

Opera Warhorses

Glimmerglass Festival Young Artists Romp in Young Verdi Comedy – “King for a Day”, July 21, 2013

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The 2013 Glimmerglass Festival celebrated the bicentennial of Richard Wagner’s birth with a new production of “The Flying Dutchman”. It also chose Giuseppe Verdi’s early comedy “Un Giorno di Regno” in a new American English translation as “King for a Day” as the bicentennial present for the Italian composer.

The opera is comprised of scene after scene of vintage Verdi music. After 170 years of existence, it still remains a rarity in performance (I have seen it only twice previously, both performances conducted by Calvin Simmons, in a cast with Arlene Saunders, Bruce Reed and J. Patrick Raftery, in a traditional presentation in Italian at the San Diego Opera’s 1981 Verdi Festival).

The Glimmerglass Festival production is based on several premises: (1) the opera should be presented in English, as “King for a Day”, for which a new translation was commissioned, (2) members of the Glimmerglass Festival Young Artists should be cast in three of the six major roles, and (3) a new production moving the action to the 1950s should be created.



Above: Baron Kelbar (Jason Hardy, left) is starstruck, because Belfiore (Alex Lawrence, seated) whom he believes is the King of Poland, is staying in his mansion; edited image, based on a Karli Cadel photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.

The first two objectives were met admirably, the third less so.

The satirical elements that poke some fun at the fashions and concerns of the late 1950s (guess who “The King” in “King for a Day” turns out to be) reminded me of the Santa Fe production of Menotti’s “The Last Savage” spoofing the 1960s [See Loving “The Last Savage”: Over the Top Menotti Charms at Santa Fe Opera – August 5, 2011], except that Menotti’s opera was deliberately written with 20th century satire that it mind, while Verdi’s, of course, was not.

That said, the Glimmerglass revival had much to commend it, not the least the opportunity to hear early Verdi and Verdi’s only attempt at writing in the early 19th century *opera buffa*.

The opera abounds in melody, and in lively duets and ensemble pieces.

Below: Giulietta (Jacqueline Echols, left) shares the mood with the Marchesa (Ginger Costa-Jackson, center) and Edoardo (Patrick O'Halloran, right).



The opera's title refers to the Count Belfiore, It is a factoid that inevitably is noted in reviews whenever the piece is revived that the comedy appears to be based on an actual event. A claimant to the throne of Poland (who off and on was actually the Polish king) created a diversion by having an aide-de-camp act as his impostor in Paris while the king-again-to-be secretly slipped into Warsaw.

At opera's end Belfiore, besides being named Marshal of France for his deception, marries his sweetheart, the redoubtable (and in this production rather cougarish) Marchesa.

Below: Ginger Costa-Jackson as the Marchesa; edited image, based on a Karli Cadel photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.

Belfiore was played amusingly by Massachusetts bass-baritone Alex Lawrence, one of this season's Young Artists.

The Marchesa was sung by Sicilian mezzo-soprano Ginger Costa-Jackson, who had sung the title role of Bizet's "Carmen" in the 2011 Glimmerglass Festival [See Costa-Jackson, Diegel, Matanovic and Simmons Excel in Glimmerglass Opera's "Carmen" – August 13, 2011]. She sang the challenging music impressively, and proved to be a spirited comedienne.

Edoardo was played by Tennessee tenor Patrick O'Halloran. In a role notorious for the percentage in the highest part of the tenor *tessitura*, O'Halloran proved his mettle, heralding the arrival of an important new lyric tenor talent.

Edoardo's love interest is Giulietta, sung by Michigan soprano Jacqueline Echols. She is yet another of the Glimmerglass Young Artists whose vocal skills suggest an important career.

The two *buffo* roles were played by Florida basso Jason Hardy as the Baron Kelbar and Minnesota baritone Andrew Wilkowske as the Treasurer La Rocca.



Below: Patrick O'Halloran as Edoardo; edited image, based on a Karli Cadel photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.



The Watson sets used the theme of large sized picture frames through which the characters would step from time to time. Christian R ath directed the stage action. Joseph Colaneri conducted with spirit. Eric Sean Fogel was the choreographer.

Below: Giulietta (Jacqueline Echols, center) and Glimmerglass Festival Young Artists in Court Watson's sets; edited image, based on a Karli Cadel photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.



The smaller parts were sung by Young Artists. Indiana tenor Joe Shadday was the elderly Count Ivrea, Minnesota Tenor Andrew Penning was Delmonte.

Court Watson, who had previously created 2011 Glimmerglass Festival sets for Berlin's "Annie Get Your Gun" and Tesori's "The Blizzard at Marblehead Point" was the set designer.



Above: Baron Kelbar (Jason Hardy, above) is carried by La Rocca (Andrew Wilkowske, below); edited image, based on a Karli Cadel photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.

Recommendation

Verdi's youthful comedy has many virtues. No one who appreciates the heritage of Italian opera should bypass an opportunity to see this rarely done work.