

Roberto Alagna and Aleksandra Kurzak in Concert August 2020



With opera houses shuttered by the pandemic, the Metropolitan Opera is streaming "Live from the Met" productions from years past, and a newly-recorded series "Met Stars Live in Concert." This installment of the latter was especially exciting, going far beyond the static singer-next-to-the piano studio format into an exciting outdoor performance by the husband and wife singers on a terrace on the French Riviera with a gorgeous view of the Mediterranean Sea. They were accompanied by the Morphing String Quintet (2 violins, viola, cell, double bass), which provided much more instrumental heft than the usual piano reductions at such recitals.

The program was as follows:

"Vogliatemi bene" (duet) From Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*

"Ah! lève-toi, soleil!" (tenor aria) From Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*

"Una voce poco fa" (soprano aria) From Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

"Caro elisir" (duet) From Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*

"Ch'ella mi creda libero e lontano" (tenor aria) From Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*

"Tu qui, Santuzza?" (duet) From Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*

Intermission: "Parle-moi de ma mere" (duet) From Bizet's *Carmen*
(film clip from Met staged production of 2019)

"Ave Maria" (soprano aria) From Verdi's *Otello*

"Già nella notte densa" (duet) From Verdi's *Otello*

Duets:

"Lippen schweigen" From Lehár's *The Merry Widow*

"Cielito lindo" By Quirino Mendoza y Cortés

"Funiculì, Funiculà" By Luigi Denza

The singers played to the camera, prancing about the terrace and peering directly into the lens, thus breaching the "fourth wall" to make contact with their virtual audience. They were obviously enjoying themselves, and it made the program so much more enjoyable for the audience.

Kurzak showed off her phenomenal stylistic and dynamic range, from Rossini's light coloratura to Mascagni's spinto verismo to late Verdi's *Otello* and back to the lighter fare of the three closing duets. The "Ave Maria" was gorgeously done, with a delicacy belying the power she could unleash in other numbers (see my impressions of her Violetta in [Traviata](#) at the Met pre-pandemic).

Alagna is not one of my favorite singers. Here, he did better than what I heard in [Samson et Delilah](#) at the Met in 2018. He was more animated and expressed more engagement with the action, but his dynamic range was rather narrow – all on the blustery far side of mezzo-forte. That worked for the brash outlaw Dick Johnson in *Fanciulla*, but not for "Ah! lève-toi, soleil!" supposedly sung by the teen-age Romeo.

But overall, a most enjoyable performance from two superstars of the operatic world who obviously share an intimate on-stage chemistry.