

On Lucia Ronchetti
by Jill Comerford

Dresden, Semperoper: "L'Impresario delle Canarie" & "Sub-Plot"

Dresden. Semperoper, Opera Season 2013-2014.

"L'IMPRESARIO DELLE CANARIE"

Intermezzo for two, libretto Pietro Metastasio

Composer **Giovanni Battista Martini**

Dorina CHRISTEL LOETZSCH

Nibbio MATTHIAS REXROTH

"SUB-PLOT"

Intermezzo for soprano, 2 baritones, contrabassoon and double bass.

text based on the libretto '*Didone abbandonata*' by Pietro Metastasio selected and compiled by Lucia Ronchetti and Anne Gelber

Composer **Lucia Ronchetti**

Didone NORMA NAHOUN

Enea PAVEL KUBÁN

Iarba JULIAN ARSENAULT

Dancers: Mandy Garbrecht, Nicole Meyer, Mykola Abramenko

The Handel Festival Orchestra Halle

Conductor and basso continuo **Felice Venanzoni**

Director **Axel Köhler**

Set designer **Arne Walther**

Costumes **Frauke Schernau**

Choreography **Carla Börner**

Baroque gesticulation **Nils Niemann**

Lighting **Fabio Antoci**

Dramaturgy **Anne Gelber**

Co-production with the Halle Opera House.

Dresden. 13th April, 2014.



With their latest premiere, the Dresden Semperoper Dresden has the double merit of presenting a rarely performed baroque intermezzo together with a contemporary chamber opera commissioned by them from the Italian composer Lucia Ronchetti. It is already the

second excursus, into this genre by Ronchetti who will complete her trilogy for the Saxon opera house next year. In the 18th century, an intermezzo indicated a brief, fun entertainment held during the intervals of serious operas. Ronchetti has taken this opera within an opera format and reversed it, inserting an opera seria within the opera buffa. She has taken '*L'impresario delle Canarie*', set to music by Giovanni Battista Martini in 1744 to a libretto by Metastasio, and interpolated, within it, her chamber opera *Didone Abbandonata*, the original opera seria for which the intermezzo had been written. The text of her Sub-Plot is a selection and compilation of Metastasio's own libretto of *Didone Abbandonata*, first performed in 1724 to music by Domenico Sarro.

The entire performance lasts just over an hour and uses only the proscenium and pit area. An excellent small



baroque orchestra, made up of members of the Halle Handel Festival Orchestra, conducted by **Felice Venanzoni**, is employed. The deceptively simple and fixed set design by Arne Walther is a stage set seen from the back-stage perspective, representing the location of the behind the scenes behaviour of the impresario. This perspective also provides the reduced stage zone with the possibility of exploiting the vertical space for action and movement by means of stage machinery, in this case a scaffolding bridge. With the subtle use of lighting by Fabio Antoci, the same scene transforms from the harsh footlights of the intermezzo into a diffused dimness of an unidentified background for the Sub-Plot while availing itself of the identical structures. The costumes define the characters; beautifully baroque and elegant for Dorina, garishly colourful for Nibbio, shadowy purple in baroque coat, soft bow and britches for Iarba, Grecian white simplicity for Didone and a brocaded waistcoated replica of the conductor for Aeneas.



L'impresario delle Canarie, written in the style of Pergolesi, is a charming work with a melodic vein, rich in ornamentation, instrumental novelties and self-parody. Both **Christoph Loetzsch** and **Matthias Rexroth** who carry two thirds of the weight of the performance on stage, are engaging and commanding in their respective roles of Dorina and Ni Loetzsch, a member of the Semperoper's Young Artist's Programme, has the poise and presence but also the temperament in the part of the prima donna. Vocally precise in exacting runs and ornaments, fluidity of line and clarity of diction suffered due to an intense vibrato and dark, covered colour, suited to Dorina's passionate nature, but which camouflaged the text and weighted the flow. Supported by a stylish gesticulation of the baroque declamatory style, Matthias Rexroth's counter tenor shone for technical security, clear and focused enunciation, together with an easy and galvanizing stage-presence and a perfectly calibrated self-mockery.

With his exit and the dramatic device of a dream sequence, the Sub-plot is grafted seamlessly into the intermezzo. Fascinating for its parallels with baroque opera and oratorio, it presents a lean cast and a musical base akin to a basso continuo with only a contra bassoon and double bass. The plaintive timbre of the bassoon and the cavernous



sound of the bass, lend themselves to an atmosphere of pain and despair, and allow the vocalists an almost a cappella freedom for dynamics and colour. The solo voices overlap and intertwine in a clearly defined counterpoint, each expressing their individual state of mind and expressing their intimate emotions. The build up of tension passes through the constant harmonic oscillation between dissonance and resolution as the vocal lines overlap and fall away. The scene is based on the brief, crucial episode in the tale of Dido and Aeneas when Aeneas, declaring love for Dido but confesses to her that the gods request his departure: the Didone Abbandona scene of the original title. Aeneas is torn between love and duty. Dido is in despair and Iarbas, the local king demands Dido's hand in marriage.



The conflicting sentiments and emotions are projected clearly and articulately in counterpoint, and the vocal writing is extremely supportive of the voice, never demanding brutal or violent handling of it. The cast, all from the Young Artist's Programme, **Norma Nahoun** as Dido, **Pavol Kubán** as Aeneas and **Julian Arsenault** as Iarbas, did justice to Lucia Ronchetti's solicitous and sensitive writing. Norma Nahoun brought both expressive and musical phrasing to her part. Her even emission and sustained breath control, with the roundness and purity of her timbre, lent dignity, grace and pathos to her character. Pavol Kubán and Julian Arsenault were convincing foils for her tragedy and dilemma; Kubán in conveying a sense of hopelessness and Arsenault in his portrayal of an impetuous and unrefined rejected suitor. The baroque orchestra, under the guidance of the conductor and harpsichordist, Felice Venanzoni, played stylishly, with consummate precision and beauty of tone, always in perfect balance within the group and in relation to the singers. It was also encouraging to see such a large percentage of families, and enthusiastic too, which made up the audience at the second performance matinée, on Sunday 13th April. *Photo Matthias Creutziger*