

Bastianello, Musto

Lisa Vroman (*Amadora/Ettalina/Stelladora*), Sasha Cooke (*Ortensia/Eustacia*), Paul Appleby (*Bastianello the Younger/Lambent*), Patrick Mason (*Bastianello the Elder/Frediano/Ippolito/Lino*), Matt Boehler (*Luciano*), Michael Barrett and Steven Blier (pianos)

Lucrezia, Bolcom

Lisa Vroman (*Annunciata*), Sasha Cooke (*Lucrezia*), Paul Appleby (*Lorenzo*), Patrick Mason (*Ignacio*), Matt Boehler (*Chucho*), Michael Barrett and Steven Blier (pianos)
Bridge 9299 A/B (two CDs)

These highly entertaining comedies dating from 2008, by two pre-eminent American opera composers, were conceived as a double bill by the New York Festival of Song—hence the animated two-piano accompaniments, brilliantly played here by Michael Barrett and Steven Blier. Each opera has a witty, imaginative and fast-paced libretto by Mark Campbell, the librettist of John Musto's prior operas *Volpone* and *Later the Same Evening*. In *Bastianello*, based on 'an Italian fable', post-wedding festivities go awry when the bride Amadora, while singing a maudlin song about the futility of life, leaves the wine spigot on, thereby enraging her new husband Luciano, who leaves her after spurning entreaties from his mother and his father-in-law and vows to return only after finding fools stupider than the three of them. In this he has no difficulty, encountering, among others, a man who tries to put on trousers both legs at a time. But the opera abandons its frothy ensembles and absurdist tone in favour of expressive simplicity when Luciano meets a fisherman claiming to see his wife, who drowned after they had argued, in the moon's reflection on a lake—a touching encounter that leads Luciano to see the error of his ways. Musto's lively, inventive music includes recurring motifs, including one reminiscent of the Forlane from Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

William Bolcom's *Lucrezia* also has an Italian source—Machiavelli's play *La Mandragola*—but is set in Argentina, thereby prompting the Spanish melodic inflections and rhythms in Bolcom's rollicking score. The story involves an intricate scheme, hatched by the Figaro-like character Chucho, for allowing Lorenzo to seduce Lucrezia, the wife of the lawyer Ignacio. The piece is full of choice musical numbers, including a scene in which Lorenzo masquerades as a German by spouting words learned in a cooking class. Especially fun is a number

■ William Bolcom



for sex-starved Lucrezia, a kind of Latin parody of the song 'Makin' Whoopie', which she sings as a confession to Lorenzo (disguised as a priest), leaving him breathless.

The same talented singers appear in both operas, taking multiple roles in *Bastianello*. The soprano Lisa Vroman finds the right tone of self-pity for the bride Amadora's musings in *Bastianello*, and as Lucrezia's mother amusingly joins her daughter in a duet about the hardships women are constrained to endure. Sasha Cooke's lustrous mezzo is an asset in both operas, though it

sometimes sounds a little blowsy in expressing Lucrezia's craving for sex. Paul Appleby's fine, clear tenor serves handsomely for the narrator's adolescent pronouncements in *Bastianello* as well as for Lorenzo's rhapsodic expressions of lovesickness. The baritone Patrick Mason underscores the pathos of the fisherman's song, and his solid singing nicely suits the soon-to-be cuckolded Ignacio. With his rich bass voice and keen way with words, Matt Boehler gives winning performances as both the groom Luciano and the resourceful Chucho. A fun double bill.

GEORGE LOOMIS