

CIM Opera presents *Don Giovanni*

by Mike Telin



“He is like the great seducer — Don Juan — and there is cosmic revenge taken on him. But he does his best to ruin many lives in the process.” This is how JJ Hudson, interim artistic director of CIM Opera

Theater described the title character in Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni*.

On April 23 and 25 at 7:00 pm in the Mimi Ohio Theatre, Playhouse Square, CIM Opera Theatre will present Mozart’s masterpiece. The show is directed by Hudson and conducted by Harry Davidson. Tickets are available [online](#).

Describing the opera’s action, Hudson said that it’s “a train that wreaks havoc on all levels of society — that’s the thread that connects the beads of this show — the interaction of peasants and aristocracy in joint pursuit to catch this guy and bring him to justice.”

Hudson noted that from the very first scene there are two events that set the tone for the rest of the show. “It begins with an attempted assault on Donna Anna, and not two minutes later her father the Commendatore is killed by Don Giovanni. That’s a very dramatic opening to a show.”

The opening of the opera also introduces audiences to Leporello, the title character’s ever-present servant. “Leporello — bless his heart — is always having to put out the fires that his master starts. In many ways he is the unsung hero of the show. He is in almost every scene and his is the largest role — not Don Giovanni and not the other characters, but Leporello.”

Despite Leporello’s constant complaining about how tired he is of being in servitude and wanting to be the aristocrat, he remains faithful to his master. “The question for me is always, why does Leporello stick around?” Hudson said. “This is a question we’ve asked many times in the course of staging rehearsals. The actors and I have come to the conclusion that Leporello likes it as much as he might grumble about it. And he has an interesting life that is certainly not boring — the highs are high and the lows are low.”

Then there are the three very different female characters. “Donna Anna is a true aristocrat who has more than a few issues to deal with. Not only with what happened to her and her father, but she’s betrothed to Don Octtavio who is the ultimate aristocrat of non-action. We see her trying to light a fire under him to get him to do things that she as a female can’t — but he doesn’t.”

Hudson described Donna Elvira as the quintessential abandoned woman who is angry and out for revenge. She loves Giovanni but she swings on a pendulum back and forth from great anger and desperation to great hope. In the end she tries one last time to convince Giovanni to change his life and come back to her, but he tells her to go away.”

The peasant Zarlina completes the trio. “She provides a lot of comedy for the show but if you make her too wise, too knowing, you lose a lot of the comedy.

Don Giovanni is the second collaboration between Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte — who was the first professor of Italian literature at Columbia University and for a time ran a grocery store in Sunbury, Pennsylvania.

“There’s a wonderful book called *The Librettist of Venice* about Da Ponte’s life that I read about ten years ago. It’s a fascinating read and makes you wonder why no one has made an opera about him. But how did he and the composer work together?

Many Mozart scholars have said that you can’t always trust Da Ponte’s recollections of his time with Mozart because everybody was writing from their own perspectives and had their own objectives. But from all accounts, it appears that in this case the stars aligned artistically and temperamentally. They’re great collaborations and the characters are just so human.”

In part two of this article Hudson will talk about the cast which includes CIM alum Brian Myer in the title role and Andrew Hiers as the Commendatore. We’ll also hear from Kiana Lilly (Donna Anna) and Caroline Friend (Zerlina).

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