



REVIEW

Both Lyrical and Heart-wrenching

GREGORY MOOMJY experiences a Divaria Productions concert

It is a rite of passage for any young opera lover in the New York area; the realization that despite the prestige of the Metropolitan Opera, it is far from a perfect institution. I was reminded of this paradigm on Saturday 13 October 2012 at a concert given by Divaria Productions at St Patrick's Old Cathedral on Manhattan's Mulberry Street. The concert starred only three singers and featured a mix of opera, Zarzuela and Broadway show tunes. David Guzman, Ashley Bell, Pedro Quiralte-Gomez, Anton Armendariz Diaz and pianist Maria de Los Angeles Rubio all collaborated on a wonderfully thrilling and intensely musical evening.

Divaria Productions is a new national company only in its second year of operation. They opened last year with a production of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. The company specializes in comic operas and divides its time between stage productions, concerts and community outreach. To that end, they perform for patients with debilitating illnesses like Alzheimer's and cancer. While the company has not ventured overseas, there is talk about a future trip to Spain.

The audience on Saturday night was sparse. Nonetheless, the energy was palpable. Highlights included a thrilling rendition of 'Hai gia vinto la causa' from *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Mr Quiralte-Gomez proved himself a delightfully physical and rich-voiced Count Almaviva. His performance in this aria is an auspicious sign for his pending debut as Don Giovanni.

Mr Guzman was in fine voice. It was a joy to hear him sing 'Ah leve toi soleil' from Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, a work that seems to come and go as fashion dictates. In the Zarzuela section, Mr Guzman gave an adroit rendition of 'No Puede Ser'. It was both lyrical and heart-wrenching.

Ashley Bell had wonderful technique. Her appoggiaturas were well controlled. Unfortunately, we live in an age when Italianate singing is a rare gift. This is a skill Miss Bell certainly possessed. Her voice may have been one size too big for Juliette's Waltz but this is a matter of

taste. However, her voice was a glove-like fit for 'Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again' from *The Phantom of the Opera* and her performance of *Entrada de Cecilia Valdes*. Here, every facet of her voice and her magnificently coquettish acting brought a complete performance to fruition. Based on that, she belongs in a company that specializes in comic opera. She could be incredibly sexy as Norina in *Don Pasquale*.

Anton Armendariz Diaz was immensely funny. He only needed to appear to get a laugh. I especially enjoyed his particularly inebriated rendition of 'Get Me to the Church on Time'.

The concert capped off an interesting week in New York's classical music scene. A high profile production of Verdi's *Otello* starring Renée Fleming in what is rumored to be her final NY performances as Desdemona opened on Tuesday. Unfortunately, Miss Fleming's leading man, tenor Johan Botha, cracked his voice multiple times due to an allergy attack. By comparison, the concert offered by Divaria productions is proof that sometimes the smaller, lesser known companies are where opera truly lives.

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