

# OPERA AROUND THE WORLD

- 1340 **Argentina** Buenos Aires, La Plata
- 1341 **Australia** Perth
- 1343 **Austria** St Margarethen
- 1343 **Belgium** Brussels
- 1345 **Bulgaria** Sofia
- 1346 **China** Hong Kong
- 1348 **Czech Republic** Litomyšl
- 1349 **Finland** Savonlinna
- 1353 **France** Aix-en-Provence, Paris
- 1360 **Germany** Berlin, Detmold, Hamburg, Leipzig
- 1365 **Italy** Florence, Genoa, Milan, Palermo, Verona
- 1372 **Mexico** Mexico City
- 1372 **Netherlands** Amsterdam
- 1374 **Poland** Sopot
- 1376 **Romania** Bucharest
- 1377 **Spain** Madrid
- 1377 **Switzerland** Bern

## ARGENTINA

### Buenos Aires

Butterfly, Mimì, Tosca, Minnie and Suor Angelica are Puccini's great female protagonists, but next to them is undoubtedly Liù, whom the master from Lucca consecrated in the last pages he wrote. After insipid revivals of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (April 12) and *Einstein on the Beach* (April 25), the TEATRO COLÓN offered a production of *Turandot* (May 17) in which it was Jaquelina Livieri's Liù who stood out. Livieri made an impact with her consistent warmth of tone and her projection, with communicative phrasing cleanly handled.

Under Carlos Vieu's secure baton, Marcelo Puente sang a rather mechanical Calaf and Veronika Dzhioeva overcame the difficulties of *Turandot*'s tessitura; they fulfilled their duties without going any further than that. The house chorus and the children's chorus each did magnificent work. The visual picture was decidedly splendid. Originally conceived by the late Roberto Oswald, the staging was in the charge of Aníbal Lápiz, who handled it faithfully and himself designed the costumes, which were of extraordinary colour and creativity.

For *Carmen* (July 12), the Colón made the mistake of presenting Calixto Bieito's staging, which may have seemed groundbreaking when new but today, a quarter of a century later, is no longer so. Fashions pass. In addition to this, on the musical level things were not brilliant at all, which added together made for a show that was long and at times tedious. Kakhi Solomnishvili's conducting was almost entirely devoid of phrasing and was distinguished by its speed. Francesca Di Sauro sang *Carmen* with a splendid voice, fresh yet velvety across the range, and moved with punch and character. Jaquelina Livieri showed impeccable timbre as Micaëla, with a fine sense of legato, although in places her expressive delivery seemed more suitable for verismo than for French opera, especially given the sweetness of her character. Simón Orfila sang *Escamillo* powerfully but without much smoothness, while Leonardo Caimi (*Don José*) appeared diminished since his 2020 performance here in *Adriana Lecouvreur*: he has begun to tackle a heavier repertoire, but here seemed neither one thing

nor the other and his singing was uneven.

*Hänsel und Gretel* was presented at the TEATRO AVENIDA on July 6. The performance was offered in German and not (as is customary in Argentina) in Spanish, and in the cast the 70-year-old Luis Gaeta stood out as the Father, his singing rounded, broad and homogenous throughout, even at this stage in his long and brilliant career. The soprano Ana Sampietro (Gretel) sang with crystalline lyricism, but the mezzo Lídice Robinson (Hänsel) seemed somewhat diminished in her power. Virginia



Marcelo Puente and Veronika Dzhioeva as Calaf and Turandot at the Teatro Colón

Lía Molina sang the Mother and the non-binary singer Luchi de Gyldenfeldt was a stentorian-sounding Witch. On the podium, Helge Dorsch conducted with skill, conviction and confidence, within the best stylistic tradition, and Emilio Urdapilleta's staging was dynamic, simple and clear in all its theatrical details. CARLOS ERNESTO URE

## La Plata

The season at the TEATRO ARGENTINO, opened again for opera in 2023 after seven years of inactivity, began with a fine *Aida* (June 7), conducted with refinement by Carlos Vieu. With this huge venue (one of the largest in South America) sold out, Enrique Folger (Radames) and Guadalupe Barrientos (Amneris) stood out clearly in the cast. Folger sang with a polished, even voice with easy high notes and *squillo*; Barrientos showed penetrating dramatic force. In the title role, Monserrat Maldonado sang with secure, velvety timbre, and Fabián Veloz was a lyrical Amonasro. The house chorus was a pillar of the performance. The staging was by the sisters María de la Paz Perre and María Concepción Perre. With sets that were appropriate to the grandeur of the opera and lighting of many tonalities, it had creativity and imagination in every scene, and a deep feeling for the opera's Verdian essence. In other performances, María Belén Rivarola sang *Aida* with remarkable flow and attractive expressiveness. CARLOS ERNESTO URE

## AUSTRALIA

### Perth

WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA's new production of *Rusalka* (July 18) was impressively magical and effective, in terms of both setting and performance. Directed by Sarah Giles, this co-production opened in Perth at HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE and will subsequently be seen elsewhere in Australia. Performed in the original Czech with



Elena Perroni as *Rusalka* in *Perth*

English surtitles, it achieved narrative clarity while packing dramatic and emotional punch, all with visual panache.

In Charles Davis's sets, the opening scene took place in a pond, an underwater setting achieved with glimmering strands reaching down from a ceiling of lily pads. Its denizens appeared to swim around above floor level, thanks to David Bergman's video design, Paul Jackson's lighting and Lyndall Grant's movement direction. In the second act the prince's palace was represented by a set of steps

and a colonnaded facade; the third act returned us to the pond, with a vertical back wall of lily pads in this instance. Costumed by Renée Mulder, *Rusalka* and her sisters wore white skull caps with heavily shadowed black eyes and silvery white gowns, with the *Vodník* (here rendered as the Water King) in a male version. *Ježibaba* and her minions were decked out in somewhat unwieldy layers of multicoloured clothing. The three Wood Sprites were tree-like figures with exceptionally long arms, while the Prince, the Duchess (usually known as the Foreign Princess) and the court wore modernish dress. *Rusalka* is hardly a byword for levity, but there were a few laughs as *Rusalka* tried to manage stairs for the first time in high-heeled shoes, then appeared in a cocktail frock identical to that of the Duchess. In the final scene *Rusalka* spent much of the time perched on a platform swathed in white swirls of clothing; after the death of the Prince she threw these off to reveal a multicoloured outfit, apparently becoming one of *Ježibaba*'s acolytes.

The West Australian Symphony Orchestra provided sterling support for the singers, and the conductor Christopher van Tuinen brought out the subtleties of the score. The West Australian Opera Chorus was in equally good form.

Four of the principals had made notable appearances for WA Opera in recent years. Paul O'Neill (heard last year in *La Bohème* and *Otello*) sang the Prince in a fine, ringing lyric tenor. In the title role, Elena Perroni (last year's *Mimi*) conveyed vulnerability and longing as well as nailing the exposed high notes. Naomi Johns (last year's *Desdemona*) was the Duchess, suitably unsympathetic but soaring over the orchestra. Ashlyn Tymms (last year's *Emilia*) brought her strong, creamy tones to her convincing *Ježibaba*. Warwick Fyfe, who has sung everything from *Wotan* in Melbourne to *Bottom* in Adelaide, was an authoritative Water King. The Wood Sprites were prettily sung and entertainingly performed by Bella Marslen, Chelsea Burns and Brigitte Heuser, and the cast was well rounded out by Stuart Laing as the Gamekeeper, Brianna Louwen as the Kitchen Hand and Brett Peart as the Hunter.

SANDRA BOWDLER

## AUSTRIA

### St Margarethen

'Daddy, is it all right if I laugh?,' Peter Ustinov's little daughter apparently asked her father during a performance of *Aida* at the Baths of Caracalla, when at a climactic point in the Triumph Scene all the animals on stage relieved themselves simultaneously.

Thaddeus Strassberger's production (in his own set designs) for OPER IM STEINBRUCH seen on July 11 at the QUARRY OF ST MARGARETHEN avoided having



'Aida' at St Margarethen

live animals and instead provided a huge artificial elephant. There were also dancers, acrobats, jugglers, fire-eaters and fireworks in an impressive fire-and-water extravaganza enhanced by Driscoll Otto's spectacular lighting design and Giuseppe Palella's extravagant costumes.

Within this framework the acting remained rather static. Vocally, too, the result was a mixed bag: how would these singers have sounded without acoustical amplification? Leah Crocetto threw herself relentlessly into the role of Aida, her voice showing some signs of wear and tear. Her rival in love was Raehann Bryce-Davis's convincing Amneris, a vocal interpretation of top quality. Radames was sung by Jorge Puerta, his tenor sound showing promise although it needed some technical fine-tuning at *mezza voce*. Gangsoon Kim was a notable Amonasro and Ivan Zinoviev was reliable as the King. The most impressive voice belonged to Jongmin Park as Ramfis, but it seemed to me that he indulged in too much artificial darkening. There were also good cameos from Melissa Purnell as the High Priestess and Xhoiden Dervishi as the Messenger, with an excellent performance by the Philharmonia Chor Wien. The tried and tested Hungarian Piedra Festival Orchestra conducted by Iván López Reynoso gave secure support.

GERHARD PERSCHÉ

## BELGIUM

### Brussels

LA MONNAIE's audience had been looking forward to the final production of the 2023-4 season: after its 45-year absence from the house, the return of Puccini's *Turandot* (seen on June 14) marked the centenary of the composer's death, which had occurred in Brussels, just a few streets away from the theatre. Moreover, Kazushi Ono, who was due to conduct, had not appeared at La Monnaie since 2008, when his six-year tenure as music director came to an end.

A month before the first night, Ono pulled out of the production, reportedly because of problems with his shoulder. As it happened, he conducted three performances of