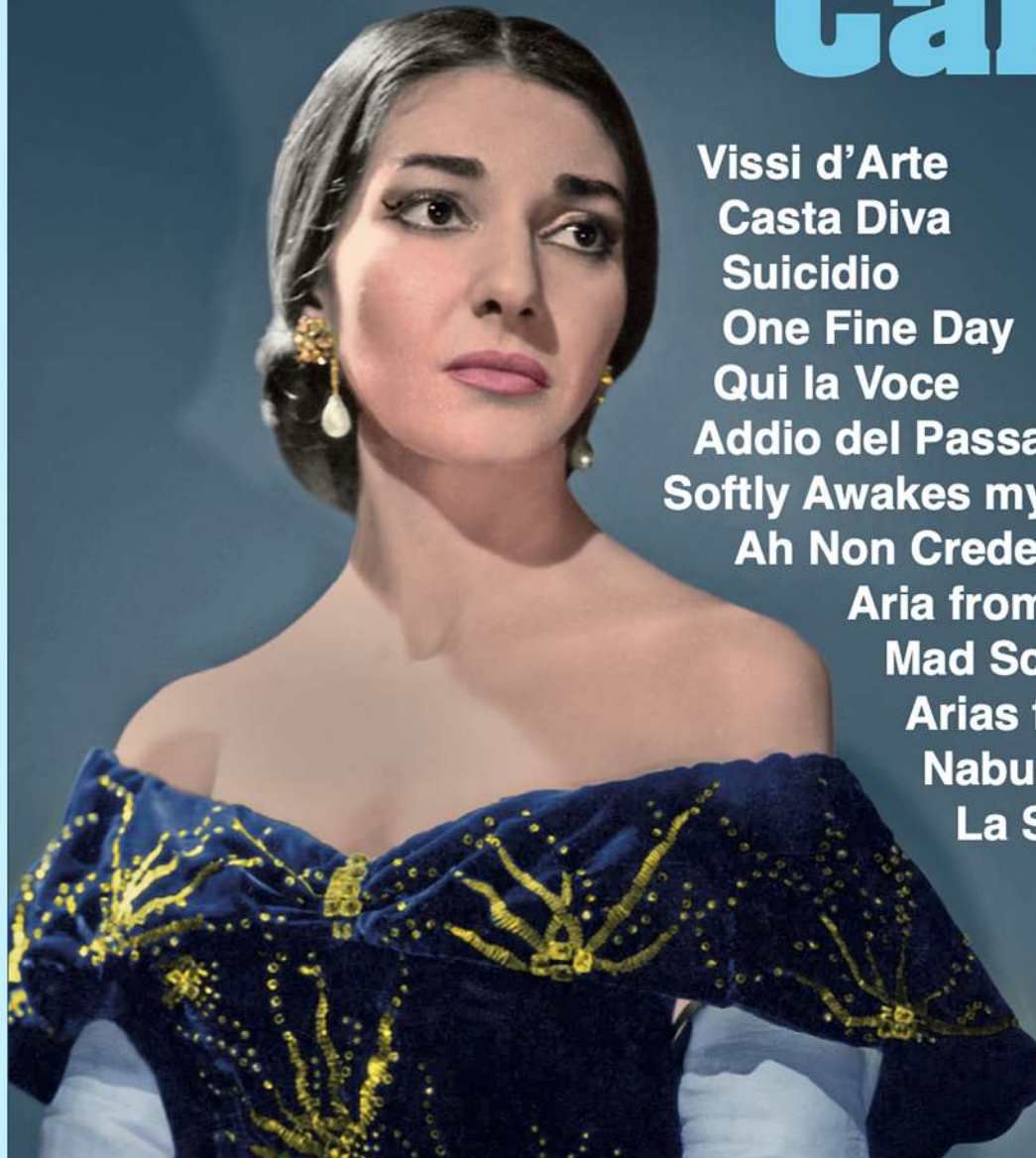


Very Best of **Maria Callas**



**Vissi d'Arte
Casta Diva
Suicidio
One Fine Day
Qui la Voce
Addio del Passato
Softly Awakes my Heart
Ah Non Credea Mirarti
Aria from 'Diva' (La Wally)
Mad Scene (Lucia)
Arias from Traviata,
Nabucco, Macbeth
La Sonnambula**

alto

Very Best of Maria Callas

- | | | |
|-----------|--|------|
| 1 | Vincenzo Bellini: <i>Norma</i> - Casta diva | 4:44 |
| 2 | Bellini: <i>I Puritani</i> - Qui la voce | 4:48 |
| | Orchestra della RAI Torino • Arturo Basile, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 3 | Bellini: <i>La Sonnambulla</i> - Ah non credea mirarti | 4:10 |
| | Nicola Monti, <i>tenor</i> • Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Milano • Antonino Votto, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 4 | Gaetano Donizetti: <i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i> -
Spargi d'amaro pianto (mad scene) | 6:38 |
| | Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Milano • Herbert von Karajan, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 5 | Gioacchino Rossini: <i>Armida</i> - D'amore al dolce impero | 8:05 |
| | Orchestra della RAI Sanremo • Alfredo Simonetto, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 6 | Giuseppe Verdi: <i>Nabucco</i> - Anch'io dischiuso | 5:55 |
| 7 | Verdi: <i>Macbeth</i> - Vieni! t'affretta | 9:50 |
| | Orchestra della RAI Torino • Oliviero de Fabritiis, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 8 | Verdi: <i>La Traviata</i> - Ah fors' e lui... sempre libera | 3:15 |
| | Cesare Valetti, <i>tenor</i> • Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden • Nicola Rescigno, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 9 | Verdi: <i>La Traviata</i> - Addio del passato | 4:19 |
| | Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden • Nicola Rescigno, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 10 | Amilcare Ponchielli: <i>La Gioconda</i> - Suicidio! | 5:18 |
| | Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Milano • Antonino Votto, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 11 | Camille Saint-Saëns: <i>Samson et Dalila</i>, Op. 47 -
Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix | 4:50 |
| | Orchestre National de l'ORTF • Georges Prêtre, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 12 | Alfredo Catalani: <i>La Wally</i> - Ebben? ne andro lontano | 4:43 |
| | Philharmonia Orchestra • Tullio Serafin, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 13 | Giacomo Puccini: <i>Madama Butterfly</i> - Un bel di vedremo | 3:16 |
| | Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Milano • Herbert von Karajan, <i>conductor</i> | |
| 14 | Puccini: <i>Tosca</i> - Vissi d'arte | 3:16 |
| | Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Milano • Victor de Sabata, <i>conductor</i> | |

Produced by **Tony Watts**

mastered for alto by **Paul Arden-Taylor**

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Design produced by **Imergent Images Ltd (info@imergent.co.uk)**

Project Co-ordinator: **Robin Vaughan (musicalmerit@blueyonder.co.uk)**

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Born in New York in 1923 to Greek parents, **Maria Callas** participated in normal school productions (Ralph Rackstraw *HMS Pinafore* in New York), moved to Greece with her mother when her parents separated in 1937, and entered the Athens Conservatory the following year. As a student Callas sang Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana* before being trained by Elvira de Hidalgo in coloratura roles. However she sang *Tosca* for the first time in 1942 and, following her return to America, was cast by a Chicago company as *Turandot*. Although the company folded prior to the performances, it led to Callas being chosen by Giovanni Zenatello to sing *La Gioconda* under Tullio Serafin in Verona in 1947. Later that year Serafin had her singing Isolde, and this in turn led to her performing *Turandot* several times during 1948. In 1949 she sang Brünnhilde in *Walküre* but had also in the meantime performed *Norma*! Finally, when Callas was asked by Serafin later that year to replace the indisposed Carosio in Bellini's *Puritani* her career found some stability. She was coached in *bel canto* roles, (although she sang the heavier role of Aida for her 1950 La Scala debut), and she made house debuts as *Norma* in London (1952), Chicago (1954), New York Met (1956) and in concert in Paris (1958). For her debuts in Berlin (1955) and Vienna (1956) Callas performed Lucia.

Although Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi continued to form the mainstay of her repertoire there were anomalies: she sang in works of an earlier era such as Haydn's *Euridice*, *Iphigénie* and *Alceste* (Gluck), Cherubini's *Medea* and Giulia in Spontini's *La Vestale*. She was also interested in certain *verismo* heroines such as *Tosca* and Maddalena in *Andrea Chénier*. She chose to record (but not sing on stage) a number of *verismo* roles including Mimi, Cio-Cio-San, Nedda, Manon Lescaut and most famously *Carmen*.

As well as Serafin, the principal guide of Callas's career was her husband, the industrialist Giovanni Battista Meneghini, whom she met in 1946 and married in 1949 when he became her manager. Their relationship lasted until 1959 (the marriage was annulled in 1966), by which time she had become the lover of Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis whom she had met in Venice. She had been the centre of media interest before, but when she quarreled in turn with the directors of Rome Opera, La Scala and the Met all in 1958 this became a media frenzy. By 1960 her career was in virtual tatters: her interest in performing seemed minimal as she focussed instead on

Onassis. In 1964 Callas was tempted back to the stage by Franco Zeffirelli with offers to star in new productions of *Tosca* in London, Paris and the Met and a new *Norma* in Paris. However illness prevented Callas from completing all of these engagements and her final appearance on stage was at a Royal Gala performance of *Tosca* in London (5 July 1965).

Callas was devastated when Onassis married Jackie Kennedy in 1968. She made the highly publicized but unsuccessful *Medea* directed by Pasolini in 1969 but was something of a recluse until her series of master classes at New York's Juilliard School in 1971 and 1972. Giuseppe di Stefano persuaded her to undertake a world-wide concert tour (1973-4) to raise funds for the medical treatment of his daughter. Neither artist had retained the vocal powers necessary for such a tour but they were received ecstatically at each venue. Following the tour Callas returned to her lonely life in Paris where she died on 16 September 1977.

Mention the words *bel canto* (literally 'beautiful singing') to most opera lovers and they will think of the works of Rossini (1792-1868), Donizetti (1797-1848) and Bellini (1801-35). These composers conceived their operas with certain singers in mind, artists who had spent many years perfecting their *legato* technique in lengthy sustained phrases and who were capable of launching into an elaborate vocal pyrotechnical display (*fioritura*). Gradually it became less easy to find sopranos capable of combining coloratura with dramatic credibility and the coloratura soprano became once more a songbird. It was not until the Maria Callas phenomenon in the 1950s, coupled with the scholarship of Richard Bonyngé, his wife Joan Sutherland (ALC 1125, 1155, 1185), Marilyn Horne and others, that audiences began to see that Italian and French 19th century Romantic opera was not purely for 'canary fanciers'.

Vincenzo Bellini, though short-lived and less prolific than Rossini and Donizetti, composed three operas in particular that represent the finest of Italian Romantic opera: *La sonnambula* and *Norma* (both premiered in 1831) and *I puritani* (1835). Bellini's glorious soaring melodies and Romani's text for ***Norma*** were later highly praised by Wagner. It is said that Giuditta Pasta, the first *Norma*, was less than impressed by her opening aria ***Casta Diva*** and asked Bellini to change it. However as she became familiar with the aria, she grew to love it and so no rewrite was necessary! Set in Roman-occupied Gaul, the

priestess Norma has had a secret affair with the Roman general Pollione, who has now deserted her in favour of a younger priestess. As mistletoe is gathered, Norma sings an invocation to the chaste moon goddess. In the second half of the aria *Ah! bello a me ritorna* she secretly prays for Pollione's interest to reawaken.

Set in Civil War Plymouth, *I puritani* concerns the love of Elvira, daughter of the Puritan city-governor, for a Cavalier Lord Arthur Talbot. In the story, Talbot rescues the disguised Queen Henrietta Maria, leading to a tragic misunderstanding between Arturo and Elvira. Elvira's belief that Arturo is faithless drives her mad. The aria *Qui la voce* tells of how Arturo first wooed her and then abandoned her.

The premiere of Bellini's *La Sonnambula* (The Sleepwalker) took place at the Teatro Carcano, Milan in March 1831 with Pasta and Rubini in leading roles. Set in a 19th century Swiss village, the engagement of Amina to a local farmer Elvino had been broken off through a misunderstanding. Heartbroken and walking in her sleep, Amina laments the loss of their love *Ah non credea mirarti*.

With *Anna Bolena* (Milan 26 December 1830) Donizetti entered the premier rank of composers. On 18 May 1835 he let it be known that he was considering an adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* and that his hoped-for collaborator would be Salvatore Cammarano. Having become hugely popular during the 19th century, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (ALC 2006) suffered a decline during the first half of the 20th century when productions failed to take advantage of its fine dramatic possibilities. Its return to public and critical favour can be attributed to the acting capabilities of Maria Callas who in a number of memorable productions reminded the European public what fine drama was contained in this work. Joan Sutherland, although not so fine an actress, also made a huge impression in the title role at Covent Garden in 1959. Donizetti knew better than to make the famous *Mad Scene* simply a brilliant coloratura display: to illustrate her confused state, various previously heard themes are altered to indicate a mind that hardly knows what it is doing. Lucia, caught in a family feud, loves a man hated by her brother but is tricked into marrying another to save her family's honour. Lucia's lover Edgardo enters unexpectedly during her wedding and curses her for her faithlessness. This *Mad Scene* occurs after she has murdered her new husband Arturo. Edgardo, believing Lucia to be unfaithful, rips off his ring and crushes it under his

heel. Flinging a final curse at the Ashton family, he leaves the scene. She enters, covered in blood and carrying her dagger, believing she is about to marry Edgardo, and, oblivious to the shocked presence of the guests, acts out her wedding to him (*The "mad" scene* -final section here: *Spargi d'amaro pianto*). Before collapsing, she asks that no one should mourn her passing with tears but instead place flowers on her grave.

Rossini composed *Armida* (San Carlo, Naples 1817) for Colbran; it is set during the Crusades and based upon Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, a work that also inspired Handel's *Rinaldo*. Armida is a sorceress and Damascan princess who uses her charms to weaken the crusaders. Much of the opera is set in Armida's magic garden where she makes love to the crusader general Rinaldo and where her followers tempt his colleagues away from the fight and their mission in recalling Rinaldo. *D'amore al dolce impero* takes place in Armida's magical domain. Performances of this opera were few and far between even in Italy until it was staged at the Maggio Musicale in Florence in 1952 with Callas and Fillippeschi conducted by Serafin.

Giuseppe Verdi's (1813-1901) *Nabucco*, premiered at La Scala Milan in April 1842, was his third opera and his first true success; within two years it had been played not only throughout Italy but also in Vienna, Lisbon and Barcelona. It tells the Old Testament story of the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar (Nabucco), his conquest of Jerusalem, his madness and his renouncing of the god Baal in favour of Jehovah. The most interesting character is the war-like Abigaille, who we assume is Nabucco's eldest daughter. This extract opens the second act: Abigaille has uncovered a document which discloses that she was born a slave *Anch'io dischiuso*. As she hides it away, the High Priest of Baal pledges his support to her desire to usurp Nabucco's throne.

Verdi's *Macbeth* (composed 1846-47) was his first Shakespearean setting and the first opera in which he showed equal interest in the construction of the libretto, the proposed staging and his own composing: he was insistent upon the casting of Felice Varesi in the title role and personally coached the first Lady Macbeth (Marianna Barbieri-Nini) so that the first audiences at Florence's Teatro della Pergola could indeed be convinced that they were watching someone walking in their sleep. In the extract heard in this collection: *Nel di della vittoria...Vieni t'affretta* Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband telling her of his military prowess and also of the witches' prophecy that he will be King of Scotland. Aware that she must apply

pressure for him to achieve his ambition, she sees the imminent arrival of King Duncan as the perfect time to act. It is generally considered that it was Callas' opening of the La Scala season in December 1952 as Lady Macbeth, two years after her planned debut in the role, which formed her springboard to operatic stardom. Henceforth she was often referred to as *La divina*.

Verdi's opera ***La Traviata*** (1852-3) was based on the play *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas Jnr (1849), which was in turn based on his short novel of the same name which first appeared in 1848. The novel caused something of a sensation at the time since it took as its subject Dumas' affair with the glamorous courtesan Marie Duplessis who had died of tuberculosis at the age of 23. The affair lasted 11 months until Dumas, finding himself unable to support Duplessis in the style to which she had become accustomed, left her in August 1845. He then travelled abroad with his father (author of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*) and only heard of Duplessis' final illness when it was too late for him to help.

The action begins at a party in Violetta's home in Paris. Gaston, one of Violetta's admirers, introduces Alfredo to the courtesan. The first time they had met previously Violetta had made fun of Alfredo's awkwardness. Gaston tells her however that during Violetta's recent illness, Alfredo came each day to ask after her. Once the guests have left Violetta finds it strange that anyone could fall in love with her and wonders whether this ardent young man could possibly be her 'saviour' ***Ah, fors' e lui***. She then decides the whole notion is too ridiculous and embarks upon an exhilarating paean of her life of pleasure ***Sempre libera***. As Alfredo's declaration of love is heard offstage, she repeats her determination to continue life to the full.

Alfredo's father's later intervention hastens their inevitable separation and in the last act Violetta is alone and dying of consumption. Violetta reads a letter from Germont in which he tells of Alfredo's duel with the Baron and Alfredo's subsequent flight. However, Germont states that now Alfredo knows the truth and is returning to ask Violetta's forgiveness. But he will be too late, cries Violetta: in ***Addio del passato*** she expresses regret for her former ways and prays for God's forgiveness.

In **Ponchielli's** opera ***La Gioconda*** it should be understood that La Gioconda, a ballad singer, is in love with Enzo Grimaldi, a Genoese

noble who is unwelcome in Venice. La Gioconda is however lusted after by the Venetian spy Barnaba...

The final act 'The Orfano Canal' opens with Gioconda contemplating suicide (***Suicidio!***) having arranged for the removal of Laura from Alvisé's palace. Distant voices announce the fact that corpses have been recovered from the Orfano Canal. Enzo has indeed been freed from prison and is told by Gioconda that Laura's body has been moved from the palace. Enzo, believing Gioconda to have desecrated a place of burial is about to attack her when he hears Laura coming to. The happy pair thank Gioconda for saving them both and are sent on their way by the distraught woman. For Maria Callas, *La Gioconda* was her first role outside Greece (Verona, 1947).

Amazingly, **Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila***, composed between 1868 and 1877, took several years to be accepted as a viable stage work. The role of the Philistine beauty Dalila contains three wonderful arias of which the last ***Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix*** (often translated as "Softly awakes my heart") is one of the best-known in the mezzo soprano repertoire. Oozing with passion, she urges Samson to divulge the secret of his great strength.

Alfredo Catalani's (1854-93) most successful opera was ***La Wally*** (1892), a tragedy set in the Tyrol. ***Ebben? Ne andro lontan*** is sung as Wally's father disowns her after she has rejected his chosen suitor; its melody had been previously used by the composer in a different context and achieved cult status as a result of its use in the 1981 film *Diva*. Callas' only known performance is this recording.

Madama Butterfly (composed 1901/3) was a setting by **Puccini's** now regular librettists Giacosa and Illica of the successful Belasco play that Puccini had earlier seen in London which had profoundly moved him. He felt it was his finest work to date although famously the premiere was disrupted by his tormentors. Following Butterfly's wedding to Pinkerton, an American naval lieutenant, he treats their marriage as a temporary fling and soon returns to America. Butterfly is certain that he will come back to Japan and in ***Un bel di vedremo*** she tries to convince her maid that this is so. Butterfly has had a child and has been outcast by her family.

Puccini had first considered setting Victorien Sardou's play *La Tosca* some 18 months after the play's premiere but during these negotiations was at work on *Manon Lescaut* and *La Bohème*. Upon completion of the

latter work in 1895, he renewed his interest in Sardou's 'shabby little shocker'. Puccini invariably took enormous care in composing and scoring his operas and his works often changed a great deal during their creation. An example of his attention to detail can be seen by the manner in which he made a special journey to the Castello Sant'Angelo in Rome in 1897 to hear the church bells so they could be reproduced accurately in the final act of *Tosca*. Other delays in finishing the composition meant the score was finally completed only in 1899.

Few operas are as intensely dramatic as *Tosca*: from the striking (and surprisingly modern) opening chords that depict the evil menace of Scarpia through to the reprise of '*E lucevan le stelle*' that accompanies Tosca's suicide, the listener is carried along at a furious pace. The sheer brutality of Cavaradossi's torture and of Scarpia's attempted rape of Tosca is expertly handled by Puccini.

At first Scarpia seems sympathetic to Tosca's anguish about Cavaradossi's capture, but it soon becomes clear that he will stop at nothing to force Tosca to submit to his lustful desires. The choice is simple: either she gives in to him or Cavaradossi dies. Tosca sees that she is left with no choice *Vissi d'arte* and she agrees to become his mistress. Scarpia tells Tosca that they must go through the motions of pretending to execute Cavaradossi, but that once he has possessed her then she and Cavaradossi would be free.

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