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Music

# Washington National Opera’s ‘Magic Flute’ features strong opening and alternative casts



Paul Appleby as Tamino in the Washington National Opera's "The Magic Flute." (Scott Suchman/Scott Suchman)

By **Charles T. Downey** May 6

Washington National Opera opened a new production of Mozart’s “Magic Flute” on Saturday night, featuring psychedelic, potentially headache-inducing sets and costumes designed by [Jun Kaneko](#). The run features double-cast alternatives for several roles, some of whom were heard at the second performance Monday evening in the Kennedy Center Opera House. On the basis of just these two performances, the opening night cast struck these ears as superior, but the alternate cast is certainly worth hearing.

Paul Appleby, who has a gift for comic roles, made a vanilla Tamino, lacking a silky legato in “Dies Bildnis” and with occasional unreliability in his top notes. Japanese soprano

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Eri Nakamura, in her American debut, showed a big, handsome voice as Pamina, but she seemed strangely compressed in the showpiece “Ach, ich fühl’s.” Baritone David Pershall was in solid voice as Papageno, a role he also sang [for Virginia Opera in December](#), strutting and goofy, adding pop culture references from “The Three Stooges” to air guitar, but not always with the beat of conductor Philippe Auguin. Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Shantelle Przybylo was a perky Papagena, although no one likely could compete with the darling chicks running around the couple in their duet.

Due to the unavailability of her alternate, young soprano Kathryn Lewek stepped in to save the day, giving much the same performance of the Queen of the Night as on opening night, all vitriol and venom, technically fortified and, hopefully, not bad for her voice in the long run. Auguin provided a steady hand at the podium, helping the orchestra turn in a detailed and clear performance and realigning often nervous singers.

This production continues through May 18.

Downey is a freelance writer.

David Perhall as Papageno in the Washington National Opera's "The Magic Flute." (Scott Suchman/Scott Suchman)



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