

The Financial Times Thursday March 23 1972

Sadler's Wells Theatre

Ormindo

by DOMINIC GILL

Last week in the Purcell Room, Raymond Leppard gave a master-class with students from the London Opera Centre on Monteverdi's *Poppo* and Orfeo and on his realisation of Cavalli's *Callisto*. Last night he took the LOC a step further, directing them in a full-scale staged performance of the first of his Glyndebourne Cavalli operas, *Ormindo*.

For this first transfer from Sotex, the Rosebery Avenue theatre was a sensible choice: small enough to let the chamber-music ensemble of singers and players breathe and speak; informal enough to let the semi-professional cast relax, move happily and easily in their parts. Both the production and the designs are new. Colin Graham has his singers moving confidently, unfussily, always purposefully: there are no Rennet trucks, no clever sidestow, no distractions. The focus is admirably clear. The pace is exactly right: never hurried, but with enough movement and wit to keep tension at theatre pitch. John Fraser's simple, uncluttered set, dappled with warm chints and gold, is also very apt, functional as well as pretty. The royal castle becomes a prison, grim enough, with just some extra railings and another light. The costumes are mixed, generally attractive, and period at least: no paint-stained jeans.

Doctors and scholars may still disagree among themselves: but one thing is certain—Leppard's realisation, or better "presentation," of the gay, sad, courtly, sprightly music of 17th-century Venice is a delight, and still a delight. He directed his ad hoc band with customary vigour and sweetness; and inspired his singers unflinchingly to involve themselves with each note as if it belonged to them, each gesture, laugh or sigh. Paul Whitmarsh in the title role made several telling points: the voice is not large, but it is clean and subtly modulated. The final scene was played small-scale, without loss of warmth or dignity.

Stuart Harling's *Amida* is strong and friendly, better in outspoken aria than in hushed exchange. Neither Mary Ann Fones as *Siele*, nor Helen Grant as *Erise* was outstanding; but Miss Grant moves well, shows promising instinct for the stage. The two travesty roles were exceptionally well taken by Wendy Pashley as *Nerillo*, lusty, bouncy; and by Brian Burrows as *Erico*, deceptively rosy-cheeked, sly and very funny. The fiction of these last two was also notably fluent and clear.

There are three more performances at Sadler's Wells, divided between last night's, and a second, cast: today, tomorrow, and Saturday.



Mary Ann Fones, Elizabeth Connell, Helen Grant and Stuart Harling

Sadler's Wells THEATRE

ROSEBERY Avenue LONDON EC1

Box Office Telephone 01-837 1672

The LONDON OPERA CENTRE

presents the first London staged performances of

L'Ormindo

by CAVALLI

in the version realised by Raymond Leppard

March 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th, 1972 at 7.30 pm

Conductor: Raymond Leppard
Producer: Colin Graham
Designer: John Fraser

ENTERTAINMENTS

When telephoning use 01-837-0111 outside London Metropolitan Area

OPERA AND BALLET

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL OPERA
Tonight at 7.30 P.M.
MON. 21.30 NABUCCO

THUR. 23.30
FALSTAFF

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL BALLET
Tonight at 7.30 P.M. AFTERNOON
TUE. 2 P.M. LA BELLE GALERIE

FRI. 8.30 P.M. at 7.30
ANASTASIA

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL OPERA
LAST PERFORMANCE OF SEASON
Tonight at 7.30
THE RINGGOLD

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL BALLET
Tonight at 7.30 P.M.
MON. 21.30 NABUCCO

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL BALLET
Tonight at 7.30 P.M.
TUE. 2 P.M. LA BELLE GALERIE

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL BALLET
Tonight at 7.30 P.M.
WED. 7.30 P.M. LA BELLE GALERIE

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL BALLET
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SAT. 7.30 P.M. LA BELLE GALERIE

COVENT GARDEN ROYAL BALLET
Tonight at 7.30 P.M.
SUN. 7.30 P.M. LA BELLE GALERIE

SUNDAY TIMES 26-3-72.

Fine revivals

FELIX APRAHAMIAN

new heights of spiritual expression, which owed as much to their sense of timing and tempo as to beauty of vocal tone and impeccable enunciation. Mr Norrington's choral contribution was worthy of such principals. An Argo record with Tuesday's cast has just been issued, and the third concert of the cycle (with the Resurrection Story) will be given at St Andrew's Holborn on April 15 at 8.

Cavalli's *L'Ormindo*, which has already delighted Glyndebourne audiences in the original Italian, provided equal delight in Geoffrey Dunn's racy English version when the London Opera Centre staged it at Sadler's Wells Theatre last week. Conducted again with his usual verve by its editor, Raymond Leppard, elegantly designed by John Fraser and vivaciously produced by Colin Graham, it presented a cast whose excellence simply belied their student status. Applauding Paul Whitmarsh, Stuart Harling, Wendy Pashley, Mary Ann Fones, Rosalind Milnes, Brian Burrows, Helen Grant, Elizabeth Connell, Michael Follis and Philip Gelling, I can only regret that I was unable to see the alternating cast as well. Another triumph for the Centre.



THE TIMES
23-3-72
Ormindo
Sadler's Wells

William Mann

London Opera Centre, our training ground for advanced operatic students, had a success recently with Monteverdi's *Così fan tutte*. So, taking another step along the Glyndebourne path, they have put on the second seventeenth-century Venetian opera which Raymond Leppard edited for the festival season in Sussex, Cavalli's *Ormindo*. The LOC production is to be seen, every night for the rest of this week, at Sadler's Wells Theatre in Finsbury. Two alternating casts perform it under Leppard himself. This is the opera's London premiere and, I believe, the first time it has been sung in Geoffrey Dunn's quirky, amusing English translation. In due course we may hope to see LOC productions of *Calisto* and *Ulysses's Homecoming*.

Ormindo seems musically less substantial, in Leppard's version, than his *Calisto*. The set pieces, both serious and saucy, are there: last night's cast made of them according to each singer's talent. As Nerillo, the cynical page, Wendy Pashley (the only singer in both casts) projected both her areas strongly, especially "Che città" ("What a town"), the boy's expect-

of scandalous goings-on—presumably in the Venice of Cavalli and Faustini, for all that the action stipulates Fez in North Africa. John Fraser's delightful and practical unit set hints rather at Turkey: a regency Brighton dolls' house, as it were.

The other comic parts were effectively done too: Elizabeth Connell radiated apple-cheeked nude health as Mirinda, and Brian Burrows conveyed the paradox of the gossiping Quixkyesque nurse with a tender voice most expertly, without recourse to conventional camp. The serious roles were less skilfully sung, although there is real potential in Stuart Harling's baritone voice. But the balance between serious and comic in the opera was convincingly held, more so than at Glyndebourne, perhaps.

Some of the credit for this may go to Mr Leppard who persuaded an experienced, indeed distinguished, orchestral ensemble to behave, actively as well as passively, the still-developing solo voices. As much credit was due to Colin Graham's judicious production which gave proper weight to the serious contents, avoided Renner's fustiness, and found strength of presence and movement to compensate for vocal failings. It is a production worth going to see, apart from the interest of a much discussed opera which many readers may have missed at Glyndebourne.

THE STAGE and TELEVISION TODAY, March 30, 1972—13

'L'Ormindo' at Sadler's Wells

THE AWAKENING of interest in seventeenth-century opera owes much to the work of Raymond Leppard, whose "realisations" of works by Monteverdi and Cavalli are increasingly familiar to opera audiences. Students, too, need to acquire first-hand experience of this unfamiliar and difficult style, and so it was praiseworthy of the London Opera Centre to stage Cavalli's "L'Ormindo" at Sadler's Wells Theatre on March 22, and to invite Raymond Leppard to conduct the performances.

"L'Ormindo" is a severe test for comparatively inexperienced singers, but they were helped through the movement and characterisation problems by Colin Graham, whose production was unfussy and lucid, and Mr Leppard guided them through the even more worrying musical difficulties.

On the whole the singing was of a high standard, with only one or two performances falling short of the general level of professionalism. Elizabeth Connell produced some of the most assured singing as Mirinda, with clear diction and flexible rhythmic sense, and Wendy Pashley as Nerillo was deliciously ambivalent in this boy's song about the sexual dangers of the city.

In the principal parts, Mary

Ann Fenes revealed a dramatic soprano voice and stage presence as Sicile, whilst Stuart Harling as her lover Amida sang with firm control of his vocal line. Paul Whitmarsh was less secure as Ormindo, wavering off pitch during the first act, but recovering in time for his moving solo after Erisbe's supposed death. As Erisbe, Helen Grant lacked force of vocal characterisation, though she sang well, and there was a strong supporting performance from Brian Burrows as a Peggy Mount type of nurse, along the lines of Hugues Cuervo's famous study, but differently characterised. Michael Follis and Philip Gelling were prominent in other parts, and John Fraser's designs set the seal on an extremely worthwhile achievement. D.F.B.

John Rush

HILTON AMBLER is retiring from the board of David Higham Associates Limited with effect from March 31, but will remain with the company as a consultant working part-time. John Rush will join the firm on February 14 to take charge of film, television, radio and stage rights. Mr Rush has for the last four years dealt with authors' film, stage, radio and television rights at Christopher Mann Limited.

SADLER'S WELLS

THE GUARDIAN, 23-3-72.

Meirion Bowen

L'Ormindo

RAYMOND LEPPARD'S version of Cavalli's "L'Ormindo"—first seen at Glyndebourne a few years back—is highly valued to young singers cutting their teeth on seventeenth-century opera. At Sadler's Wells Theatre, London Opera Centre students are to be heard in a well-rehearsed, if over-economical production by Colin Graham, with Leppard himself conducting. The opera is on until Saturday, with alternating casts. The singers I myself heard were an uneven bunch. In the title-role Paul Whitmarsh sang, in the little-rolle Paul Whitmarsh sang, generally above the note, but had a happy knack as far as the dramatic placing of phrases was concerned. Similar vices and virtues were to be observed in Ormindo's loved one, Erisbe, taken by Helen Grant, and in his rival Amida (Stuart Harling).

At Glyndebourne, "L'Ormindo" was done in Italian; here it's sung in Geoffrey Dunn's translation, which is useful to those who can't understand an Italian libretto, but not really conducive to hot *canto* vocal delivery and baroque ornamentation. Leppard's version of the opera surrenders some of its period trappings, attempts to reshape it in terms similar to those of

Opera
DAILY TELEGRAPH 23-3-72.

Cavalli's 'L'Ormindo'
with gusto

By MARTIN COOPER

THE production of Cavalli's "L'Ormindo" at Sadler's Wells Theatre last night did quite exceptional credit to the London Opera Centre.

Free and natural movements and gestures demanded by Colin Graham's apt and imaginative production combined with the Baroque figuration.

These with the strong, light rhythms and the sheer pace of Cavalli's music present a formidable test for young singers and one that was passed with flying colours by all the cast.

Paul Whitmarsh sang the title-role with style and feeling but his intonation was too often uncertain. Helen Grant's Erisbe was well characterised and her voice gained in power and colour during the evening, as did the Sicile of Mary Ann Fenes.

Stuart Harling's Amida was a little rough, though the voice promises well, and Wendy Pashley carried off the part Nerillo with neat economy.

★

Perhaps the best projected and most finished performance of all was Elizabeth Connell's Mirinda, a handsome voice used with intelligence and an infectious wit.

Brian Burrows brought the house down as the old nurse Erice, a spontaneously comic performance that could hardly have been bettered, and Michael Follis displayed an impressive basso in the part of Ariadeno.

Raymond Leppard conducted with a fine gusto and delicacy, and John Fraser's single open set—as exotic summer-house easily converted into a prison—facilitated the changes of scene but preserved the continuity of dramatic interest.

say, "Così fan tutte." "L'Ormindo" will not bear the strain. Its music is full of charm and there are many moments of conventional pathos, especially in the prison scene—"ground-bass" duet and some bold modulations worthy of mention: but not on a par with Monteverdi's "Orfeo" or "Poppea." Dunn's translation makes one less willing to suspend disbelief. One assumes from the start that Ormindo will be allowed to take over Erisbe from her old, frigid husband. And these days, one wouldn't mind if she ultimately manages a message of truce with Amida also, but the latter gets rebooked on an older acquaintance, Sicile.

I found that John Fraser's sets—a sort of circus marquee, light brown with spots, creating a stage within the stage—was less rebarbative than these abstract splurges in the Calisto "Poppea." But they add little. Some day perhaps an outing could be arranged for aspiring designers of baroque opera. First stop, Felini's "Salyricos"; second, Pasolini's "Decameron"; their methods of creating an interplay of illusion and reality are of more consequence than any period pictures conjured up. They give the story a meaningful setting. Most opera producers never come within striking distance.

