

How blue blo thinner than

VERDI'S *Don Carlo*, which opened in Tallinn on October 28, is, for its length and complexity, like reading a novel.

Incidentally, with the addition of subtitles, Estonians can now literally read along to the action. The words are projected onto a small strip of screen above the stage, although only during night-time scenes is there enough contrast to read them without having to strain.

Other non-Italians will relish the programme's perceptive synopsis in English. Even if neither story line nor nuances are lost on you, you might still consider spending another three and a half hours at the Estonia Theatre to hear understudies and foreign guest stars in performances later this month.

Don Carlo is "tragedy". Many of the characters, the title role included, are sufficiently neurotic to dig themselves into their private pits of despair. But they are not hell-bent enough to reach utter brimstone and catastrophic demise. As an unfair purgatory, life will suffice. "Joy is forever eluding us," as Elisabeth and Carlo lament.

Don Carlo and stepmother Elisabeth, fooling around behind royal dad Philip's back, seem intent on fostering the notion that their futile affair is truly incestuous — they address each other by "mother" and "my son". How the melodrama doth thicken.

No one holds any long-range ideals, except possibly for Rodrigo, who is committed to the rebellion in Flanders. Accordingly, his perseverance pays off in agonising death. (Last gasps

handled nicely by Tarmo Sild.)

All submit to ideals in others, no matter how mutinous they are. King Philip is attracted to Rodrigo's fiery frankness even though the nobleman is alleging Flandrian human rights abuse by the monarch; the blind Grand Inquisitor is struck dumb by the King's blunt refusal to have Rodrigo executed — these are scenes that come across strongly.

Effects and sets. A great mechanised tilted drum twists up like a corkscrew with actors on board for scene changes: from an inclined courtyard to the balcony and façade of a cloister. At the entrance of the Grand Inquisitor, fanfares are traded off between bugles backstage and trumpets in the orchestra pit. Or just as the King is set to turn stepmother & son over to the Inquisition, blinding magnesium deadlights spill forth, marking the resurrection of Emperor Charles V. That is a picture equal to a stentorian "step aside, mortal fools — this opera is over".

Of course, Charles V did not actually feign death to see how his vacillating survivors would handle the empire. Otherwise, the historical events are fairly accurately represented by dramatist Schiller.

If there is a single theme to be extracted from the jumble of subplots, it is probably suggested by the fictional ending. A king's right to rule — to purge his enemies and suppress the rest, if you like — is mandated by a power higher than the hardliner Inquisitor-

ood is water

ial God. (If he had made that point during the dark turbulent age that surrounded these events instead of within his own powder-puff 19th century Romanticism, Schiller would have been burned at the stake.)

Costumes, to this undiscerning eye, appear very authentic and are definitely appropriate, neutral white for Don Carlo, etc. Some details of Princess Eboli's costume might pose some interesting questions, which shall remain unasked here.

Maestro Carlo Felice Cillararo from Italy will split conducting duties with Arvo Volmer of Estonian National Symphony Orchestra ERSO for the remaining performances.

— Kristopher Rikken



WHAT TO DO: Don Carlo (Vello Jürna) and Elisabeth (Mare Jõgeva) get scant relief from meeting secretly.

Tiik Reinau



PUBLIC SHAME: Carlos (genuflecting) had to be disarmed by his friend Rodrigo when he brashly drew his sword against his father. In the background, heretics are burning.

Photos by Harri Rospu