

Love And Other Demons, Glyndebourne Festival, Glyndebourne

(Rated 3/5)

Reviewed by Edward Seckerson
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Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novella, upon which this work is based, certainly suggests opera: a total eclipse of the sun, a rabid dog, a girl named Sierva Maria de Todos los Angeles, a priest whose compassion turns to forbidden love, a monstrous exorcism. The "demons" of the title are prejudice and intolerance. Love dies, innocence dies in a climate of suspicion and mistrust.

But have Peter Eotvos and his librettist Kornel Hamvai successfully realised the "magic realism" of the novel? Yes and no.

What we have is the framework of a play infused with music. Eotvos sets his text as heightened speech, the better to convey the words, which are ritualised, carried on an instrumental current that behaves like underscoring, recalling Eotvos's early days as a composer of incidental theatre music. But here his music is organic and superbly accomplished, upper and lower frequencies set in thrilling opposition to suggest the opposing forces that eventually tear our heroine apart.

But the "songs", such as they are, feel subsumed by the relentless *lento* pacing of the score. It's as if the whole evening is under hypnosis. There is plenty of variety, you just don't feel it. But you do remember the haunting juxtaposition of religious chant and Sierva Maria's birdlike pyrotechnics, wonderfully handled by a fearless Allison Bell – the suppressed lyricism of Father Delaura (Nathan Gunn), the anguish of Maria's father Don Ygnacio (Robert Brubaker).

In Helmut Sturmer's striking design there's a suggestion of excavation in the remnants of Don Ygnacio's mansion: we're digging into the past to shape the future. But the future is bleak; there is no harmony of ideas. "Rabies of the soul" infects everyone but Sierva Maria and her would-be saviour Delaura. The scene where his healing turns seductive is beautifully handled by director Silviu Purcarete, the first embrace clinching a forbidding unison crescendo in the orchestra.

Indeed, under Vladimir Jurowski, the London Philharmonic shimmers and grows evocatively, and, surfeit of "meaningful" projections aside, Purcarete's production delivers.