

## Edinburgh Festival: Turin Opera - William Tell

*by David Kettle - 28 Aug 2014*



One of the often-quoted benefits of opera in the concert hall – as opposed to the opera house – is that it can be more vivid than a fully staged production. You're not getting just a single director's vision, and the action can't help but unfold in the endless vistas and bright colours of the imagination.

That was true of Turin Opera's colourful concert account of Rossini's *William Tell*, in which the apple-splitting archer hero leads Swiss nationalists to revolt against their Austrian oppressors. The orchestra played as if the music was running through their veins, with a captivating confidence and a lustrous, distinctive sound – silky strings, woodwind that truly sang, and even a boisterous percussion section – especially in the bass drum thuds that brought so much character to the storm section of the famous *Lone Ranger* overture.

You couldn't have hoped for a brighter or more persuasive account to fire the imagination. But the real advantage to this concert was in bringing conductor Gianandrea Noseda out of the pit and placing him centre stage. He seemed like the source of power around which the performance revolved.

It wasn't simply an athletic performance – for the most part, he took things at quite a relaxed tempo, although his gestures became increasingly extrovert as the opera's revolutionary zeal developed. It was his soft shaping of phrases, his command of the grand architecture, his generosity in allowing soloists to shine in their own personal deliveries.

And for an opera that relies so heavily on its chorus – representing by turns Swiss villagers, Austrian troops and Alpine guerrillas – the Turin Opera choir was on astonishingly fine, incisive form.

Strangely, it was with the solo singers that the performance was rather variable. Angela Meade shone as love interest Matilde, with a superbly controlled, powerful voice that nevertheless brought a touching vulnerability to the Act 2 aria 'Selva opaca', while John Osborn as her tormented suitor Arnaldo had a gloriously rounded, intense tenor.

Fabrizio Beggi was big and demonstrative as the doomed elder Melcthal, and Luca Tittoto made a suitably imperious Gessler, head of the Austrian oppressors. Least convincing, was Dalibor Jenis in the title role, who seemed ill at ease and struggled to project above Noseda's scintillating orchestra. But it was a quiet note of doubt amid a revelatory evening of tumultuous drama.