

CIM Opera Theater shines in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (Mar. 1)

by Mike Telin



Is there a more fun-filled, accessible opera than Mozart's *The Magic Flute*? Its classic fairy tale plot — good versus evil combined with a search for enlightenment and love — is timeless. Its characters are sympathetic, and it's filled with beautiful arias and catchy tunes that are certain to cause the most wonderful earworms long after you leave the theater.

There was so much to like about the Cleveland Institute of Music Opera Theater's new production of *The Magic Flute*, directed by Dean Southern, that it's difficult to know where to begin with the accolades. The opera was presented on February 26 and 28 and March 1 in CIM's Kulas

Hall. (I attended the final performance.)

The production, sung in German with German spoken dialogue and English supertitles, succeeded in no small part due to the vocal prowess and theatrical abilities of the young cast. Tenor Giwooung Kim embodied the handsome though sometimes daft prince Tamino. His delivery of "Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton" ("How strong is thy magic tone") during the finale of Act One was splendid.

Baritone Dylan Glenn, as Tamino's sidekick Papageno, brought an abundance of character to the role of the foolish bird catcher in search of a wife. Soprano Siyeon Kim, singing with clear diction and vocal flexibility, made for an innocent and appropriately confused Pamina. (When would she get to meet Tamino?) And singing with a rich, resonant tone, bass Daniel Fridley personified the enlightened Sarastro, whose actions are guided by principle and reason.

Other excellent performances included Brianna Nemback, Elise Pates, and Emma Nossem as the Three Ladies, attendants of the Queen of the Night, who were vocally splendid as well as comical in the opera's opening scene as they contemplated whether or not to abandon the unconscious Tamino.



Baritone Xiaoyang Zhang made the most of his role as the Speaker of the Temple, and soprano Jean Furman (*above*) was simply delightful in the role of Papagena, the would-be wife of the birdcatcher. Furman and Glenn outdid themselves during the famous “Pa-, pa-, pa-” aria.

Rounding out the supporting roles were Tyler Evatt-Young as Monostatos; Xiaoge Zhang, Jacqueline Schimpf, and Yuzhebn Jin as the Three Spirits; Borui Xiang and Jiayin Shi as the Priests; Daveon Bolden and Matt Mueller as the Armored Men; and Francesco Bochicchio, Jose Hernandez, and Cameron Liflander as the Slaves.

Soprano Mengqi Gao was superb as the obscurantist Queen of the Night. Her powerful, focused tone projected well in her lower register, and her high notes during “Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen” were stunning.

Southern's staging allowed the characters to engage in natural conversation with one another while always letting the cast's comedic abilities shine. However, Dylan Glenn's hysterical delivery during Papageno's suicide scene stole the show. Dave Brooks' sets and lighting and Ina Blatch Geib's costumes created the magical world the opera requires.

Conductor Harry Davidson did an excellent job of keeping everything moving. The CIM Orchestra sounded secure and featured many wonderful wind solos. The chorus, prepared by John Simmons, and cast were stentorian in the opera's concluding scene.

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