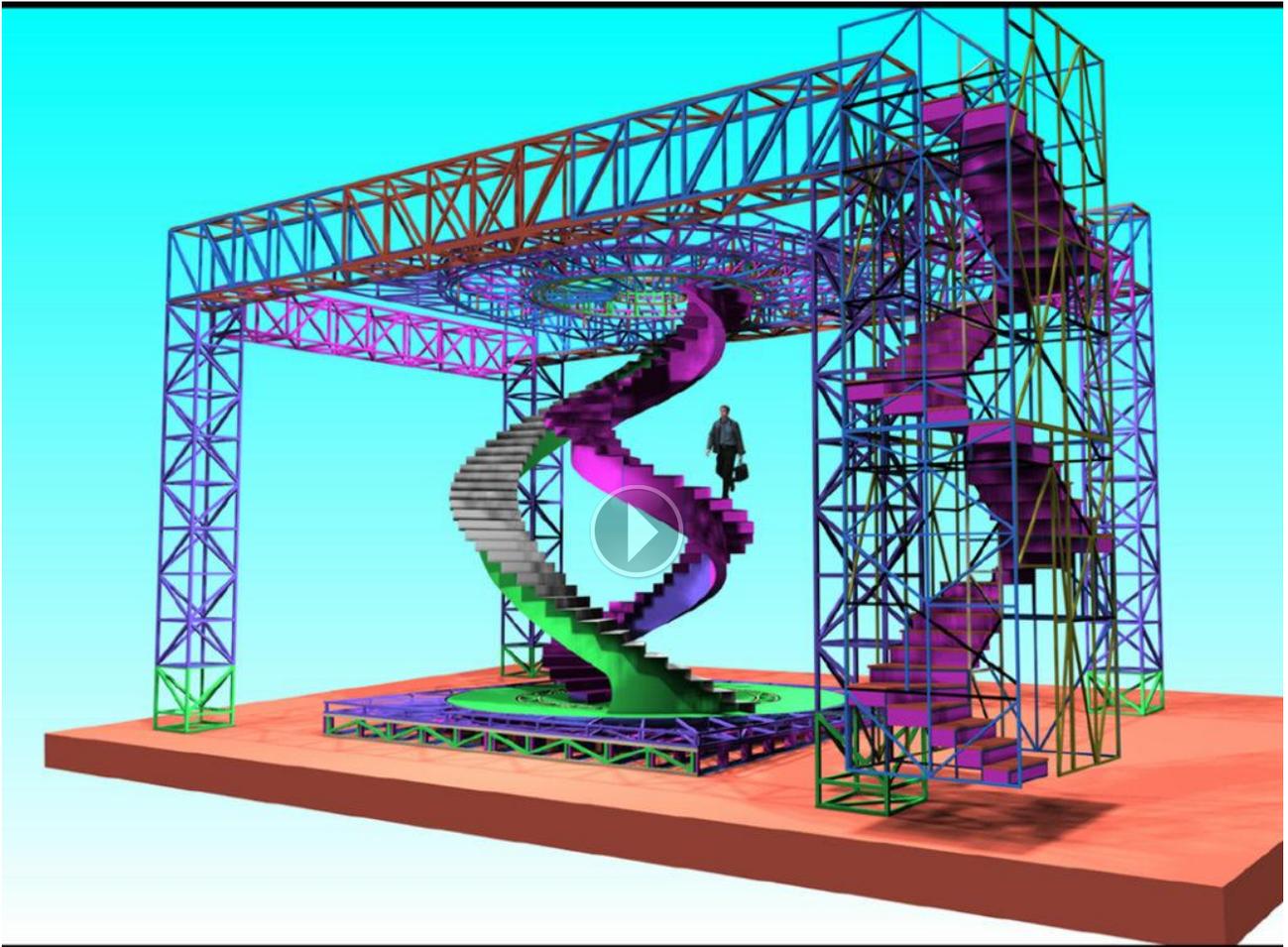


# IRON AND AIR

by Sergio Tramonti

Stagecraft notes for the **MATILDE DI SHABRAN** (Melodramma giocoso by Giacomo Ferretti) direction by Mario Martone, scenography by Sergio Tramonti, lighting designer Pasquale Mari, painting by Salvano Santinelli, stagecraft by Delfini Group.

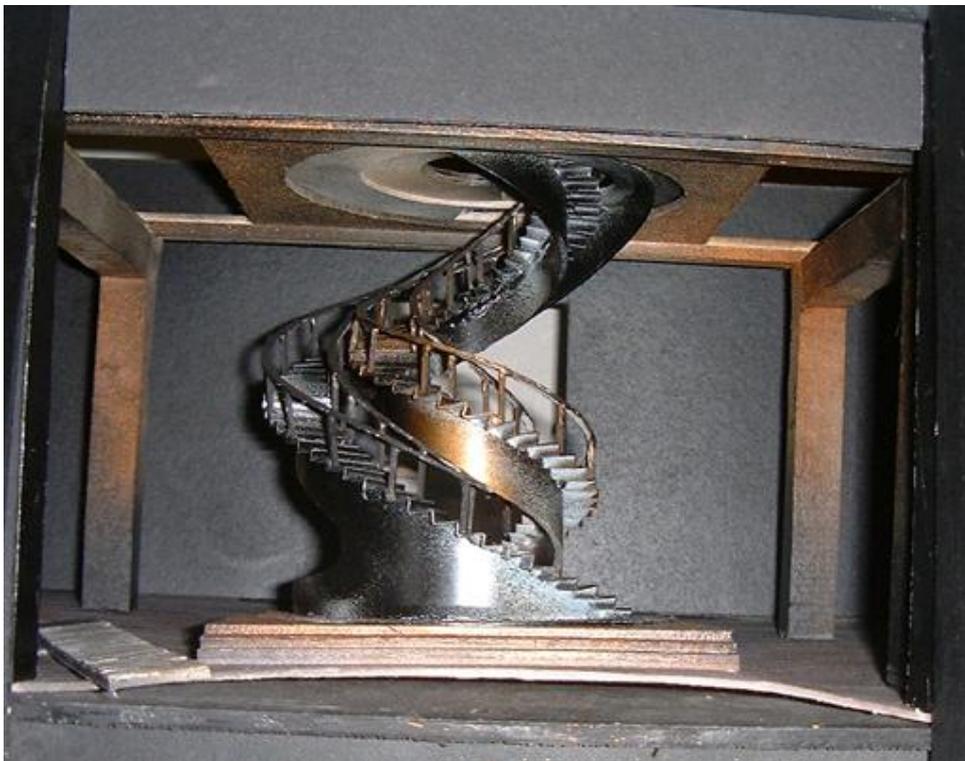
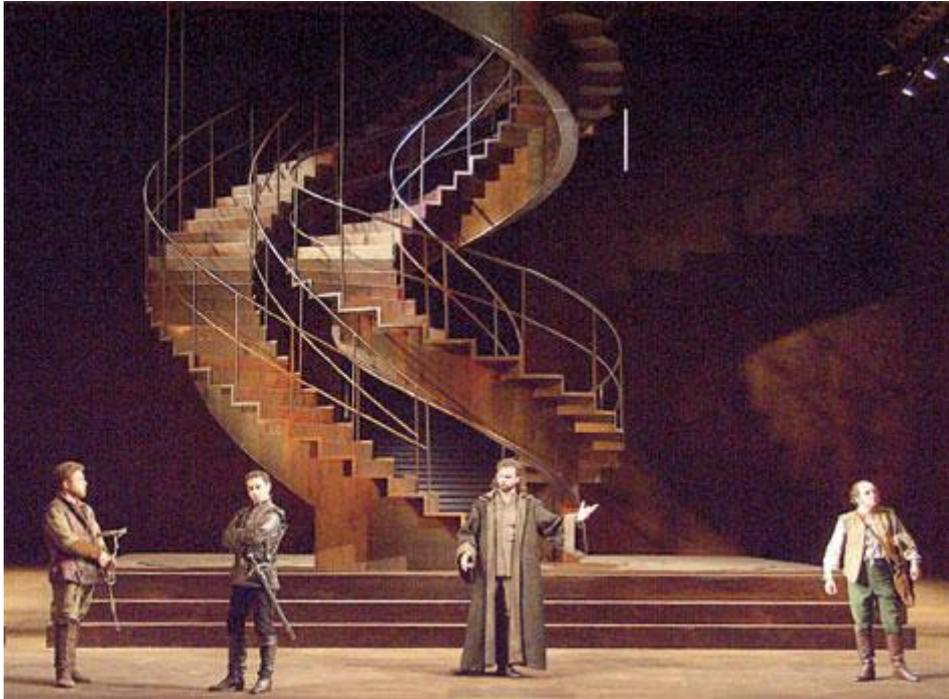


The spiral staircase of *Matilde di Shabran* was the brainwave of director Mario Martone, spurred by the need to find a spatial solution for the set. I was party to this right from the start, lobbing words, thoughts, ideas... in a kind of verbal ping pong as a prelude to the game at stake – Rossini's opera: *"Let's make it so... the singers don't have the castle at their backs...not as a backdrop, nor as a standard piece of scenery, not even in the wings to the left or right... Lets have it so... the castle is above their heads... above the stage at an eight-metre height... Let's make it so the artists can ascend and descend in view of the audience from a spiral staircase positioned on a revolving platform..."*

So, an apparently fixed, immobile set; such a simple idea - and quite a gamble considering that the opera runs for over three hours – yet so visually appealing that it couldn't fail to enhance Rossini's heady and exhilarating music.

From a rough three-dimensional sketch in 1:50 scale, I fashioned the first model out of some hand-pleated cardboard, concertina-wise. Within the main staircase I then added a smaller revolving

staircase that could when needed also rotate in the opposite direction. In the second model, made with my assistant Stefano Cerulli, we accentuated the expressive quality of its architectural elements, the colours and the materials employed.



The entire project was taken on and developed by manufacturer Vanni Delfini and his team. The set was then erected at the Teatro Rossini by the Rossini Opera Festival technicians under the supervision of Mauro Brecciaroli. Behind the two helicoidal staircases we had a long raked platform made that we linked up to the walkways by the dressing rooms... from there the choir-come-army descended at the closing of the first act.

The tabs that depict “exterior - countryside” that open Act Two were created in-house at the R.O.F. shop by a close friend and colleague of mine: the painter and scenographer Silvano Santinelli. It is a touch of materic painting that I especially like, for the lightness of the brushwork and the simplicity of materials used: gauze – starched open-weave cotton – perforated canvas. A home-spun effect which, thanks to Pasquale Mari’s lighting, transmutes into an expressive, lyrical element of great dramatic impact though of an airy, almost impalpable substance. Thanks to everyone who worked on the project: the metalworkers, carpenters and stage machinists, we built, welded and unveiled a structural plaything with wow factor. A “super-sized double-helix spinning top” at the service of the director and cast.

Every movement of the staircase was calibrated in relation to the music and the opera’s narrative flow. After the initial hesitation all the performers exploited to the max, step by step, the ascents, descents and especially the exits offstage. Juan Diego Flores, in a marvellous interpretation of a crabby, ironic yet poetic Corradino, even managed to exploit the ramps to the full by gripping the handrails while expressively conveying the emotionally unbearable torment of the contagion and loss of ... love.

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