Rossini [1792–1868] seems indelibly associated with fun; many people’s first opera experience is his fizzy Il barbieri di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville, 1816), a rom-com for its time, a brilliant piece of propulsive theatrical and musical construction, composed early in his career. Or, we know the theme tune of The Lone Ranger — again with propulsive energy as a deep, characteristic part of the William Tell Overture, Rossini’s operatic swansong. For many, this is all they know of the composer who shook up 18th century operatic form, and prepared the way for the great Verdi. Recent times have allowed us to enjoy and understand more of his work; the 2014–2015 season has been particularly rich, and there is a glorious opportunity in the middle of March, at a cinema near you — read on ...

In September 2014, The Barber opened the season in London and Paris. Meanwhile, The Welsh National Opera had a double bill of Guillaume Tell (William Tell) and his earlier Mosè in Egitto (Moses in Egypt); apparently very different works, brought together to strengthen their message. Both deal with a nation under the yoke of a mighty empire, and personal struggles of leadership. Rossini used the chorus as a character in its own right, foreshadowing the big Verdi choruses in Nabucco and Macbeth, articulating growing frustration in the populace. Both pieces address the personal cost of rebellion, with love affairs between members of opposing sides, in one case doomed and tragic (pre-echoing Verdi’s Aida) in the other, redemptive. Tell contains that heart-stopping moment: shooting at the apple placed on his own son’s head. Rossini has the music for all of this yet can concentrate our attention in an intense moment of stillness. How different from The Barber; you may think; but he did it there, too, right in the middle of the piece.

In July 2014, Buxton Festival had a concert performance of Rossini’s Otello, which held the stage until Verdi’s masterpiece eclipsed it. In October, the young artists at Covent Garden showed us their promise in a very early piece, La Scala di Seta (The Silken Ladder), which, like The Barber, requires comic timing, musical flexibility, and accuracy. Rossini’s music calls on the singer to produce beautiful singing — bel canto — and amazing vocal decorations — fioritura/coloratura. A good example will come in the middle of March 2015, when New York’s Metropolitan Opera is broadcasting the dark and serious rarity La Donna del Lago, to cinemas worldwide — with a truly beautiful singing — bel canto — and amazing vocal decorations — fioritura/coloratura. A good example will come in the middle of March 2015, when New York’s Metropolitan Opera is broadcasting the dark and serious rarity La Donna del Lago, to cinemas worldwide — with a truly beautiful singing — bel canto — and amazing vocal decorations — fioritura/coloratura. A good example will come in the middle of March 2015, when New York’s Metropolitan Opera is broadcasting the dark and serious rarity La Donna del Lago, to cinemas worldwide — with a truly beautiful singing — bel canto — and amazing vocal decorations — fioritura/coloratura.

So, if I’ve whetted your appetite, or you fancy a virtual trip to the red velvet seats in New York, google ‘MetOpera la Donna del Lago’ and book a cinema ticket for 14 March.

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DOI: 10.3399/bjgp15X684133

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