

NUANCED TONAL BEAUTY

Yende, Lee shine in stellar 'Lucia'

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR: A CONCERT PERFORMANCE, Thursday 18th. CPO and CTO Chorus conducted by Richard Bonyngé, with soloists Pretty Yende, Colin Lee, George Stevens, Xolela Sixaba, Violina Anguelov, Lukhanyo Moyake and Tshepo Moagi. At Artscape Opera House. **DEON IRISH** reviews

THIS WAS a performance which created a wave of gratitude for the wealth of artistry that has been engendered in our lovely city: a performance to savour and to add to the memory banks storing our richest experiences.

Superbly presided over by the magisterial Richard Bonyngé, a conductor with an impeccable 50-year pedigree as a performer and scholar of the bel canto repertoire in particular, we were treated to an immaculate concert reading of Donizetti's masterpiece, performed by a homegrown cast and our own symphony orchestra. Homegrown they might be; but Pretty Yende, Colin Lee and George Stevens have all become international artists, living abroad and performing in the leading opera houses of Europe, the UK and North America.

What really pleased, accordingly, was the manner in which their locally-based colleagues rose to meet their level, particularly in the ensemble pieces, in a telling demonstration of the depth of operatic talent South Africa – and particularly Cape Town – now enjoys, equally demonstrated by the splendid chorus contribution.

But it is appropriate to commence with Bonyngé, for his treatment of the score and his inter-

action with his fellow musicians lay at the very core of the performance and provided the lodestar which both singers and orchestral players followed. It is not unkind to note that Bonyngé has an idiosyncratic conducting style. He appears, paradoxically, to afford little attention to the mere beat; but he conjures a flexibility of rhythm and pulse that few could emulate, and probably none better.

He directs, much of the time, through an elusive range of gestures that suggest he is moulding the air. But there is a fine musical instinct at work, coupled to a rigorous understanding of the score, and the seemingly elusive gestures in fact convey a musical logic from score to players and singers alike. It results in extraordinarily good ensemble (nowhere more so than in the accompanied recitatives) and beautifully graded phrasing.

In consequence, and with leading of a very high quality from concert master Patrick Goodwin, the orchestral realisation of this lovely score was as good as anything we have heard from it this last decade. Yende is long since a big name in Cape Town. I have had the privilege of both working with and reviewing her over the course of almost a decade and she has simply grown in

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stature with each encounter.

There hardly seems any point in enthusing about the quality of a voice that is already so commented on, discussed and admired. It is an extraordinary instrument, of wonderful reliability throughout Yende's considerable range and possessing a captivating mellow quality that gives even the most forceful utterances a nuanced tonal beauty.

But what really impressed in Yende's debut in this taxing role was her exemplary breath control. No, more than exemplary: for she governs her considerable lung capacity with a rigorous diaphragmatic control that ensures a seemingly endless and perfectly stable vocal projection. To this she adds the myriad technical vocal inflexions that create a Lucia of overwhelming musical impact. On this showing, Yende is going to be one of the great Lucias of the next two decades.

Opposite her, we heard the equally stellar Lee as Edgardo. Here is another young artist who has matured in a gratifying fashion and whose light Rossinian tenor had fleshed out just sufficiently to give it the fuller timbre required for a role (and accompaniment) of weightier mien. Throw in stratospheric top notes and you have another singer who engrosses.

If breathing was Yende's trump card, Lee's was staying power. It's a nasty role because the two biggest vocal demands are right towards the very end of the opera – particularly the great final aria. Lee sounded as vocally fresh as on his first appearance and brought the work to a triumphant conclusion.

Stevens was heard as Enrico, a role that perfectly suited his pleas-



TAXING ROLE: Pretty Yende's exemplary breath control impressed.

Picture: RUDY AMISANO DE LESPIN

ingly mobile baritone. It's a pretty unrelenting role, too, but Stevens never flagged and remained musically convincing from first to last, particularly in the set pieces with Yende and Lee.

The four other roles were de-

livered with verve and accuracy, but I should single out the young tenor Lukhanyo Moyake's Arturo for special mention. It's not often one hears a second tenor of such quality in the sextet which dominates the wedding scene and the glorious

ensemble of these six voices garnered a rumbustious standing ovation from the packed opera house, matched only by the 15 minutes frenzied applause that greeted the work's conclusion.

● See www.cpo.org.za

what's on

Coetzer's 'Honeymoon'

Katrin Coetzer's solo exhibition of drawings and paintings, titled *Honeymoon*, is at Salon91 Contemporary Art Collection in Kloof Street from Wednesday at 6.30pm until May 18. The exhibition expresses how the artist is forging a connection between her inner world and the geographical spaces she visits. The gallery is closed on Sundays and Mondays. Call 082 679 3906.

Hogarth's art and life

The Fine and Decorative Art Society will present a lecture by Rosalind Whyte, titled "William Hogarth – his art and life", at the SA Jewish Museum in Hatfield Street, Gardens, on Wednesday at 7.30pm. Call 021 434 4579.

Metallica support

The support band for the Cape Town leg of Metallica's tour on Wednesday and Thursday at the Bellville Velodrome will be Van Coke Kartel. Tickets are R360 to R850. Call Computicket at 0861 915 8000.

'Good Morning, Sunshine'

Shortstraw will launch their second album *Good Morning, Sunshine* at Mercury Live in De Villiers Street on Friday at 9pm. Captain Stu and I Was an Exorcist will also perform. Tickets are R40. See www.mercury1.co.za

'Rocking for Cancer'

The Soap Girls, McCree, Tombstone Pete, Carmelita Daniels and Anel van der Merwe will perform at *Rocking for Cancer* at Club Montreal in Loop Street on Freedom Day, Saturday at 9pm. All money raised will go to St Luke's Hospice. Tickets are R40 to R80. E-mail caseytarr30@gmail.com

Hennessy 'Talent Quest'

Entries for Hennessy's international *Talent Quest* close on April 30. Bands and musicians over the age of 25 are invited to submit videos of themselves performing blues, soul, funk, folk, R&B, boogie, swing, country, gospel, hip hop, or rock 'n roll. Winners will have the opportunity to perform at the *Blues Passions Festival* in Cognac, France. See www.hennessy.com

'Is This the Way to Amarillo?'

British singer and actor Tony Christie will perform at GrandWest's Grand Arena on May 15 at 8pm. The artist has sold more than 10 million albums worldwide and is known for hits like *Is This the Way to Amarillo?* and *I Did What I Did for Money*.



Of birds and butts: check out this Chekhov celebration

Arts writer

blooded, free-swinging and spe-

a farcical monologue in the act fea-

of a second-class provincial theatre.

Russian theatre portraits includes