

NEWS

COMPETITIONS

ADVERTISING

USEFUL LINKS

ABOUT US

CONTACT US

Special-assembly orchestra delights thousands Reviewed by Bill Stephens with Jorian Gardner.

“Opera By The Lake”, 2007 National Multicultural Festival Finale.

Conducted by Andrew Greene. Artistic direction by Vivienne Winther. Hosted by Ross Solly. Presented by Stopera and the National Multicultural Festival. Rond Terrace, Lake Burley Griffin. Sunday, February 18.

Inspired by a tough drought in the capital, enforced water shortages and transport logistics, the decision by organisers to move what was originally “Opera on the Island” to “Opera by the Lake” for the finale of the 2008 Multicultural Festival proved a recipe for magic, with an extraordinary evening of performance, on what turned out to be a postcard Canberra evening.

Canberra music-lovers are a resilient lot. A half hour before the advertised starting time of the concert, rain was teaming down, but still they arrived in their hundreds, set up under their umbrellas and waited for the concert to begin. Their confidence was rewarded when a few minutes before start time the rain stopped, the sun came out and conditions were perfect.

Produced by Stopera’s artistic director Vivienne Winther, and compered with relaxed good humour by ABC personality Ross Solly, “Opera by the Lake” consisted of a selection of some 20 well-known and popular operatic arias selected from perhaps the most popular operas in the repertoire, sung by seven highly accomplished opera singers. It was backed by a large specially assembled Stopera festival orchestra, conducted by one of the country’s most experienced opera conductors, Andrew Greene.

What made the concert so special was that, under Greene’s firm and experienced musical direction, each selection was given due respect and beautifully shaped interpretations, so that audience members certainly didn’t have to be opera buffs to appreciate why this music continues to excite and move the emotions.

The concert commenced with a sparkling account of Mozart’s overture to “Cosi fan tutte”, quickly followed by a fine rendition of Figaro’s aria from “The marriage of Figaro”, by Stephen Bennett. More Mozart, this time from “Don Giovanni”, from Rebecca Collins and Gary Rowley with a delicious interpretation of “La’ ci darem la mano”.

Then it was time for some Verdi, with a stirring rendition of “See how the flames rise” from “Il Traviatore” from Maria Danielle-Sette, before Operatunityoz winner Roy Best revealed his superb tenor voice in “La Donna e’ mobile” from Verdi’s ever-popular opera “Rigoletto”. Rachael Duncan took the stage for a glittering version on “Cara nome” from the same opera, before being joined by Roy Best, Maria Danielle-Sette and Garry Rowley for the famous quartet.

Highlight after highlight followed, among them two famous and familiar duets, “Au fond du temple saint” from Bizet’s “The pearl fishers”, sung by Roy Best and Eddie Muliaumaseali’i, and “The flower song” from Delibe’s “Lakme” sung by Rachel Duncan and Maria Danielle-Sette.

From Bizet’s “Carmen”, Garry Rowley impressed with his dashing “Toreador song”, as did Rebecca Collins with her brave and gutsy interpretation of the famous “Habanera”, while Eddie Muliaumaseali’i used his rich bass baritone voice and imposing presence to charming effect as Porgy singing “I got plenty of nuttin’” from Gershwin’s famous opera.

Throughout the concert, the Stopera Festival Orchestra, under the ever-confident conducting of Andrew Greene, provided lush and responsive accompaniment for the singers, particularly in the beautifully realised selection from Puccini’s “La Boheme”, and the dazzling complexities of septet from the Act 1 finale of “The Italian girl from Algiers”.

It’s not often that technical staff rates a pat on the back, but it must be noted that mixing such a large-scale live event is difficult but the team here, supplied by Eclipse Lighting and Sound and lead by John McFarlane, did a wonderful job filling the venue with crisp and clear sound.

Rond Terrace, with its magical panoramic views of the sun setting over Lake Burley Griffin, proved an inspired setting for this memorable concert, so it was a pity that more effort was not taken to take advantage of the sweeping views across the lake to old and new Parliament Houses. The untidily hung black drapes behind the orchestra tended to soak up the light, and as



The perfect location... Opera by the Lake provided a magical night out. Photo by Silas.

the natural light faded, made the performers hard to see. Perhaps a clear backing may be possible for future concerts, or even coloured lighting on the white of the tent would add more sparkle to the presentation.

Speaking of light, more lighting across the terrace at the end of the evening was needed, as it was extremely dark in some sections, making walking difficult, even dangerous, when leaving the area.

Nonetheless, "Opera By The Lake" was a fitting finale to a memorable Multicultural Festival, and one which, hopefully, will be repeated for future festivals.