

Verdi: *Stiffelio*. Angeles Gulin (Lina), Mario del Monaco (*Stiffelio*), Giulio Fioravanti (Stankar), Angelo Marchiandi (Raffaele), Joshua Hecht (Jorg), Eva Ruta (Doretea), Luigi Paolini (Federico); Teatro San Carlo, Naples, conducted by Oliviero de Fabritiis.

Verdi: *Otello*: excerpts. Katia Ricciarelli (Desdemona), Mario Del Monaco (*Otello*), Aldo Protti (Iago), Anna di Stasio (Emilia), Pierre Lani (Cassio), Loris Gambelli (Lodovico), Jean-Jacques Scheurs (Roderigo), Luigi Medda (Montano); Theatre de la Monnaie, Brussels, conducted by Franco Ferraris. Legato Classics LCD 169-2 (2 CDs), distributed by Lyric Distribution.

Performances of *Stiffelio* have been few and far between until very recently when both Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera added the opera to their repertoire. The opera lay unperformed for over 100 years until the revival in Parma in 1968. Verdi suppressed the score for *Stiffelio* when he revised the opera under the title *Aroldo*. Using pages from the *Stiffelio* autograph score, Verdi added a fourth act to the new work and attempted to have all copies of the original destroyed. He was quite successful, and for many years only a few copies of the vocal score of *Stiffelio* were known to exist. The extensive changes made to the score in the revision as *Aroldo* precluded any use of that score for orchestral parts. In the late 1960s, two copyist's scores for *Stiffelio* turned up in Naples, one being a score for *Guglielmo Wellingrode*, an early revision of the opera with very few changes in the score. This version was created to appease the censors, but it too did not find acceptance. The first modern performance of the opera took place in December 1968 with Angeles Gulin, Gaston Limarilli and Walter Alberti, with Peter Maag conducting the Teatro Regio Chorus and Orchestra in Parma. The score was edited by Rubin Profeta who made some cuts and other changes to the score. There was another edition published in 1972, and used as the basis for the performances at Cologne. In 1985 another copy of the score was discovered and since that time most performances have been based on this fuller, more cohesive edition.

The only commercial recording of *Stiffelio* was part of the Philips early Verdi series with Sylvia Sass, José Carreras and Matteo Manuguerra, with Lamberto Gardelli conducting the ORF Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Vienna. This recording, made before the discovery of the latest score, is more complete than the performance under review, but we still await a complete recording of the original score. The original version is available on videocassette in the Covent Garden revival of the opera with Catherine Malfitano, José Carreras and Gregory Yurisich, with Edward Downes conducting.

The discs at hand offer a rough and ready performance of the opera. Angeles Gulin as Lina has a large voice that can be exciting, but when flexibility is required she is not always up to the task. Mario del Monaco sings the title role with considerable attention to the fortes, but his usual disregard for any dynamic marking below mezzo-forte. He makes an exciting sound in the upper register but it is simply too unrelentingly loud to be effective. Giulio Fioravanti also disregards most of the dynamic contrasts. The minor characters are adequately sung with no special redeeming qualities. The conducting of Oliviero de Fabritiis is fine but the sound of the recording does not allow one to judge the performance of the orchestra or chorus.

The second disc is filled out with over 40 minutes from a 1972 performance of *Otello* from Brussels. This performance is very late in Del Monaco's career and does nothing to enhance his reputation. Of course, this issue is necessary for the die-hard fans of any of the participants, but I recommend looking elsewhere if it is the work which is of primary interest. *Reviewed by Richard LeSueur.*