

REVIEWS

TRAVEL OPERA WEAVES L'ORFEO INTO A WORK OF ART



PETER FRANKEN · JANUARY 27, 2020

The new production of *L'Orfeo* at the Nederlandse Reisopera is a work of art. Director Monique Wagemakers has arranged a meeting between Claudio Monteverdi and Richard Wagner. This has resulted in a beautiful spectacle, in which the somewhat slow music of Monteverdi blooms.



The group moves like a human sculpture. Only the soloists occasionally leave the whole. (© Marco Borggreve)

Where possible, all disciplines come together in a total work of art: music, singing, declamation, dance and visual arts. Wagemakers has therefore expanded the usual direction team with a choreographer and a studio that specializes in creating 'experience sculptures'.

The ten singers are supplemented by the same number of dancers from Dance Company Nanine Linning, all dressed similarly and permanently on stage. The group moves like a human sculpture, without real dance technical highlights. This allows the singers to keep up with the dancers. Only the soloists occasionally leave the whole.

With her Studio Drift, Lonneke Gordijn has created a sculpture consisting of 16 km of woven thin nylon thread. It bears the name 'Ego' and represents the world of thought of Orfeo. With the help of eight motors, the canvas can take many different forms, which show how Orfeo experiences the world at a certain moment. Wonderful is the moment when, according to the myth, the title hero loses his beloved Euridice for the second time. The moment this penetrates to him, the sculpture collapses in an instant, as if Orfeo's throat is being squeezed shut. He threatens to suffocate and Ego shows us this greatly magnified.

The costumes of Marlou Breuls show the players in a sand-colored body stocking, with strips in different patterns that add a touch of individuality. During the scenes in the underworld, people wear a dark, loose-fitting robe. Clothing and living sculpture therefore make it difficult to recognize individual singers, all the more so because they play multiple roles.

However, a number of singers stand out. Luciana Mancini opens as La Musica and can also be heard as Messagiera and Proserpina. Her interpretation was sober and to the point, consistent with the nature of the music of this work in general. At first I thought I noticed a certain harshness in the voice, but later the voice softened and as Proserpina Mancini almost sounded like a romantic heroine.

Kristen Witmer played Euridice, Speranza and Eco. As Speranza she brings Orfeo to the bank of the Styx, so that he can look for his Euridice. As if he heard her voice, asking him to come to the Hades to get her. Alex Rosen's Caronte, however, does not want to know about any neighborhoods. Yannis Francois as Plutone also views Orfeo's arrival with mixed feelings. Nice occupation of these two male roles with low voices.

The demanding title role was excellently played by tenor Samuel Boden. Assisted by Ego, he managed to put his changing moods in the spotlight. Beautifully sung, well acted. The other roles were also adequately occupied.



Scene from L'Orfeo at the Dutch Travel Opera. (© Marco Borggreve)

A difficult point in this myth remains the moment when Orfeo looks back against better knowledge. In this production this is solved by giving him a direct reason. The players who guide Euridice suddenly make a lot of things wrong. They suggest that something very unexpected has happened. Has Euridice perhaps returned to its steps? This misery is the trigger that causes our hero to look back. He did not do it on his own, he is ultimately just pushed for it. This maintains the classic worldview: no one ever returns from the Hades among the living. *Und das ist gut so* .

The La Sfera Armoniosa ensemble, led by Hernán Schvartzman, provided a significant accompaniment. Striking contributions came from the two cornets, a remarkable instrument that sounds like copper, but in reality belongs to the woodwind.

This total artwork - let's not forget the sophisticated lighting of Thomas C. Hase - meets all the conditions for bringing Monteverdi's original opera to the limelight for a contemporary audience. This four centuries old work is definitely recommended, also for opera lovers who are not fond of very early baroque.

L'Orfeo can still be seen nine times until 22 February. For more information, see the [website of the Dutch Travel Opera](#) .