

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Orfeo

Claudio Monteverdi  
Royal Opera House  
The Roundhouse  
13–24 January 2015

Royal Opera House's newest collaboration with the Roundhouse is exceptional, heartbreaking and entrancing. Monteverdi has rarely been better.

*Orfeo* brings together a young cast and fresh production team, many debuting for the ROH. The combination certainly worked—and the packed, unusually mixed demographic of the audience is a real testament to this new collaboration.

Opera is real jigsaw puzzle of an art form. There are so many component parts that often pieces get lost and as a total art form the result is a glaring hole.

This is a wonderfully rare occasion where I can rave about every aspect, from the sublime singing and accompaniment by the Early Opera Company conducted by Christopher Moulds to the captivating choreography and acrobatics.

An ensemble chorus from Guildhall and a community dance troupe from East London support a first rate principle cast. Rather than an elaborate set, we're transported through the action by the dancers' circus-style choreography; movement director Liz Ranken and circus director Lina Johansson deserve huge praise.

Director Michael Boyd's days as RSC boss certainly pay off in this production. The dance troupe have the feel of court jesters frolicking around the stage beneath the watchful gaze of the elevated Pluto and Proserpina who are surrounded by a sombre-clad chorus and clergy.

The round space works well, lending an intimacy to the production despite requiring modest amplification.

Vocally this production is a real treat—Mary Bevan (Euridice) exudes grace with her spinning legato. Counter tenor Christopher Lowrey shines alongside fellow tenor pastor Anthony Gregory. Callum Thorpe's (Pluto) sonorous bass adds pleasing weight alongside James Platt (Charon). They perform a new English translation by Don Paterson.

The cast's diction is impeccable and there is no need for the subtitles. Whilst it's more obvious that English is not Gyula Orendt's (*Orfeo*) mother tongue, any lax in language is more than compensated for in vocal range and expression.

Orendt has the audience in the palm of his hand by the time his exquisite aria comes round in act 3, a masterclass in ornamentation. The dynamic change as well as the range of colours employed to beg for entry to the underworld should have melted the resolve of the sternest of guards.

The real joy alongside the superb music making is the cast's ability to move. Act one features a beautiful dance duet for Orfeo and Euridice whilst singing and they make it look effortless. Visual imagery from the choreography will remain in my memory—multiple elevations and archways created by the dancers' bodies, and even trapeze work for the principals.

As a first foray into staging Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, the Opera House must be feeling deservedly pleased. The many debuts deserve repeat performances and Michael Boyd certainly has an opera directing career beckoning.

**Reviewer:** [Louise Lewis](#)