

A Very British International Centenary

Sogni di una notte di mezzaestate, William Shakespeare, Felix Mendelsohn, and Benjamin Britten. 7th August 2013. Dress Rehearsal. Macerata Opera Festival, Arena Sferisterio.



Sogni rehearsals, illustrating the interactivity of the director Francesco Micheli

The second work within the Macerata Opera Festival to mark the centenary of Benjamin Britten was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, only it was not presented as one might expect. Rather, the director Francesco Micheli, had the foresight to create a new work by fusing elements of Shakespeare's original play, with both the musical settling of Mendelsohn and Britten. The differing tones and styles added to the magic and mystery of this play in a new interpretation which privileged the work's multiplicity. *Sogni, Dreams*, made for an international, multimedia, vibrant experience.

Utilising the original English text set by Britten and sung in English, along with surtitles in Italian, and a translation of Shakespeare's text spoken in Italian by Puck, played by Lella Costa, supplemented by subheadings and directions in the surtitles, which were placed centre stage in a 1920s style

frame, produced a multilingual feast. Moreover, the video projection seen in some earlier performances in this season was used again, now to introduce the main characters in black and white silent film during both Mendelsohn's and Britten's overtures. The text which overlaid this, using the surtitle technology, informed the spectators who is in love with whom.

The characters of Bottom, sung by Andrea Concetti, and Tytania, sung by Pervin Chakar, were impeccable. Their shared energy, and appropriation of the characters were to such an extent that they both embodied their roles completely. Bottom's entrance in a red, and then white, racing sport's car was marvellous and utilised the unusual scale of this stage well. Tytania's hammock, swung between about 30 large trees, in the middle of the stage set, brought the forest quite literally to

the stage. The care, dedication, detail and depth to this stage has been unparalleled in other productions in the season.

The four main characters were physically and vocally agile, able to project in this very large auditorium and to manifest their characters wholly. Helena (Carmela Remigio), Hermia (Gabiella Sborgi), Lysander (Blagoj Nacoski) and Demetrius (Haris Andrianos) were all exceptional. The detailed choreography, rhythmic precision and focus on articulation to express the emotions of the moment made for a thrilling performance. Not least mention must be given to the children's roles. The children's choir and four soloists were laid out among the forest of the Sferisterio stage, coming together in such a clear, vibrato free

tone that it felt like a cathedral performance at times.

The combination of both Mendelsohn's and Britten's music allowed for the mysterious world of Bottom to be juxtaposed effectively with that of the main human characters. With both overtures, Micheli ensures the rhythmic drive of the fairies is introduced alongside the recitative-like quality of the fairies. Both music and text become fused in the story's telling. With English sung, Italian spoken and both used as projected text, the multilingual and international nature of this production seemed easy to capture. It was both effective and highly exciting. The setting of the Sferisterio added further depth to a wonderfully polished production which was a highly fitting tribute and contribution to Britten's centenary.



Sogni

Helen Julia Minors
2013

Forthcoming, an illustrated talk by Dr. Helen Julia Minors, on the transfer of sense between musics and text, as part of the annual Kingston Connections Public Free Events, at the Rose Theatre, Kingston Upon Thames, July 2014.