

## **LF: Scottish Opera: The Burning Fiery Furnace**

St Mary's, Haddington



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With its talk of an 'invasion of immigrants' and 'foreign traitors', the troubling contemporary resonances in Britten's church parable *The Burning Fiery Furnace* are hard to miss. While recounting the Old Testament tale of the three pious Israelites who survive Nebuchadnezzar's inferno through their unshakable faith, it's also an examination of how belief shapes identity, and how competing creeds quickly become perceived as threats – all themes to the fore in this compelling debut visit by Scottish Opera to the Lammermuir Festival, in a modern-dress staging directed by Jenny Ogilvie that found an ideal setting in St Mary's Church, Haddington.

It was an able, thoroughly convincing production, fittingly one step removed from naturalism, that allowed time and space for Britten's ritualistic austerity to make its mark. David Stout was assertive and beautifully clear-voiced as the welcoming Abbot, and later also as Nebuchadnezzar's scheming Astrologer, while Ben Johnson was rather camp and appropriately self-obsessed as the preening King, going on to daub himself in gold to become the idol his subjects worship.

Benedict Nelson, William Morgan and Lancelot Nomura were strong – and immaculately balanced – as the three Israelites.

There were a few sound issues, notably from the eight-strong instrumental ensemble who sounded rather recessed within the circular set, but sparkled seductively during their procession around the church.

Likewise, some of the singers' lines became inevitably muddled among St Mary's generous acoustic – supertitles might have helped. Nev-

ertheless, this was a mesmerising, memorable and quietly provocative production – and, we can hope, the start of a fruitful relationship between company and festival.

**DAVID KETTLE**

## MUSIC

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### Dionne Warwick

Glasgow Armadillo



There are not many singers out there who could kick off their concert with songs of the calibre of Don't Make Me Over and Walk On By and still have somewhere to go but that remains a measure of what composers Burt Bacharach and Hal David heard in Dionne Warwick's voice back in the early 1960s when they picked her as their favoured interpreter of what was to become one of the classic canons in pop music.

Over the course of two hours (which felt more like two minutes), Warwick worked her way through her phenomenal catalogue in close to chrono-