

Operaclick
- by David Tosci

Bologna Modern is a festival FOR contemporary music, and is the only one produced entirely by an operatic-symphonic foundation. Nicola Sani, artistic director of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, the promoter responsible for Bologna Modern 2 and himself a composer, frequently stresses the uniqueness of his project.

It is a pity, however, that the Festival takes place in Never-never Land. The theatre was three quarters empty, with no trace of that horde of young people who, drawn both from among composers and from the public, should have flocked to the Teatro Comunale di Bologna and brought life to it. The majority of performances are still to come, up to the end of the month. In the auditorium there was no sign of young authors or of the young people who, outside the door of the theatre, play, sing, or simply gather.

Students at the universities of Bologna number about seventy thousand. There were none of them in the theatre, detached as it is from the first faculty of Arts, Music and Drama which the city created years ago, and which continues its existence with varying degrees of success.

On Wednesday October 11 'The space of the contemporary' was three-quarters empty, distant, detached, turning its back on the reality of a musical city, as Bologna shows itself to be every day.

But let the music begin. And what music!

Bologna Modern 2 opens with a diptych of one-act dramas separated by more than two centuries, both concerned with the myth of **Medea**. The first is by Georg Benda, a Bohemian composer active during the second half of the eighteenth century, with a libretto by F. P. Götter, a poet and classicist contemporary with Benda. The progress of the drama seems minimally touched by the many mythological complications that have grown around it. Götter's Medea is more human than divine. Shocked by Jason's decision to marry the young Glauce/Creusa, which would have brought him to the throne, Medea plans vengeance by killing her own two sons, thus denying progeny to Jason.

Benda's music soon became a model for the melodramas of the period, as melodrama became the predominant style in the opera house.

The Bologna production, conducted by Marco Angius, demanded from the not always perfect Orchestra del Teatro di Bologna energetic dynamics, capable of a coherent cooperation with the intense vocal recitation of Salome Kammer, the exemplary protagonist. Thus, Benda's score takes on a graceful life, shown in every expressive detail of the proclaimed text.

The actor Paul Suter, who played Jason in both works, gave a consistently well-judged performance. Well played also were the Governess (Ulduz Ashraf) and the two children of Medea and Jason (Federico Spitz and Anna Kehl).

A total contrast in complexity is offered by Pascal Dusapin's dramatic treatment of the text of Heiner Müller. **Medeamaterial**, composed in 1992, minimises the mythological aspects of Medea and offers an almost exclusively psychological portrait. Here, Medea is a woman trapped in the crucial knots of her existence, arising from (supposed) abuse, deception and betrayal. This vision is coherent with Müller's dramatic conception, which situated the mythological figure in her personal history and thus in the contemporary world.

The text is hard, schizophrenic and obscene. Together with the obsessive vocal lament of the main character, it becomes a musical carpet for Dusapin's orchestral composition to escape the claustrophobic universe that Medea has created within her own mind. Piia Komsa was magnificent, a coloratura soprano with astounding expressive skills. She interprets the lament with her voice, the sounds she produces come from deep within her head, using instruments of the rarest agility and precision. Her singing is music, her body an instrument perfectly tuned and trained. This is an excellent performance, which confirms her reputation as a truly great coloratura soprano whose technique and musicality are of the finest. She reveals the astounding ability of Pascal Dusapin to discover compelling vocal lines, not only because they are extreme, but also because he is able to design for them a most refined orchestral accompaniment, based on structures that I would rather call crafted than mechanical. Even the five-voice ensemble is built on an original pattern, however obscure, which is the *canto tenorile*. Almost imperceptibly, that is what provides tempo and rhythm to the group, to say nothing of the precise and always balanced interventions of the Chorus. The vocal quartet (Gabriella Costa and Sabina Martin, sopranos, Katarzyna Otczyk, mezzosoprano and Constantin Derri, Counter-tenor) made a good contribution. The sensitive and coherent approach adopted by Marco Angius make this performance, assisted by the excellent work of chorus-master Mario Benotto, a point of reference for the future of Medeamaterial.

Both performances benefited from the contribution of Pamela Hunter for video-projected scenery and staging, evidence of the professionalism and the already well-recognised value of the productions of Nimrod Opera Zurich, which specialises in producing contemporary operas and is also able to tackle the earlier repertoire confidently.

Excellent was the management of the sound, when amplified, by Francesco Cavanese and Giovanni Magaglio of Tempo Reale, as were the appearances onstage of the video camera, which mostly 'amplified' the image of the protagonist, under the care of Dalibor Pys for Vox Multimedia and the lighting under the care of Daniele Naldi.