Tieppo's Suggestions of Love at Lauderdale House

Friday

9-Nov-12 19:00 Lauderdale House, London

Suggestions of Love: A Song Opera

Tieppo, Suggestions of Love, a song opera

Amy J. Payne, Mezzo-soprano

Kevin Kyle, Tenor

George Collie, Spoken word

Luca Tieppo, Piano

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Contemporary opera is a genre that strikes fear into the hearts of many: visions of singers throwing themselves around the stage, incomprehensible atonal music, avant-garde costumes and weird and wonderful story-lines abound in the classical concertgoer’s expectations. I have to say I rather enjoy seeing what new and boundary-pushing ideas living composers have come up with, and it was with some excitement I arrived at Lauderdale House for composer Luca Tieppo and writer Riccardo Bentsik’s new opera, Suggestions of Love.

This was the première small-scale performance of this three-man piece, and the set was simple and striking. The plot was an exploration of the love between a He and a She (Kevin Kyle and Amy J. Payne), orchestrated by the puppeteer Mr Wyrd (George Collie) through the means of music boxes. In the first part, he keeps the lovers separate and then allows them to meet in the second half, by the means of the third music box, and they fall in love. We follow them through the ups and downs of a tempestuous relationship until Mr Wyrd no longer has control over their actions and we leave them to live their lives independently, no longer under the guiding hand of the puppet-master.

I thought the juxtaposition between the two sung parts and the spoken narration, presented in an extended and rather philosophical monologue, worked well. Rather like a traditional recitative, the monologues moved the story along at quite a pace leading into the songs, which, in the style of a traditional operatic aria, used small snippets of text to explore the emotional world of the lovers. The music was minimalist, and Tieppo’s musical theatre background, along with touches of film music and jazz, came to the fore. The music was pleasant, but unfortunately this musical structure, along with the unadventurous sound world and compositional style, became rather repetitive. The simple pianistic accompaniment, played by the composer himself, worked well in the space and balanced the singers well.

There were flashes of brilliance, mostly due to Payne’s exemplary performance and wonderfully rich and emotive voice. Her diction and presentation of the occasionally challenging text was crystal clear and I really felt the emotional arc of her performance. Kyle, disappointingly, didn’t rise to the occasion and I felt there was both vocal power and emotional connection lacking in his performance on this occasion. Collie was suitably weird and wonderful as the freakish puppeteer and his thought-provoking lines provided some interesting musings.

The entire evening had a nice feel of the homemade, and I enjoyed the intimacy of the performance space. Lauderdale House seems to enjoy a wide variety of events, with art exhibitions and chamber music, and I will certainly be attending a concert in the future. As for this particular work, I feel that it has potential to be an enjoyable and accessible way into world of contemporary opera and I look forward to seeing Tieppo’s development as a composer.

Submitted by Emily Owen on 14th November 2012