

Arts



Review: 'Die Fledermaus'

Opera San Jose takes on Strauss' a bright and bubbly bourgeoisie farce
 September 18, 2019 by Tad Malone



FABERGÉ FARCE: The upper crust of Viennese society fumbles through first-world problems in 'Die Fledermaus.'

Opera San Jose's newest production, *Die Fledermaus*, is a delightfully fun and breezy romp that exemplifies the company's consistent standard of excellence.

The Strauss classic has its origins in a farce by German playwright Julius Roderich Benedix. French playwrights Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halevy took notice and staged their own adaptation, *Le Reveillon*—French for "supper party." Soon after, *Le Reveillon* was translated into German by Karl Haffner. The German version found its way to playwright Richard Genee and Strauss, who composed the libretto and score, respectively.

The opera premiered on April 5, 1874, at Vienna's Theater an der Wien. Since then, it has not only been a staple of the theater's repertoire but has grown in

reputation, becoming one of the most popular operas ever produced.

Opera San Jose's adaptation opens on an upper-crust Austrian apartment, where consummate man-about-town von Eisenstein (Eugene Brancoveanu) has found himself in a bit of a pickle. Eisenstein was planning to attend Austrian Prince Orlofsky's annual New Year's Eve Party. However, a recent altercation that ended with Eisenstein punching a police officer in the face has thrown a wrench in the works.

A true reveler, Eisenstein decides to attend the forte, consequences be damned. Flouting the law and lying to his wife—so that he may attend the bash with his friend, Dr. Falke (Brian James Myer), instead of her—he heads to the party.

Eisenstein's wife, Rosalinde (Maria Natale), is wise to her husband's game, so she disguises herself as a Hungarian countess and follows them to the ball. Meanwhile, on the other side of town, the couple's maid, Adele (Elena Galvan), also lies to get out of work so that she may attend the party. She, in turn, disguises herself as a Russian actress named Olga.

A textbook farce follows. There are multiple instances of mistaken identity, and Eisenstein unwittingly attempts to seduce his own wife. Yet somehow, after the party is over and the new year has been rung in, everyone walks away in a better, happier place.

Opera San Jose hits it out of the park, revelling in the hilarity and preposterous premise as the cast moves from one opulent, high-ceilinged room to another. As usual, the sets are both florid and spare, capturing both the opulence and vacuousness of the bourgeoisie. The same goes for the costume design. While in a sense, it's the standard late-Victorian haute couture, there is enough

pomp and color to distinguish the world of *Die Fledermaus* as one of exclusivity and privilege.

The cast is lively and compelling, and makes the characters memorable. Brancoveanu's Eisenstein is brash and witty, with a voice to match. Natale as Rosalinde is equally charming, but with an elusiveness that effectively captures her character's particular situation. As Dr. Falke, Mayer has the perfect supporting presence. The ensembles dance through the show with aplomb, exuding a festive energy.

Oddly, the least impressive aspect of Opera San Jose's *Die Fledermaus* is the score. Though all the actors hit their notes without missing a mark, the music itself is rather ambiguous, flowing from one scale to another, leaving less of an impression than a bad aftertaste.

Ultimately, Opera San Jose's *Die Fledermaus* hits all the right notes, expertly organizing chaos into excitement, ludicrousness into delightful absurdity.

Die Fledermaus

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