

OPERA NEWS

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Der Fliegende Holländer

Madison, April 11, 2010

Madison Opera boldly essayed a chancy maiden voyage into Wagnerian waters with a traversal of *Der Fliegende Holländer* that proved as artistically rewarding as it was successful in augmenting the company's estimable profile.

Bass-baritone Bradley Garvin was suffering from a throat ailment (an indulgence announcement was made at intermission) but it must be said that aside from an occasional woolliness in sustained legato, we should all sound this good when sick. Garvin's Dutchman was at once noble and pathetic, and he delivered a splendid account of the great monologue, less darkly cavernous than some, but very intelligently inflected. His timbre is intrinsically masculine and beautiful. This is a good role for him, and it will be interesting to watch his growth in it.

Turid Karlsen had all the requisite power for Senta and hammered out those Gs in the ballad dead-on, but the Norwegian soprano ultimately conquered the audience with the beauty of her softly floated upper register in the duets. Arnold Rawls' stentorian Eric was similarly impressive, especially in his surprisingly fluid dispatch of the intermittent passagework in "Mein Herz, voll Treube bis zum Sterben." The American tenor made a sympathetic personage of what can be a rather two-dimensional assignment. Bass Dean Peterson's warmly humorous Daland was sonorously delivered and an obvious delight to the audience, who chuckled empathically at his flights of paternal ambition. Tenor Gregory Schmidt's mellifluous Steersman fielded a surfeit of timbral honey and a telling ping above the staff. The principal cast was completed with distinction by the always reliable Julia Faulkner, who was a spirited Mary.

The familiar, vaguely abstract Giles Cadle settings from NYCO by way of Washington National Opera looked terrific in Madison's stunning Overture Hall. Matters have been tweaked somewhat—newly added fluttering sails enhanced visual interest, as did Christopher Rynne's fabulous lighting—but the extensive use of scrim and projections of turbulent seascapes that lend a cinematic fluidity to this mounting remains quite effective. Ingeborg Bernerth's costumes seemed revitalized as well, though I could have done without Garvin's Sweeney Todd make up: the character is described as "pale," but so are any number of tormented Victorian heroes, and the Dutchman is a romantic figure as well as a supernatural one.

Michael Scarola's direction was specific and often illuminating. Erik's bitter ripping of pages from Senta's storybook was a nice touch, though it created a mess for the boozy sailors to clean up (one wondered why they would care), and the final apotheosis was shattering, as

Senta and the Dutchman appeared in eternal embrace, having clutched hands and plunged together into the sea.

Wagner's multiple-act version was utilized, with all redemption themes intact; Acts II and III were performed straight through. **Madison Symphony played beautifully for conductor John DeMain, whose thrilling account of the overture signaled a prodigious musical experience to follow. When regional companies undertake a project such as this, one's thoughts immediately go to the choral forces, and Madison's excellent assemblage rose gloriously to the task, delivering its finest work in memory. The ovation in the calls was deafening and entirely deserved. This *Holländer* represented a proud moment for Madison Opera. Wagner had a great night, too.**