

ASIAN REVIEW OF BOOKS

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Peter Gordon / 15 October 2018 / Classical music, , Opera

“Il Signor Bruschino”: Opéra de Chambre de Genève, Macau



Photo: 32nd Macao International Music Festival

Giochino Rossini could hardly have asked for a better commemoration—this year marks the 150th anniversary of the composer’s death—than this celebratory performance of his lesser-known comic one-act opera *Il Signor Bruschino* brought to the Macao International Music Festival by the Opéra de Chambre de Genève.

The performance took place at the Dom Pedro V, Macau’s mid-19th century jewel of a theatre. After not having had much if any opera for several years, *Il Signor Bruschino* was the second opera staged there this year after a comic opera double bill in late March.

A domestic farce of love, deception and mistaken identity, the 90-minute single act *Il Signor Bruschino* comes relatively early in Rossini’s career. The plot is too complicated to relate here; it strains credulity, of course, but no more so than many modern comedies and credulity isn’t the point.



Macau’s Teatro Dom Pedro V

☰ It works well in a small production, with no need for scene changes—and hardly any need for much in the way of scenery at all in fact—with the score trimmed for the 15 or so members of the Orchestre de Chambre de Genève, which filled the Dom Pedro V's small pit. Indeed, the entire production fit snugly into the theatre's intimate embrace.



Closeup: Marion Grange and Manuel Núñez Camelino as Sofia and Florville (Photo: 32nd Macao International Music Festival)

As is not unusual for Rossini's comic operas, this production updated the action to some vague 20th-century period, this time sometime around 1970, give or take. Sofia and Florville, the two young lovers, seemed to be channeling *Grease* at the finale. The production used every comedy trick in the book, from stage gags, comic mugging and sexual innuendo to singers and conductor breaking the fourth wall to engage in conversation.

The overture, which some may have heard as a concert piece, displays some of Rossini's penchant for innovation: the violinists memorably tap their bows on the music stands. The opera itself, after this peppy overture, is a bit of slow-burn until the marvelous patter trio, executed with precision, something under half-way in.

This mostly young cast produced an example of what can be accomplished by an ensemble performance. Nevertheless, Italian baritone Michele Govi, a relative veteran, was particularly convincing, vocally and dramatically, as Signor Bruschino himself.

French soprano Marian Grange was a sprightly and manipulative Sofia. Argentine tenor Manuel Núñez Camelino was her energetic lover Florville; he over-acted dreadfully, which of course the point. Sacha Michon, according to the programme, subbed in for the previously scheduled Gaudenzio, Sofia's rather clueless guardian. French Juliette de Banès Gardonne sang the conniving maid with gusto in a rich mezzo. Everything was ably directed by Italian conductor Franco Trinca who doubled up on the harpsichord.

The star of the show may have been the theatre. The Dom Pedro V remains under-exploited as an opera house, but a little less so than before.



Michele Govi as Bruschino (photo: 32nd Macao International Music Festival)

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