

British Theatre Guide

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Persinette

Albin Fries, libretto Birgit Mathon

Vienna State Opera

Released 13 October 2023

In 2019 the Austrian composer Albin Fries announced he was giving up composing for good, gave away his piano, destroyed most of his CDs and threw out thousands of manuscript pages.

It wasn't the first time he had thrown his pen out of the pram. He did the same thing in 1985, claiming his music was shunned by local musicians because it was "melodious and not in 7/13 rhythm." He said something similar second time around, but also complained that, despite the "great success" of *Persinette*, Vienna State Opera had failed to issue the "almost completed" DVD.

It's all very odd, for this is that DVD, but, rather than being "almost completed", it was recorded only two days before the end of 2019. So what of the work itself.

Persinette is the story of Rapunzel, imprisoned in a tower by a witch, but who lets down her long tresses for a prince to climb to her rescue. The opera, written for children, runs to just over an hour, and is indeed melodious in a light, late-Romantic style, and indeed with not a 7/13 rhythm to tangle the toes.

It's a pleasant, enjoyable if not particularly memorable work, with the most lyrical writing provided for the heroine, Australian soprano Bryony Dwyer, and her closing love duet with Lukhanyo Moyake's prince—the most hummable number in the score. Monika Bohinec, characterised by a rough trombone motif and a striking blue and green hair-do under the pointed hat, weaves her witchy spells with some nifty wand-work.

The production relies visually on designer Marc Jungreithmeier's video projections that synchronise magically with the actual stage set, especially for *Persinette*'s dangling braids that wind around her tower like a helter-skelter. Constanza Meza-Lopehandia's costume designs are mostly quirkily effective—apart from a silent and needless chorus bizarrely dressed in boxes.

Overall, I would have appreciated a few more touches of humour, especially to play up the role of Sorin Coliban as the raven Abrasax, but there is just enough in this fairy tale to entertain young viewers, who in many cases will be more receptive to contemporary tonal music than their more conservative parents.

Reviewer: [Colin Davison](#)