

Season 2014/15
Season 2015/16

Leonardo Vinci

CATONE IN UTICA



parnasus
arts
productions

DECCA

LEONARDO VINCI

CATONE IN UTICA

MAX EMANUEL CENCIO | FRANCO FAGIOLI
JUAN SANCHO | VALER SABADUS
VINCE VI | MARTIN MITTERRUTZNER

WORLD PREMIERE
RECORDING
RICCARDO MINASI
IL POMO D'ORO

DECCA

Leonardo Vinci

CATONE IN UTICA



“Vinci is the Lully of Italy: true, simple, natural, expressive”- for generations Leonardo Vinci was just another obscure Baroque composer, but in 2012, Parnassus Arts’ amazingly successful performances of his *Artaserse* lifted the veil from this forgotten genius of Italian opera, and from the mysterious all-male world of the 18th-century Roman stage.

Il *Catone in Utica* offers another gourmet vocal menu, and a powerful plot exploring eternal themes of love, duty and honour. This new production, in which Parnassus will for the second time collaborate with Il Pomo d’oro under the baton of Riccardo Minasi, will have an

all-star cast, headed by stratospheric countertenors Franco Fagioli, Max Emanuel Cencic, Valer Sabadus and Vince Yi alongside tenors Juan Sancho in the title-role and Martin Mitterrutzner. This unique production will go on tour in 2015 and will be released on CD by Decca.

Born around 1690 in the small Calabrian city of Strongoli, Vinci studied at the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo in Naples, later the scene of his first successes, a string of comic operas in Neapolitan dialect that he wrote between 1719 and 1724. He then became exclusively a composer of serious opera until his untimely death in 1730, itself the stuff of opera – it was very sudden, and was rumoured to have been the result of deliberate poisoning, perhaps over a secret love-affair.

Il Catone in Utica premiered in Rome at the Teatro delle Dame on January 19, 1728. This was also the first setting of Metastasio’s remarkably fine libretto based on an episode of Roman history, and specifically chosen to please audiences in that city: Cato was a great hero from Classical history, the last upholder of republican values in the battle against imperialism. His sources were Plutarch, an earlier libretto *Cateone uticenze* by the Venetian Matteo Noris, and Joseph Addison’s popular and influential tragedy *Cato* (1713, translated into Italian in 1725, and later said to have been a literary inspiration for the American Revolution).

It should never be said that the conventions of *opera seria* were immutable. Though both text and score are full of the usual recitative conversations between the protagonists and long virtuoso arias describing their states of mind and emotions, there are remarkable departures from the norm, especially in the last act. Here the two characters upon whom the emotional weight of the action falls, namely Cato and his daughter Emilia, express themselves only in recitative, often accompanied, to remarkable dramatic effect.

An important scene of this act is set in an underground aqueduct, which caused great controversy - one commentator remarked "Cruel Metastasio, you have reduced all the heroes of the Tiber into a drainpipe." Cato's onstage death is also a rarity, and leads to an ending of great originality - no *lieto fine*, just a brief exclamation from the astounded Cesare, and the curtain falls. Such factors so dismayed the audience that Metastasio was obliged to rewrite the opera's closing scenes, and no other setting of his original version has survived.

By papal decree *Il Catone in Utica* had an all-male cast, on this occasion headed by the famous castrato Carestini as Cesare, praised as a fine actor as well as for a voice with a range of over two octaves. At a time when the castrati ruled the Italian opera stage it was unusual to find the title-role given to a tenor, but such is the case here, Catone being created by Giovanni Battista Pinacci, who later sang several roles for Handel. Emilia was sung by the castrato Giacinto Fontana, a specialist in roles *en travesti*, who was known as "il Farfallino" ("the little butterfly") because of his graceful onstage appearance: nonetheless he was clearly able to portray parts of great dramatic force, having previously taken the lead in Vinci's *Didone abbandonata* (1726).



Max Emanuel Cencic



Franco Fagioli



Ray Chenez

CATONE IN UTICA

Synopsis

Catone, a Roman senator, his daughter Marzia, and his ally Arbace, King of the Numidians, bemoan the fate of Rome under the yoke of Cesare. Catone wishes Marzia to marry Arbace, but the latter knows that Marzia secretly loves Cesare. Cesare and his ally Fulvio meet Catone at the gates of the city and offer him peace and friendship, but Emilia, widow of Pompeo, bids Catone to avenge her husband's death. She also enlists the help of Fulvio, who loves her, against Cesare.

Cesare next reassures Marzia of his feelings of esteem and friendship towards her father. Catone returns and wishes to take his daughter to marry Arbace, who, however, asks to delay the wedding – Catone departs in dismay. Emilia enters, and after much discussion, blames Cesare for the uncertainty. Marzia is left to contemplate her feelings.

Because of his wavering over the marriage to Marzia, Catone doubts Arbace's fidelity to him also. Fulvio arrives, bringing a proposal from the Senate and people of Rome for reconciliation with Cesare. Catone bids him return to his master, whom he spurns utterly. Marzia and Arbace quarrel, and Cesare is amazed at Catone's pride. Fulvio now enters with the news that Catone, influenced by the citizens of Utica, has changed his mind, though his assent was bitter. Emilia and he dissemble with one another – he falsely promises to kill Cesare.

Marzia hopes against hope that her father and her lover can be reconciled, but when they actually meet, Catone is resolute

and demands that Cesare renounce his dictatorial power. Cesare refuses: this means war. Catone, concerned for Marzia's safety, bids her leave the city by a secret passage to the sea. Arbace enters. Knowing that soon he and Catone must go into battle, as a sign of fidelity he offers his hand to Marzia again, but she rejects him angrily, and admits that Cesare is her true love. Catone calls down curses upon her. Marzia turns on Arbace and Emilia, asking if they are now satisfied to see her wretched. Emilia can barely believe what has happened, and Arbace is left in despair.

While preparing to leave Utica, Cesare is informed by Fulvio that armed followers of Emilia are lying in wait to kill him, but that one faithful to Catone will lead him to safety towards the sea by a secret way. Marzia is amazed to find Cesare in the city – her feelings towards him are confused. Cesare is now approached by Arbace, whom he does not know – on recognising him, their feelings of rivalry are overcome by concern for Marzia's safety.

In the underground passage, Marzia seeks to escape, but finds the way shut: Emilia has had this done in order to trap Cesare and murder him. Brought this way by a deceitful follower of Catone, Cesare confronts Emilia, but suddenly Marzia reveals herself. Catone enters with his sword drawn, and seeing Cesare and Marzia, thinks they wish to flee together; he threatens them. Fulvio arrives with more soldiers and announces that Utica is about to fall to Cesare's forces.

In the city Fulvio encounters Arbace and tells him that Cesare only wants his friendship, but Arbace retorts that nothing is left for him but to die by the sword. Emilia arrives and tells them that Catone has stabbed himself. He now enters with Marzia, who, goaded by his spurning of her, asks her father's pardon, promising to obey his desire that she should marry Arbace and reject Cesare. With a final embrace he bids her farewell. At the last moment Cesare enters but Catone dies cursing him, and Cesare's triumph is confounded.



Vince Yi



Max Emanuel Cencic, Vince Yi, Ray Chenez

CATONE IN UTICA

Cast



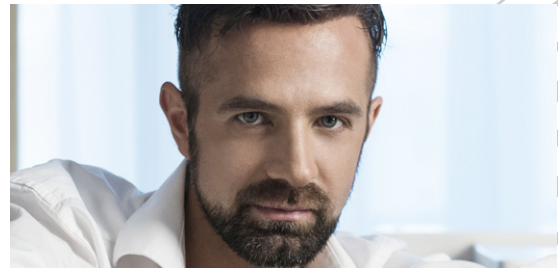
Franco Fagioli (*Cesare*)



Juan Sancho (*Catone*)



Ray Chenez (*Marzia*)



Max Emanuel Cencic (*Arbace*)



Vince Yi (*Emilia*)



Martin Mitterrutzner (*Fulvio*)



Valer Sabadus (*Marzia, on CD only*)



Riccardo Minasi (*Conductor*)

Dates

30.5.2015: Hessisches Staatstheater, Wiesbaden (DE)

01.6.2015: Bergen (NO)

16.6.2015: Opéra royal, Versailles (FR)

19.6.2015: Opéra royal, Versailles (FR)

21.6.2015: Opéra royal, Versailles (FR)

06.09.2015: Ateneul, Bucharest (RO)

24.9.2015: Theater an der Wien, Vienna (AT)

CD-release: May 2014

The CD *Catone in Utica* has won the following awards:



Classica's Choc



Opera's Disc of the Month

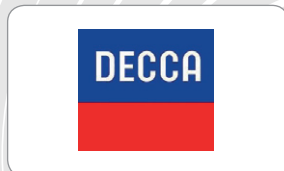


Res Musica's La Clef du Mois



Il Pomo d'Oro (Orchestra)

Partners



Catone in Utica is a coproduction of Parnassus Arts Productions and Château de Versailles Spectacles.



Photos: © Guillaume L'Hôte