

## Opera review: Lucia di Lammermoor, Mercury Theatre

By [William Dart](#)

5:00 AM Tuesday Oct 14, 2014

It was difficult not to be swept away by Lucia di Lammermoor, a joint production by the Auckland Chamber Orchestra and Auckland Opera Studio.

The Mercury Theatre brought the atmosphere of a real night at the opera and a full house was spellbound by Raymond Hawthorne's portrait of Donizetti's tragic heroine, as her considerable spirit succumbed to the ruthless political machinations around her.

Working with designer Tracy Grant Lord, Hawthorne's 18th century Scotland was grim and foreboding under the lights of Jennifer Lal.

An effectively austere set was built around various cross motifs; costumes were rigorously dark-toned, apart from a white wedding dress for Lucia and a brilliant red gown for her final swansong.

Minutes into the first act, major musical virtues were apparent in the lusty singing of Kalauni Pouvalu's Normanno and the men's chorus, as well as in Maia Vegar's tenderly attentive Alisa.

Phillip Rhodes, as Enrico, dealt out testosterone thrust with immaculate bel canto credentials, while Marlena Devoe, fearless in her coloratura, was an affecting Lucia. Throughout the evening, Hawthorne's chorus showed the energy and alacrity of a seasoned theatrical troupe.

In the second act, the focus sharpened psychologically, as Devoe stood up for her true love, Edgardo, against her bullying brother in a cat-and-mouse game around a massive table. This culminated in a magnificent duet, its subtle inflections underscored by conductor Peter Scholes and his ACO.

Other highlights here were the resonant baritone of James Ioelu's Raimondo and the celebrated Sextet, so beautifully sung that some may have secretly wished for an immediate encore.

The final act offered more confrontation, this time between Rhodes and David Woodward's Edgardo, but inevitably Lucia's celebrated mad scene was the emotional and narrative climax.

Devoe was diva assoluta, touching and terrifying by turns, unravelling her soul before the assembled chorus. She left us with a thrilling top E flat, but only after her simpatico duetting with flautist Adrianna Lis.

This is a hard act to follow and the ensuing scene, very much revolving around the disconsolate Edgardo, required more tenorial charisma to leave a lasting impression.

Opera review



Marlena Devoe was an affecting Lucia to Phillip Rhodes' Enrico in the production at the Mercury Theatre.

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What: Lucia di Lammermoor

Where: Mercury Theatre

When: Sunday.

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