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Leonardo Vinci *'Catone in Utica'*

Opera Royal Versailles, domenica 21 giugno 2015

La sensualità della melodia dell'opera barocca napoletana

di Marita Bevilacqua Bonetto



(Foto tratta da **Parnassus** official facebook page)

Dopo il successo straordinario di pubblico e di critica di *Artaserse* la benemerita, e mai abbastanza lodata casa Parnassus, produce per la gioia dei barocchisti, con la collaudata formula CD, tournée scenica e versione concerto in mezza Europa, ovviamente non nei climi italici, un'altra opera del talentuoso compositore di scuola napoletana Leonardo Vinci, il *Catone in Utica*, dal musicista considerato, e non a torto, il figlio prediletto.

La trama è nota basandosi, se pur con alcune licenze specie nei rapporti amorosi, sul rapporto conflittuale tra l'anziano Marcio Porcio Catone Uticense, sostenitore dei vecchi valori della Repubblica romana, e il neo dittatore Cesare allestito dalla brama di potere assoluto pur dichiarando rispetto per l'incorruttibile politico.

A ciò aggiungasi l'amore contrastato tra la di lui figlia Marzia con l'osteggiato Cesare e il desiderio di vendetta covato dalla vedova di Pompeo che cerca di farsi alleato il legato Fulvio ammaliato dal suo fascino e combattuto com'è d'uopo dal senso del dovere verso il suo generale.



(Foto tratta da **Parnassus** official facebook page)

Le ragioni del successo strepitoso del *Catone* andato in scena presso l'Opera Versailles, con ovazioni da parte del pubblico estatico percorso, ora come allora, dalla melodia sensuale dell'opera barocca napoletana, è da ascrivere in primo luogo alla forza drammatica dell'opera grazie al raffinato e particolarmente studiato libretto di Metastasio, con caratterizzazione delle dinamiche dei rapporti tra i personaggi in modo tutt'altro che superficiale, sostenuto da una musica varia e da momenti piuttosto complessi con lunghi e interessanti recitativi accompagnati.

L'audacia del compositore emerge inoltre nello stupefacente finale della morte 'tout court' in scena, di Catone, senza alcun momento musicale a seguire (notevole la somiglianza con la scena della morte di Bajazet nel *Tamerlano* di Haendel, del 1724), preceduta da un quartetto di rara forza espressiva.

Ma tutta l'opera è caratterizzata da notevole ispirazione con momenti musicali che quasi sempre sono funzionali alla descrizione dell'agire dei personaggi e alle loro motivazioni tradotte in affetti.

La seconda ragione sta nella strepitosa direzione musicale da parte del complesso Il Pomo d'Oro con la direzione di Riccardo Minasi, sempre attento a sostenere i solisti e a variare le dinamiche espressive con un ritmo ora pulsante ora tenero con rara sensibilità grazie a una compagine giovane e compartecipe.

La terza ragione è la sensazione avuta di un filo sottile che all'opera di Versailles univa lo spettatore moderno, con tutte le sue sovrastrutture, con il pubblico del Teatro delle Dame quando a Roma nel 1728 venne dato in scena il *Catone* con cast esclusivamente maschile, castrati e tenori, dato il noto divieto papale a calcare le scene dell'opera nei confronti delle donne.

Fiumi sono stati spesi sull'utilizzo dei controtenori come succedanei dei castrati e tali riserve potevano essere condivise in epoca passata con impiego disinvolto di falsettisti con voci sbiancate di scuola inglese assolutamente non adatti a ricreare lo spirito flamboyant del barocco italiano. Quando tuttavia si è in presenza di artisti –attori del calibro di quelli assoldati dalla scuderia Parnassus, di cui non si scordi è direttore artistico Max Emanuel Cencic, che di voci se ne intende, ogni riserva cade.



(Foto tratta da **Parnassus** official facebook page)

Siamo in presenza, nel caso di specie, di una messa in scena che riesce a ricreare il senso di meraviglia e di 'follia 'barocca del gusto per la stravaganza artificiosa delle forme. Sbaglierebbe chi cercasse alcun realismo nella regia che pone l'accento sul senso di morte incipiente dell'annunciato suicidio di Catone, un vero e proprio dinosauro, di cui uno scheletro in sottofondo appare, di fronte al nuovo che avanza. Le incisioni delle rovine di Piranesi sono assai appropriate così come il bianco e nero dei costumi di Catone, un po' hidalgo seicentesco, e della figlia Marzia seducente bionda Marylin che si diverte con una scena con i suoi figuranti boys.

Una messa in scena che come per il caso dell'*Artaserse* qua e là strizza l'occhio allo spettatore moderno con ironici siparietti che non fanno venire meno il senso drammatico ma alleggeriscono qua e là la tensione contribuendo al senso teatrale della messa in scena.

Ma dove il regista Jacob Peter Messner, aduso a messe in scena di opere barocche, non sbaglia è avere abbigliato Cesare come un divo castrato dell'epoca, e infatti quando Franco Fagioli erompe sulla scena, vero colpo di luce con il costume iperbarocco luccicante rosso e oro con tocchi di blu, il pubblico ha l'impressione di vedere Carestini risorto in carne e ossa!

Abbiamo in altre sedi sottolineato come Franco Fagioli, vincitore non per nulla a suo tempo del prestigioso premio italiano della critica musicale Franco Abbiati, sia l'unico a potere sostenere con credibilità il ruolo dell'eroe amoroso appannaggio dei divi castrati e lo confermiamo se non bastassero le ovazioni dopo le arie di bravura, i silenzi estatici e le lacrime di molti, di cui siamo stati testimoni, al termine dell'aria sublime 'Quell'amor che poco accende' del terzo atto interpretata con assoluta partecipazione e costante attenzione alla linea del canto.

La partecipazione di Fagioli è sempre altissima come il suo interagire attento con gli altri protagonisti; la dizione, assai migliorata, è scolpita nei numerosi recitativi; la proiezione notevole e i colori innumerevoli passando da una vocalità soprana a note baritonali. Come tutti i grandi artisti sulla scena Franco Fagioli diventa 'il personaggio' facendo dimenticare il grande lavoro di tecnica e impostazione che precede l'entrata in scena.

Rari sono gli artisti a cui si può fare proprio il detto: Un canto che nell'anima si sente.

A sostituire l'infortunato Valer Sabadus un esordiente Ray Chenez nella parte di Marzia dalla solida scuola americana; al di là degli auspicabili miglioramenti nella dizione, stupisce per il volume assai considerevole e per il coinvolgimento attoriale.

Vinc Yi assume completamente la parte della vedova di Pompeo Emilia con un costume un po' déco con piume varie; chapeau per l'attore ma anche per gli incredibili progressi vocali della voce da soprano coloratura di notevolissima estensione.

Il tenore Juan Sancho è perfettamente credibile nel ruolo dell'anziano padre; non gli si attribuisca un senso di eccessivo verismo ma piuttosto una interpretazione della parte non comune. La voce è drammatica e agile al punto giusto e non si potrebbe trovare a modesto avviso un migliore Catone in scena.

Gli fa da contraltare la bella voce tenorile assai diversa ma anche meno particolare del giovane Martin Mitterrutner, fattosi giustamente notare, nella parte del fedele a Cesare legato Flavio.

Max Emanuel Cencic nella parte del principe Numida Arbace alleato di Catone e amante non ricambiato di Marzia, se pure sofferente, si conferma per il senso musicale raffinato e del cantabile senza fallo. Una musicalità la sua unica. L'infaticabile direttore artistico di Parnassus si conferma con Fagioli nell'eccellenza controtenorile.

Non si pensava davvero, fino ad anni recenti, di potere assistere a uno spettacolo di così rara coerenza, tale da rinverdire i fasti barocchi di un lontano passato.

M.B.B.
27 giugno 2015

Ndr. Per chi volesse rendersi conto del livello dello spettacolo è annunciata una messa in scena del Catone il 1 luglio 2015 on line su Culture Box



(Foto tratta da **Parnassus** official facebook page)

TORNA AGLI EVENTI

Sendung von Montag, 29.06.2015

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Leonardo Vinici

Catone in Utica

Max Emanuel Cencic, Franco Fagioli, Juan Sancho, Valer Sabadus

Martin Mitterrutzner, Il Pomo d'Oro, Riccardo Minasi

Decca

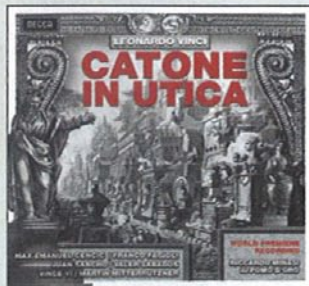
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Der Cellist Karim Wasfi

Redaktion: Christian Schnitzler



Leonardo
Vinci

(1690-1730)

Catone in Utica

Juan Sancho (Catone), Franco Fagioli (Cesare), Valer Sabadus (Marzia), Max Emanuel Cencic (Arbace), Vince Yi (Emilia), Martin Mitterrutzner (Fulvio), Il Pomo d'Oro, dir. Riccardo Minasi
Decca 3 CD 4788194 (Universal).

2014. 2 h 54'

Nouveauté

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CLASSICA



CD CHOC / PLAG 5

RICCARDO MINASI RESSUSCITE VINCI

Tout est superbe dans cet opéra, tant le livret de Métastase que la musique bouleversante de Vinci, servie par une équipe de musiciens exceptionnels.

deux salués dans ces pages (n^{os} 169 et 171), voici le troisième *blockbuster* baroque de Decca en six mois. Tandis que la couverture met en avant les stars Fagioli et Cencic, l'absence de dames à l'affiche peut étonner. Mais déjà on comprend : cet opéra romain, créé en 1728 au Teatro delle Dame, ne pouvait employer de cantatrices, conformément au décret papal proscrivant les femmes de la scène. Des castrats incarnaient donc les deux rôles féminins, tenus ici par Sabadus et Yi.

Le livret de Métastase, conçu pour le public de la ville éternelle, est une variation sur le

thème de la Rome républicaine (Caton) résistant à l'impériale (César). Cependant, le poète y équilibre subtilement la rhétorique des deux camps, évitant dans cette version originale la fatuité de ses nombreux imitateurs et adaptateurs. Premier à mettre en musique cette *tragedia* souvent reprise par la suite, Leonardo Vinci mérite largement cette parution, qui le fera connaître autrement que de nom ou au détour d'une anthologie. Aussi savant et singulier que les plus grands, le Napolitain est constamment heureux dans la variété des airs (la fugue de « *Va,*

ritorna al tuo tiranno ! »), comme dans la tension du récitatif, indispensable à l'intrigue politique. La véhémence fantasque de Fagioli répond à l'ardeur tranchante de Juan Sancho dans un face-à-face éruptif entre les deux chefs.

Aux côtés d'un Sabadus quelque peu monotone, Cencic en amant contrarié montre ses qualités de nuance, particulièrement émouvantes dans « *So che pietà non hai* ». Précieux soutien, la pulsation saillante du Pomo d'Oro donne à l'ensemble une vitalité irrésistible. Viva Vinci ! ♦

Luca Dupont-Spirio

Après le *Siroe* de Hasse et le récital des Cinq contreténors, tous

Vinci

Catone in Utica

Juan Sancho <i>ten</i>	Catone
Franco Fagioli <i>countertenor</i>	Cesare
Max Emanuel Cencic <i>countertenor</i>	Arbace
Valer Sabadus <i>countertenor</i>	Marzia
Vince Yi <i>countertenor</i>	Emilia
Martin Mitterrutzner <i>ten</i>	Fulvio

Il Pomo d'Oro / Riccardo Minasi

Decca © 478 8194DH3 Gh 53' • DDD • S/T/b



Max Emanuel Cencic and his production company Parnassus Arts follow up their trailblazing recording of Vinci's *Artaserse* (Virgin Classics, 1/13) with *Catone in Utica*. This not only further rehabilitates Vinci's reputation but also restores an unabridged and complete first version of Metastasio's libretto, elaborated from Plutarch's account of the staunch Republican patriot Cato's preference for committing suicide rather than submitting to the victorious dictator Julius Caesar. It was premiered in January 1728 in Rome, where a Papal decree forbade women from performing publicly onstage, so the original cast featured four castrati, two of whom sang the female characters: Marzia (Cato's daughter, secretly in love with Caesar but betrothed to Arbace) and Emilia (widow of Caesar's opponent Pompey).

Perhaps it is needless and anachronistic to reconstruct, as here, the Roman all-male cast using countertenors for both female roles, but there is no disputing everyone's complete dedication to the cause. Cencic's firm yet sensitively balanced singing conveys the pathos of Arbace's numerous expressions of unrequited love for Marzia ('Che sia la gelosia' concludes Act 2 with elegant respite from the preceding turbulence). Franco Fagioli's swollen vibrato and exaggerated articulation will not please everyone, but the braying horns and astonishing silent pauses during the valorous 'Soffre talor del vento' suit his aptitude for Caesar's declamatory outbursts; Vinci unleashes high trumpet, two horns and thunderous drums to explosive theatrical effect for Caesar's declaration of war after diplomacy has failed ('Se in campo armato'). Vince Yi sounds appropriately feminine as Emilia but an accomplished female performer might prove a more adequate match for Il Pomo d'Oro's brio in the spirited 'O nel sen di qualche stella'. Likewise, Valer Sabadus's limpid singing does not always reveal every aspect of Marzia's personality evident in Metastasio's poetry and Vinci's

music; her breathlessly disorientated description of her troubles during a rushed encounter with Cesare ('Confusa, smarrita') and an extraordinary accompanied recitative as she attempts to flee to safety through a subterranean aqueduct (Act 3 scene 5) are intensely dramatic highlights which a top-notch female singer might have invested with more searing passion (and firmer projection).

Juan Sancho's beefy tenor aptly characterises Cato's scepticism about reaching a diplomatic resolution ('Va', ritorna al tuo tiranno' is a vigorously fugal denunciation of Caesar's emissary), and his infuriated response to his daughter's betrayal has a visceral malevolence comparable to Handel or Mozart at their most potent ('Dovea svenarti allora'). At the other end of the scale, Fulvio's eloquent self-pity in 'Nascesti alle pene' is accompanied by muted upper strings and *pizzicato* basses, although I can imagine it being sung with mellifluous delicacy rather than the 'can belto' ardency of Martin Mitterrutzner.

Il Pomo d'Oro, directed by concertmaster Riccardo Minasi, vividly characterise each scene with theatrical zest. The use of forceful guitar strumming in quick arias is tiresome, but otherwise the continuo team and singers ensure that reams of recitatives crackle along with a vital dramatic atmosphere. The opera's thrilling climax springs some astonishing surprises, with a confrontational quartet followed by a chain of accompanied recitatives for the dying Cato and the remorseful Caesar, who curses his victory and throws down his laurel wreath as the curtain falls (a striking experiment with dramatic realism). Supported by Kurt Markström's scholarly essay, this release boldly champions Vinci's merits as a musical dramatist. **David Vickers**

Countertenor-Fest

Mal wieder eine zu Recht vergessene Barockoper, könnte man bei Leonardo Vincis „Catone in Utica“ denken. Doch das Werk von 1728 überrascht in seiner musikalischen Gestaltung trotz der typischen Verwicklungen von Pflicht und Neigung vor einem politischen Hintergrund. Vinci befreit durch die Musik die Figuren aus ihrer holzschnittartigen Anlage. Epochenbedingt dominieren die hohen Stimmen in dieser Produktion mit dem Barockorchester Il Pomo d'Oro, selbst die beiden Frauenpartien sind mit Countertenören besetzt.

Es ist faszinierend, wie die vier Sänger in ähnlicher Lage ein eigenständiges Profil entwickeln, vom etwas kehligen Franco Fagioli über den herb tönenden Max Emanuel Cencic bis hin zu den leichtfüßigen Stimmen von Vince Yi und Valer Sabadus. Da wird mit Spitzentönen und Koloraturen im Überfluss gearbeitet und der Ausdruck auf die Spitze getrieben. Da auch die beiden jungen Tenöre Martin Mitternutzner und Juan Sancho mit ihren ebenmäßigen Stimmen auf ähnlichem Niveau agieren, beglückt die Aufnahme rundum. *dip*



Leonardo Vinci:
Catone in Utica
Decca/Universal (3 CDs);

21 July 2015

CD REVIEW: Leonardo Vinci – CATONE IN UTICA (J. Sancho, F. Fagioli, V. Sabadus, M. E. Cencic, V. Yi, M. Mitterrutzner; DECCA 478 8194)



LEONARDO VINCI (circa 1696 – 1730):

Catone in Utica—[Juan Sancho](#) (Catone), [Franco Fagioli](#) (Cesare), [Valer Sabadus](#) (Marzia), [Max Emanuel Cencic](#) (Arbace), [Vince Yi](#) (Emilia), [Martin Mitterrutzner](#) (Fulvio); [Il Pomo d'Oro](#); [Riccardo Minasi](#), conductor [Recorded in Villa San Fermo, Lonigo, Italy, 27 February – 7 March 2014; [DECCA](#) 478 8194; 3 CDs, 233:42; Available from [DECCA Classics](#), [Amazon \(USA\)](#), [fnac](#), [jpc](#), [Presto Classical](#), and major music retailers]

In order to meaningfully advocate for the music of a forgotten composer, generalities must be avoided at all costs. It is informative in the most basic manner to state that a composer was a contemporary of this or that more famous name, but does this motivate a listener to hear that composer's music with intensified interest? In the case of Leonardo Vinci, generalities sadly must do. Not even the year of this gentleman's birth is known with certainty, but the anecdotal evidence of his extant scores, particularly his operas, offers glimpses of an unexpectedly unique voice that seems likely to have been heard with no little pleasure and appreciation during the first three decades of the Eighteenth Century. Furthermore, accounts of Vinci's death, surely too salacious to be wholly apocryphal, are themselves the stuff of opera: allegedly murdered by the jealous husband of a poorly-chosen paramour, the Calabrian composer was at most forty years old at the time of his death in May 1730. A life little longer than Mozart's, a demise worthy of Don Juan, and a gift for composing for the stage that prompted the genesis of several of the famous Metastasio's most persuasive libretti: what more could be needed to rekindle interest in Vinci's music in the Twenty-First Century? Recent years have taught artists and audiences alike that not every excavation among the brittle pages of libraries and archives unearths an unheralded masterpiece deserving of exhibition, but [Max Emanuel Cencic](#), [Georg Lang](#), and [Parnassus Arts Production](#) have frequently proved to possess the musical Midas touch. In their hands and those of [Il Pomo d'Oro](#), [Riccardo Minasi](#), and a superb cast, Vinci's *Catone in Utica* is indeed a golden treasure. In generations past, DECCA was the label of authoritative performances of the operas of Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Puccini: in the new millennium, it is the home of innovation that unites the rediscovered past with the ever-transitioning future. Perhaps verifiable knowledge of Leonardo Vinci is mostly confined to generalities, but the virtues of this recording of his *Catone in Utica* are very specific.

First performed in Rome in 1728, *Catone in Utica* fell victim to the papal ban on theatrical performances by female artists founded upon too-literal interpretations of Scripture dating from the Pontificate of Leo IV in the Ninth Century, reinforced by Sixtus V in the 1580s and Innocent XI in the 1680s. Further creative manipulations of scriptural and ecclesiastical opinions on the rôles of the sexes in musical performances both liturgical and theatrical instituted the phenomenon of the castrato. As in an earlier opera like Stefano Landi's 1632 *Il Sant'Alessio*, in which Cencic was unforgettable as the Sposa (the title saint's abandoned wife) in a touring production with Les Arts Florissants, even the female rôles in the first production of *Catone in Utica* were assigned to male singers. Strange as it may seem when viewed from the perspectives of modern notions of gender in opera, the recreation of this aesthetic permits heightened appreciation of the timbral homogeneity that composers such as Landi and Vinci likely expected to hear in scores created for all-male casts. To the credit of everyone involved with this recording, the casting of male singers in female rôles is managed completely without affectation: indeed, reversing the gender paradigm, female Cherubinos, Tancredis, Octavians, and Komponists could learn much from this recording about allowing text and musical context to convey a character's sex. Still, there are passages in which the interchanges of male voices, exacerbated by the preponderance of *secco* recitative, introduce dramatic inertness: though the singers make admirable efforts to differentiate their timbres, it is possible if not listening carefully to lose track of the plot. The continuo created by [Federica Bianchi](#)'s harpsichord and [Simone Vallerotonda](#)'s theorbo is splendidly effective at sustaining momentum, but the task is a difficult one. On the whole, though, *Catone in Utica* is an inspired work, Vinci's craftsmanship rarely falling below the level of that of his best-known contemporaries, and this recording introduces the opera to the listener with a performance from which emanates passion that, as Beethoven suggested, makes perfection inconsequential.

Directed by violinist and conductor [Riccardo Minasi](#), the musical magicians of [Il Pomo d'Oro](#) cast enthralling spells in virtually every bar of their parts. The tripartite Sinfonia with which the opera begins is played with rapier's-point rhythmic accuracy, establishing the taut metrical atmosphere of the performance as a whole. Minasi's affinity for Vinci's idiom is immediately apparent, his tempi bringing the moods of each aria into sharp focus even before the singers utter a line of text. Whatever the circumstances of his musical education were, Vinci acquired a consummate mastery of the orchestra of his time, and his instrumental writing in *Catone in Utica* discloses a cleverness that rivals the work of Telemann and Vivaldi. Minasi and [Il Pomo d'Oro](#) are clearly no less inspired by Metastasio's libretto, the poet's first for a Roman theatre, than was Vinci himself, the sounds with which they support the singers' enunciations of the words judged to enable nuanced inflections. Equals among virtuosos, bassoonist [Anna Flumani](#), oboists [Emiliano Rodolfi](#) and [Federica Inzoli](#), trumpeter [Jonatha Pia](#) and horn players [Dileno Baldini](#) and [Francesco Meucci](#) garner admiration for the brilliance and pluckitude—not always qualities present in performances featuring period instruments—of their playing. The strings also deliver first-rate accounts of their parts, avoiding the acidic sounds and inflexible sawing inflicted upon many performances. In a garden of fruits as sweet as those cultivated on these discs, the work of Minasi and [Il Pomo d'Oro](#) is indeed a gilded apple of special savoriness.

In the title rôle, that of the Roman statesman Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis, Spanish tenor [Juan Sancho](#) contends with exacting music composed by Vinci for Giovanni Battista Pinacci, the Florentine tenor who created parts in *Ezio* and *Sosarme, re di Media* for Händel in London

and sang Artabano in the 1731 revival of Vinci's *Artaserse*. Continuing the legacy of Gasparini's *Il Bajazet* and Händel's *Tamerlano*, *Catone in Utica* was notable in the Eighteenth Century for depicting the suicide of a lead character, facilitating display of the acting skills for which Pinacci was renowned, not least in London, where his interpretation of Händel's Bajazet was lauded by both the composer and his public. In Act One of *Catone in Utica*, Sancho battles manfully with the trumpet obbligato in the aria 'Con si bel nome in fronte,' the fine calibre of his singing jeopardized only by a final cadenza that takes him uncomfortably high. Competing with the horns in 'Si sgementi alle sue pene il pensier di donna imbelbe,' the tenor's articulation of the unconventional vocal line occasionally makes the aria sound like a refugee from Vinci's beloved Neapolitan *opera buffa*, but he dispatches the coloratura with absolute confidence. The contrapuntal writing in Catone's Act Two aria 'Va, ritorna al tuo tiranno, servi pur al tuo sovrano,' the melodic line again punctuated with outbursts of frenzied coloratura, draws from Sancho singing of incredible technical acumen, something also devoted to his stimulating performance of the *aria agitata* 'Dovea svenarti allora che apristi al di le ciglia,' its music so reminiscent of Vivaldi. Catone has no arias in Act Three, but he here has the challenge of the emotionally-charged *accompagnati* with which Vinci limned the character's suicide. In Sancho's performance, Catone takes leave of a life that has become hateful to him with dignity that does not preclude blinding flashes of anger. There is just enough of an edge on Sancho's tone in the upper register to sometimes make his Catone sound more sophomoric than stoic, but the ease with which the singer executes Vinci's most daunting feats is imposing.

Having recently been signed to a long-term recording contract by the Deutsche Grammophon, still a rare relationship among the few remaining major labels and singers within his Fach, Argentine countertenor [Franco Fagioli](#) here sings Cesare, the rôle created in 1728 by world-famous castrato Giovanni Carestini. More than any of the other rôles in *Catone in Utica*, Cesare was composed almost to order, as it were, with the goal of showcasing the astounding capabilities of Carestini's voice. Some of the part's bravura passages are beastly, but Fagioli tames them with singing that never deviates from the exalted standard set in his performance of the Act One aria 'Nell'ardire che il seno t'accende,' in which he makes love in music with delicate trills matched by the strings. No less captivating is his voicing of 'Chi un dolce amor condanna,' a bewitching number in the gallant style of Pergolesi. 'Soffre talor del vanto i primi insulti il mare' in Act Two is a simile aria of the type frequently encountered in Baroque opera, its billowing horns and cascades of coloratura tempered by pregnant pauses that Fagioli infuses with a serenity almost as engaging as his rapid-fire coloratura. The breakneck roudades and punishing intervals of 'Se in campo armato vuoi cimentarmi' render the aria as much of an exercise for the singer as for the trumpeter and timpanist, but this singer is never outshone by his orchestral colleagues. With an arching violin obbligato that brings to mind the ravishing 'Sovvente il sole' from Vivaldi's *Andromeda liberata*, Cesare's 'Quell'amor che poco accende' in Act Three is as stunningly beautiful as any aria composed in the Eighteenth Century, and Fagioli's performance of it is worthy of the music, the upper register glowing. As recorded here, his mezza voce has a 'spin' as alluring as those of Zinka Milanov and Michel Sénéchal.

Marzia, Catone's fiery-spirited daughter, was sung in the première of *Catone in Utica* by the soprano castrato Farfallino (né Giacinto Fontana), the 'little butterfly' of Roman Baroque opera. When *Catone in Utica* was produced in Naples in 1732, the celebrated Faustina Bordoni assumed Marzia's identity. Despite his gender, it is intriguing to conjecture whether the portrayal of Marzia in this performance by Romanian countertenor [Valer Sabadus](#) is more like Farfallino's or Bordoni's. Sabadus's unique, silvery timbre causes Marzia to sound more petulant than she might if sung by a warmer, more conventionally feminine voice, but he sings the music so capably that the acerbic shadow cast by his vocalism seems justified by the character's dramatic predicament. The necessity of negotiating the difficult vocal line of the Act One aria 'Non ti minaccio sdegno, non ti prometto amor' causes the words to be lost, and the aria's close is undermined by a strange cadenza that leads nowhere, but the voice shimmers. The aria 'È follia se nascondete, fidi amici, il vostro foco' receives from Sabadus a beguiling performance, and the gossamer strains of 'In che t'offende se l'alma spera' in Act Two are eloquently elucidated. The accompaniment of 'So che godendo vai del duol che mi tormenta' sounds as though borrowed from Vivaldi's mandolin concerti, and Sabadus shapes the vocal line with poetic sensitivity. In Act Three, the aria 'Confusa, smarrita, spiegarti vorrei che fosti' is nobly sung, and the powerful *accompagnato* 'Pur veggio alfine, raggiar' in the scene at the ancient aqueduct—deemed an inappropriate setting for evocation of the glories of Imperial Rome by Vinci's audience—lures from Sabadus polished but dynamic vocalism. He soars in Marzia's lines in the quartetto with Cesare, Catone, and Emilia, 'Deh! in vita ti serba,' interacting with his colleagues with unforced synergy. Throughout his performance, a few of Sabadus's highest notes are slightly uncomfortable, and notes at the bottom end of resolved cadences tend to disappear. Nonetheless, there is no condescension in the artfully-conveyed femininity of his Marzia: he sings the music without artifice and trusts Metastasio and Vinci to communicate the character's gender identity to the listener.

It was to Bolognese castrato Giovanni Battista Minelli, a widely-lauded singer who created rôles for virtually every Italian composer of importance in the first three decades of the Eighteenth Century, that Vinci entrusted the part of Arbace. It was recorded by his contemporary Giambattista Mancini that Minelli possessed a two-octave contralto voice of uncommon distinction, distinguished by near-perfect trills and mordents. One might think that Mancini was describing Max Emanuel Cencic. The Croatian-born countertenor complements the fantastic string playing in Arbace's Act One aria 'Che legge spietata che sorte crudele' with formidable evenness of tone and tasteful ornamentation. Then, he responds to the whirling string figurations in 'È in ogni core diverso amore' with singing of sparkling sensuality. 'So che pietà non hai, e pur ti deggio amar' in Act Two is phrased with tremendous imagination. It is with 'Che sia la gelosia un gelo in mezzo al foco' that Arbace brings down the curtain on the second act, and it is difficult to imagine Minelli, for all his gifts, singing the aria more compellingly than Cencic. The grandeur of all that has come before notwithstanding, it is the Act Three aria 'Combattuta da tante vicende' that is the pinnacle of Cencic's performance. He rockets through the fiendish coloratura with calm aplomb, but it is the sheer loveliness of his voice that refuses to be forgotten. Cencic's presence on disc in general is exemplary, but his Arbace in this recording of *Catone in Utica* is the work of an artist with few peers in any Fach.

Christened Emilia by Metastasio and Vinci rather than the Cornelia familiar from Haym's and Händel's—and, by extension, Bussani's and Sartorio's—*Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, the rôle of Pompey's widow was taken in the first performance of *Catone in Utica* by Giovanni Ossi, a star pupil of Gasparini. The Emilia of California-bred countertenor [Vince Yi](#) is a study in contrasts. At first, Yi's voice, though attractive and ably-produced, seems debilitatingly pale in comparison with Fagioli's, Sabadus's, and especially Cencic's instruments, lacking the weight of tone to meaningfully evince the grieving Emilia's vengeful bloodlust, yet Yi's tones soon reveal a haunting ambiguity. In the Act One *accompagnato* 'Io con quest'occhi, io vidi splendor l'infame acciaio,' the young singer is at once poised and perverted, and the aria 'O nel sen di qualche stella' is voiced with authority despite the relative shallowness of the timbre. Yi's traversal of 'Un certo non so che veggio negli occhi tuoi' is tranquil but not complacent, his perverted upper register heard to optimal advantage. The first of Emilia's arias in Act Two, 'Wer te spero e per te solo mi lusingo e mi consolo,' is an unusual number that exploits the dramatic possibilities of *accelerandi*, and Yi tellingly explores the expressive possibilities of music and text. His voicing of 'Se sciogliere non vuoi dalle catene il cor' is no less fetching. Yi proves a model to his colleagues in the alternation of private and public sentiments: asides are handled with atypical credibility in this performance by all of the singers. Vinci's Emilia is not as endearing and approachable a character as Händel's Cornelia, but Yi's subtle, unflinchingly appealing singing invests her with a pragmatic determination that sighs when other, less insightful singers' portrayals might shout.

Tyrolean tenor [Martin Mitterrutzner](#) portrays Fulvio, created by Filippo Giorgi, Porpora's preferred Varo in his setting of Metastasio's *Ezio*, with dramatic vigor and vocal freshness. From the opening phrase of Fulvio's Act One aria 'Piangendo ancora rinascere suole la bella aurora,' Mitterrutzner wields strikingly handsome tone, easy command of broad tessitura, and crisp trills. The diaphanous G-minor melodic line of 'Piangendo ancora' is caressed by the tenor's plangent tone, his elegant phrasing seconded by Minasi's aristocratic management of the minuet rhythm. The Act Two aria 'Nascesti alle pene, mio povero core' is voiced engrossingly. 'La fronda, che circonda a' vincitori il crine,' Fulvio's aria in Act Three is a bravura tour de force, and Mitterrutzner excels in it. The solid technical foundation upon which his well-integrated vocal registers are laid is heartening in a young singer, and the anticipation of future marvels—his Idomeneo is destined to be legendary—encouraged by this performance is thrilling.

In an age in which enterprising artists and ensembles have before them means of rediscovering and exploring neglected repertory that could hardly have been imagined just a generation ago, it is frustrating to note the frequency with which opera companies that might, even with relatively modest resources, mount unforgettable productions of rejuvenated operas like Leonardo Vinci's *Catone in Utica* forgo opportunities for innovation in order to put on tired, often badly-earned performances of *Rigoletto*, *Carmen*, and *La bohème*. These scores have of course sated their places in international repertory, but more than any of their Twenty-First-Century admirers might suspect, Verdi, Bizet, and Puccini respected and honored the achievements of their operatic forebears. To suggest that *Rigoletto*, *Carmen*, and *La bohème* would have been impossible without *Catone in Utica* is to stretch the point, but this phenomenal recording of the opera proves that Vinci's music is by no means undeserving of performance alongside the works of the best of his contemporaries. With [Catone in Utica](#) joining acclaimed recordings of Händel's *Alessandro* and Hasse's *Siroe, re di Persia*, the commitment of DECCA and Parnassus Arts Productions to retrieving wonderful music from the shadows of history is thriving. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it has achieved miracles for *Catone*.

Feuerwerk barocken Operngesangs

29/07/2015



Leonardo Vinci: Catone in Utica; Max Emanuel Cencic (Arbace), Franco Fagioli (Cesare), Juan Sancho (Catone), Valer Sabadus (Marzia), Martin Mitterrutzner (Fulvio), Vince Yi (Emilia), Il Pomo d'Oro Riccardo Minasi; 3 CDs Decca 4788195; 3/14 (233'42) – Rezension von Remy Franck



Nach dem Erfolg von Leonardo Vincis 'Artaserse' wird jetzt mit 'Catone in Utica' (1728) eine weitere Vinci-Oper auf ein Libretto von Pietro Metastasio der Vergessenheit entrissen.

Das Libretto verarbeitet die Tragödie des römischen Staatsmannes Cato (95 bis 46 v. Chr.), der vor seinem Gegner Caesar nach Utica in Afrika geflohen war und dort mit ansehen musste, wie Caesar nicht nur Utica eroberte, sondern auch das Herz seiner Tochter, die er dem König von Numidien, Arbace versprochen hatte. Die Oper endet mit Catones Selbstmord.

Die Aufnahme hat viele Stärken. Die wichtigsten sind wohl, dass für die ausschließlich mit Männerstimmen besetzte Oper eine Besetzung gefunden wurde, in der auch die Countertenöre sich so sehr voneinander unterscheiden, dass für jede Rolle eine typische Stimme vorhanden ist, die hundertprozentig passt. Stark ist auch der Orchesterpart besetzt, denn Riccardo Minasi und sein 'Pomo d'Oro' musizieren absolut hinreißend.

Franco Fagiolis Cesare ist vokal ein Feuerwerk an Farben und stimmlicher Virtuosität, darstellerisch eine Figur, deren Dramatik und Emotionen man wohl kaum besser zum Ausdruck bringen könnte.

Max Emanuel Cencic, der die Oper mit seiner Firma Parnassus produziert hat, gibt dem Arbace viel Noblesse und Gefühlskraft, wobei seine Vokalführung als exquisit bezeichnet werden muss.

Der spanische Tenor Juan Sancho ist in der Titelrolle eine ideale Besetzung. Seine wendige, wohl timbrierte und gut fokussierte, klare Stimme gibt dem Catone viel Power.

Vince Yi hat eine sehr charakteristische, helle und leichte Stimme, die er sehr einfühlsam und differenzierend für die Rolle der intriganten Witwe des Pompeius, Emilia, einsetzt.

Die weibliche Hauptrolle wird von Valer Sabadus in allen Hinsichten erfüllt. Der vokale Reichtum seiner ungemein blumigen Stimme eignet sich vortrefflich für die in ihren Gefühlen hin und hergerissene Marzia.

Das Klangbild ist direkt, sehr präsent und wohl ausbalanciert. Das Booklet enthält viel Information und den ganzen Text mit deutscher, französischer und englischer Übertragung.

Freunde barocker Opern werden mit diesem 'Catone in Utica', in dem Leonardo Vinci eine vokale Salve nach der andern abfeuert, voll auf ihre Kosten kommen.

Those who were amazed by Vinci's Artaserse, will certainly love this new production of Catone in Utica. Fabulous singing, especially from Franco Fagioli and Valer Sabadus, and the luxuriant orchestral playing ensure a first class baroque experience.

Il Giardino di Arcadia

A CURA DI
ALESSANDRO MORMILELeonardo Vinci
Catone in Utica

Riccardo Minasi - Il Pomo d'Oro

Juan Sancho, Catone, Franco Fagioli, Cesare, Valer Sabadus, Marzia, Max Emanuel Cencic, Arbaço, Vince Yi, Emilia, Martin Mitterutzner, Fulvio.

Registrazione effettuata a Villa San Fermo, Lonigo, dal 27 febbraio al 7 marzo 2014.

T.T. 233.44

3 CD DECCA 478 8194

Ancora un titolo che dimostra come l'opera seria in stile napoletano di Leonardo Vinci meriti di essere riscoperta in tempi di barocco renaissance come quelli che stiamo vivendo. La Parnassus Arts Productions aveva già fatto risorgere con successo, sia a livello discografico che scenico, *Artaserse*, opera che ebbe la sua prima assoluta due anni dopo *Catone in Utica*. Entrambe videro la luce in quella Roma papalina che impediva alle voci femminili di solcare le scene favorendo il proliferare dei castrati, che furono impegnati non solo in parti eroiche, ma anche in ruoli femminili. Così accadde al Teatro delle Dame il 19 gennaio 1728, quando *Catone in Utica* andò in scena con un cast stellare, che vide schierati il celebre cantore evirato Giovanni Carestini nei panni di Cesare, e Giovanni Minelli in quelli di Arbaço, mentre per i ruoli femminili di Marzia ed Emilia due castrati *en travesti*, fra i quali il versatile Giacinto Fontana, noto come "il Farfallino" per la deliziosa grazia con cui sapeva solcare le scene quando interpretava parti da donna, come quella di Emilia, ma anche mostrando vigore eroico quando Vinci lo impegnò in ruoli seri, come avvenne in *Didone abbandonata*. Al tenore Giovanni Battista Pinacci, noto per le sue molte interpretazioni händeliane, venne affidato Catone. Una distribuzione i cui fasti vocali, dimenticati nel tempo, rinascono attraverso le scelte ormai ben note della Parnassus Arts Productions, che nelle fila della sua agenzia schiera i più noti controtenori che oggi eseguono parti che furono dei castrati e poi incide e mette in scena le opere in un'Europa che accoglie (soprattutto in Francia, Austria e Germania) l'opera barocca con entusiasmo sempre maggiore. Lo fa, in questo caso, scoprendo un'opera in prima incisione assoluta basata su un libretto di Pietro Meta-

stasio che fu un classico del Settecento, musicato da diversi compositori, come Leonardo Leo e Antonio Vivaldi. Vinci non è solamente, come a molti appare, un distillatore di magie vocali belcantistiche, di acrobatismi virtuosistici ed espressivi destinati a mettere in luce le capacità dei grandi cantanti per i quali componeva. Era un compositore, più attento di quanto possa sembrare, a curare la portata emozionale del testo all'interno della struttura fissa dell'opera seria che, pur nella rigida alternanza fra recitativi secchi ed arie tripartite con da capo, mostra una attenzione particolare al recitativo accompagnato o alla drammatizzazione degli effetti espressivi del pezzo chiuso, come il lungo ascolto dell'opera svela, soprattutto quando si approda all'ultimo atto. Ma la vena più nota della poetica vocale vinciana è quella belcantistica, coniugata negli aspetti dello stile "agitato": quello del virtuosismo più sfrenato delle arie in cui l'ambascia sentimentale dei personaggi viene messa in relazione con la coloratura più vorticiosa. Così avvenne quando la Parnassus Arts Productions incise e eseguì con trionfale successo *Artaserse*, con Diego Fasolis alla testa del Concerto Köln. Oggi è la volta di Riccardo Minasi che, alla testa del complesso con strumenti originali Il Pomo d'Oro, scatena dinamiche e sonorità indiolate. L'incisività donata alla scansione dei lunghi recitativi secchi vivifica la narrazione, rendendola fluida e molto teatrale, così come foga e ritmica delle arie in stile agitato sono decisamente inebrianti. Talvolta un tocco di galanteria in più non avrebbe guastato in pagine di mezzo-carattere che richiederebbero forse più eleganza e finezza. Notazioni marginali se si valuta l'esito complessivo dell'operazione e il risultato ottenuto da una compagnia vocale dove a svettare sono soprattutto due divi del moderno controtenorismo: Max Emanuel Cencic e Franco Fagioli. Nel loro caso - non è la prima volta che lo si sottolinea, e qui lo si riconferma - la rinascita del controtenore ha un fondamento belcantistico pertinente, e non appare una forzatura. Cencic e Fagioli trascendono infatti i limiti del falsetto, utilizzano sonorità di petto, sanno colorare la linea espressiva delle pagine patetiche con calore e densità di suono, mentre nel canto acrobatico trascinano. Fagioli, in particolare, si conferma il controtenore tecnicamente più agguer-

rito e funambolico dei nostri giorni e si impone per un timbro camoso e pieno. Conosce l'arte della fioritura minuta, trilla da vero virtuoso e ha un dominio del fiato a dir poco portentoso. Ha poi un controllo assoluto del suono su tutta la gamma, passando dal registro acuto al grave senza mai snaturare l'emissione. Lo si ascolti in "Chi un dolce amor condanna" del primo atto e poi, nel terzo, nel delicato abbandono di "Quell'amor che poco accende", banco di prova del vero virtuoso; in quest'ultima lascia stupiti come in un'aria di andamento galante - e ve ne sono altre di tal fatta in quest'opera - Fagioli sappia essere delicato, commosso ed insieme aulico, usando tutte le possibilità virtuosistiche di una voce che ha trasfigurato il falsetto rendendolo virile, ardito e imperioso, sia quando deve accendere le polveri del canto di coloratura più altisonante (come in "Soffre talor del vento i primi insulti il mare" e in "Se in campo armato", quest'ultima con sfavillio di trombe e tamburi) che esprime il carattere marziale di Cesare, sia quando, come nel caso dell'aria "Nell'ardire che il senso l'accende", deve toccare la corda dell'"alma romana" che non conosce timore e viltà. Non gli è da meno l'Arbaço di Max Emanuel Cencic, al quale sono affidate alcune fra le più belle arie dell'opera. Rispetto al collega, suo rivale in bravura, Fagioli non è così analitico e vario sul versante meramente virtuosistico, ma ha una voce densa di suono e parimenti flessibile, per certi aspetti capace di vestire il suono di un calore più avvolgente e composto. Lo dimostra nell'andamento riflessivo di "Che sia la gelosia" e poi nel torrenziale scatto donato a "Combattuta da tante vicende", dal sapore quasi vivaldiano, dove sa essere altero e fiero, con una voce dai centri densi e

composi. Due voci che hanno donato possibilità prima sconosciute a chi cantava nel registro controtenorile tentando invano di emulare la vocalità perduta dei castrati. Prima di loro sembrava impossibile che tali voci potessero giungere a tali traguardi utilizzando un falsetto rinforzato, direi oggi trasfigurato fino a fargli assumere sonorità, flessibilità e ricchezza virtuosistica che rendono Cencic e Fagioli cantanti da considerare storici per aver agito, da un lato, a favore della rinascita della vocalità che fu dei castrati, dall'altro, a rivoluzionare la figura del controtenore, che da voce esangue si trasforma in un virtuoso a tutto tondo, creando non poco scompiglio in chi riteneva i falsetti lontani anni luce dal raggiungere traguardi belcantistici che qui si ammirano con rinnovato stupore. Il resto della compagnia non esalta. Il tenore Juan Sancho comincia subito nell'aria di sortita, "Con si bel nome in fronte", a mostrare una voce che pare avere, anche in disco, limitata risonanza, la cui agilità, per quanto fluide, mancano di spessore. La vocalizzazione è flebile e l'accento dimesso, così che nell'aria in stile agitato del secondo atto, "Dovea svenarti allora che apristi al di le ciglia", alla sua ira mancano autorità e gradazioni espressive. I due controtenori Valer Sabadus e Vince Yi, nelle rispettive vesti femminili di Marzia ed Emilia, sono corretti, ma non lasciano il segno dinanzi ad arie alle quali fanno mancare quella differenziazione espressiva senza cui si rischia di rendere l'ascolto monotono e assestato sulla monocromia di falsetti privi di reale personalità timbrica; quello di Vince Yi, in particolare, è sì singolarmente femminile, ma petulante e privo di colori. Martin Mitterutzner, nei panni del legato del senatore romano Fulvio, ha voce luminosa di schietto tenore e nell'aria "La fronda, che circonda a' vincitori il crine" si impone, se non per l'ampiezza sonora, per l'accento incisivo e baldanzamente giovanile del timbro. La registrazione è di qualità altissima, così come ricche di notazioni sull'opera sono le note stese da Kurt Markström per il prezioso cofanetto Decca, che ha anticipato le esecuzioni in forma scenica dell'opera su diversi palcoscenici europei, a partire da quello dell'Opéra Royal di Versailles, dove già trionfò l'allestimento di *Artaserse* di Vinci prodotto dalla Parnassus Arts Productions, che così prosegue il suo benemerito cammino esecutivo di rinascita del barocco italiano, ottenendo continue consacrazioni.



Leonardo Vinci's *Catone in Utica* – Il Pomo d'Oro/Riccardo Minasi with Juan Sancho, Franco Fagioli, Valer Sabadus, Max Emanuel Cencic, Vince Yi & Martin Mitterrutzner [Decca]

Reviewed by Tim Ashley



We owe the rediscovery of Leonardo Vinci primarily to the determination of countertenor Max Emanuel Cencic to revive his operas with forces that aim to approximate, as closely as possible, those for which they were written, which nowadays strike us as unusual, even bizarre, though the 18th century thought differently.

Regarded very much as an equal by Vivaldi and Handel, Vinci, who died in 1730, comparatively young and supposedly murdered by his mistress's jealous husband, trained in Naples, but wrote his major operas for Rome, where a papal proscription, in force since 1599, forbade women from appearing on the stage. Vinci consequently wrote for all-male casts, deploying castratos as his heroines as well as some of his heroes: the practice was not, in fact, uncommon in castrato-obsessed Italy at the time.

The Baroque revival has seen his work championed by, amongst others, Simone Kermes and Cecilia Bartoli, but a turning point was reached in 2012 when Cencic decided to perform and record Vinci's *Artaserse* with the castrato roles taken by virtuoso countertenors, a ground-breaking achievement that opened ears to a composer of remarkable psychological perception and depth, and revealed the startling potential of the countertenor voice itself. Now we have *Catone in Utica* cast along similar lines, and though it doesn't, perhaps inevitably, bring with it the element of surprise, even shock, that accompanied its predecessor, we are dealing, I think, with a greater work and arguably a finer recording.

The opera dramatises the final days of Marcus Cato, one of the last great libertarians of the Roman Republic. A fierce opponent of the military and imperial ambitions of Julius Caesar, he committed suicide at Utica in North Africa in 46 BC when defeat at the hands of Caesar's forces became inevitable. The subject was of immense importance in the early 18th century when republican and imperial ideologies vied for supremacy. There were two major literary treatments in English. Nicholas Rowe's hugely influential translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, of which Cato is the morally impeccable hero, was published in 1718. Even more important, however, was Joseph Addison's play *Cato*, first performed in 1713, the appearance of which was to have far-reaching consequences.



The play became a rallying cry for liberal supporters of the Protestant Hanoverian succession in the face of a potential return to Catholicism under the Jacobite branch of the Stuarts, who had the more legitimate claim to the British throne. Its success was even greater, however, in Britain's American colonies, where its libertarian ideology became integral to demands for independence: the revolutionary slogan "Give me liberty or give me death", derives from one of Cato's speeches, during the War of Independence. George Washington insisted the play be performed for his army at Valley Forge.

Translated into Italian in 1715, Addison's *Cato* was also the source for Metastasio's libretto, which Vinci was to be the first composer to set it in 1728. The great cry for liberty remains at its centre in one of the big confrontations between Cato and Cesare around which the work is structured. The overall tone, however, has changed. The hidden relationship between private agendas and political decisions has become Metastasio's principal theme, and the opera is essentially a tragedy in which both ideological loftiness and deceit are brought into sharp moral focus.

Cato is insistent that his daughter Marzia should marry Arbace, the Numidian prince who loves her and is her father's political ally. Both men are unaware, however, that Marzia, in less troubled times, was Cesare's mistress: the pair are still in love, though Cesare, unscrupulous throughout most of the opera's course, is persistently willing to sacrifice the relationship for his ambition. The situation is complicated by the presence in Utica of Emilia, the widow of Cesare's murdered enemy Pompey, an altogether more vindictive figure than her sorrowing counterpart, Cornelia, in Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. She, in her turn, is ostensibly being pursued by Fulvio, a senatorial legate, apparently of Cesare's party, though Metastasio tellingly leaves his loyalties unclear.

Metastasio was a greater, more subtle writer than many have assumed, and the opera's dramaturgy is dependent for its impact on constantly shifting perspectives that repeatedly cast doubt on its protagonists' motivations. Marzia strings Arbace along with promises of eventual marriage and urges her father to consider peace, all of which hides her determination to repeatedly manoeuvre herself into Cesare's presence. Cato's moral nobility masks a catastrophic inflexibility of will, and though his opposition to political tyranny is portrayed as wholly admirable, he proves to be a tyrant himself in private: when the truth eventually comes out about Marzia's feelings for Cesare, he disowns her, announcing he wishes he had killed her at birth. Metastasio deceives us himself in his depiction of the emotional hovering between Fulvio and Emilia, initially leading us to believe that Fulvio is lulling her into a false sense of security in order to be able to spy on Cato's camp: it gradually becomes apparent, however, that his feelings for her are sincere, and that it is she who is exploiting his sexual interest as part of her own plot to have Cesare assassinated.

Vinci's score probes the resulting ambiguities with great subtlety. Militarism and seduction frequently collide. Cesare, as one might expect, has the lion's share of the display pieces: the role was written for the castrato Carestini and his arias, with their ferocious *coloratura* covering a colossal range, are tracked by obligatos for trumpet or horns: the latter a constant reminder that he is essentially a hunter homing in on his prey. Cato is a tenor, as is Fulvio: Cato's noble vocal lines turn precariously angular and clipped under stress, while Fulvio's protestations of desire are lyrical and at times deeply erotic. His "Nacesti alle pene", dreamily addressed to Emilia is one of the opera's two great declarations of love: the other, "Quell amor che poco accende", exposes Cesare's only moment of weakness, when he thinks Marzia is moving away from him. Marzia's grand statements of passion and rage mark her out as being very much his companion, musically as well as emotionally – again the span of the vocal line is often immense – while Emilia's high-flying arias alternately wheedle and sputter with fury. Arbace, struggling to maintain both integrity and dignity in the chaos that surrounds him, has the most consistently beautiful and reflective music in the score.

Throughout we're aware of a great melodist at work – it's no wonder that Handel and Vivaldi regarded Vinci as a serious rival – and his dark-hued orchestration reveals remarkable surety. More pertinently, perhaps, he allows traditional structure to buckle as the dramatic tension mounts. Continuo gradually gives way to full orchestra in the recitatives, and when we reach the denouement, the pattern of recitative and aria collapses, first into ensemble writing, then into the extended passage of through-composed recitative that brings the opera to its disorientating close.

The ending was one aspect of the work that its first audiences found problematic. The premiere, at Rome's Teatro delle Dame, seemingly aroused mixed feelings. Metastasio offended contemporary sensibilities by locating Emilia's attempted assassination of Cesare in a disused underground aqueduct – by implication a sewer, and a potent symbol of the moral depths to which everyone has sunk, except Arbace, the only character absent from the scene. Doubts were also raised about the appropriateness of Cato's suicide – he bleeds to death on the stage, having stabbed himself off it – as a subject for performance in papal Rome where suicide was considered a mortal sin. When other composers, Handel and Vivaldi among them, took up the libretto, they tinkered with the final scenes. Vivaldi's *Catone* is forcibly prevented from killing himself, paving the way for eventual reconciliation with Cesare, which makes nonsense of much that has gone before. Handel's 1732 pasticcio – superbly revived at this year's London Handel festival – retains Cato's suicide, though Handel, unwilling to end the work with recitative, follows it with a scene in which Marzia becomes deranged: her closing aria, ironically, is the now-famous "Vo Solcando", which Handel imported from Vinci's own *Artaserse*.

Issued to coincide with a European tour of the work with the same forces, the recording, meanwhile, is a stunner. Cencic casts himself as Arbace, effectively leaving Franco Fagioli's Cesare and Juan Sancho's Cato centre stage. All three performances are finely judged: Cencic's dark, warm voice is extraordinarily beautiful, and the quiet intensity of his singing, all deep feeling and rapturously sustained lines, admirably suggests a man whose emotional sincerity is compounded with innate moral fibre. Fagioli's Cesare, in contrast, is all hauteur and reckless flamboyance. Not everyone will like his frequent plunges into chest voice, or his aspirated, Bartoli-ish way with the *coloratura*, though his accuracy and precision is a feat in itself that continually startles. Sancho, meanwhile, proves to be both an exceptional technician and a remarkable vocal actor: his loftiness and rage hit home with every phrase; his denunciation of Valer Sabadus's Marzia is genuinely terrifying, while his death scene, complete with its prophecy of Cesare's own assassination at the hands of Brutus, is immensely powerful in its naturalism.

Sabadus makes a sensuous, even voluptuous-sounding Marzia, all heightened emotions and stropky grandeur, in marked contrast to Vince Yi's jolly self-controlled Emilia. Sabadus's tone can sometimes lose warmth in his lower registers, for which he compensates for spectacular abilities elsewhere, including the kind of peprick high staccatos one associates primarily with the great divas of yesteryear. Just occasionally you also wish there was a bit more bite to Yi's explosions of anger, though he and Sabadus work wonderfully well together in the big confrontations between the two women.

No one is likely to have any qualms about Martin Mitterrutzner's Fulvio, though, sung with persuasive sensuality and an appealing gleam in the tone throughout. You can't fault Il Pomo d'Oro under its violinist-director Riccardo Minasi, either. The playing, all suave strings, fiery brass and rich woodwind, is tremendous in both finesse and enthusiasm, and throughout they generate that crackle of electricity familiar to anyone who has heard these musicians at London's Wigmore Hall, and you understand completely why they have become today's 'period' ensemble of choice for Italian Baroque. An outstanding recording of a remarkable work, with complete text and translations provided, and highly recommended.

Leonardo Vinci

CA 1696-1730

Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ Catone in Utica.

Juan Sancho (Catone), Franco Fagioli (Cesar), Valer Sabadus (Marzia), Max Emanuel Cencic (Arbace), Vince Yi (Emilia), Martin Mitterutzner (Fulvio), Il Pomo d'Oro, Riccardo Minasi. Decca (3 CD). © 2014. TT : 3 h 54'.

TECHNIQUE : 4,5/5



Conçu pour Rome dans l'esthétique napolitaine virtuose incarnée par Vinci, créé par des chanteurs

masculins comme l'exigeait la papauté, dédié aujourd'hui par la rumeur publique à la gloire des contre-ténors et du travestissement : *Catone in Utica* surfe sur le succès d'*Artaserse*, du même Vinci, gravé en 2011 par une équipe similaire (Virgin, cf. n° 607), puis à l'honneur d'un spectacle extravagant et subtil. Le défilé de contre-ténors est bien au rendez-vous, mais cette fois, l'un des deux héros est ténor – Catone prend la voix de Juan Sancho.

En janvier 1728 (deux ans avant *Artaserse*), Métastase et Vinci l'ont échappé belle : une contrariété du pape a entraîné l'annulation des festivités du carnaval... sauf *Catone in Utica* dédié à la grande-duchesse de Toscane, de passage. Teinté de diplomatie entre empire habsbourgeois, cités italiennes et papauté, le livret du grand Métastase narre la victoire de César, héros promis à la tyrannie, contre Catone, vertueux trop obstiné. C'est le triomphe de la Rome impériale contre la vieille République. Intrigues parallèles de rigueur : Marzia, fille de Catone, promise à Arbace le lieutenant fidèle, est amoureuse de l'ennemi César ; un agent double (mais pas tant que ça, Fulvio) et une veuve vengeresse (Emilia) pimentent le duel principal. Métastase se surpasse. Le personnage de Catone, vertu austère et intransigeance fatale, est admirable, on se régale à lire le grand dialogue Catone/César à l'acte II.

Métastase ménage des gradations dramatiques subtiles rythmées par l'opposition frontale des deux héros. Vinci y puise de quoi briser la rigidité des conventions : constructions harmoniques mouvantes, flamboyance lyrique. Par leur grande intensité dramatique, les récitatifs préfigurent ceux d'*Artaserse*. On retient également de beaux accompagnatos dans le troisième acte (« *Pur veggo affine un raggio* » de Marzia, mort de Catone), un quatuor vocal étincelant, des arias agitatees modèles du genre (« *Dovea svenarti* » de Catone, « *Confusa, smarrita* » de Marzia), des cantabiles généreux.

Comme on aurait aimé que l'enregistrement soit réalisé après l'expérience de la scène (une production tourne cet été), et non comme sa répétition générale ! La loi du marché le veut ainsi, et nous laisse – comme pour le disque d'*Artaserse* – partagé entre l'enthousiasme de la découverte, le niveau élevé de la réalisation d'une part, et des airs ou des scènes moins clairement construits chez certains solistes que chez d'autres.

On n'appréciera pas forcément le soprano Vince Yi, mais force est de constater que l'acrobate colle à merveille au personnage d'Emilia, comme le ténor mozartien Mitterutzner à Flavio. Si un magma imprécis tient lieu de texte à Fagioli, si son trille s'élargit dangereusement, comment ne pas fondre, en revanche, devant ce cantabile liquoreux (« *Quell'amor che poco accende* »), l'insolence des airs de bravoure, à l'unisson des cors ou trompettes d'un Pomo d'Oro rutilant (« *Soffire talor del vento* » ou « *Se in campo armato* ») ? Moins de narcissisme, plus d'intégrité, radieuse et nuancée, chez Valer Sabadus (« *In che t'offende* »). Toutefois, c'est à nouveau Cencic qui domine le plateau par son intelligence perfectionniste. L'engagement dramatique et vocal de Juan Sancho est servi par une tessiture princière et une intonation à l'avenant. Jusqu'alors voué aux rôles secondaires dans les productions baroques, il gagne ici ses galons de héros.

Sophie Roughol



Ein Schiff wird kommen! Der barfußige Statist, der es hereinträgt, ist namenlos. Einsteigen müssen Martin Mitterrutznr (Fulvio), Franco Fagioli (Cesare) und Vince Yi (Emilia).

Foto Martina Pipprich

Vier Kastraten und ein Selbstmord

Achtung, Verwechslungsgefahr! Wer sich für diese preiswürdige neue Barockoperproduktion interessiert, sollte zuvor zweierlei wissen. Erstens darf er Leonardo Vinci, als Komponist tätig in Neapel und Rom, auf keinen Fall verwechseln mit dem berühmten florentinischen Ingenieur, Architekten, Maler, Bildhauer und Thrillerhelden Leonardo da Vinci, der, als ein multipel begabtes Universalgenie, natürlich auch ein bisschen komponiert hatte, aber dies in einem anderen Zeitalter, mehr als zweihundert Jahre vor seinem heute immer noch eher unberühmten Beinahe-Namensvetter. Und die beiden sind auch keineswegs verwandt.

Zweitens: der junge, multipel begabte Countertenor Max Emanuel Cencic aus Wien, der die blitzgescheite Selbstverdingungsidee hatte, dass er, im digitalen Zeitalter, sich und seine Musik nicht mehr einem herkömmlichen Label anvertrauen könne, sondern selbst vertreiben müsse, und der inzwischen ein florierendes kleines Unternehmen für Verbreitung und Förderung des Countergesangs leitet, sollte auf keinen Fall verwechselt werden mit dem Gesangslehrer Nicola Porpora, der einst in Neapel ein florierendes Unternehmen für Verbreitung der Kastratenkunst unterhielt. Obgleich: eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit besteht.

Nicht im Äußerlichen. Nicht in den Lebensumständen. Keine Sorge. Kein hübscher Knabe mit schöner Stimme wird heutzutage noch zum Besten des Geschäfts (und der Kunst) entmannt, dies zu vermeiden, gibt es Gesetze. Aber wie es Porpora dereinst gelang, seine Kastraten-sänger grenzübergreifend in ganz Europa

Ein Sängerfest! Die Renaissance von Leonardo Vincis „Cato in Utica“ ist schon der zweite Volltreffer im Barockoperfach, der Countertenor Max Emanuel Cencic mit seiner Firma Parnassus glückt.

an den Höfen unterzubringen, so bringt auch Max Emanuel Cencic heute seine Countertenor-Events an Theatern in ganz Europa unter, mit wachsendem Erfolg.

Was auch wohl daran liegt, dass das Falsettgesingen sich in den letzten zehn Jahren zu einer virtuoseren Perfektion entwickelte, die mit den Anfängen der historischen Aufführungspraxis, als die männlichen Altus- und Sopransänger noch ohne Fokus und Stütze piepsten und krächzten, nichts mehr zu tun hat. Der Counter-Gesang ist heute den Kinderschuhern entwachsen. Es gibt etliche fantastische Sänger dieses Fachs, mit Volumen und Ambitus, Glanz und Charisma, und sie werden immer mehr.

Der erste große Coup von Cencics Firma Parnassus Arts Productions war die Wiederentdeckung der letzten großen Seria-Oper „Artaserse“ von Leonardo Vinci, die, zu besetzen mit nicht weniger als fünf Countertenoren, szenisch und musi-

kalisches vor drei Jahren Furore machte (siehe F.A.Z. vom 10. Dezember 2012). Jetzt legte Parnassus nach mit Vincis Oper „Cato in Utica“, komponiert 1728 ebenfalls für das römische Teatro delle Dame, nach einem Textbuch von Pietro Metastasio. Da weibliche Sängerinnen seinerzeit in Rom nicht zugelassen waren, ist auch diese Studioaufnahme rein männlich besetzt, und zwar glänzend: mit vier Countertenoren sowie zwei Tenören. Idiomatic solid, zügig in den Tempi, rhythmisch scharf akzentuiert, etwas ruppig im Klangbild und mit dramatischem Aplomb musiziert das Ensemble Il Pomo d'Oro unter Leitung von Riccardo Minasi. Mit dem Label Decca wurde ein weltweit agierender Vertriebspartner gefunden. Und flankierend zu dieser CD-Veröffentlichung gab und gibt es eine Handvoll szenischer Aufführungen, vielleicht, hoffentlich, wird am Ende eine DVD folgen.

„Cato in Utica“ fällt insofern aus dem Barockoperrahmen, als das Stück kein *lieto fine* hat. Und darum geht's: Cato der Jüngere stemmte sich gegen den Lauf der Zeit. Er hatte die römische Republik 46 vor Christus verteidigen wollen gegen die Alleinherrschaftsansprüche des Julius Cäsar, verlor die Schlacht, floh nach Afrika. Und hier, vor der Stadt Utica, wird er jetzt von Cäsars Truppen eingeholt und belagert.

Catos Tochter Marzia, die heimlich in Cäsar verliebt ist (in wen sonst? Er hat ja auch die Glanzrolle, bei der Uraufführung gesungen von Kastratenstar Carestini), sowie Catos Freund Arbace, den sie eigentlich heiraten soll, außerdem die Witwe des von Cäsar ermordeten Feldherrn Pompejus und deren Lover sorgen nun vier Opernstunden lang für koloraturen-

reiches Hin und Her und allerhand Machtkämpfe, bis schließlich Cäsar siegt und Cato Selbstmord begeht. Er stirbt auf offener Bühne. Für Roms Publikum war das ein echter Schock. Fünf Kastraten (auch Fulvio war so besetzt) und ein Selbstmord. Das musste man unbedingt gesehen haben! Vinci, der den Erfolg einfuhr, war freilich nur der Erste, der dieses vielverkomponierte Libretto realisiert hat. Später, als andere es ihm nachtaten, hatte Metastasio den Schluss dann verändert.

Es gibt nur ein einziges furioses Ensemble in „Cato in Utica“, ein auch harmonisch höchst erregtes Quartett, kurz vor Schluss: Da geben sich die beiden „Mädchen“ sowie Hahn im Korb Cäsar jede erdenkliche Mühe, Cato davon abzuhalten, den Heldentod zu sterben. Es gibt auch keinen Chor, der ihn anschließend beklagen könnte. Alles in diesem römischen Operntypus ist nur ausgerichtet auf das Ausstellen der kostbaren, funkelnden Kleinode der Kastratenstimmen. Weshalb auch die Arien Vincis formal idealtypisch konstruiert sind: mit einem flächigen, streicherstarken Orchesterpettich, von dem sich das artistische Feuerwerk der nicht enden wollenden Läufe, Triller, Rouladen und die scheinbar leicht erreichten Spitzentöne vorteilhaft abhebt.

Allenfalls das Palaver der einformigen Rezitative wirkt zuweilen etwas endlos, zumal, wenn die Artikulation (wie bei Juan Sancho, als Cato) nicht präzise genug ist, so dass man nicht versteht, was da gerade verhandelt wird. Doch ist die Affektlage der Arien unterschiedlich genug, und die Stimmfarben der vier Countertenöre sind so charakteristisch, dass dieses Spezialisten-sängerfest nicht nur für Freunde der Travestie zu einem reinen, unge-

trübten Hörvergnügen wird. Franco Fagioli, der die Paradepartie des Cäsar singt, be-tört mit seinem leuchtenden Ton, der Intensität des Ausdrucks und einem Ambitus, der auch ohne Bruststimme eine erstaunliche Tiefe erreicht. Valer Sabadus, in der Rolle des Töchterchens Marzia, ist von allen Counters mit Abstand der Beweglichste, geschmeidig, süß, süffig und elegant. Max Emanuel Cencic dagegen, als Altus in der Rolle des Arsace zu erleben, pflegt einen Ton der Empfindsamkeit und Innigkeit, während Vince Yi in der Rolle der Pompejus-Witwe Emilia eine wasserklar fließende Leichtigkeit und einen wahrhaft mädchenhaften Ton an den Tag legt.

Bei den beiden Tenören, Martin Mitterrutznr (sehnh-kehlig und machtvoll als Fulvio) und Juan Sancho (sonor glänzend als Cato), fehlt in den bravourös absolvierten Koloraturen manchmal doch das letzte Quentchen beseligender Biagsamkeit. Aber das sind nur Nuancen, das ist wahrlich Kritik auf höchstem Niveau. Nach Aufführungen in Wiesbaden, Versailles und Bergen wird die Bühnenproduktion von „Cato in Utica“, inszeniert von Jakob Peters-Messer, demnächst, am 6. September, beim Enescu-Festival in Bukarest sowie, in einer Aufführung am 24. September, am Theater an der Wien zu erleben sein.

ELEONORE BUNING

Leonardo Vinci: „Cato in Utica“, Franco Fagioli, Juan Sancho, Valer Sabadus, Max Emanuel Cencic, Vince Yi und Martin Mitterrutznr, Il Pomo d'Oro, Riccardo Minasi.



3 CDs Decca 4788194 (Universal)

Das Counter-Kartell

Leonardo Vincis „Catone in Utica“, auf grandiose Weise wiederentdeckt für eine Platten-Produktion mit angeschlossener Inszenierung

VON MARKUS THIEL

Nach dreidreiviertel Stunden fällt die Musik einfach in sich zusammen. Kein jubelnder Schlusschor, keine Moral von der Geschichte: Catone verrückt unter stockendem Gesang, die letzten Worte gebühren Widersacher Cäsar, der wütend seinen Lorbeerkranz zu Boden wirft. Was für ein unerhörter Schluss, was für eine Irritation fürs Publikum, das doch eigentlich zur klingenden Sahnnetortenschlacht in den Logen Platz genommen hatte. Unerhört auch für uns heute: „Catone in Utica“ von Leonardo Vinci (nicht verwandt mit dem Mona-Lisa-Papa) würde kein Mensch mehr kennen – wenn da nicht dieser Countertenor wäre.

Schon einmal hat Max Emanuel Cencic die Barockplattenszene aufgemischt, ebenfalls mit einer Oper Vincis, mit dem „Artaserse“. Der ehemalige Wiener Sängerkna-

be gibt sich längst nicht mehr mit virtuosen Auftritten zufrieden. Cencic ist als Produzent, Musikermöglicher und Firmeninhaber zu einer imponierenden Größe auf einem Markt geworden, der zwecks Kassenklingeln das immer Gleiche mit Stars oder schnell hochgeschossenen Sternchen wiederkaut. Auch andere haben sich ja von den etablierten Unternehmen abgewandt, die Dirigenten John Eliot Gardiner und Jordi Savall etwa, doch Cencic dreht den Spieß um, er macht mit den CD-Supertankern einfach gemeinsame Sache: Die Projekte seiner Firma Parnassus werden – wie jetzt wieder „Catone in Utica“ – einfach koproduziert.

Diven- und Zickenkrieg ist dabei unangebracht. Für den Catone sind – in Rom Anno 1728 waren Frauen auf der Opernbühne verboten – vier Countertenöre erforderlich, die auch die Damenrollen übernehmen. Mit Franco Fa-



Seine Counter-Spitzenstellung untermauert Franco Fagioli in der Rolle des Cäsar. FOTO: MARTINA PIPPRICH

gioli als Cesare, Valer Sabadus als Marzia (Catones Tochter und heimliche Geliebte Cäsars), Vince Yi als Pompeo-Witwe Emilia und Cencic als Arbace (Prinz Numidiens, Catones Freund und ebenfalls in Marzia verknallt) ist das Who's Who der späten Kastraten-Nachfolger versammelt – was für ein aufreizendes Counter-Kartell. Am grandiossten schneidet Franco Fagioli ab: die bruchlos über einen extrem weiten Ambitus geführte Stimme, der Zierrat, der ihm aus der Kehle kullert, als sei's das Leichteste der

Welt, dazu das gedeckte, bestechend schöne Timbre – mit dieser CD untermauert Fagioli seine derzeitige Counter-Spitzenstellung.

Besonders reizvoll, wie sich Valer Sabadus mit seiner orpheisch schlank geführten Stimme, Cencic mit hochintelligenter Charakterkunst und Vince Yi mit knabenhaft heller Tongebung voneinander absetzen. Die beiden Tenöre machen ihre Sache ebenfalls außerordentlich gut: Juan Sancho singt einen formatfüllenden, kernigen Titelhelden, Martin Mittertutzner als Cesare-Freund Fulvio empfiehlt sich mit leichtgängiger Gestaltung dringend für weitere Barock-Einsätze. Dirigent Riccardo Minasi und das Orchester Il Pomo D'Oro finden vier Gefallen an dramatischer Attacke, bleiben aber stets sängerdienlich.

Im Vergleich zu Vincis „Artaserse“, der als Schlagerparade überrumpelt, ist die Musik

zu „Catone in Utica“ differenzierter, lyrischer, nicht durchwegs auf Attacke angelegt. Viel hat das zu tun mit der fast tiefenpsychologisch aufgeblättern Konfrontation zwischen Cesare und Catone, die in den Suizid des Letzteren mündet. Dennoch sind die meisten Nummern klingende Colliers für die Stars.

Beim bloßen Klingeln, auch das ist eine Spezialität von Cencic, bleibt es allerdings nicht: Seit einiger Zeit tourt man mit einer Inszenierung durch passend kleine und mittlere Häuser, die nächsten Stationen sind Bukarest und das Theater an der Wien. Dass es (trotz dementsprechender Vorsätze) nie zu einem Halt in München kam, spricht Bände – und eigentlich gegen diese Barockmusikstadt.

Leonardo Vinci:
„Catone in Utica“.
Il Pomo D'Oro,
Riccardo Minasi (Decca).

VINCI - CATONE IN UTICA DECCA CD 4788194



Leonardo Vinci - not to be confused with his more famous countryman Leonardo da Vinci - was a prolific Italian opera composer born in 1690. Active in the city of Naples, he became an overnight success aged 29 with his comic opera in the Neapolitan dialect *Lo cecato fauzo* (The False Blind Man). Further successful comic operas followed before Vinci turned his attention from 'opere buffe' to 'opere serie', a style in which he was a pioneer, influencing later composers such as Pergolesi, Johann Hasse, Vivaldi and Handel. *Catone in Utica*, which premiered in Rome at the Teatro delle Dame in 1728, explores the eternal themes of love, duty and honour in 46BC. Pietro Metastasio wrote the text, and chose the subject specifically to please the Roman audiences - Marcus Porcius Cato being a hero of classical history and the last upholder of the values of the old Republic against encroaching imperialism. His story is based on an episode taken from the civil wars between Julius Caesar and Pompey, after Pompey's murder and the final defeat of Cato's army. Catone dominates the opera, both musically and dramatically, with Caesar receding quickly into the background. Strong-willed Marzia, Cato's daughter, tries to reconcile the two generals. The music is heroic and vigorous, often containing energetic coloratura and daring approaches to composition. This splendid three-CD box set features outstanding Croatian-born countertenor Max Emanuel Cenčić in a world premiere recording of the powerful and innovative *Catone in Utica*. The remarkable cast also includes countertenors Franco Fagioli, Valer Sabadus, Vince Yi and Martin Mitterutzner, with tenors Juan Sancho and Martin Mitterutzner. The orchestra is excitingly directed by the acclaimed Baroque music specialist Riccardo Minasi. Leonardo Vinci died in 1730, rumoured to have been poisoned by a jealous husband in the wake of an ill-advised affair, and became a largely forgotten genius of Italian opera. 'Vinci is the Lully of Italy: true, simple, natural, expressive.'



Vinci-Entdeckung

Diese Ersteinspielung von Leonardo da Vincis Oper „Catone in Utica“ macht Lust auf die kommenden Händel-Festspiele des Badischen Staatstheaters, sind doch die Countertenöre Max Emanuel Cencic, Franco Fagioli und Valer Sabadu, die dann alle in der Fächerstadt zu erleben sein werden, auf diesen Silberscheiben vereint.

1728 wurde die Oper auf ein Libretto von Pietro Metastasio (dessen Texte auch Komponisten wie Mozart, Beethoven oder Schubert inspirierten) in Rom uraufgeführt; da Frauen auf der Bühne dort noch verboten waren, war sie nur mit Männern besetzt. So finden sich in der von Riccardo Minasi und seinem „Il Pomo D'Oro“ orchestral mit viel Furore und Klangfarbendifferenzierung geleiteten Aufnahme neben den drei berühmten Countertenören noch ein vierter (Vince Yi) sowie der sehr achtbare Tenor Juan Sancho in der Titelpartie. Franco Fagioli überwältigt als Cäsar mit seiner Koloraturflut wie in der Arie „Se in campo armato“. Als vielbegehrte Tochter Catones Marzia kann Valer Sabadus voller Eleganz, aber auch ansprechender Leidenschaft die Figur gestalten. Arbace profitiert von der Mezzoüppigkeit des Kluges des Countertenors Max Emanuel Cencic.

Da nicht nur die Gesangsleistungen bestrickend sind, sondern der Dirigent und sein Originalklangensemble ebenso rhythmisch mitreißend wie dramatisch zupackend musizieren, ist diese auch aufnahmetechnisch gelungene Ersteinspielung eine wichtige Ergänzung des barocken Repertoires. sws

Leonardo Vinci, Catone in Utica, Minasi, Il Pomo D'Oro, Cencic, Fagioli, Sabadus, Decca 3 CDs 4788194, 46,99 Euro.