

Masterful 'Dutchman' sails into Glimmerglass

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By Joseph Dalton



Ryan McKinny as the Dutchman in The Glimmerglass Festival's 2013 production of The Flying Dutchman. Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival. (Karli Cadel)

Cooperstown – The new season of the Glimmerglass Festival set sail on Saturday with Wagner's "The Flying Dutchman." The staging by Francesca Zambello, the festival's artistic and general director, was masterful in its highly imaginative uses of rather modest stagecraft and drew some fine poignancy from the opera's pivotal moments of romance and redemption.

In the lead role, a ghost-like sailor doomed to stay at sea, is the outstanding bass-baritone Ryan McKinny. Water may be the dominant metaphor in Wagner's turbulent score, but McKinny's voice was solid as a rock. His long opening aria, "*Die Frist ist um*," seemed to rise out of the quiet, stillness of earth. Yet the sustained power and force of McKinny's singing was seldom gentle or cradling, either.

As Senta, soprano Melody Moore was in fine form, the beauty of her voice almost always at its best at the highest notes of each phrase. The role is full of inner conflict, which sometimes played out as agitation. Her stage business got awkward each time she climbed a metal tower. Maybe it was to suggest her going into a lighthouse to keep watch, but it was distracting, even a bit worrisome.

Among the other principals, bass Peter Volpe as Daland started off dusty in the first act, but did freshen up his sound over time. Tenor Jay Hunter Morris as Erik was the real storm on stage. His presence, both vocal and physical, seemed to always arrive with a sweep of agitation and fury.

James Noone's single set easily changed from ship deck to seaside port to Daland's parlor. Ropes were plentiful. Crosshatched, they suggested elaborate masts. Hanging from above, they were props for the men of the chorus in a brief but surprising dance. The women of the chorus used similar chords to braid while gossiping and commiserating with Senta. (So what if the libretto actually says they were spinning?)

The most imposing of the traditional costumes by Erik Teague was a massive black leather coat worn by the Dutchman. Its plunging neckline allowed glimpses of a large tattoo on McKinny's chest. And yes, this "barihunk" did show more. The reveal came during the love scene, of course. She pledged her heart. He bared his chest.

Taking suggestions of colors from the libretto, Mark McCullough's excellent lighting underscored the opera's intersecting realms of reality. Throughout the night, the Glimmerglass Orchestra led by conductor John Keenan was steady, secure and sometimes even commanding. And that's no easy feat when it comes to Wagner.