



OPERAVILLE

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2018

A Tasty Abduction



Michael Dailey as Pedrillo, Ashraf Sewailam as Osmin. All photos by Pat Kirk.

Mozart's Abduction from the Seraglio

Opera San Jose

September 15, 2018

This is not one of those productions that you would call earth-shattering or revolutionary. But Opera San Jose has put together a performance of Mozart's 1782 singspiel full of sage, finally balanced touches, allowing the finer points of a lesser-known work to come through.

The danger of going too broadly with Mozart's comedies is that they're cluttered up with all this brilliant music (damn, you, Amadeus!). Stage director Michael Shell has done an excellent job of picking his spots for tomfoolery, and the production further protects its musical assets by sticking to German for the singing, with spoken dialogues in

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ABOUT ME



 MICHAEL J. VAUGHN

Michael J. Vaughn is the author of seventeen novels, including The

English. The combination creates an interesting effect, a certain sense of relief when the dialogues begin and one can take a rest from the supertitles. The English also allows a bit of improvisation with the libretto. The Pasha psyches himself up for a meeting with his new British wife by quoting SNL's classic Stuart Smalley skit ("...and by Allah, people like me!"). Later, a confusing discussion of the escape route turns into a Gilbert & Sullivan patter.



Matthew Grills as Belmonte, Rebecca Davis as Konstanze.

The 1930s update doesn't really change much, but it does allow Ulises Alcala to dive into that wonderful period of fashion (notably Konstanze's gorgeous Act I blue sparkledress) and to deploy one divine Middle Eastern fabric after another. Steven C. Kemp had some serious fun, too, covering his minarets and castle walls with amazing regional patterns. His Act II garden, festooned with topiary, tulips and ivy, received its own ovation, and his spinning scaffolding earned some applause as well. Pamela Z. Gray toned down her lighting whenever a character went internal, which created an intriguing psychological effect.

At this point, the singers in my audience may be asking, "Hey! What about us?" To which your average lighting designer or stage manager (Darlene Miyakawa) would say, "Ha! Now, you know how it feels."

In a sense, Shell's primary comic weapon is Michael Dailey, an OSJ veteran who acts as a sparkplug whenever he's onstage. Playing Pedrillo, an expatriate gardener in love with the British captive Blonde, Dailey gives an upbeat and antic performance, serving as a kind of Figaro as he manipulates the proceedings.

Popcorn Girl and Billy Saddle. His poetry has appeared in more than 100 journals, and he works as a competitions judge for Writer's Digest. He lives in San Jose, and plays drums for the San Francisco rock band Exit Wonderland.

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Bass Ashraf Sewailam provided an excellent villain/oaf as the caretaker Osmin, particularly as the booze and sleeping potion had its way with him in Act Two. The simplest little hip-twitch or eye-roll had the operistas all atwitter. It was also thrilling to listen as he went down the impressive bass-clef elevators provided by Wolfgang. Tenor Matthew Grills created an affably insecure Belmonte (sort of a Matthew Broderick vibe), and deployed a supremely well-balanced tone, particularly the warm sustenatos of his opening aria, "Hier soll ich dich denn sehen."

Katrina Galka is an out-and-out delight as Blonde. In the well-known battle aria with Osmin, "Durch Zärtlichkeit und Schmeicheln," her soprano flew freely, her coloratura climbing so high I wished I had a pitch-pipe handy to gauge what I was hearing.



Michael Dailey as Pedrillo, Katrina Galka as Blonde.

The most anticipated singer was Rebecca Davis, a resident artist at OSJ in 2008. She portrayed Konstanze with a statuesque presence and lovely swelling phrases. But what really brought out her talent was “Marten aller Arten,” Konstanze’s passionate rejoinder to the Pasha’s odd combination of threats and wooing. The scene demands ferocity, a bit of lightning in the voice, and Davis delivered in spades.

As Pasha Selim, Nathan Stark gave us the expected arrogance and force, but also a surprising warmth. The most touching moment of the evening is when he admits that a woman has never quite had this effect on him. Shell uses Stark’s good looks to imply that Konstanze might, despite her devotion to Belmonte, have a bit of a thing for the Pasha, and also uses his Orson Welles laugh for great comic effect.

Through September 30, California Theater, 345 S. First Street, San Jose. \$55-\$155. 408/437-4450, www.operasj.org.

Michael J. Vaughn is a novelist and painter, author of [Operaville](#) and [Gabriella’s Voice](#).

POSTED BY MICHAEL J. VAUGHN AT 11:21 AM

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