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ARTS ENTERTAINMENT PERFORMING ARTS

A visual and aural delight, 'The Magic Flute' opens Dallas Opera's 10th season in the Winspear

Gerald Scarfe's cartoonish sets and costumes prompt smiles, and there's a lot of really fine singing.



Dress rehearsal of the Dallas Opera's 'The Magic Flute,' at Winspear Opera House in Dallas, TX, on Oct. 15, 2019. In foreground, L to R, Brian Frutiger as Monostatos, Sean Michael Plumb as Papageno and Andrea Carroll as Pamina. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)

By [Scott Cantrell](#)

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I'll never forget walking out of the brand-new Winspear Opera House after the Dallas Opera's first performance there, of Verdi's [Otello](#). How happy I was that the company finally had a first-rate facility in an Arts District finally coming of age. How lucky I felt to be writing about such a stirring time in Dallas history.

The Dallas Opera opened its 10th season in the Winspear Friday night with a performance of Mozart's [The Magic Flute](#) that gladdened both eye and ear. English cartoonist Gerald Scarfe's colorful sets and costumes, with aptly

playful takeoffs on Egyptian motifs, have been around since 1993. But they — and the dancing animals — fit the fairy-tale story, and they still bring smiles. **Credits, too, to lighting designer Thomas C. Hase.**

Stage director Kyle Lang kept the dramatis personae vivid and mobile. I did hold my breath, though, when singers had to go up and down those steep pyramid steps. There was a lot of really fine singing, and music director Emmanuel Villaume got well disciplined, suave playing from the Dallas Opera Orchestra. Ensemble singing in the first act was impressively precise, although there were a couple of slips after intermission.



Tamino, played by Paolo Fanale, performs during a dress rehearsal of Dallas Opera's "The Magic Flute" at Winspear Opera House on Oct. 15, 2019. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)

The three main roles are superbly cast. Paolo Fanale is a fresh, natural Tamino, his pleasantly sinewy lyric tenor deployed with ease. Sean Michael Plumb, looking like pop singer Rod Stewart with heavy eyeliner, is an agile and delightfully goofy Papageno, with a finely focused baritone. Andrea Carroll gives Pamina touching dignity and a lustrous, beautifully nuanced, soprano.

Jeni Houser, originally booked as Papagena, was a late substitute as Queen of the Night. (Short version: Olga Pudova, who was to sing the role, had to take over the role of the Queen of Shemakha in the upcoming production of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*.)

Houser pinpoints Mozart's stratospheric pitches with ease and accuracy — much more so than 90 percent of singers you'll hear in these virtuoso demands. But the voice is a size or two smaller than ideal, and her initial appearance suspended well upstage disadvantages projection. (This is another of those productions lacking physical walls to help reflect sound out into the hall.)

At the other end of the frequency spectrum, Morris Robinson has Sarastro's notes, but, at least for me, he somehow lacks priestly gravitas. David Pittsinger does have imposing dignity, and a sonorous voice, for the Speaker. Brian Frutiger is a slimily comic Monostatos, Abigail Rethwisch the perky Papagena.

I can't think I've heard finer Three Ladies than Diana Newman, Samantha Hankey and Hannah Ludwig, their voices beautifully blended and exquisitely flexible. They're funny, too.

The Three Boys, floating by on a gilded ibis, are less happy. Mozart conceived those parts in an age when boys sang soprano and alto parts in church choirs, so there were plenty of able ones at hand. In the absence of that culture, I vote for using slightly older girls who can more reliably sing and project accurate pitches.

The chorus, prepared by Alexander Rom, was too muted at its initial warning, but afterward sang heartily, if without that last bit of refinement.

Details

Repeats at 2 p.m. Oct. 20 and Nov. 3, and 7:30 p.m. Oct. 23 and 26 and Nov. 1 at Winspear Opera House, 2403 Flora St. \$19 to \$304. 214-443-1000, dallasopera.org.



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