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Mozart meets John Hughes in a magical "Die Zauberflöte"

January 13, 2016

9:53 AM MST



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Mozart's Die Zauberflöte directed by Tom Creed

Rating: ★★★★★

There's a natural reticence when it comes to reviewing student productions. Even when said students hail from illustrious institutions such as the Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire. A reticence not necessarily eased by the presence of seasoned professionals such as director Tom Creed, conductor Andrew Synnott and lighting designer Paul Keogan. On the one hand you fear being overly generous for fear of crushing young confidence. On the other, you're mindful that audiences are being asked to give up their precious time and hard earned cash rather than using same to attend some other production. In the case of the Royal Irish Academy of Music's production of Mozart's classic opera 'Die Zauberflöte,' produced in collaboration with the Design for Stage and Screen at IATD, Dun Laoghaire, such reticence proves unwarranted in what is a wonderfully charming and deeply engaging production.

First performed in 1791, Mozart's 'Die Zauberflöte' or 'The Magic Flute,' has enthralled opera goers for over two centuries. Under Creed's masterful eye, 'Die Zauberflöte,' is reimagined for a modern audience in a fashion that equally enthralls. Gone are the overt magical references. Gone too are the Singspiel dialogue sequences, along with some carefully selected details from the original story. Instead we have a story steeped in the magic of youth, of being young and in love, or in need of love. Of finding yourself in a world of peer and parental pressure, of fitting in and failing to fit. In an all too familiar high school straight from a John Hughes' movie, Goths and mean girls, skaters and misfits struggle to conform and be themselves. Here Tamino and his trusty friend Papageno, at the request of the Queen of the Night, must try save Pamina from Sarastro, Monostatos and from her own dark self, though salvation might well be where least expected.

Creed's direction never panders to the inexperience of 'Die Zauberflöte's' student cast. Rather the wonderful complexity and precision of its staging demands a phenomenal degree of focus and the cast rise to the occasion. Nor does it make lighting designer Paul Keogan's job any easier. Switching between stage and walkways both to the side and rear of the stage, as well as incorporating several sharp scene changes in Act Two, Keogan's lighting design was a masterclass in both mood and precision. The orchestra too were outstanding and under conductor Andrew Synnott's careful guidance brought Mozart's classic music to life.

All of which was ably supported by IATD's excellent craftsmanship. Set Design by Natasha Bertram, Damien Crean, Bridget Ní Dhuinn Belcher and Eimear Noctor was meticulously realised, perfectly capturing the grubbiness of a high school canteen and showing impeccable attention to detail. Costume Design by Amy Gillen was also first class, with Make-Up and Hair Design by Yasmin Archer and Hanna Dobson rounding out some wonderful physical characterisations.

Throughout, characters were wonderfully realised and the entire young cast were vocally strong. Soprano's Lorna Breen and Clodagh Kinsella, along with Mezzo Soprano Niamh O'Sullivan as the three ladies were a sheer delight. Soprano's Kate Millet, Katie O'Donohue and Mezzo Soprano Carla Snow as the three skater youths were equally delightful. Bass Baritone Robert McAllister's Sarastro and Tenor Callan Coughlan's Monostatos were equally strong, as were Baritone Peter Manning's hapless Papageno and Tenor Andrew Gavin's goodly Tamino. Supporting cast of Tenor's Ben Escorcio, Philip Keegan and James McCreanor as Sarastro's slaves were equally engaging, as was Soprano Dana Tanase as Papagena and Baritone Tim Shaffrey as the First Priest. Soprano Corina Ignat as the Queen of the Night was particularly strong, giving a wonderful rendition of the iconic aria 'Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen,' and Soprano Sarah Brady as the lovelorn Pamina was outstanding with her powerful aria 'Ach, ich fühl's, es ist verschwunden' being particularly memorable.

Minor technical hitches with subtitles, along with a hint of opening night nerves that led to a little tension and vocal restriction on the rare occasion, were minor distractions and never so noticeable as to overly detract from the experience. Rather 'Die Zauberflöte' possesses a palpable synergy, with its various components harmoniously gelling together to wonderful effect, against which many productions will pale in comparison.

'Die Zauberflöte's' youthful cast do not ask for your indulgence, rather they ask to indulge you.

They do not ask for your generosity, rather they give generously. Young or old, 'Die Zauberflöte's' eternal themes have a universal appeal and under Tom Creed's excellent guidance 'Die Zauberflöte' has something to offer to both the experienced opera goer and those engaging with opera for the first time. All in all, a truly superb production.

Mozart's 'Die Zauberflöte,' directed by Tom Creed, produced by The Royal Irish Academy of Music in collaboration with the Design for Stage and Screen at IATD, Dun Laoghaire runs at The Samuel Beckett Theatre January 13th and 15th at 7.30 p.m. and January 16th at 4.00 p.m.

For more information visit [Samuel Beckett Theatre](#)



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