



Mr. Wonderful

Juan Diego Flórez delivers a remarkable program of arias and duets by Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti — with a little help from an all-star cast of his friends.

Juan Diego Flórez

□ “BEL CANTO SPECTACULAR” *Arias and duets by Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini. With Ciofi, Netrebko, Barcellona; Domingo, Kwiecien; Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana, Oren. Decca 478 0135 and 478 0314 (deluxe version)*

Juan Diego Flórez’s latest release is, as its title implies, spectacular in many ways. Unfazed by extreme passagework, the tenor delivers each selection with security and finesse. His tone is bright and ringing and, barring an occasional flash of nasality, makes up with its beauty and consistency for what it lacks in sheer visceral power. Excellent support is provided by conductor Daniel Oren and the Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana.

The opening track from *La Figlia del Reggimento* — recorded here in Italian instead of the original French offered on a previous Flórez aria album — is superb. This famous high-C-fest has become, as Anna Russell might say, Flórez’s “signature tune” since he broke the seventy-four-year encore ban at Teatro alla Scala in 2007. It is thrilling to hear it performed again with such apparent ease. Donizetti’s “Ange si pur,” from *La Favorite*, is appropriately warm and sensitive, although the aggressive octave leap to high D in the final cadenza does not suit the established mood of the aria. “Una furtiva lagrima” is expressively sung as well, with a firm legato line, although this, too, Flórez has recorded previously. Of more interest are his fine renditions of two arias from Donizetti’s *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Linda di Chamounix*, operas he has yet to perform onstage.

In a departure from past Flórez aria recitals, this disc also features several of the

tenor’s colleagues performing with him in duets. Anna Netrebko joins him in a lengthy selection from the last act of *I Puritani*, and the performance is strong overall. Although Netrebko’s dark timbre makes for an odd pairing with Flórez’s lighter, brighter sound — and there are a few moments when the soprano’s vibrato widens unpleasantly — hers is the more convincing portrayal. Indeed, if one can find fault with Flórez, it is that his singing can sometimes lack vitality when high notes are absent.

Other collaborators include baritone Mariusz Kwiecien, whose effervescent duet with Flórez from *L’Elisir d’Amore* has all the palpable excitement of a live performance, and soprano Patrizia Ciofi, whose expressive singing in a selection from *Linda di Chamounix* is undermined by a breathy, unfocused tone. A duet from *Il Viaggio a Reims* features mezzo-soprano Daniela Barcellona, whose sizable voice is impressive in coloratura but in no way equals Flórez’s in beauty. Some of her higher notes are squawky but acceptable, while the final high C is decidedly strained. The “bonus” track, featuring Plácido Domingo in a duet from Rossini’s *Otello*, closes the disc with a bang. Though he lacks the coloratura facility of the much younger Flórez, Domingo’s singing continues to impress with its robust virility and seemingly eternal freshness.

This release comes in two editions — a CD-only affair and a “deluxe” version with a bonus DVD. The DVD contains a nine-minute interview with the personable Flórez, the complete “Ah! mes amis” from Decca’s DVD of *La Fille du Régiment*, and the recitative portion only of “Povero Ernesto” from *Don Pasquale*. Also included are a small selection of photos, two trailers and a discography. DEREK GRETEN-HARRISON

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