

Where a naked diva hides her mic

by Jessica Duchen

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Amazing to think of how much an audience never sees during an opera performance – or never used to see. Live cinema relays from the world's leading opera houses can now convey a level of close-up detail rarely visible in a theatre. But that, says the soprano Danielle de Niese (pictured), brings challenges of its own. Especially if the costumes are none too substantial.

De Niese is starring as the feisty Norina in Donizetti's bel canto masterpiece *Don Pasquale*, which is being streamed this week live from Glyndebourne to a big screen near you. Parts of the staging – set in the 18th century and highlighting certain similarities between the plot and *Dangerous Liaisons* – see her in little more than underwear. The sound must be recorded for transmission, therefore each singer must have a microphone, which should ideally be invisible, along with its wires. So where to put it?

“You wear a little battery and transmitter, normally on a belt around your waist, or maybe in your corset cleavage,” says de Niese. “But here, I spend my first scene in knickerbockers, my corset is removed on stage – I look like Catherine Zeta-Jones in *The Mask of Zorro*, when he takes the sword and strips off all her clothes – and I’m not wearing much underneath that they can hang anything on. So we had to devise another way to keep the battery pack intact.” The solution: it is under her wig.

Apart from growing accustomed to singing under these surprising circumstances, de Niese has found that cinema relays sometimes require adaptations in acting, depending on the opera. “In some I’ve noticed a need to slightly scale down some of the emotional intentions because a camera is like an audience of one, not an audience of several thousand; as it’s zoomed in, there’s less need to project certain emotional states. That’s the only thing I’ve ever changed.”

Don Pasquale has its subtleties in storytelling terms. The eponymous elderly nobleman, played at Glyndebourne by the brilliant Italian baritone Alessandro Corbelli, decides to take a wife in order to produce an heir and disinherit his nephew, Ernesto. Norina and Ernesto are in love, and conspire to outwit Pasquale, leaving him forced to admit that “marriage is not for old men”.

“It’s supposedly a comedy, but it’s also very poignant,” de Niese remarks. “Ultimately this opera is about all the things that people will do for love.”

'Don Pasquale' live cinema relay from Glyndebourne
(www.glyndebourne.com/production/don-