

Opera

April 2003

Patrice Michaels — *Divas of Mozart's Day*
Arias by Mozart, Righini, Salieri, Soler,
Storace and Cimarosa. Classical Arts
Orchestra, c. Stephen Alltop. Cedille
Records CDR 90000 064 (one CD)

This disc celebrates five famous 18th-century divas: Catarina Cavalieri, for whom Mozart wrote the role of Constanze in *Die Entführung*; Nancy Storace, the half-English soprano who was the first Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*; Adriana Ferrarese del Bene, the first Fiordiligi; Luisa Laschi Mombelli, the first Countess in *Figaro*; and Louise Villeneuve, the first Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*. The American soprano Patrice Michaels sings arias from the roles they portrayed in Vienna, always including an appropriate Mozart item and arias by other composers who wrote for them.

It was Catarina Cavalieri who survived longest in Vienna, from 1778 to 1793. A Viennese Austrian who adopted an Italian name for the stage, she was in her late 20s when she created the role of Constanze. She was apparently a poor actress, but had a voice of astounding flexibility. 'I have sacrificed Constanze's aria a little to the flexible throat of Mlle Cavalieri,' Mozart wrote to his father. Vincenzo Righini, a composer and voice teacher in Vienna in the 1790s, also wrote for her, and is represented here by a gentle and exquisite aria with clarinet obbligato. Michaels copes splendidly with the large-scale coloratura piece written for Cavalieri by Mozart's rival Antonio Salieri.

The other four divas each spent no more than two or three years in Vienna. Nancy Storace's brother Stephen composed for her, as did Salieri and Martin y Soler, a Spanish composer who wrote three operas for Vienna. Among the most attractive arias on this disc are those composed by Salieri for Ferrarese del Bene, by Martin y Soler for Mombelli, and by Cimarosa for Villeneuve. Most have never been previously recorded, and Michaels's attractive voice and secure technique does them full justice. This unusual and original disc will delight anyone with an interest in 18th-century opera in Vienna that extends beyond Mozart.

— Charles Osborne

