

Lucia di Lammermoor - Clonter Opera

Philip Radcliffe, Manchester Evening News

It was touch and go whether the leading lady would be able to sing – and that was the off-stage drama. On stage, she did perform and revealed a voice of quite exceptional quality, a glorious soaring soprano.

Natalya Romaniw, Welsh-born, sings the title role in Donizetti's opera, written in 1835 to a text based on Sir Walter Scott's 1819 gothic novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*.

Lucia is tragically at the centre of a fight-to-the death feud between her family, the Lammermoors, led by her brother Lord Enrico, and another noble Scottish brood, the Ravenswoods, led by Sir Edgardo. Inevitably, she falls in love with the latter, but is forced by her brother to marry another for the sake of the family fortune.

It is a loaded drama, predictable but gripping in this traditional Ashley Dean production. Designer Cordelia Chisholm sets the action on a spacious gloomy set, barely furnished, and the costumes are Victorian mourning. All of which seems appropriate for the tale of tragedy and romance taking place mainly in the faded stately home of the Lammermoors.

Clonter is known for giving future stars a beginning. We certainly have one in Romaniw. She is an outstanding coloratura soprano and shows maturity in her acting. Yet she is still a student at the Guildhall, albeit with a string of prestigious prizes (including Clonter) to her name, and was, we were told, hampered by a head cold. She could have fooled me. She was terrific.

Not only that, but in the Japanese baritone Koji Terada (the 2011 Clonter Prizewinner) as Enrico and the South Korean tenor Jung Soo Yun as Edgardo, fiercely confronting each other, vocally and physically, we have two more quite exceptional singers able to hold their own with Romaniw.

I have never heard finer singing at Clonter than from this truly international cast, extending to supporting roles sung by Ciprian Droma from Romania and locally-born tenor Adam Smith.

Clive Timms conducted with care and precision and spirit – Donizetti's dramatic yet vivid score is not all doom and gloom. He coaxed dramatic and sensitive playing from the youthful 14-strong Clonter Sinfonia. I particularly enjoyed Jennifer George's flute, the horns of Leone McDonald and Jonathan Harris, and the light-fingered pizzicato of the strings at key dramatic moments.

Further performances: 26, 28, 30 July. Tks: £30 - £65 Box Office: 01260 224514

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