



OperaZuid presents ORPHÉE AUX ENFERS on tour



Operetta – or *opéra bouffe*, if you prefer – is not everyone’s cup of tea. It is seen by some opera buffs as flippant, lacking the drama and weight of grand opera, forfeiting the opportunity for majestic arias and a dying heroine. Comparing Offenbach to Wagner, or even Puccini, is like comparing Alan Ayckbourn to Chekhov. No prizes for guessing on which side the scales come down.

But what *opéra bouffe* does offer a company with an adventurous director is the chance to let their hair down, to have some fun. And fun is the word that would describe OperaZuid’s splendid *Orphée aux Enfers* (*Orpheus in the Underworld*) which is currently on tour.

Jacques Offenbach’s satirical masterpiece first saw the light of day on 21st October, 1858 at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens in Paris. Described by critics at the time as “sacrilege” and “a disgrace” because the play, set on Mount Olympus, mocks classical Greek heroes. It was seen as ridiculing the grandiose French establishment and even Napoleon III himself. The composer, not one to miss a

populist trick, exploited the controversy and his *Orphée* became a huge hit, not least because it was the show that launched a famous dance.

With their production, OperaZuid with director Benjamin Prins, has created a production that would grace any of the world's great opera houses. They pulled out all the stops and then some more, telling a story that provides myriad opportunities – all of which are gleefully taken.

The marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice is on the rocks, each of them seeking retribution on the other. The rock on which the relationship, and they, finds itself is the aforementioned Mount Olympus, home, as we all know, to the gods, and it is from the ranks of these almighty beings that the pair enlist help in order to bring down their erstwhile partner. And there are lots to choose from. They are all there – Jupiter, Juno, Mercury, Diane, Venus, Apollo *et al.* If you threw a stone on Mount Olympus in those days you'd be pretty sure to hit a god.

The piece opens in pastoral bliss with Euridice, surrounded by a small flock of sheep – not real sheep as we have seen in a recent production, nor very realistic ones like we saw in another. No, these were fairly basic sheep but not ashamed of it as they frolicked unaware of what was to unfold. It all kicked off when boring old Orpheus arrived on stage, insisting his wife should listen to his latest violin composition.

The decor, and I think this is what dominated the evening, was outstanding, lavish by any standards. The show would almost have been worth seeing just for the visuals. The pantomime/commedia dell'arte inspired sets by Marloes and Wikke were outstanding with bright colours and cut out trees and clouds and the transformations were brilliantly done. The costumes by Marrit van der Burgt and brilliant lighting by Julian Malwald completed what was a series of very beautiful tableaux.

The large cast were evidently having a good time and all sang and acted well, led by Amel Brahim-Djelloul as the heroine and Mathys Lagier as her feckless other half. The ensemble work was particularly strong and the dancers, once they had shed their woolly fleeces of the opening scene, were excellent.

I really liked Thomas Morris as Public Opinion, there in a chorus capacity and doubling as a nappy-clad (diaper, if you are American) Bacchus. As Public Opinion he/she really enforced the pantomime analogy bejewelled in a sequined blue frock and fancy hair do – a cross between a pantomime dame and another dame, Edna Everage [Google her]. If you keep your eyes open you may well encounter her lurking in the foyer before curtain up – either monitoring public opinion or influencing, not sure which.

Now, as I said, *opéra bouffe* provides no great arias but Offenbach' *Orphée aux Enfers* does have the distinction that it launched the *Galop infernal* better known as the Can-Can and, incidentally, providing the ident music for Eurovision which, had you watched the recent Eurovision Song Contest, you would have recognised.

So, all in all, a splendid very enjoyable evening was had by one and all. This is the second consecutive OperaZuid production that I have seen that exceeded my expectations, so I shall eagerly look forward to their next. **Michael Hasted at Amare in The Hague, 30th May 2023**

OperaZuid's *Orphée aux Enfers* tour continues until 22nd June.

← The 76th HOLLAND FESTIVAL takes place in Amsterdam

WELCOME TO ARTSTALK MAGAZINE HOLLAND

Launched in June 2017, we provide previews, reviews and information, in English, for theatres, art exhibitions, concerts, opera etc, concentrating on cities in south west Netherlands. We cover Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and everything in between and nearby – an area known as Randstad. Each venue, museum or gallery has its own page with information and a link to its website. The site is updated on a daily basis.

If you are promoting any events, please let us know and we'll probably be able to list them.

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NOT ONLY, BUT ALSO . . . some dates
for your diary



Here's a run down of some other events coming up in the next few weeks in Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and places nearby and in between. . .

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CONTINUING . . .



There is so much going on in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and nearby there are hardly enough days in the week to see or do everything. Luckily a lot of the exhibitions, events and tours run for quite a long time so if you have missed anything, don't worry, it may still be running.

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May 2023



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We are at THEATER PEPIJN in The Hague for an ENGLISH COMEDY NIGHT and talk to comedians Greg Shapiro, Mohna Joshi, Luana Elena Matei, Weina Ma and to the show's producer from the Diligentia, Vera Papilaja. We talk to author NICCI FRENCH whose new book, "Has Anyone Seen Charlotte Salter?" has just been published in The Netherlands. We finish with Delft-based Trio Beijersbergen playing the Miles Davis classic "Four".

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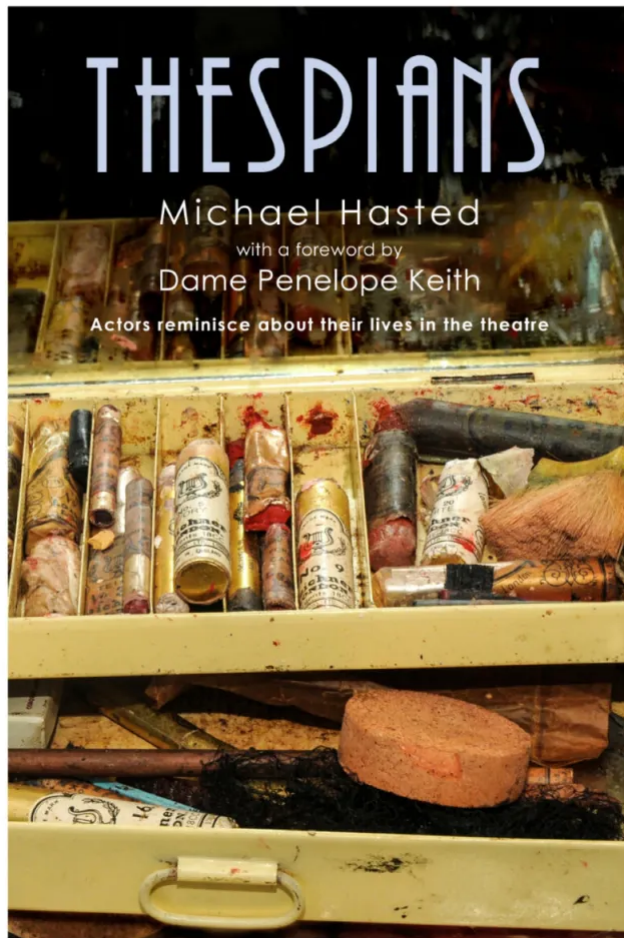
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