

May 27, 2008

OPERA REVIEW: Miami Lyric Opera reaches a high point with 'Lucia'
The young company showed it has arrived with its staging of Donizetti's 'Lucia di Lammermoor.'

Author: LAWRENCE A. JOHNSON, lajohnson@MiamiHerald.com

When Raffaele Cardone launched his Miami Lyric Opera four years ago, the reaction from other arts organizations ranged from bemusement to disdain. How could a retired tenor with no management experience expect to mount opera performances in as difficult a market as Miami, let alone hope to achieve any degree of artistic merit?

As in the Gershwin song, Cardone is having the last laugh now. The company's production of Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor, presented Saturday at the Colony Theater, offered MLO's finest outing to date with a pair of principals worthy of any major opera house, a solid supporting cast, and enough dramatic fire and Italianate vocalism to make one overlook the rough edges. Miami Lyric Opera has arrived.

The inevitable limitations with doing opera on a small budget still exist. The lack of a pit at the Colony means a tiny orchestra must be jammed cheek-to-jowl in front of the house, with the harpist placed discreetly on stage in the wings. Curtain glitches abounded and the weakness of the male chorus members remains a liability, glaringly so in the opening and closing scenes. Yet, it's easy to overlook the lapses, because nearly all the important things were right about this well-sung, dramatically effective Lucia.

Donizetti's tale tells of the unfortunate Lucia who is driven mad by her heartless brother Enrico, who forces her into a loveless marriage to restore his financial fortunes. The opera remains one of the bel canto evergreens, bursting with indelible melody, with the role of Lucia a favorite for high-voiced sopranos.

Darynn Zimmer made an impressive company debut in the title role, displaying the requisite high voice, flexibility and dramatic range. Her *Regnava nel silenzio* showed a pure tone and polished technique, and Zimmer's soprano soared in a thrilling account of the Act 2 sextet. While not the flashiest in terms of coloratura decoration, Zimmer's rendition of Lucia's mad scene delivered the top notes securely along with sensitive singing and compelling acting that made Lucia's tragic end intensely moving.

As her equally doomed lover Edgardo, Jorge Antonio Pita made a worthy protagonist, Pita's tenor tends to turn dry and lose focus on top, but in the middle voice where much of the role lies, his tone is attractive with a warm tone and heroic ring. Pita brought dramatic urgency and credible acting to the role, rising to the final scene superbly,

bringing a supple bel canto style and emotional intensity to Fra poco a me ricovero and Tu che a Dio.

Daniel Snodgrass made a worthy villain, deploying his rich lyrical baritone as Enrico. Jesse Vargas was a stiff Arturo, Diego Baner, a superb Raimondo, with a booming resonant bass and natural stage presence. Rebekah Diaz as Alisa and Jared Poroune as Normanno rounded out the cast.

Conductor Doris Lang Kosloff at times buried her singers in tuttis but otherwise provided an excellent hand in the non-pit. Kosloff paced the music idiomatically with rhythmic spring, and drew responsive, largely polished playing from the small orchestra

Copyright (c) 2008 The Miami Herald

Record Number: 200805270301KNRIDDERFLMIAMIH_opera