

Did you ever go to Venezia no? Well you must..... It is one of the 7 wonders of the world and if it is not listed as such it certainly should be.

The Frecciarossa, the Italian equivalent of the French TGV or Japanese Shinkansen will take you there from the south, the north and the west of Italy.

Build on wood pillars that withstood the gloom future predicted hundred of years ago Venezia remains splendid with palazzos adorning the ground canal eventually taking you to “La Fenice” station by mass transport (boat lines number 1 from the central station) And there stands “La Fenice” that you can get to, also, with a water taxi from the station for 60 euros a 10 minutes trip (our taxi driver middle aged well mannered friendly said at our hotel it is 80E “but for you will make 70E”).

So la Fenice was built in 1792 by architect Giannantonio Selva with an opulent interior.

It opened with grand fast with “I giuochi di Agrigento” and the whole aristocracy of the Serenissima ... was there and continued to come ... and so it went for 200 years with premieres of theatre pieces ... and operas. By Vivaldi Monteverdi Bellini Verdi and others.

Traviata, among them saw there it's "prima assoluta" celebrated as one of the jewels of the Italian republic after the unification of Italy in 1861.

Until the year '2000....

Enrico Carella and cousin Masimilliano Marchette were local electricians ... in charge of electric equipment of La Fenice also the manipulation of the electrical gadgets during rehearsal and performances. Unhappy with the working conditions they created an artificial court circuit which set the fire to the theater which burned to the ground !!!!

They fled to Mexico but were eventually arrested and condemned to 7 years

It took years and contributions from the whole world to bring Fenice back to the original glory and crews working 24 hours 7 days a week to open on schedule in March 2001..

Today La Fenice with a new platea, 5 balconies resplendent with golden ornaments ... delicate seraphim floating on it's azur ceiling is alive and singing in full splendor.

The management graciously offered us two two splendid seats in the platea where we could see and hear well the feast unraveling on the stage.

La Traviata, by G. Verdi, with the libretto by Francesco Maria Piave was given in the “prima assoluta” in the very Fenice we are sitting in 2019.

The reception by the public was unfriendly mainly because Violetta, the ... courtesan was impersonated by ... an overweight unattractive singer so much so that Verdi cancelled the next performance until an appropriate replacement was found.

The rest is history: as Traviata is today the most performed opera from Alaska to Brazil's

Manaos's opera house.

THE STORY:

Inspired by Dumas ... and composed when he lived in Paris tells the story of Violetta, high class, courtesan leading a life of lust and luxury notwithstanding her consumptive tuberculosis .

Enter Alfredo young attractive gentleman .. they fall in love instantaneously and decide to leave Paris for freedom and love to friendly country side ..

The father of Alfredo, Germont Sr., will be a spoiler: he meets Violetta and demands she abandons Alfredo so the family honor will not be stained and Alfredo's sister imminent marriage could proceed.

Violetta shattered but resolute to liberate Alfredo and salvage his future returns to an old lover. Alfredo learns the somber news and publicly humiliates and dispatches Violetta

Later on he comes to understand her sacrifice and hurries back to her abode.

They swear eternal love as she expires in his arms.

THE CAST AND REGIA

I am indebted to Canadian Robert Carsen who's regia is so minimal. in good taste and let the singers have their way with the magnificent score. This is in sharp and felicitous contrast to the noisy, egomaniacal modern registas who dare think their passing scribble such as a David Livermores's Attila of "La Scala", or ... Cenerentola at "Teatro Verdi" in Padova could overcast Verdi or Rossini's music.

This performance is all music, singing and rich orchestral work

SINGING ORCHESTRA others

The first scene of I act is meant to be a shocker: the entire chorus dressed as venal clients pass by, some throwing, some gently tending bunches of banknotes, to Violetta for her sex offerings (“me too “ movement might rise an eyebrow ...).

“Fussero ora” by Alfredo and “tra noi” arias are splendidly rendered by Francesca Sassu, a wonderful full throated lyric soprano and Alfredo a silvery tenor who’s voice will warm up with

ensuing arias.

Then the “misterioso” duet that will move every opera lover in spite of some of Francesca’s shrill high notes ..

Il act open on a barren forest scene it will all be bel canto with Violetta's aria "pensateci" the heart wrenching "addio" and "dio mi guido".

Elisabetta Martorana a strong mezzo makes a short appearance we will hear more bad news but great singing from her later.

The splendid Germont Sr, Luca Grassi, is the "clou" of the second act and maybe the star of this production, a deep sonorous warm bass-baritono as colorful in the high range as dangerous in the lows he makes one think of Ghiaurov or Rossi-Lemeni ... of great days past.

The III^d act brings us back to festive Paris and then to Violetta's modest apartment, now bereft of all lovers save faithful companion, Anina (Sabrina Vianetto) ... doctors and lovers will not help ... or stop the phthisis that eats away Violetta.

Sento Quatrini, the young conductor, succeeds holding together the excellent orchestra, the Sonorous Choir, and the soloists, ever attentive to his "baton" may be driven a bit too severely.

A final note of the "bel canto". This is a monstrous formidable vocal enterprise for Violetta who holds the stage for most of the 3 acts. From a full throated happy libertine to a frail dying penitent she travers the entire range of "verissimo bel canto" and Francesca Sassu is doing it brilliantly.

All in all a pure native musical production for everybody is italian by birth or schooling.

The crowd was international: to my right "frenchys" from Lyon; behind us a row of germans; in the bar elegant japanese; and standing talking effusively Veneziani with bow ties and lacquer shoes.

If you have been in Venice last week you probably have heard this Traviata and loved it; if you didn't yet: book your flight and the sumptuous hotel Bellini, close to the station, where we stayed for 100 euros and order tickets by mail for La Fenice; and don't forget to lunch or dinner at ristorante "Antico Calice" where you will eat fresh fish brought by gondolieri themselves who are eating next to you.

Peter Hermes