

August 3, 2013

Michael Johnson

A fine production of a Broadway classic

Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot* (premiered in 1960) arrived at what is now regarded as the end of Broadway's Golden Age of Musicals, when individual songs from each show quickly permeated not only US culture but beyond. The story comes with its own built-in backward-looking view of a golden age and, as the program notes emphasize, the musical is connected with the "Camelot" of the Kennedy years which came to a traumatic halt 50 years ago.

Festival director Francesca Zambello likes to claim how her policy of presenting musicals without amplification is more authentic than modern commercial practice. Even if one agrees (as I do) one still fears being unable to hear every word of the dialogue (although the lyrics are projected - which isn't "authentic" - but spoken dialogue is not). No such problem in this production - Alan Jay Lerner's clever words come across with superb clarity. This brings to mind just how wonderfully well Lerner managed to capture the mix of deep myth and whimsy that permeates T. H. White's novel *The Once and Future King*.

David Pittsinger is a marvel as Arthur, starting off as a diffident, uncertain adolescent and then growing into the mature, disillusioned king. The tiny second where he becomes aware that Guenevere and Lancelot are lovers is a subtly-defined electric moment. Director Robert Longbottom deserves credit for this and other telling details in the production.

Andriana Chuchman is Guenevere as to the manner born (or "the manor born" since, after all, she is a royal). A highlight for her is the scene ("The joust") where she encourages three knights to do all they can to vanquish the conceited Lancelot. Young Artist baritone Noel Bouley as Sir Lionel is a standout here as well. Festival favourite Nathan Gunn is a complete natural as Lancelot, managing to be both sincere and self-mocking.

Wynn Harmon totally convinces in the brief role of Merlin and then as the wisely befuddled King Pellinore. (I do wish they had found a way to include his Questing Beast in the work - but that would badly disperse focus.) Jack Noseworthy grasps every opportunity to broadcast the utter wickedness of the hateful Mordred. Young Richard Pittsinger makes a properly appealing appearance in the final moments as Tom of Warwick.

Conductor James Lowe has absolutely the right touch for the work, which has many subtle demands. The chorus and ensemble of nine Young Artists capably contribute. Kevin Depinet's sets deftly create each scene (it would be nice if the production were made available to other companies), and Paul Tazewell's costumes help create the richly romantic atmosphere. All in all, a very satisfying experience.

Next season's classic musical: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*.

Albany The Alice Busch Theater 07/13/2013 - & July 19, 22, 27*, 28, August 1, 3, 5, 11, 13, 15, 17, 23, 2013 Frederick Loewe: *Camelot* David Pittsinger (Arthur), Andriana Chuchman (Guenevere), Nathan Gunn (Lancelot), Wynn Harmon (Merlin, Pellinore), Jack Noseworthy (Mordred), Clay Hilley (Sir Danadan), Noel Bouley (Sir Lionel), Wayne Hu (Sir Sagramore), Richard Pittsinger (Tom of Warwick) The Glimmerglass Festival Chorus, David Moody (chorus master), The Glimmerglass Festival Orchestra, James Lowe (conductor) Robert Longbottom (director), Alex Sanchez (choreographer), Kevin Depinet (set design), Paul Tazewell (costume design), Robert Wierzel (lighting design)