

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society : **Reading Operatic Society**
Production : **'DIE FLEDERMAUS'**
Date : **Saturday 17th September 2008**
Venue : **The Hexagon, Reading**
Report by : **Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13**

'*Die Fledermaus*' was first presented in Vienna on the 5th April 1874 and initially it had a rather unimpressive international career, but it made up for it later. As the most successful stage work, attached to the well-preserved name of Strauss, it was brought back in the 20th century to be revived, revised, readapted, souped up and even filmed and gradually it made itself a place in the repertoire, not only in the German language countries, where it had always enjoyed a healthy life, but in those overseas areas, that had, after a first hearing, put in on the shelf. Nowadays - and no small thanks to the still magic name of Strauss - it has become the most played, and in some places, the only played, piece from the 19th century Viennese tradition, whilst shows by lesser remembered musicians, which were better loved first time round have now slipped into obscurity.

'*Die Fledermaus*' is probably the finest operetta ever written with an hilarious story line and magical music and on Saturday 27th September 2008, I was invited by Reading Operatic Society to review their latest presentation of this show at the Hexagon Theatre. I took my seat in the auditorium with anticipation and I was not disappointed. From the overture to the champagne finale I witnessed a feast of music, singing, and acting of a very high order.

Maggie Preston - (ROSALINDA EISENSTEIN - *Eisenstein's wife*) - Maggie brought all her vast experience to this part, presenting a very accomplished '*Rosalinda*'. Acting, facial expressions and movement was all of a high order. Vocally, Maggie sang the part as I am sure the composer intended and which came to the fore in '*Homeland*' - Well done.

Daniel Powell - (BARON GABRIEL EISENSTEIN - *A gentleman of independent means*) - I liked this characterization by Daniel, he portrayed well his liking for the ladies and also his gullibility. His business with the watch was well contrived with a well sung duet with '*Rosalinda*' "*The Tick Tock Polka*". - Well done.

Suzannah Brooksbank - (ADELE - *Pert soubrette, Rosalinda's maid*) - This was a part made for Suzannah, sexily flighty with a wonderful range of facial expressions. Her excellent singing voice came to the fore in the numbers "*Life is a Song*" and "*How Can You Be So Ungallant*" - Congratulations

Keith Lawrence - (DOCTOR FALKE - *'The Bat' of the story*) - This was certainly one of the better parts I have seen Keith play, bringing all his experience to the character which for me, was absolutely spot-on, displaying all the deviousness in his dealings with his friend, '*Gabriel Eisenstein*'. Vocally, Keith was excellent, lending his voice to such numbers as '*What a Night*', '*The Laughing Song*' and in particular '*Brother Mine*', a show-stopper - Congratulations.

Tom Gingell - (ALFRED - *An opera singer, an 'old flame' of Rosalinda*) - As the Italian tenor who is relentlessly pursuing '*Rosalinda*', Tom was suitably 'over-the-top' with a well sustained accent throughout - A good characterization.

Iain Whittaker - (FRANK - *Governor of the Prison*) - Iain always excels in these type of parts and this was no exception, his portrayal of the '*Prison Governor*' could not have been bettered, a wonderful characterisation.

Jenny Gumbrell - (PRINCE ORLOFSKY - *A blase millionaire*) - I was pleased to see that this character was presented traditionally, in other words, a female playing the part of the Prince. Jenny was excellent in this role. Her stature was suitably masculine without losing her femininity, movement and expressions could not be faulted, all coupled with an excellent singing voice - Well done.

Rebecca Finch - (IDA - *Sister of Adele*) - This minor role was well played by Rebecca, she looked good on stage with controlled movement and she presented just the right character.

Adrian Tang - (Doctor Blint - *The Baron's Lawyer*) - This particular character has to display a nervous demeanour and Adrian got it just right. Here we had good movement, diction and facial expressions.

Kevin Gingell - (FROSCH - *A bibulous police-sergeant*) - This is a nice character role to play, it has a lot of humour and you have to display a drunken person which is not easy as so often performers go over the top and which spoils the characterisation, but Kevin got it just right with good comedy timing - A very good performance.

Jess Wallis - (MITZI - *One of Rosalinda's housemaids*)

Philip Elliott - (IVAN - *Orlofsky's major-domo*) - These two minor roles were well presented ensuring the right characters were seen.

Chorus of Footmen, Maidservants, Guests and Warders - This was an excellent chorus, the singing of the choral numbers having the right balance and projection and which gave the number '*Brother Mine*' a new meaning. This coupled with good, controlled movement about the stage area ensured this show was the success it was

Emily-Jane Ashford, Rachel Cunnington, Abi Holland, Grace Jabbari, Natasha Miller, Ellie Taylor, Ashley Taylor - (BALLERINAS) These young ladies danced their traditional dances with precision, displaying excellent dancing skills and had obviously been well rehearsed - Well done.

Jill Morgan - (PRODUCER & CHOREOGRAPHER) - This was a good, traditional production by Jill with excellent positioning of both principals and chorus presenting some attractive pictures on stage. Movement was well controlled throughout and all the right characterisations had been brought out. I was impressed with the choreography for the 'Ballerinas' which was precisely danced by all of them - Congratulations on a good production.

John Lawes - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) - Once again, a good orchestra under the baton of John Lawes. It had a good balance of instruments but on occasions the brass section was inclined to overpower the performers on stage. Vocally, the cast had been well rehearsed in the music with the principals giving a good account of themselves and the chorus doing full justice to the choral numbers, and in particular '*Brother Mine*' which was beautifully sung with good balance and control.

Stage Manager & Crew - This was a well managed stage with two very large scene changes and I would imagine it probably took all of the two twenty minute intervals and a lot of hard work - Well done.

Lighting Design & Operation - The lighting plot had been well devised giving a good balance of light over all the Hexagon stage and it portrayed well the three various settings. On the night of my visit the operation was good, I did not see a late cue throughout the performance.

Sound - I found the sound level very acceptable with the amplification being well controlled without distortion. Thank goodness radio mikes were not being used!!!

Costumes - A good set of costumes which portrayed well the period of 1874. The ladies costumes were colourful, particularly in the second act and the men were suitably and smartly dressed. The costumes seemed to fit well and appeared clean.

Scenery - Overall this was a good set of scenery which enhanced the three scenes and gave a good overall atmosphere.

Props - All props used were pertinent to the plot and looked authentic.

Make-up - The make-up appeared to have been well applied but it appeared that the wrong bases and highlights had been used as it appeared very pale on stage and which was washed out by the stage lights. A stronger base would have stood up better under the lights.

Programme - This was an impressive and eye-catching programme containing all the necessary information with interesting biographies together with well defined, coloured photographs of the principals. It was good to see a programme not inundated with adverts as so often happens in this day and age. You will be pleased to know that this programme has been submitted for a NODA Award.

Front of House - The Front of House staff are still maintaining the high standard one has come to expect from this society.

Thank you for inviting me to review this show and your warm hospitality. This was an excellent production, what a pity the audiences were not larger. Good luck with your next production '*La Belle Helene*'

Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13 - London Region