



# La Donna del Lago at the Royal Opera House: Starry cast all set to make waves

by Jessica Duchen Friday 17 May 2013

Gioachino Rossini's *La Donna del Lago* ("The Lady of the Lake"), which has just opened at the Royal Opera House, is an operatic rarity of the first order – hardly ever performed, according to its director, John Fulljames, because its leading roles are so demanding. "You have to have the right constellation of stars to pull it off," he says. "That only happens once in a generation."

With a cast led by two bel canto supernovas, the American mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato (pictured) and the Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Flórez, that occasion is now. The opera also requires a second team of tenor and mezzo in roles nearly as demanding, including a duet in which the two high tenors "exchange top Cs in every bar," according to Fulljames.

This multinational galaxy is enlisted to represent a romantic ideal of Scottish nationalism, promulgated by Sir Walter Scott in the narrative poem on which the opera is based. The author set out to concoct an historical identity for his country, even if it was fictional: "He invented an idea of Scottishness that connected to the past, to ideas of knowing who we were then so that we know who we are now," Fulljames says. Rossini himself was writing in Naples: "Scotland was far enough away to be strange, exotic and wonderful, beyond the bounds of civilisation." And the opera's heroine, over whom the men in her life battle, essentially personifies Scotland itself.

*'La Donna del Lago', Royal Opera House, London WC2 (roh.org.uk) to 11 June*