



Where the conductor, director and cast united in achievement was the rape scene—a slow crescendo of implied savagery and gripping tension, giving *Lucretia* the shattering climax it deserves, before subsiding into Britten’s equally well-calibrated post-traumatic decrescendo.

ANDREW CLARK

Gianni Schicchi

Five Senses Music at Greycoat Hospital School, London, January 25

Puccini on the fringe usually entails a substantially reduced band or simply a piano, so this *Gianni Schicchi* offered a special thrill in the form of a full-sized orchestra in the close confines of the hall of Greycoat Hospital School. One of those ‘let’s make an opera’ happenings that defy conventional logic and silence scepticism, Five Senses Music’s performance was the product of just a day’s rehearsal with professionals working pro bono beside amateurs. Tom Seligman, a regular conductor at Covent Garden, though in ballet rather than opera, prefaced the performance with an absorbing 30-minute lecture, illustrated by the orchestra.

Musically, the show felt not just immediate, but tight and theatrical. The semi-staging was surprisingly vigorous, even though the performers were sharing floorspace with the audience and several of the singers had their scores on standby. The orchestral players, paying variegated sartorial tribute to Florence’s emblematic crimson lily, supplied living decor, and the singers’ variations on modern dress included glitzy mourning gear for the Donati ladies and a cheeky trilby for Schicchi. Buoso’s corpse—a life-size rag doll—was thrown about with abandon as the family searched frantically around the hall for his will. Andrew Mayor’s pliantly voiced Schicchi tempered his chutzpah with laid-back charm, Lauren

Lodge-Campbell sounded delightfully pellucid as Lauretta (though the strings doubling her big tune almost threatened to drown her before she reached the Ponte Vecchio) and Seumas Begg's Rinuccio sprang vividly into vocal, verbal and physical action. Leading the avaricious clan of Nella (Philippa Boyle), La Ciesca (Emma Lewis), Gherardo (Lyndon Green), Marco (Jerome Knox) and Betto di Signa (Andrew Tipple) were the discreetly imperious Zita of Jessica Gillingwater and the warmly resonant Simone of Adam Maxey. James Gribble doubled as doctor and notary, Owain Evans and Kevin Hollands were the dutiful tradesmen and the very young Felix Davis interjected with astonishing assurance as a cowboy-hatted Gherardino.

YEHUDA SHAPIRO

Carmen

English National Opera at the London Coliseum, January 29

All is relative in the world of *Regie* opera. In a London that's still coming to terms with Barrie Kosky's gorilla and stairs, Calixto Bieito's modern-dress but narratively viable *Carmen* was welcomed back like the prodigal son. Yet when the quirky Catalan first unveiled his production at the 1999 Peralada Festival his concept caused a stir of its own, hazily updated as it was to an unspecified Spanish overseas territory (probably in North Africa) and shot through with contemporary nationalist tensions. Aspects of Bizet's scenario that didn't fit his concept were either glossed over or rendered in abstract terms, some via simple means such as the physical disposition of the chorus, others through stage tricks including the furtive gathering of contraband-laden gas-guzzlers.

English National Opera came late to Bieito's *Carmen*. The production was already venerable when it reached St Martin's Lane in 2012; now, eight years further down the line, it could be seen as old hat. Except it isn't. The lean staging, shorn of much dialogue and given with a single interval, hurtles towards its visceral conclusion with an inevitability that still shocks the senses. The latest incarnation retained some of the power that made it a hit first time round, but as revived by Jamie Manton it proved a patchy experience. There were too many dead moments, especially after outbreaks of half-hearted whooping, and diction was often incoherent. Nobody successfully negotiated Christopher Cowell's prolix English translation, but how could they? Few moments in the opera are catchier than the slinky trio 'Quant au douanier, c'est notre affaire', but render that elegance as 'You leave those customs men to us', with the near-unsingable 'customs men' set to a tripping dotted rhythm, and the singers are stymied.

Justina Gringytė returned to the role she sang at ENO's 2015 revival and, after an alarming bout of

Justina Gringytė as Carmen and Sean Panikkar as Don José at ENO



Opera, April 2020

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