



[Life is a Dream](#) by [Birmingham Opera Company](#)  
at Argyle Works, Birmingham  
Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) March 2012

Going to see an opera doesn't normally entail a drive to an industrial estate warehouse on the outskirts of the city, but this was to be a new experience for me: opera denuded of its high art pretensions.

I had heard whispers about Birmingham Opera Company before: this was opera for the masses; cutting edge and the realisation of Berthold Brecht's revolutionary approach to theatre outlined in his *Short Organum* for the Theatre.

Arriving at the 'venue' in Digbeth, Birmingham, we made our way through a strip door into a small warehouse section with a makeshift bar and people standing around or sitting on a few work benches and chairs.

We were then guided into the main arena which was already peopled with characters sleeping in foetal positions or walking around. Our guides ushered us through to one section, where we could view a chorus standing on a staircase whilst other members of the company passed amongst us; some dressed in costume and some in everyday clothes - an insider's view of the opera is available from [Niall Crowley](#)'s excellent blog piece. The orchestra were situated in a circled partition in the middle of the warehouse, with the conductor, William Lacey, the only member who looked the part.

In the far right hand corner of the warehouse we come across an exaggerated bed where Segismundo (the outstanding baritone, Eric Greene) awakes and is confused as to why he is where he is (*Ah, wretched me*). The chorus taunt him for his incomprehensiveness. We later learn that he had been imprisoned by his father, the King of Poland, who was terrified by omens at the birth of the boy. Another character, Rosaura the mezzo, Wendy Dawn Thompson, appears, arrives, disguised as a boy and carrying a sword, that belonged to her father, whom she had never met.

