

# Review: 'The Magic Flute' a whimsical blend of color, dance

Imagine reading a lusty, laugh-out-loud love story while looking through a spinning kaleidoscope, and you just might get a sense of the startling mix of color and creativity at play in Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet's rendition of "The Magic Flute."

Choreographed by the renowned Mark Godden, this theatrical ballet enchanted and entertained audience members Friday night at the Lied Center with innovative movement that was, at twists and turns, technically amazing and at the same time, expressive, warm and funny. Breathtaking lifts in which the dancers flew over each other's heads and curved their bodies weightlessly together were often followed by playful gestures that conveyed the characters' passions and personalities. Rolling pelvic thrusts, catwalks and flexed feet flirted with clean technique and flawless turn-out. It gave the whole performance an ageless exuberance and vitality that was absolutely perfect for Mozart's lively opera, which depicts three love stories simultaneously in an adventurous fairy tale of magic and mayhem.

The costumes and set design were also spectacular, in the most spellbinding sense of the word. Designer Paul Daigle, a former dancer whose first love is painting, did an excellent job of infusing Mozart's masterpiece with a modern sensibility. The dancers' attire had an almost punk-rock aesthetic that was fresh and interesting, yet without being too hip or distracting.

For example, Sarastro, the father of leading lady Pamina, wore a voluminous orange coat that bloomed outward from his spinning body while he danced. The Queen of the Night (an exquisite, platinum blonde, Tara Birtwhistle) wore a star-studded choker/sheer black slip ensemble that was two parts Madonna and one part Billy Idol. And several of the lovely ladies wore electric blue or lime-green toe shoes, which were secretly coveted by shoe aficionados in the audience all evening.

Colors conveyed relationships in simple, powerful ways: Sarastro's flaming jacket is echoed by the pumpkin-colored satin that lines the white, fuzzy coats that envelop the characters in a strong connection of love and forgiveness at the end of the story. And white definitely seemed to represent the concept of love, as main couple

Tamino and Pamina sparkled in it at the end; when they were finally reunited, the stage was covered in dazzling mounds of snow, and the characters offered each other coats of the same color.

Daigle also maintained a nice balance between needed props and a minimalist set that allowed the dancer's bodies to become the main visual element. Exaggerated objects, like the giant, whimsical nightlight that shines on Pamina while she basks in her father's love, added just the right emotional cues. And Pamina's larger-than-life glass wall provided the perfect backdrop for diffusing light and movement during the second act of the performance, particularly when the Queen of Night emerges behind it, like a ghost, resplendent under a glowing moon.

With Daigle's painter's palette of colors, the artistic genius of Godden and the amazing talents of Royal Winnipeg's ballet dancers, "The Magic Flute" was a delightful, dream-filled triumph of storytelling through drama and dance.