

Lawrence Brownlee



Virtuoso Rossini Arias

CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN

KAUNAS CITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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LAWRENCE BROWNLEE

VIRTUOSO ROSSINI ARIAS

"bel canto at its best" -Shirley Apthorp, *Financial Times*

1. LA GAZZA LADRA: Vieni fra questa braccia (5:12)
2. LE COMTE ORY: Que les destins prospères (5:15)
3. L'OCCASIONE FA IL LADRO: D'ogni più sacro impegno (5:06)
4. OTELLO: Che ascolto! (6:56)
5. SEMIRAMIDE: Ah dov'è, dov'è il cimento (7:43)
6. IL TURCO IN ITALIA: Tu seconda il mio disegno (6:20)
7. LA DONNA DEL LAGO: O fiamma soave (8:41)
8. ZELMIRA: Terra amica (9:13)

LAWRENCE BROWNLEE, tenor
CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN, conductor
KAUNAS CITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Total Playing Time: 54:32



"With his sweet tone, fastidious pitch, and poetic phrasing, Brownlee made...familiar fare sound intriguingly fresh, banishing, for a moment, the ghosts of Caruso and Pavarotti."

-Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*



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LAWRENCE BROWNLEE

VIRTUOSO ROSSINI ARIAS

1. **La gazza ladra:** Vieni fra questa braccia (5:12)
2. **Le Comte Ory:** Que les destins prospères (5:15)
3. **L'occasione fa il ladro:** D'ogni più sacro impegno (5:06)
4. **Otello:** Che ascolto! (6:56)
5. **Semiramide:** Ah dov'è, dov'è il cimento (7:43)
6. **Il Turco In Italia:** Tu seconda il mio disegno (6:20)
7. **La donna del lago:** O fiamma soave (8:41)
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This album of spectacular cavatinas and arias by **Gioacchino Rossini** (1792-1868) from tenor extraordinaire **Lawrence Brownlee** – his first-ever aria collection with orchestra – is long overdue. It not only captures one of the most unique and exciting Bel Canto tenor voices of our time at its glorious peak, but it also offers a choice selection of thrilling vocal blockbusters that you may well never have heard, drawn as they are from several of the old master's most rarely performed operas.

Best-known for its witty and scintillating overture, the otherwise unfairly neglected ***La gazza ladra*** (The Thieving Magpie) was composed in great haste in 1817 for Milan's La Scala. It's a classic example of "melodramma semiseria," a then-popular category of opera that told a serious story, but with comic elements. Here, the sober tale – based on a true story – revolves around a young servant girl condemned to die for the theft of a silver spoon that had in fact been purloined by a magpie. With his Act I cavatina "**Vieni fra questa braccia,**" the young soldier Gianetto, upon his return from war, greets his sweet-

heart Ninetta, who is soon to be accused of the crime.

Vieni fra questa braccia...
mi balza il corn el sen!
D'un vero amor, mio ben,
quest 'è il linguaggio.

Anche al nemico in faccia
m'eri presente ognor:
tu m'inspiravi allor
forza, oraggio e valor.

Ma quell piacer che adesso,
o mia Ninetta, io provo,
è così dolce e nuovo
che no si può spiegar.

Come to my embrace...
my heart leaps in my breast!
My darling, I speak
true love's language.

Even in the face of my enemy,
my thoughts were ever of you:
It was you who inspired in me
strength, courage and valor

But the pleasure
that I now feel, Ninetta,

is so sweet, so new
that I cannot explain it!

Le Comte Ory (Count Ory – 1828) is, by nature, a comic opera – though it was written in the more formal structure and style of a serious opera. Recycling some of the earlier music from his *Il Viaggio a Reims*, it tells the twelfth-century story of the opportunistic rascal Count Ory, who – with most of the court’s men away on Crusade – seeks romantic adventure among the women left behind. In Act I, disguised as a hermit, he enters the castle grounds and – in his opening cavatina, “**Que les destins prospères**” – promises sage advice to lonely women, widows and young girls alike, in how to find husbands.

Que les destins prospères,
accueillent vos prières!
La paix du ciel, mes frères,
soit toujours avec vous!
Veuves ou demoiselles,
dans vos peines cruelles,
venez a moi, mes belles:
Obliger est si doux!
L'accorde les familles,
et même aux jeunes filles
je donne des époux.

Que les destins prospères,
accueillent vos prières!
La paix du ciel, mes frères,
soit toujours avec vous!

May the reconciling fates
graciously receive your prayers!
May the peace of heaven, my brothers,
be always with you!
Widows or maidens,
in your cruel suffering,
Come to me, my pretty ones:
To oblige is so appealing!
I reunite families,
and even grant husbands
to young maidens.
Come, everybody, come.

L'occasione fa il ladro (Opportunity makes the thief) dates from 1812; it's one of five early one-act operas (a so-called *burletta per musica* or *farsa*) that he wrote for a theatre in Venice before he became widely known as an operatic composer. The work quickly fell into obscurity after his death, and remains almost unknown today. This lighthearted “farce” presents the unlikely tale of Count Alberto – who is travelling to meet the fiancée he has never met.

Alberto's luggage is mistakenly taken by another man – who finds the lady's portrait among his belongings, and resolves to claim her for his own. In the confusion that follows, Alberto gives voice to his indignation and outrage in **"D'ogni più sacro impegni."**

D'ogni più sacro impegno
sciolta pur sia la fede,
amor da voi non chiede
chi amor per voi non ha.
Pera, chi vuol costringere
d'un cor la libertà.

Ma se un sopetto indegno
di soverchiarmi intende,
quel generoso sdegno,
che il mio decoro accende,
dalla ragione armato,
un vano ardir confondere,
e impallidir farà.

Of all holiest bonds,
let faith first be undone.
He who has no love for you
asks you for none.
Who wants to confine
the freedom of another's heart?
But should a shameful suspicion

strive to overcome me,
that high-born contempt
which ignites my honor,
armed with virtue,
will pale and vanquish
audacity so vain.

Otello – one of the first of Rossini's Neapolitan operas (1816) – is unusual in that three of the main character roles – Otello, Iago and Rodrigo – are assigned to tenors! Rossini took much greater liberties with Shakespeare's classic tragedy (like shifting the action from Cyprus to Venice) than Giuseppe Verdi did in his better-known adaptation seven decades later – but recent performances of this vigorous and rousing opera have suggested that the work's comparative neglect is hardly justified. Rodrigo's **"Che ascolto!"** recitative and aria opens act II: in it, he bitterly decries Desdemona's betrayal of his love, and swears that he knows how to punish his rival, Otello.

Che ascolto! Ahime! Che dici!
Ah come mai non senti
pietà de' miei tormenti,
del mio tradito amor?
Perché pietà, oh Dio, non senti

del mio tradito amor?
Ma se costante sei
nel tuo rigor crudele,
se sprezzi I prieghi miei,
saprò con questo braccio
punire il traditor.

What am I hearing? Alas! What are you saying!
Ah, why do you not feel
pity for my suffering,
for my love's betrayal?
Why, oh God, do you have no pity
for my betrayed love?
But if you firmly persist
in your cruel harshness,
if you ridicule my prayers,
I shall know, by my own hand,
how to punish my betrayers.

Set in ancient Babylon, ***Semiramide*** – Rossini's 1823 opera based on Voltaire's tragedy *Semiramis* – is his final Italian opera, as well as his magnificent final tribute to the Baroque traditions of highly stylized and decorative singing that he had grown up with. The opera's plot follows the complex course of traitorous plotting and palace intrigue as to who will succeed Queen Semiramide's

recently murdered husband, King Nino. Idreno, a visiting Indian King, is in love with the princess Azema – who, in turn, loves another. Towards the end of Act I, he pours out his passion for her in "**Ah dov' è, dov' è il cimento.**"

Ah dov' è, dov' è il cimento?
Già di me maggior mi sento;
tu mi rendi la speranza,
muovo in me rideste ardir.
D'un rival la rea baldanza
lo già avvampo di punir

E se ancor libero
è il tuo bel core;
di quell che accendemi
tenero amore
in seno almeno
senti pietà;
più fida un' anima
non troverai:
tu sola l'idolo,
cara sarai,
che ognora Idreno
adorerà.

So where, where then is the contest?
I already feel myself to be the greater;
you give me hope,

and arouse new daring in me.
I am now burning
to punish an evil rival's impudence.

And if your lovely heart
is still free,
at least have compassion
in your breast
for the tender love
you awakened in me;
you will never find
a more faithful heart:
you alone, beloved,
shall be the idol
that Idreno
adores forever.

Rossini wrote his *Il Turco in Italia* (The Turk in Italy) – a true masterpiece of the *dramma buffo* genre – in 1814. A kind of companion piece (but not a sequel) to his earlier hit, *L'Italiana in Algeri*, the opera revolves around a hilarious culture clash involving a Turkish Gentleman who – while in Italy – sees no reason why he can't buy a wife as he could in his homeland; his effort to do so turns an existing love triangle into a "love quadrangle." Amid a chaotic scenario of disguised impersonation and mistaken identity, the Turk's attentions to Narciso's beloved

prompt him – in act II – to dress in Turkish garb himself, after expressing his love-lorn rage in the spectacular aria, "**Tu seconda il mio disegno.**"

Tu seconda il mio disegno,
dolce Amor , da cui mi viene.
Deh! Ricusa a tutti un bene,
che accordasti solo a me.
Se il mio rival delude!
Se inganno un incostante!
Per un offeso amante
vendetta egual non v' é.
Ah! Sì, la speme
che sento in core,
pietoso amore,
mi vien da te.

Support my plan,
inspired by you, sweet love.
I beg you, refuse to all a favor,
which you granted only to me.
If I frustrate my rival,
if I deceive a flirtatious girl,
there's no better revenge
for a wounded lover.
Ah! Yes, the hope
that I feel in my heart
comes to me
from you, merciful love.

La donna del lago (The Lady of the Lake), is based on Sir Walter Scott's like-titled epic poem that takes us back to sixteenth-century Scotland, amid the country's long-standing conflict with England. Composed in 1819, it inspired a veritable flood of Italian operas based on Scott's romantic epics (the best known being Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*). In terms of its stylistic variety and innovation, it's been called one of the composer's most engaging and tuneful operas. Uberto – actually King James V of Scotland in disguise – has fallen in love with Elena, the title heroine, whose heart belongs to another. As Act II begins, Uberto – seeking to save Elena from the threat of imminent battle – gives ardent voice to his passion for her with “**O fiamma soave.**”

O fiamma soave,
che il sen m' accendi!
pietosa ti rendi
a un fido amator!
Per te forsennato
affronto il periglio:
non curo il mio stato,
non ho più consiglio;

Vederti un momento,
bearmi in quel ciglio
è il dolce contento,
che anela il mio cor!

O sweet passion,
that burns in my breast,
have mercy
upon a faithful lover!

It is for your sake
that I face danger like a lunatic;
with no regard for myself,
all reason has left me.

To see you but for a moment,
to bask in the glow of your gaze –
this is the happiness
that is my heart's sweetest desire!

Zelmira (1822) is the last of Rossini's vaunted “Neapolitan operas,” a series of nine mostly serious works written during his seven-year stint in Naples that – despite the popularity of his brilliant comic operas – many consider to be the qualitative core of his life's work. The scenario takes us back to the island of Lesbos in ancient Greece, where dwells the title heroine: the wife

of Prince Ilo and daughter of King Polidoro. Zelmira has, in fact, hidden her father away from his enemies – but is accused by a traitor of having murdered him instead. In “**Terra amica**” – Ilo’s Act I Cavatina – he sings warmly (surrounded by his soldiers) of his love for the fair land where dwell his beloved wife and child – even with peril all around.

Terra amica, ove respire
la consorte, il figlio amato,
qual contento in sen m’ispira
quell’ aspetto fusinghier!

Là fra l’armi, e mentre intorno
si aggirava a me il periglio,
riveder la sposa, il figlio
era il dolce mio pensier!

Cara! Deh attendimi!
Nel tuo bel seno
volar saprò.

Felici l’aure
che per te spirano!
Felici i zeffiri
che a te s’appressano!

E avventurato

dirmi potrò
quando al mio lato
ti rivedrò.

Pleasant land, where dwell
my wife and beloved son,
what happiness your friendly presence
inspires in my heart!

There, under arms,
and with dangers all around,
my sweetest yearning
was to see my wife and son again!

Dearest one! Ah, wait for me!
To your fairest breast
shall I fly!

Happy is the air
that envelops you!
How happy the breezes
that caress you!
I will only be able
to claim true happiness
when, once again,
I see you by my side

The most in-demand American tenor in the world in the bel canto repertoire, **Lawrence Brownlee** continues to stupefy audiences with the power and agility of his instrument. From firmly American roots, Brownlee has become a star on the international scene, performing opposite the leading ladies of contemporary opera, and lauded continually for the seemingly effortless beauty of his voice.

Recent Brownlee performances include a solo recital program at the Wigmore Hall in London; a debut at Grand Théâtre de Genève in a production of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*; a Carnegie Hall recital; a Santa Fe Opera debut in *La donna del lago*; an appearance at Houston Grand Opera in *L'italiana in Algeri*; *Le Comte Ory* with Cecilia Bartoli at the Theater an der Wien; a performance of *Carmina Burana* in Russia; *La fille du regiment* and *L'elisir d'amore* at the Hamburgische Staatsoper. The latter marked the first time Brownlee appeared as Nemorino in a fully staged performance.

Brownlee had the honor of opening the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York with Louis Langrée and the Mostly Mozart

Orchestra. His high Cs were on display when he was Tonio in *La fille du regiment* at the Metropolitan Opera, where he is rapidly becoming a house favorite. Brownlee recently performed in South Africa for the first time, a recital as part of Cape Town Opera's season.

Brownlee has been featured in nearly every major theater in the world and enjoys a relationship with many premiere conductors and symphony orchestras. Among his other memorable engagements are: *Cenerentola* in Milan, Houston, Philadelphia and the Met; *L'italiana in Algeri* in Milan, Dresden, Boston and Seattle; *I puritani* in Washington and Seattle; *Mosé in Egitto* in Rome; *Il turco in Italia* in Toulouse and Berlin; *Tancredi* with the Detroit Symphony and on an eight-city European tour with the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées; *La donna del lago* in Washington; *Semiramide* and *L'elisir d'amore*, both at the Caramoor Festival; *Armida* at the Metropolitan Opera; *La Fille du regiment* in Hamburg, Cincinnati and at the Metropolitan Opera; *Salieri's Axur, re d'Ormus* in Zurich; *L'ape musicale* in Vienna, and the world premiere of Lorin Maazel's 1984 at Covent Garden.

In the orchestral arena, he has been heard in: Bach's Magnificat in Cincinnati; Messiah in Houston, San Francisco, Detroit, Baltimore and Indianapolis; Israel in Egypt in Cleveland; the Mozart Mass in C minor in Chicago and Baltimore; Carmina Burana with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood, and highlights from Porgy and Bess with the New York Philharmonic (including a "Live From Lincoln Center" telecast).

Brownlee has performed recitals at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall, in Atlanta, Tokyo, on London's Rosenblatt Series, and others around the United States under the auspices of the Marilyn Horne Foundation.

Brownlee's discography/videography continues to grow impressively. The 2010-11 season saw the EMI Classics CD release of Rossini's Stabat Mater, featuring Anna Netrebko, Joyce DiDonato and Ildebrando d'Arcangelo, with Antonio Pappano leading the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, as well as a pair of DVDs: the Met Opera's 2010 HD relay of Armida on Decca and Carmina Burana with Sir Simon Rattle leading the

Berliner Philharmoniker on EuroArts/Opus Arte (a CD version of this performance already exists on EMI Classics).

Other releases include three CD sets: on Opera Rara, an exploration of Rossini songs, and on Naxos, L'italiana in Algeri conducted by Alberto Zedda. A live recording of Mayr's Medea in Corinto from St. Gallen was released by Oehms Classics. Additionally, Deutsche Grammophon released a DVD of the Metropolitan Opera's 2009 production of La Cenerentola with Elina Garanča as Angelina. Among his earlier CD releases is his first solo disc (EMI Classics) featuring Italian songs by Schubert, Verdi, Donizetti, Bellini and Rossini, accompanied by Martin Katz. Song released a live Il barbiere di Siviglia. Decca has released a DVD of a performance from the Covent Garden world premiere run of Lorin Maazel's 1984, in which Brownlee took on the role of Syme.

Brownlee was named the Seattle Opera's 2008 Artist of the Year, received the Opera Company of Philadelphia's 2007 Alter Award for Artistic Excellence, and was the winner of both the 2006

Marian Anderson and Richard Tucker Awards, a feat never before achieved by any artist in the same year. He participated in young artist programs at both the Seattle and Wolf Trap Operas.

The Ohio-born Brownlee received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Anderson University and a Master of Music degree from Indiana University. He is a Life Member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc.

“Constantine Orbelian stands astride two great societies, and finds and promotes synergistic harmony from the best of each.” (*Fanfare*)

For over 20 years the brilliant American pianist/conductor has been a central figure in Russia’s musical life — as Music Director of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia of Russia, and as frequent guest conductor with other illustrious Russian orchestras. In 2013 he also became Chief Conductor of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra. He tours with American stars in Russian and European music centers, and with Russian stars in North American music centers, and extends these splendid

collaborations to tours in Europe, UK, Japan, Korea, and other music capitals throughout the world.

Orbelian’s appointment in 1991 as Music Director of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra was a breakthrough event: he is the first American ever to become music director of an ensemble in Russia. This “American in Moscow” is well known as a tireless champion of Russian-American cultural exchange and international ambassadorship through his worldwide tours. In January 2004, President Putin awarded Orbelian the coveted title “Honored Artist of Russia,” a title never before bestowed on a non-Russian citizen. In May 2010, Orbelian led the opening Ceremonial Concert for the Cultural Olympics in Sochi, Russia — the first event setting the stage for Russia’s hosting of the Olympic Games in 2014.

“Orbelian has star quality, and his orchestra plays with passion and precision,” *The Audio Critic* wrote of his acclaimed series of over 30 recordings on Delos. Among his recent concert and televised appearances are collaborations with stars Renée Fleming and

Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and with Van Cliburn in Cliburn's sentimental return to Moscow, the great pianist's last performance. *Opera News* calls Orbelian "the singer's dream collaborator," and commented that he conducts vocal repertoire "with the sensitivity of a lieder pianist." Orbelian's frequent collaborations with Hvorostovsky include repertoire from their Delos recordings "Where Are You, My Brothers?" and "Moscow Nights," featured on many tours and telecasts. On several occasions he has conducted historic live telecasts from Moscow's Red Square, the latest of which took place on June 19, 2013, with Hvorostovsky and Anna Netrebko.

Recently Orbelian has turned to film to create more of his unique American/Russian collaborations. His first film production, "Renée Fleming and Dmitri Hvorostovsky: *An Odyssey in St. Petersburg*," was filmed in St. Petersburg's most glorious palaces, and stars Renée Fleming and Dmitri Hvorostovsky in opera scenes and arias. The film is in some ways a culmination of Orbelian's efforts in St. Petersburg, since he is founder and Music Director of the annual Palac-

es of St. Petersburg International Music Festival.

Born in San Francisco to Russian and Armenian emigré parents, Constantine Orbelian made his debut as a piano prodigy with the San Francisco Symphony at the age of 11. After graduating from Juilliard in New York, he embarked on a career as a piano virtuoso that included appearances with major symphony orchestras throughout the U.S., U.K., Europe, and Russia. His recording of the Khachaturian piano concerto with conductor Neeme Järvi won "Best Concerto Recording of the Year" award in the United Kingdom.

From his 1995 performance at the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the United Nations in San Francisco, to his 2004 performance at the U.S. State Department commemorating 70 years of diplomatic relations between Washington and Moscow, and a repeat State Department appearance in 2007, all with the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, Orbelian continues to use his artistic eminence in the cause of international goodwill. He and his orchestras also participate in

cultural enrichment programs for young people, both in Russia and the U.S. In 2001 Orbelian was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, an award given to immigrants, or children of immigrants, who have made outstanding contributions to the United States.

The **Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra** grew from the Kaunas Chamber Orchestra, which was founded in 1988 and since 2000 has been managed by Algimantas Treikauskas. Its previous principal conductors were Pavel Berman, Modestas Pitrenas and Imants Resnis; the position now belongs to American maestro Constantine Orbelian.

The Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra gives concerts at home in Lithuania and abroad – including Latvia, Estonia, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Finland, and Italy. It appears regularly at various international festivals, presents special concert projects and gives theme-oriented concerts. Many famous Lithuanian as well as foreign soloists and conductors have collaborated with the orchestra – which organizes and

appears in around 50 concerts per year. A highly versatile ensemble, the orchestra specializes in various genres of classical and contemporary music, including crossover projects with such groups as The Scorpions, Smokie, and the Electric Light Orchestra, to name a few.

The orchestra also appeared at the opera contest show *Arc of Triumph* for two years on Lithuanian National Television.

Among the group's prominent highlights in the 2012/2013 season are its collaboration with famous baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky and Maestro Orbelian, as well as its appearance at the Murten Classics festival in Switzerland under the baton of Kaspar Zehnder. The orchestra's discography includes several CDs. A number of recent projects were recorded for Delos with several of today's most famous voices, conducted by Maestro Orbelian. There is also a new recording of Giuseppe Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* starring Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Barbara Frittoli and Stefano Secco (DE 3457). The latter will be released in September 2014.

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Balance Engineer and Editing: Vilius Keras

Recording Engineer: Aleksandra Suchova

Equipment: Neumann, Schoeps and DPA microphones; Mogami cables; RME pre-amplifiers and A/D converters; Sequoia workstation; Dynaudio AIR loudspeakers; Sennheiser headphones.

Photos of Lawrence Brownlee: Alabastro Photography

Photo of Constantine Orbelian: Vladimir Semenikhine

We would like to thank Algimantas Treikuskas-General Director of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra for his invaluable help in producing this recording.

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