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## **Mythical songs on steel scaffold**

Öhringen. Australian Co-Opera plays “The Magic Flute” at the Kultura to 300 patrons  
By Michael Dignal

It is futile to speculate how many different performances of Mozart’s opera “The Magic Flute” have been staged since it premiered in Vienna in 1791. Co-Opera’s version from Adelaide, Australia should in any case rank among the most conspicuous.

Under the direction of Tessa Bremner (staging) and Brian Chatterton (music), the touring troupe was on the road in Germany and bordering Switzerland for more than two weeks. The final destination was Öhringen where roughly 300 patrons witnessed a spectacular performance at the Kultura.

**Tattooed pizza chef.** The fairytale revolving around prince Tamino (Ernst Ens) and princess Pamina (Sara Lambert) was transported without hesitation to take place on, under, and around a shiny steel scaffold. The sun priest Sarastro (Andrea Carcassi) and the Queen of the Night (Eleanor Blythman) were restaurant owners, Papageno the bird man (Guy Booth) a supplier of chooks, and the slave overseer Monostatos (Vince Fusco) a tattooed pizza chef.

The looks alone were reason enough to be amused. For example, when Papageno wore shrill and colourful Bermuda shorts, a Hawaiian shirt and a baseball cap and sang about his yearning for a Papagena, or when the three court ladies appeared in front of the Queen of the Night as buxom, fun-loving waitresses. Unlike the setting, however, all matters to do with singing were by and large held in conventional style. Every once in a while the English translation was complemented by the German original text. Besides, Bremner and Chatterton insisted on highlighting their candid interpretation by smuggling, with the help of the waitresses, a couple of Motown Supremes songs into the original score.

**Mini orchestra at work.** Overall, the ensemble was in good voice, which was most notably revealed during the choral sequences. The equally famous and exhausting aria of the Queen of the Night was convincingly mastered by Blythman. The Australian “mini orchestra” consisting of four string players and a pianist was proof that a fully-fledged orchestra is not necessarily required in order to make an opera sonorous.

After three hours Tamino finally had his Pamina, and crowd-pleaser Papageno had his Papagena. And Öhringen was yet again enthralled by the Aussies and their invigorating performance.