

Rafael's Music Notes

ALL ABOUT THE ARTS

A perfect Romeo and Juliet

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Much like its operatic cousin Faust, Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* began its initially humble stage life in 1859 at the Opéra-Comique, only to move fifteen years later to the opulent Paris Opéra, where the huge stage and technical equipment allowed for the big bones production that **R&J** needs and that it is now receiving on the stage of Cincinnati's Music Hall.

With the Cincinnati Opera chorus, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in the pit, **Ramon Tebaras** its conductor, great production values, and a cast of a dozen principals, this Gounod does not stint on size.

But size is not the end all in this opera, which is in fact structured as a series of intimate encounters between two characters: Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet. Other characters play crucial roles

in the story: the well-meaning Friar Laurent, the all too fatherly Lord Capulet, and the hot-headed Tybalt. But ultimately as told by Gounod and his librettists this is the story of two ill-fated lovers.

Making one of the best Cincinnati Opera debuts in recent memory tenor Matthew White combined in the part of Romeo vocal elegance, youthful looks, virility, and the much needed but elusive French style that is so rare to find these days. He delivered his aria *Ah! lève-toi, soleil!* as well as I have heard it from many tenors in years of opera-going, and he sang passionately in his duets with his Juliet.

The ever lovely Nicole Cabell returned to Cincinnati to prove that she has the perfect voice and looks for Juliet, singing her first act waltz with graceful lyricism, and acting convincingly as a giddy girl in love with love. Her dramatic and vocal journey from virginal maiden to tragic heroine within the span of the opera's three hours was riveting.

The supporting roles in the Cincinnati production are exceptionally well sung and acted by a mix of veteran singers and newcomers, with bass-baritone **Kenneth Shaw** mixing good-natured bonhomie and authority as a standout Friar Laurent, singing sonorously throughout the evening.

Baritone **Hadleigh Adams** is a charming Mercutio, delivering a brilliantly sung Queen Mab ballad and fencing like a champion. **Thomas Dreeze**, an appropriately pompous Lord Capulet, colorfully sang his *Allons jeunes gens* to the guests at the Capulet ball. Tenor **Piotr Buszewski** a strong Tybalt, acted convincingly, singing well, and sporting terrific swordsmanship in the fight scene, which was nicely staged by **Gina Cerimele Mechley**.

Baritone **Vernon Hartman** was a commanding Duke of Verona, and mezzo-soprano **Reilly Nelson** an enchanting Stephano. **Catherine Keen** (Gertrude), **Phillip Bullock** (Gregorio), **Darian Clonts** (Benvolio), and **Simon Barrad** (Count Paris) served their roles to perfection.

Ramon Tebar conducted the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra with sensitivity and authority, ever supportive of the singers and alert to the stage, eliciting superb playing from his musicians. The production exudes elegance in every department, from **Mathew Ozawa's** stage direction to **William Boles's** marvelous sets to **Sara Bahr's** perfect costumes to **James Geier's** wigs and **Thomas C. Hase's** dappled lighting. **Henri Venanzi** obtained great work from his well-prepared chorus

This performance significantly marked to the day the 90th anniversary of the Cincinnati Opera. With a perfectly cast and staged *Romeo and Juliet*, **Evans Mirageas's** Cincinnati Opera once more reasserts itself as one of the top companies in North America.

Rafael de Acha <http://www.RafaelMusicNotes.com>

Romeo and Juliet Music Hall. Cincinnati, Ohio. Music by Charles Gounod Libretto by Barbier and Carré

Cast:

Romeo Matthew White
Juliet Nicole Cabell
Mercutio Hadleigh Adams
Friar Laurent Kenneth Shaw
Count Capulet Thomas Dreeze
Tybalt Piotr Buszewski
Duke of Verona Vernon Hartman
Stephano Reilly Nelson
Gertrude Catherine Keen
Gregorio Phillip Bullock
Benvolio Darian
Clonts
Simon Barrad

Count Paris

Production

Stage Director Matthew Ozawa
Scenic Designer William Boles
Costume Designer Sarah Bahr
Lighting Designer Thomas C. Hase
Wig & Make-up Designer James Geier
Chorus Master Henri Venanzi
Choreographer Oğulcan Borova
Fight Director Gina Cerimele Mechley

A co-production of Minnesota Opera and Cincinnati Opera. Scenery and costumes constructed by Minnesota Opera and Cincinnati Opera.

ROMEO AND JULIETTE MAY BE SEEN AGAIN THIS SATURDAY, JUNE 29, AT 7:30 PM

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