



Rediscovering, restoring, recording and performing  
the forgotten operatic heritage of the 19th century

## OPERA RARA NEW RELEASE 20 SEPTEMBER 2019



### PUCCINI *LE WILLIS*

Complete opera in one act

Ermonela Jaho, Arsen Soghomonyan, Brian Mulligan

London Philharmonic Orchestra, Opera Rara Chorus  
Sir Mark Elder, conductor

**First time on recording**

Catalogue number	ORC59
Packaging	1CD clamshell, 78pp booklet – Note in English - Synopsis in English, French, German and Italian – Libretto in French & English
Release date	20 September 2019
Guide PPD	£11
CD UPC	792938005928
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HD digital format	24bit 48kHz
IGT track	Track #6 – Preghiera 'Angiol di Dio' (Guglielmo, Anna, Roberto, Chorus) 6mins 11
Focus Track	Track #4 – Duetto "Tu dell'infanzia mia" (Roberto, Anna) 3 mins 36

**Opera Rara's recording of *Le Willis* gives listeners the chance to hear Puccini's first opera as it has not been heard for more than 120 years. Making use of the new Ricordi edition, Sir Mark Elder conducts a star cast that brings the acclaimed soprano Ermonela Jaho back for her second recording with Opera Rara and introduces the exciting Armenian tenor Arsen Soghomonyan. This recording includes the two celebrated arias that were added to the revised two-act version of *Le Villi* and showcases the young and prodigiously talented composer in his first exploration of operatic drama.**

Anna .....	Ermonela Jaho
Roberto .....	Arsen Soghomonyan
Guglielmo .....	Brian Mulligan

Opera Rara Chorus  
London Philharmonic Orchestra  
Sir Mark Elder, *conductor*  
Studio recording from the Henry Wood Hall, London, November 2018



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## **TRACK LISTING**

CD1 (65'44)

Track No.	Title	Running time	ISRC
1	Preludio	2:34	GBQXY1900001
2	Coro d'introduzione "Evviva I fidanzati" (Chorus, Guglielmo)	5:47	GBQXY1900002
3	Duetto "Non esser, Anna mia" (Roberto, Anna)	1:47	GBQXY1900003
4	"Tu dell'infanzia mia" (Roberto, Anna)	3:36	GBQXY1900004
5	Pregghiera "Presto! Presto in viaggio!" (Chorus, Roberto, Anna)	2:01	GBQXY1900005
6	"Angiol di Dio" (Guglielmo, Anna, Roberto, Chorus)	6:11	GBQXY1900006
7	L'abbandono	5:19	GBQXY1900007
8	La tregenda	3:40	GBQXY1900008
9	Preludio e scena "No! Possibil non è che invendicata" (Guglielmo)	3:28	GBQXY1900009
10	"Anima santa della figlia mia" (Guglielmo)	2:06	GBQXY1900010
11	Scena finale "Ei giunge! Anna!" (Chorus, Roberto, Anna)	3:30	GBQXY1900011
12	"Tu dell'infanzia mia" (Anna, Roberto, Guglielmo, Chorus)	6:29	GBQXY1900012
13	Appendix Scena e Romanza di Anna "Se come voi piccina io fossi, o vaghi fior" (Anna, Roberto)	7:02	GBQXY1900013
14	Appendix Scena drammatica e Romanza di Roberto "Ei giunge!... Ecco la casa..." (Chorus, Roberto)	2:32	GBQXY1900014
15	Appendix Scena drammatica e Romanza di Roberto "Torna ai felici di" (Roberto, Chorus)	9:42	GBQXY1900015



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**IN THE PRESS...** *about the live performance at the Royal festival Hall on 21 November 2018 that immediately followed the recording sessions*

"The cast was exceptional. Ermonela Jaho is justifiably famous for her Puccini interpretations and superb vocalism. [...] Arsen Soghomonyan's Roberto was equally assured. He has a lovely covered quality in his tone, is thrillingly secured above the stave, and he colours and phrases most musically and effectively. As Guglielmo, Brian Mulligan sang with resonance and bite in a role that tests the singer at both ends of a very wide range".

Alexander Campbell, **Classical Source**

"Elder is a dab hand at this genre of Italian opera and got splendid playing and singing from the LPO and the OR chorus."

Hugh Canning, **the Sunday Times**

"The performance by the LPO was energized with nuances of dynamics and colour carefully etched in the witches' dance music and the ardent love music [...] Soghomonyan, formerly a baritone, boasts a velvety, ardent tone and sang the role with considerable sensitivity: he is surely a name to watch out for."

Alexandra Wilson, **Opera**

(About Arsen Soghomonyan) "He has a burly voice of burnished bronze and honeyed sweetness where necessary"

Jim Prichard, **Seen and Heard**

"Puccini's writing when all three characters sing together is particularly skilful, and here was brought to the full by Brian Mulligan's strong and assertive baritone as Guglielmo, Arsen Soghomonyan's dark but exceptionally versatile tenor as Roberto, and Ermonela Jaho's highly committed and emotional performance as Anna."

Sam Smith, **Music OMH**

"Opera Rara's splendid concert allowed us to hear this novelty in its original form for the first time in 134 years, and it proved a winner. [...] [Ermonela Jaho] gave her all, drawing on vocal reserves belied by her ballerina figure. Arsen Soghomonyan revealed a warm, mellifluous tenor as the faithless"

Rupert Christiansen, **The Telegraph**



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## **LE WILLIS**

Opera Rara's recording of Puccini's *Le Willis* is based on the new Ricordi critical edition, reconstructed by musicologist Martin Deasy. The original one-act version of Puccini's first opera was successfully premièred at Milan's Teatro Dal Verme but was never published and has not been heard since 1884. This marks Opera Rara's first venture into the musical world of Puccini and its second verismo project.

Based on the short story *Les Willis* by French novelist Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr – based in turn on the legend of the Vila who appear in the ballet *Giselle* – *Le Willis* was composed for a competition in 1883. While Puccini's work did not even earn an honourable mention, his supporters helped fund its first production the following year in Milan. This, in turn, won the 24-year-old composer – already hailed as Verdi's successor – a contract with Italy's leading publisher, Ricordi. At Ricordi's request, Puccini set about revising the work, creating a two-act version with additional arias for the soprano and tenor; and this is the form in which the work has been performed ever since.

Returning for her second collaboration with Opera Rara, Ermonela Jaho – the star of the company's revival of Leoncavallo's *Zazà* in 2015 – sings the role of Anna. Armenian tenor Arsen Sghomonyan will make his UK debut as her lover Roberto and Brian Mulligan sings the role of her father Guglielmo. Opera Rara's Artistic Director Sir Mark Elder conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra, marking the Orchestra's sixteenth collaboration with the company following Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmira* and Bellini's *Il pirata*.

## **OPERA RARA**

Opera Rara's mission is to rediscover, restore, record and perform the lost operatic heritage of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

For over 40 years, Opera Rara has been bringing neglected operatic masterpieces back to life through our acclaimed concerts and award-winning recordings, building an ever-growing musical archive, available to audiences all over the world. In recent years, we have achieved unprecedented artistic success under the guidance of Sir Mark Elder, who has been our Artistic Director from 2012 until 2019. This has been publicly recognised through major awards, notably Best Opera Recording at the International Opera Awards and the International Classical Music Award (Best Opera) for Rossini's *Semiramide* (2019), Donizetti's *Les Martyrs* (2016) and Offenbach's *Fantasio* (2015).

The Opera Rara recording catalogue comprises over 100 titles including 58 complete opera recordings. Our work has led to a fundamental reevaluation of the reputation and output of Donizetti, Pacini, Mercadante and Offenbach, changing the way in which these composers are perceived internationally. Following our world premiere concerts in July 2018, Donizetti's *L'Ange de Nisida* will receive its first professional staging in Bergamo in November 2019 and Offenbach's *Fantasio* has received several stagings throughout Europe since our recording in 2015, including at this summer's Garsington Festival.

Opera Rara has fostered the careers of some of modern opera's greatest names. Our casts represent both established artists and the best young singers. Renée Fleming sang the title role in Donizetti's *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, one of her first recordings, for Opera Rara. In 2017, Opera Rara released *Écho* and *Espoir*, two recital recordings by Joyce El-Khoury and Michael Spyres, with the Hallé, conducted by Carlo Rizzi, selections of which were performed in concert at London's Cadogan Hall.



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**SIR MARK ELDER CH. CBE**  
CONDUCTOR

Sir Mark Elder is Music Director of the Hallé, a Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Artistic Director of Opera Rara. He was Music Director of the English National Opera from 1979 to 1993 and has been Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

During his tenure as Artistic Director, Sir Mark Elder has conducted twelve operas for Opera Rara. His recordings of *Fantasio* by Offenbach, *Les Martyrs* by Donizetti and *Semiramide* by Rossini each won the 2015, 2016 and 2019 International Opera Awards for best CD recording. With Opera Rara, he recently conducted the world premiere of Donizetti's *L'Ange de Nisida* at the Royal Opera House, which was recorded live and was nominated at the 2019 International Opera Awards for Best Rediscovered Work.

Sir Mark Elder has appeared annually at the BBC Proms in London for many years, including, in 1987 and 2006 the internationally televised Last Night of the Proms. He has worked in many of the most prominent international opera houses including the Covent Garden, The Met, Chicago, San Francisco, Paris, Munich, Amsterdam, Zürich and the Bayreuth Festival. In November 2011, he co-presented BBC TV's four-part series *Symphony*, and in 2012 he acted as chair of the judging panel on BBC2's TV series *Maestro at the Opera*. Sir Mark presented a series of TV programmes on BBC4 during the 2015 Proms in which he introduced eight symphonies ranging from Beethoven to MacMillan.

Sir Mark Elder was appointed a Companion of Honour in the 2017 Queen's Birthday Honours, was knighted in 2008, and awarded the CBE in 1989. He won an Olivier Award in 1991 for his outstanding work at ENO and in May 2006 he was named Conductor of the Year by the Royal Philharmonic Society. In 2011, he was awarded Honorary Membership of the Royal Philharmonic Society.



**ERMONELA JAHO**  
SOPRANO

Over the last year, standing ovations have followed Ermonela Jaho from Sydney to London and everywhere in between, with Australia's *Daily Telegraph* describing her as 'an unstoppable phenomenon', *The Independent* as 'the best Madame Butterfly London has seen in years', and Germany's *Die Welt* describing her in Munich as 'the undisputed star of the evening'. Her performances were recognised with the presentation of the International Opera Readers' Award in 2016, and earlier this year she was nominated in the Best Female Singer category. Her recording of Leoncavallo's *Zazà* with Opera Rara was nominated for a 2017 International Opera Award.

Now resident in New York, Ermonela Jaho was born in Albania. At 19 she won a scholarship to study with Katia Ricciarelli in Mantua, and a year later moved to Rome to continue her studies at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Over the next years she won singing competitions in Milan, Ancona and Rovereto, and began her professional career singing with roles at the Teatro Comunale di Bologna (Mimi in *La bohème*); the Teatro La Fenice in Venice (Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*); the Teatro Verdi in Trieste (Micaela in *Carmen*); and Wexford Festival Opera (Irène in Gounod's *Sapho*).



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## **ARSEN SOGHOMONYAN**

TENOR

Arsen Soghomonyan was born in Yerevan. He studied at the Barkhudaryan Music School and at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan. He initially trained as a baritone and sang many leading baritone roles with the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera. He went on to become principal baritone with the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theatre in Moscow, where his roles included Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*), Giorgio Germont (*La traviata*), and Napoleon (*War and Peace*). He also sang as a guest artist at the Bolshoi Theatre. In 2017 he made his tenor debut as Mario Cavaradossi (*Tosca*) with the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Opera Theatre. Roles in his tenor repertory include Riccardo (*Un ballo in maschera*), Don Alvaro (*La forza del destino*), Radames (*Aida*), Gherman (*The Queen of Spades*), Canio (*Pagliacci*) and Otello. This season, he will sing Don Jose (*Carmen*) at the Royal Opera House.

Soghomonyan was awarded the State Prize of Armenia by the President of the Republic of Armenia in 2006; other awards include First Prize at the Pavel Lisitsian International Competition (where he also received the Special Prize from the Lisitsian Family), and prizes at the Romansiada International Competition in Moscow, the Stanislaw Moniuszko International Competition in Warsaw and the UNISA International Singing Competition in South Africa.



## **BRIAN MULLIGAN**

BARITONE

Baritone Brian Mulligan is equally renowned as an interpreter of classic works by Verdi, Wagner and Strauss, as well as the most challenging 20th- and 21st-century operas.

His 2018/19 operatic season includes a role debut as Mandryka in *Arabella* in a return to San Francisco Opera conducted by Marc Albrecht. He makes a double debut with Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam, first as *Sharpless* in *Madama Butterfly* and then as Golaud in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. A further season highlight is the release on Bridge Records of his second solo CD, 'Old Fashioned', which features beloved songs of the early 20th century made popular by great American baritones of the past.

On the symphonic front, Brian Mulligan has appeared with the San Francisco Symphony in Mahler's *Das klagende Lied* under Michael Tilson Thomas, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* with Robert Spano, and the world premiere of James Primosch's *Songs for Adam* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis.