

Marcus Bosch
Capella Aquileia
Giuseppe Verdi: *Oberto*
Coviello Classics // VÖ: 18. Februar 2017

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The vividness & vibrancy of having been performed on stage: Verdi's *Oberto* from Heidenheim

Labels: [cd review](#)



Verdi *Oberto*; Choi, Princeva, Hebelkova, Dumitru, Banasova,
cond: Marcus Bosch; Coviello Classics
Reviewed by Robert Hugill on May 15 2017
Star rating: 3.5

Based on performances at the Heidenheim Opera Festival, this recording bring tremendous verve and energy to Verdi's first opera

This disc is the first fruits from the Heidenheim Opera Festival, though the CD booklet does not make that particularly obvious. Verdi's *Oberto* was staged at the 2016 festival (based in Heidenheim an der Brenz in Baden-Württemberg in Southern German) and this recording was made in Heidenheim shortly afterwards. Released on the Coviello Classics label it features Marcus Bosch conducting the Cappella Aquileia and Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno. Bosch is the artistic director of the Heidenheim Opera Festival and Cappella Aquileia is the resident orchestra. The cast features the Korean bass Woong-Jo

Choi as Oberto, the Russian soprano Anna Princeva as Leonora, Czech mezzo-soprano Katerina Hebelkova as Cuniza, Romanian tenor Adrian Dumitru as Riccardo and the Slovak mezzo-soprano Daniela Banasova as Imelda.

Oberto was Verdi's first opera. It was sufficient a success when first produced at La Scala Milan in 1839 for the impresario to commission two further operas from Verdi. It went on to have further performances in Italy in the early 1840s but it has been overshadowed by Verdi's subsequent operas (by 1844 he had produced, *Un giorno di regno*, *I Lombardi*, *Nabucco* and *Emani*). The highly abbreviated libretto provides Verdi with some strong scenes yet is not high on logic. When I saw it performed by Opera North in the 1994/95 season the director (John Tomlinson) commented that it made most sense if you thought of it as the second two acts of a three act opera.

The plot involves a background of warring politics (insufficiently sketched in), and a tenor hero Riccardo (Adrian Dimitru) who is about to marry one woman, Cuniza (Katerina Hebelkova) whilst having been betrothed to another, Leonora (Anna Princeva) whose father Oberto (Woong-Jo Choi) is passionate in his support of his daughter's rights.



Verdi: *Oberto* - Heidenheim Opera Festival 2016
Woong-Jo Choi & Anna Princeva

Perhaps the work's strongest scene is the wonderful duet for father and daughter, Oberto and Leonora, finding each other again after a long absence.

Woong-Jo Choi and Anna Princeva manage to cook up a real emotional charge here, and whilst neither has quite the ideal sense of line the energy and commitment of their performance really carries things. Princeva impresses in her opening cavatina, with an appealing edge to her voice and a nice delicacy in the ornamentation, but though she participates in the Act One finale, we have to wait for the rondo finale to the opera to hear her again properly, and here she rises to the occasion with a performance which, not always subtle, is high on vibrancy.



Verdi: Oberto - Heidenheim Opera Festival 2016 - Adrian Dimitru

Tenor Adrian Dimitru, as the rather unsympathetic hero Riccardo, gets off to a slow start as his opening aria sees Dimitru sounding a bit pushed by the tessitura, which brings a few pitch problems and you long to tell him to relax. But his final Romanza is impassioned and intense, though still with a little tightness at the top.

Katerina Hebelkova as Cuniza is a real second heroine rather than the rather mumsy mezzo-soprano figure you can sometimes get. Her voice has an attractively resinous quality which brings great character to the role and she brings a believable brilliance and vibrancy in her performance of Cuniza's music, so that though there is the odd smudge in the faster passagework we appreciate the verve of her performance, and she is rather stylish too.

In the title role Woong-Jo Choi is creditable, and in the various ensembles he clearly develops a passionate

intensity so that the ensembles fairly crackle, but I found his voice sometimes lacked focus and he has a tendency to mistake bluster for drama.

It is in the ensembles that the performance really comes alive. There is a terrific Donizettian duet for Riccardo and Cuniza in Act One, where the two give the music a real emotional charge and this is followed by a trio for Cuniza, Leonora and Oberto which leads into the Act One finale, a superb dramatic sequence which rather reminds you of some of Rossini's large scale ensemble scenes. Bosch brings a terrific sense of impetus to the drama. The quartet in the middle of Act Two is equally impressive, as a duel for Oberto and Riccardo is interrupted by Cuniza and develops into a vivid quartet.

The chorus get a number of opportunities and are in fine voice. The orchestra gives a lively account of the opening Sinfonia, and provide strong support. This isn't a period style performance and they provide strong weight and impetus in the music.

The CD booklet provides copious pictures of the Heidenheim production along with full text and translations.

Verdi's first opera has done well on disc, and if you don't possess a copy then you might think about exploring Samuel Ramey, Maria Guleghina, Stuart Neill & Violeta Urmana on Decca, conducted by Neville Marriner or Rolando Panerai, Ghena Dimitrova, Carlo Bergonzi & Ruza Baldani on Orfeo conducted by Lamberto Gardelli. But Marcus Bosch draws tremendous verve and commitment from his performers, creating an account of *Oberto* which, for all the occasional complaint, really punches above its weight.

Bosch and his cast bring all the vividness and vibrancy of having performed the work on stage. This year, Heidenheim continues its early Verdi explorations with another rarity, *Un giorno di regno*.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) - *Oberto* (1839) [1:45:19]

Oberto - Woong-Jo Choi (bass)

Leonora - Anna Princeva (soprano)

Cuniza - Katerina Hebelkova (mezzo-soprano)

Riccardo - Adrian Dumitru (tenor)

Imelda - Daniela Banasova (mezzo-soprano)

Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno

Cappella Aquileia

Marcus Bosch (conductor)

Recorded 31 July-5 August 2016, Festspielhaus Congress Centrum, Heidenheim, German

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