

The Cleveland Opera to present Mozart's *Don Giovanni* April 7 & 8

by Mike Telin



Beginning with its production of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in 1989, the company formerly known as Opera Circle Cleveland has presented eight of the composer's musical dramas. This week, under the company's new name, [The Cleveland Opera](#) will complete their survey of the Mozart-Da Ponte operas with two performances of *Don Giovanni* on April 7 and 8 at 7:30 pm at First Baptist Church.

"Knowing the challenges the opera presents, we've always said that we would produce *Don Giovanni* later, but now is the time," executive artistic director Dorota Sobieska said during a telephone interview. "This is my favorite of the Da Ponte operas — the music is pure magic and it fits each character perfectly."

Based on the legends of Don Juan, the opera opens with Don Giovanni, an unabashed womanizer, sneaking into the bedroom of Donna Anna. When she screams, her father the Commendatore comes to her assistance. A fight ensues, and Don Giovanni escapes, leaving him for dead. With no sense of remorse, Giovanni is soon in pursuit of another woman.

Sobieska, who will perform the role of Donna Anna, said that she finds the opera's story to be all too familiar. "Throughout history, we have been at the mercy of people in power who don't take responsibility for their actions, and have no idea what problems they are causing for others. It's pretty much a continuous story. In fact, one of the most interesting things about the score is that it only places the opera in a city in Spain, it doesn't say which city or when. I like that because it shows that the story is universal."

Sobieska also enjoys the opera's complex characters, who she said can be portrayed differently depending on the production. "In one, Don Ottavio (played here by Kyle

Kelvington) can be brave, and in another, he can be a shy guy.”

It is her own character that Sobieska finds to be the most misunderstood. She noted that Donna Anna is often presented as a victim. “But she tells Don Ottavio to kill Don Giovanni (played here by Lawson Anderson), and no pious woman would ever say that. She is not evil, but she has a short fuse.”

With so many distinct personalities onstage, who is the opera’s central character? “To me it is Donna Elvira (Rachel Morrison). Although she’s often portrayed as Don Giovanni’s jilted, nagging wife, I think she is hurt. On one hand, she wants to warn the young women about him, but on the other hand, I’m not sure she isn’t sending a secret message letting them all know that he belongs to her.”

The cast will also include Nathan Baer as Leporello, Susan Fletcher as Zerlina, Christopher Aldrich as Masetto, and Adam E. Shimko as the Commendatore. Conductor Grzegorz Nowak will lead The Cleveland Opera orchestra and chorus.

“We have a very big chorus and they will be onstage a lot,” Sobieska said. “We’re still figuring out how to fit everyone in the sanctuary, but it’s exciting to see that so many people were interested in being part of the production and the creative process.”

In addition to the pit orchestra, the opera also calls for an onstage ensemble to play during the ballroom scene. “Musically this is a big undertaking, but we have a great conductor and fantastic musicians, so everything is going to be wonderful.”

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