



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Kennet Opera
Production : The Magic Flute
Date : Friday 22nd November 2019
Venue : Arlington Arts - Newbury
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I was absolutely delighted to be invited to Kennet Opera's The Magic Flute as they celebrated 25 years of performing opera in Newbury. In this difficult economic climate it is a credit to them that they have grown in stature going from strength to strength.

This was a knockout performance funny, warm lively and energetic. There were some superb characterisations, outstanding singing and fine acting.

The director had given the production a modern take setting it in a holiday camp complete with bluecoats, a boiler man and Sarastro as the camp owner. Tamino's travelling companion Papageno was a zoo keeper and the spirits sea cadets. Every aspect of his vision worked giving it a fresh and original look.

Robert Felstead – (Terry Tamino) – As the dashing hero off on an adventure to save the princess this young man was superb! I so enjoyed his "Tarzanesque" crocodile fight it set the tone for the rest of the performance. His reaction to the three Ladies was aptly comical and his anxious meeting with Dame Regina-Knightly similarly amusing. I so liked the way he looked longingly with doe eyes at Pamina on their first encounter. He has the most superb tenor voice which made all his numbers engagingly alluring.

Tamsin Slatter – (Lady Jessica)

Alex Merckx – (Lady Joanna)

Susan Moore – (Lady Jemima) – As the mysterious ladies doing the bidding of Dame Regina-Knightly these three were fabulous. Although I would have liked Lady Jemima to have been visually more animated (she also had a tendency to keep looking at the MD rather than joining in with the other two) they were a formidable trio. I really enjoyed their first encounter with Tamino and their efforts to get each other to leave thereby getting him to herself. Their voices blended brilliantly adding greatly to all their numbers.

Luke Deacon – (Pablo Papageno) – I was enamoured with this young man. For me he had absolutely everything being quirky funny and endearing! His character, acting and singing were outstanding and his interaction with the other characters superlative.

Hanna Dobra – (Dame Regina-Knightly) – This young lady had the most amazing voice making for a truly sublime performance. Looking stunning she made good use of hand gestures and body language which enhanced her character no end.

Rachel Crisp – (Pamina Regina-Knightly) – I liked the character portrayed by this young lady. She was radiant and bright and sparkled throughout the performance. She had a super rapport with Tamino reacting coyly and skittishly to his attentions. Her beautiful soprano voice soared effortlessly in her solos and her expressive visuals enhanced her vocals fabulously.

Cathy Black – (Dib 1)

Helen Maguire – (Dib 2)

Clare Kirk – (Dob) – This trio was certainly divergent guiding Tamino and Papageno along their dangerous path. They were vivid spirited and energetic singing with good expression. Their voices weaved a melodious union with clear diction and exquisite harmonies.

Duncan Powell – (Costas Monostatos) – As the villain of the piece this actor was brilliant. I so enjoyed his lecherous characterisation. He had just the right amount of menace and intimidation which enhanced his performance no end. His solos were extremely well sung with excellent light and shade.

Don Crerar – (Len Senior Blue Coat)

Ant Goffart – (Bluecoat Bernard)

Adrian Slatter – (Bluecoat Eric) – These three minor characters were great; they had a fair amount to do and did so with great aplomb. They all had super singing voices and their solos came over quite brilliantly.

Lucy Fitt – (Pamela Papagena) – This young lady was absolutely joyous. She was lively peppy and animated. Her old lady was terrific fun complete with a crackly old voice. The rapport between her and Papageno was delightfully spontaneous and they made a fabulously bashful and awkward couple. Their duet “Pa pa pa” was a highlight of the evening.

James Mitchell – (Sidney Sarastro) – As the imposing entrepreneur owner of the holiday camp; wise and compassionate this actor was exceptional. His rich bass voice enhanced his singing adding to his charismatic depiction.

Kennet Opera Chorus – This chorus was absolutely glorious. Their singing was outstanding and they kept the characters they had been given famously. I would have liked a little more visual animation from some members; however this did not detract from their overall achievement.

Jim Petts – (Stage Director) – This director really knows his craft. He produced a fresh fun and highly entertaining piece of theatre. He gave the characters an original take and their relationships were amusing captivating and engrossing. Staging was cleverly devised with excellent use of the T shaped walkway and the well to stage left for use by the chorus. He created well contrived entrances and exits by using the space behind the orchestra as well as the auditorium door. This really was a superbly directed original performance, one which the audience enjoyed immensely. You really did deserve the calls of “Bravo” received at the end.

Justin Bindley – (Music Director) – This MD has worked wonders with this society. His direction of principals and chorus has been tremendous boosting their confidence and working on diction and dynamics. He clearly encouraged the soloists to act their numbers through the lyrics thereby bringing the characters to life. The off stage singing was skilfully conducted with

the cast sounding inviting and pleasing. Under his direction this superb orchestra accompanied the singers sympathetically never overpowering yet always effective and energetic.

Suzanne Thomson – (Set Designer) – I have to be honest and say that this design really didn't do anything for me. However the cast were so good that they completely took the attention away from it. I also note that she said the structure was there to emanate light and thank goodness the lighting technician was able to do this.

John Heywood – (Stage Manager) – with DSM **Sam Spaak** With no scene changes this pair really only had to be on hand in the event of any mishaps. However they made sure that the cast were able to get on and off stage unhindered.

Vicky Allen – (Lighting/Sound) – This technician absolutely excelled with this lighting plot! Having nothing to light but a geometric shape made of 3x2 wood attached to the back wall either side of the T shape walk way and a third standing shape on the walk way; what she achieved was nothing short of miraculous. How she angled her lights to catch the wood I do not know. The colours she used were interesting and vibrant and really did enhance the production no end. I particularly liked the red and blue used for Tamino and Pamina as they walked through fire and water. Congratulations! Sound was extremely well balanced and the sound effects worked brilliantly loud enough to be audible yet completely unobtrusive.

Phil Hallam/John Heywood/Chris Moore – (Set Build) – The three geometric shapes were robust and had been sturdily built.

Gay Buchanan/Sam Roscoe – (Props) – All props were perfect for their use. I liked the holiday camp banner which looked great. The crocodile was fab and I loved the way he shot on to attack Tamino. Papageno's nets and pipes, plates of food, drinks, chairs, the noose, and of course most importantly the magic flute and bells! All exactly right.

Helen Ryan – (Costume Design) – There were a variety of costumes not necessarily all from the same era; yet they really worked for the characters. There were men's suits blue jackets for the blue coats, 1940's clothes for the 3 Ladies, peasant costumes for the chorus, a safari shirt and shorts for Papageno, a lavish evening frock for the queen, an old boiler suit for Monostatos and I have to mention the bluecoats bathing suits. For the most part shoes and accessories coordinated well with the costumes; however; I did note a couple of pairs of shoes that looked out of place. **Helen** was ably assisted by **Julia Radbourne/Tamsin Slatter**

Deanna Ellington – (Makeup Design) – Although there was no special requirements makeup had been well applied emphasising and highlighting the actors' features. With the cast so close to the audience I was pleased to note that it was not so heavy as to make us aware they were actually wearing makeup.

Mike Merchant/Don Crerar – (Programme) – This society always produces a good looking programme which is interesting and informative. The quality was excellent with glossy paper, a good size font and fine print.

Jim Needham/Christine Crerar/Bill Bateman/Karen Cameron-Taylor/Phillipa Harper –
(Front of House) – This team was well dressed noticeable and friendly. They mingled with the audience chatting and making sure they catered for all their needs.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13