

Medea in Corinto, Performing Arts Center, Purchase College, New York — this is how it should be done



*The Teatro Nuovo season presents an exemplary performance of Giovanni Simone Mayr's opera
-George Loomis*

Operas by early 19th-century masters such as Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti form a beloved cornerstone of the repertoire, and we are blessed with singers equipped to do them justice. Yet tendencies to abuse the music's traditions of improvisation often lead to slipshod practices without counterpart in operas of other styles.

For 20 years the conductor Will Crutchfield's Bel Canto at Caramoor series has provided a model for how things should be done. Now, renamed Teatro Nuovo, it carries on in a significantly expanded form at a new Westchester County location. Training efforts for young singers have been boosted, but the most obvious change is a brand new period-instrument orchestra of nearly 50 players — a rare resource for US opera and a first here for opera of this era.

The orchestra's bold, vibrant playing, superbly attentive to the music's intricate wind writing, helps bring to sizzling life *Medea in Corinto*, Giovanni Simone Mayr's best known opera. Born and trained in Bavaria, Mayr came to Italy as a young man, Italianised his name and productively remained there, notwithstanding an invitation from Napoleon to head the Paris Opera.

Dating from 1813 — the year of Rossini's first big success, *Tancredi* (also on Teatro Nuovo's boards) — *Medea* reveals Mayr's roots in musical Classicism, yet the title role of the jilted sorceress is as fiercely impassioned as any Romantic heroine. Jennifer Rowley, who succeeds Anna Netrebko as Adriana Lecouvreur at the Metropolitan Opera next year, brings full-bodied, resonant tone and unflinching determination to her portrayal. Yet, like her colleagues Derrek Stark (*Giasone*), Teresa Castillo (*Creusa*) and William Lee Bryan (*Creonte*), she sings with cultivated phrasing, expressive dynamic contrasts and stylish ornamentation.

As a start-up venture, Teatro Nuovo has directed its funds towards the music. While the orchestra plays from a pit raised almost to floor level and is seated according to a contemporary plan from Naples, the singers, wearing concert dress, enact the work on a bare stage abetted only by discreet lighting. Yet they put the drama across. Jonathan Brandani, at the piano, and orchestra leader Jakob Lehmann persuasively share conducting responsibilities.

★★★★☆

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