**Losey's Don Giovanni: A Cinema Triumph**

Don Giovanni, directed by Joseph Losey; written by Lorenzo Da Ponte; music by W. A. Mozart. Starring Ruggerio Raimondi, John Macurdy, Edda Moser, Kiri Te Kanawa, Kenneth Riegel, Jose Van Dam, Teresa Berganza, and Malcolm King. Now playing at the Exeter St. Theatre.

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**Ruggerio Raimondi as Don Giovanni, the personification of pure evil.**

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**Don Giovanni arrives by water during the overture.**

Losey agrees with novelist Patrick White's description of Giovanni as a "dangerous and cold as steel" character. How better to sum up Ruggerio Raimondi's performance? Established as dangerous at the start by his demonstration of calm arrogance as Donna Anna hysterically morns her father, slain at his hands, Giovanni is never someone to be trusted. Raimondi makes of him a man of unshakable will who must always have his own way, who will never compromise. His erotic desires on peasant girl Zerlina is staggering, what an incredible sound he produces as La ci daremo la mano floats mysteriously from his mouth, unworldly, magnetic, smother. And his face when he spits another peasant girl, naked and bashing, is one of pure evil, or an irresistible dark power.

"Leporello is always sacrificed" according to Losey, "he is in a state of complete dependence on Don Giovanni, always forced to risk his life for him." Malcolm King sings the part of Giovanni's servant, producing a character who, although he may be trapped as Losey claims, at times gets not a little enjoyment out of his duties. In Maddalena the ridiculous of Elvira, is forcefully brought home as he draws the list of Giovanni's conquests down the stairs, a sneering tone in his voice. And when he sits with Giovanni on a couch on which is stretched out an anonymous nude, we can have no doubt of his pleasure as he feels her buttocks as though they were a hunk of meat.

Edda Moser presents a picture of a strong-minded Donna Anna. Her uncontrolled hysteria at seeing her dead father is ironically contrasted with the steady rainfall Losey introduces. In her last for vengeance she is fixed; how clear and how pure are her tones, cold and determined is her face. Kenneth Riegel is an ardent Don Ottavio — with great eloquence he sings in tune to his beloved Anna.

Kiri Te Kanawa's sweet and beautiful voice makes Donna Elvira's torments all the more telling. As Losey says, Elvira is the only one who does not think first of herself and who would be willing to give up everything to change Giovanni's ways. And Te Kanawa, in creating such a genuine characterization, makes her emotion more electric.

And so to our third lady, peasant girl Zerlina, betrothed to Masetto, sung by Teresa Berganza. It is normal to perform Zerlina as a charming, gentle and rather simple person; but Berganza creates a bit of a flirt — the least innocent Zerlina I have ever seen. Nonetheless, as the bags Masetto's forgiveness for going off with Giovanni in Batti, hasti e bel Masetto, Berganza's Zerlina is sweet and sincere, as her voice lifts up in loving devotion, Masetto can not but forgive her.

Malcolm King's Masetto has more character than is sometimes ascribed to this part. Bukish and jealous as he is, there is nothing he can do against Giovanni. Finally have John Maxwell as the Commendatore, Donna Anna's father, killed by Giovanni at the beginning, and whose statue reincarnate returns at the end to throw the tyrant to Hell. A firm, solemn voice adds to the terror of this scene, helped on by the orchestra's frenzied acrobatics.

Losey's use of location gives an aura of artificial nature of opera itself and the confinement of the opera house, to which Mozart would have no alternative, perhaps this may be doubted. There are also definite losses in terms of quality of sound — though maybe it is simply that the Exeter St. Theatre's sound reproduction system is poor — and sub-standard synchronization of the action with the recording was at times a distracting irritation. And something else was missing — the invisible, but powerful sympathy between a live performer on stage and the listener in the audience, a relationship only available in the opera house and without which, despite Losey's claims, some emotional tension within the audience itself must be lost.

Rolf Hedemann, whose conception was used, stated: "I believe that an opera film — and not filmed opera — is a solution, a worldwide solution to the crisis in lyrical theatre. It is a means of democratizing it. It does not replace the direct spectacle, it must be seen as another way of diffusing opera, without barriers between social classes and without frontiers." So do go and see Losey's creation — it is a magnificent, and different film — but do not miss opportunities to see opera live.

— Jonathan Richmond