

## BoV Opera Festival

Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*  
Manoel Theatre

The Bank of Valletta Opera Festival kicked off with two performances of this Donizetti masterpiece, the first of which is under review here.

Plamen Kartaloff's artistic direction of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* left one a bit puzzled.

Very well, it was in the traditional vein still so very popular here, but there were far too many discrepancies. Most glaring among them were the costumes: they were generally fine, but over a century divided the styles worn by the ladies and the gentlemen.

One also wondered what (painted) cypresses were doing on the Scottish moorland sets. There were other strange happenings, chiefly the complete ignoring of the music's urgency depicting the hurried farewell of Edgardo to Lucia at the end of Act I – when the couple were made to embrace, kiss and sink to the stage floor.

In his duet with Lucia, her brother Enrico was not on stage all the time and at the end of the opera there seemed to be no suicide at all. Edgardo staggering about and sang heart-broken until he sinks beneath a shrouded ghostly Lucia who envelops him in her veil. I found this utterly risible.

Act III Scene 1, referred to in the programme, was left out completely.

How fortunate that the National Orchestra under Michael Laus held the work together thanks to an intelligent reading of the score, the immortal music always there to please the ear. That after an admittedly jittery start which was soon shaken off.

The chorus was in the same rest of the opera they were pretty much on cue the quality of the singing, especially the male section, left much to be desired. The tendency to shout notes and cut short on breathing were common occurrences.

The main characters had established themselves pretty well by the end of Act I. Niko Issakov's Enrico is the ever scheming and relentlessly desperate brother willing to sacrifice a sister's happiness to get out of his precarious position. Issakov showed fine presence and acting. At first one was led to believe he may have been rationing his voice but his singing was to remain even throughout revealing a not-so-strong, smooth and well-pitched top register contrary to the warmth of timbre and steady singing in the other reaches.

Tenor Juan Gambina was a convincing Edgardo especially when it came to the projection of the character, although this was perhaps not always underlined enough by his vocal resources. His phrasing is well-sharpened



PHOTO: Damir Zammit Lupi

Soprano Mariana Panova's Lucia projected the instability of the character from the start. Her singing was beautiful, she acted just as beautifully and carried off her part very well whether in her duets with Edgardo or Enrico, in the finely wrought sextet, where the action moved slickly yet the required tension was well-directed, or finally in the great Mad Scene. Her veiled appearance at the end had a trivialising effect.

Latchezar Lazarov's Raimondo was vocally uneven in quality even if of quite impressive resonance. One wonders why small parts like those of Arturo and Normanno often have to be sung by people with hardly a voice at all. The parts may be small but should be sung well, matters which found Nikolai Pavlov and Emanuele Genovese very much lacking.

reliable Alisa.

### Recital of arias St Paul's pro-Cathedral

**T**HE Manoel Theatre took the BOV festival to a different venue – the Anglican Cathedral in Valletta, where a recital was presented by *I Solisti di Operalaboratorio* of Palermo.

Presenting a cast of young and mainly promising singers, I was glad to notice how much higher the standard of singing was this year compared to a similar event during last year's festival.

Three musicians were constantly kept busy during the recital, namely pianists Clara Capozza, Tiziana Nania and Salvatore Scinaldi, who did well considering the less than ideal instruments at their disposal.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable

Piccolo gave a warm rendering of *Vi ravviso o luoghi ameni* from *La Sonnambula*. It was a feat he was to repeat, in a different vein, in *Miei rampolli femminili* from Rossini's *La Cenerentola*.

Vincenzo Taormina, in *Ah! per sempre io ti perdei* (Bellini, *I Puritani*) has a warm timbre, which needs a little more polishing in the upper reaches, and exudes equally warm personality. He was to sing much better later in the evening in both of the very difficult patter ensembles from Rossini's *Cenerentola* and *Barbiere*.

Two of the finest voices of the evening were Lorena Scarlata's, who sang the spirited 'Habanera' from Bizet's *Carmen*, and Ivanna Speranza who sang 'So anch'io la virtù magica' (Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*) and 'Il barbiere di Siviglia' from Rossini's *Barbiere*. Add to these Natasa Kitai who with a female chorus sang 'Giusto ciel! In tal periglio' (Rossini, *L'Assedio di Corinto*) and bass Ugo Guagliardo in the amusing 'La calunnia' from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

From the same opera came a finely balanced duet between tenor Nunzio Galli and baritone Giovanni Bellavia. The latter has a very attractive voice while the former shows improvement in delivery from last year even if the timbre is not of the best.

An all-round improvement seems to have been registered by Valentina Vitti, as displayed in some of the ensembles and in the 'Cats' Duet, attributed to Rossini, which, however suffered in balance and effect because of the tenor's weak and colourless contribution.

Roberta Caly's 'Il vecchiotto cerca moglie' (Rossini's *Barbiere*) was appropriately ironic.

As referred to above, the ensembles were brilliantly crisp and the typical Rossini crescendos were well wrought to

### Romanze da salotto Italian Cultural Institute

**I**T WAS a very good idea to spread out the venues for the festival. One of them was the main hall of the Italian Cultural Institute, where *I solisti di Operalaboratorio* of Palermo must have felt very much at home during a recital of Italian vocal salon music, to keyboard work shared by pianists Clara Capozza and Tiziana Nania, both proving to be very good, understanding accompanists.

In such a mixed group of young singers it is obvious that some would stand out more than others. Among them, once again, was Ivanna Speranza in Donizetti's 'Amorosi miei giorni'. And again, it was Lorena Scarlata who was among those who impressed most in the Neapolitan 'A vucchella' and Tosti's beautiful romanzetta 'L'ultimo bacio'.

Baritone Salvatore Grigoli cut a very good figure in Tosti's *Mafia* – an excellent interpretation. It was very gratifying to hear Emanuele Genovese in Donaudy's aria 'Luoghi sereni e cari'. This was quite good, especially after such a poor showing as Normanno in the recent first night of *Lucia*.

Roberta Caly's rendering of that other popular Neapolitan song 'Marechiaro' had a lot of verve and warmth. Natasa Kitai impressed even more in Donaudy's 'O del mio amato ben', as did Valentina Vitti in 'Amor, mi fa cantare'. Nunzio Galli's interpretation of Bixio's 'Mamma' was more satisfactory than Gastaldon's 'Musica proibita' which he had just sung before.

Unfortunately, the weakest link again was tenor Domenico Bellantone in De Curtis's lovely 'Non ti scordar di me'...