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Placido Domingo, iTunes Festival, Roundhouse, review: 'embarrassing but delightful'

The household name of opera beautifully closed the iTunes Festival, says Rupert Christiansen



Placido Domingo performs at the iTunes Festival




By **Rupert Christiansen**

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This was a bizarre occasion, by turns excruciatingly embarrassing and rather delightful. As a climax to a month-long rock and pop festival at London's **Roundhouse featuring such hot names as Pharrell Williams** and Sam Smith, Placido Domingo topped the bill, compèring a programme of what used to be called "light music", but would now be

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labelled "crossover". The arena was packed with a youngish crowd who seemed to enjoy themselves enormously. Some incarnation of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra provided routine accompaniment, and the whole affair was heavily miked.

I started off wondering why the planners hadn't opted for someone a bit less granddaddy than the septuagenarian Domingo – Anna Netrebko, for instance, or a dashing barihunk. But Domingo is still the ticket-selling "household name", as well as a complete pro, and he did the job beautifully. He can spin out the backchat, but more importantly, he projects a sincerity, modesty, generosity and natural courtesy that more than compensates for any lack of edgy glamour.

His operatic contribution was carefully confined to two baritonal numbers. Gérard's monologue from *Andrea Chenier* was an odd choice as an opener, inasmuch as it is relatively unfamiliar and would have made little sense without surtitles. He pulled it off impressively, but was less persuasive in the duet from *Il Trovatore*'s penultimate scene, for which he was partnered by the American soprano Angel Blue.

If it was tenor histrionics you were after, then Vittorio Grigolo was on hand to mash up *E lucevan le stelle* – which I enjoyed far less than *La donna è mobile*, sweetly and musically done by Jonathan Antoine, the 19-year-old star of *Britain Got's Talent*. Somebody must be teaching this boy good vocal technique.

But grand opera wasn't the focus of the evening: it was big tunes this audience wanted, and that's what they got. Antoine breezed through *Volare*, Domingo sparked some of the old magic in *Granada* and Grigolo came into his own milking *Ti voglio tanto bene* dry with a spectacular display of constipated facial anguish.

The highlight of the evening, however, was a rare sighting of Domingo's younger son Plácido, a songwriter who joined his dad in a rendering of John Denver's tear-jerker *Perhaps Love*. It would have melted the flintiest heart, and it certainly did mine.