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A COMIC OPERA

'Die Fledermaus' Review – An Operetta in Grand Style

Although the plot involves infidelity, duplicity and revenge, it's a frothy romp that waltzes its way to your funny bone and doesn't let go until the last bottle of bubbly is uncorked.



GREGORY M. ALONZO

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Die Fledermaus



★★★★☆

4 out of 5 stars - 'Smashing'

Opera San Jose

Directed by Marc Jacobs

Music by Johann Strauss, Jr.

Libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genee

November 10-25, 2012

California Theatre

www.operasj.org



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Cast A: Soprano Melody King as Roselinde and tenor James Callon as von Eisenstein.

Johann Strauss, Jr.'s operetta, *Die Fledermaus*, is a Viennese comedy with roots in German farce and French vaudeville of the late 1800s. And indeed, from the opening bar of the *Waltz King's* brilliant, melodic overture – conducted under the masterful baton of musical director David Rohrbaugh – the promise that fun times are about to ensue is clearly at hand. Thankfully, this wonderful production by [Opera San Jose](#) does not disappoint.

Although the plot involves infidelity, duplicity and revenge, it's a frothy romp that waltzes its way onto your funny bone and doesn't let go until the last bottle of bubbly is uncorked. Moreover, its many pleasures are made all the more accessible by the smart decision to recite the spoken dialogue in English – peppered with a few not too subtle modern references.

Gabriel von Eisenstein (tenor James Callon) is a banker's assistant who's about to serve a brief stint in jail for engaging in questionable derivative trading – sound familiar? But before he's able to turn himself in, he's invited by his friend, Dr. Falke (an impressive baritone Zachary Altman), to a fantasy ball hosted by an 18-year-old playboy, Prince Orlofsky (mezzo-soprano Nicole Birkland in a "breeches role"). Falke assures the reticent Gabriel that his friendship with the warden will ensure his safe surrender the following morning.

In reality this invitation is part of an elaborate scheme by Falke to seek revenge for being the victim of a practical joke in which Gabriel had left him drunk and humiliated in a public square dressed as a bat (aka *fledermaus*). The plan is to expose the philandering Gabriel for the true scoundrel that he is.

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Rosalinde, (soprano Melody King), Gabriel's wife, sees her husband's imminent departure as a chance to rekindle a romance with Alfred (a melodious and hilarious tenor Michael Dailey), a former suitor and opera singer who serenades her at every opportunity. Things go awry very quickly, however, and in a case of mistaken identity the hapless Alfred ends up serving Gabriel's prison sentence!

Of course, ultimately everyone (except poor Alfred) ends up at the prince's party under disguise, including Adele (soprano Jillian Boye), Gabriel's spirited chambermaid.

▶ Lyric tenor Mr. Callon handles both the acting and singing chores with equal aplomb, displaying a refined tone and an affable comedic sense. He comes alive vocally in the final terzett with Ms. King and Mr. Dailey ("A strange adventure"), and his "watch duet" with Ms. King – "My eyes will soon be dim" – is nicely conceived and executed.

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This is another rousing entry in Opera San Jose's far too short 30th anniversary season.

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Unfortunately, one is obliged to add Mr.

Callon's duet with Mr. Altman ("Come with me to the souper") was virtually drowned out by the vibrant orchestra on opening night.

Ms. King's performance is fine if not somewhat subdued throughout, and her vocalizations noticeably falter during the closing passages of the beautiful *csardas* aria "Sounds from home." She does find her stride, however, in Act 3 (in the aforementioned "A strange adventure").

The vivacious Ms. Boye is a sheer delight and just about steals the show, displaying impeccable comic timing and a crystalline voice. Her high notes are clear and open, and she performs the demanding coloratura phrasings of "My lord marquis" ("The Laughing Song") with confidence and considerable panache. Brava!



Cast A: Soprano Jillian Boye as Adele.

The remaining cast is uniformly good, including bass-baritone Isaiah Musik-Ayala ("Frank"), and Kelly Houston in a non-singing role ("Frosch").

Marc Jacobs directs all elements with consummate skill, employing props as exorbitant as a large Faberge egg, and taking full advantage of his superb set and costume designers (Charlie Smith and Cathleen Edwards, respectively) and utilizing the talented, ebullient chorus (under chorus master Andrew Whitfield) to full effect.

Mr. Jacobs' attention to detail, however, is perhaps best exemplified during the quieter moments of the lovely opening sequence of the third act that feature some excellent acting technique by Mr. Musik-Ayala. Bravi!

And one must not forget the spectacular and clever choreography provided by Robyn Tribuzi – particularly in the final scenes of Act 2 ("Unter Donner und Blitz"; "Ha, what

Monica Turner

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joy, what a night of delight”) that include an elaborate “falling dominoes” number – performed with the invaluable assistance of her dancers and the entire ensemble.

This is another rousing entry in Opera San Jose’s far too short 30th anniversary season.

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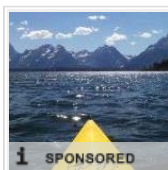
GREGORY M. ALONZO

Despite living in the South Bay, Greg’s heart remains in his hometown of San Francisco. When he’s not spending time attending local theatre, art exhibitions or the cinema, he makes ends meet by practicing law in San Jose. He likes to think of himself not as a “critic” but as an unabashed fan of the performing arts with an opinion that, he hopes, is worth sharing. His reviews can also be read at bayareacritic-at-large.blogspot.com which covers theatre venues throughout the Bay Area.

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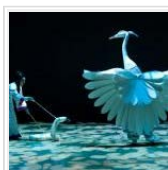
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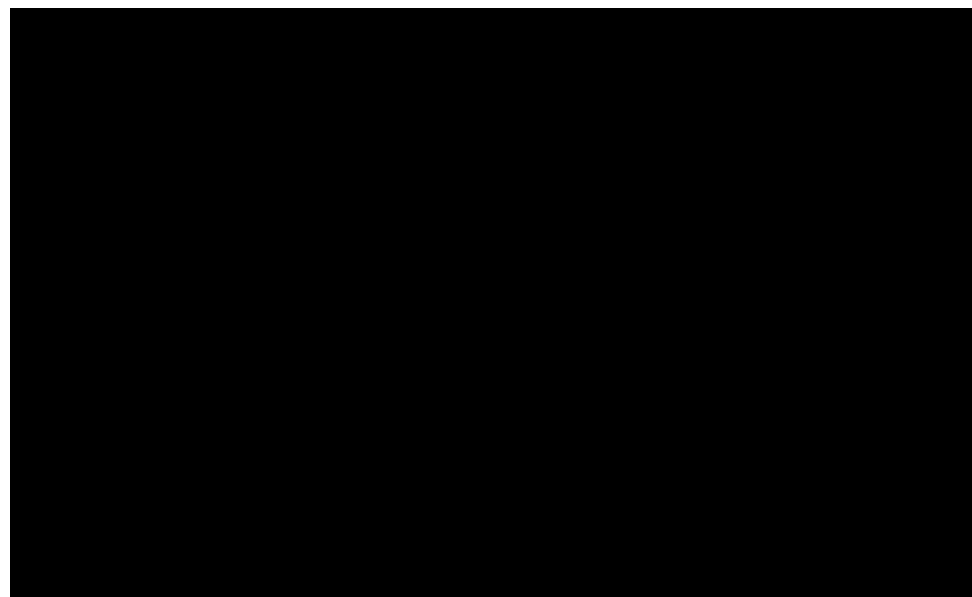
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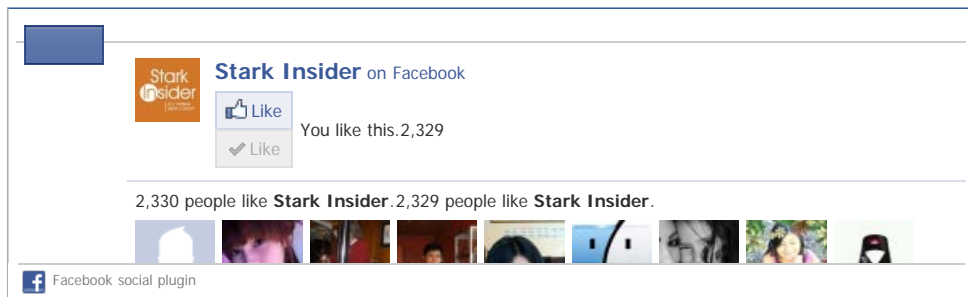
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