

Lucia challenge is well met

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Audience enthusiasm and capacity houses were the reward of Opera Omnibus's courage in producing Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* last week, in three performances at the Haslemere Hall.

Courage was needed, because although this is a splendid vehicle for singers, with many lovely melodies, it makes heavy demands on them.

The company responded to the challenge with an excellent cast. Moreover the libretto by Cammarano is a long way removed from Scott's novel, though sung in English and in a new translation by Peter Clarke. Cammarano presented Donizetti with stock dramatic situations — lovers' misunderstandings, a murder, and two suicides — which gave him scope for some of his most effective musical numbers including the Mad Scene and the rousing sextet in Act 2.

Any soprano who undertakes the role of Lucia must be conscious of following in the steps of Patti and Galli-Curci, not to mention Nellie Melba and Dame Joan Sutherland.

Fortunately, Zoe Turner showed herself completely mistress of the part with its exacting vocal line and demand for precise intonation, particularly in the unison passages with the flute in the Mad Scene. Her acting also demonstrated that this opera is more than a feast for "canary" fanciers", and her ovation from the audience was well merited.

Although the soprano and her comforting companion Alisa (excellently sung by the mezzo-soprano Lindsay Bramley) dominate most of the scenes, there are very substantial roles for the men.

Caruso, in his time, enjoyed singing the part of Edgardo, which the tenor Andrew Morris tackled with verve and strength. Equally, the baritone role of the wicked brother Enrico was confidently mastered by Stephen Faughhey.

Daniel Meades, as Lucia's unfortunate bridegroom, has a very pleasing tenor voice, of which one would have liked to hear more.

Keen appreciation was shown by the audience for the sonorous bass and effective stage presence of Peter Barber in the major part of Raimondo, the Chaplain. The short part of Normanno was also well sung by the experienced tenor Sean Sweeney.

With such a cast of capable soloists with stage experience, the skills of the director, Geoffrey Ford, and the choreographer, Irene Axon, were no doubt mainly concerned with the deployment of the chorus, who sang with all their accustomed enthusiasm.

The costumes gave a good suggestion of the period of the story, about 1700, without any special Scottish identity.

Although primarily a work for display of vocal talent, Donizetti's score is far more interestingly orchestrated than those of his predecessors such as Bellini.

So it was fortunate that the Bernardi Opera Orchestra, under the authoritative conducting of David Wright, numbered no less than 19 and were able to provide fine solo performers such as Catrin Morris Jones for the lovely harp solo before Lucia's first entrance, and Fiona Beddow for the flute accompaniment to the singer in the Mad Scene. Altogether, an evening to remember.

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