

Reviews

Original take on Werther



Jonathan Boyd's steely Werther complements Viktoria Vizin's Charlotte

Picture: James Glossop

OPERA
SCOTTISH OPERA:
WERATHER
 THEATRE ROYAL, GLASGOW
 ★★★★★

WITH an arch-Romantic hero who comes to a sticky end after falling for a woman promised to another, Massenet's 1892 opera *Werther* is – depending on your point of view – either one of the great operatic love stories, or a study of somewhat deranged obsession.

Pia Furtado's new production for Scottish Opera treads an occasionally precarious path between those two points of view. It often aches with big-hearted desire, yet her decision

to place Werther as immovable presence observing everything from the wings casts a sinister shadow – one that's continued in Oliver Fenwick's sometimes crepuscular lighting. There's some beautifully evocative storytelling choreography, especially during the orchestral interludes, but at other times things can feel strangely static.

Nevertheless, in vocal terms the production excels. American tenor Jonathan Boyd makes a muscular, determined Werther, one far from the introspective dreamer we might expect. His clear, focused voice and sometimes steely tone might seem jarring in the production's first two acts, but

are entirely appropriate as his character becomes increasingly unchanging. Viktoria Vizin is spellbinding as Charlotte, the object of Werther's affections – wide-eyed and oblivious as his desire blossoms, yet wracked with guilt in her moving final scene, a masterpiece of joyless desperation.

But in terms of passion, the real emotion comes from the pit: the Orchestra of Scottish Opera have never sounded so good. Under Francesco Corti's sure direction, they convey Massenet's turbulent emotions in grand sweeps of surging sound, yet remain ever sensitive to the music's subtler moods.

DAVID KETTLE