

Something For Everyone

Monday, 22 September 2008

Melodrama, drama, comedy, science fiction. Whatever you want (as long as you want opera).

Los Angeles Opera Season Openers.

Three one act operas by Puccini collectively named *Il Trittico*, played out on magnificently epic sets by Santo Loquasto and conducted with verve by James Conlin. In a gritty (all things being relative) dockside love triangle, gruffly mellow Mark Delavan just knows his wife, lush Anja Kampe and her feisty "friend" Salvatore Licitra, passionately piping, are up to no good (for him). He's right and slays who is stalking him with evil intent on a quaint french waterside.

Suor Angelica is a dramatic and vocal triumph for Sonia Rodvanovsky playing a wealthy woman who enters a convent after giving birth to an illegitimate child. When vengeful Larissa Diadkova, harshly informs her that the child is dead, Angelica kills herself with systematically gathered poisonous herbs from her convent garden. Rodvanovsky is immensely moving. Her soprano voice has a grainy, slow vibrato as though colored by her anguish, she soars in beatific flights of fate.

The piece de resistance for many is the Woody Allen-directed *Gianni Schicci*, jam packed with juicy Italian greed, sex, and family feuding which Puccini and his librettist supplied bountifully. Thomas Allen, got up in Marcello Mastroianni drag, threatens, cajoles, and schemes (in short, he rampages) about a dead man's decayed mansion. He triumphs briefly (in this version) and snatches a fine dowry for his daughter (Laura Tatulescu) as well. The way that she and swain Saimir Pagu have been lip locking and body melding, to the ire of his domineering, gusty, voiced aunt Jill Grove, throughout makes marriage seem a mere detail. Woody Allen created an week's worth of frenetic business for this one act opera, almost all of which is hilarious as it is displayed in front of a monumentally busy urban set.

The next day, *The Fly* had its world premiere. It's the subject of two movies, the second of which (released in 1989) achieved cult status (disclaimer- I have seen neither). The opera and David Cronenberg's production—he also directed and co-wrote the 1989 film—reek of film noir atmosphere for this eery, faintly disturbing science fiction tale. Howard Shore's relentlessly grim score (he composed the movie sound track) has a role for a computer suitably sung by the chorus as an automaton. Daniel Okullitch is the increasingly manic scientist and Ruxandra Donode is his brittle love interest. It is a shade too weird to be disturbing, and a tad too disturbing to be sympathetic. David Henry Hwang's libretto is said to closely follow the movie

In repertory through 9/27 at the Music Center. Call (213) 972-8991 or browse LosAngelesOpera.com

Byplay *E Hula Mau*, a delightful chunk of Hawaiian culture, has come and gone from Long Beach's Terrace Theatre. An annual Labor Day event, mark your calenders if you any affinity with the islands. This year's version pitted the big three of LA area hula halaus in friendly but tough

competition. Kealii O Nalani, Lilinoe, and Kamuela (along with its Oahu branches) are perennials at the Merrie Monarch, the Olympics of Hula held each April in Hilo. The performance level has risen so high that this year Nani Ola from Las Vegas was also invited to the Merrie Monarch. So the system is working. Island eyes are on this event. For news of next year, browse NaMamo.org.