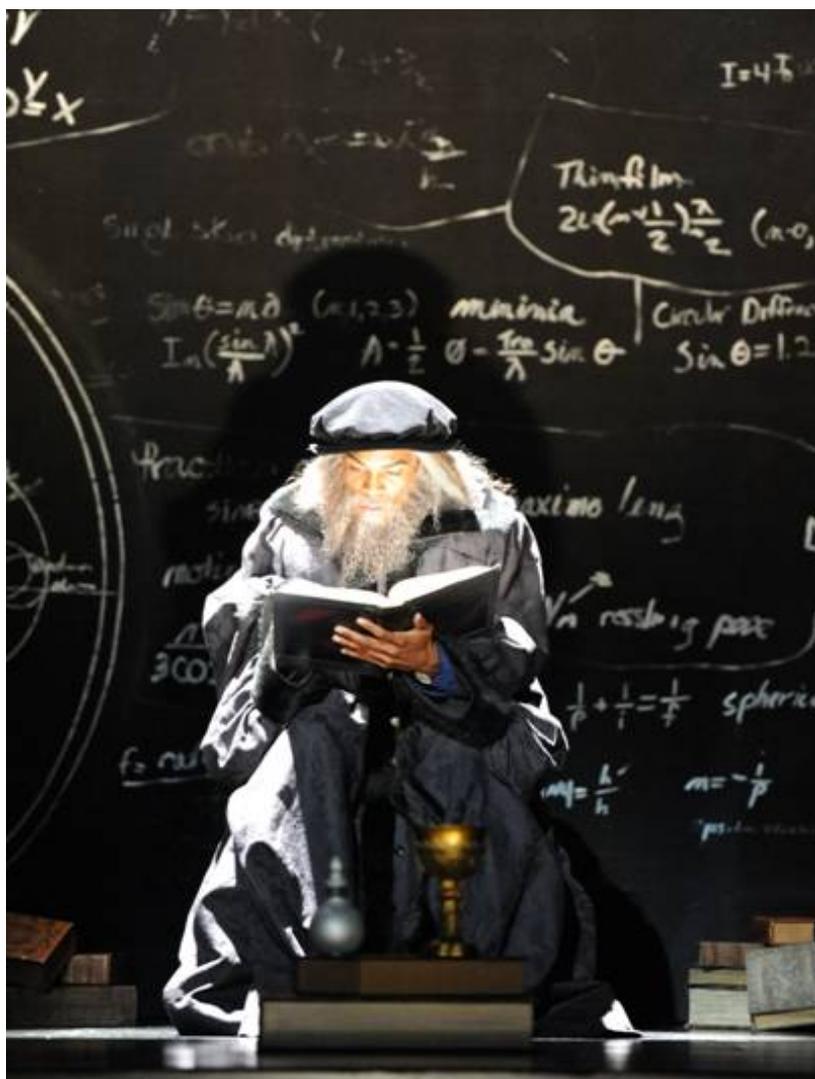




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**“FAUST”**  
**ANOTHER MAGNIFICENT PRODUCTION**  
**OF OSJ**  
**By Iride Aparicio**

**Photos by Pat Kirk**



*Tenor Michael Dailey as old Faust*

SAN JOSE, CA. – Opera San Jose, (OSJ) is ending its 2011-2012 Twenty-eight Season with a production of composer Charles Gounod’s FAUST with libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré (Based on *Faust et Marguerite* by Carre), that can only be described as “Magnificent.”

On opening night, Conductor David Rohrbaugh directed the orchestra with precision. Every pause in Gounod’s score was executed, every note played in tune, the tempo kept, the dynamics interpreted correctly; as a result, the wondrous melodies were saturated with feeling.

Beautiful in sound that night were also the choruses, a few with mixed voices, some women choruses, interpreted with angelical-sounding tones, and some rhythmic men choruses, sang with strong dynamic voices.

All the singers singing the principal parts showed mastery singing their arias with each one singing one or more arias in which he or she could fully display the quality of their vocal instrument.

As Marguerite’s brother Valentin, (Evan Brummel) gave the audience a felt rendition of his arias which started with “*O sainte medaille*” in which he explains that his sister gave him a medal to ward off all danger and fear during the war, continuing with a dialogue-like aria in which he talks with

**Wagner (Sepp Hammer) tenderly, about his sister, and asks his friend Siebel (Betany Coffland) to look after Marguerite.**



*Evan Brummel, (Center) played Valentin on opening night.*

**Brummel's best acting that night was in Act III, when after returning from the war and learning what happened to Marguerite while he was away, he tosses on the floor the sacred medal which protected him for being killed in war but failed to protect his sister. He also gave the audience a full-of-hatred rendition of "*Counte-moi bien*, ("Listen to me carefully) which he sings before dying, in which to the horror of all present, he curses his sister. Stage Director Brad Dalton directed the scene very dramatically.**

**As Siebel (a role usually played by a woman) Betany Coffland played her part convincingly, mainly because she did not try to "act" like a man. As Marthe, (Heather Clemens) made us laugh when after learning from Mephistopheles (Silas Elash) that her husband had been killed in the war, without knowing who he is, she starts flirting with him.**

**Wearing a hat with two red feathers in the front instead of horns, singing his arias with a dark full vocal tone, and acting with a mischievous expression in his eyes, Bass Elash represented a convincing Mephistopheles that night.**



*Silas Elash(center)play the role of Mephistopheles*

With the charm of a refined cars' salesman, he managed to arouse the crowd with his waltz, disturb Marguerite when she was praying, saturate Faust's heart with wild passion, induce him to kill Valentin, and at the end, to destroy Marguerite, a simple, pious, young girl, for no reason at all.

In analyzing the Devil in "Faust," many music scholars had wondered why Gounod's decided to use him in his ópera. At the time he wrote FAUST (Which premiere in Paris on March 19, 1859) in France, Devils were characters belonging to "The Opera Comique," (a light opera, usually funny) FAUST is an Opera Seria.

Another paradox in the work, is that the opera is named FAUST, yet Dr. Faust is neither a tragic figure nor the protagonist of the drama. As presented in the ópera, Faust only crime is that when he was young he yearned for knowledge, which was common at that time for all young people. Maybe that's the reason why many scholar describe students like him as "Faustinian heros."

In another exrange twist, Mephistopheles is the protagonist in GOUNOD's opera, because he originates all the action in the drama, yet he is also the villain that everybody likes because he is represented in the ópera singing beautiful songs and as a very likable character.



In his role as Faust, when "old Dr. Faust" (Michael Dailey) started singing on opening night, his mellow tenor's voice was overpowered by the orchestra. He finally regained his full tone during his transformation from old Faust to young and from there on his singing tone was wonderful.

There was not "strong chemistry" between Faust and Marguerite (Jouvanka Jean-Baptiste) that night, yet Dailey's acting was convincing.

When we first meet him, he is completely despondent to



the point that he is ready to end his life, then as a beautiful choir is heard singing about the beauties of nature, in the background, Faust wonders why a cup containing the poison he is about to drink, is trembling in his hand. After that, he begins cursing his folly for believing in science, instead of joy and love. In another mood change, he dares the Devil to come. Faust doesn't seem to be afraid of Mephistopheles. He even acts daring

when he asks him, "What can you do for me?" and presents him his request as : "I want youth."

*Michael Dailey and Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste  
As Faust and Marguerite*

He learns from the Devil that he will be given youth, (in exchange from his soul) and in spite that he doesn't like the fact that here in this world the Devil will be his servant but in the world below, he will belong to Mephistopheles, when he sees "Marguerite" in a vision, he signs the contract.

We meet Marguerite (Jean-Baptiste) that night kneeling in prayer and crying next to a small coffin, that we later learn belong to her younger sister, represented in the production as a silent young girl all dressed in white (like an angel) who moves around slowly on the stage. Jean-Baptiste has a well trained coloratura voice with an exquisite timbre so that night, she delighted the audience with each one of his arias.

In his acting, she was good. She looked surprised when Mephistopheles disturbed her prayers and she showed her feelings with her expressions. She may had needed more excitement at the garden when she tries the jewels that Faust gave her, but being a simple young woman she acted like a girl who tries a diamond necklace and matching diamond earrings because they look pretty and make her look pretty, not because she is aware of the value of such jewelry.

On that night, the soprano represented her emotions, which were many, without exaggeration. It helped her that she has very expressive eyes which at the end opened wide and by not fixating them in anything around her, managed to convinced us that she had lost her mind and was completely unaware of where she was and that she was about to lose her life.

FAUST the ópera has several endings. In its version, Opera San José gave it a happy ending, in a beautiful scene which includes not only the return of the angel but a very bright sun.

The designs of Steven C. Kemp, mostly back-drops, were creative. Faust lab, for instance was black and scribbled all over it in white one can see mathematical equations and different pictures of the planets. Marguerite's house, represented by a picture of a French cottage surrounded by a meadow, with the toll white steeple of a church painted in the background. The town, by a Goya-like painting of a large group of peasants, the inside of the church by a large white cross.

Lise La Cour choreography, which included a short dance, Earl Staley costumes, David Lee Cuthbert light Designs and the masterful direction of stage Director Brad Dalton. Complemented the magnificent production that night.

FAUST will be played (with two different casts) until May 6  
For tickets call (408) 437-4450 or go online to [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org)

