Don Giovanni, illuminating: Magic Flute entertaining


By JONATHAN RICHMOND

Mozart's instrumentation in Don Giovanni is crucial to its dramatic continuity. Wind instruments, in particular, play an important role in different numbers and combinations, filling with strings to color the mood of the moment. The betrayed Donna Elvira, for example, is often painted with soft flutes and clarinets, which serve to underline her plight.

Martin Pearlman's concert version of Don Giovanni, the first American performance on original instruments, showed a deep understanding of the subtleties of the score, and exploited the sonorities of his orchestra to produce an interpretation of both clarity and profundity. There was clarity in the ability to clearly discern each instrumental voice — this was most significant in the case of the winds. There was profundity in the careful blending of differing sounds, the often understated, ethereal quality of the strings which could also — under Pearlman's control — rise to massive dramatic proportions, the molding of shimmering brass and illuminating winds.

The Banchetto orchestra, an orchestra of powerfu, if often subliminal (since we are wont to focus more on the singers) force, the distinguished performances of the singers were further enhanced.

James Maddalena's Don Giovanni was strongly projected, clean of line but sinister of tone. Flippant but calculating, this Don's arrogance sent many a shiver down the spine. Finish his line, which did show the Don in an obsessive light. La di dara la

Don Giovanni's voice was a force of the Com- mendatore's thrilling; but it was the Ban- chetto orchestra that cemented Giovanni's fate.

Don Giovanni pivots on the keys of D major and D minor. Mozart's D minor is a key of danger and unease. The overture starts with a blaze of D minor, nine bars of D minor culminate at the Comendatore's slay of Don Giovanni, and L is D minor which — along with the statue of the Comendatore — returns to drive Don Giovanni to hell. The orchestra took

Martin Pearlman, Founder and Music Director of Banchetto Musica.

Don Giovanni's prey — Zerlina — begins to fall, but the music talks of reconcili- ation. Batti, batti, o bel Masetto under Pearlman's control — rise to its utmost. His staging went a long way toward the delivery of continuity that so often afflicts this opera. His orchestra played with buoyancy, but at times lacked sensitivity. If there were constraints to the development of Don Giovanni's eloquent winds. There were other places where clarity of sound held sway over depth of searching. One left the performance refreshed and happy as a Papageno, but perhaps not quite as enlightened as Pamina.

Emanuel Schikaneder as the first Papageno. His lyricism was magnetically compelling. Don Bildaus's baritone was sung with sensuous rapture; Pamina's search for truth was marked by sincerity, and his final meeting with Pamina was particularly illuminating;

Eunice Panagulias as Pamina and Edward Bryant as Tamino.

amano was seductive, and was made the more so by Pearlman's delicate strings and winds, spanning at first, but intensifying at Giovanni's prey — Zerlina — begins to fall, but the music talks of reconciliation.

Sharon Baker had the prettiest voice of the cast, making her performance of the role of Zerlina's heart.

Karen Winner provided a psychological- ly-pointed portrayal of Donna Anna — plaintive in an honestly and beautifully sung Noi vi rider, o mio re, communicated and clear-headed in a thrustful Oh che furor. Orchestral balance here was superb, strings sounding suspense, obors on ghostly dimensions here, three insistent trombones pointing the way to a climax more transfixing than anything Wagner could create.

W/ITH JOHN MORATZ in the pit and his talented conserva- tory students on the stage one can be sure to expect something special. And indeed Moratz's production of The Magic Flute provided wonderful entertainment and showed so- lidity from both a musical and a dramatic viewpoint. Yet in some regards it showed superficiality. Moratz showed the greatest success in making the opera attractive on its more extraneous levels; one might have wished for a little more introspection.

Edward Bryant, singing Tamino, provided the most probing account of the evan- bling, happy singing was enchanting. Her Ah ich fah's was also beautifully done, but not quite satisfying. Set in the D mi- nor of Don Giovanni's damnation, it is an aria of disturbing proportions. Pamina, thinking Tamino no longer loves her, con- templates death. "If you feel no longing, then I must find repose in death," she sings. Pamina recalls memories of past happiness with a less-than-happy chromat- ic vocal line, but becomes calms at the thought of death. Paragonilas was not up to these dramatic requirements, although her technical dexterity and quality of tone suggest that with experience she will pro- vide a sure penetrating performance.

Cecilia Chaisson also put in some spiri- tual singing as the Queen of the Night, but failed to maintain the depths of the role. It is easy to think of the Queen, black as night, as a character of pure evil, but Mo- razt is not as simple as that. The well- known connections of the opera with Ma- sonry are not limited to Sarastro's court. Female initiates in Masonry took on the name of the "Order of Mopsos" — and their ritual included a serpent, veils and a golden phallic, all of which are associat- ed with the Queen of the Night. It is the Queen, also, who provides the enchanted flute and bells which have such positive ef- fects at overcoming evil. And it is the Queen who feels real grief at the loss of her daughter, Pamina, to Sarastro's camp. Chaisson did not adequately capture the pathos in Zum Liden hem ich auferwachen, although the trenented Der Helle Rache was considerably more powerful and accom- plished.

Jess Perry did develop a sense of gravity for the role of Sarastro, and sang well, too. Her Queen of the Night was glow- ingly sung — spiritedly sung, for example, they were — and her aria was particularly winning. William Cotten's Monastatos was wickedly funny, and his one aria quite telling.

The Three Ladies of the Night made a striking focus of attention, with dis- ciplined singing and witty acting.

Moratz did much to draw the humor of Flute to its utmost. His staging went a long way toward the delivery of continuity that so often afflicts this opera. His orchestra played with buoyancy, but at times lacked sensitivity. If there were constraints to the development of Don Giovanni's eloquent winds. There were other places where clarity of sound held sway over depth of searching. One left the performance refreshed and happy as a Papageno, but perhaps not quite as enlightened as Pamina.

The statue scene from Don Giovanni at Covent Garden in 1847.