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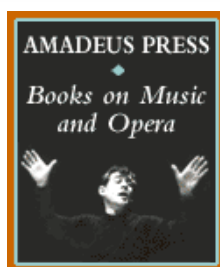
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**GIOACHINO ROSSINI**  
Torvaldo e Dorliska

Huw Rhys-Evans (tenor); Paolo Cigna (soprano);  
Mauro Utzeri, Michele Bianchini (bass-baritone)

ARS Brunensis Chamber Choir  
Czech Chamber Soloists Brno

Alessandro de Marchi

Naxos- 8.660189-90(CD)  
Reference Recording - this one

*Artistic Quality 8/8 Sound Quality*

Torvaldo e Dorliska was Rossini's 16th opera, premiered in Rome in December, 1815, two months after Elisabetta... and two months before Barbieri. It has an odd tone--it's a so-called "rescue opera". The plot concerns the eponymous hero and heroine, who are married. The evil Duke loves Dorliska and attacks the couple on their wedding day and leaves Torvaldo for dead. Dorliska runs away but winds up (unknowingly) taking refuge at the Duke's castle and is imprisoned. When Torvaldo finds his way there he attempts to rescue her, but he also is taken prisoner. The Duke's embittered henchman, Giorgio (a comic role), helps the couple. The villagers rise up and the Duke is punished, while our heroes live happily.

The opera is not in the top 10 of Rossini's great output--it breaks no new ground--but it's quite enjoyable despite being neither serious nor comic. Torvaldo has a couple of fine arias, as does Dorliska, the first-act finale is excellent, and even the basses and baritones have some good, if not altogether memorable, music.

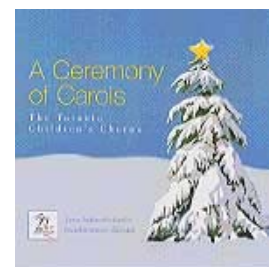
This performance is very good indeed. Taped live in Bad Wildbad in July, 2003, stage noises do not interfere and there are precious few problems with ensembles, missed notes, etc., perhaps because there were patch-up sessions. Paolo Cigna and Huw Rhys-Evans are our heroine and hero and they're both up to the task. The former has plenty of high-flying and florid music and she sings it all accurately and with the right emphasis, while Rhys-Evans' very light, sweet voice copes well enough without the word "virtuoso" (or "Blake" or "Florez") coming to mind.

Michele Bianchini as the Duke exhibits a good-sized voice that may lack heft in the middle but that otherwise is a pleasure to hear. Mauro Utzeri, as the villain-turned-good guy Giorgio, sings with great character and a light tone (he's billed as a baritone); his duet with the Duke is a high spot. The rest of the cast is just fine.

Alessandro de Marchi leads a tight performance, one in which neither recitatives nor slower passages drag, and he keeps up with the singers nicely. Even a superb conductor would be unable to make the music of our

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Choir of St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle  
Timothy Byram-Wigfield  
Naxos

 **LEOS JANÁČEK**  
Brno Philharmonic Orchestra  
František Jílek  
Supraphon

 **ALAN HOVHANESS**  
David Leisner (guitar); Lars Ranch (trumpet)  
Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra  
Gerard Schwarz  
Naxos

 **GIUSEPPE VERDI**  
Keith Erwin (tenor); Pauline Tinsley, Patricia McCurry (soprano); Terence Sharpe (baritone); others  
BBC Concert Orchestra & Chorus  
Marcus Dodds  
Ponto

villain, the Duke, sound villainous (this is Rossini's shortcoming in this opera), but he gives the work a respectable amount of drama nonetheless and his orchestra and chorus are excellent. No libretto is supplied but the track-by-track synopsis is very helpful.

There is another live recording of this opera, from Radio Switzerland in 1992 and starring tenor Ernesto Palacio (on Arkadia), but I haven't seen it in years--and at any rate, this Naxos set is better. Calling all Rossinians--who will also enjoy spotting bits and pieces of some of the composer's other operas sprinkled throughout.

--Robert Levine

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