

***Magic Flute* at CIM:
chatting with the Queen of the Night,
Papageno, and Pamina**

by Mike Telin



Here's a story: a young prince named Tamino finds himself lost in a far-off land being pursued by a snake, and he faints. Three ladies, attendants of the Queen of the Night — who is seeking revenge against the high priest Sarastro — appear and kill the snake. After arguing about which of them should stay with the handsome Tamino, they leave. Tamino wakes up just as Papageno, a bird catcher who dresses like a bird, enters and complains that he has no wife — he also takes credit for killing the snake.

The three ladies reappear and put a padlock over his mouth to remind him that it is not good to tell lies.

Before leaving they give Tamino a portrait of Pamina — the daughter of the Queen of the Night — who has been kidnaped by Sarastro. In an instant, he falls in love. Thus the stage is set for one of the most beloved operas of all time: *The Magic Flute*.

On Wednesday, February 26 at 7:30 pm in Kulas Hall, Cleveland Institute of Music Opera Theater will present Mozart's popular opera. Directed by Dean Southern, the cast includes baritone Dylan Glenn as Papageno, soprano Siyeon Kim as Pamina, and coloratura soprano Mengqi Gao as the Queen of the Night. Harry Davidson will lead the Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra. The production will be sung in German with English supertitles. Performances will continue on Friday, February 28 at 7:30 pm, and Sunday, March 1 at 2:00 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

We spoke with Mengqi Gao, Dylan Glenn, and Siyeon Kim and asked them to share their thoughts about the characters, the production, and Mozart's score.

Mengqi Gao (China) is a second-year master's student studying with Mary Schiller.

Mike Telin: Your character, the Queen of the Night, is a little angry.

Mengqi Gao: She wants revenge on Sarastro. It all stems from the fact that when her husband passed away, he gave the temple and all the power to him. I think the reason she didn't get that power is that she is a woman. And she wants her daughter Pamina to kill Sarastro so she can get it back.

MT: What is her relationship with Tamino?

MG: I think she just wants to use him to save her daughter from Sarastro.

MT: Your character is at her angriest when she sings the famous aria "Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen." It's full of emotion and high Fs.

MG: It is really difficult. There are a lot of details but the coaches have been very helpful with how to deal with the musical phrases and to be aware of what Mozart wanted the music to convey. It helps that Mr. Davidson has given me a very good tempo.

MT: Is this an aria you've wanted to sing?

MG: Yes, but I never thought that I would be able to sing it, and I was surprised when my teacher told me that I had the voice to do it. I have the coloratura, but I didn't think my voice was big enough. When I auditioned and got the role, it was kind of a dream.

I'm so thankful my teacher recommended that I learn the aria. I've been at CIM for almost two years, and at first my vocal range was not as high as you need for the aria. I didn't have the high F, but now I can hit the F. I really appreciate all that Dr. Schiller has done for me.

MT: Are you enjoying the rehearsals?

MG: Yes! I'm getting a lot from the rehearsals, which is helping to make the aria even more perfect. And Dr. Southern is doing so many interesting things with the staging. It's a fun opera and I think it's going to be a very good production.

Dylan Glenn (Utah) is a second-year master's student studying with Clifford Billions.

Mike Telin: Papageno is so much fun. But who is he and what drives him?

Dylan Glenn: He is Tamino's sidekick, but I also think of him as a character foil for Tamino as well. Tamino is an elevated figure of royal descent. But Papageno — he even says this about himself — is a child of nature. He is the representation of the everyman. In every way, he is the antithesis of Tamino.

His needs are very basic and I think for that reason, people gravitate towards him. In a way, he represents all the things that we want: a simple life and to be loved.

MT: But Papageno has his complications, like telling the truth.

DG: Yes, he tends to get in his own way in pursuit of the things he wants.

MT: It must be fun to get to walk around with a bird cage, a flute, and bells.

DG: It is. The pan flute plays heavily into the story and into the music. In some productions that part is played in the orchestra, with a pantomime on stage. In our production, we're playing the parts onstage which creates a unique sense of immediacy. The birdcage adds an interesting physical, comic element to all of it.

It's interesting that from the first moment that we meet him, he talks about his desire to capture a pretty little wife for himself. This is at the forefront of his motivation. It pops up all over in the dialogue. He's looking for someone to love him, and at the end he finds someone who is perfectly suited for him in every imaginable way. It's clear that he and Papagena are intended to be together.

MT: Do you have a favorite aria?

DG: How to choose? In terms of emotional expression, it's the suicide aria. It shows Papageno at his most vulnerable. It conveys the depth of his feelings, which he doesn't always make clear. And because he is the only person onstage, he speaks directly to the audience. Even if it isn't played up, the fourth wall is broken.

MT: Have you performed the role before?

DG: I did a condensed version in English. It was in a small summer program right after I graduated high school. That was so many years ago and probably before I had any business singing any of this. It's been wonderful to come full circle after a myriad of musical experiences. It's always interesting to revisit a character that you haven't spent time with for a while.

MT: Do you see him differently now?

DG: I do. I think it's very easy to make Papageno a farce, to turn him into a comedic device. He is funny and he makes people laugh, but I think rooting that in honesty and sincerity makes him more believable and more enjoyable for the audience.

Siyeon Kim (South Korea) is a second-year artist diploma student of Mary Schiller.

Mike Telin: Pamina is stuck in the middle of many people's demands.

Siyeon Kim: Yes, she is. She absolutely loves her mother, but she is passive in her relationships with her, Tamino, and Sarastro. She cannot decide anything on her own until the very end of the opera. But this does make sense because a 15-year-old girl would be like that.

And the older characters are being harsh to her — Monostatos is trying to have his way with her, she's kidnapped by Sarastro, and Tamino doesn't talk to her. So many things are going on with her, but at the end she shows herself to be very strong, so maybe all of this makes her grow up.

MT: But Tamino — he is an odd guy.

SK: (laughing) Yeah, he falls in love with a picture of Pamina. When Papageno tells her that Tamino is in love with her, she says, "Love? He's never seen me."

MT: Are you having fun with the role?

SK: For sure. The music is so great and somehow I am comfortable playing the part of Pamina. Mozart has written everything in such an honest way. The music tells me where to walk, when I'm sad, when I'm happy, and when I'm frustrated.

MT: Are you enjoying your colleagues?

SK: Yes, they are so talented. What I like so much about CIM are my colleagues. They're just a great team and so nice. We've been together every single day for more than two months — opera is hard enough without having problems with your colleagues.

Dr. Southern is so creative. He works with you and doesn't tell you how to do everything. He lets me try things in different ways, we talk about which approach is better, and that makes me grow as an actor and as a singer. I'm so lucky to have him as

the director. And Mr. Davidson is so wonderful — I'm 100% sure that Mozart is his specialty.

MT: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

SK: Another great colleague is Rachel Glenn — she's covering the role of Pamina. We work on everything together. We help each other and discuss ideas about the character. And that has been so helpful.

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