

The Cleveland Opera: *Don Giovanni* at First Baptist Church (April 8)

by Robert Rollin



On Saturday night, April 8, The Cleveland Opera gave an outstanding performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at First Baptist Church in Shaker Heights. Despite the venue's awkward acoustics and lack of a pit for the sizeable orchestra, conductor Grzegorz Nowak led a well-balanced performance that allowed the singers to be heard clearly. The opera flowed beautifully through its many

intricate arias, recitatives, and ensembles, and all eight leads were in fine voice.

Baritone Lawson Alexander was terrific as Don Giovanni. His powerful, darkly-hued voice brought the character's callous licentiousness to life. Pacing was excellent during the famous duet "Là ci darem la mano," when Don Giovanni attempts to seduce the peasant girl Zerlina.

Bass Nathan Baer was outstanding as the servant Leporello, especially during the "Catalogue Aria," when he lists the womanizing title character's many "conquests" by country. Baer possesses a magnificent voice, although at times it was difficult to hear him over the thick accompaniment.

Soprano Dorota Sobieska sparkled as Donna Anna. Her light soprano floated beautifully in the highest range. She and her love interest Don Ottavio (sung by tenor Kyle Kelvington) skillfully negotiated their virtuosic



coloratura passages.

Rachel Morrison, as Donna Elvira, sang with a gorgeous full tone, as did fellow soprano Susan Fletcher, as Zerlina, while bass Christopher Aldrich depicted Masetto's peasant background with fine vocal color and strong delivery. Bass Adam E. Shimko, as the Commendatore, was vocally solid but lacked the dark timbre needed for the character.



The production made the best of the church setting, with much of the scenery left to the audience's imagination. Stage director Dorota Sobieska and costume designer Barbara Luce showed wonderful imagination in Don Giovanni's death scene, when dark demons dressed in black, winged costumes seemed to envelop him in his demise.

The opera's perennial popularity stems from the wonderful mix of comedy and melodrama, and from Mozart's magnificent music. All of these elements were performed to perfection.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 21, 2017.

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