

Hagen celebrates Don Giovanni: The cart before the tree driven

The Hagen Theatre takes the keyword "journey to hell" literally in Don Giovanni.

Why the car plays a role as potency symbol number 1.

The dead tree stump rises high into the stage sky like a warning finger. Don Giovanni fixes his cart to it long before the Commendatore gives him the kiss of death. In its new production of Mozart's popular opera, the Theater Hagen now takes the term "journey to hell" literally. The production is visually strong, well-crafted and musically convincing, the audience celebrates a great opera evening with standing ovations.

Mozart's "Don Giovanni" occupies a central position in the history of Western philosophy and culture history. He is regarded as the incarnation of the modern man in opera, his sexual transgressions are understood as emancipation from the restrictions of Christian morality, and the women he abused are seen as needy creatures in search of redemption. No wonder that productions of the material are usually from a decidedly male perspective, the anti-hero becomes a freedom fighter, his rebellious servant Leporello a class warrior against absolutism.

A female view of the myth

The Hagen interpretation, on the other hand, develops a female view of the myth of Don Juan. Angela Denoke, the famous soprano, increasingly emerges as a director. For Hagen, together with the stage design team Timo Dentler and OKarina Peter, she convincingly places Don Giovanni in a film set. The scene is also a nod to Quentin Tarantino's "Death Proof", in which a wife-killer kills his victims by car before he gets to a trio of women who turn the tables on him. On the revolving stage, the Dodge driven into the tree circles as hopelessly as Don Giovanni in his narcissism. It's very beautiful how the car becomes the number one symbol of potency. There is a road, but it leads nowhere. Even during the overture, the ghosts of the women that Don Giovanni uses and then takes away appear Giovanni used and then threw away.

Sexism in the culture industry

In the age of "Me Too" and ever new revelations about sexist behavior of untouchable heroes in the culture industry, it makes sense to make Don Giovanni contemporary mirror. But that is not exactly what Angela Denoke does. Rather, she is interested in the women concerned: Zerlina, Donna Anna, Donna Elvira and the complicated grey area of their relationship with the aristocratic seducer between consent, lust and abuse of power. Donna Elvira can rationally analyse in detail how Don Giovanni humiliates her, but she cannot let go of him. In technical language, this is called a toxic relationship. The production is particularly exciting in its reassessment of the role of Leporello, who here is a vulture, a recycler of his master's lust. Angela Denoke's interpretation is gratifyingly open-ended, she does not she does not pigeonhole her protagonists, but opens up spaces for thought.

Well-cast ensemble

The large Mozart ensemble is very well cast, beginning with Nayun Lea Kim and Kenneth Mattice as the charming peasant couple. Netta Or portrays Donna Anna with dramatic metal in her soprano timbre as a woman who is pushed beyond the limits of what is bearable. Anton Kuzenok sings her faithful companion Don Ottavio with a mullet haircut and mullet hairdo and fine lyric tenor. Dong-Won Seo as the Commendatore is not a polter-bass, but a frighteningly gentle avenger. Benjamin Pop creates the Leporello with a beautiful lyric bass as a nasty beta male.

For Insu Hwang, Don Giovanni is a dream role, and he does not just play it with powerful vocal accents, not as a libidinous demon baritone, but as an intellectual for whom women are simply the prey in the game. He bites Angela Davis alias Donna Elvira, he ultimately cut his teeth. The colouratura-assured soprano is able to impressive range of emotions, and above all: she can change and let herself and lets the audience share in this painful process.

General Music Director Joseph Tralon conducts the Hagen Philharmonic Orchestra in a Mozart instrumentation according to the insights of the early music movement and also plays the fortepiano in the recitatives.

Beautiful dialogues blossom between the soloists' coloratura and the parallel woodwinds. At its best the conducting works best when the music feels the psychological states: the palpitations and fear of the descent into hell.

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