

Die Fledermaus



Soprano Jillian Boye as Adele in "Die Fledermaus" at Opera San Jose.
Photo: Pat Kirk.

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"Die Fledermaus" at Opera San Jose

"Die Fledermaus," a comic operetta now in production at Opera San Jose's California Theatre through November 25, boasts a giddy plot that calls to mind the zaniest story lines of "I Love Lucy" with disguises, mistaken identities, suggestive flirtations, foolish characters gulled and exposed and lots of physical comedy.

The joy of the evening begins when David Rohrbaugh gives the downbeat and once again one is reminded what a sheer pleasure it is to luxuriate in the rich

sound of a superb thirty-piece opera orchestra. Then the familiarity of Johann Strauss II's melodies strikes an emotional chord and warms the anticipation of opera action.

As for plot, it concerns Dr. Falke who acquired the nickname "die Fledermaus" (the bat in English) when his friend Gabriel von Eisenstein, a loose canon practical joker, marooned him dead drunk on a park bench dressed in a bat costume. Waking after the sun was up and forced to walk home in full view of the town, he has been called "die Fledermaus" ever since. The opera's clockwork plot is too complicated to summarize here, but let's just say Falke gets his revenge with an elaborate scheme that turns virtually all the characters' lives upside down.

That an opera succeeds or fails on the foundation of the singing is a given. In "Die Fledermaus" the singing is excellent. But for this commentator, acting is of equal importance. It is no longer enough to, in a phrase revealed to me a few years ago by an Opera San Jose star, "park and bark." This production has plenty of singers with good chops both ways.



Soprano Melody King as Rosalinde and tenor James Callon as von Eisenstein in "Die Fledermaus" at Opera San Jose.
Photo: Pat Kirk.

I don't believe a performer "steals" a scene, but rather takes the stage when it belongs to her and Jillian Boye (a powerful lilting soprano), as the chambermaid Adele, owns the audience from the first moment of action. James Callon (a golden-toned tenor) as the corrupt banker Eisenstein fully commits to the comedy. Powerful soprano Melody King (what a wonderful name!) is delightful as Eisenstein's wife Rosalinde, lively, coy and manipulative. Smooth of manner and liquid of voice, tenor Michael Dailey as Rosalinde's old flame Alfred, is, as always, a delightful stage presence who can pop out a thrilling high C on demand.

As Falke, Eisenstein's wounded, simmering, vengeful friend, Zachary Altman has a commanding baritone and an authoritative persona that suits the role. And Isaiah Musik-Ayala is well sung and a comedic delight as the easily fooled Frank, the prison



Baritone Isaiah Musik-Ayala as Frank in "Die Fledermaus" at Opera San Jose.
Photo: Pat Kirk

As usual, all the singing is done in the original German and all the dialogue is in English, which I noticed more this time than when the Opera last staged "Die Fledermaus" in the Montgomery Theatre. Made me think about how each opera always sounds best in its original tongue because the arrangement of vowels and consonants ideally suits the music. But this time around, the English was mildly jarring. I don't want to have to read supertitles for spoken dialogue, but it has me wondering. Certainly the second act plays better on the big California Theatre stage. In 2004 I wrote that "Die Fledermaus" was too big for that "hug of a space." Let us thank once more David Packard, the City of San Jose and all the others who contributed to making the California Theatre the perfect home for Opera San Jose.

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