

The Flying Dutchman

Glimmerglass Music Festival

Reviewed by Herbert Wolff

WAMC/Northeast Public Radio

Onto the placid shores of Otsego Lake in Cooperstown, New York, has burst *The Flying Dutchman*...heaving with passion, danger and excitement.

This is a daring undertaking – to offer a Wagnerian opera as summer music fare. But, Francesca Zambello, Artistic & General Director of Glimmerglass Music Festival, is an impresario who is as fearless as she is creative. She succeeds magnificently with this production.

The Flying Dutchman is a relatively early, and relatively brief, opera by Richard Wagner. Written in 1842, it is based on a nautical legend and centers on the theme of redemption through love. The story is that of tormented man aboard a ghostly galleon who, because he once invoked the powers of Satan, has been damned to roam the seas forever. According to the terms of the curse on him, the Dutchman goes ashore once every seven years – where the only possible escape from his perpetual wandering would be to find a woman who would love and be faithful to him.

The most familiar section of this opera is its overture, which conveys the stormy and dramatic saga ahead. It introduces the *leitmotifs* for the sea and for two of the principal characters, the Dutchman and Senta, daughter of the captain of another vessel. Under the baton of John Keenan, the Glimmerglass orchestra presents this chestnut with verve, steadiness and balance, which continue through the performance.

The action begins on the deck of a fishing vessel on its homeward journey, captained by Daland, Senta's father. The crew battles a fierce storm, during which they encounter another ship and the "Flying Dutchman." Daland provides shelter for the Dutchman and his crew. When the stranger divulges his enormous wealth, the captain offers his daughter's hand. The Dutchman hopes that, at last, he will find the woman to liberate him. This may seem promising enough. However, as Director Zambello sums it up: "Things go poorly, but we are left with one of the great Romantic [period] opera scores."

The storytelling at Glimmerglass is abetted by brilliant – albeit minimalist – stage design by James Noone and lighting by Mark McCullough. Their use vertical ropes, and shifts in vibrant reds and blues, change the setting from ship...to port village...to Senta's bedroom. The staging moves the tale along, underscoring the suspense, emotions and disaster.

Most important...the cast of *The Flying Dutchman* is perfectly suited to this sensual, intense production. All the soloists and chorus members effectively "inhabit" their characters. Peter Volpe's vocal range and sonority creates a memorable Captain Daland. Soprano Melody Moore possesses a soaring, beautiful voice and acting skills

to deliver a heartfelt Senta. In the title role, bass-baritone Ryan McKinny displays fine voice and solid sex appeal, and the ability to convey the Dutchman's longing and distress. Metropolitan Opera star Jay Hunter Morris brings credible despair and forcefulness, as well as great vocal finesse, to the role of Erik, Senta's shunned fiancé.

In short, this Glimmerglass production has it all. It will be playing in repertoire throughout the summer until August 24th.

This is Herbert Wolff, for WAMC.