

REVIEWS

The Kiss

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During nearly 60 years of programming unusual operas, Wexford has rarely repeated a title, almost always preferring to uncover further unfamiliar works to champion. This season departs from tradition in returning to Smetana's 1876 comedy, which was played in English in 1974. In the event it seems entirely forgivable that the current artistic director, David Agler, should want to revisit this charming piece, sung this time in the original Czech.

The Kiss almost never appears outside the Czech Republic, although it is just as delectable as the much better known Bartered Bride or even The Two Widows. The story tells of the recently widowed farmer Lukas, returning to his first love, Vendulka, after his wife's death. Their romance seems to be successfully renewed until he demands a kiss, which she refuses so soon after his loss. A small matter becomes a big disagreement, and the rest of the action describes how the contretemps is eventually resolved with the inevitable, if belated, kiss.

Though the premise seems slight, Smetana charts the humanity and reality of his 19th-century village characters with depth. The subtle and entrancing score comes over marvellously with the Wexford Festival Orchestra on superb form, under the gifted young Czech conductor Jaroslav Kyzlink. South African soprano Pumeza Matshikiza adds further to her rising reputation with her beautifully sung and acted Vendulka, with Peter Berger bold and bracing as the more volatile Lukas - but there are no weak links in the cast.

To unflinchingly clever and attractive designs by James Macnamara and Fabio Toblini, Michael Gieleta's staging is flawlessly judged.

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Production information

Opera House, Wexford, October 18-30

Composer: Smetana

Director: Michael Gieleta

Producer: Wexford Festival Opera

Cast: Pumeza Matshikiza, Jiri Pribyl, Peter Berger, Pavel Baransky, Eliska Weissova, Bradley Smoak

Running time: 2 hrs 15 mins

Production information displayed was believed correct at time of review. Information may change over the run of the show.