

August 3, 2013

Michael Johnson

An avalanche of operatic joy

Verdi's second opera (and first comedy) has gone down in history as one of the great flops of all time, nearly ending his career. This lively production is a great success because, while it treats the music with serious respect, it subjects the libretto to a dashing zany translation as *King for a Day*. Kudos for this to the festival's dramaturg, Kelley Rourke who deserves some sort of Crazy Genius Award for her inspired lunacy. One never quite grasps each and every plot point, but it simply does not matter.

At the start the titles inform us that we, the audience, are invited to a double wedding involving members of the aristocracy. It soon becomes clear that we are among somewhat Eurotrash aristos circa 1960 or so when paparazzi lurk behind every shrub. The hackneyed plot involves two mismatched couples who must devise ways to get rematched to the right partners and - surprise! - it all comes right in the end.

The music is unfailingly lively but hardly has the memorability of the great Verdi works we know and love. One might guess it was by someone under the influence of Rossini but who had mercifully tossed aside the vocal roulades. It bodes well for the festival's future that conductor Joseph Colaneri who delivers such a sharply-defined performance is to be Glimmerglass's music director.

Christian R ath's inventive direction provides an excellent counter-argument against anyone who maintains that Germans cannot be funny. He has seized upon any and every opportunity for some sort of surprising bit of action and all of this is supported by the witty sets and costumes of Court Watson. Contributing to the fun is Eric Sean Fogel's choreography which has the chorus at times doing Macarena-style moves.

Ginger Costa-Jackson made a fine debut at the festival in 2011 as a go-for-broke Carmen and here she gets to show comedic flair - which she does brilliantly. She plays a widowed (but not sorrowing) Marchesa dolled up à la Zsa Zsa Gabor with a toy poodle her main fashion accessory. She seemed a bit pressed vocally at her entrance but quickly assumes mastery of the role. The other leading lady is Young Artist Jacqueline Echols who gives a sparkling performance as Giulietta, the girl in love with the tenor, Edoardo, performed by Patrick O'Halloran, yet another member of the Young Artists Program on the brink of what promises to be a terrific career.

I mentioned Ms Costa-Jackson's "comedic flair" - but the entire cast seems possessed of it. They also seem to be having as much fun as the audience.

The "king", who has been asked by the real King of Poland to pretend to be him for reasons that don't concern us, is Belfiore, played with great brio by Young Artist Alex Lawrence. He's the man who ends up marrying the Marchesa and who might in actual

fact really be a king, namely Elvis Presley (really! - neither Verdi nor his librettist Felice Romani foresaw this).

Baron Kelbar is the grandee hosting not only the two marriages but also the visiting “king”. Bass Jason Hardy obviously relishes the role; the comic highlight of the opera is probably the “duel” (boxing match) between him and La Rocca (baritone Andrew Wilkowske) the man who has been enticed to ditch Giulietta (Kelbar’s daughter) - which leaves her free to wed Edoardo. (Got that?)

The roles of Belmonte (the baron’s treasurer) and Count Ivrea (the doddering fiancé of the Marchesa) are ably portrayed by two tenors from the Young Artists program, Andrew Penning and Joe Shadday.

I keenly regret I am unable to see this delightful production a second time.

It’s a bit surprising that this is just the fifth Verdi opera (and eighth Verdi production) performed in Glimmerglass’s 39 years. *La Traviata* appeared in the second season and has had two subsequent showings. *Rigoletto* has had two productions; *Falstaff* and *Aida*, one each. Not that the festival should challenge Sarasota Opera and its complete Verdi cycle, but it would be nice to see some more.

Albany The Alice Busch Theater 07/21/2013 - & July 26*, August 2, 6, 8, 10, 17, 19, 24, 2013 Giuseppe Verdi: *Un giorno di Regno* Ginger Costa-Jackson (Marchesa), Jacqueline Echols (Giulietta), Patrick O'Halloran (Edoardo), Alex Lawrence (Belfiore), Jason Hardy (Baron Kelbar), Andrew Wilkowske (La Rocca), Andrew Penning (Belmonte), Joe Shadday (Count Ivrea) The Glimmerglass Chorus, David Moody (chorus master), The Glimmerglass Orchestra, Joseph Colaneri (conductor) Christian R ath (director), Court Watson (set and costume designer), Eric Sean Fogel (choreographer), Robert Wierzel (lighting designer), Kelley Rourke (projected text)