

Saturdee Opry Links Bel Canto Edition/ Rip Rense

Saturdee Opry Links' gorgeous all-bel canto (beautiful song) edition is now available for public consumption. Or private consumption, as the case may be. And the case may be Scotch, or burgundy, or a good stout, whatever you like. It will help! Drink enough, and you will fall in love with what you hear. Of course, you will be left with a choice: music, or AA. Hmm. . . No comparison, of course. "Music is the best," as Frank Zappa liked to say. Or, to quote Bullwinkle, "just listen!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvGolWBPrZ4>

Saturdee Opry Links Overture!

"Semiramide," by Rossini. (You will recognize it, Bugs Bunny fans.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjEpJQhLcJ4>

About the opera:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semiramide>



Jessica Pratt



Danielle De Niese



Corelli and Callas



Nicolai Ghiaurov



Santo and Johnny



Ollie, Stanley

1.

Rossini's "Semiramide" is based on Voltaire's tragedy, "Semiramis." So they are more than semi-related. It is a rather arch embodiment of irony and tragedy, which, of course, describes many an opera. The crux: Queen Semiramide entices her lover, Assur, to murder her husband, King Ninus. Meanwhile, her son, Ninus, disappears, and is believed dead. Fifteen years later (where the opera begins), she is about to announce the name of her successor. Semiramide, it seems, favors young Arsace, her victorious general. She is also in love with him, which proves rather inconvenient later in the opera, when it turns out that she is his. . . mother. (Vice is nice, but incest is best!) Here is the fiendishly difficult, heavily ornamented cabaletta, "Bel raggio lusinghier" "Alluring ray of light," in which Semiramide declares her love for Arsace. The excellent soprano is Jessica Pratt. The production is asinine, as are so many opera productions today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrvmzm0qp4o>

And here is Callas, who helped revive this opera, back in '56.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6yWwWua1tw>

Translation:

<https://bpb-us->

[e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.ucsc.edu/dist/0/689/files/2019/06/72_Bel_raggio_lusinghier.pdf?](https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.ucsc.edu/dist/0/689/files/2019/06/72_Bel_raggio_lusinghier.pdf?)

(more)

2.



What? The first selection was not heavily ornamented enough for you? Well, let's go back about a hundred years, that should do the trick. Here is "one of those" baroque arias, you know the kind, with a million notes, a melisma miasma (or otherwise, depending on your taste). Another real voice-twister. And in Danielle De Niese's case, doing goofy choreography to top things off. Talk about walking and chewing gum. . . This is the Cleopatra's rather glorious aria from Handel's 1724 opera, "Giulio Cesare," "Da tempeste il legno infranto." With English subtitles.

Setting: Cleopatra's room, Alexandria, Egypt, 48 B.C..

Synopsis: Just before Cleopatra leaves to go to prison, Caesar breaks into her apartments and liberates her from the clutches of her evil brother, Tolomeo. In jubilation, she anticipates the victory that is sure to follow. You know, before things bite her on the asp. So to speak.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhMd8ppnKuA>

*Da tempeste il legno infranto,
se poi salvo giunge in porto,
non sa piÃ¹ che desiar.
CosÃ¬ il cor tra pene e pianto,
or che trova il suo conforto,
torna l'anima a bear.*

3.

Sometimes a flight of ornamented high notes is accompanied by little staging whimsy. Note how the fellows help Natalie Dessay hit certain high notes, much to the audience's amusement. . . In Bellini's crazy-plotted tragic-comic opera, "La Sonnambula" ("The Sleepwalker"), we find Amina, an orphan who has been adopted by one Teresa, engaged to Elvino. Confused already? Well. . . Near the mill in a Swiss village, in early 19th century, after awaking from a sleepwalking episode to find that her love, Elvino, has decided that she was not unfaithful to him after all, Amina sings of her dissipating sorrow, destroyed by Elvino's love. Essentially the climax of the opera. Here is wonderful Natalie in a lovely, rousing Met production from 2009. One of her later performances, before her well-worn, surgically corrected pipes finally gave out. A tour-de-force!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOB_xXAhFgw

Translation:

*Ah! non giunge uman pensiero
Al contento ond'io son piena:
A' miei sensi io credo appena;
Tu m'affida, o mio tesoro.
Ah mi abbraccia, e sempre insieme
Sempre uniti in una speme,
Della terra in cui viviamo
Ci formiamo un ciel d'amor.*

ENGLISH:

*Ah! no human thought comes
To the content with which I am full:
I barely believe in my senses;
You entrust me, my treasure.
Ah hugs me, and always together
Always united in one hope,
Of the land we live in
We form a heaven of love.*

And, for fun, Callas (who spurred a revival of all bel canto in the '50's.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-5hNDBU6w8>

P. S.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBRCvVpknvg>

4.



Vince

The prolific composer, Vincenzo Bellini, as we know, pioneered the legato (long, flowing) melodic line in opera. The category, "bel canto" (beautiful song) was concocted retroactively to describe operatic fare of the 18th and 19th century, including Bellini's, but it is certainly apt, as it pertains to music written to be magnificently, concertedly a product of melody and decorative flourish. Here is a terrific Bellini duet

from his most loved opera, "Norma." This is "In mia man alfin tu sei," which is thrilling even if you do not know the rather grisly matter being argued: a demand of love in exchange for sparing the lives the two children (more below). Gad. The basic, or base, story takes place in Gaul under the Roman occupation, and is centered on the love triangle among Pollione, the Roman proconsul of Gaul, Norma, his former companion, and young Adalgisa. Here are two examples of this bel canto thrill-ride, first an historic recording with young Maria Callas and Franco Corelli, way back in 1953.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBJvVoQg7TM>

And how it can look on stage, in a recent production with Sondra Radvanovsky and Gregory Kunde.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLluCsQdauI>

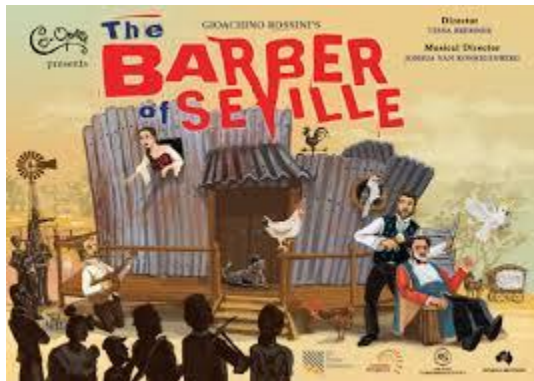
Summary:

The crowd departs: (Duet, Norma and Pollione: "In mia man alfin tu sei" / "At last you are in my hands"). Norma demands that Pollione forever shun Adalgisa; only then will she release him and never see him again. He refuses, and she vents her anger by threatening to kill the two children she had with Pollione. (She doesn't.) "Strike me instead", he demands, "so that only I alone will die", but she quickly asserts that not only will all the Romans die, but so will Adalgisa, who has broken her vows as a priestess. This prompts him to plead for her life. Fun stuff!

Translation:

https://lyricfluent.com/lyrics_translation/montserrat_caballe_norma_act_ii_in_mia_man_alfin_tu_sei_norma_pollione_jon_vickers_lyrics_english_translation?

5.



There are a fair number of scenes in opera of a love-smitten callow youth standing below the window of a beloved, singing his heart out. In listening to such an example in Rossini's "Barber of Seville," one can understand how persuaded the young woman might be, so bel is his canto---until the singer goes into melismatic madness. Well, not really---that's 21st century flippancy. This sort of razzle-dazzle thrilled audiences in its day (and still does.) This is a gem of an aria that will forever be in standard recital repertory, "Ecco ridente in cielo," realized with Spanish allure (those trumpets sound almost mariachi) by the golden-toned Canary Islands-born tenor, Alfredo Kraus (Austrian mother, Spanish father.) "Here, laughing in heaven, emerges the beautiful dawn. . ."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8wqFJRNeMw>

Synopsis: Outside Dr. Bartolo's house at daybreak, Count Almaviva has fallen in love with Rosina. He stands outside of her house and sings.

Translation:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecco,_ridente_in_cielo

P. S.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dbp7iEs0AJ0>

SOL EXTRA!

Interview: Alfredo Kraus.

EXCERPT: Tito Schipa, for me, is the greatest singer of the world. I'm not talking about voice, I'm talking about singing. His voice was small, but it was lovely because his singing was lovely. If you like something, it is beautiful because you like it, but it doesn't have to be beautiful for everyone else. Maybe a voice is not beautiful, but you like it so it is beautiful for you.

<https://www.bruceDuffie.com/kraus.html>?

6.

Some of the most beautiful bel canto (sorry for the redundancy) arias were written for baritone, beginning, in SOL's arrogant opinion, with most of those by Verdi. But here is a splendid example by Verdi's precursor, Bellini (and do we not hear echoes of this melodiousness in Verdi baritone arias?) This is the poignant "Cinta di Fiori," from "I Puritani," an epic historical drama of 17th-century England, in which young lovers find themselves caught up in a conflict between peanut butter and jelly---oops, I mean opposing political factions---driving one Elvira to madness. This is the great Bulgarian baritone, Nicola Ghiaurou, in a performance duly regarded as definitive. Feast your ears. . .

https://youtu.be/kLB33uKh1_g?si=Lfa2o0eomibynkYO

Synopsis: Sir Giorgio Walton, a Puritan, brother of Lord Gualterio Walton, is in a hall in the castle near Plymouth, England, during the English Civil War (1649). Giorgio sadly tells the inhabitants of Elvira's madness. "Garlanded with flowers and with her lovely hair disheveled, sometimes the beloved maiden wanders about. . .)

ANNNNND. . .how it can look on stage. With Jongmin Park.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_xo8cena2o

Translation:

Ebben, se volete, v'appressate.

Cinta di fiori e col bel crin disciolto

Talor la cara vergine s'aggira,

E chiede all'aura, ai fior con mesto volto:

"Ove andò Elvira? Ove andò? Ove andò?"

Bianco-vestita, e qual se all'ara innante

Adempie il rito, e va cantando : il giuro :

Poi grida per amor tutta tremante:

"Ah vieni, Arturo!"

Geme talor qual tortora amorosa,

Or cade vinta da mortal sudore,

Or l'odi, al suon dell'arpa lamentosa,

Cantar d'amore.

Or scorge Arturo nell'altrui sembiante,

Poi del suo inganno accorta, e di sua sorte,

Geme, piange, s'affanna e ognor più amante,

Invoca morte.

Ah, la misera...

Oh ciel, pietà prendi al suo dolor!

ENGLISH:

Well, if you want, come closer.

Surrounded by flowers and with beautiful loose hair

Sometimes the dear virgin wanders,

And he asks the aura, the flowers with a sad face:

"Where did Elvira go? Where did she go? Where did she go?"

White-dressed, and as if at the altar

He fulfills the rite, and goes singing: I swear:

Then she shouts for love, all trembling:

"Ah come, Arturo!"

Sometimes she moans like a loving dove,

Now she falls overcome by mortal sweat,

Now you hear it, to the sound of the plaintive harp,

Singing about love.

Now she sees Arturo in the other's countenance,

Then she realized his deception, and his fate,

She moans, cries, worries and becomes more and more loving,

Invoking death.

Ah, the poor...

Oh heaven, take pity on her pain!

SOL EXTRA!

Listen: rare interview with baritone Nicolai Ghiaurov.

<https://hampsongfoundation.org/resource/nicolai-ghiaurova-never-before-heard-interview/>?

7.



Yankee Merrill

From bel canto baritone poignancy to bel canto baritone outrage, here is the great devotee of opera and baseball, Robert Merrill, with a blood-stirring rendering of the aria, "Cruda finesta smania," followed by

the cabaletta, "La pietade in suo favore," from Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor." Two. . .two. . .two hits in one! (I guess Merrill would call it a double.) Live on stage at the Met, way back in 1948.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCOGmnekFU4>

Synopsis (aria):

Enrico Ashton, lord and master of Lammermoor, is in the Lammermoor Castle courtyard, Scotland.

Angry that Lucia has had secret romantic meetings with a man whose family is the mortal enemy of the her own Ashton family, Enrico rails that she has betrayed him.

Synopsis (cabaletta):

After the family chaplain suggests that Enrico should have mercy on Lucia for secretly meeting with the enemy of their family, Enrico declares that he does not understand mercy and that the only thing he really understands is vengeance. Funny coincidence: same with SOL!

Translation, aria:

<https://www.aria-database.com/search.php?individualAria=170>

Translation, cabaletta:

<https://www.aria-database.com/search.php?sid=2&X=5&individualAria=171>

ANNNND, what, exactly, is a cabaletta? Dunno. Have a go at this:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabaletta>

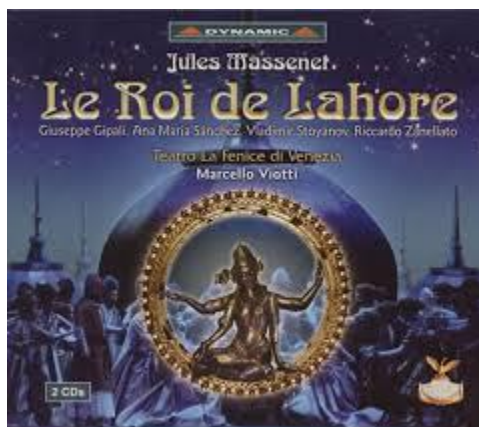
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cabaletta>

(No, I still don't know, either.)

ANNNNNND. . .How it can look on stage, with Renato Bruson:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9BnR6ggGvE>

8.



Rarity of the Week. This is from Jules Massenet's 1877 opera, "Le Roi de Lahore" ("The King of Lahore") based on a story in the classic Hindu epic, the Mahabharata. The gist: Alim, the King of Lahore, is attacked in battle by his own minister, Scindia, who is his rival for the love of the priestess Sitâ. Yes, another love triangle---certainly the most popular geometry in opera. Well, Alim dies, but in a scene set in Indra's paradise, the gods restore him to life. And all that Hindu jazz. . .

A great success in its day, "Le Roi de Lahore" seldom is performed today. This little excerpt is the perfectly cut diamond, "O Casto Fior," or "Oh, chaste flower." If one makes the assumption that this is a love aria, one would probably be on the right track. It is sung by Scindia, minister to Alim, to his cherished Sita, who happens to be Alim's niece. (Vice is nice, but incest is best!) As they say in India,

"Ohmygoshgolly." Why has SOL chosen this, even though it is yet another baritone aria? Because it is so brimming with nobility and, yes, bel canto. No translation available. Here is the forgotten baritone, Mattia Battistini. He might not hit all the notes, but his heart is in the right place.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Uz0XQ0Sn1U>

Full opera summary:

<http://opera.stanford.edu/Massenet/RoiDeLahore/synopsis.html>

More:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_roi_de_Lahore

Review of a rare performance:

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/mar/02/le-roi-de-lahore-queen-elizabeth-hall-london-review?>

ANNNNND, here it is sung technically better, but is lacking in the tender-heartedness of Battistini (start at 1:10.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe6saqw0scU>

9.



Oropesa

Back to sopranos. . .As SOL is fond of saying, if you don't know the plot of Bellini's "I Capuleti e i Montecchi," go back to staring at your iPhone. This aria is, in essence, "Wherefore art thou, Romeo?" to be plain about things. The 1830 premiere of the work was a great success, and, while SOL might be talking through a hat here, this aria shows a growth and maturation of the composer's great flair for bel canto, legato writing. Was a more tender, more artfully melodic aria written before this one? You might be in the realm of splitting hairs on that question. Now, SOL is an unabashed fan of Lisette Oropesa, so did not audition other renditions that might be superior. You're stuck with Lisette. (A fate devoutly to be wished!) Here is "Oh! quante volte?" or "Oh! How much time?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjCGpow8sQU>

Synopsis: Giulietta's balcony in the palace of Capulet, Verona, Italy, 15th century. Giulietta worries because she does not know where Romeo has gone. She is in love with him and waits with anguish for him to come. She longs to see his silhouette in the light of the day and hear his sigh, which, she sings, reminds her of a wonderful breeze.

Translation:

<https://www.aria-database.com/search.php?individualAria=581>

SOL EXTRA!

Fifteen Questions with Lisette Oropesa:

<https://www.15questions.net/interview/fifteen-questions-interview-lisette-oropesa/page-1/>

EXCERPT:

My favorite book of all time is "East of Eden" by John Steinbeck. My favorite piece of music is impossible to choose but I think something beautiful to listen to is the "St. Matthew Passion" by J.S. Bach.

FINAL BOW:



The mad scene in Bellini's "Il Pirata" ("The Pirate") of 1827 apparently had strong influence on the mad scene in Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor," for those keeping score at home. The opera debuted in Milan to great success and sold-out houses, yet did not make its debut at the Met until. . .2002! With Renee Fleming. Of course, when you speak of bel canto opera, you inevitably speak of Maria Callas, and it was Callas who brought this opera (and many other eclipsed bel canto works) back to the repertory in the 1950's---specifically, in the case of "Il Pirata," 1958. Here she sings the climactic, shattering moments, "Col sorriso d'innocenza ... Oh sole, ti vela di tenebre oscure / "With the smile of innocence / with the glance of love / pray speak to your father of clemency and pardon.") Be entranced. SOL was.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VdQPthU014>

Synopsis:

Gualtiero is an exiled count, forced to become a pirate. His enemy, Ernesto, blackmails Imogene into marrying him, even though he knows she loves Gualtiero. In the searing final scene, Imogene goes insane when Gualtiero is condemned to death.

TRANSLATION:

Ascolta...

Geme l'aura d'intorno... Ecco l'ignuda

Deserta riva, ecco giacer trafitto

Al mio fianco un guerrier... ma non è questo,

Non è questo Gualtier... È desso Ernesto.

Ei parla... ei chiama il figlio...

Il figlio è salvo... io lo sottrassi ai colpi

Dei malfattori... a lui si rechi... il vegga

Lo abbracci, e mi perdoni anzi ch'ei mora.

Deh! tu, innocente, tu, per me l'implora!

*Col sorriso d'innocenza,
 Collo sguardo dell'amor,
 Di perdono, di clemenza,
 Deh! favella al genitor.
 Digli, ah! digli che respiri,
 Che sei libero per me;
 Che pietoso un guardo ei giri
 A chi tanto oprò per te.
 Odesi dalla sala del consiglio un lu-gubre suono.
 Qual suono feroce Echeggia, rimbomba?*

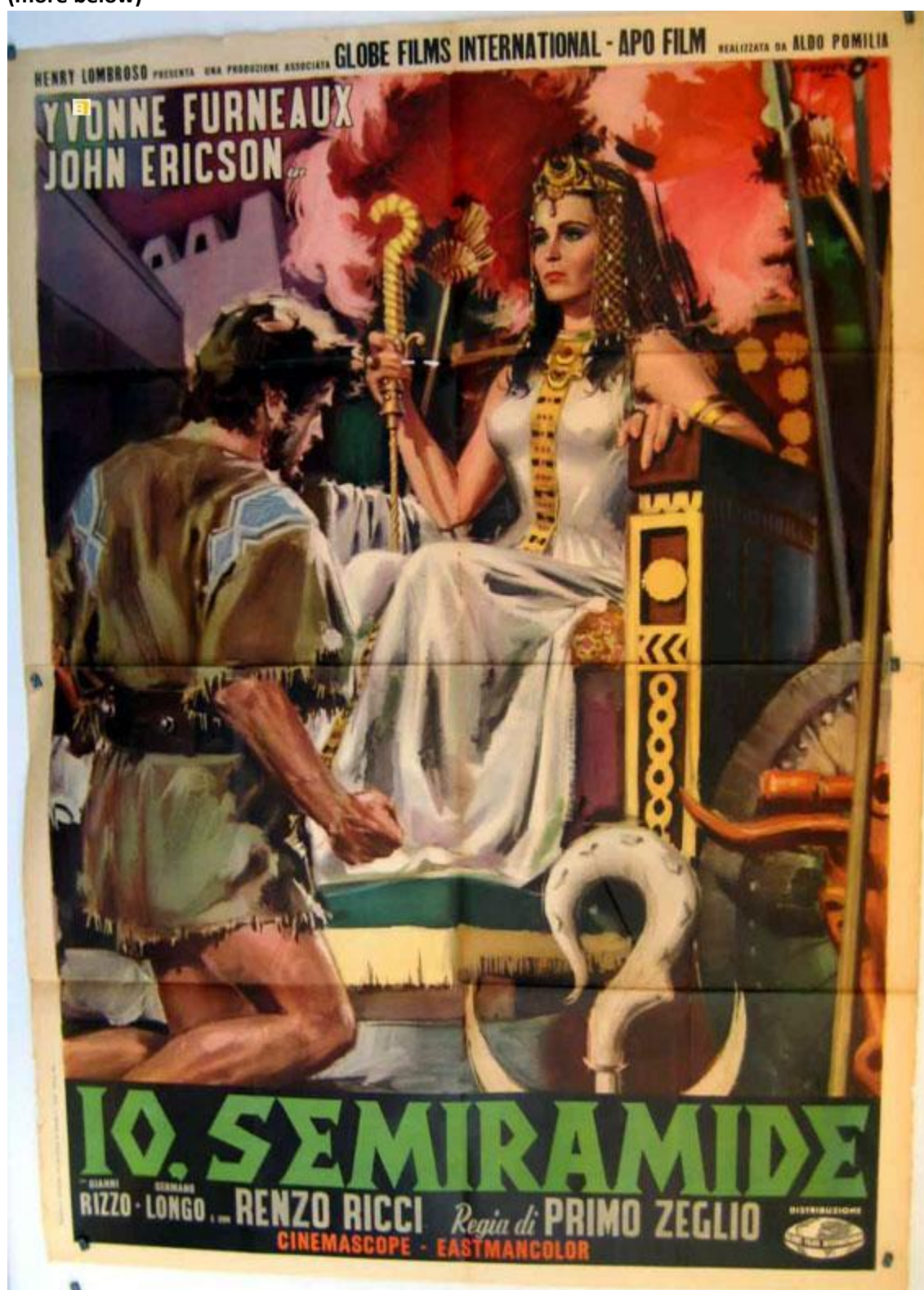
ENGLISH:

Listen...

*The surrounding aura groans... Here is the naked one
 Deserted shore, here I lie transfixed
 At my side a warrior... but it's not this,
 It's not this Gualtier... It's Ernesto.
 He speaks... and calls his son...
 The son is safe... I saved him from the blows
 Of the criminals... go to him... see him
 Hug him, and forgive me even if he dies.
 Oh! you, innocent, you, beg for me!
 With the smile of innocence,
 With the gaze of love,
 Of forgiveness, of clemency,
 Oh! speak to the parent.
 Tell him, ah! tell him you breathe,
 That you are free for me;
 How pitiful a look and turns
 To those who worked so hard for you.
 A mournful sound is heard from the council chamber.
 What feral sound Echoes, rumbles?*




(more below)





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