

RIGOLETTO

By Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

Virginia Opera

Harrison Opera House

October 2, 6, 8, & 10, 2010

For tickets: 757) 623-1223

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

RIGOLETTO is Verdi's sixteenth opera. It was the first to occupy a permanent place in the repertory of every leading opera house. It's easy to see why. It's a veritable gusher of arias, duets, and ensemble numbers. They cascade over the audience like a magic waterfall of melodic beauty.

There is a keen sense of the dramatic and, the most stunningly crafted coloratura aria ever written, "Caro Nome." It is sung to perfection by Sang-Eun Lee as Gilda. Her voice is like fine silk being wafted aloft in a gentle breeze. She hits those way up there notes without a hint of shrillness or strain in her ornamentations. I'm out of sequence but that's how I will always remember this production.

Director Marc Astafan has elected to set the work in 16th century Mantua as Verdi wrote it. However, he has taken a rather old-fashioned "stand-and-sing" approach that makes for a very staid, formal presentation lacking variety and change.

Astafan has reconceptualized (I'm not sure what that means) Peter Harrison's scenery. I don't think he helped solve the original problems with this set. Even so, the Duke of Mantua, tenor Aurelio Dominguez, at a potential orgy, boasts of his conquests of the ladies. His big tenor voice is effective enough but he seems lethargic, lacking in flippant sexuality that women can't resist. Rigoletto fears that his daughter, Gilda, will be seduced by the Duke. As the hate-filled jester, Fikile Mvinjelwa, projects the man's patriarchal obsessive fury but again his over all performance is without diversity.

Evan Brummel is convincing as the elder Count Monterone and Nathan Stark is appropriately sinister and has some inner life as Sparafucile. His sister Audrey Babcock is indeed a pretty, very sexy wench with a winning mezzo voice. She brings much needed life to the show.

Peter Mark finds the dramatic pulse of the Verdi score in a way I wish Director Astafan and his cast had also done. During the storm, lightning flashes in time with music which is rather corny. In this scene there is a lyric that says "Tempest above. Murder below." I wish there were more tempest below to enhance and vitalize the murder and other violent action.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.