

Jacek Kornaki

The Warsaw Chamber Opera presents the opera *Castor et Pollux*. This is your next production that the Warsaw audience will be able to see. I would like to ask you how do you perceive the role of a set designer in a Baroque opera?

Francesco Vitali

It is worth checking out the artists who created performances in the Baroque era. There was no clear division between director, set designer, costume designer or playwright. These specializations have only become common in modern times. As early as the Renaissance, for example, Leonardo da Vinci was an engineer, architect, painter, but also a musician, set designer and costume designer. He has prepared several plays for the Duke of Milan Ludovico il Moro. The same goes for the artists who prepared works in the Baroque era. They had extensive knowledge, from music, through science and the humanities. These artists were able to use the technologies available to them in their age to amaze the public. The Baroque audience expected new music and scenic techniques in opera and theatrical performances. At that time, new stage machines were built which impressed with their ingenuity. I think today we also need Renaissance people in the opera world who have a vision of the whole. The scenography is not a separate part of the opera. It is an integral part of the show. The magic of opera lies in the fact that music is intertwined with theater, architecture, visual arts and often dance as well. When working on an opera production, the most important thing is to create a coherent whole that is able to attract the audience. The production designer doesn't just create a backdrop for the music. Together with the director, he works on a vision that will result in a complete opera show.

Jacek Kornaki

What can a Baroque work like *Castor et Pollux* offer to a contemporary viewer? Does it offer us only the entrance to a beautiful museum of the past or is it still capable of arousing emotions? As a set designer, how do you work with centuries-old works to bring them closer to today's audience?

Francesco Vitali

Baroque operas in their day were considered extremely progressive, sometimes even shocking. Usually they offered the audience something new from the musical point of view, but also from the point of view of the staging. Today these operas are several hundred years old, but I believe

they may still be fresh in our time. I don't see my role strictly as a production designer, but rather as a visual artist. I design the sets, but also the costumes and the lights. For this reason I sometimes use tools typical of the Baroque era, for example pulleys to move backdrops, but also new technologies such as visual projections. Theaters today can use available technologies to present Baroque operas in a new context. In my work on Baroque opera, I try to create aesthetic coherence in the contemporary context. For me the space in which the opera is staged is part of the representation. Before starting to design my projects, I always study the space in which the work will be set up.

Jacek Kornaki

How did you work for *Castor et Pollux* for the Warsaw Chamber Opera? How will you introduce this pearl of French Baroque to the Polish public?

Francesco Vitali

The starting point for me was where the work of *Castor et Pollux* would go on stage. I researched the history of this building and its functions before the war (Historic WOK Theater). I tried to understand the space in which to create. In this case, the WOK headquarters naturally reminded me of an astronomical planetarium for the intimacy that characterizes it. In this show the audience is welcomed and enveloped within the scene. After all, *Castor* and *Pollux* they are transformed into the constellation of twins by *Jupiter* at the end of the opera, so they follow their destiny within this planetarium which is the WOK. The key for me is to create an atmosphere that appeals to the contemporary viewer. The intimate space of the WOK theater is perfectly suited to this type of stage operation. As in a kaleidoscope, the walls and ceiling alternate with images of monumental architectures drawn with white lines, places, suggestions that disappear at the end of the opera, giving space to infinity, to the universe in motion where our *Castor* and *Pollux* become stars that they will live forever. The visual *fil rouge* also continues on the stage where the projected images extend, interspersed with painted wings, traditionally moved by a system of pulleys, just as it happened in the eighteenth century. At the center of the scene a - Compass wind rose- directs and guides the characters that appear and disappear in our story. An "ancient" astrolabe in its deepest and most ancestral meaning but contemporary in its visual transposition, moved by remote-controlled winches, reminds us that the characters in this opera belong to the universe, connected to the planets that visually represent them even in costume, for the related tarot cards and the zodiac signs from which we drew inspiration.

As I work on this performance, I am not trying to reconstruct Baroque historical representations in any way. Starting from the assumption that every musical work and its staging is the daughter of its own time, we need to stop

and ask ourselves where we can find the subtle link between what impressed spectators in the eighteenth century when viewing a musical work and what may surprise today. With this artistic research undertaken by me and Deda Cristina Colonna, which now continues with the representation of "Castor et Pollux", the intent is to make it clear that the meeting point today lies precisely in the choice of using together typical mechanisms of the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century and the technologies of our time. I am inspired by the Baroque, but I am a contemporary man and I want to include contemporary sensibility in this production. While working on a Baroque opera, I don't recreate performances from three hundred years ago, but I draw inspiration from the reality that surrounds us today, and from the past.

Jacek Kornaki

Castor et Pollux, despite the beautiful music, today may seem rather hermetic. How are you trying to make this work accessible to a modern audience?

Francesco Vitali

Castor et Pollux's work is based on the Greek-Roman and Etruscan myth of the Dioscuri. I think we can still identify with the myths today. Due to the fact that they are devoid of literality, they can speak to people of any age at any time. When staging a Baroque opera based on a myth, it is important to be faithful to the Baroque aesthetic, but also to appeal to contemporary sensibility. When working on myths, I try to avoid literal and conventional realism. A certain amount of abstraction helps to make the work ambiguous.

Speaking of contemporaneity in observing the Baroque today, I would like to present my next great project after the Opera di Castro et Pollux which could be described as a Baroque film. The film tells the story of a talented English Baroque tenor, who is Kieran White. We are all unique as human beings, but when I met him here in Warsaw during the creation process of the Opera Castor et Pollux in 2020, produced by the Warsaw Chamber Opera, where he plays the lead role of Castor, I fell in love. of his voice and his humanity. I discovered aspects of Kieran's life shared between working on a family farm in the South West of England and developing his career as a professional singer following his passion for music. This leads him all over the world to perform with the best ensembles, conductors and in prestigious venues such as the Warsaw Chamber Opera. Through this film we will connect and instill curiosity in the new generations by sharing with them the beauty of Baroque music through the fantastic world of Kieran White in a totally contemporary way.