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# Opera abounds in our green hills

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In the world of opera, no operatic venue bespeaks consistent excellence of quality and elegance of performance does that of the ancestral home of the wealthy Christie family, Glyndebourne, today a mecca for serious opera lovers. I mention this because it has been a summer opera home, much like Green Mountain Opera Festival, now in its fifth year.

Glyndebourne is noteworthy for elegant picnics, which is a one thing that is absent from Green Mountain Opera Festival and on the strength of the last two years, I'm beginning to think that we are capable of producing world-class opera productions that need not depend on opera singers and of the first magnitude. There was no single performance in GMOF's last two productions that would not have graced any operatic stage in the world..

This year's production, Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor", advanced beyond the excellences of last year's "The Marriage of Figaro", which was the finest production of that opera this reviewer has ever seen, and remarkable for the total unity of conception which started from the terrific sets designed and executed by Warren, Vt., resident, Gary Eckhart. I chanced upon him in the lobby prior to Friday night's opening performance of Lucia and told him once again how excellent the production of Marriage had been. He told me if I thought that was true of last year's production, I should, in effect, hold onto my hat, because I was due for some really pleasant surprises.

He was more than correct. What he had devised were sets which suggested the various scenes called for in the opera libretto.

They were like huge steles in a graveyard, and in the production they were quickly, and I do mean quickly, put into place by the members of the chorus, who also performed the function of the curtain sometimes in order to block the audience's view of the chorus members' activities. The fluidity that was gained by using the curtain only to close the end of the first act and the end of the opera itself was immeasurable, and had a notable positive impact on the forward motion of the libretto.

Lighting, costumes, well-trained chorus (trained by the talented Tim Tavcar, formerly director of the Vergennes Opera House), orchestra well under the control of conductor Leonardo Vordoni and playing beautifully throughout the evening (and the restoration of a glass harmonica to play the wisps of the earlier love duets was a stroke of genius, it's sound introducing a natural melancholy that was perfectly apposite for the Mad Scene ).

And the singers—if I was pleased with the cast of Marriage last year, how much greater my pleasure and hearing the splendid singers that been brought together for this production, starting with the Lucia of Nikki Einfeld. She turned the Mad Scene into a genuine tour de force of meaningful bel canto singing, and her first act aria, "Regnava nel silenzio" was a fine introduction to what we could expect from her vocally throughout the opera. There were several times where her topmost voice was just a trifle edgy, but in general her singing and acting were of superior merit.

The role of Enrico, Lucia's brother and the motivating force that drives the opera, was superbly sung by baritone Jordan Shanahan. He is also a keen actor, and he had delineated his character to make a man once sympathetic and hated. His solos were gorgeously sung, and he was expert in making his ensemble pieces significant parts of the drama.

The same is true of Gustav Andreassen, who sang the pivotal role of Raimondo, a minister who fails to see the consequences of Lucia's betrayal. Two tenors, Scott Ramsey (Edgardo) and Cameron Schutza (Arturo), sang very well. Ramsey had some benefits in that the second act retained the original order, where Edgardo dies after Lucia. I had from time to time of feeling that we were being reintroduced to aspects of the score that I usually cut for the sake of time (in particular, the duet between Enrico and Edgardo in act two, and the marked division between the two sections of the Mad Scene.).

The ensemble singing was generally of a very high quality, especially the famous sextet.

What will year six have to bring to Green Mountain Opera Festival? According to Artistic Director Taras Kulish, the plans for next year's opera are being discussed at this moment, and the choice may fall to "Don Giovanni", an opera that has a very small chorus and a rather large cast, three sopranos, one tenor, three baritones and one bass, and now one of those cast members has an insignificant role. Not to mention the demands put upon the conductor and the orchestra.

Frankly, so long as the production team includes Gary Eckhart, and so long as the company is managed by so personable man as Taras Kulish, and so long as the backers realize they are backing a true winner, I see nothing but a rosy future for Green Mountain Opera Festival, and I hope I'm around to chronicle their continued ascendancy in bringing opera of first-class quality to Vermont.

Burlington resident Dan Wolfe observes and critiques the local arts scene for The Eagle.