

Rossini Perduto, review by Karl Varnik.

Rossini's retirement from writing operas before the age of 40 has sparked fascination and curiosity among fans of the art form. Why did such a prolific and talented composer decide to abandon the art which had brought him fame, fortune, and acclaim among the public and critics? For many, it's a subject of speculation. For the composer David Winkler and librettist Luigi Ballerini, this mystery became a source of inspiration.

In the opera **Rossini Perduto** - which had its world premiere at New York St. Jean's Theatre on May 22nd - the composer/librettist duo use the figure of Rossini to explore the nature of art, creativity, longing, love, death, and life. Surely an ambitious number of themes to cover in a three act opera, but much like Rossini's music, the composer and librettist move nimbly - at times with humor, at times with poignancy, and at times with beauty.

The music often propels quickly and with an energy with which fans of Rossini's music are familiar. There are light touches of Rossini's music occurring throughout the score. Occasionally there are famous stanzas of Rossini's music interspersed between the modern compositions of Winkler. It's an engaging effect - the old and the new - and for the listener the message how art is often - or perhaps always - connected to the art that came before it is difficult to miss.

The libretto is written in Italian but even in the English translation the cleverness, playfulness, and intelligence come through. Though Rossini remains silent - a metaphorical giant looming over the opera - the dialogue of the other characters flows freely. Creating an opera with figures like Isabella Colbran, Wagner, Dumas, Stendhal, Beethoven is something many librettists would approach with glee - and there does seem to be joy in the result.

The sets were minimal but elegant. The furniture and costumes were obviously chosen with thought and a high level of detail. Combined with the extremely well-done and gorgeous lighting, this was a production that was a pleasure to watch. The use of light and shadows, besides being beautiful on their own, also served to emphasize the themes of the opera.

The way the cast was directed by Stefanos Koroneos also deserves much praise. Despite being a conceptual opera, the flow of the singers as they interacted on stage was natural and thoughtful. When there were more climactic moments, such as the cast singing together near the conclusion, the combination of the directing, staging, and lighting made for breathtaking moments. Koroneos is an extremely competent and brilliant director and one should not miss the chance to see more of his work with New York's Teatro Grattacielo.

The Long Island Concert Orchestra, conducted by Enrico Fagone, sounded great. Because this is not a full-time orchestra and this is the premiere of the piece - obviously meaning nobody was familiar with it - challenges were to be expected. Fagone did a wonderful job keeping the orchestra together. Despite the very rare slipup, the orchestra managed to play with an energy and liveliness that served both Winkler's and Rossini's music well. The oboist sounded phenomenal during one of the Rossini callbacks. There was a wonderful cello solo as well during a section of Winkler's score. Beautiful tone and phrasing by that cellist!

Opera is a collaborative art and when everything comes together - the music, the libretto, the sets, the costume, the lighting, the blocking - the result can be magical. That was the case here.

Disposizioni sceniche: This was first adopted in France in about 1840 using the words livrets de mise-en-scene and was then adapted in Italy in the second half of the eighteenth century. The term means the definition of a series of gestures and movements which could be repeated, without variations in every theatre in which an opera was produced. The stage directions published, above all in Italy by Casa Ricordi were based on the idea that the dramatic interpretations of an artistic work would be one only, close to the author's intentions and that the performer would follow the stage instructions faithfully. The practicality and fortune of Stage Directions declined rapidly in the first ten years of the nineteenth century when new ideas for stage design were introduced and, above all the idea that a stage production could mean a free adaptation and recreation of an artist's work, far from being a passive reproduction of a pre-formed model. (from Opera in Miniature)



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OPERA IN THREE ACTS
Long Island Concert Orchestra

Music by **David Winkler**
Luigi Ballerini Librettist
Enrico Fagone Conductor
Stefanos Koroneos Director

**ROSSINI
PERDUTO**