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The Magic Flute

An opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Libretto Emanuel Schikaneder

Performers Iain Paton (Tamino); Roland Wood (Papageno); Jennifer Rhys-Davies (Queen of the Night); Marie Arnet (Pamina); Roderick Williams (The Speaker); Pauls Putnins (Sarastro); Gillian Keith (Papagena); Scottish Opera Chorus, Piers Maxim (Chorus Master); Scottish Opera Orchestra, Vincent de Kort (Conductor)

Director Jonathon Moore

Designer Rae Smith

Lighting Director Bruno Poet

Movement Director Peter Brennan

Commedia dell'Arte Consultant Emil Wok

Dates 27 and 29 May 2003

Venue Edinburgh Festival Theatre

Address 13-29 Nicholson Street

Reviewer Jonas Green

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Scottish Opera's new *Magic Flute* could perhaps be dubbed the *Irreverent Magic Flute* or possibly a bit of mischievous Mozart magic. Why so? Well, here are a few reasons.

Tamino lands on the moon as an astronaut; the three ladies are lascivious and the three boys streetwise. The pop-culture references range from cuddly toys and bondage gear to Eric Morecambe. (When an audience mobile phone went off early in Act I, it seemed - momentarily - a part of the onstage antics.) Later, Papageno's outrageous front-of-tabs routine with fake glockenspiel - using ever more mallets in sometimes suggestive ways - would fit perfectly in any Christmas panto. The lyrics have been rewritten by Kit Hesketh-Hervey and the dialogue by director Jonathan Moore.



Roland Wood

Opera directors' innovative treatments of classics are often misguided and this one has apparently troubled some purists. But I found all of it entirely and gloriously appropriate to Mozart and Schikaneder's blend of high art and popular Viennese theatre. The traditions of the opera are still observed: an underlying and essentially serious confusion between the good and the bad; a human unity expressed through contrasts of behaviour, culture and location, together with doses of masonic ritual and earthy clowning; there are even sly references to the original Monostatos' skin colour.

Designer Rae Smith achieves many fine visual effects by simple means, such as the fire and water trial. Though noisy scene-shifting was criticised at the earlier Edinburgh performance, this one ran silently.

My only reservations concern two of the principal roles, and Jonathan Moore's panto-style dialogue, which is overlong, and sometimes lame and laboured. It should be critically revised, since the rest of the production is well worth preserving.



Marie Arnet

Wood, a new, valuable talent and a natural comic, has to carry most of the long dialogue scenes.

Musically, the chorus is strong as usual, as is the orchestra once the brass have settled down, and all the smaller parts are well done. Three out of the five principal parts which matter are excellent: Iain Paton as Tamino and especially Marie Arnet as Pamina are light but stylish. She has even tone throughout her range, some good expressive colour (though she will develop more) and the flawless accuracy required for Mozart. The Papageno of Roland However both Sarastro and the Queen are vocally sub-standard; while they look good, their combined weakness risks spoiling the show. When will we hear a proper resonant bass as Sarastro? Pauls Putnins' bottom fifth lacks sonority. His upper register starts woolly and improves slightly. Jennifer Rhys-Davies as Queen of the Night has the hardest job vocally but she falls the furthest short - as she sometimes does of the pitch. Too much vibrato. Why, when Pamina has all the right qualities, do they choose a Queen of the Night who has none of them? But enough carping. For most of the time, it's a great show.

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Mozart

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