

**Don Giovanni | His Majesty's Theatre | til Oct 27 | ★★★★★**

West Australian Opera's 2018 production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* brings life to the legend of the fictional libertine Don Juan, ultimate seducer. This tragi-comedy follows the life of a dark, seductive anti-hero working his way through the women of Europe in the late 18th century. Set in 1787 Carl Friedrich Oberle's towering set presents a simple yet aristocratic aesthetic; an enormous stone hall with gold detailing bordering a large glass window. This open planned hall like structure provides the backdrop for the entirety of the performance. Nigel Leving's lighting is versatile against the fixed set, showing changes from night to day, indoor to outdoor and being in the midst of a thunderous storm.



Conducting the ensemble of the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra and Western Australian Opera Chorus is WAO's artistic director Brad Cohen who carries the performers through this exuberant, magnificent score. Cohen allows for much emotional expression throughout the opera, though the tempi at times seemed unsettled. While the chorus don't spend a great deal of time on stage during the opera, their refined, energetic performance emphasises the class system and accentuates the grotesque nature of *Don Giovanni*.

Performing the titular role, our first view of baritone Teddy Tahu Rhodes is of him scrambling backwards out the upper storey window of a sexual conquests' bedroom. Wearing nothing but knee high boots, a black eye mask, and black leather mini shorts, Tahu Rhodes looks like a somewhat erotic version of Zorro. Contrasting to the otherwise period set, props and costumes, this bold costuming choice brought a touch of contemporary humanity to Don Giovanni's unlikeable character. Tahu Rhodes' charismatic performance made his characters' unbelievably repulsive, animalistic behaviour comic, emphasizing his disregard for anyone's' feelings, and oblivious to the trail of destruction he left behind.

In a scene where Don Giovanni is indulging in a feast-for-one, members of the orchestra join him as on stage cast members in costume and very much in character as they comprise the in house entertainment ensemble for Don Giovanni's feast. It's unusual to see orchestral performers on stage, and this production brings an additional layer of drama to Tahu-Rhodes' hideous and captivating scene. Servant to Don Giovanni is Leporello, performed James Clayton who brought a fervent, lovable charm to the role with his goofy and endearing characterisation and his rich, genuine tone.

Performing the role of Donna Elvira the forsaken lover of Don Giovanni is soprano Emma Pearson, who embodies the role with superb singing and a commanding stage presence. Her rich, florid tone fills the theatre with ease as she portrays her anguish and vengeance for the man who abandoned her with phenomenal prowess. Her noble and dignified characterisation gave a refreshing tone to a character which is sometimes portrayed with a bolshy, aggressive manner.

Capturing the audience with her clear and pure tone, Anita Watson plays the role of Donna Anna. Whilst at times some of the coloratura didn't seem to sit well, Watson gave a most moving performance of her anguished character. Jonathon Abernethy performs the role of Donna Anna's lover Don Ottavio who brings to the role a thoughtful, heartfelt passion through his sensitive yet ardent performance.

The soon to be wed lovers Zerlina and Masetto are performed by Rebecca Castellini and Wade Kernot. Castellini's comic timing and bright tone matches her playful, sensual on stage charm. Kernot's performance contrasts Masetto's childlike jealousy with a touching sense of vulnerability. Both Kernot and Castellini's facial expressions and physical characterisation are delightfully frank and allure the audience from their first entrance.

After a short appearance in the first scene, Jud Arthur delivers a virtuosic performance of the superhuman Il Commendatore. Back from the dead, Il Commendatore resurfaces in the closing scenes of the opera dressed like a stone statue. Director Göran Järvefelt presents Don Giovanni's death in a thrilling underworld scene where Il Commendatore is surrounded by demon creatures in a nightmarish hell. Arthur's powerful and raw performance conveys an electrifying and frightening scene as Don Giovanni is sent into a fiery abyss.

Rehearsal director Roger Press has brought together the cast and crew as well as members of the Western Australian Opera Chorus and Western Australian Symphony Orchestra in this intense and entertaining production. While Mozart balances the dark plot with bright melodies and comedic interactions, this production makes no attempt to hide the dark side of Don Giovanni's treatment of women through themes of rape, revenge, murder and sex. Despite the period costuming and set design, the subjects of seduction, desire, grief and jealousy will never stop being relevant to contemporary human nature, thus making the story of *Don Giovanni* still pertinent and relatable, two centuries on.

**WA Opera's *Don Giovanni* will be at His Majesty's Theatre on October 23rd, 25th & 27th. Tickets available from [Perth Theatre Trust](#).**

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