

Opera Nice Côte d'Azur and Company Meetings Report 02.06.2018

Nicholas Cannon

Nabucco by Verdi – Opera Nice Côte d'Azur 4th – 18th May 2018

Creatives

Direction musicale / Music Director: György G. Ráth

Mise en scène / Stage Director: Jean-Christophe Mast

Décors et costumes / Set and Costume Design: Jérôme Bourdin

Lumières / Lighting Design: Pascal Noël

Cast

Abigaille: Raffaella Anceletti

Anna: Perrine Madoeuf

Fenena: Julie Robard-Gendre

Nabucco: Serguei Murzaev

Ismaël: Jesús León

Zaccaria: Evgeny Stavinsky

Le Grand prêtre: Nika Guliashvili

Abdallo: Frédéric Diquero

Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice

Choeur de l'Opéra de Nice et Toulon



On Saturday 4th May, my arrival to the company coincided with the first of the Technical rehearsals in the Nice Opera Theatre.

It wasn't long until my liaison with the company, the artistic assistant of the General Director, Daniela Dominutti, introduced me to the stage director of Nabucco, Jean-Christophe Mast. He invited me to sit with him at the director's table. I also met the costume and set designer Jérôme Bourdin and the lighting designer Pascal Noël as well as Maestro György G. Ráth.

This particular production of Nabucco was first performed at Opera Saint-Etienne June 2017. The production was then taken on as a co-production by Nice and Toulon Opera with a combined chorus of the two opera companies.

The focus of this particular Tech rehearsal at the Nice Opera Theatre was on the large combined Chorus. The director was making sure everyone was placed in the right position on the stage. The second day of Tech focused on the principals' placement and action on the set. Examples of some of the tech issues the director had to attend were trap doors opening, wheel chairs malfunctioning, safety of dancers using long lances and curtain movements, plus some character reactions.

When chatting with the set and costume designer, Jerome, about his inspiration for the concept, he was looking for something pure, graphic/angular (almost cubist) and will visually support the chorus so all the singers will always be seen. This concept is not set during a particular time period.

The set is all black with a raked stage on various angles. A large square block with stairs used for characters to ascend and descend for different points of their status. Four large angular columns are flown in and out at different points of the opera. There is a large transparent black curtain which dramatically drops to the floor in the opening chorus scene as well as slowly opens to reveal the famous 'Va Pensiero' chorus.



The Israelites' costumes are natural sandy toned with some traditional Jewish symbols. The Babylonians costumes are more aggressive, black, armoured and animalistic with elements of bold yellow colour including the long spears used by the dancers.

When attending the lighting focused session, I could see how Pascal and Jean-Christophe were trying to enhance the angular style with the lights and timing them well with movement of curtains and columns and music. They also decided on appropriate colour tones and cues with the stage manager.

During a break of all our rehearsing, I managed to grab a coffee with Jean-Christophe do discuss the production, a little about his background and life as a metteur-en-scene (Stage director) in France. He was very kind and supportive, giving me good advice and possible further networks.

Interestingly, there was no sitzprobe rehearsal but an extra orchestral stage rehearsal which allowed more time to get the music and movement right together. I noted what a beautiful and extraordinary building the Nice Opera Theatre is with its ornate interior design and acoustic perfectly supporting the orchestra and singers equally. All musicians played and sang to a very high standard.

During the final rehearsals, the main issues the team were addressing were some speedy costume changes which caused some chorus members to be late on stage, timing the syke and curtain cues, and finessing the dancers' movements. Jean-Christophe asked for my opinion for the chorus exit at the end of Act 1 which he appreciated during a stressful rehearsal.

The final General Rehearsal was open to the public and the theatre was full. Jean-Christophe asked for me to sit next to him during the run to talk through any final director notes he needed to make. Sitting close by were the team from Toulon Opera who were preparing for when they take on the production. After the rehearsal, Jean-Christophe thanked me for the support I gave him and appreciated my input. We will keep in touch and try to catch up again in Paris.

I enjoyed opening night from a second level balcony box seat kindly given to me by the company. The performance went very well and was enthusiastically received by the audience. Afterwards, I was invited to an after party where I could chat with the singers and crew in a more relaxed atmosphere. They are a lovely community and made me feel very welcome which allowed me to learn about their creative approach to opera and the organisation of how they put it all together plus the valuable contacts I have made.



Photograph: Nabucco's Entrance. Abigail: Raffaella Angeletti, Anna: Perrine Madoeuf, Fenena: Julie Robard-Gendre, Nabucco: Serguei Murzaev, Ismaël: Jesús León, Zaccaria: Evgeny Stavinsky plus chorus and dancers.



Photograph: The Israelites Act I. Zaccaria: Evgeny Stavinsky, Anna: Perrine Madoeuf, Fenena: Julie Robard-Gendre plus chorus.

Meetings:

English Touring Opera – London Tuesday 22nd May
Jane-Eve Staughton – General Manager

Welsh National Opera – Cardiff Thursday 24th May
David Pountney – Artistic Director and Nick Winter – Director of Artistic Administration

Opera Holland Park – London Monday 28th May
Imogen van Santvoort – Associate Producer

Scottish Opera – Glasgow Tuesday May 29th May
Vivienne Wood – Director of Planning

Opera Liceu – Barcelona Wednesday 13th June
Christina Scheppelmann – Artistic Director and Leticia Martin Deputy – Artistic and Production Director

Royal Opera House – London Tuesday 3rd July
Amy Lane – Senior Staff Director

Each meeting so far everyone was very kind and happy to meet me. Everyone was very interested in the work I had done so far, my style of direction and what work I have coming up. They each have my information on their records if they have any appropriate work for me. I have also gained a small understanding of how their company is run. I am satisfied that I have made good contacts with these companies and could easily approach them again about further industry relations or possible work experience opportunities in the future. In particular, Ms Lane from the Royal Opera House mentioned when I am next in London she will help find an opportunity to observe one of their productions in development.

Thank you

I would like to once again thank the Friends of State Opera of South Australia ever so much for their generous support and sponsorship. It has made this experience possible. I look forward to applying this experience to my work back a State Opera in all my up-coming projects. This trip has also reminded me of the incredible standard of work State Opera does. In my mind, it truly is a great international opera company and it is such a privilege for me to work there and be a part of the community of such a wonderful company.

Nicholas Cannon
2/06/18