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Review: Overture Alcina

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Photograph by Marco Caselli Nirmal

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Overture Alcina

P.S. 122 (see Off-Off Broadway)

By Nevio Spadoni. Music by Luigi Ceccarelli. Devised by Ermanna Montanari and Marco Martinelli. With Montanari. 50mins. No intermission.

Overture Alcina—a frightening, hypnotic bit of recitative—scratches a very, very specific itch. Are you, for instance, a fan of minimalist stagings, but histrionic actresses? Do you like opera—but have a secret desire to hear one butchered for its sonic parts? In Teatro delle Albe's strange spoken-word aria, rending things apart is the order of the day. Ermanna Montanari speaks, shrieks and growls her Romagnol text—Nevio Spadoni's updating of the seductive witch from *Orlando Furioso*—as though it's being clawed directly from her voicebox. Around her screams the tempestuous electronic score by Luigi Ceccarelli, a noise so insane it seems to have ripped itself violently away from the libretto. Co-devisor Marco Martinelli cuts the space with icy stripes of light—though Montanari often prefers to back slightly away from us, leaving her face in darkness. The effort is to divorce every element from every other element, and to make the susceptible among us feel torn apart as well.

The short work is only seven short sections: Alcina bemoans her fate, hurls a decent amount of invective at men (memorably she likens them to pig-shearing, "all that noise, so little wool") and takes leave of her senses, all while flickering just at the edge of our vision. There's no need to follow the story, since it is brutally simple. (Alcina has betrayed her sister by seducing her lover. Then she loses it.) We're really here to revel in Montanari's extraordinary control, her painted eyes, her full-throttle staginess. In various avant-garde experiments I've seen recently, characters from the great silent movies find themselves spliced into modern work. Here, without any recourse to video trickery, Teatro delle Albe gets the same effect.