

## Die Gezeichneten

Teatro Massimo, April 14-21 2010

### Synopsis

#### Act I

In 16th-century Genoa, Alviano Salvago, a young nobleman, hunchbacked and deformed but full of sensual and artistic longing, has created an island paradise called "Elysium", which he himself avoids for fear his ugliness would spoil its beauty. Alviano has decided to transfer ownership of the island to the city and soon afterward he learns that his friends, a group of dissolute young nobles, have been using an underground grotto on the island to celebrate orgies with young women abducted from prominent Genoese families. Amid the protests of his friends, Alviano awaits the mayor (the Podestà, Lodovico Nardi) and members of the senate to conclude the formalities. Count Vitellozzo Tamare arrives late and out of breath. He is little interested in his friends' agitated pleas because he is overwhelmed by the beauty of an unknown young woman he has just encountered. At that moment, the Podestà arrives with his entourage, including his daughter Carlotta, whom Tamare recognizes as his beautiful unknown. While the Podestà and Alviano exchange pleasantries, Tamare draws Carlotta aside. Her cryptic responses to his advances entice and infuriate him and he leaves in haste as Alviano leads his guests into a banqueting hall. In a comic interlude, the nobles' henchman, Pietro, concocts and elaborate story to convince Martuccia, Alviano's housekeeper, to hide one of the abducted young women, Ginevra. Martuccia, ignorant of the true facts, agrees. Carlotta, having feigned indisposition, emerges from the banquet with Alviano. She tells him she is a painter whose greatest ambition is to capture on canvas the human soul, and that she wants Alviano as her model. He recoils at the idea, certain that she is mocking his ugliness. Carlotta persists, saying that from her studio on the outskirts of town she has often observed Alviano in his lonely early morning walks in the countryside. She sensed the soaring beauty of his longing one morning when she saw him standing erect, arms outstretched, greeting the morning sun. Her portrait of him in this attitude is nearly finished and lacks only the details of his countenance. Confused and overwhelmed with emotion, Alviano agrees to come to her studio.

#### Act II

The next morning, the Podestà and three senators have just come from an audience with Duke Adorno, whose permission is needed for the transfer of the island. the Duke is noncommittal, wanting to alienate neither his fellow nobles, who are against the transfer, nor the general populace, which has declared Alviano a public hero. the senators hint darkly that a veto might bring a popular uprising. As the Podestà and senators leave, the Duke enters with Tamare, who tells him of his love for Carlotta, whom he has met again that morning. She has rejected his suit and the Duke offers to intervene, although he counsels Tamare to accept the possibility of failure. Tamare counters that if Carlotta refuses to be his bride he will take her by force. He reveals the secret of the grotto, thereby coercing the Duke into vetoing the transfer in order to avoid the explosive consequences of discovery.

Alviano is sitting for Carlotta while she speaks nonchalantly about a painter she once knew. Her friend's sole subject was hands of all kinds and descriptions, but the strangest painting was of a pale and waxen hand with long, thin fingers grasping an unseen object that emitted a weak purple glow. Carlotta explains that her friend had never known the happiness of love for fear that its physical ecstasy would overwhelm her weak heart. The hand represented the searing pain that seized her heart at moments of excitement. Carlotta complains that Alviano is avoiding her gaze and he admits that he fears she is only trifling with him. She declares her love for him and with Alviano in a state of ecstatic transfiguration she completes the portrait. In that moment of fulfillment Carlotta grasps her heart and, steadying herself, inadvertently uncovers a nearby painting. It is the picture of the hand she had earlier described and Alviano realizes that Carlotta had been speaking of herself. He rushes to support her but, instead of taking advantage of her willing submission, restrains his ardor and embraces her tenderly. A servant announces the arrival of Duke Adorno and Carlotta, perplexed by his visit, prepares to receive him.

### **Act Three**

The next evening, the people of Genoa have gathered on the island of Elysium and are bewitched by its splendors. Martuccia, having learned the truth about Ginevra's abduction, wants to warn Alviano, but Pietro has her bound and gagged. Alviano and the Podestà enter, discussing the island, whose transfer Duke Adorno has promised to oppose. The Podestà is full of apprehension but Alviano hopes the gift can atone for the evil his dream has spawned. As Alviano and the Podestà leave in search of Carlotta, to whom Alviano is now betrothed, Carlotta and the Duke enter. Carlotta confides to the Duke, whose suit on Tamare's behalf has been unsuccessful, that since completing her portrait, her interest in Alviano has slackened, though she rejects the Duke's attempt to malign Alviano's character. Increasingly caught up in the sensual splendor around her, and haunted by memories of Tamare's passionate appeals, she wanders off alone into the summer night. A succession of short scenes captures the growing frenzy of the festivities, culminating in an elaborate pantomime mixing Greek and Renaissance imagery. Alviano is anxiously seeking Carlotta, who has been swept away by Tamare. Just as Alviano is being hailed by the populace, Duke Adorno, disguised as the Captain of Justice, intervenes, and accuses Alviano of masterminding the abductions. Alviano, beside himself with worry for Carlotta, leads everyone to the underground grotto. In the grotto there are signs of a struggle and an interrupted orgy. Tamare and the nobles are in chains, disoriented young women cower in alcoves, and Carlotta lies senseless on a bed covered with rose petals. Alviano refuses to believe that Carlotta gave herself to Tamare freely. Tamare, taunting and unrepentant, breaks loose from his chains and is stabbed by Alviano. Carlotta awakens and Alviano rushes to her side, but she rejects him in horror, calling for Tamare with her dying breath. Alviano, completely deranged, stumbles over Tamare's body as he makes his way through the stunned crowd.

(Christopher Hailey)