PINCHGUT OPERA 2016

HAYDN'S

ARMIDA

LOVE IS A CRUEL MISTRESS

22, 24 & 26 June at 7pm, 26 June at 5pm
City Recital Hall, Angel Place, Sydney

The Saracen sorceress Armida has cast her web of seduction over the Crusader knight Rinaldo: caught in her enchantments, he has abandoned his Christian comrades and thrown in his lot with the enemy, just to be with her. But this time Armida has gone too far, unleashing a force beyond her control: the power of love.

Rachelle Durkin
Leif Aruh-Solien
Janet Todd
Jacob Lawrence
Orchestra of the Antipodes

Amor
Rinaldo
Zelmira
Ubaldo

Sung in Italian with English surtitles

Armida
PINCHGUT OPERA SECONDMEMENT

Sallyanne Facer | Design | 2016
Pinchgut Opera

Pinchgut Opera is a Sydney based opera company whose main aim is to rediscover baroque and early classical opera pieces. It has been putting on these lesser known operas since 2002 in an effort to introduce the Sydney public to new operas they wouldn’t see elsewhere.

Their list of productions to date is as follows;

- Handel’s Semele
- Purcell’s The Fairy Queen (2003)
- Monteverdi’s Orfeo (2004)
- Rameau’s Dardanus (2005)
- Mozart’s Idomeneo (2006)
- Vivaldi’s Juditha Triumphans (2007)
- Charpentier’s David et Jonathas (2008)
- Cavalli’s Ormindo (2009)
- Haydn’s L’anima del filosofo (2010)
- Vivaldi’s Griselda (2011)
- Rameau’s Castor & Pollux (2012)
- Cavalli’s Giasone (2013)
- Salieri’s The Chimney Sweep (July 2014)
- Gluck’s Iphigénie en Tauride (Dec 2014)
- Vivaldi’s Bajazet (Jul 2015)
- Grétry’s L’Amant jaloux (Dec 2015)
- Haydn’s Armida (June 2016)
Alicia Clements

Alicia is a Costume and Set Designer for theatre, film and live performance who has worked across Australia and the UK. Alicia graduated from WAAPA and went on to do further training in the UK and Paris where she worked for Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and assisted on many productions.

She is currently based in Sydney where she has worked on productions with Sydney Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare, Pinchgut Opera and Sport for Jove Theatre Company.

Her costume designs have been shown in Moscow as part of the global exhibition *From Russia With Love: Costume at the Turn of the Century 1990-2015*.

“Live performance offers unique creative opportunities for a designer, working within an intimate collaborative team. Design for theatre and opera does not have to be literal and can offer audiences the chance to connect with stories, characters and themes on a number of different poetic and metaphorical levels… Opera story-telling is far less straight-forward and requires rigorous investigation, experimentation and support from the director and design team to create a cohesive production that resonates on both a musical and narrative level.” - [http://www.pinchgutopera.com.au/the-post/category/behind-the-armida-set-with-alia-clements](http://www.pinchgutopera.com.au/the-post/category/behind-the-armida-set-with-alia-clements)
Armida

The story of Armida was transformed into an opera by Joseph Haydn in 1783 and was his most highly regarded, it also happened to be his favourite of all his works. It was written for Count Nikolaus Eszterházy’s palace theatre in Hungary and was performed a total of 54 times while this venue was open.

Armida is an Italian heroic drama loosely based on an epic poem by Torquato Tasso and is about the struggle the character of Rinaldo must face between duty and love. The opera ends slightly ambiguously with the audience unsure about the fate of the characters of Armida and Rinaldo.

It is an opera in 3 acts and sung entirely in Italian.
The Design

Due to the fairy tale quality of the story of Armida, the set designer decided that the set needed to have a scale and height to it that would match this aspect of the story. Several different locations were needed, included a space placed above another so that characters could be seen to be ‘climbing’ up to Armida’s world.

The design has been approached through a romantic and abstracted feel and includes 3 distinct elements, the charred barren forest on the ground lave, the sweeping staircase and the balcony with a large window which conceals Armida’s myrtle tree. This design allows the director, through clever use of lighting, to isolate characters and spaces. The set transitions from black at the bottom to very pale grey right at the top which helps to distinguish spaces but also aids in blending the set in with the surrounding venue.

Figure 2 Section of Armida Model by Alicia Clements
The Venue

Armida was performed at the City Recital Hall in Sydney. The venue is a non-traditional theatre space and has a distinct design and bright colour scheme. The hall has a lot of white, and blonde wood which is the opposite of a traditional black box theatre. There is also no proscenium, and all these things can create issues for the set designer when trying to come up with a concept that will work for both the space and the script. It was built specifically for the presentation of soloists, chamber music and the spoken word but is also often used for special events such as conferences and events.

The auditorium features gently raked stakes with 2 levels of galleries that warp around the sides and rear of the venue. It has a total of 1,238 seats plus the potential for 16 more standing positions and 2 wheelchair spaces.
Pinchut Opera does not own the venue but hire it out for the performances each season.

Due to this special care must be taken by the production team during bump in and performances not to damage the venue in any way. Drilling in to the floor, for example is not permitted. This can cause issues for set designers and sometimes they have to get creative about how things are constructed. The forest in the Armida set, for example, was created making each branch their own base plate and weighing these down with black sandbags. Pinchut do have their own floor they place over the stage floor in the venue so that the designer can paint the floor any design they wish.
Role on Secondment

To assist, primarily the set designer, Alicia Clements, but also the Costume designer Christie Milton, when needed, to bring the designs of the show to life. The role on secondment included observing the production team in weekly meetings, making props and costume elements and sourcing props, set pieces and costume items for the production from various sources around the city of Sydney.

To create the baren charcoal forest for the set the production manager sourced a large number of tree branches and the I had to lay them all out in the workshop space and spray them black using watered down acrylic paint and a compressor machine. Once dry very watery white paint was sprayed on to the tops of the branches to create a diffused effect.
To create Armida’s Myrtle tree for the show 2 large tree branches were attached together with zip ties and all the real leaves were stripped off. The leaves were then replaced with bunches of fake bougainvillea to create the desired look. The production manager created a mechanism for the base of the tree so that it could stand up but also so that the performer could pull the tree down securely down during a key scene.
Soldier's Clubs.

The shaft was made by the workshop team and then I had to cut out lots of triangles out of an extremely dense foam to create the head of the club. These were then sanded and attached with contact adhesive and allowed to dry.

They were then painted with silver and Bitumen paint to age them. The handles were painted with shellac and leather look material which I sourced was wrapped around the handle.
Idreno’s Map

The set designer sourced an image of an old map and it was made job the find a printing company that could print it on thick A3 paper. Once I had done this I had to age the map and go over all the lines and images on the front to exaggerate the colours so that it would read from the stage. I also aged and added text to the back so that it would look good from all sides. I used watercolours, spray paint and pencils to achieve this.
Army water canteens which have been aged with bitumen paint

Old rags which were made from squares of muslin, tea dyed and then stained with instant coffee.
Glass vase was sourced and then gold foil was applied by hand to create a look that would match with the world the designer had created. This was used by the character of Armida when she was casting her magic spells.
Soldier’s Gauntlet. The leather glove was sourced from an op shop by me and then I was asked to come up with the design for the top of it. The embellishments were glued and sewn on to keep them secure.

The look was inspired by Byzantine designs.
Armida’s Cloak

The fabric that was purchased for Armida’s cloak was heavily sequined but was in the wrong colours for what the costume designer wanted. Therefore, we hand painted gold and copper tones directly onto the fabric using acrylic paint to adjust the colour slightly but we were careful not to go too heavy with the paint as we didn’t want to dull the sparkly and shine of the cloak under stage lights.
Due to the fact that I was sent out on numerous solo sourcing missions I was given petty cash and asked to keep a record of all my expenses so that the company could keep track of the budgets. This was a very useful learning experience for me as I've never had to do this on a WAAPA show. I tried to stay very organised and labelled on my receipts with a number and updated my budget at the end of every day.

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This was an extremely good learning experience for me and I thoroughly enjoyed working with everyone on the production from all the different departments. It was very much the kind of show where everyone was happy to do whatever was necessary regardless of their job description to make sure the show was a success. I thought the set and costumes were effective in helping to communicate the ideas of the Opera. I think I particularly benefitted from working on a show in Sydney as I learnt about all the different Sydney based companies and who to contact, which I’m sure will prove highly useful in the future.