

Opera NOW

LIVE REVIEWS | Italy

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Il Mondo alla Rovescia Salieri

TEATRO SALIERI, LEGNAGO/

TEATRO FILARMONICO, VERONA

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Photography by ENNEVI

The victim of an all-out character assassination perpetrated by Peter Schaffer's play (and Milos Forman's subsequent film) *Amadeus*, Antonio Salieri was in reality neither a crazed murderer nor a hapless creative bore.

THE RECENT REVIVAL OF SALIERI'S OPERAS – SO FAR just a handful among the more than 40 titles he produced between 1770 and 1804 – shows that he was more at ease with tragicomedy than in the outright *seria* or *buffa* genres. This format was in fact the favourite of the Enlightenment at its height, from grand court theatres to provincial stages. In easily accessible stories it combined dramatic flair with up-to-date philosophical ideas and a pinch of social critique. The pathetic and the heroic, the erotic and the farcical often alternated within the same character.

Il Mondo alla Rovescia ('The world turned topsy-turvy') is a subject devised by Carlo Goldoni in 1750, based on the mythical Amazons and first set to music by Galuppi. On a remote island, traditional gender roles are reversed: women hold sway over politics and warfare, while men are sitting ducks for the opposite sex's desire, fond of fashion and prone to coquettish behaviour. The population is bound by a strict moral code and may be punished for any transgression. Two European aristocrats, the Count and the Marchioness, are caught in a shipwreck. After awkward romances, serenades, frustrated attempts at elopement and a battle between the women and a European rescue fleet, the Count stays on the island to marry the attractive she-Colonel, while the Marchioness chooses liberty and sails back to Europe with the General's nephew.

SALIERI'S SCORE, PREMIERED AT VIENNA'S BURGTHEATER in January 1795, displays a variety of orchestral colour, dizzying vocal agility alongside lyrical melodies, a moderate amount of self-borrowing (mainly in the overture, a reworking from *Don Chisciotte alle Nozze di Gamace*, and in the bravura aria for the Marchioness 'Quando più irato freme', from *Europa Riconosciuta*), plus posthumous tributes to Gluck's *Orfeo* and Mozart's K431 concert aria 'Misero! O sogno'.

This first modern-day production of the work was sponsored by the Fondazione Salieri. It scored



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Gender-bending in the first modern-day production of Salieri's Amazonian escapade

a successful run of four nights in the composer's native Legnago, and at nearby Verona mainly thanks to Federico Sardelli's brisk conducting and a fresh-sounding company featuring baritones Marco Filippo Romano and Gianpiero Ruggeri, mezzo Rosa Bove, soprano Patrizia Cigna and tenor Emanuele D'Aguanno.

Marco Gandini's staging was a low-budget and historically informed affair that wisely stayed clear of any drag-queen antics. ●

FIRST PRODUCTION RUN

This production was the centrepiece of the Salieri Opera Festival in November 2009
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