



June 10, 2008 Tuesday

Classical:

PUCCINI "La Bohème"

Norah Amsellem, Marcus Haddock, Georgia Jarman, Fabio Capitanucci, Christopher Schaldenbrand, Kevin Glavin. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Robert Spano conducting (Telarc, two discs, 3 stars)

In the Atlanta disc... , the big picture is excellent, the details less so. The fine Telarc engineering and the Atlanta Symphony Chorus lend a cogent musicality and atmosphere that's rarely heard in the Act III opening. The cast of lesser-known singers include a particularly vivid Musetta in Georgia Jarman. But as Rodolfo and Mimi, both Marcus Haddock and especially Norah Amsellem sing to the balcony in ways that blight the intimate tenderness of their roles. Though Amsellem handles her death scene masterfully, her stentorian singing and slight wobble suggest that, elsewhere in the opera, she's auditioning for Salome.

-David Patrick Stearns

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PUCCINI *La bohème* * Robert Spano, cond; Norah Amsellem (Mimi); Marcus Haddock (Rodolfo); Georgia Jarman (Musetta); Fabio Capitanucci (Marcello); Denis Sedov (Colline); Christopher Schaldenbrand (Schaunard); Kevin Glavin (Benoit/Alcindoro); Atlanta SO & Chorus*
TELARC 2CD-80697 (2 CDs: 110:32) TT Live: Atlanta 9/2007

Two things in particular make this recording noteworthy: the ensemble spirit, and the dramatic veracity. For this, he and Spano probably should share the honors. What creates the veracity is detail, and this recording is filled with it. Try, for example, the start of act III. I love the slightly annoyed tone of the Customs Official's "Vengo!", the earthy "Hopplà!" of the milkmaids and carters, the apparent tipsiness of the revelers inside the tavern, and, upon Mimi's entrance, her breathlessness. No other recording paints as complete a picture as this. Another moment: in act IV, Marcello's response "Ah, miseria!" ("Ah, poverty") when asked by Musetta if there is any coffee or wine in the garret is heartbreaking...

...You'll probably wait a long time before you hear a chorus and orchestra better prepared for *La bohème* than Atlanta's. It is good to know that the late Robert Shaw's legacy lives on. Spano is a non-interventionist conductor, but that's not to say that the conducting here is dull or routine. As I hope is clear from what I already have written, his personality comes through in the conscientiousness and subtlety of this recording, not through a Karajan-like superimposition of ego on the score.

-Raymond Tuttle