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OPERA REVIEWS

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Reviews

Minimalist staging and singing

by Silvia Luraghi

Verdi: Otello
Teatro Regio di Parma
 15 April 2007



As its last work of the current season Parma's Teatro Regio presented *Otello*, the most difficult among Verdi's operas, before an audience considered one of the most demanding in the world.

The John Cox production, coproduced with the

Opéra de Monte Carlo with scenes and costumes by Johan Engels featured an almost empty, slightly raked stage, where only some scenic elements hinted at the setting: the mast of Otello's ship in the first act, a table in the second, Desdemona's bed in the fourth. The colors of the costumes were white and red (only Iago and Emilia wore black), and contrasted with the deep blue of the sea on the background. Two cubicle structures on the sides provided separate spaces when needed.

The fact that the setting remained the same for the whole opera made the action more compact, and highlighted the intimate aspect of the tragedy. Such a minimalist setting would have profited from more accurate stage direction: the impression was that the singers did more or less what each of them found appropriate to his/her role, without a unity of intentions behind their acting.

In the title role, Vladimir Galouzine certainly displayed adequate vocal means, but in spite of his familiarity with the Moor, he still has problems with the Italian diction. In addition he has a hard time controlling the volume of his voice, and tends to sing everything *forte*, in an opera which should have quite a few *piani* passages. Fortunately, his top register is secure and perfectly tuned, though not always ringing: the "Esultate" was not impressive, although the duet with Iago in the second act was



more convincing.

The villain was Italian baritone Marco Vratogna, who debuted the role and certainly will have to carve deeper into it, but for a debut he did his part with honors. Svetla Vassileva was an assertive Desdemona, and highlighted the more dramatic moments darkening the color of her in voice, in a way that was perhaps not entirely suited to this role.

In the pit, Bruno Bartoletti conducted the Orchestra of the Teatro Regio in a very analytic manner, but lacked the fire required by the score. The chorus, directed as always by Martino Faggiani, was excellent, and all of the smaller roles were adequately covered.

Audience reaction to Galouzine was mixed. During the performance he received some applause and at the end some booing was mixed with many bravos. Reportedly, at opening night Galouzine had aroused the disapproval of the loggionisti, who booed for pretty much the whole opera. The biggest applause went to Svetla Vassileva, with cheers for all other singers and for Maestro Bartoletti.

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