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# Opera

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## Miami

There could not be more resplendent source material for an opera than *The Leopard*, the novel by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, which was published in 1958 and inspired a magnificent 1963 film directed by Luchino Visconti. For lovers of the book and the film—‘It’s *Gone With the Wind* with sensibility,’ wrote the film critic Pauline Kael—the prospect of an operatic adaptation by the composer Michael Dellaira and the librettist J.D. McClatchy was irresistible. In a production



Frank Ragsdale (Father Pirrone) and Kim Josephson (Don Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina) in the premiere of Michael Dellaira’s *The Leopard* in Miami

by the University of Miami’s FROST SCHOOL OF MUSIC staged at the SOUTH MIAMI-DADE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER, *The Leopard* was given its premiere on March 5.

Set in Sicily, *The Leopard* is an epic about change, as negotiated by Don Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina, known as the Leopard for the device on his coat of arms and his commanding presence. The opera mostly takes place in the 1860s during the Risorgimento, the struggle for Italian unity and statehood launched by Garibaldi and his followers, with profound consequences for Don Fabrizio, whose fading fortune and influence stand to be swept away in the revolution. The Prince’s favoured nephew, the opportunistic Tancredi, who joins Garibaldi, voices the work’s theme in reasoning that appeals to his uncle: ‘If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.’

McClatchy’s libretto (completed just before his death in 2018; his third opera with Dellaira) is a superbly crafted account of how the Prince positions his family to survive. The opera has two acts with a dozen scenes, bookended by a Prologue and Epilogue that provide perspective from the vantage point of 1910, when the Prince is long dead but his now aged spinster daughters remain under his spell.

Three members of the university’s voice faculty had leading roles: the baritone Kim Josephson as Don Fabrizio; the mezzo-soprano Robynne Redmon as the Princess; and the tenor Frank Ragsdale as Father Pirrone, a Jesuit priest. The bass-baritone Kevin Short, a former Frost artist-in-residence, sang Cavaliere Chevalley di Monterzuolo, and Frost professor Gerard Schwarz, conductor laureate of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, was an invaluable asset in the pit, leading the school’s 33-member orchestra and providing steady guidance to the largely student cast. Jeffrey Buchman was the capable director, but with 14 named characters plus servants, villagers, dancers and others in a work that covers a lot of ground, it may have been difficult for audience members to keep everything straight if they weren’t already familiar with the story. Cameron Anderson designed the set, and costume supervision was by Camilla Haith.

Josephson was the perfect hero, right down to his extravagant mutton-chop whiskers. His deeply humane, witty portrayal of the Prince was an uncanny extension of his moving performance as another Italian aristocrat 30 years ago, when he sang the title



role in *Simon Boccanegra* for Sarasota Opera, a highlight of the company's Verdi cycle. The tenor Minghao Liu was Tancredi, and the soprano Yaqi Yang was Angelica, the lower-class beauty whom Tancredi marries, as arranged by the Prince and Angelica's nouveau-riche father, Don Calogero Sedàra (the baritone Thandolwethu Mamba). The soprano Margarita Parsamyan sang Concetta, the Prince's eldest daughter, doomed to a life of loss and lament because of her father's manipulations.

Dellaira's score is dotted with exquisite moments, such as the luminous coloratura aria in which Angelica introduces herself to society, 'I am Angelica', or the guitar solo (played by Kara Brusven) that emerges when the Prince is dying, the music drawn from Edgardo's aria 'Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali' in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Right from the Prelude, marked to be performed 'with an uneasy majesty', much of the sound of *The Leopard* has a complex, turbulent undercurrent that comes gloriously to the fore in orchestral interludes; but there is also a relaxed, generous ease to the swirling waltz of the elegant, ghostly ballroom scene that is at the heart of the opera.

In Italy, Lampedusa's novel was adapted into an opera by the composer Angelo Musco, with a libretto by Luigi Squarzina. *Il gattopardo* had its premiere in Palermo in 1967, with the bass Nicola Rossi Lemeni in the title role. Even with publication by Ricordi, the work did not find a place in the repertory. Let's hope that the Dellaira-McClatchy opera attracts the attention of an enterprising company for a second, professional production, because it is a smart, stylish and musically involving drama about a way of life vanishing in the tides of time and history.

JOHN FLEMING

## New York

There are those, even some in the operatically conservative United States, who welcome *Regietheater* as a refreshing antidote to staid rehashings of the classics. There are more outspoken audience members and critics who downright despise any whiff of a radical rethinking of the standard repertory. With Simon Stone's *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the METROPOLITAN OPERA (a co-production with LA Opera, seen on May 2), that divide revealed itself in full force.

Of course in Europe, where *Regietheater* was born and is now ubiquitous, people seem more relaxed about updatings. Or so one would like to think. As someone who's admired many such re-evaluations but been annoyed (not outraged but annoyed) by silly provocations, I found Stone's vision involving, striking, sometimes almost beautiful. Yes, a 19th-century production would have been closer to what Donizetti intended. And yes, modernizing the setting makes the music sound quaint, even trivial. (Of course, George Bernard Shaw thought the same thing back in the late 19th century.) But Stone's ideas didn't get in the way of the underlying plot.

Stone says he set the opera in a decaying rust-belt America. Trump country, in short. In fact, the sets, revolving dizzily on the Met's giant turntable, looked fairly spiffy, almost middle-class. And there were anomalies within the concept, such as characters using cell phones while the local drive-in was showing a black-and-white Bob Hope/Dorothy Lamour movie. Was that a statement or just sloppy?

Above Lizzie Clachan's sets, the top half of the proscenium opening was filled with a screen on which was projected close-ups of the singers, shot by an onstage cameraman