

DON GIOVANNI: Singers elevate Mozart masterpiece

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Monday, 25 October 2010 12:06



The world's greatest lover is in the house. The Winspear Opera house in Dallas, that is.

With the current production of Mozart's 1787 masterpiece, *Don Giovanni*, the Dallas Opera has made good on its promise to bring world-class talent to the Lone Star State. There wasn't a weak link in Sunday afternoon's spectacular performance.

Brazilian baritone Paulo Szot, fresh from his Tony-award winning performance in the revival of *South Pacific*, brought great swagger to the title role.

From the moment the curtain rises, opera's bad boy commands attention with both his talent and his rakish presence. (Think Errol Flynn in leather.)

Don Giovanni has some pretty impressive bragging rights. According to his little black book, he has seduced women all over the world – 640 in Italy, 231 in Germany, 100 in France, 91 in Turkey and 1,003 in Spain. That's 2,065 – in case you're counting.

Italian Mirco Palazzi plays Don Giovanni's hapless manservant, Leporello, responsible for keeping track of his master's conquests. Palazzi may not have Szot's booming delivery, but he sure has a boatload of finesse.

"His presence and the way he inhabits the role makes up for his lack of volume," said Carol Allen, director of the Northeast Texas Choral Society, who joined me for the matinee.

Indeed. Palazzi's impeccable comedic timing and his ability to do some pretty athletic pratfalls will serve him well in what should be a very long operatic career.

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Claire Rutter, the English soprano who has been compared to Maria Callas, was regal in the role of the chaste Donna Anna.

Immune to his charms, Donna Anna rejects Don Giovanni's advances, with disastrous – and fatal – results. Rutter reaches deep for the emotions necessary to carry her through the opera, as her character vows revenge and retribution for her father's death at the hands of Don Giovanni.

Her voice is a subtle instrument with a double helping of flexibility. She can belt to the back of the house, and she can pull back during more intimate moments.

Jonathan Boyd, who plays Donna Anna's betrothed, is a revelation. He's not the title character, but he stops the show with his aria, *Il mio tesoro* (My Treasure), where he vows to avenge her father's death. Sweet and full of pathos, Boyd's moment in the spotlight earned "Bravos!" from the appreciative audience.

Brooklyn native Georgia Jarman is completely believable as Donna Elvira, the woman Don Giovanni loved left with more than a broken heart. Of all the women he's conquered, perhaps Donna Elvira is the one who knows him best and loves him most.

Jarman's soprano carried through the house with precision and passion.

Soprano Aliyn Perez was an utter delight in the role of Zerlina, the peasant girl Don Giovanni tries to seduce on her wedding day.

Her performance almost steals the show from Rutter and Jarman. Evidently the audience agreed, as "Bravas!" echoed through the hall when Perez took her curtain call.

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Perez' hapless groom, Masetto, was ably sung by bass Ben Wager, in what could be a throwaway role. A 2009 graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, Wager will be ready for leading roles in a few years.

Morris Robinson, perfectly cast in the role of Donna Anna's doomed father, The Commendatore, doesn't have a lot of time on the stage, but his death is one of the story's driving forces. Robinson's physical presence is as powerful as his bass voice. Immortalized in marble in the graveyard, the character "comes to life" in the final scene to confront Don Giovanni.

Robinson makes you believe in the possibility of a living, breathing, singing statue.



This production, designed and directed by John Pascoe, gives the singers a larger-than-life set to work with. Catholic imagery dominates the sets, as do priests, nuns and the Virgin Mary. Given that the opera is set in Seville, Spain, the religious backdrops seem perfectly appropriate and project the importance of morality onto the audience. We know early on the finale will be all about good versus evil.

During the two acts, the singers engage in groping and sexual activity that distracts rather than enhances the plot. We know the story. Don Juan has his way with a lot of women. Enough said.

The stage crew for this production faces some pretty daunting physical challenges. The scenery is huge and changes often. Because the opera is in two acts, there is no "down time" to switch out the sets. The Winspear's practically perfect acoustics amplified several backstage rumblings during Sunday's production, but without a real break in continuity.

Take advantage of this opportunity to see grand opera at its finest.

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Don Giovanni – Winspear Opera House

Wednesday, Oct. 27 - 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 30 - 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Nov. 5 - 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 7 - 2 p.m.

Tickets from \$25 to \$225

For more information, log onto www.dallasopera.org