



Peninsula Reviews

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Opera San Jose — Die Fledermaus

by Sarah Morris

September 17, 2019



Vienna in the 19th century was having a love affair with the waltz, and Johann Strauss II's 1874 operetta (a pre-cursor to today's musical) satisfied this desire in an excellent way. Having learned from his conductor/composer father, Strauss II knew exactly how to employ his techniques as a serious composer and how to incorporate the dance tunes of the day into his works.

Act I opens with a fun scrim of a newspaper clipping intended to be read by the audience to give them background on the wide number of characters they're about to meet, created by set designer, Charlie Smith. The scrim gives way to the Klimt-style home of Mr. and Mrs. Eisenstein, and the action begins. The number of characters and the farcical nature of their relationships is quite dizzying at times, but by the end of the first act, Elena Galván as Adele, Maria Natale as Rosalinde and Eugene Brancoveanu as von Eisenstein are the clear main characters all hoping for a secret bit of fun at the expense of each other. The trio 'Oh dear, oh dear, how sorry I am' is acted brilliantly by all three. Robyn Tribuzi's choreography in this song is gleeful and witty, a sneak-peek of much more to come in the dazzling second act. The short trumpet solo was particularly of note, played with a lovely, dark tone.

The party in Act II was the perfect chance for conductor Michael Morgan to exult the Waltzes, Polkas and Galops (think the Can-Can) of the day. Morgan's command of the orchestra, deftly taking the quick tempo changes by the reins, was clearly observable. Galván's playful rendition of 'My Lord Marquis' may have been the highlight of the act, with the coloratura soprano skillfully executing the formidable aria. Stephanie Sanchez made her company debut in the pants role (a male part

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sung by a woman- a real treat for audiences of the day) of Prince Orlofsky and was strong, as was Brian James Myer's Dr. Falke. Natale's controlled rage towards her husband throughout this act was palpable- even behind a mask!

Act III was absolutely stolen by Nathan Stark as Frank, the jail warden. His faux drunken state was absolutely gut-busting and the audience loved every minute of it. Mason Gates as Dr. Blind was yet another great moment of hilarity in this act, only topped by Brancoveanu, playing Dr. Blind complete with a purposefully horrendous wig. There was a moment when it seemed Brancoveanu almost broke character when imitating Dr. Blind's lisp, he was enjoying himself so much. The whole cast seemed to immediately gel in this first production of the season and entertained themselves as well as the audience. What an exuberant way for Opera San José to open their season!

Performances remaining: September 19, 22, 27 & 29

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