



Maria Callas

Copenhagen Concert

Georges Prêtre, Conductor
June 9, 1963



MARIA CALLAS LIVE IN COPENHAGEN, JUNE 9, 1963

Maria Callas (1923-1977) remains an indelible icon in the world of opera today. Despite passing away 45 years ago at the age of only 53, interest remains strong in her recordings, and even today we may find discoveries of unreleased live recordings. The present release of a live 1963 concert with orchestra in Copenhagen is not entirely new—portions of it were released on CD in 1998 on a small label, in poor sound, pitched quite sharp. But the present high resolution release, based on the original tape of the concert, recorded by the Danish concert hall in which the concert occurred, is the first high quality release of this concert, which has been transferred and restored in a high resolution format (PCM 352.8 kHz). The tape of the concert is *almost* complete, and it includes previously unreleased vocal portions, plus the well-played unreleased orchestral pieces, allowing HDTT to provide the listener with a better sense of “being there” at a Maria Callas concert in 1963. It is fortuitous that this good sounding live tape features a fine orchestra, the Danish Radio Symphony, plus the fact that the concert was taped in a concert hall with excellent acoustics, Falkoner Centret. An advantage of the live recording made in a hall is that we can get a better sense of just how generous in tone Callas’ voice could be, and how wide her dynamic palette, things we do not hear accurately in many of her commercial recordings.

The one aria sung by Callas at the Copenhagen concert that is not on the tape is Rossini’s “Bel raggio lusinghier” from *Semiramide*. Nor do we have the overture from that opera that followed the aria on the program, as for an unknown reason the tape appears to have been paused before the aria began and restarted later, after the Overture had finished. These two omitted pieces occurred right after the initial number, the William Tell Overture, suggesting that the omission was inadvertent. The printed concert program, confirmed by contemporaneous Danish newspaper accounts, demonstrates that these missing pieces were in fact included on the program. For the present release, the missing aria is supplied as a bonus track from another concert four days earlier (see below), but another performance of the *Semiramide* Overture has not been included.

As heard in this release, Callas’ voice remained quite functional in 1963, with a great deal of its special quality intact, and it was still very much at the service of Callas the incomparable artist—she had reportedly worked diligently on her voice in this period, with obvious positive results, although steadiness on the highest notes could still be an issue. For example, the positive results show in her dreamy “Casta diva,” which in this Copenhagen concert is steadier and sung with greater ease than in her complete stereo *Norma* recording made in 1960, where this challenging *bel canto* aria is successfully managed but not without a sense of vocal struggle. In Copenhagen the *Nabucco* dramatic recitative is full of exciting dramatic fire, followed by a fine sense of legato repose in the cavatina (the cabaletta was omitted on all of the tour concerts). And the three Puccini arias that close the program show Callas in full command. Not every note is perfection, but there are none that could be said to go awry. She wisely opted to finish the *Norma* cabaletta with a high B-Flat in place of the usual high C, and she appears to have made this same option throughout the tour.

The six 1963 European tour concerts, of which this Copenhagen concert was the last (and apparently her only appearance ever in Denmark), consisted of Berlin (May 17), Düsseldorf

(May 20), Stuttgart (May 23), London (May 31), Paris (June 5) and Copenhagen (June 9), with ample rest time between concert dates. All were conducted by French conductor Georges Prêtre. Recordings exist from all but apparently Düsseldorf, but the sound quality for all the recordings that exist is variable, with the present Copenhagen recording being by far the best sounding. It is a mystery why EMI did not record all of these concerts, but no evidence has emerged that such occurred. So the rare Copenhagen tape heard in this release, made by Falkoner Centret on very good recording equipment, is in fact a treasure, at last letting us hear a typical concert from this 1963 tour in fine sound. It goes without saying that Callas herself makes a far stronger impression when we can hear what she actually sounded like.

After an intensely busy operatic career starting when she was still in her teens, Callas stepped away from staged opera performances in 1962, following her last two performances at La Scala in Cherubini's *Medea* in May and June of that year. Prior thereto, in February and March, she carried out a European tour of concerts with local orchestras, all conducted by Prêtre, which took her to London (where she appeared in concert again, with others, later that year), Munich, Hamburg, Essen and Bonn. Audio and/or video recordings have been released from Hamburg and both London appearances, and it is unknown if any recordings exist of the rest.*

In 1963 Callas did not appear on any opera stage, instead focusing on (1) recording sessions in early May (all French pieces) and throughout the month of December, and (2) another European concert tour in late May through early June, described above. The rest of this year consisted of substantial "time off" away from her career, including spending time with Aristotle Onassis, in what was apparently a good period in their complicated relationship. Callas turned 40 on December 2.

Whatever her intentions, Callas' brilliant career was starting to wind down. She would appear back on stage in 1964, in *Tosca* and *Norma* in London and Paris, and would record *Tosca* and *Carmen* for EMI, plus continue with quite a few more recording sessions, many of which did not result in released recordings. After some more appearances in *Tosca* (New York and London) and *Norma* (Paris) in 1965, her career on the opera stage would be over, with her voice thereafter becoming sadly diminished. Further singing activity was sporadic and rarely an unqualified success.

The Copenhagen tape captured what was occurring on the stage with admirable clarity but at the same time captured plenty of HVAC and audience noise along with the music, likewise with clarity, including a plethora of small audience noises that are normally not captured by a recording microphone located in a hall. And the tape itself has more inherent noise than we would like. Much of the restoration effort has been directed at removing or minimizing such noise, without damaging the quality of the recording of the music. As noted, the wide dynamic range of the recorded music has not been compressed, but a large amount of vigorous applause has been curtailed for this release.

Bonus material

The best source for the missing "Bel raggio" was the Paris concert that occurred on June 5, four days before the Copenhagen concert. All of the 1963 concert dates, except Paris, consisted of the

same program, although it is not clear that the one encore, “O mio babbino caro,” was performed at all concerts. For Paris, Callas and Prêtre changed the standard program to include three vocal pieces that were not on the other 1963 concerts, being the showy final scena from Rossini’s *La cenerentola*, “Nacqui all’affanno ... Non, più mesta,” which they would record for EMI at the December, 1963 sessions, and two French arias that they had just recorded at the pre-tour EMI sessions of May, 1963, both being rueful arias by Massenet, “Adieu, notre petite table” from *Manon* and Charlotte’s Letter Scene from *Werther*. The *Cenerentola* scena had appeared on all five of the 1962 tour concerts, and here, after a lot of extremely brilliant and characterful singing it concludes with a bravely attacked but wayward climactic high B-natural. The two extremely well performed Massenet arias show us Callas as the outstanding tragedienne, being all the more poignant for the sense of restraint, subtlety and vulnerability that she brings to these expressive pieces. One commentator has expressed the view that these live Paris versions of the Massenet arias outshine their contemporaneous EMI commercial recordings of the month before, and so they do.

Callas’ Paris performances of these three added pieces are so stunning and so affecting that it seemed a shame not to include them here as additional bonus material, along with “Bel raggio.” The four bonus pieces constituted the first four numbers on the Paris concert, in the same order presented here, and the remainder of the vocal pieces on the Paris concert duplicated arias heard in the Copenhagen concert, minus the *Norma* selections.

The Paris source does not have the same sound quality as the Copenhagen tape, and unfortunately it was noisier. Despite an extensive restoration effort, some of that noise must remain, with our apologies. As with the Copenhagen concert, these Paris selections were carefully pitched. The bonus tracks have been upsampled. A source exists for this Paris concert that seems to be stereo, but it was rejected as it is exceptionally noisy and provides a less flattering presentation of Callas’ voice.

By John H. Haley
Harmony Restorations, LLC

* [Gratuitous non-musical footnote] For those to whom such things matter, on May 19, 1962 Callas participated in a birthday fundraiser for then-President John F. Kennedy at Madison Square Garden in New York, singing two *Carmen* arias (preserved on video), on a program that included Jack Benny (host), Harry Belafonte, Bobby Darin, Jimmy Durante, Ella Fitzgerald, Henry Fonda, Eddie Jackson, the Jerome Robbins Ballet, Peter Lawford, Peggy Lee, Shirley MacLaine, Elaine May, Mike Nichols, Elliott Reid and Marilyn Monroe, who famously sang “Happy Birthday, Mr. President” unaccompanied. Jacqueline Kennedy opted not to attend, instead attending a horse show in Virginia, given the rather poorly kept secret of her husband’s affair with Marilyn Monroe. (In October, 1963, Callas also turned down an invitation from Jackie Kennedy to perform at the White House for the visiting Emperor of Ethiopia.) As these things go, unknown to Callas at the time, Jackie’s absence at the JFK birthday bash was also

pertinent to Callas, as Callas' then love interest, Aristotle Onassis, would jilt Callas and disastrously (for him) marry Jackie Kennedy in 1968. Callas' relationship with Onassis reportedly resumed on some level after his marriage to Jackie turned sour. Callas did not lead an easy life.

MARIA CALLAS LIVE IN COPENHAGEN, JUNE 9, 1963

Live concert at Falkoner Centret concert hall, with the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Georges Prêtre.

01. Rossini: *Guglielmo Tell*: Overture (10:58)
[Rossini: *Semiramide*: “Bel raggio lusinghier” and Overture occurred here—see notes.]
02. Bellini: *Norma*: “Casta diva” (7:17)
03. Bellini: *Norma*: “Ah! bello a me ritorna” (2:06)
04. Verdi: *I vespri siciliani*: Overture (9:26)
05. Verdi: *Nabucco*: “Ben io t’invenni ... Anch’io dischiuso un giorno” (7:38)
06. Mascagni: *Cavalleria rusticana*: Intermezzo (3:45)
07. Leoncavallo: *Pagliacci*: Intermezzo (3:16)
08. Puccini: *Manon Lescaut*: Intermezzo (5:07)
09. Puccini: *La bohème*: “Quando m’en vo” (2:31)
10. Puccini: *Madama Butterfly*: “Tu? tu? Piccolo iddio” (2:50)
11. Puccini: *Gianni Schicchi*: “O mio babbino caro” (encore) (2:28)

Bonus tracks:

Live concert of June 5, 1963 at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, with the Orchestre Philharmonique de la Radio-Télévision Française conducted by Georges Prêtre.

12. Rossini: *Semiramide*: “Bel raggio lusinghier ... Dolce pensiero” (5:43)
13. Rossini: *La cenerentola*: “Nacqui all’affanno ... Non più mesta” (6:11)
14. Massenet: *Manon*: “Je ne suis que faiblesse ... Adieu, notre petite table” (3:18)
15. Massenet: *Werther*: “Werther! Qui m’aurait dit ... Des cris joyeux” (Air de lettres) (7:12)

Total time: 79:46

These recordings are monophonic. For the Copenhagen tape, transfer of original tape at 352.8 kHz, 24 bits by Robert Witrak, HDTT (2022). Restoration and mastering of all tracks by John H. Haley, Harmony Restorations, LLC (2022). Grateful thanks to Richard Copeman, Karl van Zoggel and The Maria Callas International Club (<http://www.callasintclub.com>) for valuable information about the Copenhagen concert, and to Pablo Berruti of Divina Records. We also wish to acknowledge use of Frank Hamilton's excellent Maria Callas research materials. Booklet, compilation, restorations and remasterings: © (p) 2022 High Definition Tape Transfers, Inc., 118 Tower Hill Road, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada L4E 0K6. Product of Canada. All rights reserved.

IMPORTANT WARNING: *We have applied no compression to the dynamics present in the live Copenhagen recording.*