



■ (l. to r.) Iréne Theorin (Ortrud), Liene Kinča (Elsa), Zoran Todorovich (Lohengrin) and Craig Colclough (Telramund) in 'Lohengrin' in Ghent

Belgium

Ghent

Before arriving in Antwerp (for the first time since 1994), where Wagner's opera is set, David Alden's staging of *Lohengrin* first made a stop in Ghent, that other city on the Scheldt (September 20). This co-production with Covent Garden was first seen in London in June, when it was described and evaluated by the Editor (August 2018, pp. 1005-6). Alden's staging, which is especially striking and impressive in the big

choral scenes, opens up some new perspectives but does leave questions unanswered. In the excellent chorus of OPERA VLAANDEREN, Alden had an important partner for his interpretation; they moved in disciplined masses, singing with great conviction and a glorious sound. Under the baton of Alejo Pérez, the company's music director elect, the orchestra didn't give the prelude the ethereal sound wished for, but afterwards played glowingly and vigorously, in an energetic performance that sustained tension until the end.

The strongest performers were those playing the 'evil couple', Ortrud and Telramund, both making role debuts. Iréne Theorin, feted as Isolde and Brünnhilde, was an imposing, dominating, even terrifying Ortrud with a steely, dramatic soprano voice that filled the role perfectly. Craig Colclough convinced as her swaggering but dependent husband, a shifty schemer, singing in a strong, expressive baritone. Liene Kinča (another role debut) was a touching Elsa, blossoming from abused victim into a confident young woman, singing with a clear soprano and a beautiful legato. The Lohengrin, unfortunately, was less convincing: Zoran Todorovich lacked charisma and sounded short on warmth and colour; he also had intonation problems. The indisposed Thorsten Grümbel mimed the part of the apparently weak and terrified Heinrich (looking like a priest with a cardboard crown) while Wilhelm Schwinghammer sang it nobly from the proscenium. Vincenzo Neri was an excellent, strong-voiced Herald.

ERNA METDEPENNINGHEN

Canada

Montreal

Almost like clockwork, OPÉRA DE MONTRÉAL offers *Rigoletto* every seven or eight years. *Rigoletto* opened the season in 2010, and it opened the current season in its sixth reincarnation in the company's 39-year history (seen September 20). The cast, all Canadian except for the American tenor René Barbera as the Duke, was mostly well chosen aside from Rigoletto himself: James Westman seemed to be having a bad night, the voice often choked and thin. Scenes with his daughter lacked warmth, and those with the courtiers lacked drama, both vocally and visually. But the Duke! What a voice!