

The Petrelis Files

Reports, muckraking, photos and musings from the veteran gay and AIDS human rights advocate Michael Petrelis. Based in San Francisco since 1995. Contact: MPetrelis_at_AOL_dot_com

Sunday, July 01, 2012

San Francisco Opera's Magical New 'Flute'



The dictionary does not contain enough superlatives to do full justice to describe the awesome new production of [Mozart's "The Magic Flute" at the San Francisco Opera](#). My partner Mike and I caught the matinee performance on Gay Pride Sunday and both of us highly recommend you catch it before the summer season is over.

We were fearful the colorful abstract video projection of crayons slowly creating patterns during the overture would prove distracting. Our fears vanished as the show went on and the projections gave depth to the storytelling and perfectly contrasted with the delightfully zany costumes.

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Japanese artist Jun Kaneko served as the production designer and also was responsible for designing the costumes. Kaneko brilliantly unified the visual elements pushing this "Flute" into a spectacle to marvel at.

Sung in English with super-titles appearing above the stage, all of the subplots, occasional jokes and lyrics were easy to understand making the action and antics fun to follow.

The cast over all had wonderful voices and terrific acting skills, putting an extra layer of fabulousness for audience to revel in.



Russian diva Albina Shagimuratova, pictured, was the stand-out singer as the Queen of the Night. She put to shame all the queens across Van Ness Avenue celebrating Pride on a gloriously sunny San Francisco afternoon.

When Shagimuratova made her first act appearance, a girl maybe ten-years-old in the row in front of us turned to her father with a question. "Daddy, what is that thing the Queen has on her head?" she asked, making Mike and I break out in smiles because we also wondered what the crown was made of.

Shagimuratova put the audience into a rapturous state of bliss and almost lifted the opera house roof up, up and away with her rendition of the Queen of the Night's aria. Needless to say, Shagimuratova received the most thunderous applause at the end.

A week after seeing "Flute", I am still full of absolute and intense happiness recalling the magic of Mozart's score brought to life by the San Francisco Opera's magnificent orchestra. I am not the sort of culture vulture who automatically engages in standing ovations at the end of performances, but as soon as the curtain came down at this "Flute" I was on my feet cheering and applauding.

There are only two more performances on July 6 at 8 p.m. and July 8 at 2 p.m., and tickets are still available for both shows. Don't miss this chance to experience genuine cultural and aural euphoria. Click [here](#) for ticket information.

(Photo credit: Cory Weaver.)

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Stephen R. Stapleton, Sacramento, CA said...

The Magic Flute is one of those operas I feel iffy about. I like most of the music and enjoyed it greatly until I read the plot, which is a total mess. Most operas are a little melodramatic, but the jumps the shark.

Tamino is saved from a serpent by three ladies who argue over him and then just leave. Along wanders Papageno just Tamino is waking up from his ordeal, so, naturally, Papageno claims credit for killing the serpent (the big bad serpent that had chased Tamino all over the place and to exhaustion is killed by a guy dressed like a Cirque de Soleil cast member, uh huh). Fortunately, this lie, which Tamino is apparently stupid enough to believe, is revealed by the women, who have wandered back to pimp Pamina to him. So much for their ardor. The Queen of the Night appears, weird headdress and all, claiming Pamina is her daughter. Equipping our brave heroes with the latest in evil fighting weaponry directly from the labs of Q, Tamino gets a magic sword, oops, no a flute. Clearly the most dangerous of weapons, until they give Papagano a set of bells. Our brave champions set forth (Quintet: "Hm hm hm hm").(really, that's the name)

They find the castle of the evil Sarastro. His henchman Monostatos is dragging poor Pamina along by a chain, but he is frightened off by the strange Papagano's appearance because evil henchman are naturally afraid of colorfully dressed guys with bells. Papagano, who had earlier bragged of killing a snake is so entranced by Pamina's beauty, he immediately tells her what a swell guy his buddy Tamino is (There was originally a duet about "You Talk to the Fat Friend, so I Can Hit on the Blond," but it was dropped). After some rigamarole, turns out Sarastro ain't such a bad guy, but can only let Pamina go is she is accompanied by a man ("a real man, a true man"), so Tamino gets the job.

Enter the priests of Isis and Osiris, you remember them from the Wizard of Oz, they originally owned the crystal ball Professor Marvel uses, and warns Tamino of the trials ahead. These mostly consist of walking slowly on stage. Papageno fails the first test because he talks to the temptresses, thus meaning Papageno will never know the enlightenment of the Gods. Papageno is OK with this as long as he gets a girl.

After our dynamic, but mentally challenged, duo final get through the trials, an old lady appears and puts the squeeze on Papagano. She actually turns out to be the young and lovely Papagana, but only after the beer goggles have been applied (amazing how all those guys in the bar are too old and tired until about one o'clock and four beers). Then the Queen of the Night appears to destroy them all (solo, "ha ha ha" -- the campion to "hm hm hm"). She could have done this some three hours early, but she is now the evil one, having just lost it waiting off stage, and is cast out into the eternal night (big punishment for some who is queen of the fricken *night!*).

Sarastro appear again, having received his online pastor's license and marries our two couples. That leads to the sequel, *The Marriage of Tamino*, part of the RIng Trilogy).

Great music, apparently good costumes this time around, but a plot to drive you mad.

4:29 PM

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