

REVIEW: *CLASSICAL FIREWORKS OF A CASTRATO*

A Fine Champagne

J. Á. VELA DEL CAMPO 14/11/2011
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When a baroque concert features a countertenor, we assume it will be frothy, pyrotechnical and exhibitionist. Philippe Jaroussky's concert was not expected to be different. And indeed, the singer of the moment in this tessitura sang the opening aria, *Agitato da fiere tempeste* from Handel's *Oreste*, in a way that left no doubt as to the reasons for his prestige. It was clear that the evening would be an eruption of fireworks, as proved to be true. But that was only a first impression.

FIREWORKS OF A CASTRATO

Philippe Jaroussky
(countertenor),
Apollo's Fire, The
Cleveland Baroque
Orchestra.

Conductor: Jeannette
Sorrell.

Works by Handel and
Vivaldi. Teatro Real
(Royal Theatre), 12th
November.



“Sensational from start to finish... the audience on its feet – a rarity at the Royal Theatre (Teatro Real).”

The second impression was even better. In *Ho perso il caro ben*, from Handel's *Il Parnasso in festa*, Jaroussky was utterly convincing with his melodic sweetness, excellent phrasing, technical mastery in all registers and his empathetic treatment of suffering in song. With this demonstration of musicality, the fireworks became a secondary consideration. It is no surprise therefore that a member of the audience commented to me during the intermission

that: “This is good champagne.” This reminded me of Louis Roederer and his mythical Crystal Champagne, the best bottles of which he would send from Rheims to the Czar of Russia from 1833 until the Russian revolution put an end to that market. Moreover there seemed to be something Slavic about the French countertenor’s surname.

Jaroussky’s performance was sensational from start to finish, in both the Handel and the Vivaldi as well as in the three encores by Porpora and Handel. The encores culminated with an *Ombra mai fu* at the singer’s full powers, with the audience on its feet - a rarity at the Royal Theatre (Teatro Real).

The combination of Vivaldi and Handel could bring to mind a marvelous novel by Alejo Carpentier, *Concierto barroco (Baroque Concert)*, in which the two composers alternated their Venetian adventures with a Louis Armstrong performance of variations on the theme “*I can’t give you anything but love, baby.*” The shadow of Louis Armstrong was perfectly evoked in spirit by his compatriots from Cleveland, thanks to some stunning variations on Vivaldi’s trio sonata *La Follia*, which rejuvenated us with its jazzy rhythms, joyous orchestral playing, stylishness and energy from violinists Olivier Brault and Johanna Novom, and the striking Jeannette Sorrell, who conducted from the harpsichord with great precision, sensitivity and femininity – a rarity among women conductors, most of whom tend to imitate the gestures of male conductors.



“Joyous orchestral playing... and the striking Jeannette Sorrell, who conducted with precision, sensitivity and femininity – a rarity.”

The concert was impeccable and the Teatro Real was full to overflowing, which shows how baroque music can entice the crowds, when performed like this. It was one of those evenings that leaves you wanting more.

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