Out of Hours Opera

GRAND CINEMA

Les Vêpres Siciliennes

*The Royal Opera House, a co-production with
The Royal Danish Opera, Copenhagen*

Live cinema relay throws the doors of the Royal Opera House open to the world and last year in November *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, Giuseppe Verdi's grand opera in five acts, beamed live from Covent Garden to cinemas globally. A rare treat, and the Royal Opera House's first ever production of a mature Verdian masterpiece. Why rare? Because the forces involved are massive. Grand opera at its Grandest. One world class baritone required? Nope, we need two. And wheel on a 90 strong chorus to belt it out. And a corps de ballet.

For an opera novice watching from Edinburgh, the production seemed unmoved by transmission to the screen and remained a soaring and stirring epic about foreign occupation, love, and tested loyalties. The strong international cast told the story of insurrection brewing in 13th century Sicily against the occupying French and their tyrannical leader Guy de Montfort, majestically performed by German baritone Michael Volle. Among the oppressed

Sicilians, the Duchess Hélène (Lianna Haroutounian) and the young rebel Henri (thrilling American tenor Bryan Hymel) are passionate in their hate for Montfort and love for one another. But when Henri discovers that he is, in fact, Montfort's son, these passions ignite the gripping moral dilemma at the opera's heart. A stunning opening to Act IV shows Henri torn between loyalty to his father, dedication to his cause and love for Hélène, and as she is led to the scaffold, he pledges himself to Montfort in exchange for her life.

There's no doubt that cinema relay can do justice to such an exuberant story and to Verdi's wonderful composition. Perhaps the notes don't reverberate through a cinema quite as they would through the Royal Opera House, and the buzz of a live audience isn't experienced to quite the same degree, but all the sound and work of the orchestra was powerfully broadcast and the singers' presence still acutely felt. The camera-work offered panoramic views of the ingenious stage design (replicating the 1855 Paris Opera where *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* premiered) and chorus, as well as poignant close-ups of the solos and duets, where every tremor could be seen

and felt with clarity. Meanwhile the libretto was usefully translated into on-screen English subtitles and a commentary with back-stage interviews was provided to occupy the intervals. Viewers around the world commented on Twitter.

The Royal Opera House's live cinema season has a lot to recommend it. In coming months it will feature *Don Giovanni*, (12 February 2014) and the Royal Ballet's premier of a new full-length version of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (28 April 2014) among others. The Royal Shakespeare Company, National Theatre, and New York Metropolitan Opera are all set to distribute their wares globally, live via cinemas. Thus, the scene is set for a feast of theatrical and operatic treasures this year to be enjoyed from afar, although no less alive and no less intense. And all for the price of a cinema ticket!

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