

Vivaldi's *Farnace*

4 - 10 December, 2019

Vivaldi's operas are a unique blend of beauty and brilliance, and in *Farnace* we find the composer at the pinnacle of his operatic career.

Wed 4 Dec 7pm | Thurs 5 Dec 7pm | Sat 7 Dec 2pm | Sun 8 Dec 5pm | Tues 10 Dec 7pm

City Recital Hall Sydney

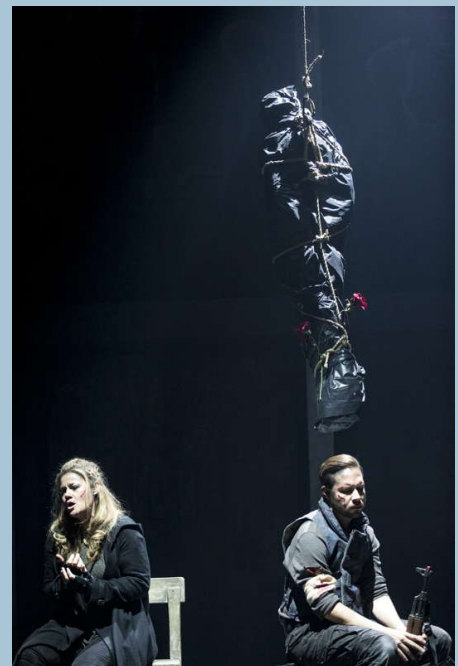
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Pinchgut Opera's 'Farnace' — Issue 132, 1 January 2020

David Mitchell: Pinchgut Opera is Australia's early music and Baroque opera company, specialising in performing less well known works in the repertoire. To close their 2019 season they presented Vivaldi's *Farnace* - the first time the opera has been staged in the southern hemisphere. First performed in 1717, Vivaldi constantly revised *Farnace*. In 1738 he was working on a new version for a festival in Ferrara, but the festival was cancelled. Vivaldi abandoned the score, having finished the first two acts but not the third. Pinchgut Opera has chosen to perform the incomplete 1738 version and Erin Helyard, Artistic Director of Pinchgut, has used arias from other Vivaldi works to provide a finished score.

Farnace is about an ancient kingdom - Pontus - in turmoil. As the opera opens, Pontus has fallen to the Roman general Pompey (Timothy Reynolds). The king, Farnace (Christopher Lowrey), desperate that his family will not be enslaved by the Romans, orders Tamiri, his wife (Helen Sherman) to kill their young son and herself. In addition to the Romans, Farnace also has to deal with some internal threats. His mother-in-law Berenice (Jacqueline Dark) has allied herself with Pompey and seeks revenge against Farnace for his role in the death of her husband and son. Selinda (Taryn Fiebig), Farnace's sister, is captured by the invading force and is using her powers of seduction to try and help her brother. Despite this complicated web of vendettas and intrigue, the opera ends on a happy note, as was the convention for Baroque opera.



'Helen Sherman as Tamiri and Christopher Lowrey in the title role of Pinchgut Opera's production of Vivaldi's 'Farnace'.

Photo © 2019 Brett Boardman'

Director Mark Gaal uses a single set, a modern war zone with black plastic clad corpses hanging from the rafters on stage. The raising and lowering of the corpses is very effectively used to signal changes in place, time and mood.

In the final scene, for example, the corpses are winched down and laid on the stage. They are literally 'laid to rest' in the same way as the characters' hatred and thirst for revenge will be quickly put aside so the opera can finish on a happy note.

But at the beginning the contemporary staging is slightly off-putting and requires some tweaking of the surtitles to work. In the first scene, when Farnace orders his wife to commit suicide by burying 'this blade to the hilt' the surtitle translation substitutes 'bullet' for 'blade'. But after a few scenes, the costumes (combat uniforms with packs and automatic rifles) and sets, both designed by Isabel Hudson, and the lighting by Benjamin Brockman, effectively heighten the emotions being presented by the singing and music. [READ MORE ...](#)

David Mitchell also reviews the first Australian production of Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*.

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Mike Wheeler: The first thing that strikes you about the piano-duet partnership of Dina Duisen and Martin James Bartlett is their immaculate ensemble - Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 22 December 2019. This was evident from the start of Mozart's Sonata in D, K 381, where the spirit of comic opera was never far away, in the helter-skelter opening movement, the aria-like Andante, and the energetic romp of a finale.

Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite No 1, in the composer's own transcription, began with a 'Morning Mood' full of delicate, subtle touches. These continued into 'Åse's Death', though this turned somewhat clangorous in the middle. 'Anitra's Dance' was treated as more of a waltz than I've previously heard, and was perhaps a touch on the quick side. At the bass end of the keyboard, Bartlett gave the start of 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' rather mannered treatment, but those trolls became positively savage by the end.

The two players swapped position for the remainder of the programme. For some reason they omitted the Minuet third movement of Debussy's *Petite Suite* (and kept very quiet about it). In 'En Bateau' their boat had a tendency to drift lazily, threatening at times to end up becalmed in a backwater. But 'Cortège' was nicely brisk, as was much of the concluding 'Ballet', though here again there was an occasional tendency to go off into a daydream.

Three movements from Rachmaninov's transcription of Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* ended the advertised part of the programme. Duisen and Bartlett explored a wide expressive range in 'Introduction and The Lilac Fairy', sometimes slightly at the expense of forward movement. They made the most of the intricate textures and colours of 'Adagio and Pas d'Action', and the well-known 'Waltz' had spirit, though it did feel at times as though they were just skating over the surface.



Martin James Bartlett and Dina Duisen

One of Moszkowski's *Spanish Dances* - we weren't told which, but it was No 1 - was the lively first encore, 'The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' was the sweet-toothed second.

Mike Wheeler also listens to the Sitwell Singers, Derby Bach Choir, pianist Ugnius Pauliukonis, guitarist Craig Ogden, Derby Concert Orchestra and Derby Choral Union.

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Giuseppe Pennisi: The Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia celebrated Christmas with an extraordinary (in the etymological sense of the term) out-of-subscription concert. It was out of the ordinary for two reasons. Firstly, a musician and composer, Ezio Bosso, who is a true 'portrait in courage', conducted the symphony orchestra. Secondly, Beethoven's fifth and seventh symphonies were in the program to anticipate the celebrations that will be made in 2020 for the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. The concert was held on 21 and 22 December 2019 in a sold-out auditorium. I attended the 22 December performance. The audience was markedly different from that of the subscription concert series: few gentlemen in dark suits and ladies in elegant outfits, but many young people in jeans and sweaters. There were five minutes of standing ovations after the first part; fifteen after the second.

Ezio Bosso, forty-eight, started a brilliant career in Italy and abroad - he is, for example, artistic director of the European Philharmonic Orchestra. But in 2011, after an operation for a brain tumour, he was diagnosed with a terrible disease, one of those which, even if they cannot destroy a talent, imprison him in a cage. The disease does so gradually, but inexorably. Bosso has a neurodegenerative disease similar to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (or ALS). Despite the illness, Bosso did not lose heart and fought with all his strength, day by day, not to let his life and his person, fall into a thousand pieces. He had to learn to play and talk again.



Ezio Bosso conducting in Rome in December 2019. Photo © 2019 Musacchio, Iannello e Pasqualini

In an interview, he said: 'At one point, I had lost everything, the language, the music: I remembered it, but I didn't understand it. I was playing and crying, for months I couldn't do anything. Music wasn't part of my life, it was far away, I couldn't grasp it. I found out so I could do without it. And it wasn't bad. It was different, it was another experience. I've learned that music is part of me, but it's not me. At best, I'm in the service of music.'

The disease took away the piano of which he was a great master. 'If you love me', he told the audience a few months ago, 'stop asking me to put myself on the piano and play. You don't know the suffering that this causes me, because I can't, I have two fingers that don't respond well anymore and I can't give music enough.' However, he decided that whatever illness the musician has suffered, his talent remains intact. So much so that he continues to be a conductor. 'No mercy, I didn't retire', Bosso wrote on Facebook. 'Let's be clear: I just said I don't do concerts alone on the piano anymore because I would do it worse than ever. But I'm very happy it continues - because I do my job as a conductor.' Bosso has a loyal audience of fans that follows him: this summer, at the Verona Arena, he performed Orff's *Carmina Burana* for an audience of 14,000. For the two Santa Cecilia concerts, about six thousand tickets were sold. [READ MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi also listens to *Pique Dame* in Naples, to *Tosca* live in HD from La Scala, and to two Verdi works in Rome - *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* and the Requiem.

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IN DEPTH — ONA JARMALAVIČIŪTĖ TALKS TO RAIN WORTHINGTON



Rain Worthington. Photo © 2018 Mark Berger

Self-taught American composer Rain Worthington is reaching international acclaim through her unique view of the American style of music. Critics compare her creative work to a walk in a familiar, yet very different park, expressing admiration for her use of musical influences from world music, minimalism and romanticism. The music of Rain Worthington is packed with emotion and speaks directly to listeners' senses because she has always followed her own musical instincts. Her pieces, awarded with grants from ASCAP, the American Music Center and the American Composers Forum, have been performed worldwide with premieres in Tokyo, at Oxford University, and at the Delhi Music Society. I recently conducted this Q and A session with the composer, where we discussed creativity, the purpose behind her work and her state of mind while writing music.

Ona Jarmalavičiūtė: *You are a self-taught composer. How did you first get in contact with music and music making?*

Rain Worthington: It is interesting how certain moments in our lives weave their way into the subconscious to emerge later in life. There were several situations in my early life that left musical imprints on me. The first was the piano at my grandparents' house where I lived during my earliest childhood years. I would wake up and go 'play' the piano; I loved the sounds of the notes and making up patterns. Also, during this time I saw the Disney animation film *Fantasia* which made a lasting impression upon me, especially the music of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. However, the real impetus for beginning to compose came when I was staying at a friend's house with a grand piano. As I had some time in the house alone, I sat down at the piano one evening and was taken back to my childhood and once again started to make up little patterns and sequences. The piano is uniquely accessible among instruments in that a complete novice can strike the keys and instantly make a lovely tone, without needing any technique to get that beautiful sound. I just fell in love with the sound of the piano and creating set pieces. The accessibility of the instrument gave me an immediate gateway into composition! When I returned to my loft in Boston, I decided I wanted to continue creating musical patterns and purchased a lovely old upright piano. I brought this piano with me when I moved to New York City.

In New York City I moved into a raw loft in the neighborhood of Soho which had been a somewhat dormant warehouse district between Houston and Canal Streets in NYC. This was in the mid-seventies before Soho became commercialized. Here I discovered and became immersed in an atmosphere of tremendous creative energy and genuine support among artists and musicians. It was a vibrant scene of artistic expression and experimentation. Music concerts, dance performances, painting and sculpture exhibitions were happening all the time. Often events were staged in fellow artists' living loft spaces. So, when friends encouraged me to perform my piano pieces, composer Charlemagne Palestine offered me the use of his loft space and his beautiful Bosendorfer piano to present a first concert of my solo piano music. At this time, I had not yet learned music notation, so I played my pieces from memory. I performed two sets of concerts at Charlemagne's loft, and subsequent concerts at the nascent music venues in downtown Manhattan, such as The Kitchen and The Ear Inn.

OJ: *What would you call your 'teachers' when you first started composing?*

RW: As I did not pursue a traditional path of study, academic institutions, professors and instrumental training did not play a significant role in my development as a composer. I was lucky to have discovered my love of the piano and creating music simply through the immediate accessibility of the instrument - exploring and following my own music through the sounds of the piano. But the real catalyst for performing my pieces publicly and beginning to think of myself as a composer came from the excitement of creativity that was happening in the mid-seventies. The atmosphere was creatively charged, mutually supportive and artistically nurturing. This was the environment where I was first introduced to the contemporary music scene and where I began to conceive of the possibility of becoming a composer.

OJ: *Your creation is described as world music, minimalism and romanticism. How would you describe your music in terms of genre?*

RW: It seems to be part of human nature to want to name things to bring a sense of order and understanding to the world. In contrast, creative artists often want their work to be seen as unique, so tend to resist categorization of their art. However, as contemporary music is new music, it's useful to apply descriptors that offer listeners accessible windows into the

music. So, beyond the generalized genre of 'contemporary classical', which already encompasses a broad spectrum of styles of music, I list world music, minimalism and romanticism as types of music that have been influences in my life.

World music has opened me to other modes of musical expression - rhythms, instrumental timbres, musical structures and modalities. The African, Arabic and Latin polyrhythms, the timbres of gamelan, Tibetan bowls, Mid-Eastern and Asian flutes and string instruments, the call and response of chants and field songs, the microtones of Middle Eastern modes have all seeped into my creative subconscious wellspring. I love the sounds of these musical cultures - the music seems to reside deep within me, and always has from an early age. Duke Ellington's *Caravan* was one of the first songs I remember loving as a child.

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PROFILE — CREATIVE HIGH POINTS — BEETHOVEN'S INFLUENCE

George Colerick: At the first rehearsal of Beethoven's fifth symphony, the performers were more amused than shocked at the sound and intensity of its opening. A few years earlier, reactions would have been more hostile but by 1805, social attitudes were becoming more enlightened following the impact of the French Revolution. Beethoven was the man to exploit this new freedom, and with his originality and vision, he would become the greatest influence on Romantic and nineteenth century music.

Beethoven grew up during the great Classical period of the late eighteenth century, with its sophisticated musical forms. He left Bonn for Vienna in the early 1790s where he was taught briefly by Joseph Haydn. His early compositions showed a special admiration for Mozart's works. In particular, sonata form as then established was to be the model for the first movement of all symphonies, and so remained well into the twentieth century. Its logic was its strength. Song has always tended to be more interesting for having two contrasting melodies. In the symphony, so-called sonata form strengthened this with two subjects or groups of themes. The first was to be developed, leading to a climax then a resolution. It was optional whether the finale followed that pattern.

Variety was assured at first by a sequence of tempi in the four movement symphony: slow introduction, then a brisk first movement (*allegro*); next slower (*andante*) or slow (*lento*); then minuet and trio; finally a finale (*allegro*) or very fast (*presto*). The last three movements had freer use of two themes (ABA, ABAB or ABABA), contrasting in shape, mood, pace and key. It was the most perfectly satisfying form for a work lasting some half an hour. Chamber music conformed to sonata form but tended to omit the third movement, the dance. This, the stately minuet, was unsuited to Beethoven who decided to replace that 3/4 rhythm with a very energetic one, a *scherzo*, Italian for joke.

Genius is privileged to break rules; Haydn would have recognised he had one on his hands though he found him a difficult pupil. Beethoven had started his composing life, choosing the piano sonata as the main form for developing his creative skills. This early phase of composing lasted roughly until 1803, the date of his *Eroica Symphony*. Conceived on a larger scale, more powerful than anything beforehand, it had been dedicated to Napoleon, but when he made himself Emperor of the French in 1804, Beethoven furiously tore out the title page. Freedom meant that much to him, both politically and for his creative self.



The title page of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, showing the removed dedication to Napoleon

At first sympathetic to the Revolution, with the French advancing and briefly occupying Vienna, he was in full political disillusion, and he gradually turned to religion. Those were the years when his impending deafness ended his career as a pianist, and threatened his composing facility. There were also disappointments in love, so that Beethoven was facing one of several critical phases in his emotional life.

Yet this had a positive effect on his creativity, and his middle period is now considered as having lasted until about 1815. It passed the bands of traditional harmony, form and emotional restraint during the first of these years. The Fifth Symphony's power was startling, the orchestra was at times used percussively. Other creative high points included the *Appassionata* Sonata, his opera, *Fidelio*, and the Triple Concerto. [READ MORE ...](#)

George Colerick also writes about music at the turn of the twentieth century, and about opera turned into film.

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CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — PETER SCHREIER (1943-2019)

Peter Schreier, the German tenor and later conductor, was born in Meissen on 29 July 1935. From 1945 he lived in Dresden. As a boy, he sang in the Dresdner Kreuzchor. After study in Dresden, he sang opera in Europe and gradually specialised in lieder and Mozart's operatic roles. He was one of the twentieth century's leading tenors, and was known as one of the few singers from the German Democratic Republic to perform internationally.

Peter Schreier died on 25 December 2019, aged eighty-four, following a long illness.

In other news, we report on a new competition in Siegburg, Germany, marking Beethoven Year 2020: *Beethoven in his time*.

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CD SPOTLIGHT — THE FRENCH ROMANTIC EXPERIENCE

We also have our usual varied selection of CD reviews this month, with contributions by Giuseppe Pennisi, Geoff Pearce, Gerald Fenech, Ona Jarmalavičiūtė and Patrick Maxwell.

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