

Alvaro's Balcony

Book by Sebastian Michael
Music & Lyrics by Jonathan Kaldor

The Dome Room, Her Majesty's Theatre, Thursday 29th November 2007

Presented by Mercury Musical Developments

Featuring a cast of luminaries that included Susannah York, Edward Petherbridge, Norman Bowman and Andrew C Wadsworth this rehearsed reading was under the direction of Michael Alvarez with Michael Haslam as musical director.

It opens in Geneva, 1972 where a stunning diamond necklace falls into the hands of Marcello, a thirsty young journalist. It takes just one meeting with an expert to identify it as the jewellery of Her Serene Highness, Princess Constance of Centoluci. Missing for over forty years, and traced to having come from a tiny island off the coast of Venezuela, the necklace was apparently sold by an ageing music teacher, whom Marcello will be on the next plane to meet. The action then takes place between this and the Alpine Principality of Centoluci in 1928/29.

The music teacher Miss Vine (Susannah York) begins the tale in the modern day by blatantly lying to the journalist before then convincing him of the truth that she knows all about the life of the Princess who tragically perished in a fire in 1929. With the journalist's intrigue growing the story shifts to the earlier time and place as we meet the Constance Neilsen an American debutante who is marrying into one of Europe's glittering royal families.

A strong willed girl Constance has been chosen as the bride of Crown Prince Cedric to surreptitiously restore Centoluci's monarchy and reinvent itself as the world's most glamorous destination. From the get go she struggles with the starchy formality of life in the castle and indeed as a royal figure. The situation is not helped by the unreciprocated love she has for her husband manifest in non consummation. We find out later in an effective barb from Constance that her husband is so lucky to have his right hand man Francois with him at every turn, and "still looking so very handsome"...

With a natural desire for excitement and substitute passion the Princess asks royal aide Gualtieri (Edward Petherbridge) to arrange music lessons for her with the local struggling musical genius Alvaro (Norman Bowman).

Declaring that she is unteachable, stubborn and hopeless Alvaro refuses to even see her at first. As her frank ways and openness become clear to him he rescinds and the lessons become frequent. The joy that Princess Constance gains from

them is sharply at right angles to her failing royal duties and her willingness to be regal preferring to drink wine in Alvaro's grotty, dark garret.

One night Alvaro takes the Princess to Bar Scuro across town to show her the view. He sings of his dream for a balcony where he could look out on the world. What she is shown is the mesmeric sight of the lake in Centoluci which explains its own name as 100 reflections of moonlight on the water spellbind them and begin their journey into love.

Act Two begins the descent from grace. The Grand Duchess Cesara sings of 'The Burning of The Flags', a symbol that the royal power over the people is crumbling and the Princess must cease this life amongst the commoners and stand firm by her husband to prevent the collapse of the monarchy.

Alvaro is beaten up and prevented from seeing Constance. Heartbroken she flees the palace to be with him turning her back forever on the impossible charade of her marriage and position. Arriving at his home she finds it burning down. Without thought for herself she dives into the building to save Alvaro but it is too late and she passes out as the building collapses.

Villagers spread the news of the Princesses heroism and tragic death plunging the Principality into mourning.

Back in 1972 Miss Vine is explaining every detail of the story to the riveted journalist. As we had been let in on the story proves to be true and the Princess did not die in the fire but fled unseen and helped by Gualtieri she began a new life free of duty yet full of sadness at the man she had loved and lost. Miss Vine was the Princess Constance.

Working with the enchanting book, by Sebastian Michael, Jonathan Kaldor has written 16 exquisite numbers that move the plot along organically, present the context of the society around the characters and indeed gives us a good insight into their lives, loves and passions

With such a talented company the impact of this piece was immediate and the plan of getting it staged was on everyone's mind. To be frank I thought we could have scooped up the contents of the room, put some designers on it and opened forthwith.

The combined works of the writers left this old hand remembering every single reason why we are in the business we are in. Alvaro's Balcony is quite simply excellent. Memorable music, witty dialogue and a hugely engaging story. Let us get this on, seen and enjoyed (I guarantee) by everyone of the thousands who should, and will be entertained and uplifted by it. Knockout!

More information about it and a chance to hear the music at www.jonathankaldor.com

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