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Bold Strokes in the Country

Glimmerglass Offers an Ambitious Spread of Works



Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival

Nathan Gunn and Andriana Chuchman in Lerner and Loewe's "Camelot."

By STEVE SMITH

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COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — Ambition has never been in short supply at the Alice Busch Opera Theater, the cozy 900-seat auditorium that long housed the Glimmerglass Opera, and now is the principal setting for its successor, the [Glimmerglass Festival](#). But even measured by the high standard this annual affair has sustained, this year's festival — which runs through Aug. 24 here — rises to new levels of innovation, curiosity and, yes, chutzpah.



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Karli Cadel/The Glimmerglass Festival

Ryan McKinny as the title character in the Glimmerglass Festival's production of "The Flying Dutchman."

Make no mistake, that's meant as praise. It takes a certain kind of fearlessness to conceive and execute a summer series in which the most conventional offering is Wagner's "Flying Dutchman." One of two shows directed by Francesca Zambello, the festival's renowned and provocative general and artistic director, the production is the first Glimmerglass staging of one of Wagner's canonical works. ("Das Liebesverbot," Wagner's second opera, [was mounted here in 2008](#), during Michael MacLeod's brief tenure at the helm.)

Compared to [last season's notorious topical updating of Verdi's "Aida"](#) — and to the other works in this year's festival, which include a popular Broadway musical, a fascinating pair of staged vocal works not intended for the theater, and a rare Verdi flop — "The Flying Dutchman" was presented in an essentially traditional manner. But Ms. Zambello's resourceful, riveting conception, seen on Thursday, still illuminates fresh depths and currents in this Wagner seafaring tale.

Credit the casting with at least part of the effect. The seaman of the title may have been cursed to wander the seas for eternity until finding a woman willing to pledge fidelity. But in Ryan McKinny, a lithe, handsome bass-baritone outfitted by the costume designer Erik

Teague in a leather jacket worn open to expose a full-chest tattoo, Ms. Zambello offered a Dutchman who seemed unusually close in age and bearing to Senta, the virtuous young woman whose love could provide his salvation.

The lustrous soprano Melody Moore played Senta with a reckless passion that matched Mr. McKinny's brooding intensity, their interactions suffusing the goings-on with an unmistakable erotic charge. Mark McCullough's vivid lighting and James Noone's stark set — a towering metal scaffolding that frames the stage; Senta's bed; billowing sheets; and dangling ropes — intersected in ways that blurred distinctions between reality and feverish dream.

The tenor [Jay Hunter Morris](#), a Wagnerian hero to be reckoned with after his portrayals of Siegfried at the Metropolitan Opera and the San Francisco Opera, gave a powerfully sung, physically impassioned account of Erik, Senta's discarded lover. Peter Volpe's bluff Daland injected a welcome note of levity. Adam Bielamowicz, a tenor, was a bright steersman. And the conductor John Keenan elicited properly elemental surges and billows from the Glimmerglass Festival Orchestra.

Despite recounting the torrid tale of the rise and fall of King Arthur's Round Table, "Camelot" (seen on Friday night) contained few comparable frissons of intensity or passion. Directed by Robert Longbottom with elegantly spare sets by Kevin Depinet, sumptuous costumes by Paul Tazewell and sensitive lighting by Robert Wierzel, this Lerner and Loewe chestnut offered bright whimsy, understated heartache and a string of good tunes, well sung and played.

The suave baritone Nathan Gunn, the Glimmerglass Festival's artist in residence this season, unsurprisingly made for a handsome, secure Lancelot. Andriana Chuchman, a winsome soprano, sang sweetly as Guenevere, bringing out the role's devilish streak especially well. But the standout performance was David Pittsinger's charismatic, nuanced Arthur, touchingly characterized and nobly voiced.

Two musical-theater actors, Wynn Harmon as Merlyn/Pellinore and Jack Noseworthy as Mordred, did lively work. Clay Hilley, Noel Bouley and Wayne Hu, all from Glimmerglass's exemplary Young Artists Program, were admirable knights. The chorus sang and danced well, and the conductor James Lowe drew a delicious performance from the orchestra.

"Passions," a new production that opened on Saturday night, ventured furthest from standard notions of operatic fare. Conceived by Ms. Zambello as a means by which to stage

“The Little Match Girl Passion,” David Lang’s 2008 Pulitzer Prize-winning work for vocal quartet, the event paired a new arrangement of that piece with a dance-oriented rendition of Pergolesi’s 1736 “Stabat Mater,” directed by the choreographer Jessica Lang (no relation to Mr. Lang).

The Pergolesi work, a reflection on Mary’s suffering at Christ’s Crucifixion, fluctuates between somberness and ecstasy, shadow and light: a complex mix brilliantly personified by the soprano Nadine Sierra and the countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo, complemented by Mr. McCullough’s deft stage illumination and Speranza Scappucci’s eloquent conducting.

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The Glimmerglass Festival runs through Aug. 24 at the Alice Busch Opera Theater, 7300 State Highway 80, Cooperstown, N.Y.; (607) 547-2255, glimmerglass.org.

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