

UWOpera rocks Don Giovanni



Written by Nicole Laidler



Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Presented by UWOpera Workshop

Paul Davenport Theatre

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If your new theatre has a trap door, you might as well stage *Don Giovanni*.

Mozart's opera certainly isn't the first choice that comes to mind when one thinks of a student production, but UWOpera rose to the occasion as surely as their Don made his dramatic, fiery trip 'down under.'

Like most great works of art, *Don Giovanni* can be interpreted in many different ways. Is the Don a heartless cad who uses and abuses any woman unfortunate enough to catch his eye? Or is he an enlightenment hero, punished for his refusal to bow to societal expectations?

UWOpera's Don – sung on Friday night by Clarence Frazer – is an unrepentant philanderer who gets his just desserts, but thanks to some fine acting, he's not a totally unlikable character. (Lead roles were double-cast for the production's six performances).

Michael Rusnak's Leporello provided the perfect comic foil to the Don's evil ways. There is plenty of humour written in to the role, and Rusnak milked every bit of it. I have never heard so much laughter during the famous dinner scene – which managed to be hilarious and terrifying at the same time.

Both men handled the dramatic and vocal requirements of their roles with finesse.

Natalie Donnelly was a real treat as the newly-orphaned (at the hands of Don Giovanni) Donna Anna. I'm sure her voice carried clearly right to the back of the hall, and her technical command of the material was impressive. Michael Marino was equally admirable as her ever-faithful fiancé, Don Ottavio.

Gabrielle Heidinger played a convincing Donna Elvira, even if the trickiest bits of Mozart's arias occasionally got away from her. Breanna Temple and Joseph Herbison were also delightful as Zerlina and

Masetto – a peasant couple whose young love is threatened by the lecherous Don. And Aaron Dimoff was a convincing Commendatore – both as Donna Anna’s short-lived father, and as his vengeful statue/ghost.

The entire cast was admirably supported by the UWO Opera Orchestra under the direction of James McKay. The orchestra sounded great in the new hall, with the balance between singers and orchestra much improved over previous years.

My only quibble with the entire production was the contrast between the set - which featured a chain-link fence and skyscraper backdrop – and the very traditional, historic costumes. I’m still not sure if it worked, and I’m still not sure if it matters whether it worked or not.

The evening was artistically and theatrically satisfying, even if it wasn’t a flawless performance. I will even dare to say that Mozart would have enjoyed the youthful spirit, enthusiasm and talent on display. Friday night’s audience sure did.

Nicole Laidler is The Beat’s print editor.