

YSU Opera: Massenet's *Cendrillon* in Ford Theater (Apr. 22)

by Robert Rollin



Last Sunday afternoon the Youngstown State University Opera Department presented a workmanlike rendition of Jules Massenet's fairytale opera *Cendrillon* ("Cinderella") in Bliss Hall's Ford Theater. An outstanding cast of singers under production director Misook Yun, an excellent orchestra conducted by Hae-Jong Lee, solid stage direction by Gary Lehman, and Wendy Akers' fine costumes all contributed to an entertaining performance.

Henri Cain's libretto, after Perrault's 1698 fairytale version, emphasizes personality depiction sometimes at the expense of action. Still, frequent arias and ensembles supported by Massenet's beautiful music make the opera memorable. Though the pacing was excellent, Ford Auditorium's acoustics made it difficult to clearly distinguish the words, and challenging for the reduced orchestra to maintain balance.

As Fairy Godmother, soprano Francesca Sierra Molinaro led the cast with flair, sailing gracefully through her coloratura high range



and wonderful arpeggios. Act III's Second Tableau was absolutely stunning, beginning with Molinaro's lovely vocalise passages supported by the wordless humming of the quintet of Spirits, and moving seamlessly to text passages where she interacted with Cinderella and the Prince.



Baritone David Mouse made the role of Cinderella's well-meaning father Pandolfe come to life with strong singing and fine stage presence. His movements really seemed that of a middle-aged man and reflected his sensitivity to his daughter. His interesting vocal color was especially notable in the low range.

Mezzo-soprano Erika Walker used her dark and penetrating vocal color effectively to project the self-centered, aggressive personality of Madame de la Haltière. She and her haughty daughters open Act I as they prepare for the ball with the help of servants. Pandolfe remarks dejectedly that he pities Cinderella's lot and wonders why he left his quiet country home to marry a selfish countess with two selfish daughters.

As the daughters, Noémie and Dorothee, Sara Eckenrode and Brianna Crawford shadowed the countess throughout the opera in stylized fashion. Good singing and comic movement characterized their performances.

Soprano Lindsay Heavner sang with alluring timbre and projected Cinderella's simple sincerity. Her Act II and Act III duets with Prince Charming, tenor Emilio Santiago, were gorgeous, especially in their beautiful harmonies set in relief against attractive obligatos by principal oboe Kristen Thompson and principal flute Nadya Stratton.



Santiago's voice had uniformly fine quality in all ranges. Placing him in a wheelchair,



weakened by sadness and worry as he struggles to find Cinderella, was an interesting theatrical touch in Act IV. Awaiting the candidates trying the glass slipper, he sang dispiritedly against an entrancing low oboe solo.

Later, when the Fairy Godmother and five accompanying spirits enter to unite the lovers, Pandolfe, Madame de la Haltière, and her two daughters appear. All the protagonists, joined by the

consistently excellent chorus, expressed their exquisite joy at the happy ending.

Photos by Olivia Kuzma.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 30, 2018.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)