

the house. Freni, on the other hand, is a faint-voiced Tosca and the warm, sweet sound which stood her in such good stead as Manon fails to project in Tosca's music. A bout of coughing, close to the mike—in the “microphone in the audience production”—is an unwelcome accompaniment to the music.

Legato's accompanying booklet provides a synopsis written by John Gotwalt with references to cuing numbers, but no libretto is included. The cuing is ample but in French which, according to Gotwalt, allows the listener to recognize familiar arias.

Not complete, not in French, neither digitally recorded nor in stereo, and with no libretto, this *Manon* nevertheless generates excitement and passion—which is what *Manon* is really all about anyhow. “Et c'est là l'histoire de Manon Lescaut!” *Reviewed by Sharon G. Almquist*

**Verdi: *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata*.**

Renata Scotto, soprano (Giselda); Anna di Stasio, soprano (Viclinda); Sofia Mezzetti, soprano (Sofia); Luciano Pavarotti, tenor (Oronte); Ruggiero Raimondi, bass (Pagano/Hermit); Umberto Grilli, tenor (Arvino); Mario Rinaudo, bass (Pirro); Fernando Jacopucci, tenor (Priore della città); Alfredo Coletta, bass (Acciano); orchestra and chorus conducted by Gianandrea Gavazzeni.

**Verdi: *La Traviata*.**

Libiamo ne'lieti calici; Che è ciò?... Oh qual pallor; Un dì felice; Ebben? Che diavol fate; Parigi o cara (Renata Scotto, soprano, as Violetta; Luciano Pavarotti, tenor, as Alfredo; conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario).

Legato Classics LCD-148 (2 CDs) distributed by Lyric. Produced by Ed Rosen.

*I Lombardi*, Verdi's fourth opera, appeared in 1843, one year after *Nabucco*. Although the plot is winding and confusing, the music offers beautiful melodies with some moments of true dramatic invention. This early Verdi work may be uneven and mechanical in some places, but it is never dull.

Neither dull nor new to early Verdi fans is this live performance from Rome now issued on CD by Legato Classics. According to the notes accompanying this release, the recording was made in 1969. On November 20, *Lombardi* opened the 1969 Rome opera season, with a second performance three days later on the 23rd. The LP release by Mauro R. Fuguetta on MRF-48, gives a recording date of November 20, 1969. Edward J. (“Eddie”) Smith on his “Golden Age of Opera” series issued this performance on two LPs (EJS-503), also without a specific recording date.

The recording has a few drop-outs, but generally fine monaural sound considering its “private” source. The bass is rather boomy and from time to time the soloists and chorus sound distant as they move about the stage. The staging of this production kept the chorus stock still on revolving benches—and their performance and uneven sound projection reflects this odd arrangement. Even without the chorus clomping about, stage noises are distinctly audible. Especially realistic is the battle scene in Act II. Here the fighting seems so intense, violent, and loud that it truly sounds like a medieval crusade. Perhaps this is misleading to the later listener because contemporary critics criticized some scenes for being too stylized and conflicting with the realism of duels.

The singing is quite exciting—uninhibited, but not vulgar. At this stage in her career, Scotto exhibited all the qualities of a first-class lyric/spinto soprano moving

into heavier dramatic repertoire. She is technically secure above and throughout the staff and produces some lovely floated pianissimi, including a shimmering B-flat at the end of the Act III duet with Oronte (“Dove sola m’inoltro?”). Even in fortes her voice does not become unpleasant and steely. The role of Giselda is a florid one, harking back more toward Donizetti’s Lucia than forward to Aida, and Scotto dashes off the coloratura passages effortlessly. At the same time, she manages to bring this heroine to life, reminding us that a lovely tone can be accompanied by fine acting.

Pavarotti as the primo tenore, Oronte, sings with his usual aplomb and full-bodied tone. He creates a fervent character, remains sensitive to the text, is relatively conscious of dynamics, and is tasteful enough to allow the wounded Moslem prince to die with a minimum of sobs. Raimondi is a smooth-voiced Pagano/Hermit. The colors in this bass voice range from snarling to pathetic to remorseful. As the Hermit, he conveys a totally different character and tone than Pagano. The three principals are joined by the solo violinist in the great Act III trio, “Qual voluttà trascorrere.” The violinist plays the long concerto-like introduction to the trio well, but rushes some of the passage work.

Grilli as the secondo tenore is light voiced, but manly, and quite able to project the high Cs he interpolates into the role. The rest of the cast is adequate with what little they have to do. Gavazzeni’s idiomatic conducting moves the opera along at a thrilling pace. At the same time, he is able to create some truly ethereal moments such as the opening of Act IV, the Vision of Oronte, which includes harp. Only occasionally do the singers lag behind his beat.

Just a few minor repeats are cut in this otherwise complete performance. Ample cuing is provided. The synopsis by John Gotwalt actually makes sense out of the plot, but no libretto is included.

Selections from a live March 25, 1965, performance of *La Traviata* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, fill out disc two. Here the sound is barely adequate, and particularly annoying is the distortion of the voices. More irritating, however, is the ponderous and heavy conducting of Carlo Felice Cillario. This is a *Traviata* without life or sparkle. Equally disappointing is the singing. Scotto and Pavarotti are again paired together, but both have certainly been heard to better advantage—such as in *Lombardi*. Pavarotti experiences a few pitch problems and Scotto sounds wobbly and shrill. As an aside, these selections have recently appeared on the very budget priced Laserlight label (issued in CD and cassette format) as a part of a Pavarotti recital.

Live recordings can capture the magic of an evening, but in the case of the *Traviata* selections perhaps you really “had to be there.” On the other hand, if you enjoy early Verdi and fine singing, the performance of *Lombardi* will not disappoint.  
*Reviewed by Sharon G. Almquist* 🎧