

Berkshire Opera Festival, Great Barrington, MA

Don Giovanni, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte.
Directed by Jonathon Loy. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Là ci darem la mano”

The beautiful duet comes about one hour into the first act of Mozart’s “Don Giovanni,” the Berkshire Opera Festival’s final presentation of their 2022 season. Giovanni has met a young bride named Zerlina and woos her with this tune and she responds in kind. “There we will give each other our hands” he sings and she, newly married, responds. It’s a black moment for her as Giovanni woos her away from her husband, Masetto. In this production in Great Barrington, Massachusetts it is indeed black; the bride wears black here, so does the groom, so does Giovanni, the chorus, the other two women in his life and most of the men. Only his servant, Leporekillo, dresses in a color, drab brown. You would expect me to say something bad here about costume designer Charles Caine, but I can’t. The entire production, directed by Jonathan Loy, is like this: black sets for the most part, dark lights, no contrast among people. A dark comedy has been given a dark treatment from one end to another.



Megan Moore as Donna Elvira, Christian Zarembo as Leporello,
André Courville as Don Giovanni; Photo: Matt Madison-Clark.

Mozart and da Ponte had already written and premiered “La Nozze di Figaro” when a new work by them was commissioned. With too many other shows in the works da Ponte rewrote a libretto by Giovanni Bertati. He also used the exploits of his friend, Casanova, while constructing Leporello’s famous Catalogue aria which was well sung in this presentation by Christian Zarembo. In fact, except for the quiet-voiced Zerlina, Natalia Santaliz, the whole company sang well giving the proceedings that sense of sheer joy.

Giovanni’s two girlfriends, Donna Anna played by Laura Wilde, and Donna Elvira, also



Laura Wilde as Donna Anna, John Cheek as the Commendatore; Photo: Matt Madison-Clark

beautifully sung by Megan Moore often came close to stopping the show for encores. Bass John Cheek, for many years resident at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, played Anna's father the Commendatore, the man whose curse brings about the undoing of Giovanni. Anna's fiancé Don Ottavio was played by Joshua Blue. Brian James Meyer was Zerlina's husband, Masetto.

Don Giovanni was played by André Courville whose gorgeous voice was ideal for

his many musical moments when women were wooed. In fact it could be said that all of the singing was exceptional. The seven or eight playing areas on the Mahaiwe Theater's stage kept the audience on edge, not knowing where the next voice might be coming from. But the real problem with the opera was the physical restrictions put on them by the director. At times the stage was so dark that it was unclear who was singing and where he or she might be. Lighting Designer Alex Jainchill may also not have been sure about who was where when.

Just to make matters worse, two dancers, also in black, danced and exercised, writhed and wrenched their bodies into impossible to describe shapes and patterns emphasizing the dark and impossible ego and soul of Don Giovanni. They are Edoardo Torresin and Katie Hardig. The toppeer, for me, was the sur-titles projected at the top of the proscenium. They too were dark, small, and basically unreadable. A perfect unity was achieved by Loy and his team.



Natalia Santaliz as Zerlina, Brian James Meyer as Masetto; Photo: Matt Madison-Clark

If all you need from this opera is to hear great music beautifully played by the orchestra conducted by Brian Garman and some extraordinary voices, young and old (Cheek sounded absolutely marvelous), go to see Don Giovanni at the Mahaiwe, but if you want to see the opera, rent a video somewhere, for you won't see it here.

+ 08/24/2022 +

The company's earlier production in July of Jake Heggie's one-act opera "Three Decembers" as PS 21 in Chatham, New York was a marvelous success by comparison. Based on a play by Terrence McNally the show boasted a cast of three fine singer/actors, Adriana Zabala as

the Broadway star and mother, Monica Dewey as her adult daughter, and Theo Hoffman as her grown son.

Director Beth Greenberg and conductor Christopher James Ray moved the opera along brilliantly on a fine set by Jane E. Howland. Only given two performances (Giovanni has three), it was the standout artistic hit that Don Giovanni is not. Let there be more like this one next season, please.



Adriana Zabala, Theo Hoffmann, Monica Dewey;
Photo: Matt Madison-Clark

Don Giovanni has one more performance, Friday, August 26 at the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, 14 Castle Street in Great Barrington, MA. For information and tickets call the box office at 413-528-0100 or go to the opera company's website at www.berkshireoperafestival.org.