Wang Center provides a fitting home for Phantom

PHANTOM OF THE OPERA


The newly restored Wang Center is very much an appropriate venue for a performance of Andrew Lloyd Webber's acclaimed musical The Phantom of the Opera. The refurbished gold leaf ornamenting and polished crystal chandelier are well-sailed for the dazzling production of Phantom. For those who know the music but have not seen the musical on stage, it is worth the price of admission to witness the live performance at the Wang.

The Phantom of the Opera takes place in the Paris Opera House at the end of the nineteenth century. The opera house is haunted by the Phantom (Kevin Gray), who lives in a labyrinth beneath the building. He becomes fond of a chorus girl, Christine (Teri Bibb), and raises her to stardom. When Christine falls in love with Raoul (Nat Chandler), a friend from her childhood, the Phantom becomes jealous and devises a plan to steal Christine away. The musical ends with a chase and a few big surprises.

The special effects in Phantom are as spectacular as the music. Magnesium burns, flares flash, and flames leap from the stage. After one particular display, the audience gaped collectively and actually applaudied the effects. The set for the labyrinth is especially memorable. Lights on the stage floor penetrate a lake simulated by a thick layer of green smoke. In one scene, Raoul jumps into the lake and is swallowed by the stage in a somewhat startling visual treat.

The interplay between the staging and the music is particularly impressive. The Phantom is able to appear wherever he wants to in the opera house. He often speaks from the rafters or from beneath the floor. Several times he literally emerges from the woodwork, quite unexpectedly. The Phantom's theme starts on a staccato descending scale from a held note, and it too can emerge quite unexpectedly from anywhere. At the end of the first act, the Phantom suddenly appears on stage as his theme can be heard in the music of the love theme, ending the first half of the performance on a haunting note.

The music is, of course, phenomenal. Tony Award-winning composer and orchestrator Andrew Lloyd Webber (Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Jesus Christ Superstar, Evita, Cats, Starlight Express, Aspects of Love) held back nothing in writing the Phantom of the Opera. From the haunting themes of "Angels of Music" and "The Music of the Night" to the showstopping love theme "All I Ask of You," the music will leave you humming for weeks. The dancing is also striking. The Paris Opera House has a ballet company that dances several numbers in Phantom. Despite the Phantom's censure of ballet sections, neither of these is a serious problem, though, and they do not detract from the overall effect of the musical.

The Phantom of the Opera runs at the Wang Center through November 14. Tickets are still available and are $20 to $60 depending on seat location and date of performance. The combination of music, dancing, staging, and the splendor of the new Wang Center make for a very memorable evening.

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