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OPERA REVIEW | 'LOHENGRIN'

## What Would Wagner Think?

By **BERNARD HOLLAND**

Salvatore Sciarrino's "Lohengrin" reduces Germanic legend to a kind of delirious narrative scarcely an hour long. As presented at the French Institute/Alliance Française on Monday evening, Elsa, the accused murderess, and Lohengrin, her swan-borne rescuer, drift in and out of sweaty sex, anguish, dread, visions of childhood and general madness.

The only principal performer, Marianne Pousseur, though billed as a soprano, scarcely sang at all. There were fractured storytelling and dialogue between lovers, all punctuated by a running repertory of gasps, gurgles, hiccups, orgasmic moans and coos. These were timed to a small, heavily amplified ensemble conducted by Alan Pierson. Ms. Pousseur functioned as a kind of untuned percussion instrument and could get your attention by hardly raising her voice.

Mr. Sciarrino's quasi melodrama (in the original sense of "melodrama") comes at the audience with a feverish theatricality fueled by an often overheated text. The music uses silence to good effect, with raw amplified string sound and woodwind chirps arriving in little bursts and gulps. The sounds seem almost intrusions on the emptiness they interrupt.

Mr. Sciarrino, a Sicilian, has a deft and imaginative mind. And if you can concentrate on his music and not the woozy philosophizing that goes along with it, "Lohengrin" is something you can buy into with pleasure and profit. The length is perfect for the medium.

Ms. Pousseur was very good. So too were Mr. Pierson and his several dozen young players and background singers.

This "Lohengrin" was the third of four Wagner-minded events at the institute. The last, on May 1, is called "Wagner: Visionary or Gravedigger?" Gee.

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