

Querini, played by Magne Flemmerlid, a stalwart of the Norwegian Opera, was portrayed as a masterful figure, who kept discipline among his men, even when confronted by the temptations of seminaked fisherwomen heading for the bathhouse. Back in Venice, Maria's three arias were splendidly delivered by Pettersen, in an approachable idiom that had as much to do with musical theatre as with contemporary opera.

The only real tension of the piece was created by the character of the rapacious island priest, who demanded a payment of seven crowns each from Querini and his men for their board and lodging – a steep charge even by contrast with today's eye-watering Norwegian food and drink prices. There was also a fleeting romance between an Italian sailor and a local girl, but no hearts were broken.

The opera ended with Querini's triumphant return to Venice, and a choral march in praise of stockfish (an operatic first, surely?). A hundredweight of dried fish was carried onto the stage by an anachronistic fork-lift truck, to riotous applause and a standing ovation, well deserved.



THE CREATOR / TOR HALVØRSEN

On location: Magne Fremmerlid as Querini and Hildegunn Pettersen as Maria

The libretto is by Ragnar Olsen, who has translated Shakespeare for the Hålogaland Theatre in Tromsø; the production team of Anne Marit Sæther, Gilles Berger and Monika Stendahl Rokne came from the Cirka Teater, Trondheim. Torodd Wigum, the conductor, is also based in Trondheim, from where he had picked the 'Querini Sinfonietta' of four strings, woodwind and brass, with percussion and synthesiser.

Above all, this was an effective and highly engaging instance of a community coming

together and celebrating its heritage through music and drama. The chorus included many Røst islanders, among them the island's doctor, its current priest and any number of children. An Italian contingent included Venerabile Confraternità del Bacalà alla Vicentina, representing the stockfish restaurateurs of Vicenza, along with Maria Vittoria Querini Scelsi, one of Pietro Querini's descendants.

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