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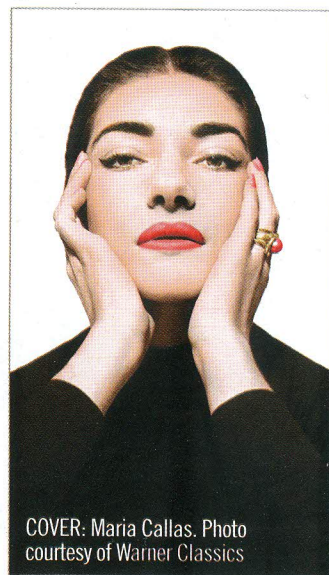
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Printed in the UK by Latimer Trend Ltd, Plymouth.

Distributed by Comag Specialist Division.

Tel +44 (0)1895 433800

Opera Now is published by Rhinegold Publishing Limited. "Opera Now" is a trademark of Opera Now Enterprises Limited

Editorial and image research services for Opera Now are provided by C Sharp LLP

Opera Now, 977096126908217, is published monthly except for August by Rhinegold Publishing, 20 Rugby Street, London, WC1N 3QZ, United Kingdom.

**R. RHINEGOLD PUBLISHING**

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## Welcome



BENJAMIN CALOVERGA

The figure of the soprano has acquired a particular mystique in the opera world, associated with romance, intrigue and tragedy, both on and off the stage. It seems telling that so many great opera composers married sopranos and cast their wives in the role of their creative muses: think of Mozart and his wife Constanze, who first sang the serene, tender vocal lines of the C Minor Mass; or Rossini and the extraordinary Isabella Colbran, with her vast vocal range and technical virtuosity; there's Verdi and Giuseppina Strepponi, whose dark, intense voice inspired the composer to write roles such as Abigaille in *Nabucco*; and Richard Strauss, whose tempestuous marriage to soprano Pauline de Ahna became the subject of an entire opera, *Capriccio*.

More than any other voice, the soprano is intimately linked with the personality of the singer. This, of course, lies at the root of the enduring appeal of Maria Callas. It is almost impossible to separate Callas's distinctive singing, a beguiling blend of vulnerability and strength, from the steeply curved trajectory of her life. Our cover feature in this issue examines the voice of Callas in a new light, as a new round of technology peels away yet more layers of noise and interference that have obscured her rich legacy on record. Warner Classics' new set of remastered studio tapes is more than just a display of techno-wizardry: we really do hear the voice with freshness and clarity. The result can be a jaw-dropping confrontation with the magnificent, daring artistry of Callas, free of intrusions and clutter.

Sopranos were very much in our sights when we invited a select group of critics, casting directors, music agents and readers to submit their choice of ten singers who have shown great promise in recent times. No list of this sort can be definitive, but inspired by listening to Callas, we wanted our panel to select singers not just for their vocal beauty, but also for the individuality, expressive powers and dramatic conviction across a range of different styles of music.

One such exemplary singer is given a special focus in this issue as our Artist of the Month: Mary Bevan. With her charm and lightness of touch, she is one of the most appealing young sopranos on the stage today. You can hear her performing a splendid programme of songs about love in our next Rhinegold LIVE recital in London on 10 November, followed by a short discussion with me on the stage of the Conway Hall – a chance I hope to investigate more deeply the mystique and allure of the soprano voice. Turn to page 13 for details.

Each issue of *Opera Now* has a reviews section devoted to new opera releases on CD and DVD, written by our team of critics who have years of experience weighing up the pros and cons of voices, musical delivery and production styles. We are delighted that two years' worth of our reviews have now been archived and can be accessed online via the website of Agora Classica. This new site is fast becoming a substantial reviews resource for classical music aficionados, collecting together the very best in music journalism. You'll find hours of happy browsing by visiting [www.agoraclassica.com](http://www.agoraclassica.com).

Ashutosh Khandekar

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