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"Movement as a description of being."

Press Text: Terrace Talk about the New Production of Gaetano Donizetti's Opera

Maria Stuarda



Left to right: Antonello Manacorda (conductor), Kate Lindsey (Elisabetta), Lisette Oropesa (Maria Stuarda), Ulrich Rasche (director and set designer)

(SF, 11 July 2025) Rehearsals for this year's new production of Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* have been going on for several weeks. The director Ulrich Rasche focuses less on the love story and rather on the "fundamental power struggle happening amidst the tension of existential threats, manipulation and friction". The set design has a chance to unfold its "full, monumental effect" at the Großes Festspielhaus. A stage space reduced to mechanical rotating discs allows him to portray the enormous brutality of these conflicts. It's not the queens alone who drive the mechanisms of power, but also those persons surrounding and manipulating them – represented here by a group of individually cast dancers from SEAD (the Salzburg

Experimental Academy of Dance). “Both women are powerful, but at the same time also powerless,” says Rasche, to whom the piece, in certain ways, also offers a portrait of society today – in that there are often individuals who seem from the outside as dependent, driven victims.

The conductor Antonello Manacorda does not consider Rasche’s relatively reduced concept for the production a contradiction vis-à-vis the large musical cast: “I don’t see a contrast here at all. His way of working suits us. The musical structure of Donizetti’s work, with its broad variety of operatic singing, is easy to adapt to this. To me, the whole thing is how opera should be done – this collaboration is the source of true musical theatre.”



Ulrich Rasche (director and set designer), Antonello Manacorda (conductor)

Lisette Oropesa sings the title role. Asked about the contrasts and commonalities of the two queens, she says: “I view Maria as a real historical person; her portrayal goes beyond actual bel canto. When preparing the role, I try to bring the tragedy and the suffering she experienced to the fore. At the same time, this opera raises the question of what we have learned, on the human side? Maria fascinates us not only from the perspective of tragedy, but she touches our hearts with her honesty and her unfailing faith. This is particularly pronounced in the prayer she says shortly before her execution. It’s almost a church hymn, symbolizing everything religion stands for.”

Kate Lindsey comments on her role of Elisabetta: “Maria and Elisabetta could be good friends, actually – if only it weren’t for this power conflict between them. Perhaps Elisabetta is not understood sufficiently as a leadership personality in the opera – in my opinion, one must differentiate between the opera character and the real Elizabeth, who – unlike Mary – had no supportive followers and loving people around her. I think she tries to compensate for this deficit by seeking a sisterly relationship with Maria. Ulrich Rasche’s stage machinery is an apt symbol of the burden placed upon her, the political power games and the continuous movement.”

Asked about his use of movement in his work, with a view to a concrete score, Rasche says: “The personal rapprochement between the characters is not in contradiction to the machinery, but they converge in unity. The challenge of highlighting the contrast between the extreme beauty of the voices and the drama is working out well.” He adds that choreographic elements offer further illustration of this point. He emphasizes how happy he is about the ability of the two main performers to move on the rotating discs while singing, explaining that the concrete sequence of steps had been worked out in advance, with the score as a guide. “This leads to a synthesis of movement, singing and machinery.”

Lisette Oropesa’s reading of the role is a good fit for this approach: “As a singer, my work requires me to fully engage my body. This work is a 360-degree experience: the continuous

tension resulting from the movement gives me a feeling of unlimited freedom, which also allows me to shut out unimportant things more easily – that is a wonderful experience.”



Lisette Oropesa (Maria Stuarda)

Manacorda too feels that the inclusion of elements of movement into the vocalism enriches the experience: “The exploration of the map of steps has intensified over the course of the rehearsals. To me, the factor of time has always played a major role in music – movement as a description of being. We have tried to view each movement of the singers not as a limitation, but as an amplification of their expressiveness. It is not least due to the movement and the interaction in dance that we keep discovering new elements in the score every day.”

Kate Lindsey agrees: “At any rate, singing can be compared to a forward motion. Another thing I have learned in these rehearsals is that one should not ignore the physical aspect. An ongoing dialogue about speed helped us here: if you make a rhythm your own, this results in something like an inner pulse. The rhythm helps the characters realize what their next steps are. This results in a connection between body and spirit.” She recounts that the encounter with such physical challenges, and learning to deal with them constructively, had also helped her for her professional life the first time she appeared at the Festival – in Jan Lauwers’ production of Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea* in 2018.



Kate Lindsey (Elisabetta)

Oropesa too has happy memories of her performance in Salzburg last year, when she appeared in the concert production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*: “I would return here anytime, immediately. The city, the atmosphere and the manner of rehearsing here are wonderful.”

Even though her debut as Maria Stuarda was only recently, the role almost feels as if it were part of her already. Asked about the differences between concert and staged performances, she says: "When it's a masterwork, as this is, both work. However, a shared rehearsal phase with wonderful colleagues, as is the case here, releases additional energies." And opera, she adds, is ultimately the only art form that unites aspects of film, theatre, dance and music – "it engages all the senses".

The fact that everyone is on the same artistic wavelength is important to Manacorda too: "The solutions for the vocal, physical and performative challenges – we all find them together."

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