

Opera Santa Barbara – Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Comedy, Music, Immorality... Don Giovanni's Fire Sizzles

A RASCAL OF MYTHICAL PROPORTIONS, the story of Don Giovanni, of opera fame, creates comedy, drama, and moral dilemma all lashed together with a dazzling score by Mozart.

"People forget that opera is about storytelling and if you love film, if you love musicals, if you love straight plays, if you love a really good television drama, opera supports that," shared Conductor Douglas Kinney Frost who is on tap as conductor for Opera Santa Barbara's production of *Don Giovanni* during an interview with CASA Magazine.

Opera Santa Barbara will present *Don Giovanni* in a 1940s film noir setting originally created for Kentucky Opera in 2013 on Friday, November 6th at 7:30pm and Sunday, November 8th at 2:30pm. Directed by Kelly Robinson, Director of Theatre Arts at the Banff Centre, with

DANIEL KEPL MUSIC PREVIEW

baritone Mark Walters as Don Giovanni, soprano Marcy Stonikas as Donna Anna, soprano Rena Harms as Donna Elvira, and bass-baritone Daniel Mobbs as Leporello, Santa Barbara's production will also feature local tenor Benjamin Brecher as Don Ottavio, and bass Kevin Thompson as Il Commendatore. *Don Giovanni* will be sung in Italian with English supertitles and is the first opera produced under the new leadership of OSB Artistic Director, Kostis Protopapas, who joined the company in July.

"*Don Giovanni* is a comedy, a drama, a love story, a psychological thriller, and a moral dilemma," noted Protopapas. "It's life set to music by the greatest composer of all time."

Notorious for ugly run-ins with his librettists over the years, Mozart was obsessed with the connection between words and music. The composer was never happy with his writers until he met fellow Freemason, Lorenzo Da Ponte, the Venetian

Classical scholar, poet, and librettist who loved the American Revolution so much he lived in the new Republic from 1805

to his death in 1838. Da Ponte's genius with words inspired three of Mozart's greatest operas, *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *Così fan tutte* (1790).

"Mozart and Da Ponte were relentless about getting the text right," explained Frost, who is also the Producing and Artistic Director of Syracuse Opera. "There is an intention of what it meant to be at a certain social level and how comfortable we all were with those things, that influenced Mozart's

works in the last several years. For me it's about ensemble casting. I don't think people understand that opera starts with text. A composer may have a melody in their head, they may have a harmonic progression in their head, they may have a rhythm in their head, but they look for context. Really, all composers start with text."

The storyline of *Don Giovanni* is based on the legend of Don Juan/Casanova, a lecherous libertine who enjoys and gets away with thousands of conquests before he eventually earns his comeuppance.

Asked about Kentucky Opera's twentieth century film noir setting of the eighteenth century opera and the trouble that may cause with purists, Frost replied: "It's like a fantastic 40s Fellini film. If you're crafting music and intensions of scenes that are true, it can exist in any time period. For example, in the traditional time period perhaps there might be a stabbing with a knife. In the forties, perhaps it's something else," he said while making like a gun with his fingers. "Coming up with all those little intricacies helps keep it alive for us and brings it into context for everyone."

According to stage director Kristine McIntyre, who helmed Kentucky Opera's production, noir conventions present an ideal lens for navigating *Don*

Giovanni's notorious moral crosscurrents and ambiguities.

"The piece has been called un-directable, and I think I know what that means," she said. "Film noir – borne of the angst and unrest left behind by the second world war, made in an atmosphere of fear and distrust and uncertainty, with strong female characters who are just as rotten as the men in their lives, where there's no such thing as innocence, and where the anti-hero knows he's going to get it but is going to take us along for the ride – here is a world in which Giovanni makes sense."

Dancing with Da Ponte's powerful, mythic text, Mozart wove his magic. "The music supports the drama and the storytelling," Frost related. "It's not about having something 'at' you for three hours, it's about being a part of the story in a context."

Opera Santa Barbara's *Don Giovanni* is supported by Roger and Sarah Chrisman, the Elaine F. Stepanek Foundation, and the Mithun Family Foundation.

Tickets are \$29-\$204. Call the Granada Theatre box office: 899-2222 or visit www.granadasb.org



Mark Walters as Don Giovanni



Mark Walters as Don Giovanni and Rena Harms as Donna Elvira

Open to all ticket holders, free informative talks will take place 45 minutes before each Opera Santa Barbara performance at the Granada Theatre. Following select performances, the stage director and other production members will be available at the front of the house for an informal question-and-answer session.

Founded in 1994 by Marilyn Gilbert and Nathan Rundlett, **Opera Santa Barbara** is committed to presenting productions and educational programs of the highest quality. Over more than two decades the company has staged some 50 operas and devoted thousands of hours to community outreach. www.operasb.org

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