

## Mozart meets Mondrian in S.F. Opera's 'Magic Flute'

By Janos Gereben

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COURTESY PHOTO

Bold and beautiful: Alek Shrader as Tamino stands out in San Francisco Opera's colorful production of "The Magic Flute."

San Francisco Opera's unusual and impressive new production of Mozart's "The Magic Flute" melds music, art and technology in a delightful mix.

Instead of a conventional set, it features 3,000 tempera-and-chalk paintings by Jun Kaneko projected over the stage. The grid-and-line design, reminiscent of Dutch painter Piet Mondrian's neoplasticism, is displayed across the entire curtain and on the back wall and side panels; it also is in constant motion.

Kaneko's giant Japanese-inspired costumes, shaped like inverted pyramids, and cute, phantasmagorical animals add to the quirky design.

An advertisement for PEJU Napa Valley wine. The top part features the PEJU logo in red and orange, with "NAPA VALLEY" underneath. Below that, it says "SATURDAY AUGUST 24, 2013" and "Buy Tickets Here" with a right-pointing arrow. At the bottom, it says "PEJU PROVINCE WINERY", "CALL: 800.446.7358", and "PEJU.COM". The background of the ad shows a person's hand holding a glass of wine.

On Wednesday's opening night at the War Memorial Opera House, the orchestra and fine cast performed Mozart's masterpiece very well, despite reports that the singers had been hit by a fast-spreading bug.

Even though a pre-curtain announcement said tenor Alek Shrader would sing the role of Tamino in spite of his indisposition, the super-talented Merola and Adler alumnus gave a great, unblemished performance.

Nothing was said of Kristinn Sigmundsson's health, but unfortunately, the company-favorite bass – who normally could ace Sarastro in his

sleep – clearly struggled with hoarseness.

Albina Shagimuratova, a stratospheric coloratura with an outstanding middle voice, is the queen of all Queens of the Night. Her performance Wednesday was sensational.

Heidi Stober as Pamina was joyous, singing and acting, and Adler Fellow Nadine Sierra's all-too-brief appearance as Papagena signaled an important career in the making.

The Three Ladies – stars of tomorrow Melody Moore, Lauren McNeese and Renée Tatum –

were brilliant, singing with clear diction in their brief solos.

Nathan Gunn's Papageno was charming, Greg Fedderly's Monostatos a singing action figure and David Pittsinger's Speaker sonorous. The three boys, called Spirits in this production, were Etienne Valdez, Joshua Reinier, and John Walsh.

Scottish conductor Rory Macdonald made an impressive debut, offering steady, clear musical lines and fine balance. Harry Silverstein's stage direction successfully steered attention to the cast, a tricky task, given Kaneko's distractions.

Ian Robertson's chorus sounded underpowered when offstage, but was robust in front-and-center passages.

Company director David Gockley's vernacular English translation and adaptation, entertaining and easy to sing, worked as well with the music as does the German original. On opening night, when the characters surprisingly sang "auf wiedersehen" to each other, it got a big laugh.

## REVIEW The Magic Flute

**Presented by** San Francisco Opera

**Where:** War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave., S.F.

**When:** 8 p.m. June 16, June 19, June 29 and July 6; 7:30 p.m. June 21 and 27; 2 p.m. June 24 and July 8

**Tickets:** \$21 to \$288

**Contact:** (415) 864-3330, [www.sfopera.com](http://www.sfopera.com)

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#### Bio:

Janos Gereben is a writer and columnist for SF Classical Voice; he has worked as writer and editor with the NY Herald-Tribune, TIME Inc., UPI, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, San Jose Mercury News, Post Newspaper Group, and wrote documentation for various technology companies.

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