

Selected Blue Electric Reactions

Tweets

Matthew d'Ancona @MatthewdAncona (journalist)

Superb and wonderfully imaginative production of 'Blue Electric' by the brilliant @tomsmailmusic and @ArikhaAlba based on the latter's gripping memoir, and directed by #HughHudson @teteateteopera - pioneering creativity in action

Polly Gamble @pollygamble (Rayfield Allied) (artist management)

Great glimpse into new opera 'Blue Electric' by @tomsmailmusic @teteateteopera @RADA_London this evening! What a moving piece of drama and the score conveys it brilliantly. #contemporaryopera

Short Film

Tête-à-Tête 'What did audiences think of Blue Electric?'

<https://twitter.com/teteateteopera/status/1027116229444730880>

E-mails

David Segal (New York Times)

Your opera last night was wonderful - powerful, sad, affecting and very beautiful. Heartfelt congratulations.

Hoss Amini (script writer/director)

I thought it was absolutely amazing. So truthful and moving. Epic and intimate and domestic all at the same time. Just brilliant. I cannot wait to see the full story. Hard to convince you over email but I REALLY LOVED IT and was very, very affected. Congrats to you both.

Christopher Reid (poet)

I was very impressed by last night's scenes from your opera: drama and music working perfectly together, great tension in the singing lines, energetically propulsive orchestration. The party conflict scene, as it drove inexorably towards that quartet of voices, was especially powerful. I hope you had some wealthy backers in the audience. More!

Matthew D'Ancona (journalist)

I felt privileged to be in the audience at such a sublimely creative event. Can't thank you enough. Huge congratulations on a remarkable accomplishment.

Chloé van Soeterstède (conductor)

Congratulations on yesterday's performance. Really great music.

Lynda Mamy (United Agents)

It's a beautiful work. I so wanted to see and hear more. It's heartbreaking. I bought Alba's book. It may be a work in process but it stood alone. Congratulations to you both and to the wonderful performers.

Reviews

Planet Hugill

Thursday, 9 August 2018. [Anthony Evans](#), opera review

Musical memoir: Tom Smail's Blue Electric at Tête à Tête

Tom Smail Blue Electric; Mimi Douulton, Jonathan Brown, dir Hugh Hudson; Tête à Tête at RADA Studios Reviewed by Anthony Evans on 7 August 2018 Star rating: 3.0

Work in progress: Alba Arikha's memoir Major/Minor translated into opera

This is the 11th year of [Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival](#) and this Tuesday, 7 August 2018, was the opportunity to see, what was described as a "work in progress", Blue Electric composed by [Tom Smail](#) with words by [Alba Arikha](#).

Economically directed by film director [Hugh Hudson](#) and atmospherically staged by [Laura Albeck](#) and [Sara Stanton](#), the protagonist Alba was sung by [Mimi Douulton](#), Vigo, her father, by [Jonathan Brown](#), with [Helen Charlston](#), [Camilla Seale](#) and [Jennifer Coleman](#) as Anne, her Mother, Barbara and Noga.

Blue Electric began life as Alba Arikha's memoir Major/Minor which is a poetic retelling of her teenage years. The haunting book is a coming of age story. The wilful teenage girl in Paris coping with adolescence. The feelings of alienation and bewilderment at the world. The struggles to find her own voice and to shake off the labels already applied to her by the adults.

This could be our life but for the fact that her father is the artist Avigdor Arikha and her godfather Samuel Beckett. Re-reading the book in 2017, her husband, Tom Smail realised he could hear "music in the words" and began to explore what more there was to say. So, Blue Electric was born.

Why Blue Electric? The opera doesn't seem to make that clear. Blue is a recurring colour in the memoir. Maybe it's the electric blue eyeshadow that Alba secretes as she experiments with her identity? I should have asked – opportunity missed.

After its haunting opening refrain, we were propelled into the emotional violence of a young Alba being mercilessly bullied about her back brace. I didn't feel the book made such a deal of it, but here amongst this musical cruelty she feels like a victim before we've even had a chance to shake her hand and say hello. Is this giving musical expression to her father's dictum "You must be strong you cannot fall"?

Despite moments of poetic beauty, there's a constant feeling of musical unease and agitation.

We hear all too briefly a warmth and sweet voiced lyricism when Alba collaborates with her father in his studio with an exultant "my father trusts me" but this evaporates. Growing up is not always pretty but any joys there might have been remain largely untouched. What of her loves, her talents and inspirations? The pacing of her father's revelations in the book are lent power by being intertwined with her teenage explorations but here musically her father's loss of his own adolescence threatens to completely suffocate her own; the echoes of the Holocaust are writ large.

It seems disingenuous to draw too many conclusions when, after all, this is only a third of the material that is to come, but I hope that some of the love, joy and inspiration I felt when reading the memoir will also weave their spells in this fascinating work.

Reviewed by Anthony Evans

The Stage

Wednesday, 8 August 2018. [Edward Bhesania](#).

Blue Electric at RADA Studios, part of the Tete-a-Tete opera festival.

Blue Electric is the most recognisably operatic of the pieces, a setting by Tom Smail of words drawn from Major/Minor, the family memoir written by his wife, Alba Arikha. We see Alba, as an unhappy schoolgirl, teased by her peers and smothered by a domineering father, a respected artist and Holocaust survivor with haunted dreams. Mimi Douulton and Jonathan Brown sing vibrantly and bring character-depth to the roles of Alba and her father respectively – but even accounting for a broader dramatic arc (this performance features only the first four scenes of the planned work), the libretto is often too prosaic and lacking in drama to support Smail's texturally complex, post-Romantic score.

The Guardian

Thursday, 9 August 2018

[Flora Willson](#)

And then there were the festival's glimpses of the operatic future beyond "the very polished". *Blue Electric*, a work in progress, was well sung and neatly designed, but its sound world was too reminiscent of Britten to point to the future.

E-mail

Sophie Daneman (soprano/opera director)

I read some tiresome bit in the Guardian about being too like Britten to be modern which I found very irritating because:

a) your music has a sound world all of its own and

b) the most recent highly successful British opera (you know the one I mean) which has been lauded the world over is very much in the Britten tradition and

c) why wouldn't our only great opera composer since Purcell have some influence on a modern British writer?

Anyway I hope there were some astute entrepreneur types there who know a good thing when they see it. The whole thing was so classy - singers were great I must say and the videos and direction spot on.

It made me think a lot afterwards about what opera has to offer (which I have to say quite often eludes me - especially in contemporary works) and made me think that, in the right hands, it can both distill a story and expand it at the same time. I could have listened and watched for hours - and hope I will get the opportunity one of these days.