

## Metropolitan Opera, March 2022: Ariadne auf Naxos, Tosca

### Ariadne auf Naxos

This performance featured some of my favorite singers: mezzo Isabel Leonard in the pant role of the composer, and soprano Brenda Rae in the coloratura role of Zerbinetta, the leader of *commedia del' arte* troupe. But the standout performer was soprano Lise Davidsen as Prima Donna/Ariadne. I had not heard her before, and this was a revelation. Her voice is decidedly in the spinto range, but with a purity and precision of intonation that is very pleasing to the ear. She can belt out fortissimo passages with no roughness, and hold long notes without vibrato.

In the first act, Isabel Leonard sang very strongly. The part is written in a high register for a mezzo (I have heard sopranos sing this role), but she managed wonderfully. The other roles in the prologue (Major Domo, Music Master, wig maker) were sung very well, if not quite spectacularly.



Lise Davidsen as Ariadne and Brenda Rae as Zerbinetta

Brenda Rae sang a little too quietly in some scenes, but hit the coloratura highlights at full volume, especially the signature aria in act II where she advises Ariadne to get over her grief at losing one lover and to find another (at left).

The production by Elijah Moshinsky and Michael Yeagan, in the first act depicted the basement of a grand mansion where the performers were preparing for the opera of the second act. Above that, there was a grand staircase on which the Major Domo would descend to give the host's instructions for the performance (both *opera seria* and *commedia del' arte* were to be performed simultaneously).

The second act staging was minimalist: a blue background, with panels that slid apart to allow entry of the various characters – the three nymphs and Bacchus. The nymphs are spectacularly dressed atop platforms 10 or 12 feet high, gliding about the stage by some motorized means (I can't find a photo). Bacchus was sung by American tenor Brandon Jovanovich. His role in the first act is small; in the second, he started out a little weakly but his voice improved as the act progressed, and in the end he was a fine match with Davidsen.

The conductor was Marek Janowski, who led the orchestra and singers superbly.

### Tosca

The title role was sung by Polish soprano Aleksandra Kurzak, who did a marvelous job, despite the pan served up by the New York Times critic, who claimed she pushed her voice beyond its limits. I heard no such thing – she was dead-on throughout, with ringing high notes, powerful *fortes* and delicious *sotto voce* passages, often in the same arias, for example, *Visi d'arte*. The role of Cavaradossi, her lover, was sung by Roberto Alagna, her real-life husband. He was in the best voice I have heard from him, articulating smoothly and powerfully throughout, with glorious high notes. The third principal, the villain Scarpia, was sung by Serbian baritone Željko Lučić, who sang with a rich, powerful voice in all of his scenes.



The production, by David McVicar and John Macfarlane, was certainly grand. The first act depicted a vast church in the Baroque style, with towering ceilings supported by ornate walls and a gilded rosette above the altar (above). The second act was in Scarpia's lavish apartment in Rome's *Castel san' Angelo*.

The third act takes place atop the turret surmounting the Castel, with a replica of the crowning angel (at right, showing Tosca, center left, about to leap to her death). Over a decade ago, on one of our trips to Rome, we saw an Italian televised production of *Tosca* actually filmed in that venue. You can't beat that for set design!

The conductor was Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Music Director of the Met, and he was firmly in control of the performance.

All in all, a wonderful experience.

