

## Wozzeck at La Scala in Milano

Hi all!

Last week I attended at the sixth performance of La Scala's new production of *Wozzeck* (the premiere was 02/28). The conductor was Giuseppe Sinopoli, the stage director Jürgen Flimm. Erich Wonder was the stage designer and costumes were by Florence von Gerkan. *Wozzeck* was Franz Grundheber, Marie Catherine Malfitano, the Drum Major Kim Begley. The others of the cast were: Jyrki Niskanen as the Captain, Kurt Rydl as the Doctor, Michael Howard as Andres and Natasha Petrinsky as Margret.

Firstly, I think that it is a happy coincidence that two major opera houses in the world produced at the same time a hard opera, and that both theaters got a full success.

The reviews I've read on the Met's production agree with the great performance of the Levine's orchestra and of Falk Struckman as *Wozzeck*, but as well with the poor performance of Maria Ewing in singing the part of Marie. I read, too, some disagreement with the Lamos' direction, although - from the descriptions - I think it looks like very interesting: a very simple dark stage of gray walls, strong light beams, shadows that mimic action, a huge blood red moon at the end, and a black little curtain between the scenes.

The Flimm's production is quite different. Like at the Met, the three acts are carried out without interruptions. There is only one scene: in foreground, a central semicircular wall heavily red coloured; in background some projections of the outside world, contrasting with the claustrophobic atmosphere of the foreground. The changes of the scenes are marked by few furnishings and by the acting of some mimes which have the function, during the interludes, to link one scene to the next one. No curtain was used.

The aim of the production is to emphasize the loneliness and the madness of *Wozzeck*, although are present, too, the other themes of the Buchner's Drama, as the social one. *Wozzeck* walks alone through a dark tunnel. The outside world, the Nature, the Doctor, the Capitain, the Drum Major, and finally Marie too, push him more and more toward the end, where he will be the murderer of his wife and of himself. Marie alternate attitudes of tenderness with attitudes of contempt and sexual excitation. However, she is never able to be in communication with the mind of her husband. The Doctor, the Capitain, and the Drum Major, more than living characters, act as grotesque ones, almost natural outer forces against *Wozzeck*. The baby is the only character harmless. In the Flimm's production, the Fool is his very nanny through the whole drama. At the end, the baby goes out (singing "Op... op...") not on a little wooden horse, but on the fool's shoulders.

*Wozzeck* is a drama with many aspects, and I think that it is legitimate to

emphasize one or another of them. The Flimm's production emphasizes the aspect of the madness.

The music: Sinopoli conducts the orchestra with great clearness. Every timbric layers are well audible and understandable, and so every leitmotifs. This is the outcome of a careful analysis of the complex rhythms of the score. The dynamic of orchestral sound well agrees with the single phases of the drama. Sinopoli is a deep connoisseur of german musical theater. He says that his acquaintance with Wagner's Operas has been an important step to his comprehension of Wozzeck's score.

The musical forms of the opera are unusual at all in a musical theatre. Each one of the 15 scenes corresponds with a form of instrumental music. So we have no arias or recitatives, but a Suite, a Rhapsodia, a Passacaglia, etc. In the second act the forms correspond with the movements of a Mahler's symphony (including a beautiful Fantasia and fugue in the second scene, and a wonderful Scherzo in the fourth one). Berg includes these forms in his opera to compensate the breakdown of the tonality. In the third scene of the Second act, a chamber orchestra of 16 plays on the stage: this is, clearly, an hommage to Schönberg.

The cast: Grundheber is a very great Wozzeck. He has a flexible voice: sweet and lyric when he minds Mary, strong and emotional during the crisis of madness, cold and uninterested when he answers his persecutors. His *sprechgesang* is nearly perfect. His acting is intense and engaging as well. I saw him also in the videorecording of Wozzeck conducted by Abbado in Vienna in 1986. Catherine Malfitano confirms her cleverness, as singer and as actress. The others singers of the cast are equal to their tasks.

The milanese audience applauded and cheered heartily at the end. I returned home happy and overjoyed.

Cheers to all, and apologies for my mistakes.

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