

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1117

ALFRED ORDA, baritone (1915-2004)

This compact disc has been compiled from broadcast performances given between 1963 and 1977 in Poland. Alfred Orda was 62 when the last of these arias was recorded. His exceptionally wide-ranging operatic repertoire, with arias in Italian, Polish, Russian and French, is represented here.

Alfred Orda-Wdowczak was born in Lodz on 9th July 1915. There was always singing in his life, for his mother had a good contralto voice. As a child he heard Battistini; the great Italian baritone became a life-long influence. While still at technical high school his vocal potential was recognized, and at 19 he had his first singing lessons with Adela Comte-Wilgocka at the Lodz Conservatorium. Soon, with a repertoire of 'Eri tu', 'Di Provenza', the Prologue from *Pagliacci* and Valentin's air from *Faust*, he set off on foot for Warsaw, a distance of 80 miles, in search of further training. He obtained an audition at the Conservatorium in Warsaw and he so impressed the Rector, Eugeniusz Morawski, that he gained a scholarship. He continued with his vocal studies under Mme. Comte-Wilgocka and he learned general repertoire and interpretative skills from Gregori Orloff. In Warsaw he was heard by Ferrari, the conductor of a visiting Italian opera company, and he was given a glowing testimonial. Following this, he was awarded a scholarship from the Municipality of Lodz to study in Italy. In 1936 he travelled to Milan, where for the next three years he studied under the direction of Alfredo Cecchi, a well-known teacher and coach, amongst whose students had been Basiola, Granda and Ziliani. A pupil of Antonio Cotogni, Cecchi had sung as a tenor in the company of many of the Golden Age stars, including Battistini in the first performance of *Per la Patria* in 1905. Orda spent entire days in Maestro Cecchi's studio, not just to have his singing lessons but in order to listen to other students, thereby acquiring facility in Italian and broadening his musicianship. In the evenings he attended opera performances and concerts. He started to collect music; one of his greatest treasures was Battistini's own working score of *Werther*, with the composer's dedication. He researched unusual operatic repertoire, later to become important in his recital programmes.

Plans to spend the summer of 1939 with Cecchi in Naples had to be cancelled because of the outbreak of war. The invasion of Poland ended his scholarship remittances, and he went instead to Rome, where accommodation was offered in the Polish College, a seminary for theology students. Early in 1940, before political developments made it necessary for him to leave Italy, Orda was able to study with Cecchi's mentor, the 76 year old Mario Cotogni, son of Antonio. Orda's brief period of tuition in Rome was of very great value, for Mario Cotogni's teaching closely followed that of his father and was in the nineteenth century, pre-verismo Italian bel canto tradition. Cotogni accompanied Orda in his public concert début at this time.

Advised to leave Italy since war was imminent, Orda met up with other Polish students and refugees and made his way through France, together with the Polish forces. Eventually he reached England. He travelled to Scotland, and before long he was singing professionally. He was engaged as soloist with the Scottish Orchestra, conducted by Warwick Braithwaite; his first concert, on 12th January 1941, contained 'Eri tu' and Prince Igor's aria. The correspondent of the *Glasgow Evening Times* reported on 13th January 1941 that "Orda proved himself a possessor of a voice of International Celebrity standard". Orda gave a second concert with this orchestra and conductor in the following year. The programme included the Prologue from *Pagliacci*, the Credo from *Otello* and 'Madamina' from *Don Giovanni*. The *Glasgow Times* reviewer wrote on the following day (5th January 1942) that "there are few living singers with a voice of such quality". The programme also included a Chopin song, *The Warrior*, in an orchestration by the conductor. While in Glasgow he met his future wife.

In 1942, Orda made his first British operatic appearance, as Valentin in *Faust* with the Carl Rosa Company. In 1943 he was engaged by Sir Henry Wood for the Promenade Concert Season in the Royal Albert Hall. With Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC Symphony Orchestra he sang the Polonaise from *Verbum Nobile* by Moniuszko (included here) on 12th August. This appearance opened up a rich succession of concerts and recitals for the BBC, extending over 25 years, and Orda long remembered with gratitude the fine conductors, instrumentalists and producers who helped and encouraged him in his work through this period. A *Times* notice of this first Promenade Concert, appearing on 13th August 1944, describes Orda as "a baritone with a freely-produced, resonant but agreeably soft textured voice who flung forth his melody as it might have been early Verdi, and at once captured the audience".

In 1944 he travelled to North America and he began a busy phase of his concert and operatic career. Initially, he appeared in Montreal. A review in the *Montreal Star* on 17th March 1944 describes "a baritone of uncommon richness and vitality, the like of which is not often heard". He travelled on to the United States. In 1945 and 1946 he was a member of the Polish Opera Company that gave performances in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Buffalo and Detroit. He continued to receive glowing press notices. At a performance of *La Bohème* in Chicago on 13th January 1946, Orda (who was singing Marcel) reversed the famous Caruso-De Seguirola episode by deputising for the tenor, temporarily amnesic, in the fourth act. Although Orda had a seamless high baritone extending in chest voice to top C, and on a later occasion at Sadler's Wells sang a memorable top B flat in octave with Leila in the finale of *The Pearl Fishers*, no great vocal heights had to be scaled, no more than Caruso had to plumb great depths in 'Vecchia zimarra'. In 1946 he appeared as Silvio in *Pagliacci* with the City Center Opera in New York. Further operatic engagements in New York were in 1946-47, with the Salmaggi Company at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, as Escamillo, Tonio and Figaro (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), and in June 1947, in the summer season of the International Opera Company at the Carnegie Hall, when he sang Rigoletto. In 1948 he attended auditions at the Metropolitan Opera House. He sang 'Ai miei

rivali cedere' from Marchetti's *Ruy Blas* (thrillingly recorded, sixteen years later, and included on this disc). Georges Hirsch, the Director of the Paris Opera, was in New York at the time, and recruited him for the following season.

Orda returned to Europe to appear as Valentin in *Faust* at the Paris Opera. His début was well received. The correspondent of *Paris-Presse L'intransigeant* wrote on 28th September 1949: "Je ne puis résister au désir de signaler un extraordinaire Valentin, baryton à la voix puissante et noble, à l'admirable plastique. Alfred Orda fut, en effet, la révélation de la soirée. Ne lereverrons-nous plus souvent, quand entendrons-nous ce magnifique chanteur dans Athanaël?" Although he was scheduled to sing this role in Massenet's *Thaïs* and also Zurga in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* at the Opéra Comique, his Paris career was limited to several appearances in *Faust*. Unfortunately, the musicians in Paris went on strike in late Autumn 1949 and, since he was a guest artist, receiving fees on a performance basis ("Par spectacle") and not a regular monthly salary, it was necessary for him to return to London.

From the end of 1949 to 1952, Alfred Orda worked as a recitalist in London and the provinces. In 1953 he joined the Sadler's Wells Opera Company. He remained a member for four years, during which time his roles included Alfio in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Peter in *Hänsel und Gretel*, Zurga in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, the title role in *Rigoletto*, Michele in *Il Tabarro*, Escalus in *Romeo and Juliet* by Sutermeister, and Escamillo in *Carmen*. His Zurga was particularly admired; the correspondent of *The Stage* wrote that "Mr. Orda succeeded admirably and movingly in conveying the mental torture of the character, and in turn stirred both the intellect and the senses of the audience with his vocal resonance and technical skill". During the period in which he was singing at Sadler's Wells, he made a variety of other appearances. In December 1954-January 1955 he was engaged to sing in the Liceo in Barcelona in a Russian season, appearing as Pojarok in *The Invisible City of Kitezh* by Rimsky-Korsakov. He took part in further Promenade Concerts, in the main singing arias from Russian operas. In 1955 he shared a BBC studio concert with Joan Sutherland in a Hugo Wolf programme. Walter Goehr conducted the London Symphony Orchestra; Orda sang Goethe Lieder. In the same year he was baritone soloist in a performance of *Pulcinella* with the Leighton Lucas Orchestra. In 1956 he sang in two broadcast studio performances of *Alceste* by Gluck, in the roles of High Priest and Apollo. The Geraint Jones Singers and Orchestra were conducted by Geraint Jones and the other soloists included Flagstad, Raoul Jobin, Alexander Young, Thomas Hemsley and Marion Lowe. Further major concert engagements in 1956 were a Stravinsky programme in the Royal Festival Hall conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent, in which he again sang in *Pulcinella*, and Janacek's Glagolitic Mass (earlier performed with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Rafael Kubelik) in the Royal Festival Hall with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Jaroslav Krombholc.

In 1957, increasing ill health forced Orda's resignation from Sadler's Wells Opera. This was a disappointment as he was scheduled to sing Di Luna in *Il Trovatore*, a high baritone role fitting his voice very well. It was with reluctance that he had to turn down an invitation from the Royal Opera House to sing the role

of Amonasro in *Aida* in the 1958/59 Covent Garden season. From this period he concentrated on concert and recital work. He undertook a tour of Poland, during which he returned to the stage in the title role of *Rigoletto* at the Grand Opera, Warsaw. In 1959 he gave the first performances in Poland of the Serenade for baritone and orchestra by Sir Arthur Bliss with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Lodz. In the same concert he sang four Shakespeare sonnet settings by the Polish composer Tadeusz Baird. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he took part in a number of memorable concerts in the Royal Albert Hall and the Royal Festival Hall, singing Pater Ecstasticus in the first promenade performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jascha Horenstein, and in a subsequent performance conducted by Sir Charles Groves with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He also sang in the Royal Festival Hall performance of Schumann's *Scenes from Faust* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Rudolf Schwarz, and the Nielsen *Hymnus Amoris* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Charles Mackerras. Through the fifties and sixties he made many BBC studio broadcasts, including in his programmes works ranging from rare arias from Donizetti's *Torquato Tasso* and *Maria Padilla*, through Bruckner to Szymanowski and Kabalevsky. A recital of Russian and Polish songs recorded during this period has been published on Symposium 1067.

From the early 1960s, Alfred Orda also appeared with regularity in Poland, making numerous broadcasts which included many fine performances of operatic excerpts, both standard and rare, some of which can be heard here. Increasingly his life became divided between London, where lived for many years, and Poland. He worked as a vocal advisor to the young opera singers in Lodz, and had the opportunity to meet the new generation of Polish composers, several of whom, notably Lefeld, Serocki, Mroszczyk, Kiesewetter, Czyz and Bauer, wrote for him.

ALFRED ORDA OPERATIC RECITAL

1 BERENICE: *Si, Ira i ceppi* (Handel; first produced 1737) (I)

Demetreo's aria from *Berenice*, first heard at Covent Garden in May 1737, is an ardent protestation of a love which will burn fiercely even in captivity, and which death will not extinguish.

2 DON SÉBASTIANO: *Gioco di rea fortuna, povero Camoens! ... O Lisbona, alfin ti miro* (Donizetti; 1843) (I)

The soldier-poet Camoens has escaped from Africa and is overjoyed on his return home. He has been the plaything of cruel fate, but is now once more in Lisbon.

3 RIGOLETTO: *Cortigiani, vil razza dannata* (Verdi; 1851) (I)

Rigoletto curses the courtiers, and then begs for the deliverance of his daughter.

4 VERBUM NOBILE: *Recitative and aria-polonaise* (Moniuszko; 1861) (P)

This one-act opera is about two friends who have given their word of honour that one day their families will be joined by marriage. Here Pan Marcin introduces

himself to his friend's daughter, Suzanna.

5 RUY BLAS: *Io scacciato! Io bandito ... Ai miei rivali cedere* (Marchetti; 1869) (I) Marchetti's once-popular opera is based on the Victor Hugo play about the spurned minister seeking revenge on his queen by presenting his valet to court in the guise of a nobleman; the queen and the servant fall in love. Like *Rigoletto*, the story involves the interplay of the grotesque and the sublime so characteristic of the Romantic movement. In this scene Don Sallustio, his pride wounded, swears vengeance.

6 I LITUANI: *Cio ehe udii; cio che vidi ... O rimembranze gioje* (Ponchielli; 1874) (I)

This Ricordi commission for La Scala was based on the same Mickiewicz poem as in track 11 below, dealing with the mediaeval struggle between the Lithuanians and the Teutonic Knights, its theme being political revenge through treason. Arnold's first act aria is about remembered love.

7 LE ROI DE LAHORE: *Le barbare tribù ... O casto fior* (Massenet; 1877) (I) Lassalle created this aria in the key of F major (and recorded it in E flat 25 years later). This G flat version was first heard when the opera was sung in Italian. The treacherous Scindia has been crowned king of Lahore. The Muslim army has been defeated, and soon Sita, his priestess niece and the lover of the dead king, will be his bride.

8 IL FIGLIUOL PRODIGO: *Era dessa ... Raccogli e calma* (Ponchielli; 1880) (I) Amenofi's ecstatic song for his distant beloved comes from Act 3 of this biblical opera, produced four years after *La Gioconda*.

9 HÉRODIADE: *Ce breuvage ... Vision fugitive* (Massenet; 1881) (F) Herod sings of a vision of Salomé that haunts him night and day.

10 MAZEPPA: *Mazeppa's arioso* (Tchaikovsky; 1884) (R)

The Cossack leader loves Maria. He abducts her and has her father killed. In his fortress he rhapsodises over the beauty of the night, and the joy Maria has brought him.

11 KONRAD WALLENROD: *Grand Commander's aria* (Zelénski; 1885) (P) Konrad Wallenrod was the assumed name of a Lithuanian who infiltrated the Order of Teutonic Knights in order to destroy it. In this Act 4 aria the Grand Commander of the Order confronts him and accuses him of bringing about its downfall.

12 OTELLO: *Credo in un dio crudel* (Verdi; 1887) (I)

Iago's creed is of a cruel god who has made him in his own image. Evil has no penalty, for after death there is nothing.

13 LO SCHIAVO: *Sospettano di me ... Sogni d'amore* (Gomes; 1889) (I)
The Brazilian composer wrote several successful operas with an Amazonian setting. Ibero sings in the fourth act of *Lo Schiavo* of his yearning for Illara and his hopes of peace.

14 I PAGLIACCI: Prologue (Leoncavallo; 1892) (I)
Before the curtain rises, Tonio tells the audience that the play they will see is from life; actors are humans with passions of their own.

15 SADKO: Song of the Venetian guest (Rimsky-Korsakov; 1898 NS) (R)
On the quay at Novgorod, the visiting merchants sing of their native lands. The Venetian praises the beauty of his city (effectively: Sadko decides to make Venice his destination).

(F) French; (I) Italian; (P) Polish; (R) Russian
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The sound of some of these archive recordings is uneven; we trust that this is outweighed by the interest of the programme and the quality of the singing.

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