

# VOCE DI MECHE

Reviews of performing arts with emphasis on young artists and small opera companies.

*We are here to encourage the development of gifted young singers and to stimulate the growth of New York City's invaluable companies. But we will not neglect the Metropolitan Opera either. Get ready for bouquets and brickbats.*

Sunday, July 29, 2018

## TANCREDI AND THE BIRTH OF BEL CANTO



**Rossini**  
***Tancredi***  
July 28, August 3

**Tamara Mumford**  
**Amanda Woodbury**  
**Santiago Ballerini**  
**Leo Radosavljevic**

About Me

Search This Blk

Follow by Email

Email address

G+

Tamara Mumford as Tancredi

Maestro Will Crutchfield has decamped from Caramoor after twenty years and set up camp as "Teatro Nuovo" at Purchase College, which has given him a compelling Bel Canto Festival to celebrate the type of opera we love the most. We will follow Will wherever he goes and we hope

his loyal fans will do likewise. There is a training program attached to this festival and young artists are surely flocking to Purchase to participate.

There is an adventure seeking motive at work in that there are some interesting explorations into performing traditions involved as well as the use of period instruments in the newly formed orchestra. At last night's *Tancredi*, this newly formed orchestra could have fooled us into believing that they have been around forever.

Maestro Crutchfield is not only Artistic Director and General Director of the festival but performed at the harpsichord as well, with Jakob Lehmann as Concertmaster, leading the orchestra. We loved the softer sound and craned our neck to get a better look at the unusual woodwinds and brass.

For this year's festival, along with lectures, panel discussions, recitals and master classes, there are two major operatic productions, or should we say two and a half. We will review a recital on Tuesday and Mayr's *Medea in Corinto* next weekend. Last night we heard *Tancredi* which Rossini composed within a month when he was but twenty years old! It was commissioned by La Fenice in 1813.

By that time, he had already written nine operas and had achieved success with the genre of *opera buffa*, but *Tancredi* launched his career as a composer of originality, creating works that served as a bridge between the Classical period and the Romantic period. He established the forms that would serve the art form for a century. He moved *opera seria* into new territory, writing extended duets and choruses which commented on the action. He set up the *scena*, comprising *recitativo-cantilena-cabaletta*. He extinguished the happy ending.

As a matter of fact, the original *Tancredi* **did** have a happy ending but Rossini was persuaded to rewrite it in a manner that more accurately reflected Voltaire's 1760 play *Tanocrède*, on which the *libretto* (by Gaetano Rossi) was based. The "half opera" we mentioned earlier will be presented at the festival on August 5th as *Tancredi Rifatto*, and includes a wealth of vocal material that Rossini added for various performances, ostensibly to suit the voices of different singers--and also includes the unhappy ending.

Well, you won't hear any objections to happy endings on our part and forgiveness is best appreciated when the one forgiven goes on living, or so we believe.

After incredible popularity in the 19th c. the opera fell out of the repertory but was brought back when Marilyn Horne chose to champion it. (Thank you Jackie!)

The opera takes place in the 11th c. in Sicily where the Byzantine Empire is threatened by the Saracens. Our hero *Tancredi* had been exiled as a child and you, dear reader, will recognize the prototype of the "outsider" as one of the great contributions of the Romantic period.

He is loved by *Amenaide*, the daughter of *Argirio*, a nobleman who has just achieved a truce with *Orbazzano*, a nobleman of another faction. He is marrying off his daughter to *Orbazzano* to cement the truce, but she isn't having any of it.

The plot thickens because a letter she wrote to *Tancredi* has fallen into the wrong hands and she is suspected of writing to the Saracen leader, an act of treason punishable by death. Although he is feeling betrayed, *Tancredi* engages in single combat with *Orbazzano*, her accuser, and saves her.

In the title role we heard mezzo-soprano Tamara Mumford, of whom we have been a fan since hearing her in a recital at the Metropolitan Museum, before we even started writing. We enjoyed

her performance at The Metropolitan Opera as Smeaton and her performance at Caramoor as well. There is no denying her vocal artistry and distinctive sound. For us, the highlight of the evening was her delivery of "*Di tanti palpiti*". There are echoes of this melody in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*.

As Amenaide, soprano Amanda Woodbury made a strong impression, handling Rossini's lavish *fioritura* with aplomb and conveying a sense of the character's challenging predicament. She was as splendid in her duets as in her arias.

As her father Argirio, we heard tenor Santiago Ballerini tear into Rossini's challenging vocal fireworks like a hot knife through butter. Small in stature but large in vocal gifts, this is a tenor to watch. His Act II *scena* beautifully expressed his ambivalence about signing his daughter's death warrant. There is something about his *decrescendo* that astonished us; he spun the vocal line out to the finest filament.

Bass-baritone Leo Radosavljevic, whom we well remember from Juilliard and several vocal competition award recitals, did justice to the role of Orbazzano, making his sound burly in times of anger. He's a man who just can't believe that his intended has other intentions.

Mezzo-soprano Hannah Ludwig was excellent as Amenaide's chief support Isaura. We loved the way she stood up for her friend. Similarly, mezzo-soprano Stephanie Sanchez excelled as Roggiero, Tancredi's esquire.

As far as semi-staged operas go, we were happy that the entire cast was "off book" (except for the excellent Teatro Nuovo Chorus) but we really missed sets and costumes. We were hoping for some projections that would suggest time and place and some simple costumes. Instead, we had a bare stage with female singers wearing gowns and male singers in dinner jackets. At the very least, we wished that the two women performing pants roles had abandoned high heels. It's one thing for Isaura to totter around the stage but Tancredi and Roggiero should have been wearing boots. It's difficult to walk like a man wearing high heels!

And that is the only quibble we have with a superb production that gave us insight into the birth of Bel Canto and an enduring ear worm of "*Di tanti palpiti*" which we have been singing all night.

The Bel Canto Festival will continue until August 5th and Purchase is but an hour away. Consult their website and pick something. Pick anything! You won't be disappointed.

(c) meche kroop

Posted by [meche](#) at [5:52 AM](#)



Labels: [Amanda Woodbury](#), [Gaetano Rossi](#), [Gioachino Rossini](#), [Hannah Ludwig](#), [Leo Radosavljevic](#), [Purchase College](#), [Santiago Ballerini](#), [Stephanie Sanchez](#), [Tamara Mumford](#), [Tancredi](#), [Teatro Nuovo](#), [Will Crutchfield](#)

No comments:

Post a Comment