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Society : Kennet Opera
Production : La Cenerentola
Date : Wednesday 9th November 2016
Venue : Arlington Arts - Newbury
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I was delighted to be asked to review Kennet's latest offering of this Rossini Cinderella opera. It had been well cast with some exceptional performances by both principals and chorus. It was great fun and no one died!

Katherine Cooper – (Cinderella) – I so enjoyed this young lady's performance. She is a skilful actress and this gave her character real credibility. Her eyes were big bright and expressive adding to her animated vivacious facial expressions. The timbre of her mezzo voice was delightfully rounded and mellow and I enjoyed every moment of her singing.

Robin Whitehouse – (Prince Ramiro) – This was an adept and polished performance. He has the most wonderful singing voice rich and effortless. Though not a natural actor he was most at ease when singing with Cinderella.

Shaun Aquilina – (Dandini – Ramiro's Valet) – Oh my word! How I enjoyed this young man's outstanding performance. He was dashing suave and debonair; with such an engaging smile and wicked twinkle in his eye, you just had to watch him wherever he was on stage. I absolutely adored his mellifluous baritone voice and could have listened to him all evening.

Julie van Haperen – (Clorinda – Cinderella's Sister)

Tamsin Slatter – (Tisbe – Cinderella's Sister) – These two worked extremely well together squabbling pushing and shoving; constantly trying to outdo each other. Characterisations were flirty lively and vital. They both had fine singing voices which blended well and had good diction. There were times when I would have liked more projection from Tisbe and on occasion she appeared a little insecure on her entries. However they looked every bit the part and gave truly creditable performances.

Don Crerar – (Don Magnifico – Cinderella's Stepfather) – This was a caricature performance which was so over the top it was brilliant. He played the buffoon with natural ease connecting with the audience and drawing them into his world. His facial expressions were sublime and his timing impeccable. He used his toupee to great effect making it highly amusing. His singing was strong confident and tuneful.

James Mitchell – (Alidoro – Court Magician) – As an integral character to the plot this was a well delineated characterisation. He commanded the stage and created an aura of mystique. His fine bass voice was expressive clear and audible.

Chorus – I was so impressed with this small chorus, they have grown in stature year on year and under the direction of this musical director they were quite literally superb! Their singing was clear and audible with some great harmonies impeccable diction and confident entries. The ladies as fairies were mischievously animated smiling the while; whilst their movement was flighty and playful. The gents as courtiers were staid and dignified. The ladies then took on the role of maids (I so liked the cook) completely changing their persona proving not only can they sing but also act through the music and lyrics. It was also notable that each member of the cast knew every word! Their entrances and exits were smooth and natural with no queuing into the wings. Well done chorus!

Dancers – What a joy these four young ladies were to watch! Their foot work was neat and precise with lovely extensions into excellently arched points. Their arms were soft flowing and delightfully balletic. The execution of their moves was graceful fluent and rhythmic as they acted and smiled their way through the routines. The three that danced en pointe are to be commended for their proficient accomplished and effortless performance.

Maximilian Fane – (Musical Director) – This young man must have worked so hard with both principals and chorus to achieve such a high standard of musical performance. He had ensured inflection intonation pitch diction and projection were prominent in all numbers. Solos and ensemble numbers were packed with expression and in depth feeling. The orchestra were super and he had absolute control over them so they accompanied the singers without overpowering.

Stan Pretty – (Stage Director) – What a stunning piece of theatre Stan created! It is clear that he was passionate about the performance; and he brought his vision to life. He had given principals and chorus excellent direction on their characters and ensured they maintained these throughout. He brought out the humour and encouraged the actors to engage with the audience. His staging was spot on with good groupings and spacing. I liked the way he utilised the front entrances which added another dimension to the performance. This truly was an artistic triumph!

Cathy Black/Felicity Merchant – (Producers) – This pair obviously work well together and sharing the load must have made this thankless task a little easier. Putting together a production of this magnitude and ensuring the smooth running is a massive challenge, however they did a sterling job and everything happened seamlessly. I'm sure the stage director must have been extremely pleased with the outcome.

Suzanne Thomson – (Stage Designer) – I so liked the “Once upon a Time” book that took centre stage it really gave the whole performance a fairy tale feel. (Wouldn't it have been brilliant if; when it came back in the finale act 2 it had read “The End”) The rest of the set was simple yet effective; with the focal point being the fireplace which really took the eye. I liked the fact it was utilised in the palace by reversing one side with a super art deco design. Having the sister's rooms either side of the stage was a great idea, although where I was sat to one side of the auditorium I found it difficult to see in the window my side. Could the scenery have been flattened out a little further perhaps? However it created the right effect maximised the acting area and had plenty of entrances.

Colin Eales – (Stage Manager) – with DSM **Shirley Bergin** This pair along with the crew certainly had their work cut out. Unfortunately on the evening of my visit there were several incidents that needed attention. The fire place would not hook on, chairs were left in fire places and a brace became detached falling toward the stage. All of which I am sure was rectified for the ensuing performances. I would like to have seen a little more urgency when changing the scenes as they looked slow and laborious and slowed the action.

Vicky Allen – (Lighting Design/Operator) – The colours this young lady chose for her plot were warm and created a great ambience. I really liked the yellow and blue hues which appeared to wash the flats giving them a golden glow. The chandelier looked fabulous and really added a 30's feel to the palace set. When we moved to the garden I liked the use of the tree gobo projected to the rear which gave the impression of space and depth.

Tim Allen (Leader)/Chris Moore/Hanna Trout/Jim Needham/Colin Eales – (Set Build) – The fire place was superb having been well built sturdy and solid. The side flats however looked rather warped and wobbly which meant when the palace panels were hooked on they did not lay flush against the flat. This was a great shame as it made you want to lean over in order to straighten them out. The story book on the other hand had been expertly made focusing on ease of movement.

Gay Buchanan/Harriet Wilson – (Props) – From the wands and ladle to the gigantic pencil the props had been thought about to give authenticity yet create a fun element into the action. Furniture and shrubs looked quite at home in their surroundings blending seamlessly into the set.

Claire Bowden/Jane Scholl/West Berks Ballet School – (Choreography) – Ballet is my absolute favourite genre of dance and the routines choreographed here were superb. The use of every accent and nuance in the music was outstanding. These were first rate pieces choreographed by a highly accomplished choreographer.

Lili Tuttle – (Director of Costumes) – assisted by **Grant Wheatley** – Setting the action in the 1930's (one of my favourite costume periods) gave this young lady the chance to pull out all the stops. The costumes were authentic to the period; and although the chorus had simple tunics on which they were able to add accessories, the sister's costumes were bright and garish as befitted the characters. I liked the naval feel of the Prince and Dandini and Alidoro's cloak was wizardly in its look. I would have liked Cinderella to have looked a little more shabby chic but nonetheless her frock captured the essence of the character and I loved her posh frock an stole!

Elisabete Santos/Nikki Rogers/Hannah Trout – (Makeup) – This had been well applied and looked totally natural. The sister's makeup was great with heavy eye shadow and bright lipstick.

Mike Merchant/Don Crerar – (Programme) – I found this programme effective and informative. It had been well laid out using a good font which was easy to read and the photos were clear and focused.

Bill Bateman/Karen Cameron-Taylor/Justine Fry – (Front of House) – This front of house team were smart and easily identifiable. They made the audience feel welcome being friendly and chatty.

Thank you

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