

International Record Review
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Diva's of Mozart's Day

By Peter Branscombe

Cimarosa/Mozart *La quakera spiritosa* – No caro, fa coraggio ... Quanto e grave il mio tormento. **Martín y Soler** *Una cosa rara* – Dolce mi parve un di L'arbore di Diana – Sereno raggio. **Mozart** *Davidde penitente*, K469 – Tra l'oscure ombre funeste. Ch'io mi scordi di te ... Non temer, amato bene, K505. Restati quà ... Per queste tue manine, K540. Al desio di chi t'adora, K577. Ahi cosa veggio ... Vado, ma dove?, K583. **Righini** *L'incontro inaspettato* – Per pietà, deh, ricercate. **Salieri** *Der Rauchfangkehrer* – Wenn dem Adler das Gefieder, *La grotta di Trofonio* – La ra la, Che filosoto buffon. *La cifra* – Alfin son sola ... Sola e mesta fra tormenti. **Storace** *The Doctor and the Apothecary* – How Mistaken is the Lover.

Patrice Michaels (soprano); Peter Van De Graaff (bass-baritone); Classical Arts Orchestra/Stephen Alltop (fortepiano).

Cedille Records CDR90000 064 (full price, 1 hour 16 minutes).

German/Italian texts and English translations included. Producer James Ginsburg. Engineer Bill Mavone. Dates February 11th, 12th, 18th and 20th, 2002.

Here are delights for the Mozart lover as well as, more widely, for readers keen to sample what was going on in Vienna in the period of Mozart's greatest operas. This project, conceived and stylishly introduced by the Canadian musicologist Dorothea Link, was to present typical areas written for the leading prima donnas of the era by Mozart and his contemporaries. Composers then normally wrote with a particular singer in mind, often tackling the arias only when personal experience had made them familiar with the strengths (and weaknesses) of the individual concerned. What we get on the fascinating CD is one intrepid soprano, Patrice Michaels, standing in for Catarina Cavalieri (the first Constanze), Nancy Storace (Susanna), Adriana Ferrarese del Bene (Fiodiligi), Luisa Laschi Mombelli (the Countess) and Louise Villeneuve (Dorabella). In each case, Michaels sings a Mozart number along with music by other composers, most of them all to seldom heard – indeed, eight of the items have not been recorded before, including two accompanied recitatives by Mozart that were rediscovered by Professor Link. We hear a fine aria by Righini, with eloquent clarinet

obbligato, a number from one of Salieri's few German-language settings and two from his Italian works, arias from two of Martín y Soler's operas (we can hope for more of him, as 2004 marks the 250 anniversary of his birth), and single items from operas by Stephen Storace and Cimarosa.

It is a measure of Patrice Michaels's talent that one is so seldom made aware of the hubristic nature of what she has undertaken. It's hard enough for a singer nowadays to rise to the technical and interpretative demands imposed on a single eighteenth-century singer; to take on five *prime donne* at their own game is bold indeed. There are just one or two moments of uncertain pitch, and an over-romantic cadenza in the excerpt from Salieri's *La cifra* (the opera that immediately preceded *Così fan tutte*, and which Mozart made fun of in *Per pietà*). Throughout, Michaels is warmly supported by the period instruments of the Classical Arts Orchestra. Apart from his secure and sensitive direction, Stephen Alltop stands in for Mozart at the fortepiano in the *scena con rondo*, *Ch'io mi schordi di te... Non temer*. Peter Van De Graaff is Michaels's reliable partner in two duets. The recorded quality is high, and the booklet includes complete texts and translations as well as Link's scholarly and readable notes on the music and the original singers. This is a recording that readers should acquire as quickly as possible.