

Der Vampyr

Gothic Opera at Grimeborn, Arcola Theatre, London, August 14

'I have an urgent appointment with your femoral artery,' ran the line that reassured audiences they could snigger in London's shabby-chic Arcola Theatre and relax into this



Conall O'Neill, Milena Knauss and Gráinne Gillis in Gothic Opera's production of 'Der Vampyr'

thing called opera. It was one of several moments that promised body horror and delivered on their word, so if you take your *guignol* grand with an extra shot, this was for you. Looking back on *Der Vampyr* in the cold light of day it's hard to believe how entertaining it was, arteries, entrails and all. That's because while the blood-letting was excessive, knowingly so, it had more in common with Punch and Judy than torture porn.

Although Heinrich Marschner composed his most enduring work nigh on 200 years ago (memo to Gothic Opera: centenary revival in 2028?) it still sounds fresh today, even on its own terms, and deserves a place on the edge of the operatic canon. What this fresh young company has done, for the second time since its inception in 2019, is to rip it open and extract the fun while keeping the corpse of Marschner's score quivering yet alive. Imaginatively reorchestrated by the conductor Kelly Lovelady for an unlikely quartet of piano/harmonium, cello, double bass and sousaphone, the music's harmonic and melodic flow rumbled satisfyingly along the bass clef, punctuated every now and then by fright whistles and piercing shrieks.

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