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## Bajazet review: Pinchgut Opera's gripping tale a glorious triumph of intensity

Harriet Cunningham

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### BAJAZET

#### Pinchgut Opera

#### City Recital Hall, July 4

The devil always gets the best lines. And so Tamerlano, conquering warlord and arch-baddy, gets some of the most glorious music in *Bajazet*, Antonio Vivaldi's artful mash-up of Neapolitan and Venetian opera. Torture, rape and suicide has rarely seemed so joyous.

Tamerlano has defeated the Ottomans and holds their emperor Bajazet and his daughter Asteria captive. Bajazet will be executed, of course, but that's not victory enough: Tamerlano also claims Bajazet's daughter for his wife. That Asteria and Andronico, a Greek prince allied to Tamerlano, are in love is irrelevant, as is Tamerlano's existing betrothal to Irene, princess of Trebisond. Control is an aphrodisiac and revenge is a superpower in this broken world.

*Bajazet* is Pinchgut Opera's second mid-year presentation, and its first venture into the delights of 18th-century pasticcio. It's also a triumph. Director Thomas de Mallet Burgess and music director Erin Helyard have fashioned a tight, gripping piece of theatre from this torrid tale. City Recital Hall has been transformed into a wonky, war-torn palace where the characters' state of dress and undress map their emotions. Ultimately, though, the music is the key and the Orchestra of the Antipodes provides a splendid frontdrop to the action.

The cast respond to Vivaldi's muscular rhythms and rangy harmonic developments with a deep physicality, capturing the swagger of triumph and the slump of despair. Their recitative passages, in particular, are choreographed with thrilling detail, sudden emotions flashing across their faces. Then, when the time comes to consider these psychological epiphanies at more length, movement on stage slows or even stops, a character is framed in a spotlight, and the music takes over.

The six principal characters are consistently impressive. Russell Harcourt's Andronico is a vibrant and sometimes garish foil to the solemn fervour of Emily Edmonds' Asteria, while Sara Macliver, Andronico's friend Idaspe, draws you in with her fierce intensity. As Irene, Helen Sherman has a powerful sound and commanding stage presence, while Hadleigh Adams, in the title role, adds a dark, fascinating timbre to the vocal mix. And then there's Tamerlano. American countertenor Christopher Lowrey is the ultimate multitasker, revelling in the lewd virtuosity of his character and vigorously pursuing his onstage duties. It's a horribly fine performance.

***Bajazet* is at the City Recital Hall until July 8.**

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/bajazet-review-pinchgut-operas-gripping-tale-a-glorious-triumph-of-intensity-20150705-gi5ezf.html>*