

Mozart close up in remote places

Australian outback-troupe enthuses at the Schlachthof with the Magic Flute.

By Volker Milch

Wiesbaden. Secretly we have been hoping to see a crocodile at the beginning of Mozart's Magic Flute and not a commonplace snake. This is because the production, which is now playing at the Schlachthof is from Australia. The German media have been occasionally reporting about the terrible appetite of the crocodiles from down under.

Nonetheless, snake sightings in Australia are probably more likely than crocodile sightings. In light of this, the first scene in which Prince Tamino is threatened by a rubber snake is plausible. The wish to see a crocodile is soon forgotten when "Rettung" is called "rescue" and it comes not in the form of three ladies, but three feisty waitresses interacting with the audience. Soon enthusiasm at the Schlachthof knows no limits.

The Magic Flute as a restaurant story: The concept of "Regietheater" has travelled to the shores of Australia. Monostatos is a filthy chef whose soul is as black as his kitchen and not as his skin. This is a lot more politically correct than it was back in Mozart's and his librettist Schikaneder's day. By the way, in this kitchen context, the aria in which the Queen of the Night pronounces her revenge, which has been burning in her heart, is given a unique flavour. All of this was masterly prepared by Tessa Bremner, the director and co-founder of Co-Opera. This outback opera company, which normally tours the wild vastness of Australia in 3 mini buses and a truck, and can now be enjoyed for the first time in Europe, has gained the hearts of the audience in no time.

Scaffold on stage

The set is a raw scaffold and Brian Chatterton carefully conducted the chamber ensemble, augmented with emerging musicians from the Wiesbaden Academy of Music. Add colourful costumes and the rest is above all an infectiously playful performance with which another chapter of the successful history of Hessian-Australian opera relation was written. Not least, this is due to a motivated and ambitious cast: Sara Lambert as Pamina, Ernst Ens as Tamino, Jeremy Tatchell as a lively Papageno, Eleanor Blythman as the Queen of the Night, and Andrea Carcassi as Sarastro. The occasional tempo instability or coloratura slip can also be heard in German theatres. Not however such a delightful English-German libretto in which men feel "love emotions" and Sarastro convenes a "meeting".

Most importantly though, the charm of this "Opera on the Move" is, despite all of its improvisations and imperfections in a certain sense, closer to historical performance practice than many expensive productions whose authenticity draws upon original instruments and well researched performance style. The spirit of the Vienna Volkstheater, with its close affinity to the Magic Flute, may be more alive in

the Australian outback, than here in Germany. There, Mozart moves a lot closer to his audience. Even though Wiesbaden has no desert on offer, the Schlachthof on the outskirts, proved to be the preferable venue over the court theatre pomp of the Staatstheater.