
Opera San Jose Opens Harker Concert Series Season on a Spectacular Note

By Zach Jones | Dec. 19, 2011

The second season of the Harker Concert Series was kicked off Dec. 2 with a stirring selection of pieces by Opera San Jose. Upper school music teacher Chris Florio customarily began the proceedings by welcoming everyone to the inaugural show of the second season.

After the announcement of some changes to the concert schedule (and the introduction of the night's accompanist, Veronika Agranov-Dafoe on piano, who provided great backing to the singers throughout the concert) by Opera San Jose's artistic director Matthew Siek, the show began with mezzo-soprano Betany Coffland, soprano Jasmina Halimic and tenor Alexander Boyer performing a section from Mozart's "Idomeneo," a retelling of the saga of Idomeneus, who led the armies of Crete in the Trojan War. The singers' wonderful dramatic interpretation, in addition to their stellar interplay and vocal abilities, were more than enough to keep both opera newcomers and aficionados entertained.

OSJ's first set was fairly diverse, due in some part to an unexpected absence by bass-baritone Isaiah Musik-Ayala, who was slated to sing "Suoni la tromba" with baritone Evan Brummel. In his place, Michael Dailey injected a little Broadway into the set, singing George Gerswhin's "There's a Boat Leaving to New York," with all the stylistic flair expected from one of musical theater's most beloved composers.

Boyer, bass Silas Elash and soprano Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste brought the first set to a fittingly grand close with "Alerte, Alerte" from Charles Gounod's "Faust," in which the three singers each gave a virtuoso performance.

During the intermission, attendees mingled in the Nichols Hall atrium, enjoying the many refreshments and snacks available, including a popular chocolate fountain.

"I think it's very welcoming," said Anne Stauffer, a first-time attendee of the Harker Concert Series of the atmosphere of the event. She added that it offered "the ability to start talking with people and engaging in conversation."

"I think this is a wonderful thing for Harker to do," said Debra Edginton. "I think it's a way for Harker to blend with the community, which I think is very important. And it's also a boost and a boon for the arts."

Dailey and Brummel opened the second set with Gaetano Donizetti's "Venti scudi," from Donizetti's opera "L'Elisir d'Amore." Dailey, who earlier had sung Broadway, had no trouble switching gears to opera, convincingly portraying the love-stricken peasant Nemorino, as Brummel faithfully recreated the pompous swagger of Sergeant Belcore.

Coffland later returned to the stage to give one of the evening's most impressive solo performances, singing the aria "Una voce poco fa" ("A voice a little while ago") from Gioachino Rossini's "Il barbiere di Siviglia," better known as "The Barber of Seville." Handling the song's many challenging passages with confidence and grace, Coffland enjoyed an enthusiastic reaction from the crowd.

For the finale, all of the evening's singers gathered onstage to sing "Libiamo ne'lieti calici," from Giuseppe

Verdi's famous "La Traviata." Their infectious delight in performing one of opera's most widely known pieces drew a lengthy, well-deserved standing ovation from the audience.

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