

Adventure Outback

Maifestspiele: "Magic Flute" at the Schlachthof

By Brigitta Lamparth

WIESBADEN. Outback. This is the name Australians give to remote regions beyond civilization. A touch of freedom and adventure is associated with this term. For the audience decked out for this evening's theatre performance, arriving predominantly in buses, the venue would also appear to be in the outback. Many of them would not have ever been here at Wiesbaden's *Schlachthof* (slaughter house).

This was now made possible by the Hessische Staatstheater. For the first time ever at the Maifestspiele this venue which is usually frequented by young audiences was chosen for an Australian touring production. And so the curious and somewhat reserved audience is lining up in the long queue outside this concert hall where usually Heavy Metal and Indie-Rock scream beneath the high ceiling. Some hard-line *Schlachthof* guests are sitting in the venue's own outdoor *Biergarten* eating pizza and gazing in amazement at the unusual scene. An extraordinary theatre evening in every respect it seems. Worlds collide.

Three hours later the scene is a totally different one. Everyone is enthusiastically celebrating together at the Australian party in the *Räucherzimmer* (smoking chamber).

What happened during those past three hours? A refreshing and infectiously joyful journey into music, that's what happened. Close up to the folkloristic Mozart, close up with the audience. Authentic and original – just as the place of the action which has strongly recommended itself as a theatre-fit venue. The now emphatically celebrated theatre troop's guest performance was also a debut. *Co-Opera* started their European tour of the Magic Flute tonight.

This ensemble, founded in 1990, would have felt at home at this venue. The 24 traveling musicians tour 30,000 kilometers per year across the continent in three minibuses and a truck. They perform operas in multi purpose halls, stables or occasionally under the stars in their musical missionary quest.

The simple metal construction scaffold set which holds stage lights and has a flight of stairs on each side is rumored to have had even Ayers Rock as a backdrop. This set is enough to give free reign to fantasy. It is a cage, then gate and escape route – or even a restaurant. It is the latter in which Tessa Bremner stages the libretto of this Mozart opera. The restaurant is called *To the Star Blazing Queen*. The very queen chooses her and her husband Sarastro's daughter to be the object of their fighting. Pamina is guarded by the tattooed and sleek chef. Luckily there are also Tamino and Papageno, the chook delivery man who come to her rescue...

All of this is indeed delicious – garnished with three wonderful Ladies. These bear a totally new significance in this witty Australian version of the Magic Flute. Not only do Lynette Harris, Sonia Anfiloff and Kerrie Bolton sound fantastic in their trios. The three waitresses also interject a couple of *Supremes* numbers. Would the Aboriginals from Down Under believe that *Stop in the Name of Love* was also composed by Mozart?

Brian Chatterton at the helm had no difficulty in bringing his small but ambitious and freshly playing orchestra back to the score after such excursions. No

didgeridoo is needed for this. Sara Lambert pleased as Pamina, Ernst Ens juxtaposed the ironic staging with a classic Tamino. Eleanor Blythman as the Queen of the Night offered cascading coloraturas, albeit ever so slightly shaky in the top notes. Protected by body guards, Andrea Carcassi made Sarastro his own and Liza Cannizzaro was a Papagena full of joy of life. Jeremy Tatchell enthralled the audience as a bull-neck Aussi-Papageno. He won over the audience with a bang commenting a glass of stage water given to him with “Iiiih. Wasser aus Mainz!” (‘Water from Mainz!’ Mainz is Wiesbaden’s twin town on the other side of the Rhine River).

Likewise several important arias were sung in German and not in English. We would like to witness another guest appearance by Co-Opera right here – maybe with their “Boheme” in 2010? For now: Farewell, Auf Wiederseh’n.