

I saw *Roberto Devereux* at the Royal Northern College of Music. What care and attention have gone into this production, the best I have seen of this inspired opera!

Full marks go to the producer Stefan Janski, for his careful direction of the principals and chorus, no tired operatic conventions here, but purposeful movement and grouping, consistently in the spirit of the work. My attendance was on the first night but it showed no sign of it, reminiscent of Royal Shakespeare Company style in production – more like a straight play.

Costumes were richly made and looked authentic. I checked to see who they were borrowed from, but the programme notes say they were made in the college wardrobe. Good use of resources, as were the unobtrusive and apt settings (Peter Ruthven Hall). The setting for Essex's cell was simple and effective, inevitably reminding one of *Fidelio*.

The orchestra seemed to me to be in top form, especially in the wonderful overture (snippets of which could be heard in rehearsal nearly until curtain-up!) Andrea Cleighton, young New Zealand soprano was thoroughly professional as the beleaguered Queen. No irritating doddering to suggest age but a sensitive depiction of the monarch, dignified and vital.

Rafael Rojas had the title role, no great actor but a big voice and a joy to hear; Nottingham was played by Riccardo Santini, a fine baritone.

A word about the theatre itself: bleakly modern, but excellent in use, auditorium steeply raked, ample stage space, a well-designed foyer and on the night I was there filled with an appreciative and enthusiastic audience. Good clear surtitles, supplied by a Scottish Bank, but too high up.

I have just been to Kenilworth for the Annual General Meeting and have seen the evocative ruins of the castle. Please Royal Northern College of Music, next year could we have *Il castello di Kenilworth* as a companion piece to this pleasurable production?

Keith Larsen