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Vinci?s Rediscovered Baroque Bollywood Spectacle

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The opera Leonardo Vinci's Alessandro nell'Indie (1730), receiving its Austrian premiere at famous magnificent Theater an der Wien on April 10, 2026, emerges from 300 years of obscurity as a Baroque revelation—Pietro Metastasio's libretto of Alexander the Great's Indian conquests elevated by Vinci's melodic genius into a kaleidoscope of love, loyalty, and imperial hubris.

Max Emanuel Cencic's Bayreuth Baroque transfer—infused with Bollywood vibrancy—transforms the historic hall into a subcontinental dreamscape, where saris swirl amid sarod-like continuo and Kathak choreography ignites Metastasio's dramma per musica. Martyna Pastuszka's Orkiestra delivers razor-sharp period precision, proving Vinci rivaled Hasse and Porpora at their peak.

The opera's emotional vortex swirls around Cleofide (Bruno de Sá), India's captive queen torn between defeated lover Poro (Dennis Orellana) and conqueror Alessandro (Maayan Licht). De Sá's countertenor—velvet fire—commands the da capo fireworks of "Minacciata di morte," ornamenting Vinci's sinuous lines with Portuguese fioriture that evoke Farinelli's golden era. His chemistry with Orellana's Poro crackles in their recognition duet: Orellana's focused, honeyed timbre navigates heroic cavatinas with regal poise, their voices blending in suspended thirds over Pastuszka's lilted strings.

Licht's Alessandro embodies enlightened despotism—his countertenor's brilliant falsettone soars through "L'Indo stan quieto," baroque trumpet echoing imperial pomp. Jake Arditti's Erissena (Poro's sister) steals scenes with coloratura bravura, her "Se mai senti" a lament of crystalline pathos. Supporting roles shine: Stefan Sbonnik's Gandarte dispatches arioso with Viennese Gemütlichkeit; Nicholas Tamagna's Timagene adds dramatic heft to the sibling intrigue. Arnold Schoenberg Chor's ripieni provide sonic exotica, evoking Indian temple processions.

Cencic's direction—hailed at Bayreuth for "enormous fun and playfulness"—reimagines Metastasio's Rome-India clash as Bollywood epic: Domenico Franchi's sets feature gilded minarets, lotus ponds, and rotating ratha chariots; Giuseppe Palella's costumes fuse Mughal splendor with Neapolitan opulence—Cleofide's emerald sari shimmering under David Debrinay's diaphanous silks. Sumon Rudra's choreography electrifies: kathak footwork punctuates arias, ensemble dances erupt into Holi revels during the victory scene. Cencic honors opera seria conventions—staged recitatives propel narrative—while injecting meta-theatricality: actors wield hand-puppets for battle reports, blurring reality and ritual.

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Pastuszka's Orkiestra—18 virtuosi on period instruments—unlocks Vinci's orchestration secrets: theorbo plucks mimic sitar drones, recorders evoke bamboo flutes, percussion deploys tabla-inspired rhythms. The overture's French overture pulse yields to galant allegros; continuo group (harpsichord, archlute) breathes life into secco recitative. Da capo repeats become vocal showpieces: de Sá cascades melismas like sitar tans, Licht interpolates trumpet fanfares. Pastuszka's brisk tempos honor 1730s Roman pacing while allowing rhetorical pauses for emotional depth.

Act II's prison reunion—Cleo/Poro's "Non temer, mio bene"—crystallizes Vinci's pathos: aching suspensions resolve in mutual forgiveness, orchestra's sighing violins underscoring sacrificial love. Alessandro's Act III epiphany ("Si può dir che son felice") crowns the redemption arc, his voice mellowing from command to contrition. The lieto fine ballet—Kathak dancers spiraling amid fireworks—celebrates cross-cultural harmony without saccharine resolution.

This production resurrects Alessandro not as curiosity but cornerstone: Vinci's melodic invention rivals Handel's Tamerlano, Metastasio's dramaturgy prefigures Gluckian reform. Cencic's Bollywood lens—playful yet profound—illuminates 18th-century esotismo while honoring stile napoletano elegance. Theater an der Wien's acoustics favor countertenor bloom; surtitles (German/English) unlock Metastasio's poetry. A triumph for Bel Canto revivalists: Baroque opera regains its imperial splendor, proving forgotten gems can outshine warhorses. Vienna's Indian conquest dazzles—encore-worthy.

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