



Ian France - Opera Favourites from the Romantic Era

With suggestions of what versions to search out

Bellini's "Norma"

"Mira, o Norma"

Norma & Adalgisa, rivals in love, come to an understanding in this poignant duet



CD: Montserrat Caballe & Fiorenza Cossotto, cond. Cillario/LPO/RCA

Caballe and Cossotto sing with great control and mostly softly (unlike Callas)

YouTube: [Anna Netrebko & Elina Garanca](#)

Adalgisa (Garanca) pleads for Norma's children to stay with her. In this concert version we don't have to worry about Norma's boys acting sensitively—our focus is on the heavenly music. As was customary in Italian operas at the time there is a fast, joyous **cabaletta** to round off the scene with Norma and Adalgisa promising to be lifelong "comrades".

Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor"

"Sulla tomba"

*Edgar reflects on the tombs of his ancestors, Lucia joins him (turning his solo into a duet) and then the "**big** tune" is sung 3 times (listen out for a celebratory "wiggle" in the orchestra as they finish singing!)*



CD : Pavarotti & Sutherland cond. Bonygne/ROH/Decca

Pavarotti and Sutherland were at their best in the Bel Canto repertoire.

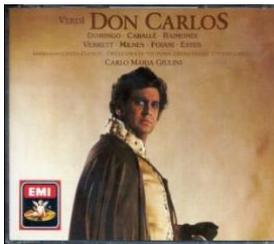
YouTube: [Beczala & Netrebko](#)

In this extended scene Edgardo (Beczala) sings of his impending journey to France in the Stuart cause. Lucia (Netrebko) begs him to keep their love secret from her brother Enrico. Edgardo has sworn by his father's grave to gain vengeance, but the music softens, the lovers kiss (cue applause!) Lucia sings "Verrano a te sull'aure" which Edgardo takes up and after her maid warns them to be on their way, both sing the "big tune" in unison. Italian opera love duet-pure indulgence (and how smart they look, in grey)

Verdi's "Don Carlos"

"O don fatale"

Princess Eboli, least important of the central characters in Verdi's opera of church and state, nevertheless gets the most memorable aria. The "don" she sings of is not the one of the opera's title, but the fatal gift of her own beauty (!). A dramatic opening gives way to a lyrical section in the mezzo's lower range and finally a call to arms as she determines to save Don Carlos



CD: Shirley Verrett, cond. Giulini/ROH/EMI

Terrific finish, guaranteed to bring the house down..there's no better exponent than Shirley Verrett.

YouTube: [Agnes Baltsa](#) or [Elina Garanca](#)

Agnes Baltsa's Princess Eboli looks and sounds more like a Queen (Elizabeth I). A steady tempo allows for great expression in the cantabile section bidding farewell to the actual Queen who has just told her-banishment or the veil? Her final call to action certainly stirs the 1986 Salzburg audience.

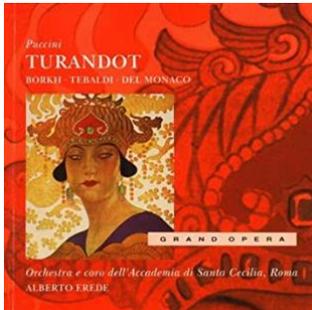
Elina Garanca-an open air concert from 2016. Wish I'd been there, my applause would've drowned the somewhat subdued audience reaction-what a performance and what additional excitement from the brass section!

Puccini's "Turandot"

"in questa reggia"

Princess Turandot makes a long anticipated entrance mid-way through Act 2. Her chilling recollection of the crimes of the male sex (a Puccinian equivalent to "I hate men" in Cole Porter's

“Kiss me Kate”) builds in intensity and conductor Erede’s orchestra punctuates the close of this section more intensely than on most recordings. Then a great lyrical flowering in the orchestra which Turandot takes up (one of the great Puccini melodies and ideal for whistling). Finally Turandot and Calaf engage in a little *“any note you can sing I can sing higher”* at which point the chorus sing the winning (whistling) tune.



CD: Inge Borkh, Del Monaco, cond. Erede/Academy of St. Cecilia Rome/Decca

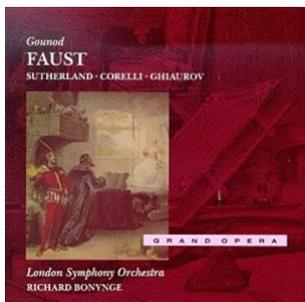
Grand Opera Puccini style and it works best in Verona or at the Puccini festival at Torre del Lago.

YouTube: [Eva Marton, New York](#)

Eva Marton is one of those larger-than-life operatic sopranos with a huge voice, wide vibrato and the musical and dramatic know-how to make the best of demanding roles like Turandot. Domingo is rather dwarfed by comparison, but then he never had the heroic spinto ring of a Del Monaco or a Franco Corelli. Puccini really moved into new territory with this his final, unfinished opera.

Gounod’s “Faust”

“Il se fait tard! adieu!”..”Laissez-moi”



CD: Joan Sutherland, Franco Corelli, cond. Bonynge/LSO/Decca

Joan Sutherland & Franco Corelli may not seem ideal casting for Marguerite and Faust but they sound ardent enough to my ears (experts say his French is awful). As Marguerite picks the petals from a daisy (“he loves me, he loves me not”) I hope you’ll join me with a resounding “we love Franco” (he can become wearisome on the ear but you can’t accuse him of being less than totally committed).

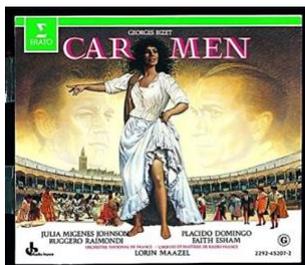
YouTube: [Filanoti, Vailgardon](#)

Faust, making the most of his re-captured youth, is a suitably ardent wooer; Marguerite seems a little too innocent and pious. They come together beautifully in “O nuit d’amour” which is where I intended the extract to stop. The continuation is rather bitty but we do get to see Mephistopheles and, in this particular production, Faust removes his jacket waistcoat and shirt before the orchestra mercifully intervenes to bring proceedings to a surprisingly subdued end. (for an ecstatic ending see the final trio of “Faust”).

Bizet's "Carmen"

"Melons! Coupons!"(card song)

*In the **card song** the joyous opera comique style of her two friends, Mercedes and Frasquita, dealing out the cards-one finds young love, the other marries a rich old man, gaining a considerable inheritance when he dies-plays out against the intense verismo of Carmen's cards, predicting death: first her then him.*



CD: Julia Migenes, Susan Daniel, Lilian Watson, cond.Maazel/Orchestre National de France/Warner Classics

YouTube: get the dvd of the film alternatively try [La Scala 2009](#)

Carmen filmed as a movie, Migenes/Domingo

Julia Migenes gives a memorable performance as Carmen in this 1982 film.

If you can find the complete film on youtube with Migenes and Domingo, the card song runs from about 1;37:32 to 1:45:25.

Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin"

The Letter scene

Impressionable teenager Tatyana, sees something in Eugene Onegin (which eludes us), and she stays up all night writing and re-writing a letter to disclose her feelings towards him. She is head over heels in love. Alas, Eugene gives her the coolly detached brush off the next day. Meanwhile Tchaikovsky has won us over to Tatyana with melodies to accompany the first stirrings of passion and her final resolution with beautifully crafted orchestral sections in between.



CD: Teresa Kubiak, cond.Solti/ROH/Decca

YouTube: [Olga Tolkmitt](#)

Unfortunately this extract omits the start of this scene, where Tatyana bursts out with her love for Onegin to an excited theme Tchaikovsky uses later in the opera when Onegin sees her and realises his love for her only for Tatyana to (very politely) reject him-ah, how the tables have turned!

Nevertheless Olga Tolkmitt looks young enough and sings more than well enough to be recommended. Very suitable for anyone who ever had a teenage infatuation and some of Tchaikovsky's most moving music.

Wagner's "Die Walkure" (The Valkyrie) Wotan's Farewell



Start just before Wotan's Farewell with Brunnhilde's "Dies eine must du rehren" (This one thing you must allow) as she pleads to have the rock on which she must sleep, surrounded by fire so that whoever comes through the flames to kiss her awake will be a HERO. Wagner the ultimate romantic musician sweeps us away with overwhelming sounds and climactic power. Wotan takes hold of his beloved Brunnhilde in one last embrace as the leitmotif of Siegfried as promised hero sounds- after a second tumultuous crescendo all is lyrical warmth as Wotan reflects. Finally his descending spear motif (trombones) elicits the Magic Fire Music.

CD: Birgit Nilsson, Hans Hotter, cond.Solti/VPO/Decca

YouTube: McIntyre & Jones, Bayreuth 1976 or [Boulez & Bayreuth 1980](#)

Donald McIntyre does his troubled Victorian parent as Wotan and Gwyneth Jones looks much more like his sister than his Valkyrie daughter-but it works and this was live at the Centenary Ring in 1976, complete with Hydro-electric substation for the Rhinemaidens and Alberich plus what looks like the interior of Frankenstein's castle in this final scene from the Valkyrie. English subtitles are available in Settings.

Having watched and listened again I am tearfully overwhelmed once more-there is something about Wagner's music which, for all the philosophizing about the meaning of the ring, comes down to an emotional experience like no other.

R.Strauss "Der Rosenkavalier"

"Marie Theres-" Trio

Richard Strauss achieves perfection as his 3 sopranos inter-weave and blend in this richest of operatic ensembles- characters set aside former relationships to enter a new ones, the Marschallin most poignantly. Bitter sweet moving on never tugged at the heartstrings so gloriously.

CD: Schech, Seefried, Streich, cond.Bohm/Staatskapelle Dresden/DG



The soloists on my chosen recording all begin with the letter S. S for sublime (S for Sachertorte).

YouTube: [Kiri te Kanawa, Anne Howells, Barbera Bonney, ROH](#)

Kiri te Kanawa was never better than playing the Countess for Mozart and for Strauss. Here she looks the part and floats those high Strauss lines with graceful ease as the Marschallin, ably supported by Anne Howells (Octavian) and the lovely Barbera Bonney as Sophie.

I am sorry that most of these excerpts have lacked words/subtitles, but there again it could be an advantage to be English, not have to follow every blessed word and just take in the glorious music which, if it's a love duet, say, is likely to contain familiar sentiments.

Korngold's "Die Tote Stadt" "Gluck, das mir verlieb" / Marietta's Lied

Paul, lives in Bruges, obsessed by the image of his late wife, Marie. He comes across a dancer, Marietta, who looks not unlike Marie. He invites her to his house and offers her a shawl to wear from Marie's wardrobe (touches of Hitchcock's Vertigo?). He gives her a lute to hold, she suggests an old song and begins singing "Marietta's Lied" (it is deliberately nostalgic). Paul soon takes the lead and he has the climactic phrase-superbly rendered by Rene Kollo on the cd. There's an instrumental interlude during which some dialogue is heard. Then, a final duet verse in harmony with a celesta-led coda echoing the presentation of the rose from Der Rosenkavalier.

Perhaps it is all rather rich (not to say gooey) for some tastes. I think it's a marvellous wallow-but you must have it in this duet version-the original.

Wonderful music, characters and plots to enjoy but, as mother once observed "I don't think this opera is doing you any good." (She felt I was living life as though in an opera-ha!) I.F.



CD: Carol Neblett, Rene Kollo, cond. Leinsdorf/MRO/RCA

YouTube: [Angela Benola, Torsten Karl, Strasbourg '01](#)

Nicely sung by the 2 soloists. Very much an exercise in nostalgia which the tenor, Paul, experiences throughout the opera. A fitting final number of farewell.

You may have come across this as a soprano solo, or even as a piece for violin (Nicola Benedetti)
Well, you are in for a rare treat when you hear the original!!!