

Florentine hits a theatrical high note with 'Prince of Players'

Elaine Schmidt | Special to the Journal Sentinel
Published 2:28 PM EDT Oct 13, 2018

Kate Royal performs in Florentine Opera's "Prince of Players" Oct. 12 and 14 at the Marcus Center, 929 N. Water St.

Kathy Wittman, Ball Square Films

Theater history sang on Friday evening in the Florentine Opera's production of Carlisle Floyd's "Prince of Players."

The opera, sung in English with some spoken dialog and stage directed by Michael Gieleta, is a snapshot of the moment in British theater history at which King George declared that men would no longer be allowed to appear onstage in female roles.

Opening the door for women to take the stage, the edict destroyed the careers of many men who had made their livings portraying females — actors such as Edward Kynaston, on whose story the opera is based.

RELATED: Florentine Opera's 'Prince of Players' strikes a timely note about gender roles

Baritone Keith Phares gave a masterful, engaging performance, both vocally and physically, moving between the male identity of Kynaston and his onstage female characters.

Kate Royal delivered strong, communicative vocal work and a dimensional, believable character as Margaret Hughes, one of the first intrepid women to appear on stage after the edict.

Overall strong vocal work and credible acting from Alexander Dobson, Chad Shelton, Frank Kelley, Vale Rideout and other members of the ensemble cast created a dynamic

performance.

Tenor Vale Rideout (left) and baritone Keith Phares perform in Florentine Opera's "Prince of Players" Oct. 12 and 14 at the Marcus Center, 929 N. Water St.

Kathy Wittman / Ball Square Films

The production's weakest moments occurred in unconvincing British accents that came and went throughout the opera, some unevenly matched voices in the ensemble cast and a rather harsh sound from the small chorus.

The production was a visual treat. Gregory Gale's richly detailed period costumes, many done in warm, earth tones, helped define characters and placed the opera firmly in the 17th century.

Shoko Kambara's compact set centered on an elegantly simple, small platform that was rotated to place the Uihlein Hall audience backstage for some scenes and in the audience for others. It offered enough details, including a wonderful "thunder machine" (a sheet of metal hanging from a stand), to give the action historical context without overwhelming the small cast with clutter.

The small set succeeded in drawing the audience into the world of the players, creating intimate theater in the large hall.

The Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra accompanied the production from the pit, under the baton of William Boggs.

This performance will be repeated at 2:30 p.m. Sunday at the Marcus Center's Uihlein Hall, 929 N. Water St. For tickets, visit florentineopera.org or call (414) 273-7206.

Published 2:28 PM EDT Oct 13, 2018

[Terms of Service](#) • [Privacy Notice](#)

© Copyright Gannett 2018