



Pilar Lorengar: A portrait in live and studio recordings from 1959-1962

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The Spanish soprano Pilar Lorengar (1928–96) had a big international career including the Met, San Francisco, and Chicago in the US but called the German Opera in Berlin her home. These recordings were all made in Berlin fairly early in her career (1959–1962). The three CDs include operatic arias; songs by Bellini, Mozart, Handel, and Verdi; and a large number of Spanish songs, some by well-known composers like Rodrigo and Granados and others either anonymous or by lesser-known composers. In all the selections, Ms Lorengar sings with the round, bright, full-bodied sound that made her an international star. She does not resort to a lot of dynamic changes but sings the entire recital with generous amounts of rich, creamy soprano sound.

The first disc contains 11 arias, mostly very familiar. 'Casta Diva' from Norma is taken at the slowest tempo I have ever heard. We can't know if the tempo is the fault of the conductor or the soprano, but the chorus singing behind her sounds as if they may fall asleep. But the tempo picks up in the cabaletta, and she is up to the coloratura demands. Liu's 'Signore, Ascolta' comes off very well, though the soprano ignores the customary pianissimo on the final note. Her singing of 'Un Bel Di' and Mimi's first aria are lovely, with the gleaming top notes Puccini requires. She includes 'Non Mi Dir' from Don Giovanni, perhaps the least effective selection here. She finds the coloratura rough going. Perhaps this tells us why she usually sang Donna Elvira instead of Donna Anna. Her account of Pamina's 'Ach, ich fühl's' is gorgeous, and she does well with Violetta's Act I scena, except for a little unidiomatic Italian pronunciation in the fast final section.

The second disc is devoted to songs by Spanish composers of the late 19th and 20th centuries as well as a group of songs by Verdi. The Spanish songs (by Rodrigo, Nin, Leoiz, Guridi, Granados, and Toldra) are unfailingly pleasant, melodic, and entertaining. The Rodrigo is played by an orchestra; the rest are accompanied by piano. Ms Lorengar is of course at home in the Spanish language and sings very well. In the Verdi songs one can hear hints of his operas.

The last disc, with guitar accompaniment, includes a few songs by Bellini, Mozart, and Handel as well as 20 Spanish songs, some by Renaissance composers and some collected by Federico Garcia Lorca. Again, all are tuneful and well sung. Some of the Lorca collection, Flamenco songs, are among the most enjoyable.

The collection comes with a booklet with the names and times of the songs, but no texts. The booklet gives a web site where the lyrics can be found, but I would much prefer having the texts with the recording.