

Sparkling conclusion with Cimarosa

SAY "Cimarosa" and up pops the only opera of his which has held a place in the international repertoire ever since its Vienna premiere in 1792. Strange that *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, an opera ideally suited for the Manoel Theatre, had never been performed there or anywhere in this country before last Tuesday. An attractive work to boot, full of mischief, bourgeois pretensions, sibling rivalry, misplaced love and an all's-well-that-ends-well conclusion in typical opera buffa manner.

The first of two performances, under review here, was staged by the *Associazione I Solisti di Operalaboratorio*, which is closely connected to Palermo's Teatro Massimo. Over the past few years Operalaboratorio has been responsible for one of the two productions offered during the BoV Festival. Always under the artistic direction of Elizabeth Smith, this time in Cimarosa's masterpiece, they provided a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

There was a lot of mischievously portentous sparkle in the orchestra, right from its longish overture. As usual with him, Michael Laus was in secure command all the time and held together

BoV Opera Festival *Il Matrimonio Segreto* Manoel Theatre

a production divided into two long acts. The rhythm and pace both in the pit and on stage remained fluid.

The singers were as usual of varying degrees of accomplishment. Two stood out way above the rest of the cast, and both are familiar to local audiences. These are bass Ugo Gagliardo, who made an excellent all-round Geronimo, who is obsessed with marrying his two comely daughters into the aristocracy. The other is soprano Valentina Vitti as his younger daughter Carolina. Hers is the secret marriage which is the opera's title. Like Mr Gagliardo, Ms Vitti gave a very good performance and, like him, she is a very good actress with good command of stage and voice.

Baritone Marco Filippo Romano came close to the other two singers to sharing the laurels as Count Robinson. Willing to pay a hefty dowry for one daughter, Elisetta, he complicates things by taking a shine to the already (secretly) married and faithful Carolina. Claudia Monda's

Elisetta was passable vocally while mezzo-soprano Valeria Tornatore showed vocal promise as Geronimo's widowed sister Fidalma, one willing to marry again. Complicating matters is her infatuation with Paolino, Carolina's secret husband and whom she believes single and available.

It is a pity that the weakest vocal link was tenor Emanuele Genovese's Paolino, and if there is any hidden talent there is a hard, long way for it to come out. Without exception and like his colleagues, he was a very convincing actor and dealt with great gusto the several scrapes and fraught situations in which he found himself. I liked the way in which some of the characters made their first appearance either in front of the closed curtains (Carolina), the proscenium (Paolino) and down the theatre's aisle (Geronimo). This made the audience relate closer to the characters.

The fine traditional costumes and the stage design, the latter effective in its simplicity, were by *Fondazione Teatro Massimo*. Quite anachronistic was the bust in one of the scenes in Act II. It looked from a much later period.