

REVIEW: *Lucia di Lammermoor*

What's Love Got to Do with It?

by Mimi Clark

On a sweet summer night, the first of the season, love wasn't in the air in Barre, the city of stone. *Lucia di Lammermoor* is a story of two families living next to each other, hating each other; another take on Romeo and Juliet, with a twist of insanity. This 1835 Donizetti opera, based on a novel by Sir Walter Scott, opens in the 18th century in cold, bonny Scotland and is warmed by the passion of Italians Gaetano Donizetti and Salvatore Cammarano, the composer and librettist. This tragedy was superbly performed by the fledgling five-year old Green Mountain Opera Company. Ukranian-born Taras Kulish, artistic director since the opera's inception, announced his company's recent acceptance into Opera America, an umbrella organization for all opera companies, and then with a warm voice, bade the audience "Enjoy the madness!"

The musical tale was accompanied by a 30-piece orchestra led by Italian-born Leonardo Vordoni. The orchestra's years of collective practice created a seamless sound. An unusual number of French horn segments gave a rare opportunity to show off for John Boden and Joy Worland, who enhanced whatever tragedy was occurring on stage below from the left stage balcony. Cecilia Brauer on her glass harmonica in the right stage balcony was haunting in Lucia's final death soliloquy. Monolithic figurelike stones cloaked in drapery, reminiscent of Michelangelo's *Rondonini Pieta*, bedecked the stage in a half cluster facing the audience. Lighting master Jeff Bruckerhoff chose simple light themes for the expansive backdrop. An immense sapphirine square backlit the stage—in sharp contrast to Lucia's russet red hair—changing to a warm umber, rose, yellowgreen, all colors enhancing a redhead.

As the music begins, the very front of the stage is full of men in kilts, cloaks and swords singing of a woman's refusal to marry a man she doesn't love. Throughout the work, curtain-free scene changes are executed almost imperceptibly behind a chorus of many local men and women who blended easily with the principals under spotlights in the foreground. Throughout the piece, drapery, paintings, candlesticks and steps all silently appear and disappear, suggesting castle interiors. The stones are always there in some symbolic form, all the work of set designer Gary Eckhart. One by one the characters were introduced in and around the stones. The opening note was timidly sung by Normanno, captain of Enrico's guard, played by Adam Caughey, in an otherwise strong supporting role. Enrico, Lucia's brother, the villain baritone and crowd favorite sung by Hawaiian native Jordan Shanahan, gave a stellar performance from start to finish. He was convincingly evil and heartless in every move, note and expression. His looks were sinister and dark. He used everything in synchronized skill to bring alive his character on the right side of the stage, where he exited in Act II Scene II. He then moved to the front left where he was softened by pity for his dying sister and repented all his wicked scheming. His face changed to an expression of regret and remorse. Although it was not clear whether Raimondo, a father figure to Lucia, beautifully sung by bass Gustav Andreassen, was her tutor, chaplain or father, he was a soothing and calming presence in the most difficult moments.

The part of Lucia, sung by soprano Nikki Einfield, requires intense pain and hopeless frustration throughout, no easy task. Einfield's consistently even, beautiful tone and seemingly effortless transitions could have made Natalie Dessay envious. But Einfield could have displayed more tenderness in the scene with her close friend Alisa, played by Samantha Grenell-Zaidman. The love scene with Edgardo lacked in feeling on Lucia's part. A little less bitterness of heart on her face and more sweet surrender during the lovers' private exchange of vows (which would have been valid in Scotland at the time) would have added to their performance. In the famous dying scene, Lucia dies for a full 20 minutes before leaving us for another world that beckons as she bids a ghoulish farewell. Although Einfield sang it as well as anyone, the scene seemed too long for a postmodern world. The swashbuckling teddy bear

heart-on-his-sleeve tenor in red plaid was Scott Ramsey and his aria was tender and convincing. Tenor Cameron Schutz played Arturo, Lucia's portly husband, in plenty of curls and yellow ruffles. He could easily have doubled for her lover. A casting oversight?

It was all there: love, betrayal, greed, powerful feuding, scheming and family subterfuge, all on a beautiful, warm summer night.