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Society : Kennet Opera
Production : The Marriage of Figaro
Date : Friday 3rd November 2017
Venue : Arlington Arts - Newbury
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

Marriage of Figaro is one of my favourite operas. It has some super characters a good plot and witty lyrics.

Kennet's performance was great fun and there were some superb characterisations and vocals.

Shaun Aquilina – (Figaro) – I was impressed with this young man when I saw perform as Dandini last year. This year he was just as impressive. As Figaro he brought a great deal of fun to the character. He controlled every situation perfectly and owned the stage on every occasion. He has a handsome baritone voice which suited his characterisation implicitly. I really enjoyed his teasingly fun rendition of act 1 “No more Gallivanting” however his act 4 “Open those Eyes” was amazing and I could have listened to it again and again.

Camilla Foster-Mitchell – (Susanna) – This young lady was absolutely delightful. She was sassy cheeky and dynamic. Her facial expressions were lively and animated and her movement lithe and fluid. She sang all her arias in character which she had pitched perfectly but “Oh come don't Delay” was quite joyous.

James Mitchell – (Doctor Bartolo) – He certainly portrayed his role with expertise. He showed his pleasure in assisting Marcellina in getting Figaro to honour his marriage contract and complete satisfaction in watching Figaro trying to wriggle out of it. This was most prominent in his well sung rendition of “Vengeance”

Tamsin Slater – (Marcellina) – This was a well delineated character and I liked the way she had designs on Figaro only to find (as in all great farces) that he is in fact her son; which was excellently depicted. After a nervy start her solo was sung with just the right intensity of emotion.

Lydia Holmes – (Cherubino) – I would have liked a little more spunk from this young lady. She was all too timid for my liking. That said she looked great carried herself well and had good facial expressions. I loved her shenanigans in the bedroom which were highly amusing and quite farcical. Her singing was competent and I very much enjoyed her act 1 aria.

James Corrigan – (Count Almaviva) – This was such a charismatic performance! His devious philandering antics which he portrayed so well really made me smile. He was expressive in both visuals and singing and this really enhanced his portrayal. I really liked the way he was

humbled in act 4 and begged forgiveness from the countess. However it was his aria in act 3 that was the highlight for me.

Duncan Powell – (Don Basilio) – I really enjoyed this actors performance. As the count's go between he had a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his lips; which made for the perfect characterisation. He had a super silky smooth singing voice and this added immensely to his arias

Louise Harrington – (Countess Almaviva) – What a shame this performer was suffering with a poorly throat! Not that you would have known; her singing was sublime and it was only her act 3 aria that was so strenuous that **Christine Buras** took over and sang so beautifully for her. Her acting was engaging and charming with good interaction visuals and movement.

David Bunney – (Antonio) – Whilst I appreciate the need to look at the conductor for entrances and timing; it should be a cursory glance rather than a continuous stare. Remember the audience want to see you looking at them not the conductor. However that said this was a good characterisation which was well-acted. He had a fine singing voice and put over his lyrics with meaning and purpose.

Jim Petts – (Don Curzio) – This was a small cameo role however one that is integral to the plot; and this actor portrayed the lawyer with all the necessary traits for a legal professional. His singing was refined and pleasing to the ear.

Lucy Fitt – (Barbarina) – I really believe that this young lady had “Lost It”! She gave a lovely performance with animated visuals that absolutely sparkled. Her singing was clear and true and her acting was first rate.

Chorus – This ensemble gave a sterling performance and acted their way through all the scenes they were involved in. They sang with confidence with having excellent timing entrances and harmonies.

Benjamin Hamilton – (Conductor) – Having read that this young man stepped in at short notice I must say he did a remarkable job! He certainly gave the cast confidence and skilfully conducted their entrances. He kept expert control over the orchestra ensuring they accompanied the performers sympathetically.

Stan Pretty – (Stage Director) – This director assisted by **Don Crerar** had created a slick well balanced performance that had great pace energy and effectiveness. He had developed some first rate characterisations and instilled in the cast a true grasp of the plot ensuring the humour and farce of the piece was brought out effortlessly. His staging and blocking was excellent and his entrances and exits for principals and chorus well contrived.

Suzanne Thomson – (Stage Designer) – This set was very simplistic, basic and two dimensional. However there was some fine artwork and it created the right impression.

Alexander Greenwood-Forkin – (Stage Manager) – with DSM **Shirley Bergin** for the most part this was a well-run stage. With a static set and the changes being effected by the cast

there was not a lot for them to do. However they kept entrances clear so the cast could easily get on and off stage. My only criticism is the wings were completely visible to the audience and it was most distracting seeing people wandering around. For the future sit someone out the front and get them to make sure the wings are masked

Vicky Allen – (Lighting Director) – With a stark white set you would think it would be fairly easy to light. However this is not always the case. This technician had used a colour that turned brilliant white into a warm yellow effect which gave real atmosphere to the flats. However the real triumph was the evening garden scene of act 4. The colours here were fabulous and the eerie shadows created an almost ethereal effect.

Phil Hallam/Chris Moore/John Heywood – (Set Build) – These gents had built a sturdy set with practical doors and window which helped to keep the action moving fluently.

Gay Buchanan – (Props) – When I see this young lady's name I can be assured that all the props will have been sourced to look authentic and fit their usage perfectly and this was indeed the case in this production. The stage had been superbly dressed with just the right amount of furniture etc. so that it looked homely but not cluttered. It is a long time since I heard sound effects performed off stage rather than from a sound desk and it really did enhance the proceedings and made it so much more realistic.

Lili Tuttle – (Costumes) – assisted by **Grant Wheatley** – Every character had a costume that suited them as well as being right for the role. I particularly liked the Countess' act 3 costume and the clever addition of a white jacket to Susanna's maid costume for her wedding. The servants costumes looked just right and I liked the way the ladies frocks were all the same length something that doesn't happen very often these days.

Elisabete Santos - (Makeup) – The choice of base colour was perfect and uniform throughout. Eye makeup was well applied and chosen to suit the performers colouring. Lips and blush were noticeable but not too heavy which really worked under the lights.

Mike Merchant/Don Crerar – (Programme) – I have come to expect a professional looking and informative programme from this company. This was no different; they always find interesting and imaginative titbits to capture the audiences' imagination. It had been well collated with a good size legible font and good clear photos.

Jim Needham/Karen Cameron-Taylor/Philippa Harper – (Front of House) – This team made such an effort to make every member of the audience feel welcome and I would like to thank Jim Needham for looking after me so well.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13