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CAMELOT - GLIMMERGLASS FESTIVAL

Written by James Karas
August 7, 2013



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Theatre Review

Production: Camelot

Authors: Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe

Company: Glimmerglass Festival

Conductor: James Lowe

Director: Robert Longbottom

Principal Actors: David Pittsinger, Andriana Chuchman, Nathan Gunn, Wynn Harmon

Venue: Alice Busch Opera Theater

Location: Cooperstown, New York

Run: July 13 to August 23, 2013



Reviewed by: James Karas

Camelot is one of the great products of the American theatre and the choice for this year's Broadway musical at the Glimmerglass Festival. The choice is unassailable and the production worth the trip to upstate New York.

The musical had an almost disastrous opening in Toronto at the then new O'Keefe Centre in 1960 but it managed to find its way and become a major hit. With book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner (based on the novel *The Once and Future King* by T. W. White) and music by Frederick Loewe, *Camelot* has a marvelous plot containing pomp, circumstance, love, pageantry and an interest in power and justice. It is all based on the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table but what really matters, of course, is that the beautiful Guenevere falls in love with the French knight Lancelot. It ends tragically for all and the only thing that remains is the legend.

Camelot needs a superb King Arthur who for many of us must compete with the voice of Richard Burton, the original creator of the role. The answer for this production is bass-baritone David Pittsinger who wins the insidious comparison by making the role his own. He has a sonorous voice and when he sings "I wonder what the king is doing tonight" and explains the joys of his kingdom to Guinevere in "Camelot," he is simply splendid. Pittsinger gives us a humane, sympathetic and marvelous King Arthur.

Canadian Andriana Cuchman makes a beautiful Guenevere. She is sassy and funny when necessary, moving and passionate when in love and a pleasure to see and hear. She goes from "The Lusty Month of May" to "I loved you once in silence" with perfect intonation.

Baritone Nathan Gunn has a marvelous voice and his Lancelot is duly heroic but I have a couple of complaints. Lancelot enters with a big paeon to knightly virtue and (unintentionally) human arrogance with "C'est moi". He needs to overwhelm the audience and here Gunn's voice falls a bit short in size if not in quality. Glimmerglass, to its great credit, does not use microphones, but in this instance, I wish they had.

The second observation is that Director Robert Longbottom (or was it just a perverse reaction from the audience) found humor in "C'est moi" as Lancelot listed his achievements, including physical perfection. Humour takes away from the beautiful song. Other than that, Gunn made a Lancelot worthy of his self-description.

Wynn Harmon doubled as Merlin and Pellinore, two juicy roles for a character actor and he did well in both.

Jack Noseworthy is a thoroughly villainous Mordred who enjoys being nasty. When he sings about "The Seven Deadly Virtues" he does so with delicious conviction.

The sets by Kevin Depinet were suitable without being grandiose. We see the Castle of Camelot in the background during the outdoor scenes and the interior living quarters are modest. The costumes by Paul Tazewell, from the attire of the heroic knights to the beautiful gowns of the ladies at court, are splendid.

The Glimmerglass Festival Orchestra and Chorus under James Lowe performed heroically as becomes the tenor of the musical, and all one can do is repeat that this is an outstanding production of a great musical.