



Women in operas can't resist a rake

By Jessica Duchen

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Things do not look good for Anne Truelove. "No word from Tom," she sings, while her beloved vanishes to London, led astray by the sinister Nick Shadow. That is just the start of her problems. Stravinsky's neoclassical masterpiece, *The Rake's Progress*, concludes with a heartbreaking scene in which Anne sings her Tom a lullaby as he dies by inches in the lunatic asylum of Bedlam.

What does Anne see in this wastrel anyway? David McVicar's new production for Scottish Opera – the company's first staging of the work for 40 years – will no doubt offer insights of its own. But in general, women in operas do love their rakes too much. From Monteverdi's Renaissance glories onwards, through centuries of operatic drama, it's not the devil who gets the best tunes: it's the cads, the bounders, the nogoodniks.

They cause heartbreak at best, multiple deaths at worst. Some redeem themselves musically, like Monteverdi's Nero in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Having murdered and executed in order to secure a throne for his mistress, he finally sings with her such a heavenly duet that we forgive them everything.

The Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* is awarded one of Verdi's most memorable melodies – and he gets away with everything too, blithely unaware that the heroine has given her life to save his, while he sashays on towards his next victim. Typical tenor, some would say.

What may explain the appeal of stage rakes is that we see their human frailties, which inspires composers to greater heights than a bland, single-faceted hero could. Wotan of Wagner's Ring Cycle is the ultimate example.

'The Rake's Progress', Theatre Royal, Glasgow, 17 to 25 March
(www.scottishopera.org.uk)