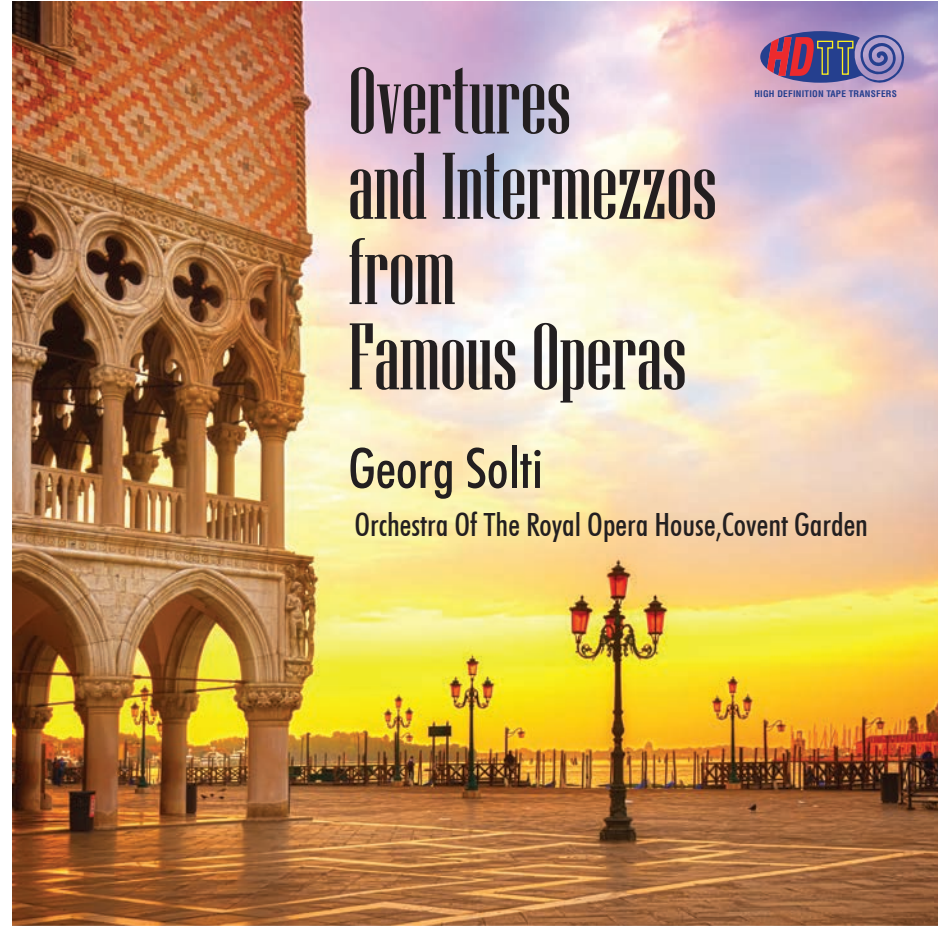


Arsace and Semiramide) and choruses are of a high order, as is the orchestral writing, which makes full use of a large pit.

After this splendid work, one of his finest in the genre, Rossini turned his back on Italy and moved to Paris. Apart from *Il viaggio a Reims*, which is still in Italian, his last operas were either original compositions in French or extensively reworked adaptations into French of earlier Italian operas. Musicologist Rodolfo Celletti sums up the importance of *Semiramide* by stating that it "was the last opera of the great Baroque tradition: the most beautiful, the most imaginative, possibly the most complete; but also, irremediably, the last."

Ponchielli was a master of many types of composition, from operas to band music to solo piano pieces. As a teacher of composition at the Milan Conservatory, he numbered Giacomo Puccini among his students, and he was no doubt the most admired Italian opera composer of the generation between Giuseppe Verdi and Puccini. If Ponchielli's operas (about a dozen of them) were seldom performed in the early 21st century, that is attributable to their poorly structured librettos rather than his music. Nevertheless, some orchestral excerpts, such as *Dance of the Hours*, escaped the fate of his larger works and lived on.



Overtures and Intermezzos from Famous Operas

Georg Solti

Orchestra Of The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

La traviata, opera in three acts by Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi (libretto in Italian by Francesco Maria Piave) that premiered in Venice at La Fenice opera house on March 6, 1853. Based upon the 1852 play by Alexandre Dumas fils (La Dame aux camélias), the opera marked a large step forward for Verdi in his quest to express dramatic ideas in music. La traviata means “the fallen woman” or “the one who goes astray” and refers to the main character, Violetta Valéry, a courtesan. The opera features some of the most challenging and revered music in the entire soprano repertoire; the aria “Sempre libera” at the end of Act I is especially well known.

L'italiana in Algeri, which became Rossini's first real smash in 1813, has maintained its place in the repertory not least because of its ever popular overture. In many ways it set the pattern for the pop-favorite Rossini overtures that followed: it features a theatrically heavy slow introduction leading into an exciting Allegro with elements of sonata form. Exceptionally, the overture is thematically linked with the opera itself (Rossini, an inveterate recycler of his own material, rarely allowed an overture to be tied too closely to any individual work). Even more exceptionally, the thematic link occurs not in the slow introduction but in the Allegro section, whose second theme is basis for act II aria “Sullo stil de' viaggiatori.”

The Tales of Hoffmann, French Les Contes d'Hoffmann, opera by German-born French composer Jacques Offenbach, with a French libretto by Michel Carré and Jules Barbier, the latter of whom was a coauthor of the play of the same name, from which the opera was derived. The opera premiered in Paris on February 10, 1881. It was the last and easily the most serious of the many Offenbach operas. Its premiere came posthumously. Left unfinished at Offenbach's death, the work was completed by the composer's colleagues. The opera is perhaps best known for its barcarolle “Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour,” originally a duet for soprano and mezzo-soprano, though often heard in instrumental transcriptions.

Semiramide is an opera in two acts by Gioachino Rossini. The libretto by Gaetano Rossi is based on Voltaire's tragedy Semiramis, which in turn was based on the legend of Semiramis of Assyria. The opera was first performed at La Fenice in Venice on 3 February 1823. Semiramide was Rossini's final Italian opera and according to Richard Osborne, “could well be dubbed Tancredi Revisited”. As in Tancredi, Rossi's libretto was based on a Voltaire tragedy. The music took the form of a return to vocal traditions of Rossini's youth, and was a melodrama in which he “recreated the baroque tradition of decorative singing with unparalleled skill”. The ensemble-scenes (particularly the duos between

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- 1 Verdi La Traviata: Prelude To Act I 3:27**
- 2 Rossini L'Italiana In Algeri: Overture 7:20**
- 3 Verdi La Traviata: Prelude To Act III 3:30**
- 4 Offenbach The Tales Of Hoffmann: Barcarolle 4:03**
- 5 Rossini Semiramide: Overture 11:22**
- 6 Ponchielli La Gioconda: Dance Of The Hours 8:43**

Producer: James Walker Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson
Recorded by Decca / RCA 18-21 June 1958 Kingsway Hall



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