

Don Giovanni



Baritone Zachary Altman as Don Giovanni.
Photo: Pat Kirk.

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Mozart's "Don Giovanni" at Opera San Jose

The strange duality of Mozart's "Don Giovanni" is revealed in the overture when dark, low chords and notes are immediately countered with flighty upper register tweets. It is a kind of a call and response hinting at the conundrum of the tragi-comic. This rendering of the legendary lothario Don Giovanni (the Spaniard Don Juan) reveals him as a compulsive, amoral user who insatiably seduces women of all ages, social standings, body types and degrees of attractiveness. Mozart's "Don Giovanni" is comedy framed with vile, often violent behavior perpetrated by almost every character who themselves are ridiculously unobservant, devious and downright stupid. What a play, what fun!



Baritone Eugene Brancoveanu as Leporello.
Photo: Pat Kirk.

Don Giovanni's man Leporello (on opening night, the masterful, entertaining and mellifluous baritone **Eugene Brancoveanu**— as usual at Opera San Jose two casts alternate) kicks off the action with the quick-witted humor typical of the comic opera servant. Within seconds, the scene opens up to reveal a bedroom where a masked, bare-chested Don Giovanni (tall, physically fit, well-sung baritone **Zachary Altman**) storms in followed by the desperate, clutching Donna Anna (the soaring soprano

Cecilia Violetta López). Don Giovanni is through with her and wants to depart, but when she momentarily leaves the room, the woman's father, the Commendatore (the always excellent **Silas Elash**), attacks him with a sword and gets slain for his trouble. Giovanni and Leporello flee.



Baritone Zachary Altman as Don Giovanni and soprano Cecilia Violetta López as Donna Anna.
Photo by Pat Kirk.

With his character and the situation established, Don Giovanni proceeds through the show with reckless abandon, dismissing a former lover, the angry, stolid Donna Elvira (powerful mezzo **Nicole Birkland**), seducing the young bride-to-be Zerlina (coquettish, winsome soprano **Kindra Scharich**), fending off the jealous groom, Masetto (fiery, Byronic baritone **Daniel Scofield**), who simmers in anger. Donna Anna, now revealed as false and manipulative, begs her fiancé Don Ottavio (tenor **James Callon**) to avenge her father and he, the loyal lover, pledges to do so.



Mezzo-soprano Nicole Birkland as Donna Elvira.
Photo: Pat Kirk.

Throughout the opera there is much comedy, often absurd, such as when Don Giovanni and Leporello change coats and hats and pretend to be each other for purposes of seduction. And there is a moment of touching tenderness in Zerlina's second act aria in which she promises to heal with love the wounds Masetto received from a beating at the hands Don Giovanni. Comedy ceases at the final reckoning when the stone statue of the Commendatore summons Don Giovanni to hell and the principals unite in a chorus saying essentially, he got what he deserved.

An opera lives or dies on the singing and in this San Jose Opera production the singing is in turns exquisite, powerful, emotional and nuanced. The opera orchestra under the baton of **George Cleve** performs the score with expert vigor. Visually, the production is a delight. **Annie Smart's** set, lit by **Jennifer Tipton**, is clever and quickly changes from interiors to exteriors with a flying wall and hinged flats that turn back on themselves. There is the de rigueur balcony and a raked platform upstage with arched flats that suggest a colonnade with a diminishing perspective all painted in textured and muted earth tones. Costumes coordinated by **Alyssa Oania** are rich, colorful and period appropriate.

“Don Giovanni” runs through May 4 at the California Theatre in Downtown San Jose.

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