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Opera

**FESTIVALS
PREVIEW**



Sonya Yoncheva — surprising herself
Directing for a naturally-lit stage
For the record: Michael Chance
Boston — an opera city?
Verdi on home soil
Buxton turns 40





■ *Lisette Oropesa as Gilda in Rome*

personality and inner torments brilliantly, really getting to the heart of the character. Lisette Oropesa's performance as Gilda was lovely, sung with radiant tone and immaculate phrasing. The tenor Ismael Jordi was a little unsatisfactory as the Duke of Mantua—he sounded somewhat underpowered and lacking in expressive weight—but Riccardo Zanellato was a convincing Sparafucile, and there were fine performances from the rest of the cast, including Alisa Kolosova (Maddalena) and Carlo Cigni (Monterone). Francesca Livia Sartori and Elisabetta Antico designed the costumes, and the choreography was by Simona Bucci. There was also a fine contribution from the chorus.

Tosca returned on December 7 under the vigorous direction of the conductor Stefano Ranzani. Alessandro Talevi directed, using the historic Adolf Hohenstein sets reconstructed by Carlo Savi, with costumes as revived by Anna Biagiotti and lighting by Vinicio Cheli. The four performances, given in alternation with *Rigoletto*, all attracted huge audiences. I enjoyed the expressive singing and acting of Svetlana Kasyan as Tosca, Giorgio Berrugi as Cavaradossi and Fabián Veloz as Scarpia. Luciano Leoni (Angelotti), Domenico Colaianni (Sacristan) and Nicola Pamio (Spoletta) also impressed.

LUIGI BELLINGARDI

of Salò and the Nazi occupiers. Only in the first act did the lighting (by Gianni Carluccio, who also designed the single set) pick out the officers' costumes—black shirts and boots—and there were a few Fascist salutes, but in later acts this all took a back seat while the real human dramas came to the fore. Abbado took enormous care with the way he directed the singers and made them use the words, creating a Brechtian production that functioned cinematically as the number of props and people on stage was gradually whittled down.

On December 9 Gatti conducted a memorable account of the score, drawing out each different instrumental colour but never at the expense of the overall dramatic perspective. And the orchestra, in excellent form, followed his every gesture, every expressive nuance. Roberto Frontali conveyed Rigoletto's

Treviso

Treviso's beautiful 19th-century TEATRO COMUNALE MARIO DEL MONACO is very much the junior sibling of its big sister, the Gran Teatro la Fenice across the water in Venice. Indeed, the Comunale does not rank in even the second tier of Italy's regional opera houses. Yet, with an inventive management and a loyally supportive audience base, Treviso hosts opera productions that put many of its bigger rivals in the shade.

Three performances of *Le nozze di Figaro* last autumn were a case in point. With a cast of singers mostly under the age of 35, this was a youthful, spirited *Figaro*—exactly the kind of *opera buffa* that Mozart and Da Ponte surely intended. All the principal roles were taken by winners of the 2018 Toti dal Monte International Singers' Competition—named after the famed soprano of the early 20th century who was born just outside Treviso in nearby Mogliano Veneto. As well as winning cash prizes, the singers were given the opportunity to perform in this fully staged production.

The singers looked their parts and delivered their roles with the right kind of energy and wit. Davide Giangregorio was a lithe-voiced lead, and was particularly effective in *Figaro*'s darker, jealous moments. Christian Federici was suave but steely as the Count and Marta Pluda made a convincingly gawky Cherubino. Francesca Cucuzza and Baurzhan Anderzhanov (not a competition entrant) formed a lively and genuinely comic duo as *Figaro*'s long-lost parents, Marcellina and Bartolo. The Russian soprano Yulia Gorgula gave a deeply sensitive performance as the Countess, despite an uncertain acting technique characterized by too many limp hand gestures. Her opening aria in Act 2, 'Porgi, amor', was an impressive study in melancholic languor, and helped her to win a further prize, the Premio Bellussi Valdobbiadene, after the final performance. Her award was well deserved, but might equally have been given to Francesca Tassinari as Susanna, whose animated stage presence and vocal versatility marked her out as a new young talent to watch.

The staging was first-class. The director Francesco Bellotto opted for a traditional 18th-century scenario, while exposing the flimsiness of *ancien régime* social and theatrical structures by calling on stagehands to interrupt recitatives rudely and anachronistically to deliver sound effects. Alfredo Corno's sumptuous costumes added colour and authenticity, and were based on French fashion prints dating from the time of *Figaro*'s composition. The conductor Sergio Alapont and the Orchestra Città di Ferrara gave a gutsy rendition of the score. The playing was sometimes rough around the edges, and tempos were occasionally a little brisk, but in the context it was all entirely appropriate.

JOHN-PIERRE JOYCE

Turin

The main reason for interest in the TEATRO REGIO's *Madama Butterfly* (January 10) was Daniel Oren's loudly applauded return to the theatre after a long absence. Constantly focused on the details, and ever attentive to the stage, he brought out the textural subtleties of the score. His interpretation was passionate and compelling, guided by an unflinching sense of theatre, with no trace of either sugary sentimentalism or bombastic rhetoric.

Rebeka Lokar, singing Cio-Cio-San, was able to deliver floating pianissimos as well as shining high notes; as an interpreter, she showed meticulous phrasing, fine nuance, force in emotional expression and a praiseworthy lack of mannerism. Far less convincing was Murat Karahan's Pinkerton. He boasts a solid upper register, but the instrument is neither big nor round, and the emission sounded rather throaty. He sang at the top of his voice almost at all times, with a vehement, nearly aggressive rendition of 'Addio, fiorito asil' (which should be sung 'sweetly, with regret'). Simone Del Savio was an outstanding Sharpless, good at the conversational singing, and expressing pity for *Butterfly* in an ideally warm and enveloping baritone. Sofia Koberidze's mellow voice and refined