



New
Theatre
Academy

brilliantly combines Mozart's farce *The Impresario* and Stravinsky's symbolist *Le Rossignol* (*The Nightingale*) into one production at the **Santa Fe Opera**.

If you arrive not knowing what is going to be presented, you might think that this is a single two-act opera with backstage dueling divas drama followed by the subsequent production.

The Impresario, assisted by dialogue by Ranjit Bolt and English translations by Penny Black, is played for laughs as prologue; and *Le Rossignol*, after all the goings-on, receives a beautifully serious production.

This may be a little hard to follow, but here is rundown.

Mozart's impresario, Yuri Yussupoich, becomes Sergei Diaghilev of Ballet Russes fame (played by Anthony Michaels-Moore). This fits because Diaghilev commissioned *Rossignol* for his company. His loyal assistant, Otto van der Puff (played by Kevin Burdette) warns that the bank account is nearly bare. Henrich Eiler arrives with a fat checkbook and contralto wife announcing that to get one of those things Yuri must take both. With the contralto thus cast, the catfight of an audition for *Rossignol*'s two soprano roles begins and is eventually decided. With the other role similarly scavenged, the resulting production follows, all foolishness set aside, as the second act.



Photo: Ken Howard/Santa Fe Opera

Mozart's *The Impresario* and Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* play a double bill at Santa Fe Opera

The three rival divas at the audition, with outrageously funny names, are a delicious sendup of all things operatic. The singers who portray them play it up for all it's worth—which is a lot.

Erin Morley portrays Adellina Vocedoro-Gambalunghi, Meredith Arwady sashays as Chlotichilda Krone and Brenda Rae booms

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as Vlada Vladimirescu, with her tenor husband Vladimir (Bruce Sledge) in tow. Later, Morley becomes the Nightingale and Rae becomes the Cook. Arwady portrays Death and Sledge becomes the Fisherman. Berdette becomes the Chamberlin, Michaels-Moore the Emperor and Groverton the Bonze. Yuri's two bedraggled stage managers (Jack Swanson, David Marlis) and the put-upon pianist for the auditions (Shea Ownens) become the three Japanese Envoys.

Got it?

At the auditions, all of the singers show off their stuff with some Mozart concert arias and other interpolated pieces. Their exaggerated performances are funny to the general audience and hysterical to the seasoned operagoer. Berdette rattles off what has to be the fastest patter song imaginable. Arwady gets the Campiest Performance of the Evening award for her version of *Don Giovanni's* "Champagne" aria in the baritone range. Once *Rossignol* starts, all of the vocal shenanigans end and we get exquisite singing.

It is not just the performance of *Rossignol* itself that is spectacular; all of the other elements are magnificent. The breathtakingly beautiful transition from Yuri's studio to Stravinsky's surreal China, and back again, is done in slow motion as we watch—amazed at Sean Curen's choreography, Fabio Toblini's converting costumes and James Macnamara's transforming scenery.

Vocally, all are terrific but the outstanding performance comes from Morley as the nightingale. This role requires a voice of great beauty with gorgeous singing throughout and she delivers on that requirement. As she floats around the stage (both vocally and physically) by unseen means, she not only enchants the Emperor but also the audience as we hang on every exquisite note.

Bravi to all of the dancers, who also have to change gears from backup dancers for a diva to the stylized motions of the Emperor's court. The dancers: Anthony Bocconi, Jesse Campbell, Reed Luplau, Shane Rutkowski, Xiaoxiao Wang and Jonathan Royce Wyndham, with outstanding solos by Jenna



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Siladie, Yoni Rose and Annie Rosen.

Conductor Kenneth Montgomery easily changes gears between Mozart and Stravinsky—no easy job. The orchestra responds in kind.

This production demonstrates that a sufficiently creative team can take two disparate operas and create something new and vital from them. In an era where operas are either done in the traditional manner or reconceptualized—for better or for worse—this pairing is something novel.

Here, two completely different operas from wildly different eras are made new although both are presented basically as originally conceptualized. (The Stravinsky is exactly as the composer designated and you can't help but feel that Mozart would have loved the update.) The pair are transformed by the juxtaposition and merged into something fresh and new.

» Other reviews from the 2014 Santa Fe Opera season:

- Donizetti's [*Don Pasquale*](#)
- Beethoven's [*Fidelio*](#)
- Bizet's [*Carmen*](#)
- Huang Ruo's [*Dr. Sun Yat-sen*](#)

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