

Music Review

## Princess and Prince Transcend the Realm

By STEVE SMITH

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Musing upon the subject of loss, Canadian poets and hair-metal philosophers concur: You don't know what you've got till it's gone. A performance of Mozart's eternally fresh singspiel, "Die Zauberflöte" ("The Magic Flute"), in the Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College on Tuesday night proved the reverse is also true: You don't know what you've missed till it's back.

If you had seen only the Metropolitan Opera's family condensation of "Zauberflöte" during recent seasons, you could be repeatedly jolted by details nearly forgotten: a tuneful duet here, a bit of brotherly misogyny there. **This version featured the earnest and talented participants in Prelude to Performance, a professional-development program founded in 2003 by the renowned American soprano Martina Arroyo.**



**Last month Ms. Arroyo was named a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honors award, both for her stellar stage career and for nurturing young singers through her Martina Arroyo Foundation, which runs Prelude to Performance.**

Tuesday's event was the second of three full-length "Zauberflöte" performances with largely different casts, presented in alternation with a comic double bill of Donizetti's "Rita" and Puccini's "Gianni Schicchi."

In almost every way the production, directed by Laura Alley, was the exact opposite of the Met's kinetic Julie Taymor whirligig. Sets were absent, props nearly so; scene changes were indicated with sheer curtains and Brian Barnett's deft lighting. Period costumes by Charles Caine and wigs by Steven Horak were splendidly florid.

In the pit Willie Anthony Waters conducted an intelligently paced account brimming with style and energy, and did stalwart work in keeping the young cast members on their marks. Lisa Dispigno, a flutist, and Nicholas Fox, a keyboardist, played their important instrumental roles with excellence.

Attending performances by aspirants, you allow for voices and techniques not quite finished. But of Tuesday's show it can be said honestly that every participant merited a place on the stage. The singing could be uneven, but the commitment was unequivocal.

Chung Gu Kim was an ardent Tamino, Yanzelmalee Rivera a lush-sounding Pamina. Jonathan Hare brought a robust, well-trained voice and comic flair to the role of Papageno. Venetia Stelliou was a courageous Queen of the Night, doing honorable work in a treacherous role.

Ryan Speedo Green was a magnificently sonorous Sarastro, resplendent in graying dreadlocks and flowing robes; vocally he lacked definition only at the very bottom of his range. Gabriel Gargari, a leering Monostatos, compensated for a slightly underpowered voice with brilliant stage presence and superb comic talent.

Jasmine Muhammad, Molly Shortall and Keiko Kai harmonized elegantly as the Three Ladies. Jake Taylor, Stefano Rozenthal and Bennett Kosma were melodious and charming as the Three Spirits. And Cristina Castro sang beautifully as a sparkling, spunky Papagena.

"Die Zauberflöte" repeats on Friday at Hunter College, 68th Street between Lexington and Park Avenues; (212) 772-4488, [martinaarroyofdn.org](http://martinaarroyofdn.org).