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Così fan tutte is superb!

Written by Iain Paterson



UWO Opera
presents

Mozart's
Così fan Tutte

Paul Davenport Theatre, Western
 February 1 at 8 p.m. February 7 at 7:30 p.m.
 February 2, 3 at 2p.m. February 8, 9 at 8 p.m.

Tickets: \$25/\$20 (seniors and students)
 Call 519-672-8800 or go to tickets.grandtheatre.com.

Così fan tutte

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Presented by UWO Opera

Directed by Theodore Baerg

Music Direction: Alain Trudel

 With Aaron Dimoff, Conlan Gassi, Sebastian Haboczki, Marjorie Maltais, Kelsey Vicary,
 Victoria Trevo

Paul Davenport Theatre

Feb. 3, 2 p.m.; Feb. 7-9, 8 p.m.

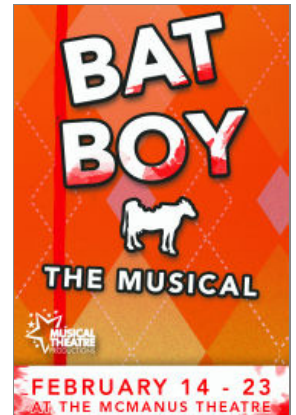
Controversy is no stranger to great works of art, whether literary or musical, contemporary or classical. Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* was no instant success when it first appeared during the Enlightenment period of the late eighteenth century. Arguments were made in defense of the composer's sublime music, whereas Mozart's librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte was excoriated for his accompanying text which was perceived as trivial, superficial and even morally abusive. Known as Mozart's "Amore" triptych which includes *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan Tutte* is now readily recognizable on its own merits and is enjoyed as any of Mozart's greatest operatic works whether from his *opere buffe* or *opere serie*.

This opera plot like many others is not original. Its sources may be traced back to Greek/Roman mythology and to Shakespeare.

Bachelor and cynic Don Alfonso enters and quickly sets the action in motion while talking to two young officers, Ferrando and Guglielmo. Alfonso makes a wager that he will prove to them the inconstancy and fickleness to which their paramours of virtue (Fiordiligi and Dorabella) will ineluctably succumb in the absence of their male partners, since all womankind is thusly created (*Così fan Tutte*: a possible translation). Hoping to prove Don Alfonso wrong and become richer as a result, both men agree to take part in Alfonso's experiment. What follows is a madcap adventure where cuckoldry and coquetterie take centre stage. By the end of the opera all is resolved, each Jill gets her Jack and the Enlightenment ideals of reason and individual autonomy are musically apostrophized.

UWO Opera's production is a huge success while having at its disposal the minimalist style of sets and costumes. As a consequence, one can view this as a student-driven endeavour, yet clearly it is not. Even if it were, everything works beautifully and to the utmost enjoyment of the audience. Instead of eighteenth century Naples director Theodore Baerg has updated the opera's time and space to a university setting campus with its characters sporting Western gear and displaying contemporary reliance on twenty-first century technology (i.e. ipods). The direction and blocking are simple, allowing the singers to perform their respective roles without the superfluity of props, although there were perhaps too many stage right to stage left and vice versa crisscrossings. This opera demands quintessential individual and ensemble singing and this particular cast delivered the goods and a lot more.

Kelsey Vicary's Fiordiligi is played to perfection. The coloratura expectations were certainly



met by beautifully controlled singing from the bottom to the top of her vocal range. Poise and confidence from this performer made it a pleasure both to watch and to listen.

The other sister, Dorabella, played by Marjorie Maltais was another musical confection. Vocal lines were clearly defined with appropriate dynamics and when singing with Fiordiligi the balance and blend of these two voices was at times quite magical.

Victoria Trevoy as Despina, the Doctor and Notary turned in a strongly convincing performance all the while being funny without caricature going too far. Although not a big operatic voice there were rich and pure moments in her singing.

Sebastian Haboczki's lyrical tenor voice was a perfect fit for Ferrando. In and out of disguise, this performer was always at ease and in control of his musical emotions. To be sure a pleasing, warm, and genuinely heartfelt performance.

Conlan Gassi's portrayal of Guglielmo was punctuated with the right amount of bravura and romantic machismo. Strong stage presence and solid ensemble singing nicely complemented the role of Ferrando.

Aaron Dimoff gave a stellar performance of Don Alfonso. With a sonorous baritone voice, expressive facial gestures and aplomb his character was brought to life with energy and conviction.

Music Director and Conductor Alain Trudel was masterful in the pit and never let the orchestra at any time overwhelm the performers, maintaining a fine balance between the strings and woodwinds. The subtlety and brilliance of Mozart's music was to be reckoned with at this performance.

Da Ponte's libretto does point the finger at the female gender for its moral failings, its weakness and suffering towards "love, the all-powerful deity". Don Alfonso does win his bet, yet the males in this opera get their comeuppance too. Despina in her aria in Act One delivers an indictment against men that must not be taken for granted. The end of the opera ends with an apotheosis to rationality, echoing once again the true spirit of the Enlightenment Age wherein all of human nature is tested in the name of all things romantic. Societal convention has been appropriated by the human instinct and in that sense Mozart too has written the appropriate music, not for an inferior libretto but one that points to all of us when all is said and done.

This production of ***Così fan Tutte*** overflows with positives: youthful enthusiasm, comedy, poignancy and above all exhilarating music making. So much so that I too would make a wager betting that the folk in St. Thomas and Brantford would be pleasantly seduced by the delight of this superb opera and the talent of its cast.

★★★★★ / 4

Iain Paterson is a Musical Theatre Performer and founder of The Broadway Singers.