



## Monteverdi's L'ORFEO by Nederlandse Reisopera on tour



Monteverdi's *L'Orpheo* is a bit of a strange beast. First performed in Mantua in 1607 it is generally considered to be the world's first opera evolving from the customary, at that time, *intermedio*, a musical interludes between the acts in straight plays. The result is that it is very "texty" and not particularly tuneful, lacking the familiar arias we associate with later operas. In fact the singing has a very recitative feel to it. So much so that when it was revived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century it was often delivered as a concert performance without any staging. Well, the Nederlandse Reisopera have certainly gone to the other extreme with one of the best stagings of on opera I have seen in a very long time.

The staging could be described as simple but the effect was astounding. Dominating the huge black stage was a giant floating transparent cube of some sort of silvery transparent mesh material. This giant amoebic gossamer-like entity was constantly changing shape like the startling murmurations at dusk or the strange swirlings of shoals of fish. It had an ethereal quality that certainly was not of this world.

But it wasn't just the décor. For the first half the entire company of twenty was on stage all the time, swaying and moving often like a single body. The choreography was amazing and its performance outstanding considering only half the company were dancers. Like the strange shape above them, no one was ever static. They all moved so well it was often difficult to distinguish between the singers and the ten "real" dancers. **The choreography was enhanced by beautiful costumes and outstanding lighting.**

Visually and conceptually the whole production was faultless, brilliantly conceived and immaculately executed for which I think director Monique Wagemakers must take much of the credit along with Lonneke Gordijn of Studio DRIFT for the amazing shiny amoeba known as *Ego*, Nanine Linning for the remarkable choreography and for Marlou Breuls' beautiful costumes and **Thomas C Hase's superb lighting.**

To look at, this production was so exciting and overwhelming that it has taken me until now to mention the music. Hmmm.

La Sfera Armoniosa, under the baton of Hernán Schvartzman, delivered an authentic sound, as well they might. The orchestra pit was a veritable *cabinet de curiosités* full of magic and wondrous instruments including antique brass trumpets and trombones, four ancient keyboards including organs, violas da gamba and three citterns which hovered like hungry cranes (the bird) waiting to swoop onto the choice notes as they swam past.

The ten singers each took on several roles, apart from Samuel Boden as Orfeo himself. It was sometimes difficult to keep track of who was doing what but generally the singing matched the visuals. As I said before, the singers should not only be congratulated on their singing but on their movement as well.

I liked mezzo-soprano Luciana Mancini, the fine tenors Laurence Kilsby and Kevin Skelton along with bass Alex Rosen and counter tenor Nils Wanderer – but they were all excellent even though at times they struggled to hold their own against the constant movement and astonishing décor. But that's what's good about opera, it embraces all aspects of the theatre and music to the full. If it ain't grand, it ain't opera.

Nederlandse Reisopera, in this co-production with DRIFT and Opera2Day, must be congratulated for taking on this difficult and not very well known opera. Not only did they succeed, they excelled. This was a production worthy of any of the great opera houses in the world and I urge you to see it while you have the chance. You will rarely see its like again. **Michael Hasted in Rotterdam, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020**