

A shining moment at Glimmerglass: Camelot

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SUSAN GALBRAITH



David Pittsinger as King Arthur and Andriana Chuchman as Guenevere (Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival)

If Wagner's creation of the **Dutchman** signifies a true Romantic anti-hero then in this season's musical we are asked to consider Arthur in Camelot to be a twentieth-century counterpart. Though the genres and styles of music-theatre differ significantly, the alchemic individualistic imagining of the two lead characters made some strong connections.

Arthur also has a kind of destiny in which he finds himself trapped. The character himself must take on a role that sets him apart and forces him to carry on his ideals alone and from which there is no exit. David Pittsinger, a phenomenal singer-actor, has created the most complexly-faceted and believable-in-the-flesh Arthur one is ever likely to see.

Pittsinger seems to always go for the truth in the creation of his roles, and it's an intelligent and well-considered truth at that. What a journey he maps for us with Arthur, showing us how a hero emerges, not so much from the myth of pulling a sword out of a stone, but through the painful evolutionary process of thinking and articulating to a community a new paradigm.

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It helps that this singer is delicious on his feet. He physically transforms himself from the lanky young Wart, sliding down tree trunks and awkwardly bumbling around the young Guenevere who's just been delivered up to him to wed, to a king who has to sit through endless meetings and diplomatic negotiations, and finally into a sad, wise man who has lost the two people he has loved most the better to serve an ideal even he can't fully understand.

How wonderful to hear Arthur's songs fully sung, rather than just talked through as some actors have done on-and-off Broadway. It can't be said enough that to hear a musical with full orchestrations and unamplified voices as Glimmerglass serves up is delicious, rarified fare indeed. To hear the bass-baritone richness of Pittsinger in this role will stay a lifelong memory. But his performance is only part of the Glimmerglass feast in this cross-over production. Two other truly gifted singer-actors make this Camelot triangle exceptional.

Nathan Gunn as Lancelot is magical. Gunn communicates this man's self-absorption and insufferable pride while his ability to have fun with this character makes the whole show an enjoyable ride. His movie-star looks can't even be eclipsed by the stunning shiny armor he wears. The singer's gorgeous baritone notes rise up and fill the 900-seat hall richly and nobly. Like Pittsinger, Gunn projects a real journey for this character, one that grows in complexity and feeling and shows how through suffering and compassion, the "perfect" knight finally learns humility and the true meaning of service.

Andriana Chuchman may not yet have the professional resumé of her two leading men but she is a simply splendid Guenevere. She plays the innocent, impulsive girl, then kind and generously loving queen, and finally the passionate and tormented lover who is able to make a great sacrifice of herself. She is a gifted soprano, and, like Dunn and Pittsinger, is able to apply her sound successfully in a musical.



Nathan Gunn as Lancelot (Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival)

The chorus members sang beautifully as well – in this show as throughout the season. These singers moved with ease between the Wagnerian demands of *The Flying Dutchman* and the Lerner and Lowe musical. Special mention should go to the memorable Clay Hilley, Noel Bouley, and Wayne Hu as the three knights in Camelot.

This year, the singers are most successful moving back and forth between music-theatre styles, and the works stand together in a kind of seamless whole.

The one jarring exception to this in my mind was the casting of Jack Noseworthy as Mordred. It may be the way the part is written – Mordred is, after all, a skunky character – and reinstating the crowd-pleaser song “Fie on Goodness” pushes the character even further “out there.” The singer-actor certainly has the chops to compete with other unamplified-champs on stage. But when Noseworthy entered, it felt like Broadway wattage jumped up. Nowhere was there a suggestion of nuance or a psychological wound explored (and there’s plenty in the set up.)

The audience clearly ate the performance up, but it made me uncomfortable and since then I have reflected again on the question of performance styles and audience expectations. (Oh, dear, I can’t lump together musical singers. Wynn Harmon comes from that side of music-theatre and he is just delightful doubling in the roles of magician Merlin and the affable Pellinore.)



Wynn Harmon as Merlyn (Photo: Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival)

**Highly
Recommended
Camelot**

Closes August 23, 2013
Glimmerglass Festival
2013
7300 State Highway 80
Cooperstown, NY 13326
2 hours, 50 minutes
with 1 intermission
Tickets: \$10 – \$117
[Details and Tickets](#)

Nonetheless, all in all, there is elegance in every aspect of the Camelot production that helps elevate the musical to grand music-theatre and therefore constitutes such a successful choice for Glimmerglass and its operatic tradition. Paul Tazewell’s costumes are just scrumptious, all metallic hues a’glittering. There are eleven for Miss Chuchman alone that exquisitely set off her lithe body. Kevin Depinet as stage designer and Robert Wierzel with lighting have created together beautiful romantic stage pictures. A Camelot castle in the clouds is painted on a canvas that floats above the stage serving to all as reminder of Arthur’s idealized societal dream. When it and the heavy iron candelabra that also serves as symbol of the Round Table go crashing to the floor, it felt an emotional blow indeed as if the dream had been destroyed forever.

Camelot by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe. Directed by Robert Longbottom. Produced by Glimmerglass Festival.