

If you thought copper tubing was only for plumbing, you didn't see Granite State Opera's production of "The Magic Flute." Artistic Director Philip Lauriat put together a thoroughly delightful production of Mozart's opera, which received two performances last weekend at the Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord.

Who could not fall in love at first sight with the serpent, a whimsical metallic collage suspended like a great puppet? Credit Stage Director Robert Lawson for a "set" as far from the bulky opulence of traditional opera scenery as one can get. Like a Calder mobile floating in space, bold cutouts and copper tubing provide fanciful scenery, foreshadowing, and deeper symbolism.

Joan Sand's vivid lighting enhanced Lawson's scenery perfectly, and Marcia McDonald's simple sixties-era costumes completed the retro theme. Tamino's and Pamina's attire seemed a bit drab compared to Papageno and Papagena, and the set could have done without the oversize frames, which seemed awkward and obscured the singers occasionally, but these are minor flaws. Scenery, lighting and costumes fired the imagination but never upstaged the singers or the music.

Musically, the production was strong. David Kravitz was a nimble Papageno, engaging the audience instantly with his warmth, and bringing depth and humanity to this comic character through superb acting and elegant, refined singing. In his aria "I'd give my finest feather," one heard all the expressive range and color of the human voice, with exquisite phrasing and line. Full of subtle nuance, this was pure Mozart, pure joy.

Tenor Jason Karn got off to a slow start as Tamino, but came alive later, displaying enviable ease on high notes. Theresa Cincione brought lovely presence to Pamina, and was especially strong in duets with Papageno. She had beautiful shimmering quality on soft high notes and lovely tone in lyric passages, but tended to pop out high notes as climactic events, and sometimes pushed volume, causing uncertain intonation and spread tone.

Sarastro the High Priest was sung by Eric Jordan with resonant voice and grand presence. Despite some problems with flatting, Mozart's music shone in all its radiance on the opening of the second stanza of "Within these holy portals"-a drop-dead gorgeous lyric bass tone.

Barbara Kilduff brought regal presence to the Queen of the Night, who must sing some of the most difficult music in all of opera. Her two demanding arias have long runs and notes in the stratosphere (F above high C). Perhaps due to fatigue or the dry air, at Friday night's performance the running passages didn't want to run, and the high notes didn't land securely. No matter what happens, though, real pros deliver: even after some sticky spots, Kilduff sang a later passage of difficult triplets with redeeming aplomb.

Other notable efforts included Rick Davis's hilarious performance as the comic villain Monostatos-he sang well and his "fear duet" with Papageno had everyone in stitches. Jodi Frisbie was a zesty Papagena whose bright soprano and graceful stage manner made her duet with Papageno a delight to both ear and eye.

The Three Spirits were performed by a poised and well-matched trio of singers, Jillian Spring, Sophie Chambers and Kara Maloney. First Priest Daniel Kamalic sang cleanly, but his tone seemed a bit uncentered; his cohort, Second Priest Robert Dockstader, boasts a lyric tenor and a beautiful sense of line.

The Three Ladies, Nouné Karapetian, Majie Zeller and Ja-Nae Duane, brought sly humor their roles, singing with individual character but also blending well in trio. The well-blended men's chorus added panache, clearly enjoying themselves immensely. Diction was a strength-a good English translation was delivered with care, both speaking and singing. Most balance problems were caused by excessive orchestral volume, partly due to the lack of a proper orchestra pit.