

Italy

Cagliari

The TEATRO LIRICO has been continuing its exploration of the operas of Respighi. Last season opened with *La campana sommersa*, and this time round it was the turn of *La bella dormiente nel bosco*. Respighi is famous for his symphonic poems but was also a prolific opera composer. He wrote *La bella dormiente nel bosco* for Vittorio Podrecca's marionette theatre, and the piece had a successful premiere at the Teatro Odescalchi in Rome on 13 April 1922. Respighi revived it in Turin in 1934, in a revised version in which actors mimed on stage while the singers performed from the pit. Elsa Respighi commissioned a further revision from the composer's pupil, Gian Luca Tocchi, which was recorded in Turin in 1967. The opera's arrival at the Lirico on February 3 with the singers now on stage can, to a certain extent, be considered a kind of premiere.

La bella dormiente nel bosco confirms both Respighi's originality and the range of his influences: here is a composer able to blend French (Debussy), Russian (Rimsky-Korsakov) and German (Strauss) influences with his own, utterly personal style. His mastery of orchestration is his trump card. The vocal writing steps away from Italian tradition to venture in new directions, and embraces coloratura for the Nightingale as well as spoken passages for the wicked Green Fairy. Gian Bistolfi's libretto is based on Perrault's fairy tale, and is set in the 17th century, but the final scene takes place 300 years later, when a group of rich Americans visits the enchanted castle. A farmer tells them the old legend. Mr Dollar would like to buy everything, while the Prince and his fiancée, the Duchess, quarrel. The Prince then ditches her and goes into the castle. We all know what happens next.



■ Cagliari's ongoing Respighi revival: 'La bella dormente nel bosco' at the Teatro Lirico

The Lirico did the piece proud. Leo Muscato created a simple, elegant production perfectly suited to a fairy tale, with sets by Giada Abiendi, costumes by Vera Pierantoni Giua, lighting by Alessandro Verazzi, video design by Fabio Massimo Iaquone and Luca Attilii, and choreography by Luigia Frattaroli. The involvement of children from local dance schools was an excellent idea and the production was effective in its treatment of both the comic finale and the moments for various individuals. The sets achieved a charming mixture of olde-worlde and cartoon styles.

The conductor Donato Renzetti made Respighi's music, of such sophistication, meticulousness and orchestral richness, sound utterly simple. Renzetti brought out the music's delicacy but also found the right energy when the occasion demanded, such as in the powerful final duet, which looks to the Strauss of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The chorus and orchestra responded with singing and playing of great energy.

There was a large cast, many playing multiple roles. In some cases this helped to create a link—between the wicked Green Fairy and the awful Duchess, for instance; in others, it emphasized the piece's playfulness. The singers included Veta Pilipenko (as the Queen, Little Old Lady and Frog), Angela Nisi (mostly effective as the Princess, but less so in the finale), Antonio Gandia (in the short but taxing role of the Prince), Vincenzo Taormina (as the King and the Ambassador), Shoushik Barsoumian (Blue Fairy), Lara Rotili (Green Fairy, Cat, Duchess and Cuckoo), Claudia Urru (Spindle and Nightingale) and Enrico Zara (Mr Dollar and Jester). The theatre was packed, and the performance was a great success.

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