

John Iacovelli's scenic design with its open stage and easily moved set pieces helps keep the action brisk. Splendid projections create place and mood as do the giant doors left and right inscribed with "Jungen" and "Madchen" emphasizing the separation of the sexes.

Spring Awakening runs through September 25.

Mozart's *Idomeneo* at Opera San Jose

Irene Dalis, the General Director of Opera San Jose, takes pains in her program commentary to acknowledge the participation of David Packard in bringing about the undeniably sumptuous production of Mozart's first major opera, *Idomeneo*. According to Dalis, Packard fell to "begging" her to agree to the mounting the opera and put the resources of the Packard Humanities Institute into financing the opulent production. Packard's love of Mozart led him to become "far more involved than anyone had imagined," becoming the de facto producer of the work, infusing his ideas for "the overall Minoan staging concept and details of the actual sets."



From L to R: Ilia (Rebecca Davis), Idomeneo (Christopher Bengochea) and his son, Idamante (Aaron Blake) in Opera San José's production of Mozart's *Idomeneo*. Photo: P. Kirk.

It is not necessary to recount the story here. It is enough to say that it concerns the Idomeneo, the King of Crete who, in the aftermath of the Trojan War, makes a rash promise to the god Neptune; the rocky romantic path of his son Idamante who loves Ilia, the captured daughter of Priam, King of Troy; and the thwarting efforts of a jealous Electra who wants Idamante for herself with it all ending in an ultimate resolution in which no one dies.

In nearly all categories the production is a resounding success. The opening night singers were superb (as always at Opera San Jose, the major roles are double cast and my experience assures me that the quality of performance is consistent in both casts). Tenor **Christopher Bengochea** in the title role is as powerful and commanding as I have ever seen him performing the difficult Mozartian runs and trills with ease. **Rebecca Davis** as Ilia also sang with a thrilling grace and power. As the love smitten Idamante, the earnest **Aaron Blake** sang of his passion with compelling sweetness in love scenes and authority in dramatic ones although

his forward leaning stance was a distraction. **Christina Major** as Elettra put steel resolve beneath the vanity, coyness and ruthlessness of her Elettra.

The huge opera chorus was thrilling to hear and the ballet sequences of Dennis Nahat added grace to the evening and gave a sense a historical authenticity. The orchestra under the baton of **George Cleve** seemed flawless.



Christopher Bengochea as the king of Crete in Opera San José's production of Mozart's Idomeneo. Photo by P. Kirk

No expense was spared in the physical production. Each set designed by **Steven C. Kemp** is thrilling, whether a palace with authentic Minoan frescos, a storm at sea or a beach and they often garnered audience applause at curtain rise. **Johann Stegmeir's** costumes, exquisite in design, opulent in material and impeccable in fit, are simply gorgeous. The lighting design by **Christopher Ostrom** is appropriately subtle and unobtrusive except in the scenes of storm and lightening. And a telling detail in the thoughtfulness of the production can be seen in the care given to the wigs and hairstyles (by **Jeanna Parham**) of everyone who appeared on stage. The men, for example, with long dark, curly hair pulled back and hanging down the back of the neck, looked like they could have stepped out from depictions seen in the frescos or ceramics of ancient Greece.



The Cretans rejoice at the heavenly proclamation in Idomeneo at Opera San Jose. Photo: Pat Kirk

The problem with the opera, from the point of view of this commentator, has to do with the very structure of the piece and while one is hesitant to criticize so revered an artist as WAM and his collaborating librettist Giambattista Varesco, the work is undramatic particularly in the lengthy arias and duets which are so repetitive musically and lyrically that I felt sorry for the singers wondering how they could possibly sustain any believable emotion throughout. As this occurred again and again, I found my eye wandering from the stage to closely observe the gilt on the theatre's decorations. Add to that the fact that the lyrics describe

emotions rather than show them and compelling drama evaporates.

Idomeneo runs through September 25 at the California Theatre in Downtown San Jose.



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