

Reviewed By Paul Joseph Walkowski for OperaOnline.us

THE STORY:

The story is not what it seems. It is not just a story of a teenager in love with a philandering nobleman, and an obsessive father undone by the unintended consequence of his own ill-conceived treachery. It is not just the story of a curse come true, a sort of poetic justice come to a man involved in deadly criminal affairs. Rather, and greatly simplified, it is a story of divine justice, the wheels of God grinding slowly, but exceedingly fine. It is retribution of divine proportions inflicted upon Rigoletto, a court jester, who sets out for revenge against his own boss, the Duke, for having an affair with his beloved daughter, whom he unwittingly gives over to the Duke, thinking it is someone else, then paying an assassin to kill the Duke, and discovering in the final act that his paid assassin inadvertently killed the beloved Gilda, his own daughter. It is the stuff of which, Sir Walter Scott must have been thinking when he wrote: "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive"

WHERE I VIEWED IT:

The Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord, New Hampshire is a suitable, acoustically friendly forum for opera that is roomy and easily accessible to the Interstate. The pit is level with the first row of chairs, meaning there is no orchestra pit, but the stage is big and expansive enough that once lit, the presence of the orchestra players is not really much of a distraction at all - and to the extent it is, it last only for several rows back.

THE PERFORMANCE:

Granite State Opera under the leadership of Phil Lauriat demonstrated once again last night that small opera company doesn't mean small production, inferior production value or second tier performers. In its fifth season, Granite State Opera offered the opening night audience a Rigoletto that had every bit as much color, majesty and excitement as the larger companies, and did so with a superb cast that was on mark in every sense of the word. First, the orchestra. Maestro Lauriat has assembled a solid 38 piece orchestra, which we have come to expect, that is full in sound, even in its presentation and measured in its delivery. The orchestra provided a wonderful accompaniment to what was going on on stage and delivered the score with polish and style. Well done, Maestro.

The production value of this presentation was also excellent. If one of the reasons you go to the theater is for the color, costumes and sets, this Rigoletto would have surely pleased. With set and costume design by Tri-Cities Opera - James Leonard, set designer and costumes by Heather Leigh Thompson -- the audience was carried back to Sixteenth Century, Italy in grand style. This production was colorful and detailed. The sets were used effectively to create the illusion of being inside and outside at different times and in the final act of being in two places at the same time; and the costumes were lush and bright and full. Tri-Cities deserves a 'tip-of-the-hat' for this one.

Acknowledgement must also go out to the lighting designer, Quentin Stockwell for lighting this production of Rigoletto in glorious colors and shades and for tailoring the lighting and background to the mood so effectively that it actually became part of the story itself. Wonderful!

The stage direction by Alexander Gelman was both economical and effective. The characters were moved around nicely, and in the Duke's great hall scene in the opening act, they were shuffled in and out of corners and crevices nicely to create the impression of high activity in a much large setting. Well done!

As for the performances, the cast was truly outstanding. Baritone Michael Corvino not only sang Rigoletto beautifully with great passion, but his voice captured both the strength and vulnerability of the character. His performance was simply riveting and could easily be a signature role he performed it so well. There were many reasons to see this Rigoletto, and Mr. Corvino's powerhouse performance is clearly at the top of the list.

Singing the role of his daughter, Gilda, soprano Monica Yunis gave us a performance that was quintessentially, Gilda. Her delivery was sweet, strong, smooth, evocative of the moment she was singing and most importantly, flexible and dynamic. She never seemed to strain or reach at the higher end, but rather arrived wherever the score called for her to be, making her performance even more enjoyable for the audience because she carried it off with such grace. Eric Fennell's Duke, was sung very well; has good stage presence, and his delivery was consistent and even throughout. He was a good cad. And both contralto Ellen Rabiner, as the assassin's sister, Maddelena (I love that contralto voice), and Bass John Weiss as Sparafucile, the Assassin, gave strong and believable performances, and provided just the right amount of dangerous and dark color called for in the final act.

The remainder of the cast delivered their roles with solid acting and sound voices that complimented the overall production and lent considerably to the feel and mood of this Rigoletto, making it a winner in this writer's eyes.

Music Director, Phil Lauriat

Stage Director, Alexander Gelman

Set Design, Tri-Cities Opera

Costume Design, Tri-Cities Opera

Lighting Design, Quentin Stockwell