

The Magic Flute



Opera San José resident artist Kirk Dougherty as "Tamino" encounters a dragon in "The Magic Flute" playing April 18 through May 3 at the California Theatre, San Jose.

Photo: Pat Kirk

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"The Magic Flute" at Opera San José

In Opera San José's splendid new production of Mozart's "The Magic Flute," the lengthy overture is enlivened with a delightful kind of pre-show with children playing, dancing and acting out on a small raked stage in a theatre-within-a-theatre complete with a false proscenium, perhaps the private theatre of a high-ranking nobleman, much like the Royal Opera of Versailles. As the overture ends, the children are hustled off and the dramatic action begins, an opera-within-an-opera. Under the inspired hand of director Brad Dalton, all aspects of this production are thoughtfully and deliberately presentational in the most theatrical, delightfully self-conscious manner, a concept that works wonderfully with the opera's theme of fantasy magic. The entire cast is alert and playing to the hilt moment-to-moment. No "park and bark" performances here.

At its core, "The Magic Flute" is a love story played out on two social levels, that of Tamino (handsome, golden-voiced tenor Kirk Dougherty), a prince, and Papageno (adorable, baritone comedian, Matthew Hanscom), official bird catcher of the Queen of

the Night (thrilling coloratura-soprano, Isabel Ivy). The plot is essentially a simple one, complicated by a plethora of characters and incidents with an overlay of pseudo-Egyptian mysticism.



Opera San José guest artist Jennie Litster as “Papagena,” with Opera San José resident artist Matthew Hanscom as “Papageno,” in “The Magic Flute” playing April 18 through May 3 at the California Theatre, San Jose.

Photo: Pat Kirk

Pursued by a fire-breathing serpent, Tamino is knocked unconscious while being rescued by a trio of wand-wielding Ladies (the powerful team of Elizabeth Baldwin, Chloe Smart, and Lisa Chavez), who are attendants to the Queen of the Night. After the Ladies leave, Papageno enters, laments his lack of a ladylove and, looking for advantage, takes credit for the rescue when Tamino awakes. When the Ladies return, they chastise the birdman and padlock his lying mouth. The Ladies then show Tamino a locket-portrait of the Queen’s daughter, Pamina (the stunning soprano Hae Ji Chang

in a flawless performance), with whom he falls instantly in love. Tamino, Pamina and Papageno reach their romantic destinies by going through death-threatening trials at the behest of the mystic ruler Sarastro (the always impressive basso, Silas Elash), which will lead them from darkness to light and wisdom.



Opera San Jose guest artist Hae Ji Chang as "Pamina" in "The Magic Flute" playing April 18 through May 3 at the California Theatre, San Jose.
Photo: Pat Kirk

There is much more plot and more characters, of course, as well as an opera chorus of twenty-nine, and six child supernumeraries who dance (choreography by Lisa la Cour). An opera needs a villain and tenor David Margulis scores as Sarastro's treacherous toady, Monostatos. Soprano Jennie Litster delights as Papageno's perfect match, Papagena. Special mention must be made for the three disciplined young sopranos who play the child-spirits called "Genies" that appear again and again in this production singing out strong and clear. They are Chris Salinas, Daniel Ostrom and Winter Felton-Priestner.



Opera San Jose guest artists Chris Salinas as "The First Genie," Daniel Ostrom as "The Second Genie", with Winter Felton-Priestner as "The Third Genie," in "The Magic Flute" playing April 18 through May 3 at the California Theatre, San Jose.

Photo: Pat Kirk

The production is brilliantly conceived and mounted. The set design by Ryan McGettigan is filled with visual surprises, with nods to baroque-rococo and Egyptian, as well as with modern electric flourishes. David Lee Cuthbert's lighting fully supports the concepts and goes far in reinforcing mood and mystery. Alyssa Oania's rococo costume design is simply sumptuous and the wigs and makeup designed by Vicky Martinez complete the look.

Opera San Jose's "Magic Flute" revels in artifice, reaches out to the audience and pulls it in with joyous comedy, thrilling singing, visual splendor and manages to tug at the heartstrings, nevermore so than when Ms. Chung sang "Ach, ich fühl's, es ist verschwunden" ("Ah, I feel it, it has disappeared") when Pamina feels that Tamino has abandoned her. A quiet aria, but, oh, so touching.

"The Magic Flute" runs through May 3 at the California Theatre in Downtown San Jose.

Special Note: Opera San José will present a very special event, the Irene Dalis Memorial Concert on May 16 at 8pm. The concert will feature arias and ensembles performed by over twenty current and former members of Opera San José's resident

company, accompanied by the Opera San José Orchestra and Chorus. Tickets are \$25 – \$200 and can be purchased online at www.operasj.org or by calling the box office at 408.437.4450. A complete list of performers can be found at: www.operasj.org/tickets/irene-dalis-memorial-concert.

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