

ROSSINI

Overtures

La Gazza Ladra • Il Barbiere di Siviglia
La Cenerentola • Semiramide • La Scala di Seta
L'Italiana in Algeri • Il Signor Bruschino
William Tell

Zagreb Festival Orchestra
Michael Halász



1989 Recording | Playing Time : 70'08"

Gioachino Rossini (1792 - 1868)

Overtures

Le gazza ladra/The Thieving Magpie

Il barbiere di Siviglia/The Barber of Seville

La Cenerentola/Cinderella

Semiramide/Semiramis

La scala di seta/The Silken Ladder

L'italiana in Algeri/The Italian Girl in Algiers

Il Signor Bruschino/Signor Bruschino

Guillaume Tell/William Tell

Gioachino Rossini, one of the most successful and popular operatic composers of his time, was born in Pesaro in 1792, five months after his parents' marriage. His father, a brass-player, and later teacher of the horn at the Bologna Accademia, had a modest career, disturbed by the political changes of the period, as the French replaced the Austrians in Northern Italy. Rossini's mother was a singer and as a boy Gioachino made his appearance with his father in the pit orchestra and from time to time as a singer with his mother on stage, going on to work as a keyboard-player in the opera orchestra.

Rossini's early studies in music were with his father and mother, and with other teachers through the generosity of rich patrons. In childhood he had already started to show ability as a composer and his experience in the opera-house bore natural fruit in a remarkable and meteoric career that began in 1810 with the production of *La cambiale di matrimonio* in Venice in 1810. There followed a series of operas, comic and tragic, until the relatively poor

reception of *Semiramide* in Venice in 1823 turned his attention to Paris. Under the Bourbon King Charles X Rossini staged French versions of earlier works and, in 1829, *Guillaume Tell*. A contract for further operas came to nothing when the King was replaced in the revolution of 1830 by Louis-Philippe, although eventually Rossini was able to have his agreed annuity restored. In 1836 he returned to Italy and in spite of ill health concerned himself with the affairs of the *Liceo Musicale* in Bologna, but in 1853 took up residence once again in Paris, where he enjoyed until his death in 1868 a reputation as an arbiter of musical taste, a wit and a gourmet. During this last period of his life he wrote the series of pieces that he called the *Sins of Old Age*, a remarkable display of his gifts, now diverted from the world of opera into a less spectacular form.

La scala di seta (The Silken Ladder) and *Il Signor Bruschino* are both one act operas, the first staged in Venice in May 1812 and the second in the same city in January 1813. The ladder of the title is used by the hero Dorvil to visit his wife Giulia, forbidden to marry by her guardian, in whose house she lives. *Signor Bruschino*, also derived from a French farce, centres on old Bruschino, whose son was to have married the heroine Sofia, but has been supplanted by Florville, whom all now believe to be the old man's son.

L'italiana in Algeri (The Italian Girl in Algiers) was first staged in Venice in May 1813, the third Rossini opera to be mounted in the city that year and the first of his full comic operas. A lively overture, with an ominous opening, introduces a plot in which the Italian girl, Isabella, who is sailing the seas in search of her lover Lindoro, enslaved by the Bey of Algiers, is driven by shipwreck to that country. The Bey falls in love with her but is outwitted as Isabella and Lindoro sail away.

Almaviva, or *L'inutile precauzione*, later known as *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville), based on Beaumarchais and on a libretto that had been used by Paisiello in 1782, was staged in Rome in February 1816, a disaster

on the first night, through the hostility of Paisiello's supporters, but a success at its second performance. The sparkling brilliance of the overture is a prelude to the outwitting of Rosina's jealous guardian by Count Almaviva, abetted by the barber and factotum Figaro.

The *dramma giocoso* *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella), based on Perrault's *Cendrillon*, was first produced in Rome in January 1817, written in some haste after the production in the preceding month of the Shakespearian tragedy *Otello* in Naples. This was followed in May by the first production of *La gazza ladra* (The Thieving Magpie) at La Scala, Milan. The subject is, as with *Cinderella*, one that has an element of pathos. A French servant-girl has been found guilty of stealing silver cutlery and has been condemned to death, to be reprieved when the magpie of the title turns out to be the real culprit.

Semiramide marked the end of Rossini's meteoric career as a composer of opera in Italy. The libretto was adapted from Voltaire and the tragedy had served a number of earlier composers. *Semiramis*, Queen of Babylon, is in love with Assur and with him murders the king. She later falls in love with a young man who turns out to be her son and is killed in error by Assur, killed in his turn by the young man, Arsace. To all this the overture makes a fitting introduction.

Guillaume Tell follows Schiller's drama on the Swiss patriot. The opera was mounted at the Paris Opera in August 1829 and was to be re-staged time and again, but generally with considerable cuts in its original length of six hours. The overture is different in character from earlier Rossini operatic overtures, consisting as it does of four sections of programmatic music. Five solo cellos suggest alpine calm, followed by a storm and a pastoral scene in which cor anglais, flute and triangle join. This leads to the well known music to the sound of which so many celluloid heroes have ridden to the rescue of the spuriously innocent.

Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra

Zagreb, the second city in modern Yugoslavia, occupies an important place in the musical life of the country. The Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra was established in 1920, inheriting the symphonic traditions of its predecessor, the orchestra of the opera-house. Since then it has won a national and international reputation, appearing in major cities throughout Eastern and Western Europe and the United States of America.

During the course of its existence the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra has worked with the most distinguished conductors, including Bruno Walter, Clemens Krauss, Felix Weingartner, Rafael Kubelik, Leopold Stokowski, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Igor Markevich, Kyril Kondrashin, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Stanislav Skrowaczewsky, Zubin Mehta, Paul Kletzki, Otmar Suitner, Jean Martinon, Vaclav Neumann and Sir John Barbirolli. The orchestra also has given concerts under the direction of Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland and Lukas Foss. Since 1980 Pavel Despalj has been principal conductor and artistic director of the orchestra.

Michael Halasz

Born in Hungary in 1938, Michael Halasz began his professional career as principal bassoonist in the Philharmonia Hungarica, a position he occupied for eight years, before studying conducting in Essen. His first engagement as a conductor was at the Munich Gaertnerplatz Theatre, where, from 1972 to 1975, he directed all operetta productions. In 1975 he moved to Frankfurt as principal Kapellmeister under Christoph von Dohnanyi, working with the most distinguished singers and conducting the most important works of the operatic repertoire. Engagements as a guest-conductor followed, and in 1977 Dohnanyi took him to the Staatsoper in Hamburg as principal Kapellmeister.

In 1978 Michael Halasz was appointed General Musical Director at the opera-house in Hagen, and there has further developed his experience of the repertoire, while undertaking guest engagements, which included television appearances as conductor in English and German versions of the Gerard Hoffnung Music Festival, as well as work with the Philharmonia Hungarica, the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Symphony Orchestra and the Hilversum Radio Orchestra.

For the Marco Polo label, Michael Halasz has recorded works by Richard Strauss, Anton Rubinstein, Schreker and Miaskovsky and for Naxos works by Tchaikovsky, Rossini and Beethoven.

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|---|-----------------------------|---------|
| 1 | The Thieving Magpie | (10:02) |
| 2 | The Barber of Seville | (7:39) |
| 3 | Cinderella | (8:25) |
| 4 | Semiramis | (12:51) |
| 5 | The Silken Ladder | (6:20) |
| 6 | The Italian Girl in Algiers | (7:59) |
| 7 | Il Signor Bruschino | (4:45) |
| 8 | William Tell | (12:07) |

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 Zagreb from 9th to 11th January 1989.
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