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Preview: Tangier Tattoo, touring across the UK

Sex and drugs and operatics

Review by Roderic Dunnett

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Glyndebourne has emerged as one of Britain's liveliest commissioners of new opera. Besides Birtwistle's *The Last Supper* and *Dove's Flight*, projects such as *Misper* (1997) and *Zoë* (2000) have won popularity with a younger audience. Now, director Stephen Langridge, librettist Stephen Plaice and composer Jonathan Lunn have teamed up again. A story of drugs, intrigue and backpackers sucked into mysterious goings-on, *Tangier Tattoo* is set to rival earlier successes.

The scenario looks intriguing: "This is the Café Central, in the Petit Socco, a bus square in the old town. The kind of place you wouldn't leave your mother too long. A drug deal for kif [marijuana] is being fixed up at the next table by dealers from the Rif mountains."

Enter two young tourists, a tattooist, a bunch of shady characters and a crazy Colombo-like detective trying to unravel the skulduggery. The American soprano Katherine Rohrer sings the girl, Nadine, who is not what she seems.

"One thing that hit me was that *Tangier Tattoo* wasn't set in stone from the start. It's potentially revolutionary as opera: a discovery process, constantly being refined," says Rohrer.

"John and Stephen wanted it to reflect what's going on in the world today. Yet when they created this fantasy world of drug deals funding jihadists, they didn't know it was actually true: that only emerged later.

"John's score is film-like, paced like an action story. There's a CD overtrack, so you have music from two different sources, and there's a strong rhythmic content.

"My character, Nadine, is a woman of a thousand faces who doesn't know her own. She's a *femme fatale*. There are loads of lies, and the audience has to figure out what the truth is. Did she really do that? Is she really in love? But you don't get answers on a plate. God help us if it's predictable."

Touring to Oxford, Plymouth, Woking, Stoke-on-Trent, Norwich and Milton Keynes from 22 October (01273 813813; www.glyndebourne.com)