

Mozart: *Don Giovanni*. Teresa Stich-Randall (Donna Anna), Montserrat Caballé (Donna Elvira), Lisa Otto (Zerlina), Waldemar Kmentt (Don Ottavio), Eberhard Wächter (Don Giovanni), Erich Kunz (Leporello), Hans Hoffmann (Commendatore), Albrecht Peter (Masetto); Teatro San Carlos, Lisbon, conducted by Michael Gielen. Standing Room Only SRO 813-2 (2 CDs), distributed by Lyric Distribution.

Here is yet another recording of *Don Giovanni* to add to the myriad collection of live historic performances issued from a variety of sources. Among the competition, the performances of Walter at Salzburg in 1937, Furtwängler at Salzburg in 1950 and 1953, and Mitropoulos at Salzburg in 1956, should be required listening for all lovers of this opera. The sound on the Walter performance may disqualify it for some collectors, but the performance is superb. It would be unfair to compare any of these performances with the best of the commercial recordings. If absolute perfection is necessary, then only under studio conditions can satisfaction be reached; but if full musical communication is of highest priority, rarely does a studio product compare to a live performance.

The performance at hand took place in 1960 in Lisbon but looking at the cast one would think we were back in Vienna. The primary reason for this issue is to document the young Montserrat Caballé in a role in which she has not otherwise been featured on disc. This is one of the earliest performances of Caballé I have heard, yet many of the characteristics of her voice are already in place. There is already the superb command of the high pianissimo as well as a tendency to simply make lovely sounds. That is the problem with her interpretation of the role of Elvira - there is no fire. She is too careful and tentative vocally to make any impact on the drama. This is one of a handful of documented Mozart performances by Caballé, but it does nothing to increase our esteem for this fine artist. On the other hand Teresa Stich-Randall was a well-known Mozart soprano. Stich-Randall sang Donna Anna regularly, a role she also documented on a recording from Aix-en-Provence, once available on Vox LPs but not listed in current CD catalogs. She is certainly into the drama and her cries for help in the opening scene leave no doubt as to the terror she is experiencing. She is in good voice and the vocalism is not as detached as that found on Westminster WST 17046, a recital of Mozart arias. Lisa Otto is uninteresting as Zerlina and there are too many portamentos for my taste. Wächter's Don Giovanni is justly famous through the Giulini recording on EMI; this performance is not much different although the Champagne aria is even faster than Giulini's. Erich Kunz was beyond his best days in 1960, but he does not offend as Leporello. By this time Waldemar Kmentt was not a reliable Don Ottavio. Albrecht Peter does offend as Masetto. Any relation between the printed pitch and what he sings in his aria is purely coincidental. Hans Hoffmann as the Commendatore is adequate.

This brings us to the conducting of Michael Gielen who is better known to me for his work in contemporary music. The tempos are very fast, as is apparent from the fact that the opera fits on 2 CDs with only the aria "Meta di voi" omitted. He has a good sense of the drama, but often the singers are unable to make a point because there is no time. Stylistically the performance reflects its age; there is haphazard use of appoggiaturas (Lisa Otto inserts the most), no embellishments, and piano in the recitatives.

The sound is variable, with more problems in the second act than in the first, but none are bad enough to dissuade collectors of live performances. The real question is, do you need this performance? For the Caballé collector there is no question, but otherwise there are greater performances that will give greater delights. *Reviewed by Richard LeSueur.*