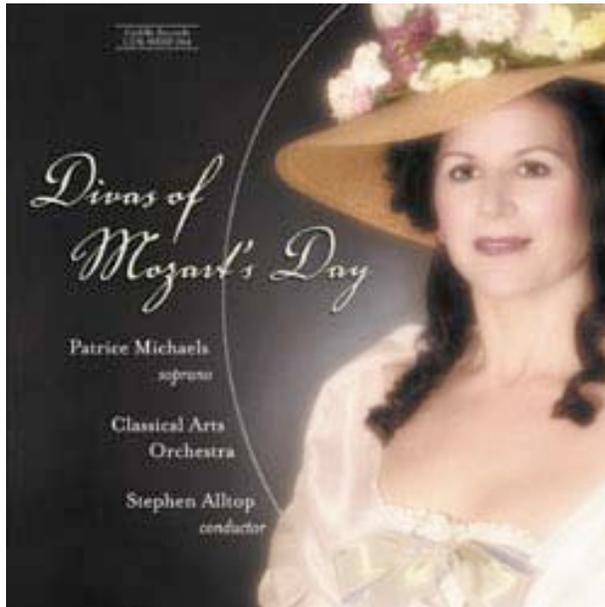


## Classical Hall of Fame

### DIVAS OF MOZART'S DAY

Patrice Michaels (sop); Stephen Alltop (fp),  
cond; Peter van de Graff (bar); Classical  
Arts O (period instruments)

CEDILLE 90000 064 (76:15)



During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Vienna was a seat of imperial and — as the musicologist and inveterate traveler Dr. Charles Burney noted — musical power, a musical magnet, if you will, that attracted many of Europe's brightest and best and some whose star never rose far above the musical horizon. In this environment — which roughly corresponded to modern day New York City or London — composers, instrumentalists, and singers were plentiful and all were certain that their abilities would get them noticed and result in what wannabes now call The Big Break. Unfortunately, for many

their dreams never came true, but for a select few, their stars were ascendant and remained in the musical firmament of the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for a number of years.

The music on this release — which includes eight world premieres — was composed for five of Vienna's most accomplished divas who were active during the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Catarina Cavalieri (1755–1801), Nancy Storace (1765–1817), Adriana Ferrarese del Bene (c. 1759–after 1803), Luisa Laschi Mombelli (1763–c. 1789), and Louise Villeneuve (fl. 1786–1799). All participated in premieres of Mozart operas: Cavalieri in *Abduction from the Seraglio*, Storace and Mombelli in *Marriage of Figaro*, and Ferrarese and Villeneuve in *Così fan tutte*. From the evidence offered here, each of these singers was deserving of the praise lavished upon them for their performances. Though of varying quality, this is music of exceptional beauty, crafted to allow the singers to display their wares, whether lyrical or virtuosic.

Patrice Michaels is convincing in her insight and stunning in her virtuosity. Just listen to the ease with which she negotiates the intervals and runs in Mozart's *Tra l'oscure ombre funeste* or Righini's relatively brief but impressive *Per pietà, deh, ricercate*. The lyrical qualities of Michaels's significant instrument enter the spotlight in Martin y Soler's *Dolce mi parve un di* and Salieri's *Solo e mesta fra tormenti*. Michaels

possesses a rich and full voice that has made her a consistent choice of performing organizations like Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and other leading orchestral and chamber ensembles here and abroad. In addition, she has a strong ability to get behind the notes and inside the libretto emotionally, enhancing each presentation with appropriate gravitas and intensity. In sum, despite the technical and expressive difficulties found in this music, every note is presented without affectation or strain, making Michaels's interpretations nothing less than models of their kind. The Classical Arts Orchestra is nicely managed by Stephen Alltop and provides poised, balanced, sympathetic, and sturdy accompaniments from beginning to end.

Without doubt, this is one of the most interesting and innovative discs that I have ever encountered. It is based on a concept by Dr. Dorothea Link, professor of music history at the University of Georgia in Athens. Dr. Link is a well-respected musicologist with a number of outstanding accomplishments in her portfolio. She *must* be numbered among those to whom we mete out kudos with regard to this release, as should James Ginsburg of Cedille for having the interest and foresight to tackle and market this project.

I cannot heap enough praise on this release with regard to either the repertoire or the performances. It is simply stunning on all counts and certainly deserving of a place in the collections of both Mozartians and opera aficionados, not to mention *Fanfare's* Classical Hall of Fame.

— Michael Carter