

## **ARIADNE AUF NAXOS by LISA GASTEEN NATIONAL OPERA SCHOOL**

by Wis Jablonski, V-Pres.

Thanks to the Greek Myths, the old gods, heroes and heroines are still with us even after thousands of years.



In its eighth year of existence **Lisa Gasteen National Opera School** has produced the most delightful but demanding (in German), opera by Richard Strauss based on a story of the Athenian hero Theseus and Ariadne, the daughter of king Minos of Crete.

Do you remember Adriane's proverbial thread and the path thorough labyrinth?

How Adriane helped Theseus to conquer the Minotaur, the bull- monster and how she has been left abandon by her, then lover, on the island of Naxos have inspired many in the literature, music and painting.

So, why is Adriane so famous? By being daughter of the king or according to the legend a granddaughter of the god Helios? Or by being a jilted lover even after performing a good deed and betraying her father in the course of her action? Or maybe because she has been rescued by another god, Bacchus and fell in love again? Who knows?

Ariadne inspired many literary works from Ovid's "*Heroides* ", through Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg, Anton Chekhov, Friedrich Nietzsche to Mary Renault's 1958 historical novel "*The King Must Die*."

Across the centuries she also featured in frescos found in Pompei (79 AD) and in paintings of the great and lesser masters like Titian (1520), Annibale Carracci (~ 1597), Guido Reni (~ 1619), Jean-Francois de Troy (1725) , Angelica Kauffman (1774), Eugene Delacroix (~ 1856 – 63), Maurice Denis (1907), Lovis Corinth (1913) and others.

The same goes for the opera. There are seven of those by the composers (in chronological order); Claudio Monteverdi (1608), Robert Cambert & Louis Grabu (1674), Nicola Porpora (1733), George Handel (1734), Jiri (Georg) Benda (1775), Richard Strauss (1912/1916) and Bohuslav Martinu (1958).

The best known and the most frequently performed is Richard Strauss' opera "*non seria*" *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Based on the Jean-Baptiste Poquelin's (1622 – 1673) known by his stage name Moliere's a play *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* .

Moliere was a French playwright, actor and poet, widely regarded as one of the greatest writers in the French language and universal literature. He was also a friend of Jean Baptise Lully (1632-1687, composed some sixteen operas) who **first** used a long conducting staff/ baton, although the very heavy one by which he has been hurt and later died.



On the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2018 the troupe of the talented singers from Lisa Gasteen National Opera School produced the most satisfying Strauss' version supported by Maestra Simone Young AM conducting.

And it is a funny one; consists of 3 parts; *Prologue, Commedia dell' Arte and Opera Seria*. They all come together and **even** simultaneously as requested by the *nouveau riche* Count Jourdain, who has a little idea how to use his new acquired wealth. He wants to please his guests and at the same time to save some money. What follows is a classical commedia dell' arte with Zerbinetta, Harlequin, Truffaldino, Scaramuccio and

Brighella full of *imbroglio, scenario and lazzi*.



But in the middle of it, here is a serious opera with a superb music and voices. And it works brilliantly. At the end of the performance flowers are presented but not for the performers but for the Count and his lovely, jealous wife. Money talks!!

I would like to comment on a few singers while appreciating that the whole cast has been magnificent and their use on German language quite good.

Zerbinetta – Rachel Pines has been the engine of the show being everywhere and sparking with the energy. This Canadian superb soprano has performed in USA, Italy, New Zealand and in Australia.



Philip Meyers, whom I met on a few occasions, played a role of major-domo with his flawless German. After graduating from the Conservatorium he has performed all over the world and is currently based in Berlin.



Ariadne - Elizabeth Lewis is a dramatic soprano of a huge calibre and the winner of many competitions here and overseas. Her Adriane has been dramatically and lyrically awesome, especially in a love duet with Bacchus – Paul O’Neill from WA who stepped in at the last moment replacing ailing Raymond Very.



My favourite young bass, Henry Pinder has been there as well singing the minor role of a Lackey/Truffaldino Cover.

After the performance guests, well wishers, *cognoscenti* and families of the artists gather in the “Con”’s foyer sharing those special moments when all has been done and done well. Meeting and communicating with the young artists, so full of vigour and hopes makes one assured of their bright future.

And to finish on even more positive note I would like to applaud my fellow members having completed the 2018 Programme with *La Rondine* (*Commedia lirica, 1917*) -- an exquisite piece of music by Puccini.

In conclusion: 2018 has been great year for the Queensland Conservatorium, especially with an in-house opera *Dry River Run, Val Machin Double* and many more exciting events. Being a member of the Director’s Circle gave me an additional insight into the “works of the Con” and I encourage our members to join this great initiative and by doing so to expand their cultural horizon.