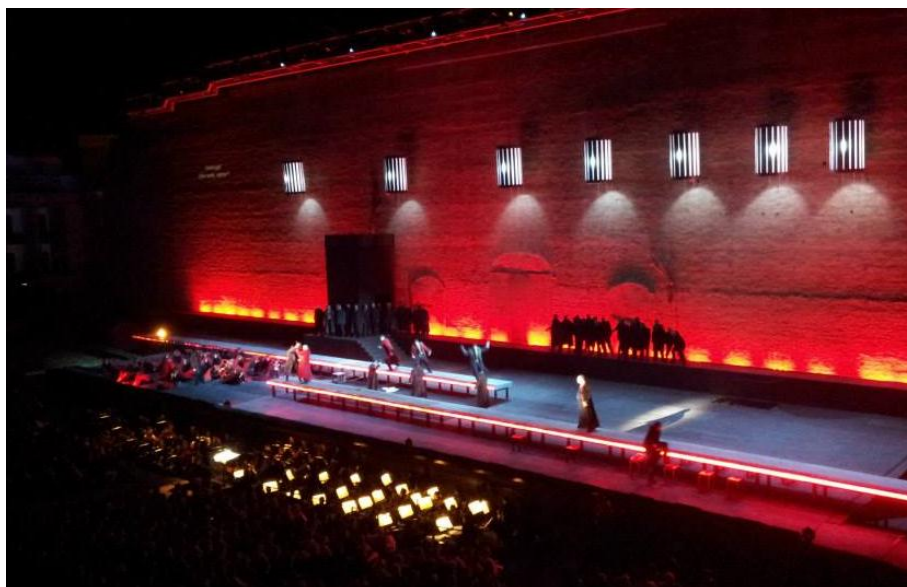


Travelling Time and Fire

Il Trovatore, Giuseppe Verdi.

3rd August 2013. Macerata Opera Festival, Arena Sferisterio.



Il Trovatore, Act 2

The dramatic logic and lyric capacity of Verdi's music is emphasised in this new production of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. The two forces of the Count of Luna and the warrior Manrico are pitched against each other and against time. The stage is set with two long tables: to the left, the past, to the right, the future. These tables provide the basis of the historical overview which is sung in Act 1. While highlighting various human conditions, this new version utilises the long stage set, with two long tables and wall lighting, limited colour palette (black and red costumes) and long thin architectural shapes in conjunction with the stage shape, the set illustrates the characters' recollections of the past and their need to avenge their futures.

The lighting designs of Bruno Poet effectively modifies the auditorium's stone wall: the red lighting during the Anvil Chorus in Act 2 foregrounds the energy and free quality of the gypsies, which along with the controlled fire lines on the two tables offers a dangerous

flavour to the drama. The gruesome retelling of a child in flames is insinuated in the set. Moreover, the restraints used to hold Azucena, in Act 3, are formed from coloured lights.

The subtlety with which the lights are used are matched in the musical interpretation. The solo harp is moved from left to right, to situate the musical telling within the stage set. The vocal demands in Verdi's score require powerful singers with much stamina. Unfortunately the leading soprano, Leonora, sung by Susanna Branchini, struggled to project her long lyrical lines across the expanse of the Sferisterio. The much more resonant and agile mezzo soprano role, Azucena, performed by Enkelejda Shkosa, suitably projected a stronger more vibrant mature character. Although Leonora was sometimes lost under the orchestral forces her restraint contributed to the reading of her character as a noble and proper lady in love with one and courted by the other lead male character. Both

her voice and her character role became subsumed into the collective narrative.

The formal structure of Verdi's composition is used here in affinity with the structural formality of the stage setting, lighting and colour palette to artfully control the telling of these unusual incidents. The new production utilised the magnificent setting of the

Sferisterio to its full, ensuring the large stone wall and long thin stage became an integral part of the drama. In many ways the stage setting here translated the content of musical form and dramatic detail.

Helen Julia Minors
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