

SONIA BEN-SANTAMARIA

PRESS REVIEWS

Sonia Ben-Santamaria dirige avec une précision d'orfèvre cet ensemble bigarré, somme d'excellents musiciens, en même temps qu'elle assure le lien avec une scène déportée à laquelle elle tourne le dos (..)

Chemirani Negar. Wanderer revues

Co-produit avec la Deutsche Oper Berlin, Negar (..) rehaussé par le geste Sonia Ben-Santamaria à la tête d'un ensemble de musicien.nes jouant sur des instruments traditionnels et classiques (..) Le geste net et rond de Sonia Ben-Santamaria enveloppe et sollicite les musicien.nes, au plus près du rythme de l'action.

Chemirani Negar. Forum Opera

I was lucky enough to hear Sonia Ben-Santamaria conducting. In her full length black dress and red high heels she gave Carmen a run for her money in the costume stakes. But more importantly she conducted firmly and with authority (..)

Bizet Carmen. London Press

Sonia Ben Santamaria drew a finely fluid and flowing account of the opera from the City of London Sinfonia.

Verdi Un Ballo in mascgera. Planet hurgill

Conductor Sonia Ben-Santamaria also from Opera Holland Park young artist scheme did a fine job of directingthe City of London Sinfonia orchestra in what is fiendishly difficult opera to conduct with its fast tempi, quintets and intricate arrangements (...) beautifully fluid interpretation of one of Verdi's most ravishing score.

Verdi Un Ballo in maschera. Art Muse London

Conductor Sonia Ben-Santamaria drew notably fine playing from the City of London Sinfonia orchestra - the arching violin lines of the Act 2 prelude linger in the memori - and articulated multifaced opera with an acute sense for both structure and drama. SBS even succeeded in aking the abrupt exclamations of "Notte d'orror" and wham-bam final bars, so often bathetic after the sublime ensemble that preceded them sound like more than an applause-cadging gesture.

Verdi Un Ballo in maschera. Opera Magazine

Musically the show got off to a fizzing start (..) Sonia Ben-Santamaria encouraged a great sound from the orchestra (..) Strauss' intoxicating music sparkled.

Strauss Die Fledermaus. BBC magazine London

Skilfully conducted by Sonia Ben Santamaria, leave nothing to be desired.
Mozart Don Giovanni. The F Word contemporary UK feminism

Sonia Ben-Santamaria conducted with great flair (..)
Tchaikovsky Eugene Onegin. The Guardian 4stars review



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ARTIST OF THE MONTH

It helped that she began to focus more on piano accompaniment and collaborative work than solo piano, which she admits she couldn't wait to give up. This led her to do the postgraduate course for repertoire and accompaniment at the RCM, going on to win a scholarship at the National Opera House in 2010 and English National Opera in 2011/12. The more time opera conducting began with stepping in on the day of the performance in the *The Magic Flute* with Cheltenham City Opera and Orchestra in 2013. "I never knew how it managed to and I said: ok, this is my career path, for me, 100%."

The end of opportunities, however, can also, until she stepped together some funds to put on a couple of short-term performances of *The Barber of Seville* in a church in Nottingham. Hilary James Clarm of Opera Holland Park was among the guests, and he was persuaded to offer Ben-Santamaria two performances of *Le Nozze di Figaro* in measure this month.

The question of which opportunities are given to which musicians is one that crosses her mind and which she has found the musical culture of the UK especially open-minded in many ways, she has come up against obstacles. She cites, as one example, the influence of Oxford on the conducting profession.

"Don't get me wrong, you have the best education. I would never have got into Oxford. I was way too thick! I understand you are knowledgeable, you do know about some of stuff, and you get a fantastic network. But it ends up being 70% a personal network. That's not necessarily, I don't think it's fair. It doesn't necessarily mean that you can be a good conductor and you communicate well and you are a good leader. That's the wrong way to think of leadership. It's not with academic knowledge and power that you are a good leader. I think it's with generosity and humility and doing things because you want to share it with other people and communicate it with your players and the audience."

She becomes especially passionate on the subject of inequality, largely because she believes the idea of equality to be a red herring: things should not be more equal but more fair. "There's no way we were all born equal, let's face it," she argues. "If you really want to change and to progress it's not equality that you need, it's equity. So if someone's got the potential but hasn't had the chance, then they need extra help. And that will raise the level for everybody."

Such ideas will be reflected in the *Classical Artists Orchestra* that she has been planning with pianist Marina de Lanza Garcia and hopes to launch soon. Meanwhile, she has Verdi to look forward to in June. "I was a soprano so I have a huge love for singing, and I love *Don Carlo*. I love the theatre. And what I love about opera – especially Verdi, one of my favourite composers – is how a fantastic translation, musically and intellectually of human beings. You can see there's no black and white in human beings, we all grey, we all have had and good in us, and Verdi translates that."

Sonia Ben-Santamaria conducts *Un ballo in maschera* at Opera Holland Park on 28 and 29 June
www.mediabentamaria.com

SOUNDBITES

On playing the piano
One of my tutors at the academy was Julius Drake and he asked: do you want to play some Bach? Because Bach was what I had in

On the conductor's role
I don't know why it all became a myth, it's not, if you have the right heart for it. I don't understand why it's so romanticised, actually.



ARTIST OF THE MONTH

Sonia Ben-Santamaria

Toby Deller speaks to the conductor about her career, from discovering classical music in the supermarket to working with Opera Holland Park



I keep having the thought that I just don't fit the box, says Sonia Ben-Santamaria, the English-born conductor who has been resident in the UK since she arrived as a student in 2005. Her CV may appear conventional enough: piano studies at her local conservatoire, a postgraduate at the Royal Academy of Music, places at the Jette Pekar Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House in Lahti, Artist conductor and the Dallas Opera Hart Institute, and an appointment as associate of Opera North to come later this year. But the story begins in a more unlikely establishment.

“It’s not with knowledge and power that you are a good leader; it’s with generosity and humility”

To come from a Spanish immigrant family, very much from a working class background, my grandparents were small shopkeepers, they didn’t speak French when they came to France. My dad is a jazz musician – jazz taught me to become a professional. He had no idea about classical music. My mum had no ear for music. I just fell in love with music as a life. I want to be a conductor and it happened that I was gifted and it worked quite smoothly. But I just had nothing in common with the other students. All my teachers were interested in me because they saw the creative side, but what was worrying them was I was wild – they couldn’t quite get me to that level.”

She began to realise, however, that her focus must not be with the piano. “Too much of a heart I couldn’t be a conductor, you need to play Bach like that, your wrist have to be like that and it’s just too suffocating. I was a super-obsessive kid until

I saw Bernstein on tv doing young people’s concerts. And I thought: you can’t be the model of an orchestra, that was cool, and I looked like he was doing what he wanted and all his imagination was revealed by the players and I thought: that’s where I fit!”

She put the ambition on hold, having made the mistake of telling the

