

***Little Sweep* – Alive and Kicking in a Little Italian Theatre**

Il Piccolo Spazzacamino [The Little Sweep: Let's Make an Opera], Benjamin Britten.
30th July 2013. Macerata Opera Festival, Teatro Lauro Rossi.

Marking Benjamin Britten's centenary, the Macerata Opera Festival 2013 incorporated two works of Britten (1913–1976). The first, his little, compact and interactive opera for children, *Little Sweep*, was staged in Italian translation, in a venue which bore affinity to the Jubilee Hall, for which Britten wrote this work, to be performed as part of the Aldeburgh Festival in June 1949. The Macerata Opera Festival audience were integrated into the performance, as in the original production, by rehearsing the four songs with the audience during the first part of the production, which is set as a rehearsal of the opera, performed in the second half.

The 'audience' songs were supported by the cast separated into four choirs around the auditorium. The intralingual surtitles and lyric sheets were integral to the audience participation. The projection of the narrative was clearly central to the performance. The work, intended to be accessible to all audiences, was performed to a sold out house, full of families. The cast, including many children and early career singers, were full of enthusiasm and energy. They all made great efforts to communicate both physically and musically. The mobile stage props and variable stage textures, using decorated boxes, gave depth and detail to the visual setting. Although the musical performance was not perfect, with a few intonation issues, its energy, dedication and interactivity made for an honest, lively and vibrant show.



Teatro Lauro Rossi

This delightful venue, with its compact auditorium and classic look, was a prime location for such an intimate work. Those familiar with Britten's work would recognise similarities with venues with which he worked. The instrumentalists, piano duet, four strings and two percussionists, were in view throughout the performance. Their tone, rhythmic precision and overall architecture created a strong and confident accompaniment to which the singers, actors and movement artists could work. For an international festival which is marked for its efforts to attract new and diverse audiences, which makes great efforts to communicate the text via programme notes, lyric sheets, surtitles and audio descriptions, this interactive performance was highly successful.

Helen Julia Minors
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