

Norma or Jack the Ripper? Diana Damrau Would Sing Both

By Svatava Barančicová, Operaplus.cz

Another of Nachtigall Artists' bold projects brought together on stage the young Czech tenor Petr Nekoranec, whose artistic career is currently on the rise and he is featured on important European stages, with the star of the Metropolitan Opera and the adornment of many world theaters, the soprano Diana Damrau. The title of the concert *Bell and Bel canto* referred to two levels of dramaturgy: the arias of Bellini and Donizetti, the top representatives of *bel canto*, and the work of the young British author Iain Bell (1980), which is currently successfully conquering the world opera scene... Tenor Petr Nekoranec opened the program with Marcello Angelo's aria *Casto e bel* from Donizetti's opera *Duke of Alba*. After that, he and Diana Damrau gave us a nice piece of opera, with a good dramatic art, in the duet of Edgardo and Lucia *Sulla tomba che rinserra il tradito genitore* from *Lucia of Lamermoor*. It was a fiery, passionately performed duet, with crying, kneeling and a range of emotions... Diana Damrau followed the prelude with Anne Bolena's aria *Piangete voi?... Al dolce guidami castel natio*. She began in *pianissimo*, in very soft notes that gained strength as the pitch of the melody rose. These strong contrasts – almost inaudible notes, and, on the contrary, a stunning *forte* in the treble – were characteristic of the entire performance of the German soprano. It gives her delicious-sounding singing tension, unpredictability and expressiveness. Her aria *Casta Diva* from Bellini's *Norma* in the second half of the evening was absolutely fantastic, her voice easily rose to the heights in the *pianissimos*, and absolutely in tune they were with the orchestra. PKF – Prague Philharmonia was very empathetic to both singers, and despite the considerable quietness or difficulty of the parts, they were not overshadowed anywhere... Petr Nekoranec also distinguished himself in the demanding high-set aria of *Arturo A te, o czar* from Bellini's *Puritans*, very nicely handling all the tricks, jumps and treble with balanced vocals, even high C flat Major.

The young tenor, who has always given excellent performances in the field of early music, baroque and classicism, where his bright characteristic voice is excellently applied, continues to undergo artistic development, and expands his ambitions into the Italian romantic repertoire. Sometimes, however, he lacks strength for the triumphant tone of the arias, especially in the climaxes... however, it can be seen that he is working on himself, and that his voice is getting stronger. The duet of Norina and Ernesto from the same opera, *Tornami a dir che m'ami*, sounded very sensitive and beautiful, when both singers held hands, sang face to face and their voices complemented each other equally. It was a bold dramaturgy move to include three samples from Iain Bell's operas: *A Harlot's Progress*, *Jack the Ripper* and *In*

Parenthesis. The themes are generally depressing... But is it different from the bloody plots of famous operas from the past? Hardly! Diana Damrau performed challenging parts with almost cinematic expressiveness, we saw sadness, frustration, madness, and insight. Petr Nekoranec portrayed the character of Private John Ball on guard in the middle of the night watch, wearing a simple sports shirt, he sang while sitting on the stage. Bell's music in an atonal style or in an extended tonality, it is challenging for the interpreters, but impressive, the voice often floats in the void or forms variations above a minimalistic constant base. In the orchestra, the author uses a wide range of percussion instruments, gongs, he knows how to effectively handle the sound of the body, for example the brightened gradation ending of the private's aria For All the Fear in This Dark Night was a real apotheosis, as if when a path to heaven opens above the deep waters... The first encore after the end of the official program was Puccini's aria from the opera Gianni Schicchi, the famous O mio babbino caro, which Diana Damrau sang simply perfectly, with perfect dynamic arcs and nuances. Petr Nekoranec sang a serenade from Don Pasquale's Com'è gentil with solo harp... The arch of the Smetana Hall above them functioned as a sounding board, and the gentle, intimate serenade sounded acoustically very well... The singers showed that they thoroughly enjoyed their collaboration. Also, the concert lasted until a quarter to eleven! But it was a good and intense time.

Reviewer's rating: 80 %

Full article: <https://operaplus.cz/norma-nebo-jack-rozparovac-diana-damrau-zazpiva-oboji>

Diana Damrau and Petr Nekoranec Put a Foot Forward into the Present

By Petr Veber, Klasikaplus.cz

The joint recital of soprano Diana Damrau and tenor Petr Nekoranec on Tuesday in Prague's Municipal House offered top singing skills, a rewarding program, excellent orchestral accompaniment and a nice contact between the stage and the audience. The usual set of classical opera arias and duets, this time exclusively from Donizetti and Bellini, i.e. from the repertoire of Italian bel canto, was significantly and uniquely enriched by three large musical numbers originating in contemporary work. The author was Briton Iain Bell, and the works presented were three of his modern opera titles, in which both soloists have already appeared in theaters in recent years... Petr Nekoranec's characteristic, high-set tense, evidently natural monochromatic way for him, with tremors and sometimes with suddenly slightly narrower highest notes. He sang emotionally and captivatingly, either alone or in duets. And just like Diana Damrau, he can work significantly with stage presence and with the necessary indication of the

actor's expression belonging to the role being sung. With an aria from Donizetti's opera Duke of Alba, Petr Nekoranec set the parameters of the entire concert at the very beginning. It was not primarily about virtuosity, but about singing with a freer tempo, full of fragile and more tense emotions, it was about legato and cantilenas, about expression. Such was the duet from the first act of Lucia from Lammermoor, the tenor aria from Bellini's Puritans and the "muted" soprano aria from the second act of Donizetti's opera Anna Bolena. Diana Damrau gave it drama and fragility, her voice, precise, clear and pleasant, moving completely freely in coloraturas and in beautiful tones, fully enables this. The way in which she sang the famous aria "Casta diva" from Bellini's Norma in the second half of the concert was exemplary - she skillfully put a technically mastered middle voice at the service of the necessary believable expression, even in urgent tension free, magically attracting attention, full of emotions. Scenes from Donizetti's comic opera Don Pasquale corresponded with similar-sounding encores from his Elisir. It had humor that did not detract from the beauty of the tone, it had vocal confidence and a background of stage experience. Iain Bell, a British composer in his 40's, can write operatic music that has a clear expressive anchoring in the classics, but is nevertheless not an imitation of it. In a somewhat "Brittenian" spirit, he moves between being anchored in voluptuousness and beauty and between sonic ingenuity, between compositional courage and moments reminiscent of more conventional idioms in the form of reference points. This applies to the extensive, expressively elaborated scene of madness from the opera A Harlot's Progress, premiered with the participation of Diana Damrau in 2013, a scene now sung really well in Prague. This also applies to the painful monologue of the main female character from the opera Jack the Ripper: The Women of Whitechapel, which the soprano was able to give even on the concert stage a musical and theatrical dimension belonging to the great and impressive tragedies of the past. But the slightly less expressive output from the opera In Parenthesis, sung by Petr Nekoranec, sounded similarly... The encores crowned the accommodating, perhaps extravagantly long, concert. Diana Damrau irresistibly sang the aria "O mio babbino caro" from Puccini's comedy Gianni Schicchi, bordering on lyricism and snobbery. Then "Com' è gentil" from Don Pasquale, which Petr Nekoranec started with a solo harp and ended amusingly with the orchestra, playing pizzicato and softly singing... And finally, more than ever, the favorite scene of the timid Nemorino and the amorous Adina from the Elisir... Another pleasant evening by Nachtigall Artists, who have been precisely profiled constants among Prague organizers for years.

Full article: <https://www.klasikaplus.cz/reflexe-2/item/8452-diana-damrau-a-petr-nekoranec-nakroceni-az-do-soucasnosti>

