

Rossinian dolce vita

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La pietra di paragone, one of Rossini's earliest triumphs (Milan, 1812), had been missing from the Rossini Opera Festival since 2002, and finally returned back this year. For the occasion the Festival asked director Pier Luigi Pizzi to revive and revamp his 2002 production. Over the past fifteen years, Pizzi's staging has circulated widely; in 2007 it was filmed in Madrid and made available on DVD. Back in Pesaro, Pizzi adapted his sleek, stylish, modern-costume production not only to a different space (the original run took place at the Palafestival, while the revival was hosted at the Adriatic Arena), but also to a cast made up of young, dashing singers. The changes further flesh out the glittering, sophisticated, and frivolous atmosphere which Pizzi has emphasized in the opera. The action takes place in the garden of a luxurious, contemporary-style villa, where the characters indulge in a dolce vita of sorts, enjoying lush buffets and seemingly endless wardrobes, diving into a swimming pool, playing tennis, and working out. Within this frame, Pizzi's imagination seem to know no boundaries: each situation presents such a wealth of ingenious ideas that the almost three hours of music pass by without notice.

The director took full advantage of the physical allure of the singers cast for the two leading roles: Gianluca Margheri (Count Asdrubale) performs most of the opera shirtless, showing off the physique of a body builder, while Aya Wakizono took advantage of her model-like silhouette and a graceful stage presence to portray an elegant and sophisticated Clarice. Vocally, however, neither of them seemed to be an ideal fit for their respective parts. Margheri joined the team a couple of months prior the beginning of rehearsals, as Luca Pisaroni (originally cast as Asdrubale) was asked to switch to the production of *Le siege de Corinthe* after Alex Esposito had withdrawn from it. But in spite of his unquestionable professionalism and remarkable engagement, his top register sounded somewhat coarse and his singing seemed on the ropes in the most demanding coloratura passages. An alumna of the Accademia Rossiniana, the young artists program of the Festival, Wakizono displayed remarkable stylistic sensitivity, fluid coloratura, and tasteful embellishments. Yet her high mezzo voice had to confront with a part that often plunges

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Arena. Gioachino Rossini, *La pietra di paragone*. Pier Luigi Pizzi,



director, set designer, and costume designer. Vincenzo Raponi, lighting designer. Aya Wakizono (Marchesa Clarice), Aurora Faggioli (Baronessa Aspasia), Marina Monzò (Donna Fulvia), Gianluca Margheri (Conte Asdrubale), Maxim Mironov (Cavalier Giocondo), Davide Luciano (Macrobio), Paolo Bordogna (Pacuvio), William Corrà (Fabrizio). Richard Barker, fortepiano. Coro del Teatro Ventidio Basso. Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI. Giovanni Farina, chorus master. Daniele Rustioni, conductor. Festival Rossini 2017

into the depths of a veritable alto range (the role of Clarice was written for Marietta Marcolini, who also premiered the title role in *Ciro in Babilonia* and Isabella in *L'italiana in Algeri*). Wakizono wisely refrained from pushing her voice in search for more volume in the low register, but as a result she sounded feeble whenever the vocal writing plummeted below the staff.



Gioachino Rossini, *La pietra di paragone*.
Pier Luigi Pizzi, director. Daniele Rustioni,
conductor. Pesaro, Adriatic Arena, August
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The other main roles were impeccably cast. Russian tenor Maxim Mironov was an elegant and finely nuanced Cavalier Giocondo. While his voice might be better suited for more intimate spaces, he sang with technical assurance, impeccable taste, and beautiful vocal colors. So eloquent and impressive was his performance of Giocondo's act-2 aria that the audience reacted by literally stopping the show for several minutes. Equally praiseworthy was Davide Luciano, who turned the role of Macrobio into a lesson of impeccable buffo singing: always expressive, delightful, and amusing, yet never vulgar or over-the-top. It was Paolo Bordogna, however, who stole the show with his exuberant portrayal of Pacuvio: not only did he sing with a rich-toned and flexible voice, he also

played the role with the consummate ability of a prose actor. His rendition of the arietta "Ombretta vezzosa" (the most well-known piece of the opera) was perhaps the highlight of the entire festival. The young soprano Marina Monzò displayed remarkable vocal and dramatic skills as Donna Fulvia, while Aurora Faggioli was less convincing in the role of Baronessa Aspasia. The small role of the servant Fabrizio provided William Corrò with the opportunity to show off a promising voice, a handsome figure, and an accomplished stage presence.

The RAI National Symphony Orchestra proved once more that the artistic management of the ROF made an excellent choice in picking it as the main orchestra of the festival. Daniele Rustioni conducted diligently, but did not offer a personal approach to the opera. Despite its less prominent role than in *Le siège de Corinthe*, the Chorus of the Teatro Ventidio Basso proved once more to be a valuable asset to the Festival.

The opera was performed from an updated version of the critical edition by Patricia Brauner and Anders Wiklund, soon to be published by the Fondazione Rossini. The revisions involved several details, the most prominent of which was the charming double echo in Clarice's act-1 aria: in the traditional version, only the Count's voice responds to Clarice, while now also an instrumental echo in the orchestra has been restored into the score. It is through such synergy of scholarship and performance that this production of *La pietra* reminds us of the importance of the Rossini Opera Festival as an occasion to cast an ever-changing light on works that we assumed we had come to know.



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