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Opera

Düsseldorf's operatic drive-in

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For the record: Ana María Martínez





Leonardo García Alarcón

unashamedly admits he 'decided to advance progressively through the story of Viennese opera' from Cesti and Draghi through to Mozart. This 'homage', as Alarcón terms it, ends up as an absurd clichéd melange with a bit of 19th-century zarzuela thrown in for good measure, concluding with an abject attempt to emulate the final duet of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

The live performance is taken from a staging at the Opéra de Dijon in June 2018. True to form for one never renowned for his adherence to historically informed practice, Alarcón deploys grossly bloated forces that combine to create a sound picture that might have had some validity 60 years earlier. A large plucked continuo section contributes lush arpeggiations that would make even Raymond Leppard blush; sackbuts snarl, cornets pipe, flutes

twitter ... This for an opera that may have used a few more instruments than the sparse forces employed in Venice in the mid 17th century, but not these instruments and certainly not in this way.

With several notable exceptions the singing is capable, but in general lacking in finesse. Especially concerning throughout is the lazy attitude toward the embellishment of cadences, leaving far too many unsatisfying blunt endings. The best performance comes from Giuseppina Bridelli's charming Nisea, the nymph whose secret love for the wayward Prometheus is finally rewarded in that final duet. Other stand-out performances come in the form of the well-focused Minerva of the mezzo Ana Quintans and the splendidly rounded bass of Scott Conner as Peleo. In the other two leading roles Fabio Trümpy (Prometeo) and Mariana Flores (Tetis) both contribute decent performances, though the latter veers between sweetly sensitive singing and wayward tone, and Borja Quiza has characterful fun as Satyro.

The staging doubtless provided an agreeable entertainment (one wonders how they dealt with the vulture), but as a document of record this is of little or no value. A more stylish performance may reveal the work in better light, but as it stands *El Prometeo* is no match for the operas of Cavalli or Cesti. BRIAN ROBINS

Sigismondo, Rossini

Hera Hyesang Park (*Aldimira*), Rachel Kelly (*Anagilda*), Marianna Pizzolato (*Sigismondo*), Kenneth Tarver (*Ladislao*), Gavan Ring (*Radoski*), Guido Loconsolo (*Zenovito*), Il Hong (*Ulderico*), Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Münchner Rundfunkorchester, c. Keri-Lynn Wilson. BR Klassik 900327 (two CDs)

Commissioned by the Teatro La Fenice, Rossini's *Sigismondo* was premiered there in 1814. Coldly received, by the late 1820s it had already faded from sight. Not until a 1992 production in Rovigo, Treviso and Savona did audiences hear the work again.

Giuseppe Foppa's inept libretto gives us Ladislao, the prime minister of Poland, whose advances toward Aldimira, wife of King Sigismondo, have been rejected. Ladislao convinces Sigismondo that Aldimira has been unfaithful. Sigismondo banishes her, but is emotionally wracked by

that decision and assumes Aldimira is dead. Ulderico, the king of Bohemia who is also Aldimira's father, declares war on Poland. Other major complications ensue (for example, Aldimira—living in seclusion as 'Egelinda', sheltered by Zenovito and passed off as his daughter—is found and presented at court by Sigismondo as the resurrected Aldimira). Eventually all is resolved happily, with the royal couple reunited and Ladislao imprisoned.

In terms of character delineation, Rossini might have composed this work in his sleep. One can scarcely believe from Sigismondo's jaunty entrance scene that he's suffering endless delusion and torment. As for Aldimira, she's a faint echo of *Tancredi's* noble Amenaide. One can duly appreciate the close harmony with Sigismondo in their duets, although these scenes hardly equal similar episodes in *Tancredi* or *Semiramide*. Only very occasionally—as in the Ladislao-Aldimira duet 'Perchè obbedir disdegni' (exuding urgency, with coloratura proving expressively meaningful rather than merely virtuosic) or the exhilarating *stretta* of the Act 2 quartet—does one find Rossini at the top of his game.

In this live performance from Munich (surprisingly, the work's third complete recording), the mezzo Marianna Pizzolato in the title role is admirably full-toned, barring occasional scratchiness in the middle range. Although seldom able genuinely to enliven the character, she's clearly born to the style, bringing especially authoritative artistry to her final *scena*. Pizzolato blends well with the Aldimira of Hera Hyesang Park, whose lightweight instrument encompasses two and a half octaves, marred only by some hard tone at the very top. Park's soprano lacks a distinctive timbre, but phrases with notable grace. Still, one can't help longing for the passion that Lella Cuberli once brought to put-upon Rossini heroines.

The *leggero* tenor Kenneth Tarver (*Ladislao*) approaches all his music elegantly.

The top lacks ring, but the challenging low notes are securely managed. Tarver communicates no trace of villainy, although Rossini gives him no help in that regard.

Completing the cast are the soprano Rachel Kelly as Anagilda (Ladislao's sister, whom he's eager to see on the Polish throne), quite polished in her *aria di sortita*; Gavan Ring (Radoski), whose dark tenor timbre makes a striking impression in his few opportunities; the baritone Guido Loconsolo (Zenovito), with almost disconcertingly clear textual projection that doesn't compensate for dry tone and smudgy coloratura; and the fruity-voiced bass Il Hong (Ulderico).

Anchoring this live performance are the Bavarian Radio Chorus and Munich Radio Orchestra—as usual, persuasive Rossinians throughout. The theatrically responsive conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson neglects neither the delicacy nor the grandeur of Rossini's score. BR Klassik's release, excellently recorded, includes a helpful essay but unfortunately no libretto. ROGER PINES

Keri-Lynn Wilson

