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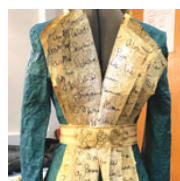
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A Timely Yet Timeless Tale

Rick's Blog



Pensacola Opera Brings Mozart's "Don Giovanni" to the Stage

By Savannah Evanoff

The #MeToo Movement wasn't around when Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart created the opera "Don Giovanni," but uniting against sexual harassment and assault was.

Jerome Shannon, the artistic director of the Pensacola Opera, said the opera opens with the character Don Giovanni trying to force himself

on a young woman. As the show continues, several characters unite, finding him their common enemy.

“These three or four different characters have all been wronged by Giovanni that would not normally be allies and all join together as an alliance to work on bringing him down,” Shannon said. “What I always say is we’re meeting this guy Don Giovanni on what is going to be the worst day of his life. Everything he tries to do fails ... I think the moral to the story is you see him dragged out to hell. That’s what happens.”

He and Fenlon Lamb, the stage director, agree Pensacola Opera’s performance of “Don Giovanni” is especially relevant in light of Harvey Weinstein’s trial beginning.

“It’s pretty timely I think, and it is a timeless story,” Lamb said. “People ask me, ‘Why tell these old stories?’ and I keep saying, ‘Because we haven’t learned the lessons from them yet.’”

In an equally timely turn of events, Lamb, a freelance director, is Pensacola Opera’s first female stage director.

Lamb grew up thinking she could do anything—



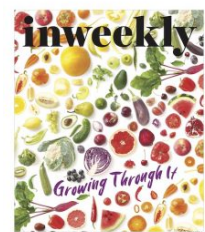
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Current Issue



her parents raised her that way, she said.

“I was an opera singer first for about 15 years, and when I switched over to being a director, it didn’t even dawn on me that I would be in power or would be an example,” Lamb said. “It just made so much sense for me. Now I look at it, and I have to mind my Ps and Qs and do a great job and create opportunities for the younger generation.”

Lamb thinks it’s important to engage different voices in opera. Like conductors, female directors are uncommon, Lamb said. Classical music is largely male based, she said.

“It’s only in the past five or 10 years that women have been climbing up and saying, ‘Hey, we’re just as good at this,’” Lamb said. “I direct around the United States now, and there are some companies that just haven’t had the opportunity (to have a woman direct). It’s always great to know I’m getting the opportunity to be in a place a woman has never been. We tell the story in a slightly different way. We have a different perspective.”

Lamb is also the director of Papermoon Opera Productions, which creates set pieces and costumes out of paper. Maureen Thomas, the

Special Issues



costume designer, created three paper looks for the women in Pensacola Opera's "Don Giovanni."

"Often we create these paper sets and paper costumes, and people don't recognize that's true, 'Oh, that couldn't be paper; that's fabric or wood,'" Lamb said. "What's particularly special about it this time is it has a real dramaturgical edge. It actually tells the story. We're creating looks for these women so that after Don Giovanni has his way with them or has interacted with them, he basically turns them into paper. It tells a story very strongly about what his feelings about women are. They're disposable."

The music is as timeless as its storyline. Shannon calls the opera a masterpiece, explaining it came from one of Mozart's most productive periods of life.

"There's a few people who I always wonder what music would be like had they lived longer, and he is definitely one of them," Shannon said. "He died when he was 33 years old, and you wonder, where would classical music be today had he lived a full life?"

Mozart excelled in chamber, symphonic, piano

and choral music, Shannon said. He had a gift for melody.

“Mozart has this ability to create ensemble work by starting with one or two characters and it grows to three or four and more and you have this incredible ensemble going on,” Shannon said. “People can be standing on the stage together and all be expressing a different thought from the person next to them. However, it all makes sense because they’re singing together.”

While the opera is traditional, Pensacola Opera’s performance won’t be. The elegant music inspired Shannon to change the time period of the show to the 1920s.

“The music feels like it’s elegance from the art-deco period—long, slim-lined, gentlemen in tails and formal wear and this façade of civilized society, and underneath is this undercurrent of evil,” Shannon said.

“It makes it a little more accessible,” Lamb said. “Sometimes when it’s way back in a period style, it’s a little far from our psyche.”

Pensacola Opera hasn’t performed “Don Giovanni” since 2002, which motivated Shannon

even further to switch things up.

“There was a guy that used to run the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Rudolf Bin, that used to say, ‘I have to find new frames for great masterpieces,’” Shannon said. “We found a new frame.”

Don Giovanni

WHAT: Pensacola Opera performs Mozart’s

“Don Giovanni”

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 24, and 2 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 26

WHERE: Saenger Theatre, 118 S. Palafox

COST: Starting at \$25

DETAILS: pensacolaopera.com

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