

CAVATINA AT THE OPERA



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American Record Guide, Sep/October 2015

Cavatina Duo—Bridge 9448—65 minutes

These are not works that demand rigorous adherence to a score's every jot and tittle. Except for the Giuliani, these are arrangements—many of them medleys—of favorite melodies from operas popular in their day, conceived as vehicles for the virtuosos who played them.

Spanish flutist Eugenia Moliner and her Bosnian husband, guitarist Denis Azabagic (the Cavatina Duo) are consummate virtuosos not merely in their peerless technique but in sheer musicianship.

The album opens with what is in 2015 the most popular opera here, Borne's Fantasy Brillante on Themes from Bizet's Carmen. Right off the bat, this duo's liquid, dramatic, and highly expressive sensitivities soar with lyricism and infectious rhythms as they tour the constantly changing moods of this opera's arias. In our day the other most popular medley here is from La Traviata, based on fantasies by Emmanuel Krakamp and Giulio Briccialdi, combined by Cavatina's friend, Alan Thomas, who brilliantly arranged the other works as well (except Giuliani's, here in its original version). Moliner not only matches Joan Sutherland's peerless full-voiced lyricism in the Verdi but is able to do things with her flute that a soprano can only dream of. And Azabagic is her Richard Bonyng, so expressive, integral, and orchestral is his guitar; it's not at all mere background—I consistently found myself listening to both instruments.

What sweep Moliner brings to 'The Carnival of Venice'! How incredibly inventive Azabagic is in the Giuliani! How spot-on their tuning and pitches are! How operatic their style is! Nor will you hear a single guitar squeak or scrape, and only in Traviata will you hear a few flutist's breaths (that's because it's the most difficult virtuoso writing for flute I've ever heard—and she makes it flow without ever wearying).

Add engineering that is warm, resonant, embracing, superbly balanced, and completely gimmick-free, and you'll feel like you're sitting not in your dry living room but in the perfect chamber music hall, alone, with these two stunning artists playing only for you.

I cannot recommend this album highly enough. And, hey, I've never even liked the sound of a guitar and have never been fond of concept albums like this.

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