

LINDA DI CHAMOUNIX Milan, September 28th 1988

My first impression of the Teatro Carcano, both in the foyer and in the auditorium was that it was a cinema - but a very elegant cinema. No boxes and one 'galleria', but with very comfortable seats, steeply raked, so that there was no problem about sight-lines. I wondered if the accoustics would be equally satisfactory, especially if the company were truly 'sperimentale', as the programme declared. Once the performance began all doubts evaporated. The conductor, Daniele Gatti, was in full command and the orchestra 'I Pomeriggi Musicali di Milano' were in brilliant form.

The curtain rose to show that, as elsewhere, simple settings can be fully adequate, and may be seen as a compliment to the cast in that the whole attention of the audience was directed to the singers and the music. William Ashbrook, writing about this work says: "*Linda is an opera of sentiment rather than emotion, a celebration of simple domestic virtues, and it results in the triumph of innocence. The plot is dated and demands from the audience a remarkable suspension of disbelief, yet such is Donizetti's skill at creating a forthright and intimate musical atmosphere, at finding just the guileless note of musical rhetoric for the character's sentiments, that much of the strain upon one's credulity is eased*". Therefore, for a performance to succeed, there must be from the cast, not only a high standard of vocal accomplishment, but also a total and sincere commitment to the roles being played. They must convey this to their audience by the quality of their voices and also by their musicianship.

This the cast achieved from the opening bars and maintained it right through the performance. The names of the principal singers were

all new to me, but the standards on this occasion showed that they should soon become well-known. As *Linda*, Valerie Esposito displayed a fine, well-schooled voice and high standards of acting especially in the Paris scene with her father. Perhaps the greatest pleasure of the evening was the clear, correct and confident singing of the tenor, Orfeo Zanetti, who used his lovely secure voice in the role of Carlo. Most satisfactory of all, however, was the high, overall standard of all the players - principal singers, chorus and the orchestra - who showed that, to quote William Ashbrook again: "*From the first-rate overture to the buoyant duet-finale, there is hardly a page lacking in distinction. The choral episodes in the 'introduzione', and at the beginning of Act 3, when most of the migrant workers return to the village, are genre scenes that create a sense of the patterns of rural life and produce an entirely different effect from that of the courtiers who populate the Romantic melodramas. The most significant thing of all about Linda is the evidence it affords of the mature Donizetti.*" Without doubt, this was truly displayed in this very accomplished and most satisfying performance.

Bill Timmons

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