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Hans Werner Henze *Pollicino* enters the wood at Teatro Regio

★★★★☆ ?

By Benedetta Saglietti, 30 May 2016

When in 1976 Hans Werner Henze founded the Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte in Montepulciano (a small town in southern Tuscany), he intended to break down the barriers between artist and public. A lot more than a festival, in the spirit of the time Henze meant to realize utopia. As an ingenious social experiment, the aim of the Workshop was to produce music and art using the locals at first coordinated by a few artists, such as Henze himself. *Pollicino* was written between 1979 and 1980 for a small group of players and singers, mostly children, put together by Gastón Fournier-Facio (now the artistic director of Teatro Regio in Turin). The "favola per musica" *Pollicino* is based on the popular fairy tale *Hop-o'-My-Thumb* translated into Italian by Carlo Collodi, *Pinocchio's* author, and partly derived from Charles Perrault's *Le petit poucet*.



Pollicino

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Due to the little technical knowledge of the original interpreters, Henze was forced to compose a special opera for amateur musicians, however by no means is the result simple or elementary. For example: polyphony, polyrhythms, modal music and clusters are frequently used. The instrumental ensemble contains recorders (a very common instrument in Italian schools), a pump organ, psalteries, crumhorns, percussion instruments, guitars, strings and teaching instruments of "Orff-Schulwerk", such as keyboards, mainly played by children and young adults, plus some soloists: a violin, a piano and a guitar. The vocal cast comprises 21 children and four adults (here professional singers). Henze plunges children, adults and audience into a fine score of contemporary music,



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Reviewed at Teatro Regio, Turin on 28 May 2016

PROGRAMME

Henze, *Pollicino*

PERFORMERS

Teatro Regio Torino Opera

Claudio Fenoglio, *Conductor*

Dieter Kaegi, *Director*

Italo Grassi, *Set Designer, Costume Designer*

Giorgio Fidelio, *Pollicino*

Kate Fruchterman, *Pollicino's mother*

Michele Govi, *Pollicino's father*

Emilio Marcucci, *The Ogre*

Silvia Beltrami, *The Ogre's wife*

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13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	01	02	03
04	05	06	07	08	09	10

Evening performance

Matinee performance



MORE OPERA REVIEWS

Bringing colour to a sombre tale: *Simon Boccanegra*

that is at the same time a clever re-creation of a vaster repertoire: echoes of Monteverdi and Rossini, compositional procedures typical of Schubert and Schumann, a touch of Mahler, plus Tuscan popular songs. This opera should be, according to the author, like a syllabus, therefore a sort of music class in action.

Alan Yu, 29th February

Patchy vocal offering saved by superb orchestra in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*.

★★★★☆

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Baroque astonishment and wonder in Turin

Edoardo Pelligra, 28th November

Though musically played with participation and sensitivity, this production was full of jugglers, acrobats, dancers, circus performers and mimes.

★★★★☆

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Teatro Regio joins Expo's cultural wave with a flavourless *Norma*

Edoardo Pelligra, 19th July

Visually traditional, this *Norma* often indulged on the most predictable aspects of Vincenzo Bellini's opera, unfortunately missing the opportunity of bringing a bigger audience to the theatre and showcasing the vastness of Italian opera.

★★★☆☆

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A *Faust* between sulphur and damnation

Edoardo Pelligra, 10th June

Stefano Poda's deeply intellectual *mis-en-scène* immersed the bourgeois love affair between Marguerite and Faust in an abstract and transcendental tangle of philosophical, existential and liturgical motifs. However, an overflowing symbolism sounded sometimes academic, but the visual effects were suggestive if not properly enchanting.

★★★★☆

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Humperdinck's bright *Hänsel und Gretel* in Turin

Edoardo Pelligra, 8th May

Vittorio Borrelli's production of *Hänsel und Gretel* in Turin offers a refined *mise-en-scène* focusing on the tiny, playful and colourful aspects of the plot.

★★★★☆

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Orchestra giovanile

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The staging of *Pollicino* at the Teatro Regio in Turin involved a variety of musicians from Italian Conservatories of music, the Teatro Regio treble choir and soloists, a primary school of Villanova d'Asti and a special partnership with the "Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'arte". Furthermore the opera is part of the educational project "La scuola all'opera", that for 20 years has brought schoolchildren to the opera. Widely known in Italian (libretto Giuseppe Di Léva), German (Henze's mother tongue), and also in English, this particular production of *Pollicino* come from the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (2010). The reason for such popularity and its strongest point is that this opera can be produced as a big scale production as well as a small scale production. Here in Turin the scenery is minimal, with contemporary costumes and video projections used to signal scene changes. Superb singing, a perfect mix on the stage of adults and young adults, and an extraordinary young audience made this evening at the opera pleasantly unusual. Even if the majority of the cast was not made by professional musicians nobody could guess it. The young Giorgio Fidelio (Pollicino) stands out due to his beautiful treble voice and very good intonation. The hard work of everybody, first of all of the conductor, Claudio Fenoglio, gave coherence to the ensemble.



Pollicino

© Ramella & Giannese | Teatro Regio Torino

Italo Grassi

Teatro Regio Torino Opera

Silvia Beltrami

Emilio Marcucci

Dieter Kaegi

Kate Fruchterman

Hans Werner Henze



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Cruel, as a lot fairy tales could be, *Pollicino* is made for young people, but the moral tale is universal. *Pollicino* and his brothers are abandoned by their parents in the wood and their descent into hell sometimes echos the mood of Berg's *Wozzeck*.

Pollicino is a piece of music that does not require a lot of time (just 1 hour and 20 minutes) nor technical equipment. If it were heard in all schools, it could be the key for youngsters to contemporary music.

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All articles by Benedetta Saglietti