

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

DIE FLEDERMAUS

Johann Strauss II 1874

April 26, 30, May 2, 4, 2014

Strauss' "Die Fledermaus" has amusing treatment, memorable melodies

April 27, 2014

By Libby Hanssen

Johann Strauss II's "Die Fledermaus" is a witty, exuberant comic operetta, and the Lyric Opera created a pleasingly ridiculous production, fun and fresh, for Saturday's opening night in the Muriel Kauffman Theatre.

Director Tomer Zvulun filled the script with self-referential jokes, and the contrivances of the plot were offset by timely dialogue and spirited physical humor, cheesy accents and nice fluidity to ensemble scenes. The comic acting of the cast was just as important as their voices.

Artistic director Ward Holmquist conducted the Kansas City Symphony through Strauss' festive, memorable melodies. The extensive overture began the performance with a medley of the cheery tunes, though some of the lines seemed timid, and downbeats bogged down initially, not quite achieving the necessarily effortless-seeming bounce and lilt.

The operetta was performed in English, but the design by R. Keith Brumley was of Strauss' period, late 19th century Vienna, with gorgeous costuming from Zack Brown, especially the flattering, shimmering hues of the women's party dresses, and elaborate wigs designed by Alison Hanks.

In this complex practical joke, the women of the cast emerged the victors. Anna Christy's Adele was chirpy, exhibiting deliciously blatant bad acting and a vibrant, enthusiastic soprano, especially during her Act 2 aria.

Kelly Kaduce, also soprano, was a ferocious Rosalinde, with a commanding "Csárdás" and fine flourish to the upper register.

The men mostly played drunken fools, serving the plot of revenge devised by Falke, performed by Paul LaRosa.

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Liam Bonner's Eisenstein, the victim, was pretentious and irascible, with an inviting baritone that belied his unsavory morals.

Gordon Gietz sang the role of the ardent opera tenor Alfred, oblivious and Italianate, with humorous musical quotations. Equally amusing was John Stephens' Frank, likable, yet lascivious.

Mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle played Prince Orlofsky, co-conspirator, with nonchalance and oddly placed timbre. Scott Michael's stuttering Dr. Blind, Samantha Gossard as Sally and Robert Gibby Brand as Ivan completed the cast.

Devon Carney choreographed dance steps for the principals and more elaborate numbers with Kansas City Ballet members, including an iconic waltz.

Like the cascade of melodies that filtered through the score, the variety of sight gags added whimsy to the production, especially during Act 3. Contributing to the comedy was Gary Neal Johnson's stumbling performance and well-timed one-liners as the jailer Frosch.

Act 2's finale contained the singular sensitive moment, a gentle, lyrical full-chorus love song, but it was the ode to champagne, celebrating decadence, that completed the performance with a raucous, high-spirited send-off.