

Review: Don Giovanni

The only downside to this production of Don Giovanni was that it was for one night only. [Amy Blumsom](#) reviews

Sunday 26 January 2014

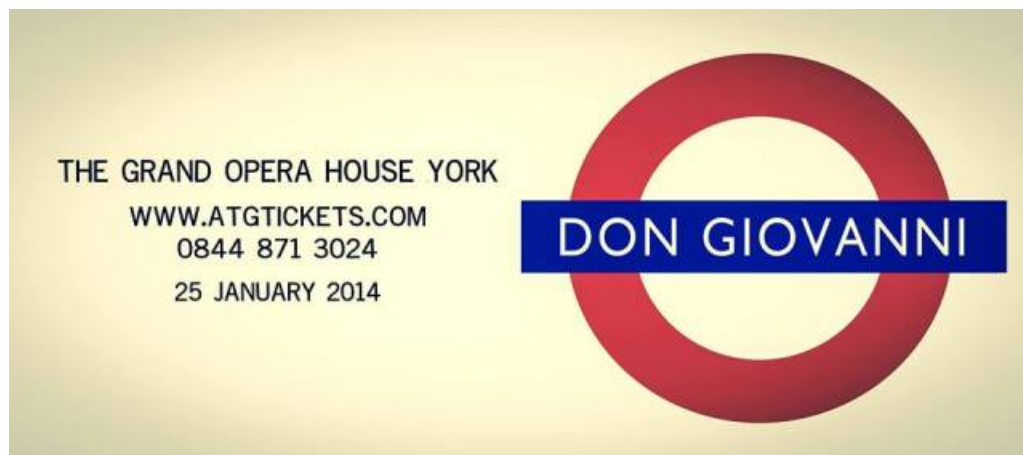


photo credit: UOY Opera Society

Conductor: Alexander Conway

Directors: William Descrettes and Simone Ibbett-Brown

Rating: ★★★★★

For one night the Grand Opera House York was transformed into an East End council estate for UOY Opera Society's stunning rendition of *Don Giovanni*. Graffitied walls, a park bench and rundown swing set juxtaposed the grandiose environment of the Opera House with an incredible effectiveness.

The decision to perform Mozart's iconic opera in English rather than the original Italian was a brave one, but also the right one in the context of a student performance. By using an English translation the distinct playful, and at times raunchy, flavour that is synonymous with Mozart was conveyed with incredible success. Zerlina's (Cassiopeia Berkeley-Agyepong) rendition of the aria 'Batti, Batti O Bel Masetto' becoming 'Beat me, Beat me'- a cheeky song of seduction- was a perfect example this.

Stephanie Wake-Edwards' performance as Leporello (or should we say, Leporella?), Don Giovanni's reluctant yet trusty sidekick, was scene stealing. Wake-Edwards' comic timing and expressive facial reactions provoked laughter throughout the audience. The decision to cast a female as Leporello added a whole new dimension to the servant-master relationship with Don Giovanni (Jake Muffett), who attacked his leading role with relish.

Eleanor Dann and Richard Pinkstone's performance as lovers Donna Anna and Don Ottavio was excellent. Their high level of classical training was evident and, more impressively still, was not hindered by impassioned acting. The pair teamed up with Eleanor Thompson's Donna Elvira and Masetto (Jason White) to foil the evil Don Giovanni whilst at the same time stepping up to the challenge of Mozart's deceptively tricky yet beautifully florid vocal parts.

At times, some of the weaker vocalists struggled to be heard over the power of the 40-piece orchestra, meaning that some witty lines did not achieve their full potential. However, this was only on occasion and was the only thing that reminded one that this was in fact a student production.

Upheaving *Don Giovanni* and setting it in a different time and class system is not an unprecedented move, but the move to set it in an East London estate made this production fresh and relatable- even for complete opera virgins. Steak and wine was substituted with McDonalds and vodka, whilst the grand masked balls were scaled down to a piss up in the park and Giovanni's list of sexual conquests became a spreadsheet on an iPad- all of these small touches added humour to this rounded performance.

Don Giovanni was a triumph for this talented group of students- the only real downside being that this performance was for one night only.



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