

Theatre



REVIEW: Welsh National Opera / Magic Flute in Plymouth

16th April 2008

Mozart's *Magic Flute* is far more like an English pantomime than an opera.

Dominic Cooke's absolutely superb production for Welsh National Opera, with revival director, Benjamin Davis, makes the most of this vital distinction, while still addressing the highly moral aspects of the plot, and its Masonic associations.

First and foremost, Jeremy Sams's English libretto is a brilliant piece of theatre in its own right, and fundamental to the work's successful transmutation from its original setting in ancient Egypt.

The set and lavishly colourful costumes combine seamlessly, and the inspired use of stage machinery and effects never degenerates into merely tasteless gimmicks.

But it is nonetheless an opera, and WNO has lined up a first-rate cast to do full justice to the music. American tenor, Russell Thomas, is a fine, heroic Tamino, with a voice to match, and Charlotte Ellett, standing in for the indisposed Rebecca Evans, provides the perfect partner in Pamina.

Neal Davies's Papageno blends exceptional vocal delivery with easy humour, while David Soar's tonal richness and imposing presence generate an intimidating Sarastro.

With overall strong supporting roles, excellent chorus work, especially from the men, superlative orchestral playing under Anthony Negus's informed direction, this production simply can't fail to delight the seasoned opera buff or newcomer to the art.

And if you're quick, there's still time to tootle on down, and see for yourself!

Welsh National Opera's *The Magic Flute* returns to the Theatre Royal Plymouth on April 18. Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* will be on April 16 and April 19 and *Falstaff*, by Verdi, is on April 17.

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