

# Arts In NY

## The Flying Dutchman

Glimmerglass Festival at the Alice Busch Opera Theater

Reviewed by David Sheward



Jamie Kraus/The Glimmerglass Festival

If you think opera is dry and boring, check out the opening production of the 2013 summer season of the Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, N.Y. In an intense staging by artistic and general director Francesca Zambello, Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* has probably never been so sexy. During a fierce duet in the second act, the leads could barely keep their hands to themselves, and I marveled at how they were able to hit their high notes while practically ravaging each other. That kind of sensuality percolates beneath the action and finally explodes as the

maiden Senta gives in to her obsession for the titular character, a ghostly sea captain doomed to roam the ocean until he can find a woman brave or crazy enough—depending on your point of view—to spend eternity with him.

After a passionate performance of the surging overture from conductor John Keenan and a magnificent orchestra, Zambello starts off with libidinal Freudian imagery. As the curtain rises, we see Senta thrashing about, entwined with ropes on a barren bed in the midst of a sexual dream. The ropes are repeated in James Noone's stark set as the scene seamlessly shifts to the ship of Daland, Senta's father, bound for home after a long voyage. The crew continually pulls on the rigging and this barely concealed erotic action is repeated with less subtlety among the sailors' sweethearts as they weave similar ropes dangling from the flies and sing of their long-awaited reunions. Zambello has them practically whip themselves into an orgiastic frenzy.

But the main friction is between Senta and the Dutchman who strikes a bargain with the greedy Daland for his daughter's hand in return for the rich cargo the Dutchman has amassed during his endless travels. But Daland is unaware that his prospective son-in-law is a damned spirit seeking redemption in the form of a girl's mortal love. By lucky coincidence, Senta is enchanted by the Dutchman's legend and falls eagerly into his arms. Zambello endows this ethereal alliance with musky earthiness by having bass-baritone Ryan McKinny got up by costume designer Erik Teague as if the wandering captain were ready to hit an S&M leather bar. It doesn't hurt that McKinny's rich and resonant voice is matched by a powerful physique and his bare chest is covered with a huge tattoo of the Dutchman's mystical vessel. This is one earthy ghost.

Soprano Melody Moore is equally riveting as the addictive Senta. Her soaring, clear tone conveys idealistic romanticism and physical yearning. When McKinny and Moore clash, vocal and sexual sparks fly. Jay Hunter Morris, who made a striking impact in the Met's recent *Ring* Cycle, keeps Erik, Senta's discarded fiancé, from paling beside the dark and rugged Dutchman. Peter Volpe makes for a sturdy and somewhat comical Daland; Deborah Nansteel lends strength to Mary, the village matriarch and weaving mistress; and Adam Bielamowicz makes the most of the small role of the steersman.

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