

# Classical

DAVID KETTLE  
@DavidKettle1



## SCOTTISH OPERA'S CINDERELLA IS FAR REMOVED FROM PANTO – OH YES IT IS

It's *Cinderella*, but not as you know it." That's Scottish Opera's tagline for its new production of Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, which opens at Glasgow's Theatre Royal on Wednesday. It's an appropriate choice of opera in the run-up to Christmas – and the tour, which also visits Aberdeen and Inverness, ends up in Edinburgh's Festival Theatre from 13-22 November. But anyone expecting the traditional trappings of a larger-than-life pantomime might be a bit surprised.

For a start, there's no magic. Some say Rossini – aged just 25 when he wrote the opera in 1817 – wasn't keen on the supernatural because of his religious beliefs, and others put it down simply to not having access to suitable special effects. But French director Sandrine Anglade, who directed Scottish Opera's co-production with Strasbourg's Opéra National du Rhin (which played there last year), says

that Rossini's focus is elsewhere. "In removing the fairy elements," she says, "Rossini and his librettist Ferretti focus more closely on human nature, its greed, its aspirations. They've reinvented Cinderella."

So there's no fairy godmother, no pumpkin, no glass slipper (which in Perrault's original French fairytale was actually made of squirrel fur). But what there is shows Cinders in quite a different light. "She doesn't randomly lose an object just because midnight strikes, leaving it to chance whether she'll get her Prince or not. In giving him one of her bracelets and encouraging him to come and collect the second one from her, she's putting him to the test. She's in control. She's never passive," says Anglade.

The fairy godmother is replaced in Rossini's version by the mysterious figure of Alidoro, philosopher and former tutor to the Prince. "He's



a character of the night. He advises, accompanies, makes things happen. But it's not magic for magic's sake. That's why we wanted to make him a person from elsewhere. In our version, he comes from the past, and he brings with him a memory of the fairytale to seek out Cinderella in the sad everyday life of our world."

Even Cinderella's wicked stepmother is replaced with a wicked stepfather – a swap that brings quite a different perspective to our plucky heroine's mistreatment.

But one element that remains just the same – well, almost – is the ugly sisters. "We're playing it very much that the sisters are ugly from the inside out," explains Rebecca Bottone, who sings Clorinda, sibling to the

*La Cenerentola* is a co-production between Scottish Opera and Opéra National du Rhin, pictured performing last year

equally nasty Tisbe.

How does Bottone feel about the differences in Rossini's opera to what British audiences will know and love? "I enjoy the fact that the story isn't in its traditional form – it's exciting to see how people will respond. Plus it's my first time playing a bad character and I'm loving it! Rossini's music dictates the relationship between the sisters. And their united front against Cinderella is wonderfully bitchy."

What Rossini's story is all about, according to Anglade, is contained in the opera's subtitle: "The Triumph of Goodness". "It's not a fairytale – it's a fable," she adds. "I think the moral of the story remains unchanged," says Bottone. "Good triumphs over evil. But the opera definitely highlights the triumph of inner beauty."

It might not quite elicit the raucous response of panto audiences, but Scottish Opera's pre-Christmas tale of more homespun, human magic might just draw the subtler laughter of insight and self-awareness.

*La Cenerentola* opens at the Theatre Royal Glasgow on Wednesday until 25 October, then tours to Aberdeen, Inverness and Edinburgh. See [www.scottishopera.org](http://www.scottishopera.org) for details.