

Green Mountain Opera Festival opener bodes well



The Green Mountain Opera Festival opened its fifth season at Waitsfield's Joslyn Round Barn on Sunday.

Stefan Hard/Times Argus file

By **Jim Lowe** Times Argus Staff - Published: June 2, 2010

WAITSFIELD – The Green Mountain Opera Festival opened Sunday at the Joslyn Round Barn with a splashy showcase introducing the three-week regional festival. Preview selections of upcoming operas, Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" and Handel's "Orlando," proved promising, and the individual singers were of largely a high professional level.

The two lovers in "Lucia," the delightful bel canto tale of insanity and murder, come together for the first time in a duet professing their love for each other despite the political ramifications.

On Sunday, soprano Nikki Einfeld in the title role and tenor Scott Ramsey as Edgardo delivered their opening lines with flair and the beginnings of good chemistry.

The diminutive Einfeld has a brilliant voice – with a slight and delicious dark tinge – which she uses with coloratura ease. The effusive Ramsey sings with strength and warmth, as well as a natural expressiveness. The evening closed with an effusive performance of the famous sextet from the opera. All this bodes well for the fully staged production scheduled for June 18 and 20 at the Barre Opera House.

"Orlando," another tale of love and insanity, will be performed by the young singers of the Emerging Artist Program on June 13 at Middlebury's Town Hall Theater and on June 17 at Waitsfield's Skinner Barn. Sunday's concert introduced its star, Gerrod Pagenkopf, a counter tenor (a male who sings in the alto range), who sang "Fammi Combattere" with a mellow warmth and impressive agility.

Three young women – mezzo-soprano Shirin Eskandani who plays the male Medoro, soprano Greer Davis as Angelica who is in love with Medoro, and soprano Margot Rood as Dorinda, also in love with Medoro – proved vocally rich, charming and expressive. Baritone Cairan Ryan was warm in Zoriastro's aria. Bruce Stasnya, director of the Emerging Artist Program, was the able pianist for the "Orlando" excerpts.

In addition to the "Lucia" and "Orlando" selections there were a number of memorable performances. Incredibly powerful was baritone Jordan Shanahan's hear-wrenching performance of Yeletsky's plaintive aria from Tchaikovsky's "Pique Dame." With an infectious dark and supple voice, Shanahan will be singing the role of Enrico, Lucia's power-mad brother.

Soprano Samantha Grenell-Zaidman sang the ever-popular "O mio bambino caro" from Puccini's "Gianni Schicchi," with an unusual beauty. Although the line could have flowed a little more easily, Grenell-Zaidman's coloratura voice had a translucent quality that gave it an unusual expressive quality. She will be playing Alisa, Lucia's nurse.

Gustav Andreasson proved a brilliant but rich-sounding baritone in Leperello's "Madamina" from Mozart's "Don Giovanni." Despite a couple of strained notes, tenor Cameron Schutz delivered a powerful performance of an aria from Verdi's "Macbeth."

Many of the Green Mount Opera Festival Opera's rehearsals are open to the public free, offering an excellent opportunity to see what the excitement of grand opera is all about.