

Opera in Review

Opera Atelier co-Artistic Director Marshall Pynkoski left the audience in Toronto's Elgin Theatre in no doubt about his intentions this fall when he stepped before the curtain to declare Mozart's *Don Giovanni* a comedy. Indeed, in the company's program, he went even further, characterizing the opera as "an outrageous comedy."

If opera-goers who remember Franco Zeffirelli's dark, grandiose production

a similarly clear-cut sense of identity.

If the ladies sounded a bit lightweight vocally, they proved no less convincing dramatically, with Meghan Lindsay, Peggy Kriha Dye and Carla Huhtanen a credible trio as Donna Anna, Donna Elvira and Zerlina respectively.

A final rose to choreographer and co-Artistic Director Jeannette Lajeunesse-Zingg, who sometimes threatens

of the laughs came courtesy of Bernstein's "Greek chorus born of the radio commercial" (mezzo Katherine Landry with tenors Paul Just and Grant Wandlow), which prattled on about the wonders of material life in post-war America while Dinah and Sam bickered and nitpicked with each other.

With references to the wondrous attractions of such places as North Burnaby and Surrey, VanCOCO astutely relocated *Trou-*

Face off in Vancouver Opera's *West Side Story*

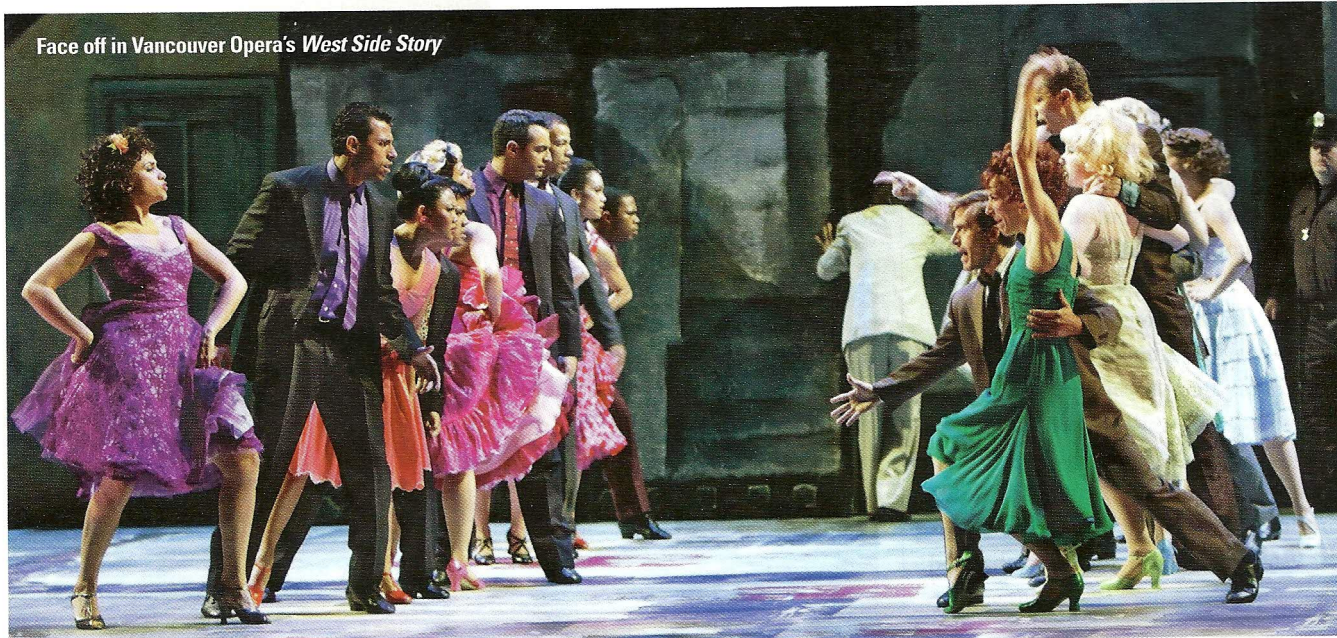


PHOTO: TIM MATHESON

for the Metropolitan Opera some years back may have been tempted to give him an argument, he presented his case so persuasively on stage, by viewing Lorenzo da Ponte's characters through a *commedia dell'arte* lens to reveal them as comic types, that skepticism felt disarmed.

There was, to be sure, the problem of Mozart's music, which, as in *Die Zauberflöte*, operates at an emotional depth unanticipated by the opera's libretto. But the lightness and dramatic thrust of Stefano Montanari's conducting of Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra went a long way to reconciling the apparent divergences. A youthful, good-looking cast, cleverly housed in Gerard Gauci's *trompe l'oeil* courtyard set, completed the task.

Pynkoski may have taken his Don, the energetic Phillip Addis, to hell, but as a lover of women rather than as a hard-hearted misogynist. Vasil Garvanliev (Leporello), Curtis Sullivan (Masetto/Commendatore) and Lawrence Wiliford (Don Ottavio) inhabited their roles with

to overload OA productions with period-conscious dances, but certainly struck the right balance this time. —Reviews from Toronto by William Littler

VANCOUVER

Too short to stand alone, its pop, film, Broadway and jazz-inflected score too stylistically at odds with most operas to pair them with it, *Trouble in Tahiti* is staged infrequently. But Leonard Bernstein's quirky exploration of the unhappiness beneath the glitzy surface of the American Utopian dream is oddball enough to be the first opera ever presented at the Vancouver Fringe Festival.

At the Sept. 8 preview of this fully, if sparsely, staged **Vancouver Concert Opera Co-Operative** (VanCOCO) production, the small but vivacious cast drew the audience in from the first bars. Expressive and versatile alto Natalie Burdeny and baritone Ed Moran, as Dinah and Sam, were always sensitive to the pathos beneath the humor and expressed it perfectly. Most

of the laughs came courtesy of Bernstein's generic American city to Vancouver and suburbs. Admittedly, it was a you-had-to-be-there kind of humor, but still garnered a sprinkle of knowing chuckles from locals in the audience.

Andrea Rabinovich's choreography enlivened the storytelling, and Alan Maldonado's video projections at stage rear lent the performance a sense of place that implied the piece is as relevant to 21st-century Vancouver as it was to 1950s America. The standout of the whole show was the Firehall Arts Centre's well-worn upright piano, played with remarkable dexterity and verve by Music Director Kathleen Lohrenz Gable. She rarely paused during the opera's 40 minutes, deftly molding Bernstein's demanding accompaniment around the opera's swirling vocal lines—and turning her own pages—in an impressive display of discreet virtuosity.

With nine productions listed worldwide this season, *West Side Story* clearly is catching on with opera companies. Bernstein's New York street gang version of