

Yet another storming performance from Adès

(EMI 6952342)

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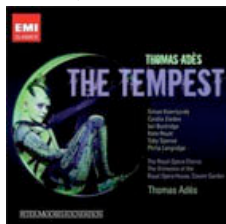
For a composer still in his 30s, Thomas Adès (born 1971) is well served on disc, loyally supported by EMI, who in the past decade have released six CDs embracing most of his output, including his early *Living Toys* and his sex'n'scandal first opera, *Powder Her Face*. This latest is the world premiere recording of his second opera, *The Tempest* (2004), an altogether richer and more lyrical affair, commissioned by the Royal Opera House and here taken live from Covent Garden's 2007 revival with help from Radio 3 and the Peter Moores Foundation.

Thomas Adès

The Tempest

Royal Opera Chorus and ROH Orchestra/ Thomas Adès

(EMI 6952342)



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Based on Shakespeare but reworked and condensed into three acts by librettist Meredith Oakes, the text is easily audible, with the sound balance slightly favouring the voices, but not detrimentally. Many of the outstanding cast created their roles in the original 2004 staging, including baritone Simon Keenlyside as a noble, perplexed Prospero, tenor Ian Bostridge as the strange, wretched Caliban and Cyndia Sieden as Ariel, leaping to her stratospheric high notes with ethereal agility. Her set pieces, such as "Five fathoms deep/ Your father lies" and "He and your brother/ Stare and shudder" beautifully capture the character's supernatural, asexual nature. The flourishes and ornaments in the vocal writing have the feel of Monteverdi through a prism of modernity.

The final exchange between Ariel and the world-weary Prospero - "I'll drown my book, I'll break my staff" - is, properly, among the most affecting moments, preceded by Antonio's bleak farewell, in even metre with a choked, low, woodwind accompaniment, ("You've won, I've lost"). This kind of musical characterisation runs through the work, more in the subtle style of Britten than in any more heavy-handed Wagnerian sense.

All the orchestral writing, expertly played, comes across powerfully, notably the storm music which roars into life at the start. Textures are luminous and clear in the bewitching prelude to Act III before the earthy, drunken arrival of Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo. Kate Royal and Toby Spence as the lovers Miranda and Ferdinand, who have a rapturous love duet at the end of Act II, and Philip Langridge's cameo King of Naples are all luxury casting in this excellent recording.