



Star soprano Sonya Yoncheva records Verdi arias
Bulgarian singer has conquered London, Paris, New York with passionate artistry and
powerful voice
'Opulent, voluptuous, glorious singing' *Le Figaro*

When Bulgarian soprano Sonya Yoncheva starred opposite Jonas Kaufmann in an eagerly awaited new production of Verdi's *Don Carlos* in the opening of the Paris National Opera season, critics went into raptures. 'Conveys the fragility and strength of Elisabeth, with a sound that is open, warm and generous,' said *The Financial Times*. 'Intelligent, reserved and wounded in her great final outpouring,' raved *The New York Times*.

Sonya Yoncheva has established herself as a much sought-after and celebrated soprano with engagements at the foremost opera houses. This season Sonya Yoncheva will be again one of the big stars at the Metropolitan Opera. She will make her debut in the title role of Verdi's "Luisa Miller" and Puccini's "Tosca" and will also take on the title role of "La Bohème". Her performances will be broadcast in cinemas worldwide.

For her third album for Sony Classical, the Operalia-winning soprano, Yoncheva turns her attention to the work of a composer for whom many feel she has always had a special affinity: Giuseppe Verdi. Yoncheva began her career in the world of baroque music, closely supported and encouraged by the early-music conductor William Christie (This bore fruit in her second Sony release, a successful album of arias by Handel). But it was always clear that the remarkable sound of the young artist also included within it the potential of a big, luscious, powerful voice ideal for Verdi's most demanding roles – a rare voice type known as a 'dramatic lyric' soprano. This voice requires an extraordinary combination of talents: a superb control of breathing, an ease of tone over a large range, enormous reserves of power, a variety of vocal colours, and – most elusive of all – an instinct for Italian musical phrasing. As audiences and critics have discovered in her performances of *Rigoletto* and *Don Carlos* Sonya Yoncheva is one such soprano. After her triumph in *La traviata*, the newspaper *Die Welt* even declared that 'she is the finest Violetta since Maria Callas'.

The music of Verdi forms the lodestone of most dramatic-lyric sopranos, and Yoncheva includes arias from some of the composer's rarely-performed operas in addition to some of the most beloved ones. From the early operas, she sings arias from *Nabucco* (1842), *Attila* (1846), *Luisa Miller* (1849) and *Stiffelio* (1850). The latter aria is a prayer of forgiveness from a woman, the wife of a pastor, who has been unfaithful. 'The emotional range of this aria is amazing, and musically it uses the whole voice from high to low- but amazingly it all happens in about two minutes.' Yoncheva will soon be singing the title role of *Luisa Miller* at the Met, and thus felt it was obligatory to include one of the arias here. 'It's so dramatic, so full of urgency: Luisa is forced to betray the man she loves. I really got a little taste of what it will be like for me to sing it on stage.' In *Attila*, the heroine mourns the death of both her father and her beloved. 'This was my favourite aria on the whole record. It's extremely melodic, and at the same time demands a full, rich lyric sound. It's my dream to persuade someone to stage the whole opera one day.'

The role of Abigaille from *Nabucco* has sometimes been called a 'voice-wrecker' for its superhuman demands: but this did not faze Yoncheva. 'I never obey the rules. People tell me I should sing this, or not sing that, but I believe you have to listen to your voice. And I wanted to challenge myself. I wanted to go into this dark and dramatic world, and see what came out!'

Of Verdi's more frequently performed operas, Yoncheva includes the celebrated aria 'Tacea la notte' from the opera *Il trovatore*. From *Simon Boccanegra* (1857/1881) she sings 'Come in quest'ora bruna': 'This is one of the lighter pieces on the album: I love this aria. It's such a beautiful piece, and so good



for the voice.' She admits to having 'a fetish' for the haunting aria 'Pace, pace' from *La forza del destino* (1862) because of its power and intensity, and is looking forward to singing the role of Leonora soon. She also sings the great 'Ave Maria' prayer from *Otello* (1887), and after her spectacular triumph in *Don Carlos* in Paris, she also adds Elisabetta's epic aria 'Tu che le vanità'. 'I lived this role so intensely that I feel I'm completely *in* Elisabetta now, even though I sang the role in French in Paris, but in Italian for the album,' says Yoncheva.

What has she gained from her immersion in the works of Verdi? 'Even deeper respect for him. He's an absolute master of the theatre, of drama, of musical construction. And it was my aim to express my admiration from the very bottom of my soul.'

Sonya Yoncheva recorded her new album with Verdi specialist Massimo Zanetti and the Munich Radio Symphony Orchestra.