

HELLO, I'M EDGAR LOESSIN WITH LOESSIN AT LARGE. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT GOUNOD IS A SENSITIVE, MELODIST. THERE ARE TWO ARIAS AND TWO DUETS IN ROMEO AND JULIET THAT GIVE THE OPERA ITS REASON FOR BEING. FORTUNATELY, THEY ARE SUNG TO PERFECTION BY CHI LIMING AS ROMEO AND WEI HUANG AS JULIET. WE REMEMBER MISS HUANG FONDLY FROM LAST SEASON'S TURANDOT WHEN SHE DID A TOUCHING LIU. SHE FLOATS TO NEW TERRITORY AS JULIET. SHE SINGS WITH LEVITATING BEAUTY AND HEARTBREAKING, POWERFUL EMOTIONAL INTENSITY. SHE IS TOTALLY BELIEVABLE AS A FRAGILE, PETITE, BUT VERY MUCH ALIVE, 14 YEAR OLD ADORABLE, YOUNG GIRL. WHILE LESS PHYSICALLY RIGHT AS ROMEO, MR. MR. LIMING IS A VOCAL FORCE THAT TRANSPORTS THE OPERA TO THE ETHEREAL REALMS OF TRAGEDY. HIS ENORMOUS TENOR VOCAL APPARATUS IS MADE UP OF MANY COLORS AND TEXTURES THAT LEAVE ONE ENRAPTURED. THE DUETS WITH THESE TWO ARE RIVETING.

GOUNOD WAS TORN BETWEEN WRITING CHURCH MUSIC AND OPERA. IN THE LATTER YEARS OF HIS LIFE HE LOST ALL INTEREST IN SECULAR MUSIC AND THE THEATRE. THAT MAY BE JUST AS WELL BECAUSE HE LACKED THE INSTINCT FOR GOOD THEATRE. I'VE READ WHERE THE GERMANS TO THIS DAY CONSIDER GOUNOD'S FAUST A TRAVESTY OF GOETHE'S MASTERPIECE. THE OPERA IS OFTEN CALLED MAGUERITE WHEN DONE IN GERMANY. I FEEL A BIT THIS WAY ABOUT ROMEO AND JULIET. THERE IS A NOTE IN THE PROGRAM THAT REMINDS US THAT OPERA AND SPOKEN DRAMA DO NOT OPERATE UNDER THE SAME LAWS. GRANTED THAT THIS IS TRUE, IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT THE ORIGINAL SOURCE MAY BE EVISCERATED OR REDUCED IN DRAMATIC POTENCY BY THE COMPOSER. IT SEEMS TO ME THE REVERSE SHOULD BE TRUE. THE ORIGINAL SHOULD BE DRAMATICALLY ENHANCED BY THE MUSIC. WHAT IF GOUNOD'S CONTEMPORARY BIZET HAD WRITTEN THE OPERA?

SHAKESPEARE'S OTHER CHARACTERS ARE REDUCED TO CIPHERS IN THE OPERA. JASON KAMINSKI MANAGES TO BE NOTICED AS A DASHING MERCUTIO. RAYMOND DIAZ, FRERE LAURENT, STAYS IN ONE'S MEMORY WITH HIS COMMANDING BARITONE. THE REST HAVE LITTLE TO DO.

DAVID LEFKOWICH WAS FORCED TO STAGE THIS TALE OF WOE IN RATHER CUMBERSOME SETS THAT DEVOUR PRECIOUS SPACE OF THE HARRISON OPERA STAGE. AS A RESULT THE OPERA IS PRESENTED IN A QUITE FORMAL RATHER STATIC MANNER. THERE IS LITTLE ROOM FOR MUCH ACTIVITY SUCH AS DANCING AT THE BALL OR STREET FIGHTING. HIS GROUP SCENES LACK DELINEATION AND DEFINITION. I WON'T MENTION THE PERFORMERS WHO, SHALL WE SAY HE ALLOWS, TO GO OVER THE TOP.

COSTUMES BY ROBERT PERDZIOLA ARE NEAT AND EFFECTIVE.

THERE IS MUCH LYRICAL BEAUTY IN THIS FLASH BACK VERSION OF THE STAR CROSSED LOVERS. WHAT'S LACKING FOR ME IN MR. LEFKOWICH'S PRODUCTION IS BASIC THEATRICAL TENSION AND DRAMATIC IMPETUS. BUT, MAYBE THAT'S MR. GOUNOD'S FAILING. MAYBE HE SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN THE CHURCH HOUSE ALL ALONG. IN THE HALLOWED SANCTUARY ONE DOESN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT FULFILLING ALL THE INTRICATE, BOTHERSOME DEMANDS OF THE THEATRE. THIS IS EDGAR LOESSIN WITH LOESSIN AT LARGE AND I'LL SEE YOU AT THE NEXT OPENING.