carreras is markedly underpowered, but seems committed. Carroli lacks ring and cannot handle the technical demands, but is stylistically right and comes closest to Verdi's intentions. The balance of the cast is adequate, but the only memorable music making is from Fantini's solo violin.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good for the era, but lacks the detail and sharpness that more light would have permitted. Audio is excellent in most respects, though soloists frequently seem to drop into dead spots from which they become all but inaudible. On occasion, that seems to be a virtue. It may not be possible to cast the work better today; in that case it may be better to retire it until the singers are available.

# Luisa Miller

## Verdi

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: Royal

Luisa: Ricciarelli  
Rodolfo: Domingo  
Miller: Bruson  
Walter: Howell  
Wurm: van Allan

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Conventional if drab live performance. Sets and costumes are unimaginative. Acting is little more than routine, insufficient to convey urgency or drama.

### PERFORMANCES

Maazel leads a solid and occasionally lively interpretation which is followed accurately by both orchestra and chorus. Ricciarelli is often lovely both to see and to hear, yet fails to convince overall and occasionally suffers lapses of intonation. Domingo is solid without the passion and grace one seeks in the rôle. Bruson blusters with neither grace nor pleasing sound. The other soloists are reasonably capable, but none stands out.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video shows its age in poor definition and overall darkness compounding the somber staging. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate for enjoyment of the score and appreciation of the interpretive failings. Video direction is unobtrusive and dramatically effective.

# Luisa Miller Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Luisa: Scotto  
Rodolfo: Domingo  
Miller: Milnes  
Federica: Kraft  
Walther: Giaiotti  
Wurm: Morris

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 20 January 1979  
Evaluation: Fair

## PRODUCTION

Loud live performance. Settings are straightforward and colorful. Costumes are traditional. Staging is unremarkable, and the performers act in the ancient mode.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine tries to propel the music with brisk tempi and admirable lilt. The orchestra and chorus are ideal — as usual. Scotto is past the time when she could have managed the lyricism of the rôle or been believable in it; while she is never off pitch, she is also never in character. Domingo almost makes the case for a spinto Rodolfo despite memories of Schipa, Tagliavini, and their ilk; he offers far more grace and style than any of his peers. Milnes is on the brink of his vocal problems, though he displays them only in the louder passages. Giaiotti has a lush tone, but lacks precision; Morris is his antithesis.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is good if far short of the standard of modern recording. Audio is generally good (though pre-HiFi monaural), but quirks of microphoning sometimes cause soloists to be lost. Camera work is surprisingly inconsistent, suggesting lack of rehearsal when a closeup shows a soloist's arm obscuring his face. Live performance and camera limitations mean inadequate lighting and frequently ill-chosen camera positions. The result is not so much a performance of the opera as a disjoint collection of star turns.

# Macbeth

## Verdi

Conductor: Hetu  
Company: Film (Canada?)

Macbeth: Quilico  
Lady Macbeth: Galvany  
Banquo: Corbell  
Macduff: Duval

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Symcox

Date: ~1982  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Cinematic record of what appears to have been a live staging. Sets are simplistic: massive battlements for interiors, abstract exteriors. Costumes are non-specific but in conventional mode. Stage movement and stage images are generally more natural than they would have been in the theater.

### PERFORMANCES

Hetu's interpretation is less dynamic than ideal, but is consistent and frames the voices well. The orchestra is a bit underpowered; the chorus is outstanding. Quilico misses an occasional note but none of the character, his conflicts, or his pain. Galvany is superb, failing only to be Callas. Corbell, Duval, and those who portray lesser rôles are effective if less than ideal vocally.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and relatively crisp for its age. Careful recording makes the most of pre-HiFi monaural sound that reproduces all forces adequately and the soloists very well. Direction is excellent. Despite the availability of later performances, this one definitely merits LaserDisc release.

# Macbeth

## Verdi

Conductor: Previtali  
Company: Torino

Macbeth: Bruson  
Lady Macbeth: Sass  
Banquo: Ghiuselev  
Macduff: Bergonzi

VHS copy  
Italian  
Director: Scaglione

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance more satisfying overall than in its parts. Costumes are colorful variations on the traditional; the set is all but invisible in the background of a raised platform for most scenes. Action is broad but effective. The ballet extends Act III almost beyond endurance; perhaps if it were intrinsically more attractive to see and to hear it would be more desirable.

### PERFORMANCES

Previtali leads a brisk, dramatic reading with confidence. The orchestra is effective but not of the highest rank. The male chorus is often admirable; the women, often painful. Bruson's Macbeth shows no nobility, hence cannot be tragic; he is occasionally off pitch and frequently slides to the note. Sass' power - vocal and dramatic - is beyond question; her technique and tone are acceptable if not admirable. Ghiuselev needs more precision to make his rich tone desirable in the rôle. Bergonzi does not make the most of his slight opportunities, but still offers grace lacking in the others. Lesser rôles are covered acceptably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review copy shows its generations since the broadcast but still offers acceptable video. Non-HiFi monaural sound presents the voices adequately but does not do justice to the score. While lacking the style and impact of the Quilico/Galvany, this performance is a reasonable second choice for its effective conducting and for Sass' domineering Lady.

# Macbeth

## Verdi

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Bologna

Macbeth: Nucci  
Lady Macbeth: Verrett  
Banquo: Ramey  
Macduff: Luchetti

VHS  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: d'Anna

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Film in highly authentic staging. The result is a cinematically excellent production, but incessant movement and adaptations for the medium are less than ideal for opera lovers. Symbols abound, some of which are difficult to appreciate and divert from the work as music drama. The film is moderately wider than usual, but subtitles are in frame. Lip sync is generally excellent.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly leads an excellent chorus and orchestra in a straightforward and relatively bland interpretation. Nucci excels vocally and dramatically; Verrett is a bit less effective vocally and emotes rather more blatantly. Ramey and Luchetti (who are replaced visually by actors) are excellent.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Clean video suffers from unremitting blue cast to the picture. Audio would be excellent, but sound effects (including in the rear channel) distract from Verdi's contribution. Camera work and direction are excellent for the work taken as a film, but extraneous characters - such as listeners in soliloquys - and diverting effects - such as witches and rats dining on the remains of the banquet several days later - aid atmosphere at the cost of intensity. In general, the result is more effective visually than sonically.

# Macbeth

## Verdi

Conductor: Stapleton  
Company: film

Maccbeth: Bailey  
Lady Macbeth: Johnson  
Banquo: Ghiaurov  
Macduff: Shicoff

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1977  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Well fashioned made-for-television movie. Sets and costumes are traditional and dramatic. Imagery is interesting, notably the implication that Lady Macbeth is reviewing events on her deathbed as the excuse for the film. No such excuse is needed in this fine realization.

### PERFORMANCES

Stapleton leads a routine reading, rather emphasizing the oompah over the novel elements. The orchestra (London Philharmonic) and chorus (Ambrosian Opera) are accurate if not inspired. Bailey strives mightily, but does not persuade; many attacks are imprecise, but his voice is adequate otherwise. Johnson is comfortable with the vocal demands, though far short of the dramatic potential. Ghiaurov and Shicoff are excellent; one wishes there were more to their rôles.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is fine: colorful and sharp for its age. Pre-HiFi mono audio is surprisingly good, perhaps because there is little detail to be lost. Lip sync is especially fine and never intrudes. The overall impression is of a very good production moved to a cinema stage and recorded for posterity. It is more worthy of commercial release than the versions now available.

# Macbeth

## Verdi

Conductor: Sinopoli  
Company: Deutsche

Macbeth: Bruson  
Lady Macbeth: Zampieri  
Banquo: Morris  
Macduff: O'Neill

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1987  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Massive, blocky staging. Sets are immense and ill defined. Costumes are colorful and sumptuous, forcing focus onto the performers instead of the staging. Movement is exaggerated.

### PERFORMANCES

Sinopoli leads a five-square performance: lumpy and dull. The orchestra is similarly square and sloppy. The chorus is excellent. Bruson approximates the notes and declaims instead of singing. Zampieri slides close to most of the notes, gives up on others. The minor characters are more nearly major singers, though Morris' instrument is dry for the rôle.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are excellent. Lighting is as clumsy as the staging, perhaps by the designer's intent. Camera work is fluid and effective. The technical assets of the recording do not compensate for vocal and dramatic incompetence.



# Nabucco

## Verdi

Conductor: Arena  
Company: Verona

Nabucco: Bruson  
Abigaille: Dimitrova  
Ismaele: Garaventa  
Zaccaria: Petkov  
Fenena: Baglioni  
Priest: d'Artegna

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Large

Date: 14 August 1981  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

A large-scale performance in the immense amphitheater. The chorus' major rôle is well served on the vast stage. While intimacy is lost, it is not the sacrifice that it would be in, say, *Falstaff* or *Traviata*. "Sets" consist largely of highlighting elements of the arena; costumes are modernized-traditional-Biblical. Such a conventional and grandiose presentation of a rarely staged work is welcome.

### PERFORMANCES

Arena is stodgy as usual, although allowance must be made for the size of orchestra and chorus; both are competent, if occasionally ragged. Bruson is dry but committed to the title rôle; few better choices come to mind among present-day singers. Dimitrova is vehement and committed, although the style is foreign to her and she brings no lyricism to a woman with lyric elements. Garaventa is moderately loud, but offers nothing more. Petkov's High Priest is fine; though a darker bass might be preferable, the contrast with Bruson is sufficient. Other parts are competently performed — to the extent that one can tell on the scale of the recording.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is distant throughout; video is frequently so as well. While "intimacy" is not a word readily applied to *Nabucco*, the distance here seems excessive. In a work so unfamiliar, subtitles would have been a definite plus. Lighting is sufficient. Camera work is primitive and effective only in conveying the total impression, not the details. Since the production and singing lack subtlety, there may be few details to lose. Overall, this is a more than acceptable rendering of a work one is unlikely to see better staged.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Kleiber  
Company: Scala

Otello: Domingo  
Desdemona: Freni  
Iago: Cappuccilli

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Zeffirelli

Date: 7 December 1976  
Evaluation: Outstanding

## PRODUCTION

Ultimately lyrical live performance. Sets are vast, dark, brooding, and conventional. Costumes and makeup exaggerate the conventional. Acting is of the olden style, but committed.

## PERFORMANCES

Kleiber leads the tragedy as an ode to love, with rich sonority and moderate pacing. The orchestra and chorus perfectly realize his intentions. Domingo is fresher and more earnest than in any of his other performances. Freni looks and acts Desdemona ideally. Cappuccilli is more vindictive than essentially evil; he sings impeccably. The supporting cast is up to the standard.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp where visible in the gloom. Inadequate lighting combines with dark staging to obscure many of the pleasures of the performance. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is surprisingly good, preserving much orchestral detail and virtually everything on the stage. Video direction is outstanding, barring a few disruptive views of the orchestra when stage action is the focus (but no one is singing). This is a wondrous performance deserving of the best transfer and the widest distribution.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Royal

Otello: Domingo  
Desdemona: Te Kanawa  
Iago: Leiferkus

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: October 1992  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Stunning, Shakespearean performance before a royal audience. Sets and costumes are conventional, though oversized and somewhat representational; prominent religious images in Acts I through III suggest a focus missing in the music, text and staging. Since the performers seem transfigured into their characters, 'acting' seems inadequate.

## PERFORMANCES

Solti stars in his dynamic, precise leadership. His only costar is his orchestra. Domingo forces nothing, singing *con forza* but never to excess. Te Kanawa portrays the First Lady of the island rather than a naïf; she does so extremely well and sings flawlessly. Leiferkus makes Iago a man of his Machiavellian times rather than a devil incarnate; while a more robust voice would help in spots, he makes the rôle his own in his way. With the exception of Powell's shrill Emilia, the smaller parts are filled in exemplary fashion.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and sharp if somewhat dark. Sound is generally excellent stereo, but there are numerous faults in sound engineering that cause a soloist to 'disappear' until balance is restored. Direction is unusually inept with extreme closeups exaggerating the obvious: Otello's pain, Desdemona's handkerchief, etc. Since this spare, literary interpretation differs so markedly from Kleiber's rich, operatic interpretation they can easily share the honors of the finest modern video recording.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Masur  
Company: Komische

Otello: Nocker  
Desdemona: Noack-von Kamptz  
Iago: Bauer

VHS copy  
German  
Director: Felsenstein

Date: 1969  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Substantially edited film. Conventional staging supports an overwhelming dramatic realization. Driven in tempo and performance, this is a stunning experience despite vocal limitations.

## PERFORMANCES

Masur impels a fine orchestra and chorus in wider dynamics than seem possible. Nocker is excellent in the same sense: power contrasting with warmth. Noack-von Kamptz is problematic vocally, shrill at times and beyond her limits. Apart from brief intonation problems, Bauer persuades with an unconventionally lyric interpretation. The smaller roles are handled in the style of the whole - impeccably.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and beautifully lighted. Monaural sound is clear and well balanced. Camera work and direction set a standard rarely approached in opera films, achieving the level of the Bergman *Magic Flute*. This recording is essential viewing for any producer of Verdi, though the cuts and the limitations of the soprano will not make it a first choice for many.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Serafin  
Company: RAI

Otello: del Monaco  
Iago: Capecchi  
Desdemona: Carteri

VHS  
Italian  
Director: Enriquez

Date: 1958  
Evaluation: Problematic

## PRODUCTION

Black-and-white film beautifully conceived and well realized. Settings are realistic. Costumes are traditional. Movement is fluid and natural.

## PERFORMANCES

Serafin's reading can only be ranked with Toscanini's — and does not suffer in the comparison. Neither orchestra nor chorus is quite up to the demands, but neither distracts from the overall effect. Del Monaco sings and acts perfectly, sounding better than in either of his commercial audio recordings. Capecchi is ideal, with a darkness of timbre that conveys his character as well as his grotesque makeup; significantly, he matches del Monaco's force and vitality. Carteri is beautiful to see and to hear, perhaps a bit more mature than the child-like Desdemona, but ultimately good and vulnerable. Minor parts are uniformly well realized.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are grossly unacceptable. The commercial tape is badly transferred from a European master. Video contrast is excessive and images smear with any movement. Sound levels have been equalized with automatic gain control so that quiet passages are as loud as climaxes but burdened with hiss. The result is an unviewable recording of an incomparable film.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: von Karajan  
Company: Deutsche

Otello: Vickers  
Desdemona: Freni  
Iago: Glossop

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: von Karajan

Date: 1974  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Film which realizes the drama and romance of the opera. Settings and costuming are realistic rather than traditional for a stage performance. The work and production are held to human scale; colors are subdued and action is contained within natural limits. The performances are consonant with the staging, sometimes even more restrained than would be ideal for the music.

## PERFORMANCES

Von Karajan controls the show, but surprisingly allows the drama to dominate. His reading is conventional with emphasis on lyricism. The orchestra is absolutely responsive. The chorus is accurate, but falls short dramatically. Vickers' Otello is introspective rather than primitive, fitting his (and Karajan's) concept. Freni is a lovely Desdemona. Glossop is dry and crude; within the overall production, Iago could be portrayed as a more subtle monster. Lesser rôles are filled capably and are magnified by the low key applied to the principals.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is effective but is a bit lacking in brilliance; extremes of tonal and dynamic ranges are somewhat suppressed, lending a monochromatic character to the sound. Video is sharp, but often lacking in contrast, perhaps by design. Lighting and camera work are excellent as one would expect in a film. Lip sync is almost perfect and faults can be found only by watching for them specifically. This is an outstanding realization of *Otello* as lyric drama; other performances stress the drama more clearly with less emphasis on humanity.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Otello: Domingo  
Desdemona: Cruz-Romo  
Iago: Milnes

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 24 September 1979  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Lyric, Levantine live staging. Sets are conventional and well suited to the huge stage. Colorful, conventional costumes maintain the image. Action is more natural than stilted for a change and the dynamic Levine infuses is well implemented on the stage.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine's reading is here lyric and passionate rather than dramatic. The orchestra is remarkably sensual in response and the chorus contrasts with its sprightly, synchronized reading in Moorish style. (At times, the orchestra seems carried away and some entrances and intonations are faulty.) Domingo and Milnes are at their best: tones ringing without apparent push, yet easily inflected and highly effective in softer passages. Cruz-Romo tends to swallow the tone, losing the balancing effect Desdemona can provide; however, she looks wonderful and sings accurately. The minor characters are well realized.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is only moderately sharp and suffers severely from inadequate lighting; the murk which prevails is only partly attributable to the stage director's intentions. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is quite acceptable, of the order of that in the Toscanini audio recording; it fully conveys both the singers' and the orchestra's achievements. Direction is remarkably good given the limitations of live performance and of inadequate lighting.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Otello: Vickers  
Desdemona: Scotto  
Iago: Macneil

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 25 September 1978  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Conventional live performance. Sets are substantial and traditional. Costumes are drab. Makeup is effective for Scotto, but Vickers' pseudo-Afro and related exaggerations are more ludicrous than constructive. Acting is of the claw-the-curtains style with all principals apparently competing for most exaggerated display.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine tries to impel the performance and succeeds much of the time. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable as usual. Vickers makes the case for a lyric Otello; it isn't Verdi's case, but it is almost convincing, thanks to his fine instrument and persuasive style. Scotto's *mezza voce* is still both attractive and effective, so her vocal limitations are less noticeable than her dramatic range. Macneil's vocal distress is less evident in Iago than in many rôles he undertook at this stage, but it hardly enhances his brutish portrayal.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good for the era and does not distract from the limited pleasures of the performance. Audio is fine although pre-HiFi and monaural. Lighting is barely sufficient so that detail is often lost. Surprisingly, there are occasional focus errors that distract from the generally fine camera work. Overall, the result is poorly integrated and offers no advantage over the alternatives.



# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Patane  
Company: Berlin

Otello: Beirer  
Desdemona: Tebaldi  
Iago: Dooley

LaserDisc  
Italian, German / Japanese  
subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 30 Aug 1962  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Disjointed, frenetic live performance. Settings are minimal but literal. Costumes are traditional, formalized outfits for the era with some anomalies in the chorus. Stage movement is of the classically despised formal style: stand and deliver. Stage direction is ludicrous. The mix of languages adds to the confusion, but is hardly a primary cause.

## PERFORMANCES

Patane offers random changes in tempo and musical focus which defy understanding for performers and audience alike. Even the orchestra sounds ragged; the chorus is worse, producing fine sound once they locate the beat, but entering erratically and seldom agreeing on much of anything. Beirer begins as a true horror, pushing the voice and phrasing erratically; from Act II on he is tolerable, but no more. Tebaldi's sounds are seductive and her acting is admirable within the crude style of the production. She is the sole reason for watching this performance, and she will justify it for many. Dooley cannot cope with the upper reaches of the music but when below the F supplies fine sonority and an attractive stage presence. The minor characters are competently played, though none but Sieglinde Wagner as Emilia merits mention.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Monochromatic video is crisp and highly detailed even in shadows. Monaural audio is precise and relatively low-noise; it conveys the musical confusion admirably. Lighting is ample and camera movement is minimized to good effect. Technical defects are not the reason to avoid or to acquire this performance.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: RAI

Otello: Cura  
Desdemona: Frittoli  
Iago: Raimondi  
Cassio: Ombuena

Broadcast  
Italian / Italian subtitles  
Director: Crivelli

Date: 8 May 1997  
Evaluation: Poor

## PRODUCTION

Live performance utterly lacking in coherence but well received by the audience. A representational set dominated by a pyramid of stairs and costumes appropriate neither to the era of the text nor to that of Verdi divert attention from the music. Acting is very broad and cinematic, approaching a parody of opera. On a positive note, enunciation and pronunciation are quite good - obviating the need for the Italian subtitles (which are mercifully out of frame on the wide format).

## PERFORMANCES

Abbado's tempi are erratic, often rushed where expansiveness is called for; the soloists are not always in sync with him. Otherwise, he leads a capable orchestra and several choruses without fault and without distinction. Cura is hopelessly miscast, conveying only Otello's torture without affection or strength and substituting barking for singing. Frittoli excels in those piano passages which avoid intonation problems, but lacks the soaring tone needed even in the Act I duet. Raimondi is effective dramatically and adequate vocally. The minor characters are sung well enough.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but with artifacts from the broadcast which would be exaggerated in NTSC transfer. Monaural sound suffices for the voices and for the orchestra in general, though it does not allow appreciation of detail. Camera work is good and apparently little disturbed by the audience. Direction is erratic with attention wandering inexplicably at times; tight closeups are few and well located. Nothing about this production or performance would make it preferable to any of the alternatives with the possible exception of the Zeffirelli film.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Pesko  
Company: Verona

Otello: Atlantov  
Desdemona: Te Kanawa  
Iago: Cappuccilli

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Vanetti?

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Adequate

## PRODUCTION

Clever live staging almost overcoming physical constraints. The set converts the vast amphitheater to the ramparts of Cyprus with white pillars and battlements; turntable elements and video direction focus attention on appropriate segments to suggest interiors. Costumes and action are conventional and colorful.

## PERFORMANCES

Pesko conducts the orchestra brightly and effectively; unfortunately, it often seems that the singers cannot see or follow him, so they sing out of time. Despite the fine sound of the chorus, both they and the soloists often seem to be in a different performance from the orchestra. Atlantov's spinto voice is inadequate for the rôle, but he tries with an excess of passion and a paucity of resources. Te Kanawa makes beautiful sounds that match the score if not the spirit. Cappuccilli is effective and nasty, though hardly malevolent. The smaller rôles are covered with distinction, often better than the major ones.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is generally good although the lighting is (as always) inadequate to emulate daylight in the vast spaces of the amphitheater. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is remarkably good with admirable balance between singers and orchestra; the tonal range is narrow and resolution is limited, much in the style of LP's of the early fifties. Camera work is remarkably sound in the difficult environment and seems unhampered by allowance for the audience.

# Otello Verdi

Conductor: Maazel  
Company: Scala

Otello: Domingo  
Desdemona: Ricciarelli  
Iago: Diaz

VHS  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Zeffirelli

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Grotesque

## PRODUCTION

Elaborate, colorful, overblown and “corrected” film purporting to relate to Verdi’s opera. Sets are literal and massive. Period costumes are strictly conventional. About a third of the score has been dropped and some bits of new music added to correct Verdi; Boito has also been improved with new dialogue. Scenes not cut have been reordered; for example, if one can find a source for the whirling dervishes who entertain in the first-act banquet of Otello and Desdemona, one has outdone Shakespeare. A positive point: lip sync is quite good throughout.

## PERFORMANCES

When conducting Verdi’s music, Maazel is straightforward and rather heavy-handed. The orchestra and chorus perform impeccably even in the foreign material. Domingo delivers his least lyric reading on video. Ricciarelli looks lovely but lacks the vocal resources. Diaz is grotesquely diabolic in appearance and brutish in style; his rough approximations to pitch could even be intentional in so crude a character. The supporting soloists are no more than competent.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp, of course, but low light levels used for dramatic effect obscure the action. Sound is not as clear as one would expect, lacking both low and high notes and oddly compressed dynamically. Cinematic direction is inexplicably problematic as well, concentrating attention on incidental aspects of the scene when action demands attention. The overall effect is deadening.

# Rigoletto

## Verdi

Conductor: Renzetti  
Company: Verona

Rigoletto: Boyagian  
Duke: Bello  
Gilda: Ferrarini  
Sparafucile: Zerbini  
Maddalena: Mattiucci

Beta  
Italian  
Director: Large

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live outdoor overproduction. The massive scale makes the graceless staging (and singing) understandable, if not acceptable. Inadequate lighting precludes evaluation of the costumes. Stage movement is minimal — the style seems even more archaic than the arena itself.

### PERFORMANCES

Renzetti distorts the musical line without mercy, racing at times in apparent compensation for a substantially slower performance than any other on video. Orchestra and chorus manage to stay with him, but can do little more. Boyagian is monochromatic and loud. Bello is aptly named, although he also contributes a wobble when he sings at less than forte. Ferrarini's voice is substantial and used well, although she eschews any trace of acting. The other soloists are capable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Lighting is inadequate and the image is murky and unfocussed as a result. Sound is very good, although there is no use of stereo to represent stage positions or movement. Camera work is kind to the oversize production. With better picture quality and consistent conducting, this performance would rate as a satisfactory if graceless reading.

# Rigoletto

## Verdi

Conductor: Molinari-Pradelli  
Company: Dresden

Rigoletto: Panerai  
Duke: Bonisolli  
Gilda: Rinaldi  
Sparafucile: Rundgren  
Maddalena: Cortez

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Nagel

Date: ?  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Apparently, a film of a Dresden staging. Lip sync is abominable and consistently distracts from the performance. Staging is cumbersome with distracting lack of continuity. Sets and costumes are traditional and brightly colored. Movement is exaggerated, with no scaling to the intimate photography.

### PERFORMANCES

Molinari-Pradelli leads a solid, stolid, traditional reading for what seems to be his thousandth exercise with the score. Orchestra and chorus are responsive to him but cannot enliven the reading. Panerai is vocally monochromatic but overacts so broadly that it would be hard to accept even on stage. Bonisolli looks the part and sings capably. Rinaldi is harsh and relatively inflexible, bringing nothing but accuracy to the rôle. Rundgren lacks ultimate sonority, but manages the part with some authority and conviction; the other soloists are capable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft and poorly focussed, with numerous cinematic devices to distract the viewer from the music. Sound is pre-HiFi mono, but acceptable. None of the singers offers significant dynamics and the audio dynamic is further compressed; the result is monotonous and trying. Camera work is fussy and discontinuous, adding to the distractions of choppy production.

# Rigoletto

## Verdi

Conductor: Elder  
Company: English National

Rigoletto: Rawnsley  
Duke: Davies  
Gilda: McLaughlin  
Sparafucile: Tomlinson  
Maddalena: Rigby

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Phillips

Date: 1988?  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live production set in Little Italy (New York). Some material appears to have come from rehearsal or other versions and is fairly well lip-synced. The parts that survive the translation in space and time reflect the eternal verities of the story; other elements emphasize the dated and localized components. Overall, it is an intriguing partial success. Sets and costumes are dreary in keeping with the milieu, but the contrasts of the original setting provide important underpinnings of the score that are lost here. Acting is admirable throughout and stage direction is all one could hope for.

### PERFORMANCES

Elder's reading is surprisingly conventional and works as a conventional reading must. Orchestra and chorus are well schooled to provide the sound he seems to want. Rawnsley's dry voice is used in almost a *parlando* style where one would prefer true singing, yet it is acceptable. Davies offers a bit more, but cannot quite bring off his more ambitious (though still modest) vocal effects. McLaughlin is dry and harsh, but is believable in context. Tomlinson stands out though he lacks depth of tone. Rigby is adequate vocally and impressive histrionically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The review tape sadly lacks video quality: insufficient, contrasty lighting is the worst factor. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate; the commercial release should be substantially better. Camera work on the live segments is choppy; the supplementary video is gimmicky and distracting at best, clashing at worst. Overall, this performance is a curiosity worth seeing—once.

# Rigoletto

## Verdi

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Vienna

Rigoletto: Wixell  
Duke: Pavarotti  
Gilda: Gruberova  
Sparafucile: Furlanetto  
Maddalena: Vergara

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Film shot in “authentic” locations in Italy. Sets are inherently right. Costumes are colorful but problematic: for example, the opening scene is staged as an orgy in ancient Rome. Acting is cinematic and generally satisfying, but some video devices are so cute or inappropriate as to divert attention from the music. Lip sync is generally good.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly's reading is conventional, but somehow conveys a bit of freshness, as though the warhorse retained some spirit of battle. The orchestra and chorus are outstanding in themselves and in conveying the life Chailly breathes into the score. Wixell is dry and unsympathetic; he is accurate in pitch, but out of sync with the spirit. Pavarotti's Duke is lecherous without the grace that can make the character personable. Gruberova is deadly accurate, but entirely unconvincing. Furlanetto is dead on. The “minor” rôles are treated seriously to the advantage of the score; among the artists are Fedora Barbieri and Katherine Kuhlmann.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

It is hardly surprising that video and audio are superb in a Ponelle film. There is a tendency to dwell on the long shot, emphasizing the “authentic” settings over the performers; at times, the singers seem to be used as scenic elements. One may even come to feel that the music is used similarly, as a tool for the director's objective rather than as the reason for the film.



# Rigoletto

## Verdi

Conductor: Boncompagni  
Company: New York City

Rigoletto: Ellis  
Duke: Leech  
Gilda: Esham  
Sparafucile: Doss

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 21 September 1988  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Dark, brooding live staging. Like the singing, the production lacks spark and spirit. Superimposed on traditional sets and costumes are occasional conceits of the stage designer, characters who appear for extraneous actions that distract from the flow of the drama and the music.

### PERFORMANCES

Boncompagni's tempo is erratic and his style is undefined. The orchestra follows him rather better than the chorus or the soloists whose entrances and phrasing are erratic and choppy to approximate the beat. Ellis has no inflection in an unsteady but accurate voice; his hamming is somewhat more disturbing than the acting of his colleagues. Leech sounds distressed with a catch in his voice on most attacks; one may be glad they did not opt for the high D in *Possente amor*. Esham is fine if vocally uninvolved. The other solo rôles are handled competently.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is marginal at best, with insufficient lighting and excessive contrast to remind one of the limitations of an earlier age. Sound is good but balances are off so that many soloists become inaudible for critical phrasing. Direction is choppy and repetitive, zooming out randomly from soloist to ensemble, then cut to another soloist, and so on. Production vagaries seem to be the director's intent; unlike the lighting, they cannot be blamed on the live audience.

# Rigoletto

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Rigoletto: Quilico  
Duke: Pavarotti  
Gilda: Eda-Pierre  
Sparafucile: Berberian  
Maddalena: Jones

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 15 December 1981  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live, conventional staging. Sets are somewhat less grand in scale than in later Met productions, and are well suited to the large-scale voices here. Costumes are more subdued than usual. Lighting is used creatively to modify colors and to enhance the mood. Stage movement is stilted in the classic style.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine's reading is solid but lacks fire. Orchestra and chorus are impeccable as (almost) always from the Met. Quilico's performance is fine despite imprecise pitch; his compensation through projection and acting in the ancient style covers his problem. Pavarotti lacks *brio* but has ample voice; although the high D is omitted in "Possente amor," he supplies a fine one into Gilda's ear in the duet. Eda-Pierre shares Quilico's attributes, including pitch approximation and grand style. The lesser rôles are handled exceptionally well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is better than one would expect from a performance of this vintage. Pre-HiFi mono audio is well balanced and shows the broad lines of the performance if not its nuances. Lighting is marginal with high contrast. Camera movement is limited by the audience, but as usual Large covers the limitations admirably and allows the viewer to stay with the flow of the music.

# Rigoletto

## Verdi

Conductor: Amaducci  
Company: Montreal

Rigoletto: Quilico  
Duke: di Giuseppe  
Gilda: Cuccaro  
Sparafucile: Rouleau  
Maddalena: Howe

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Landry

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Bright, fluid live performance. Sets are traditional and seem more opulent than they are. Costumes are conventional and colorful where appropriate. Stage movement is fluid and more than token effort has gone into acting, especially by the chorus.

### PERFORMANCES

Amaducci's reading is bright and accurate, always propelling the score and inspiring the cast. The orchestra and chorus are responsive, though there are minor miscues which are easily overlooked. Quilico is a disaster: drastically off pitch most of the time; grossly unable to handle the upper range; and overacting abominably in a futile effort to cover his limitations. Di Giuseppe is also a bit mature for his rôle, but warms to it after the first scene and turns in some fine singing (including high D's in the duet and *Possente amor*.) Cuccaro may not be well known, but is among the finest Gilda's encountered on video or audio: accurate colorature, warm and winning tone, and endearing style. Rouleau is as crude and sloppy as always; otherwise, the lesser rôles are in capable hands.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is bright and satisfying after initial engineering problems are solved. Monaural sound is not as badly engineered as in some Canadian broadcasts, but does distort on loud passages; nevertheless, one can easily hear the subtleties as well as the broad outlines of a fine reading. Camera movement is fluid and television direction is unnoticeable. If Quilico were even marginally acceptable, this recording would be outstanding; since one can hardly enjoy *Rigoletto* by closing one's ears to the title rôle, it cannot be recommended.

# Simon Boccanegra

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Simon: Chernov  
Maria: Te Kanawa  
Gabriele: Domingo  
Fiesco: Lloyd  
Paolo: Pola

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1995  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Vibrant live performance. Sets are large, but scaled well to both ancient Genoa and the Met stage. Costumes are rich, traditional, and colorful. Acting is conventional for modern opera: committed, but with overlarge gestures appropriate to the vast stage.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine is at his best here, grand in concept and efficient in execution. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable. Chernov tends to the monochromatic, acting less with his voice than with his body; still the voice is solid, and except for a few lapses of intonation and of phrasing is a pleasure to hear. Te Kanawa's instrument shows its age in some separation of registers and imprecise portamenti, but she reaches all the notes securely with her beautiful tone. Domingo is acquiring some of the ring of a Verdi tenor; overall, this is as fine a performance as he has turned in for video. Lloyd is excellent throughout except for failing to come up with the big moments in the great aria. Smaller rôles are filled capably.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and colorful; appropriate segments are underlighted, but most are bright enough for the cameras. Audio is particularly fine, using stereo to separate sources even on the stage and representing the sonorous orchestra especially well. Camera work and direction are up to Large's exceptional standard, with just enough focus on peripheral action to maintain context. Overall, this performance does not compete with the greatest on audio alone, but it joins the Scala *Aida* among the few modern performances capably representing the grandeur of Verdi.

# Simon Boccanegra

## Verdi

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Royal

Simon: Agache  
Maria: Te Kanawa  
Gabriele: Sylvester  
Fiesco: Scandiuzzi

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1991  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Precise if unimpassioned live performance. Sets are massive and largely stylized with colonnades; the garden is lost, but the council chamber is well represented. Costumes are conventional and effective. The soloists act with commitment but in overlarge gestures for the small screen.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti directs a precise reading but lacks both flexibility and passion. The orchestra is outstanding, the chorus a bit imprecise and less than sonorous, but not a serious drawback. Agache has all the notes and sings them precisely, but lacks vocal expression of commitment. Te Kanawa is past her prime and presses a bit on some of the top notes, but otherwise fulfills the requirements admirably. Sylvester is very much in his element, especially in Act II where minor flaws in production are more than compensated by a large, satisfying sound with a touch of ring. Scandiuzzi offers bright bass timbre and the requisite range, but seems short on volume and passion. Opie's Paolo is brilliant, where the rest of the minor rôles are filled no more than competently.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is soft both in resolution and contrast, due to grossly inadequate lighting even for modern cameras. Sound is good with occasionally effective use of stereo for the stage and some imaging of the orchestra. A few lapses in camera work concentrate attention on the wrong part of the stage, but otherwise Large's achievement reaches its usual peak. Given the difficulty in locating the Abbado performance and its lack of subtitles, this recording may be the first choice.

# Simon Boccanegra

## Verdi

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Scala

Simon: Cappuccilli  
Maria: Freni  
Gabriele: Luchetti  
Fiesco: Ghiaurov

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Battistoni

Date: ~1980  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from the Temple of Verdi. Sets appear to be immense and more symbolic than literal; costumes are of the period and entirely conventional. Stage movement is dramatic and effective except when the singers are working too hard on the notes.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado's reading is languorous and uninflected, though always accurate. The orchestra and chorus are superb. Cappuccilli has all the notes and much of the style; his failing is the inability to express the character in dynamics and thereby to bring the Doge to life. Freni is lovely to see and to hear, a bit more lyric than ideal perhaps, but hard to fault. Luchetti is brash and loud, accurate in pitch but not in tempo. Ghiaurov is too good: too strong and effective a performer to inspire compassion. Smaller rôles are inadequately covered, surprisingly making do with inadequate voices lacking accuracy and quality of sound.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is neither sharp nor adequately lighted. One can perceive outlines and a bit more in the murk, but no detail. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is adequate thanks to good balance between stage and pit. Video direction is satisfactory because it is minimal; one problem is occasional diversion to the orchestra during quiet moments on stage. This performance would deserve praise if the recording were technically superior; it would earn high rating if Cappuccilli were more involving.

# Simon Boccanegra

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Simone: Milnes  
Maria: Tomowa-Sintow  
Gabriele: Moldoveanu  
Fiesco: Plishka  
Paolo: Clark

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 29 Dec 1984  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Conventional concept that realizes grandeur of scale. Unfortunately, the solo voices are hard pressed to sustain those demands. Perhaps inevitably on the Met stage, the effect of massive sets is larger than life. Nothing in the production detracts from the drama, but the staging frequently attracts the viewer's attention when the vocal business is less than inspiring.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine provides rather more freshness than his conducting sometimes displays, but as always delivers an honest interpretation. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable. Milnes' Simone is the focus of the performance, and is at least adequate. He is vocally accurate and generally pleasant to hear; he moves well through the rôle with predictable exaggeration fitting to the scale of the production. Tomowa-Sintow makes beautiful sounds with some success in acting her part. Plishka is sonorous, but offers no depth and evokes no sympathy. Moldoveanu is loud in both appropriate and inappropriate pages. The many lesser rôles are well handled, including Dawn Upshaw's broadcast debut.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio representation is accurate, placing the viewer in the house in an excellent seat. Video is more than satisfactory, though not as impressive as in later recordings. Camera work is problematic, often concentrating on the grandeur of the staging and losing the humanity of the action; whether a better solution could be found in so large a house is not apparent. Lighting is sufficient and not intrusive.

# Stiffelio

## Verdi

Conductor: Downes  
Company: Royal

Stiffelio: Carreras  
Lina: Malfitano  
Stankar: Yurisich  
Raffaele: Leggate  
Jorg: Howell

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Intense, committed, live performance. Settings are warm, rich, and literal. Performers act and move well in conventional if drab costumes. The brevity of the subtitles and imprecise enunciation work against full understanding of the text. Still, the drama is conveyed effectively and only a few production incongruities intrude on the illusion.

### PERFORMANCES

Downes leads a taut, exciting, dynamic reading. The orchestra follows precisely without recognizable limitation. The chorus is a bit murky but otherwise outstanding. Carreras and Malfitano perform wonderfully, but neither has the dramatic heft to make the most of the rôle. Yurisich would be ideal if his phrasing were more Italianate; the aria of his big solo suffers quite noticeably. Leggate provides more weight than Carreras, distorting Verdi's intended balance but not disturbingly. All other parts are well filled, and every note is in place tonally and dynamically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio define the state of the art: brilliant, accurate, fully representing the experience in the house. Camera selection is surprisingly choppy, shifting attention excessively and sometimes distractingly. The result is a satisfying performance almost ideally captured for the home.



# Stiffelio Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Stiffelio: Domingo  
Lina: Sweet  
Stankar: Chernov  
Raffaele: Riberi  
Jorg: Plishka

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance of the first Met production. Sets are grand yet somewhat simplified; the effect is of appropriate style and scale. Costumes are conventional and drab. Acting is superficial and largely irrelevant.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine leads a solid reading immediately reminiscent of his *Ernani*. The orchestra is accurate and spirited; the chorus only approximates the unison and sonority desired. Domingo is in excellent voice and seems comfortable with the work. Sweet has trouble finding the note (often sliding into it) and makes some harsh and discordant sounds; nevertheless, she reminds one of Milanov at times and should be able to handle the rôle more happily in the future. Chernov's impressive instrument is similarly unable to find the note, but he simply belts whatever he does pick without looking for Verdi's choice. Riberi is a pleasure vocally and visually in a small but important role. Unfortunately, Plishka has lost weight but not the pitch problems which have inflicted him for a decade. The result is exciting, even thrilling sounds which illustrate the music without illuminating it.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and ideally lighted without adverse effect of the audience. Sound is generally good but suffers occasional lapses which would be attributed to dead spots in another house. Camera work is superb, surpassing even Large's usual extraordinary standard. The performance serves as a fine historical record and a solid introduction to a rarity deserving of more familiarity—and of finer recordings.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Rizzi  
Company: Venice

Violetta: Gruberova  
Alfredo: Schicoff  
Germont: Zancanaro  
Doughol: Mori  
Flora: Pentcheva

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Bailey

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live if not lively staged performance. Sets are simplified and colorful in traditional style. Costumes are brilliant and conventional, with consistently white gowns for Violetta. Direction is somewhat fussy, suitably so for the stage. Acting is unremarkable.

### PERFORMANCES

Rizzi is highly indulgent of the soloists, expanding tempo and restraining the orchestra more than most will prefer. Both orchestra and chorus are adequate but no more. Gruberova is fine overall, but slides into notes and introduces an ugly, glottal catch, especially in the first act; she lacks the power to be effective in the more dramatic scenes. Shicoff begins awkwardly, but sings well enough after Act I; he is not given his cabaletta. Zancanaro is direct and crude, but appropriately for his rôle; his cabaletta is included. Minor rôles are competently covered.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well lighted throughout. Audio is clear and orchestral imaging is good; no surround effects are noticeable. Video direction is fine. Overall, the major failing of the performance is grace; singing and staging are fine.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Violetta: Fabbricini  
Alfredo: Alagna  
Germont: Coni  
Douphol: Mori  
Flora: Curiel

LaserDisc  
Italian  
Director: Cavani

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Complete, capable live staging. Sets and costumes are essentially conventional with dominant color themes by scene; they are generally opulent but give an impression of a dull pall overlaying them. Stage movement is outstanding and overall direction is ideal. The performers act with conviction and extend the sense of reality lent by technology. Both cabalettas are included so that the score is truly complete.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti selects slower tempi throughout and deadly ones on occasion; otherwise, his leadership is exemplary. Both precision and enthusiasm mark the choral and instrumental work. Fabbricini provides Violetta in Callas' style: dramatically complete but occasionally strained vocally. Alagna may prove a major find with qualities reminding the listener of the young Bergonzi. Coni seems misplaced: competent in most respects, barring a tendency to sing under the note at forte and above, but dramatically negligible. The lesser parts are taken by experts; some, such as Mori, may be destined for more substantial rôles.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is superb, showing high-definition origins in both the letterbox format and the wealth of detail on screen. Audio is even finer, not only conveying the full sound of each voice and instrument, but even exploiting surround to provide the ambience of the theater. Video direction falls short of the ideal, failing to exploit the potential of approximating attendance. Had the capable Ms. Cavani chosen to pick a single altitude for her viewpoint and to emulate closing in the viewer's perception, then expanding it toward full stage, the effect might well have been remarkable. Even so, the result is an absorbing, even involving performance, despite running 25% longer than its competition. The recording is highly recommended for those who do not require subtitles.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Abel  
Company: New York City

Violetta: Hall  
Alfredo: Brown  
Germont: Otey  
Flora: Wood  
Doughol: Pallozzi

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Browning

Date: 28 March 1995  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance of Renata Scotto's production. Sets and costumes are strictly conventional and appropriately colorful. Staging offers no surprises, and the performers move in reasonably realistic fashion. One major disturbance is that many soloists maintain focus on the conductor in order to predict his shifts of tempo; that may have been acceptable in the hall, but is exaggerated on the home screen.

### PERFORMANCES

Abel's tempi vary erratically, distorting the line and confusing the performers. The orchestra and chorus are fine when in sync with him, but tend to go ragged when he pulls them far from the score. Hall's voice is afflicted with an unremitting vibrato which darkens all but the harsh highest notes; she does sing everything Verdi gave her (omitting the E-flat that he didn't), but does not create the persona of Violetta. Brown's undistinguished instrument is pressed to an almost continuous forte and he shows no understanding of the Verdi line, but he does sing all the notes. Otey is altogether unreliable in pitch and tempo, though the basic sound is pleasant. Wood's Flora is notably well sung. The lesser parts are handled adequately.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and all scenes are fully lighted. Audio quality is fine, but stereo imaging is limited to the orchestra and no ambience can be detected. Camera work is excellent, with ample use of medium shots to maintain focus of attention and to establish the context. Overall, this performance is of high provincial standard except for the conducting and the baritone.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Violetta: Cotrubas  
Alfredo: Domingo  
Germont: Macneil

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large?

Date: 28 March 1981  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live from the Met in the best tradition. Sets are oversize, strictly conventional, and done in warm tones. Costumes are similarly warm and traditional. Acting is far more convincing than usual, thanks in large measure to the vocal restraint of most of the singers.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine is more lyrical and less impassioned than usual, allowing Verdi's music to flow on a modest scale for so large a house. The orchestra and chorus are superb, as expected. Cotrubas is wonderful to watch and delightful to hear; her colorature is less spectacular than some sopranos offer, so she compensates with a superb portrayal and omitting the gratuitous high note. Domingo is at his most lyrical and most pleasing; he sings the cabaletta but wisely eschews the high D. Macneil is imprecise and clumsy, but not so badly as to ruin the performance; unfortunately, this production restores his cabaletta to no advantage. The supporting soloists are superior in every respect.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video shows its age, compounded by inadequate lighting that masks the details and emphasizes the monotonously warm tones. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is clear and well balanced. Video direction is effective and unspectacular. Technical failings and most significantly Macneil's noises limit the value of this performance.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Solti  
Company: Royal

Violetta: Gheorghiu  
Alfredo: Lopardo  
Germont: Nucci

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Burton/Maniura

Date: December 1994  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before a restrained audience. Costumes are conventionally of the period. Sets appear conventional, but exploit the limited stage area effectively—occasionally, spectacularly. The production offers several jarring novelties that distract from rather than illuminate but is otherwise conventional. Both Lopardo and Nucci act conventionally; Gheorghiu and the remainder of the cast enliven the stage with persuasive portrayals. Flora's party is a dramatic delight and a satisfying fusion of song, dance and theater. Cabalettas for both Lopardo and Nucci have been restored, though neither singer performs them to advantage.

### PERFORMANCES

Solti leads a sturdy, transparent and essentially standard, Italianate reading. The orchestra is excellent; the chorus, remarkable. Gheorghiu is a delight to see and to hear; her only vocal limitations are a substantial vibrato which is broadened where a trill would be preferred and some hardening of the top at forte. Lopardo is not overtly bad, but his voice lacks beauty, his timing and intonation are often slightly off, and his wooden portrayal (physical and vocal) comes to life suddenly and excessively when he enters the spotlight. Nucci is loud and frequently off pitch, though the Act II duet is reasonably effective. Jones' Flora stands out even from the generally high level of artist in smaller rôles.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

After a hazy beginning, video sharpens to excellent quality. Sound is clear with good frequency range and limited dynamics and with limited use of stereo even for separation, let alone imaging. Camera work is hyperactive with a profusion of sudden cuts away from the focus of action. Camera angles are often awkward, though allowance must be made for the presence of the audience. The result is visual clutter of an audibly clean performance. For Solti, Gheorghiu, and the main lines of the production, this recording can be recommended. In other respects, better choices are available.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Rudel  
Company: Wolf Trap

Violetta: Sills  
Alfredo: Price  
Germont: Fredericks

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Browning

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance in the open air. Sets are traditional in form but compressed in depth to fit the stage. Costumes are literal and contribute to the stilted formalism of the performances. Acting is minimal but not unnatural. The usual cuts are observed so the men have no caballettas.

### PERFORMANCES

Rudel exaggerates the stereotypes of the score with ritards and murky textures. The orchestra and chorus follow dutifully. Sills handles all the requirements efficiently if without evident enthusiasm. Price lacks both vocal ring and dramatic brio. Fredericks is effective if distractingly youthful. Perhaps most disturbing is the inconsistency of Sills' grand dame against the stilted, nearly amateurish performance by the rest of the cast.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is surprisingly good for the era, sharp and reasonably well lighted. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is acceptable, somehow seeming appropriate for a dull performance. Direction is excellent, maintaining attention without apparent adaptation to the live audience. Sills' many fans will find this indispensable; others will appreciate the lack of serious, specific error; none is likely to consider it a fair representation of Verdi.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: film

Violetta: Stratas  
Alfredo: Domingo  
Germont: Macneil  
Duphol: Monk  
Flora: Gall

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Zefirelli

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Lavish Zefirelli film fully realizing the drama of the opera. Overall production tends to be dark as well as grand, with fascinating similarities to the earlier film with Moffo. When appropriate, the settings sparkle; more often, they depress. Action and music are almost perfectly integrated; sets and costumes are literal and never intrude into the performance. Above all, this production supports total enjoyment of the opera.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts effectively but offers no special insight into the score. The orchestra and chorus of the Met are impeccable. Stratas is musically problematic; her contention that a rough take of her sound track was used for the final is credible, given the quality of her other work. However, her Violetta is three-dimensional and the vocal flaws are seldom intrusive in her overall performance. Domingo is more straightforward than some Alfredos, and offers a less than sumptuous sound, but he is committed to the rôle and matches Stratas dramatically. Macneil is in predictably poor voice conveying only a sketch of his character.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are outstanding. The ambience is of a film, not of an opera house. As in other Zefirelli works, the voices are sometimes used to reflect thought, and the visual and audible images are correlated only in gross concept. In other portions, lip sync is good but with significant lapses that tend to have little impact on the overall effect. This is an outstanding realization of the opera, despite vocal limitations that keep it from the ideal.



# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Gardelli  
Company: Film

Violetta: Freni  
Alfredo: Bonisolti  
Germont: Bruscantini

Broadcast  
Italian  
Director: Nagel

Date: 1980?  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Elaborate film presentation. Sets are lush, lavish and period. Costumes are also traditional; action takes some liberties with convention thanks to the flexibility of film. Lip sync is so poor as to appear to be neglected.

### PERFORMANCES

Gardelli seems to have nothing to say about the score and conducts a perfectly routine performance. Orchestra and chorus are responsive and accurate. Freni is not Violetta, despite her lovely instrument; she lacks the abandon for the first act and the pathos for the last. Bonisolti sings well, but is no longer quite the gay young blade needed for best effect (for example, the D in the cabaletta neither rings nor persuades). Bruscantini is fine vocally and dramatically in an unaccustomed baritone part; one misses his cabaletta.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear and well lighted. Pre-HiFi monaural sound suffices for the voices but does nothing for the orchestra. Camera work and overall direction are satisfactory if routine. This recording is necessary only for Miss Freni's committed fans.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Veltri  
Company: Montreal

Violetta: Mauti-Nunzia  
Alfredo: Cole  
Germont: Quilico

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Picard

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live performance on a stage of moderate size. Sets are traditional and relatively colorless. Period costumes do nothing to elevate the performance, but fit it comfortably. Otherwise conventional stage direction has some minor distractions.

### PERFORMANCES

Veltri recognizes only the tragedy of the work and conducts it as a near-continuous dirge in tempo and in feel. The orchestra is hard-pressed to convey that weight, but plays well. The chorus is relatively loud and large. Mauti-Nunzia is of an older school: dramatic in timbre, adequate in colorature, but neither pleasant to hear nor dramatically adept. Cole is miscast, lacking the ring of ardor while using a lyric instrument with restraint; he manages the cabaletta well, even with a high D. Quilico's Verdi years were past before this recording and the gruff, inaccurate sounds appeal to the audience's memory, not to their present hearing. Minor rôles are capably covered.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp and lighting is well balanced, but neither suffices to provide detail or crisp images. Monaural sound is adequate. Camera angles are forced due to the audience, but overall direction is good.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Patane  
Company: Rome Opera

Violetta: Moffo  
Alfredco: Bonisolli  
Germont: Bechi

Beta  
Italian  
Director: Lanfranchi

Date: 1968  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Theatrical film somewhat lacking in theatrical values. The production is consistently traditional, with conventional costuming. Sets appear to be a mix of sound stage and appropriate buildings. Much of the staging anticipates Zeffirelli's film, but it is brighter in lighting and mood.

### PERFORMANCES

Patane conducts traditionally, indulging the soloists in the usual manner. The orchestra is surprisingly sloppy at entrances and rather uninflected, as though bored with the whole matter. The chorus does its minor bit quite well. Moffo is superb visually and admirable vocally; some moments of strain appear, but overall her reading is by far the best available on video and among the best in any medium. Bonisolli sings and looks fine, but conveys no dimension in this shallow character. Bechi is superb: the voice is drier than ideal, but the characterization (vocal and visual) is impeccable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is adequate, benefitting from film production. The sound has limited range and is monaural, but is acceptable and does not detract from the performances. Lip sync is poor, sometimes even distracting. Most viewers should value the magical contributions from Moffo and Bechi above the technical faults.

# Traviata

## Verdi

Conductor: Sanzogno  
Company: film

Violetta: Carteri  
Alfredo: Filacuridi  
Germont: Tagliabue

VHS  
Italian  
Director: Enriquez

Date: 1954  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Monochrome film without roots in stage production. Sets and costumes are conventional and unremarkable. Ensemble movement is fluid but essentially random even in the dance sequences. The performers look their parts: Violetta lovely to watch; Alfredo ardent and committed; Germont (grand)fatherly and awkward. Acting is conventional but appropriate. Lip sync is surprisingly good when attempted, but at times singing continues after the mouth has ceased to move.

### PERFORMANCES

Sanzogno's deliberate pacing allows the music to expand without taxing the soloists. Orchestra and chorus are rather muddy but never intrusive. Carteri's spinto is used well, but lacks inflection and is short on the colorature; nevertheless, her courtesan is as convincing and as attractive as any but Moffo's and the weight of her voice is particularly effective in the later acts. Filacuridi does nothing with the rôle but sing the notes (no cabaletta) in a full, lyric tenor of reasonable quality. Tagliabue barks through the part with an affected suavity that palls rather quickly. The smaller rôles are filled exceptionally well.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably good for the era though many film flaws are readily and painfully visible. Monaural sound is adequate for the voices but preserves little of the rich orchestral fabric. Direction is cinematic in the style of 30's musicals and does nothing to enhance so classic an opera. Overall, this is a "mono" performance - monochromatic, monaural, and monotonic. Nevertheless, it is a valuable and valued record of the era and of a lovely artist in one of her signature rôles.

# Trovatore

## Verdi

Conductor: Giovaninetti  
Company: Orange

Manrico: Spiess  
Leonore: Caballe  
di Luna: Glossop  
Azucena: Arkhipova

LaserDisc  
Italian / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Jourdan

Date: 23 Jul 1972  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from l'Orange Festival with video from several performances. The amphitheater is the set and nothing is added. Costumes are collected randomly: Ruiz in burnoose, nuns in all styles and colors (including red), etc. Theatrical values are minimal; soloists stand four-square and sing to the audience. Where video is attached to the vocal performance, lip sync is not quite as bad as in others of the series. The second verse of "Stride la vampa" is cut from the recording, probably for timing.

### PERFORMANCES

Giovaninetti directs an erratic and absolutely conventional reading. The orchestra is marginal; the chorus is ludicrous. Spiess has the timbre and ring for the rôle; one misses colorature and character, but seldom voice. Caballe is near her best, with ravishing tone and effulgent voice; fortunately, she is given her last-act cabaletta. Arkhipova actually **sings** Azucena! Glossop is inaccurate in timing, intonation and pitch, but holds up in the ensembles. Zaccaria offers quality and quantity of sound for Ferrando if not precision. Begg's Ines is a positive contribution; Dobson manages Ruiz. However, the whole far exceeds the sum of the parts in excitement.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Both sound and picture fall far short of one's hopes, but neither is so poor as to detract from the thrill. Direction is painfully busy with unstable camera work and many brief shots interrupting continuous melody. Overall, this recording would be in the middle ranks without video but is by far the best choice among those one can see.

# Trovatore

## Verdi

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Manrico: Pavarotti  
Leonore: Marton  
di Luna: Milnes  
Azucena: Zajick

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 15 October 1988  
Evaluation: Acceptable

### PRODUCTION

Live, not living, embodiment of the Met's distortion. Sets are immense, on the scale of the performers. Costumes are similarly oversize and similarly traditional. Stage movement is ludicrous. Trovatore without passion may be difficult to envision until you encounter this performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Predictably, Levine is accurate and uninspired. He gives his soloists more freedom than they exploit. Orchestra and chorus are accurate. Pavarotti sings and emotes routinely, lacking the heroic element central to the character. Marton is loud, but lacks even the rudiments of fioriture essential to her role. Milnes blusters adequately. Zajick and Wells are conventionally sufficient, as are the minor performers.

### PRODUCTION

The scale overwhelms the work. Video is fine, displaying every aspect of the routine staging in fine detail. Sound is excellent. Camera work is unimpeded by the live milieu. Technical merits aside, this performance is without redeeming value.

# Trovatore

## Verdi

Conductor: Giovaninetti  
Company: Verona

Manrico: Bonisolti  
Leonore: Plowright  
di Luna: Zancanaro  
Azucena: Cossotto

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

1985  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance well realized in the vast Arena di Verona. Settings are representational and fit well into the amphitheater. Costumes are traditional. Stage movement is well planned and well realized. While the performance is substantially flawed vocally, it is more nearly integrated than the alternatives.

### PERFORMANCES

Giovaninetti races through the score but maintains control most of the time. Orchestral entrances are ragged; the chorus is capable. Bonisolti's voice is far short of the dramatic demands, but he seems committed and never becomes truly ugly. Plowright lacks that commitment, but has the technical command for most of the rôle, lacking only dramatic weight. Zancanaro is amply loud but a dramatic cipher. Cossotto recalls an earlier era of oversize performance.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is surprisingly good, benefitting from good stage design and exceptional lighting for that theater. Audio is acceptable, but seems thin and poorly focussed. Camera work is far better than usual from Verona, probably due to Large's direction. Any influence of the audience on the freedom of recording is invisible.

# Trovatore

## Verdi

Conductor: Previtali  
Company: RAI

Manrico: del Monaco  
Leonore: Genser  
di Luna: Bastianini  
Azucena: Barbieri

VHS  
Italian  
Director: Camurati

Date: 1957  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Monochrome film of more vocal than dramatic merit. Settings are essentially for the stage. Costuming is simplistic and conventional. Movement is reasonably fluid but irrelevant. Lip sync is abominable.

### PERFORMANCES

Previtali is dull but effective. Neither orchestra nor chorus quite manages the score. Del Monaco lacks the lyricism of the rôle (to say nothing of the trill) and conveys the dynamics, through a range from one *f* to three. Genser manages the fioriture but lacks dramatic impact with a voice of odd quality and limited impact. Bastianini thrills vocally and suffices dramatically, but is hard put to sustain the work with his rôle alone. Barbieri helps, with an overdone, old-fashioned, effective Azucena.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Neither video nor audio is commendable and both are quite variable among the different sources. At best, the picture suffers from some smearing and softness but is acceptable. Audio range is limited and clarity is no more than fair, but the excitement of the score gets through somehow. Direction plods without intruding. Note that some commercial transfers are so poor that the rating would drop below Acceptable.



# Vespri Siciliani

## Verdi

Conductor: Muti  
Company: Scala

Elena: Studer  
Arrigo: Merritt  
Monforte: Zancanaro  
Procida: Furlanetto

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Swann

Date: 30 December 1989  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Effective live performance at La Scala. Sets are generally simple (except for the exuberant ball scene), colorful, and appropriate. Costumes are a bit odd: except for Studer, they seem to be rationed at one per performer: all Sicilians but one are in drab; all Frenchmen are in uniforms with tarnished braid. Unfortunately, dramatic elements are of an ancient style; vocal elements are not.

### PERFORMANCES

Muti understands the score and propels it assertively and effectively — with some excessive indulgences for the soloists. The orchestra is occasionally ragged, as though they had rehearsed with a surrogate conductor. Choral entrances display similar failings, though the singing is admirable at its best. Studer provides drama for most of the work with an essentially underpowered instrument; unfortunately, the colorature, especially in the “Bolero” leaves a great deal to be desired. Merritt’s three voices control him; at best, he makes some lovely tones, at worst, he squawks off pitch. Zancanaro is a relative delight, on pitch and in style throughout. Furlanetto is marginally less satisfying, lacking grace and a few of the lowest notes. The minor rôles are competently covered. The ballet is generally fine, although the *premier danseur* seems always at the edge of disaster.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good but not as sharp as the best contemporary work. Audio for the orchestra is excellent: crisp and well resolved, placing instruments and using some surround for ambience. Audio for the singers is good in range, but terrible in bouncing singers around the stage and spreading them across it. Overall, extraneous sounds are more than intrusive: occasional interjections and extended booming noises from the floor, even when the performers are not emulating elephants. Lighting is generally good, although the darker scenes are underlighted. Camera work is so busy that it becomes dizzying at times; at one point in the ballet, the viewer may feel suspended on the pendulum of a clock.

# Vespri Siciliani

## Verdi

Conductor: Chailly  
Company: Bologna

Elena: Dunn  
Arrigo: Luchetti  
Monforte: Nucci  
Procida: Gaiotti

Broadcast  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1988  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Live staging less accessible than but as good as the Scala. Sets are essentially an exterior with creative and occasionally successful use of curtains and a few props. Costumes approximate the era of the story. Action is minimal in a production which emulates an earlier age.

### PERFORMANCES

Chailly understands the score but leads a very straight and stolid interpretation. The orchestra and chorus plod responsively. Dunn's voice is too light for the demands of the rôle, but her colorature is satisfying and only the lowest notes are lost completely. Luchetti offers the right timbre but can no longer find the notes. The rest of the soloists manage most of the music adequately though none offers any insight or musical delight.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but cannot be crisp due to inadequate lighting. A further problem with lighting is that it was unaugmented while camera angles were chosen to minimize audience impact; the result is that one seldom sees the lighted side of the subject at all. Monaural sound is clear but does not permit appreciation of the orchestral elements — and too often exposes the vocal failings. Video direction is choppy, often suggesting inadequate rehearsal by failure to track the action and by including distracting background movement even in closeups.

# Orlando Furioso

## Vivaldi

Conductor: Behr

Company: San Francisco

Orlando: Horne

Alcina: Kuhlmann

Angelica: Patterson

Ruggiero: Gall

Bradamante: Walker

Medoro: Matteuzzi

Astolfo: Langan

LaserDisc

Italian / English subtitles

Director: Large

Date: 1990

Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Simple, spectacular, and stylized very live performance. Clever devices emphasize the wit of libretto and score. Costuming is brilliant and appropriate to the era of the music; movement is minimal, yet the result is dramatically intense. By contemporary standards, the work is slow and little of the music warrants close study.

### PERFORMANCES

Behr is admirable, maintaining pulse without exaggeration and providing full sonority without excessive weight. The orchestra seems dead on throughout. Horne is superb; in her Act III scena, spectacular. The rest of the cast has less opportunity, but makes the most of it. Gall's countertenor is the second highest voice, and the lower male rôles have little to do; the result is an uncomfortable balance for modern ears. Kuhlmann is lovely to see and hear, but offers little contrast with Horne; at times, Walker is almost indistinguishable from Horne vocally.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are spectacular. The sound stage is not imaged, but movement is reflected capably in the audio. Camera work is superb, unhampered by audience; unfortunately, mirrors in the sets frequently produce extraneous images and movements which distract the home viewer but might not have been a problem in the hall. Many subtitles are lost in white-on-white and no libretto is supplied. This performance is not an homage to a museum piece but a strong argument for the value of the work on the modern stage. It is a commendable if imperfect achievement.

# Fliegende Holländer

## Wagner

Conductor: Nelsson  
Company: Bayreuth

Holländer: Estes  
Daland: Salminen  
Senta: Balslev  
Erik: Schunk  
Steuermann: Clark  
Mary: Schlemm

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Huneke

Date: 1985  
Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

### PRODUCTION

Highly idiosyncratic and problematic live staging. Concepts that work for you will be deemed illuminating as well as effective; others will appear to be conceits or may confuse you enough to distract from the music. Senta's continuous presence on stage may reflect any of a number of directorial ideas, but as often as not detracts from the musical focus. In contrast, the images of the ship in divine hands and of the chained Dutchman are striking, effective, and consonant with the musical ideas.

### PERFORMANCES

Nelsson conducts rather reticently, never asserting the score. The orchestra is solid and effective. Estes is excellent, less subtle and more sonorous than the average Dutchman, but fully comfortable in the rôle. Salminen is no less in command as Daland, balancing Estes dramatically, though not vocally distinguishable from him. Balslev is committed and accurate, but her Senta lacks the other-world components of her personality and her music. Both tenors are competent—perhaps all that one can expect in those parts today. Choral work is surprisingly imprecise, though not enough to distract seriously.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are superb throughout. Images are intense without appearing to be exaggerated. Lighting is excellent, and appears to have needed no augmentation over a normal stage presentation. Camera work is generally good, but with some distractingly wide shots where the natural focus is limited; the cause may be the desire to catch unique aspects of the production. This recording should be seen at least once, even if it is unlikely to become a favorite reading.

# Fliegende Holländer

## Wagner

Conductor: Stein  
Company: Geneve

Holländer: Roar  
Senta: Slatinaru  
Daland: Ridderbusch  
Erik: Shunk  
Mary: Budai  
Steuermann: Suttheimer

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: ?

Date: 1 February 1980  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance directed by Riber. Representational sets with billowing scarlet 'sails' and other highlights set off drab but traditional costumes. Acting is fluent and natural.

### PERFORMANCES

Stein lets the score play through to excellent effect. Orchestra and chorus are sonorous and accurate. Roar's gruff sound serves the part well in its way. Slatinaru offers a large instrument slightly less warm than ideal (and occasionally shrill and even sharp). Ridderbusch is inadequate; Shunk is fine, better than the part demands (or usually gets). Suttheimer is clearly over his head.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is good for the era but inadequate lighting loses detail. Stereo is more effective in the orchestra than on the stage, but overall sound is fine. Direction is crisp and not overly fussy. In all, the performance is effective beyond its individual strengths and in spite of relatively minor weaknesses.

# Fliegende Holländer

## Wagner

Conductor: Segerstam  
Company: Savonlinna Festival

Holländer: Grundheber  
Daland: Salminen  
Senta: Behrens  
Erik: Sirkiä  
Steuermann: Silvasti  
Mary: Vätkki

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Cronvall

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

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### PRODUCTION

Exciting live staging in an ancient Finnish castle (Olavinlinna). Simple but imaginative elements convert the stone walls to each of the settings required. Unfortunately, some stage effects are so abstruse as to distract and confuse, notably the beckoning(?), rowing(?) arms extending from the side of the Holländer's ship. Costumes are generally bright and conventional and movement is well considered. Again, a jarring element is introduced when two stocking-masked and body-stockinged members of the Holländer's crew bring a chest of jewels to Daland.

### PERFORMANCES

Segerstam leads a driven if uninspired reading with somewhat smaller forces than might be expected. The chorus is exceptional in spirit and movement. The orchestra is generally good but suffers more errors than would be needed to prove that the performance was live. Grundhaber is dry and declamatory, conveying his commitment to the rôle. Salminen is excellent. Behrens' voice catches surprisingly often and one could wish her younger, but she is very right in the part. Sirkiä is adequate but Vätkki is not (the critical middle range is missing). Silvasti is almost ideal vocally and dramatically.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video quality is excellent though it lacks sparkle. Audio is outstanding, even imaging the stage at times to show performance movement audibly as well as visually. Unfortunately, video production is excruciating. Closeups dominate, inexplicably using shots of the singers posed and silent when they are singing. A shot of the ocean interposes at every break in the action, sometimes by itself and sometimes overlaid on a tour of the castle. A drawing of a wind-battered ship is often overlaid on the roiling ocean or used alone. (For example, each time the Steuermann calls: "Wer da?," the drawing is interjected.) The gimmickry is painful on first viewing and intolerable when repeated. Fortunately, one learns when to close one's eyes. The performance is too good to be adulterated after the fact; if a straight taping is available, it should be released.

# Fliegende Holländer

## Wagner

Conductor: Lloyd-Jones  
Company: English National

Holländer: Bailey  
Daland: Dean  
Senta: Jones  
Erik: Erwin  
Steuermann: Ferguson  
Mary: Davies

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Large

Date: 1975  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Film of live production. Dark staging emphasizes the brooding and mystical qualities of the score, but is somewhat mitigated by moving the date to the turn of the eighteenth century. Conventional staging is brightened with constructive variants from the traditional; a motif of the spinning wheel (of fate?) is added to good effect.

### PERFORMANCES

Lloyd-Jones' reading is unremarkable and propels the score effectively. The orchestra is solid and responsive; the chorus is somewhat ragged and sounds underrehearsed. Bailey is outstanding, singing with authority and conviction. Jones is lovely to see and to hear despite some wobble in the tone. Dean disappoints because his G&S style does not fit the rather stolid character of this production. The other soloists are satisfactory without being memorable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video cannot be assessed on the inadequate review copy; it appears to be more than acceptable. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is sufficient to communicate wonderfully the committed performance. Camera work is outstanding, aided by the augmented lighting possible in the absence of an audience. The translation does not distort the text, and a quality transfer would be welcome.

# Lohengrin

## Wagner

Conductor: Nelsson  
Company: Bayreuth

Lohengrin: Hofmann  
Elsa: Armstrong  
Telramund: Roar  
Ortrud: Connell  
Heinrich: Vogel

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live, vivid performance greater than the sum of its parts. Sets are highly representational rather than literal, but all required elements are visible. Costumes mix eras, but distinguish classes of characters without distracting. Some stage direction seems arbitrary or even distracting, such as figures ducking into depressions in the stage. Acting is fluid and effective throughout, although Armstrong's physical efforts can seem exaggerated on the home screen.

### PERFORMANCES

Nelsson's contribution is more impressive for being essentially invisible; he propels the music effectively but unobtrusively. Chorus and orchestra are exemplary, with precise entrances, phrasing, and unison. Hofmann looks ideal and sings without great effort; not all notes are hit squarely and dynamics are compromised, but the portrayal is acceptable. Armstrong uses a light, dark instrument well but does not hit all notes dead center and suffers from a wobble that disrupts the image of the frail young maid. Connell and Roar are generally fine both in voice and demeanor; occasional harsh phrases can be interpreted as fitting for the rôles. Support from Vogel and Weikl (Herald) is adequate, though neither seems comfortable with the vocal demands.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is excellent, remarkably so for the early date, with clear resolution of visual detail and color. The sound stage is well realized, with no audible impact of the analogue origins of the sound. Lighting is highly effective, augmenting the sparse sets to emphasize or even introduce physical elements. Camera work is outstanding and overall direction is both effective and unobtrusive. While individual performances from the principals are short of the ideal, the result is effective overall and the recording is recommended in its own right and also relative to its video competition.



# Lohengrin

## Wagner

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Lohengrin: Hofmann  
Elsa: Marton  
Telramund: Roar  
Ortrud: Rysanek  
Henry: Macurdy

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 10 Jan 1986  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Basically, a traditional staging with conventional if oversized sets. Many memorable moments attributable to felicitous sets and stage direction enliven an otherwise unremarkable performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts with occasional fire and uninterrupted honesty to the score. The orchestral sound is outstanding, perhaps the only truly positive element of the performance. Hofmann is pretty. Marton is loud. Neither brings much lyricism to the rôle; better interpreters simply did not exist at that time (or when this is written), and both principals do get all the notes out in tempo. Rysanek is unremittingly shrill as Ortrud, a misreading of the part most likely attributable to her lack of resources at this late stage in her career. For Roar, there is no excuse. (You may make the obvious pun; I decline.) The less prominent parts are sung better, with the chorus as well schooled as usual.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is of the usual high Met quality, placing the viewer in the theater quite effectively. Video is outstanding; lighting seems restrained, but the image quality never suffers. Camera work is up to the usual exemplary standards of this series. If there were only a way to dub any of the fine, earlier audio recordings (especially of the soloists), we would have a winner.

# Lohengrin

## Wagner

Conductor: Abbado  
Company: Vienna

Lohengrin: Domingo  
Elsa: Studer  
Ortrud: Vejzovic  
Telramund: Welker  
Heinrich: Lloyd

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Literal staging oddly marred by effects contradicting the score and text. Sets are grand and well realized. Costuming is stylized along mediæval lines with subdued colors. Movement is conventional and appropriate. Visual effects are frequently more clever than constructive.

### PERFORMANCES

Abbado leads a remarkably dull performance, limited by factors including the singers' capabilities. The orchestra is accurate, but the chorus features ragged entrances and careless phrasing. Domingo lacks the ring needed for the climaxes and the suave tone mandatory in addressing the swan. Studer is monochromatic but provides pleasing sounds and apparently ample volume. The duet is remarkably uninflected and anticlimactic. Vejzovic overacts vocally and dramatically. Welker is fully satisfying as a conventional Telramund; Lloyd's king is acceptable though hardly regal.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is superb, often detailing stage position more accurately than the camera. Video quality is good, emphasizing errors of stage direction such as midday darkness and improbable positioning. The translation in the subtitles is inconsistent and inaccurate, often to the point of misleading the viewer. Camera angles fail to retain the positions and relationships of the characters. Overall, this performance is little better than the Met's offering; neither represents the work fairly.

# Meistersinger Wagner

Conductor: Stein  
Company: Bayreuth

Hans Sachs: Weikl  
Walther: Jerusalem  
Eva: Häggander  
David: Clark  
Beckmesser: Prey  
Pogner: Schenk

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1984  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Fine and perfectly traditional live staging. No surprises are offered, but the result is thoroughly solid and fully enjoyable. Sets are bright and colorful; costumes are generally less brilliant. Movement by principals and supporting cast is always fluid. Lighting and coloring seem especially and appropriately designed for the musical needs of each scene — as, of course, one would expect, but as one seldom finds.

## PERFORMANCES

Stein's reading is literal and flowing, though it displays neither imagination nor inspiration. The orchestra is a delight; the chorus is nearly as fine. Weikl acts the rôle well, portraying a young widower wiser than the very young lovers; his voice lacks the warmth one would prefer, but the reading is fully satisfying. Jerusalem offers the timbre and exuberance one hopes for, but has little passion and is the weakest actor. Häggander is precise but lacks the vocal and emotional resources to soar. Clark is superb in all respects except for his age, at least a decade beyond that of an apprentice; fortunately, both voice and acting are younger than their embodiment. The supporting cast is exceptionally fine, as one would expect in that venue.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio and video are as fine as on any video opera. Both visual and aural images of the stage are precisely located in the theater at all times. Lighting is ample and camera work is impeccable. There is no technical weakness in the recording. While the production is traditional, it is as nearly a perfect realization of that tradition as one could find. Only the lack of spirit on the podium and vocal limitations of the principals keeps the recommendation within reason.

# Meistersinger Wagner

Conductor: Mackerras  
Company: Australia

Hans Sachs: McIntyre  
Walther: Frey  
Eva: Doese  
David: Doig  
Beckmesser: Pringle  
Pogner: Shanks

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Butler / Lumsden

Date: 14 October 1988  
Evaluation: Good

## PRODUCTION

Live performance before an appreciative audience. Sets and costumes are traditional but not elaborate. Staging effectively uses the physical resources to provide a comfortable physical reality. Generally, acting is clean and persuasive; all performers move easily and effectively. Enunciation is very fine and subtitling is discreet and effective.

## PERFORMANCES

Mackerras leads a vaguely generalized reading lacking in shape or character. The orchestra overcomes initial sloppiness and has some fine moments; unfortunately, the small chorus lacks the requisite precision and is noticeably erratic. McIntyre's gruff presentation borders on the cynical and lacks the compassion and warmth one might hope to hear. Frey attempts lyric sounds on occasion but with little success. Doese's voice loses its beauty when she pushes it on higher notes, but she does so only rarely and the result is more disappointing than disturbing. Pringle hams visually but sings quite well; Shanks is excellent, lacking only ease on the top notes - in which he is certainly not alone among those assuming the rôle. The other rôles are filled capably, with Gunn's Magdalena deserving of special mention. Doig presents a problem in evaluation: he sings well. but fails to persuade in tone or appearance as the apprentice.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp but quite variable; many scenes are washed out and lack black tones. Sound is strident and almost completely lacking in bass; stereo is used effectively and some imaging of the stage can be heard. Camera work seems only moderately limited by the live recording but direction is erratic and problematic. On occasion, video is blacked out momentarily for a change of viewpoint in the midst of a scene, disrupting the viewer's involvement. While extreme closeups are avoided, moderate closeups and medium shots are frequently irrelevant to the focus of the scene. In all, it seems that technical problems forced compromises which seriously interfere with enjoyment.

# Parsifal Wagner

Conductor: Stein  
Company: Bayreuth

Parsifal: Jerusalem  
Amfortas: Weigl  
Kundry: Randova  
Klingsor: Roar  
Titurel: Salminen  
Gurnemanz: Sotin

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1981  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Live performance from the shrine. The semi-abstract sets fit the stage, the staging, and the scenes beautifully. Costumes are also colorful and imaginative. Stage action is effective with little evidence of static traditions.

## PERFORMANCES

Stein's interpretation stresses drama over mystery; with this cast, it works to the advantage of all. The orchestra and chorus are sonorous and accurate. Jerusalem is ideal: young looking and dramatic in sound. Weigl's dry tone is not one's ideal, but it is used with skill and musicianship. Only Randova disappoints, lacking the dark shades needed for the music and to convey the character.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp, better than usual for the era. Lighting is surprisingly good, providing detail usually beyond live camera work even with augmentation. Sound is rich, full, and well distributed in stereo. Camera work and overall direction are excellent despite the audience. This performance ranks with the finest audio-only versions and also provides a stage experience few can experience in person.

# Parsifal

## Wagner

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Met

Parsifal: Jerusalem  
Amfortas: Weikl  
Kundry: Meier  
Klingsor: Mazura  
Titurel: Rootering  
Gurnemanz: Moll

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1994  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Colorful, open live production. Sets are bright when appropriate and literal at all times. Costumes are the traditional robes and such. Stage movement is natural.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine leads a rich, steady reading which the first-rank orchestra seems to relish. The chorus lacks precision at times but is sonorous. Jerusalem's instrument is drier and less attractive than earlier and he misses a note or two, but he portrays a manly Parsifal effectively. Moll is outstandingly rich and sonorous. Weikl's tone is unsteady and Mazura seems hard pressed; otherwise, the men are fully satisfying. Waltraud Meier presents an alluring siren physically and often vocally.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are superbly detailed, with good imaging of the stage in sight and sound. Camera work is effective and invisible. A choice between the Met and Bayreuth productions depends on the viewer's tradeoff of superior voices against superior production values.

# Parsifal Wagner

Conductor: Jordan  
Company: film

Parsifal: Goldberg  
Amfortas: Schöne  
Kundry: Minton  
Gurnemanz: Lloyd  
Klingsor: Haugland  
Titirel: Tschammer

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Syberberg

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Unique

## PRODUCTION

Idiosyncratic, radically non-traditional staging for film without pretense of theatrical venue. Sets are permutations and derivatives of a head of Wagner. Imagery is usually related to the score, but not obviously so. Actors replace the singers for most rôles, with a husband and wife teaming to represent Parsifal. The Symbolism is undeniable and unfathomable.

## PERFORMANCES

Jordan's reading is lighter and more transparent than usual. The chorus and orchestra are well drilled and quite light. Goldberg's voice is right in timbre and the notes are well produced though without expression. Minton is ideal. The other singers are well into their parts and are both accurate and expressive.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is fine but ill focussed. Audio is exceptional, with emphatic surround effects. Lip sync is reasonably good, but never fully convincing — in part because the visible characters are so clearly not those whose voices are being heard. This performance should be experienced, but it cannot be recommended as a reading of the opera.

# Ring des Nibelungen

## Wagner

Conductor: Barenboim  
Company: Bayreuth

Wotan: Tomlinson  
Brunnhilde: Evans  
Siegfried: Elming  
Sieglinde: Secunde  
Gutrune: Bundschuh  
Gunther: Brinkmann

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Hohlfeld

Date: 1992  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Synthesis of live performance segments without audience. Sets and costumes are representational, with most symbolism becoming clear early on and few elements contradicting the text. For example, those without coats are plebeian (or in plebeian mode); a cloth coat is noble; a leather coat indicates deity or god-like status. Smoke and ladders seem to dominate many scenes, but they become acceptable as an idiom after a while. The men face significant athletic demands, but satisfy them throughout.

### PERFORMANCES

Barenboim damps the dynamics of the score and minimizes pointing of phrases; the result is more precise than involving. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable, as always. Almost all of the soloists seem constrained to Sprechstimme instead of singing and to a dynamic range from mezzoforte to forte. Evans is clearly at her limit almost continuously. Tomlinson's dry instrument is used well but conveys nothing beyond the notes on the page. A few imperfect notes in his final scene mar Jerusalem's enthusiastic portrayal; apart from those, the vocalism is understated and less impressive than the dramatic reading.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is sharp throughout—except when the stage smoke diffuses across the lens. Admirable stereo offers significant imaging of the stage as well as the orchestra and some surround (though its recovery invites distortion). Camera work is admirable and seldom intrusive; as happens too often, one wishes for more medium shots and fewer closeups. The widescreen (16:9) format is excellent for the stage, but is not well exploited for subtitles which usually extend significantly into the frame. Overall, this presentation is satisfying to the extent that one emphasizes the drama in describing the Ring as music drama.



# Ring des Nibelungen

## Wagner

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Wotan: Morris  
Brunnhilde: Behrens  
Siegmond: Lakes  
Sieglinde: Norman  
Siegfried: Jerusalem  
Gutrune: Lisowska  
Gunther: Raffell

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Overwhelming, classic live production. Sets are slightly stylized from traditional. Costumes and makeup follow traditional lines as well, although most are simplified from the nineteenth-century extremes. The performers act convincingly and thereby enhance the drama of the work.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine and the orchestra are the show, and their conventional reading makes for a moving experience. (The chorus has its usual, superb impact when it arrives.) Morris and Behrens sing, look and act the human side of their rôles well, though they have neither voice nor demeanor as deities. Norman and Lakes overbalance the performance by their straightforward and massive sound and appearance. The other singers are generally capable, although the limitations of Ludwig and Jerusalem can be painful. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that a stronger cast can be found today.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not as brilliant as one might hope, probably due to the low light levels of the production. Audio is superb in all respects except stereo imaging, where even the orchestra is not as clearly detailed as a wider spread would have provided. Camera work is outstanding—of course. More than its rival, this performance is a dramatic whole without serious distraction; it could even be enjoyed as a continuous marathon!

# Ring des Nibelungen

## Wagner

Conductor: Cristofoli  
Company: Den Jyske - Aarhus

Wotan: Waage  
Brunnhilde: Balslev  
Siegfried: Elming  
Sieglinde: Kiberg  
Gutrune: Bjerno  
Gunther: Bertelsen

PAL VHS  
German  
Director: ?

Date: 1996  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performances spread over about two weeks with one or two performances assembled for each part. Sets are simple and effective backdrops for the action. Costumes are a mixed bag more or less of Wagner's day; they appear practical and non-distracting. Performers move as though choreographed, rather than directed, resulting in a most human telling of the story. This is no vocal star show, though all performers are well cast (but none is free of error). Instead we are given an effective portrayal of a grand tale on a grand scale. Wagner's direction controls the show with all the required symbols present and few extraneous ones. However, the unwary should be warned of a minute or so of nudity early on, symbolizing something not immediately apparent to this viewer.

### PERFORMANCES

Cristofoli directs a musically taut but dramatically low-key reading. The orchestra is excellent and the chorus sufficient. Elming and Kiberg stand out as particularly well suited to their roles; Waage is effective, but has rather more problems (particularly in *Rheingold*) than one would like. Balslev and Bertelsen are somewhat more overmatched by the demands of their parts, but do not impair the overall effect. Andersen's timbre is so right that one readily forgets his problems as the young hero. The other rôles are filled similarly with appropriate singing actors.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is contrasty and colors do not always hold true, but it is overall sharp and clear. Sound is also clear but somewhat muted in dynamic and tonal ranges and little use is made of stereo. Direction concentrates on middle views with no closeups but effective use of long shots. The latter are less satisfying than they would be if settings were more developed, leaving the singers starkly lighted before a frequently black backdrop. Since alternative versions offer a literal production with star singing and modernist staging with vocal extremes, this narrative version fits nicely into an otherwise empty slot.

# Ring des Nibelungen

## Wagner

Conductor: Boulez  
Company: Bayreuth

Wotan: McIntyre  
Brünnhilde: Jones  
Siegmund: Hofmann  
Sieglinde: Altmeyer  
Siegfried: Jung  
Gutrune: Altmeyer  
Gunther: Mazura

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1980  
Evaluation: Idiosyncratic

### PRODUCTION

Live production with imagery and references far later than Wagner's day and related only vaguely to the text or its underlying mythology. Some of those effects are interesting (and diverting); others distract substantially from continuity of the musicdrama. Evaluation of the overall production must be done by each viewer, since no two seem to see the same symbols or the same meaning in them. Such treatment is more understandable in the ENO *Rigoletto*, where many alternative and conventional productions are available.

### PERFORMANCES

Boulez conducts a sprightly, driving reading throughout. The chorus and orchestra are predictably comfortable with the music and with their conductor. McIntyre's Wotan/Wanderer is dry and monochromatic, but accurate and authoritative. Gwyneth Jones is an unusually vulnerable Brünnhilde, well acted, but frequently painful to hear. Hofmann's Siegmund is attractive if somewhat lightweight. Jung is less attractive (physically and vocally) as Siegfried, and forces his voice nearly as often as Jones does. The other casting is more felicitous, with Zednik's Loge particularly notable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Audio is impeccable and does not suffer from its analogue origins. Video is crisp and well lighted, and camera positions and usage maintain the flow throughout. Overall, this is a dynamic and controversial reading of the cycle, one worth seeing and studying.

# Tannhäuser

## Wagner

Conductor: Sinopoli  
Company: Bayreuth

Tannhauser: Versalle  
Elisabeth: Studer  
Venus: Engert-Ely  
Wolfram: Brendel  
Landgraf: Sotin  
Walther: Pell

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1990  
Evaluation: Very Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance of high quality by contemporary standards. Set is the basic ring with drops setting the location. Costumes are stylized mediæval in ample dimensions to match the singers. The chorus moves rather busily, but does not distract significantly except for the sound of their clomping. The principals generally act minimally and conventionally. Enunciation is excellent; subtitles tend to be verbose.

### PERFORMANCES

Sinopoli barely holds the forces together while offering no significant insight or coloration. The orchestra is outstanding; the chorus only satisfactory, with some sloppy entrances and generally less precision than one expects. Versalle has the right timbre and usually the right notes. Studer's is the least steady voice (though the competition is fierce) and conveys little of the purity of the character. Solyom-Nagy is shrill and hectoring, never seductive. Brendel, Sotin and the other singers are capable if not notable. Except for Versalle and occasionally Studer, the dynamic range is compressed to a consistent forte; the content and drama are well conveyed, but there is little magic.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is clear but not crisp, matching the singing in tending to flatten out the performance. Sound is clear with wide range and effective imaging of the stage. Camera work is unobtrusive and direction cannot be faulted. Overall, this recording is recommended as a fine dramatic experience and an acceptable musical one.

# Tannhäuser Wagner

Conductor: Davis  
Company: Bayreuth

Tannhauser: Wenkoff  
Elisabeth/Venus: Jones  
Wolfram: Weikl  
Landgraf: Sotin  
Walther: Schunk

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Oloffson

Date: 1978  
Evaluation: Very Good

## PRODUCTION

Solid, modern performance filmed live from the Festspielhaus. Sets are highly symbolic but sufficient to set a clear stage for the action and to differentiate the situations. Period costumes in somewhat stylized form predominate, though the noblemen are suspiciously late in style for medieval; Venus and her coterie are more grotesque than seductive. Action is conventional and static, with Jones' somewhat overdrawn passion a notable exception. Surprisingly for Bayreuth, this is a collection of performances rather than an embodiment of an overall concept.

## PERFORMANCES

Davis manages the forces well but provides neither a dynamic nor a lyrical reading. The orchestra and chorus are impeccable and balance the singers well. Wenkoff is acceptable for the most part, though disjoint and approximate high notes provide a petulant sound to match his limited interpretation. Jones is excellent as Elisabeth, with passion and sumptuous tone that remind the listener of Lemnitz; her Venus is less satisfactory, lying low for her instrument and calling for dramatic traits she dons uncomfortably. Weikl lacks the grace in tone and style that would contrast him well with Wenkoff. Sotin looks right but needs more authoritative tone and more accurate pitch. None of the supporting characters stands out for good or ill.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is not sharp, but focus is well maintained. Lighting is low so that spotlighted figures stand in relief against near blackness. Sound is fine for the era, though highs are minimized. Camera work is remarkably good for so early a live recording, exploiting closeups that would work better if lighting were sufficient. Overall video direction is good, although focus does not always remain near the center of musical action. This is Jones' show, and she makes it well worth while. Unfortunately, she cannot make it Wagner's show without support from the pit and the other soloists.

# Tannhäuser

## Wagner

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Tannhäuser: Cassilly  
Elisabeth: Marton  
Venus: Troyanos  
Wolfram: Weikl  
Hermann: Macurdy  
Walter: Nagy

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1982  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Absolutely literal and and unimaginative live production. The staging and costuming match the other aspects. Nothing is out of place, and nothing surprises.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine leads a solid orchestra in a stolid performance. Cassilly is woefully overmatched in the title rôle, bleating frequently and never providing either the weight or the lyricism demanded. Marton is loud. Troyanos and Weikl are both predictably sound in their readings, but this Venus is less seductive than petulant, and no capable musician does so little with “*Abendstern*.” The choral work is up to the Met’s impeccable standard and makes one long all the more for soloists as well prepared or as true to the sound and spirit of the music.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video and audio are realistic and fine. There are no visible deficits attributable to the stage lighting or the live performance. Overall, this performance has all of the accoutrements of a fine release, with none of the musical, vocal, or dramatic substance.

# Tannhäuser

## Wagner

Conductor: Mehta  
Company: Munich

Tannhäuser: Kollo  
Elisabeth: Secunde  
Venus: Meier  
Wolfram: Weikl  
Hermann: Rootering  
Walter: Ahnsjö

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: 1995  
Evaluation: Problematic

### PRODUCTION

Live performance before an audience apparently stunned to silence. Sets are starkly symbolic; costumes are weirdly inconsistent. While the meaning of individual symbols is beyond the first-time viewer, the effect of the totality is undeniable. David Alden accomplished an Angst-ridden production that resembles no other.

### PERFORMANCES

Mehta leads an unbalanced reading, rather more clangorous than sonorous in keeping with Alden's approach to staging. The orchestra is strident and the chorus is far short of the timbre and precision one expects. Kollo's Tannhäuser is aged and tortured in voice and presentation. Secunde is mature and pressed, seldom ecstatic and then only for a moment at a time. Weikl's tortured Wolfram bears little resemblance to his portrayals at Bayreuth and the Met. Only Waltraud Meier supplies beauty of tone and of appearance. Other rôles are handled competently at best.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well lighted. Sound is clear but with little stereo effect and no imaging of value. Cameras move freely and direction is effective in conveying the production. Overall, this staging should be seen by someone familiar with the work for ideas it may offer and for a unique view of the characters and their relationships. It would be inappropriate as an introduction to the opera.

# Tristan und Isolde

## Wagner

Conductor: Böhm  
Company: Orange Festival

Isolde: Nilsson  
Tristan: Vickers  
Brangäne: Hesse  
Kurwenal: Berry

LaserDisc  
German / Japanese subtitles  
Director: Jourdan

Date: 7 July 1973  
Evaluation: Essential but flawed

### PRODUCTION

Live performance on an outdoor stage. The set is a single ring structure; lighting is used to vary the scene of action. Costumes are simple and stark, using color to reflect changes in performers' conditions. Movement on the open, arced stage is surprisingly fluid and effective; the stylization seems to aid the dramatic effect and comes to facilitate the drama rather than to distract from it. Audio appears to be from a complete performance different from the several which gave rise to the video; poor lip sync is a notable consequence.

### PERFORMANCES

Böhm is the master of the music; he propels it mightily, yet never draws attention to the conducting. The orchestra (French Radio) seems up to Wagner's demands; the chorus handles its minimal task adequately. Nilsson is captured late enough to reflect the woman Isolde more than the force of nature she portrayed in earlier decades. Vickers, too, is perfectly human yet manages every phrase not only without effort but as though it were the only way to express the thought. Hesse is merely competent, and so stands out as a relative weakness; Berry is excellent both vocally and dramatically. The other soloists are capable.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is inadequate: fuzzy with excessive contrast and saturated color. Sound is marginal, lacking clarity and frequency extremes; the quality is about that of a good AM radio broadcast. With the distractions of French synopses and Japanese subtitles, only the transcendent performance redeems this recording. The next time a Böhm, a Nilsson, and a Vickers come along, Wagner will be better served. However, in our lifetimes this performance must suffice.



# Tristan und Isolde

## Wagner

Conductor: Barenboim  
Company: Bayreuth

Isolde: Meier  
Tristan: Kollo  
Brangäne: Schwarz  
Kurwenal: Becht  
Marke: Salminen

LaserDisc  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Ponelle?

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Good

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from the shrine. Sets and costumes are representative rather than literal. Ponelle's staging is dramatic and effective. Unfortunately, the overall effect is flat.

### PERFORMANCES

Barenboim directs a leisurely, almost soporific reading emphasizing poetry rather than drama. The chorus and orchestra are accurate but hardly rousing. Meier lacks the volume needed but applies her lyric instrument with skill and grace; if she is not Isolde, she sings well. Kollo scoops at the notes and makes no attempt at the dramatic demands; he becomes a weakling by the duet, so the final act fails. Only Salminen among the supporting cast is comfortable with the music.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is crisp and well lighted. Audio would have benefitted from brighter balance; its subdued colors and dynamics fit with the interpretation. Video direction is routine at best, with undue concentration on the settings when the singers need to be the focus.

# Tristan und Isolde

## Wagner

Conductor: Decker  
Company: Montreal

Isolde: Lindholm  
Tristan: McCray  
Brangäne: Baniewicz  
Kurwenal: Braun  
Marke: Johnson

Broadcast  
German / French subtitles  
Director: Dormeyer

Date: 1986  
Evaluation: Adequate

### PRODUCTION

Bright, light, unique staging. Sets are replaced with rear projections and draperies. Costumes are simplified but traditional in concept. Movement is conventional and stilted, but seems fitting due to the lightness of the reading and the simplicity of the production. Overall, the staging is sufficient to represent Wagner's concepts and never distracts from the performance.

### PERFORMANCES

Decker's concept is lighter and more lyric even than Karajan's, perhaps due to limitations of his forces. Orchestra and chorus are underpowered but adequate. Lindholm is an effective Isolde who strains at climaxes. McCray offers the right timbre without consistently finding the notes of the score. Baniewicz and Braun are accurate but have little to offer vocally. Minor parts are handled routinely.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Canadian engineering is at its worst in both video and audio: diffuse, vague, and distorted. Lighting is harsh, violating the fluid lines of the production and contradicting its lightness. Camera work is admirable, deserving of better engineering and lighting. Overall, the production and Lindholm make this a performance worth watching — once.

# Tristan und Isolde

## Wagner

Conductor: Kout  
Company: Berlin

Isolde: Jones  
Tristan: Kollo  
Brangäne: Schwarz  
Kurwenal: Feldhoff  
Marke: Lloyd

Broadcast  
German  
Director: Fujii

Date: 1993  
Evaluation: Poor

### PRODUCTION

Live performance from Tokyo. Sets are simplistic and hypermodern, often inexplicable and seldom containing the elements Wagner specified either in particular or in *gestalt*. Costumes are drab, uncomplimentary, and undefined as to era or style. Stage movement is effective throughout, with Jones' acting particularly notable. Friedrich's concepts are confusing, opaque, or both; the effect is to compound the singers' weaknesses in producing a poorly integrated performance which has few virtues to cite.

### PERFORMANCES

Kout leads a stolid performance which drags interminably during orchestral passages; the effect may be intended to be portentous, but reaches only the ponderous. The orchestra is admirable; the chorus is underrehearsed and imprecise. Jones and Kollo are both undervoiced and overaged for their rôles; after the first act, both bleat and shout instead of singing, and both display painful wobbles. Schwarz's instrument is not as dark as one would prefer, but is used well. Feldhoff is remarkably unremarkable, making nothing of the rôle and singing the notes without inflection. Lloyd uses a fine instrument well, but Marke does not make *Tristan*. Minor rôles are filled routinely.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is reasonably sharp but consistently underlighted with exaggerated shadows to focus attention on the signs of the singers' age. Monaural sound is clear and voices are well miked. Camera work is erratic: overly busy throughout, often directing attention to irrelevancies, and occasionally prey to the foibles of the production (e.g., ropes cutting across a soloist's face, forcing an abrupt and inappropriate change of camera). The dark images, ugly sounds, and chaotic production preclude serious consideration of this performance.

# Freischütz Weber

Conductor: Davies  
Company: Württemberg

Agathe: Ligendza  
Max: Kramer  
Annchen: Jakainen  
Kuno: Linke

Broadcast  
German / English subtitles  
Director: Schottler

Date: ~1981  
Evaluation: Unacceptable

## PRODUCTION

Incomprehensible live performance. Sets caricature something indecipherable in brilliant colors and irrelevant symbols. Costumes and makeup border on the grotesque, and seem to be coordinated with the action to represent some form of puppet theater.

## PERFORMANCES

Davies maintains good tempo except for static, sluggish accompaniment to the arias. When audible, the orchestra is diffuse and articulates poorly. The chorus is admirable. Ligendza sings each note well but remains earthbound. Kramer has the timbre and the spirit, but lacks both the low notes and the requisite ring on the higher ones. Jakainen lacks the spirit but sings the notes. Linke is fine vocally and (as far as can be estimated) dramatically. The other characters are portrayed in provincial style, but represent only minor distractions.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is as poor as one would expect from the era: diffuse and ill-defined. Pre-HiFi monaural sound muddies a heavy reading and is complicated by faulty expansion which causes inconsistent levels. Camera work is primitive, dominated by a high angle over the stage which compresses the shallow action even more.

# Down in the Valley

## Weill

Conductor: Davis  
Company: film

Narrator: Hinman  
Brack: Cobb  
Jennie: Allen

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Cvitanovich

Date: 1983  
Evaluation: Excellent

### PRODUCTION

Bright, effective film presentation. Settings are natural; costumes are rural dress of the 1940's. The performers are actors with pleasant voices; their skill at portraying the characters is always evident and their movements are more choreographed than staged. Lip sync is excellent throughout. Enunciation is superb.

### PERFORMANCES

Carl Davis leads a gentle, flowing reading. The Ambrosian chorus and orchestra sound exactly right: precise without being prissy, committed without overstatement. Hinman's vibrato detracts from a pleasant voice but sets him apart from the real-time actors. Cobb's tenor lacks the sound of professional training (hardly a drawback here) but is both pleasant and accurate. Allen sings simply and cleanly, ideally in this rôle. The support is at the same superb level throughout.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Video is bright, colorful and without apparent flaw. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is more than acceptable, though limited in both tonal and dynamic ranges. Camera work is flexible and fitting; direction is smooth so that one seems to be eavesdropping on the evolving story. The work is fundamentally a folk opera for radio, comparable in many ways with Copland's "Tender Land" and in some ways with Gershwin's "Blue Monday"; like them, it has received a fine production and is worthy of broad distribution.

# Mahagonny Weill

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Jenny: Stratas  
Begbick: Varnay  
Mahoney: Cassilly

Broadcast  
English  
Director: Large

Date: 1979  
Evaluation: Excellent

## PRODUCTION

Live staging making the case for Weill in the opera house. Highly abstract sets exploit projection and spots of intense color. Costumes are generally drab with Jenny's first-act red and blue as shocking contrast. Enunciation is excellent so that subtitles are not missed. Acting is exemplary on the part of every performer.

## PERFORMANCES

Levine and the orchestra make more of the work than the score suggests; in the process, they lose the bite of a small band in favor of volumes of sound for the large house. The small chorus is better described as a fine ensemble of soloists. Stratas looks and sings a lyric, seductive, relatively warm Jenny. Varnay portrays the widow diabolically—which may be the same as saying: perfectly. Cassilly looks and acts just right and adds a voice of the right timbre if lacking in ring. The other soloists are exemplary.

## TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Given its age, the picture is not bad; it lacks the clarity we have come to expect, but colors are held in check and foreground detail is satisfactory. Pre-HiFi monaural sound is a severe drawback though balances are good and all the music is audible. Direction is as powerful as the music and book and never becomes noticeable. One cannot expect a second operatic production of Mahagonny; with this one, there is no need.

# Francesca da Rimini

## Zandonai

Conductor: Levine  
Company: Metropolitan

Francesca: Scotto  
Paolo: Domingo  
Gianciotto: Macneil  
Smaragdi: I. Jones  
Malatestino: Lewis

LaserDisc  
Italian / English subtitles  
Director: Large

Date: April 1984  
Evaluation: Very good

### PRODUCTION

Lavish staging that fully exploits the Met's machinery. Even the battle scene is represented nearly literally. Indeed, "literal" is the watchword for the production throughout, as expected at the Metropolitan.

### PERFORMANCES

Levine conducts solidly; without meaningful comparison (or reference to the score), one cannot fault his work or the sound of the orchestra. The chorus is also well schooled despite the unfamiliarity of the opera. The production is a vehicle primarily for the soprano, and Scotto selected it wisely for her limited resources. (On the other hand, she hardly conveys the image of the beautiful Francesca.) Domingo is solid and effective as her lover and deceiver; the rôle calls for almost a French style of declamation rather than a more traditional Italian sound. MacNeil is brash and unsubtle in a part for which his sound is reasonably appropriate. The many lesser rôles are handled solidly.

### TECHNICAL COMMENTS

Even on a large screen, the scale and scope of the staging are beyond television's capability. Perhaps a wider screen (or letterboxing) would help to convey the feel of the opera house. The sound is excellent as usual. Video quality is quite good, but lighting is frequently harsh — perhaps due to its augmentation for video. Camera work is solid despite the constraints of live performance.