

Griselda enchanted with its beauty

A resounding success at the ruins of the
Victoria Theatre in Gliwice Adrian Nowak 30/09/2025

Alessandro Scarlatti's *Griselda* – a masterpiece of Italian Baroque and the master's last opera – was performed in the ruins of the Victoria Theatre in Gliwice for the first time in Poland, enchanting the audience with its sophisticated form, drama and timeless message. The performance, prepared as part of the 18th edition of the All'Improviso festival, proved to be a complete success, proving that a work from three centuries ago can still move audiences deeply.



Sonia Prina (Gualtiero) i Dorota Szczepańska (Griselda) © archiwum Festiwalu All'Improviso

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725) was one of the most important composers of the Italian Baroque, a creator whose works set the direction for the development of opera and vocal music at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. Born in Palermo, he quickly gained recognition as a master of opera seria, and his skill in composition, instrumentation and dramatic expression led him to be considered one of the fathers of modern Italian opera. An impressive number of 115 operas, numerous cantatas and oratorios, as well as instrumental works, which continue to inspire musicians and researchers, indicate how musically rich this period was. His interest in the history of Poland is worth noting, as evidenced by one of his works: *San Casimiro rè di Polonia*.

Among his works, the opera *Griselda*, staged in 1721, occupies a special place. The composer's last opera is undoubtedly a monumental work. The beauty of the music and the content – so relevant in its message regardless of the times – give it a certain universality. Are values such as love, fidelity – also to ideals, trust, but also intrigue – not with us at every turn? After all, how many homes today are still often ruled by a tyrant whose narcissistic and selfish nature compels him to despotically hurt his loved ones...



Ruiny Teatru Victoria © Adrian Nowak

The libretto, based on a story from Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* and written by Apostolo Zeno, deals with the theme of a woman's patience and fidelity towards her husband. The story of Queen Griselda, who is subjected to cruel tests of loyalty and humility, is ideal material for the Baroque stage – it combines drama, pathos and a moral message. The happy ending seems to be compensation for all the insults and suffering endured by the heroine.

In his music, Scarlatti emphasised both the emotional depth of the heroine and the monumentality of the entire work. The da capo arias, typical of Baroque opera, are enriched with sophisticated ornamentation, while at the same time serving as clear commentary on the psychological experiences of the characters.



Sonia Prina (Gualtiero), Dorota Szczepańska (Griselda i Teresa Marut (Costanza) © archiwum Festiwalu All'Improvviso



Dorota Szczepańska jako Griselda w Ruinach Teatru Victoria w Gliwicach © Festiwal All'Improvviso

Today, *Griselda* is considered one of Scarlatti's most mature operas and an example of his mastery in combining dramatic narrative with exquisite music. Thanks to this, the composer cemented his position as a central figure of Italian Baroque and an artist who paved the way for later masters, such as his son Domenico and such great names as Handel and Vivaldi.



„Griselda” w Ruinach Teatru Victoria w Gliwicach © archiwum Festiwalu All'Improvviso



Artur Plinta (Roberto) i Teresa Marut (Costanza) © Festiwal All'Improvviso

The music performed by the Il Suonar Parlante orchestra conducted by Vittorio Ghielmi was simply delightful. The perfection of form, beautiful sound and, above all, the purity of performance captivated the audience from the very first notes. Marcin Świątkiewicz sat at the harpsichord, his essential playing setting the mood for the entire work.

Once again, I was able to see that we have outstanding Baroque singers in Poland. Dorota Szczepańska as Griselda, Teresa Marut as Costanza, and Artur Plinta as Roberto are voices to remember and admire. Both ladies demonstrated crystal-clear sound and precision in the numerous ornamentations of arias and duets.



„Griselda” w Ruinach Teatru Victoria w Gliwicach © archiwum Festiwalu All'Improvviso



Monika Jägerová (Ottone) © Festiwal All'Improvviso

Sonia Prina, her Gualtiero is a demonic, unsympathetic monster who arouses revulsion from the very first moments. With her excellent modulation of tone, she is able to give the character a distinctive character. She is, after all, a world-renowned specialist in opera and Baroque works. I felt that her voice lacked a little panache and dynamism, although it is possible that the contrasting dark voice against the backdrop of the aforementioned sopranos simply has to sound that way. Undoubtedly, however, she is a singer of the highest calibre. Finally, the last two roles, Monika Jägerová as Ottone and Karol Kozłowski as Corrado, are characters that complement the dramaturgy of the entire performance. Although it might seem that these are supporting roles, the way in which both artists perform them puts them on a par with the rest of the cast.



Karol Kozłowski (Corrado) © archiwum Festiwalu All'Improvviso



Dorota Szczepańska jako Griselda w Ruinach Teatru Victoria w Gliwicach © Festiwal All'Improviso

I think I can say with a clear conscience that this performance was prepared with the utmost precision. This is evidenced by the fact that, immediately after the last notes sounded, even before the singers appeared to take their bows, the entire audience rose from their seats and rewarded everyone with a long ovation. A complete success. And one that was repeated twice.

