

Angels & Devils | Claremont Showgrounds | til Aug 28 | ★★☆☆

Freeze Frame Opera (FFO) is a Perth based opera company established in 2016, which reframes operatic classics to make them relevant and entertaining for the modern audience. The performances are specifically designed to introduce opera to new audiences whilst employing both well established, and emerging opera stars.

FFO's *Angels & Devils* double bill provides a night of heartbreak and comedy with their performance of Puccini's *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*.



Lead by musical director Tommaso Pollio, the music ensemble Trio Tiramisu, made up of Pollio on Piano, Sophie Curtis on Cello and Cathie Travers on piano accordion provided a distinctive and rich accompaniment for the singers. Produced by Harriet Marshall, and directed by Rachel McDonald with set design by Robbie Harrold and lighting by Jerry Reinhardt, this production is performed in a large shed and presents opera in the most engaging and palatable way.

Opening with *Suor Angelica*, the work is set in an Australian drug rehab centre in present day times. The cast enter the stage in comfy clothes wearing trackies and ugg boots where they make themselves at home playing cards and folding washing to set the scene. Using colloquial, contemporary language, the surtitles provide more of a plot driven adaptation than direct translation, which is extremely well received by the audience. The current day interpretation created a relatable and engaging performance driven by the beautiful singing from the ensemble of (angelic) addicts.

Harriet Marshall gave a breathtaking performance in the role of Angel. Her aria *Senza Mamma*, a fierce lament to her dead son, was raw, heartfelt, and beautifully enriched with luscious, spinto tonal colours. Singing the role of Aunt, Nicole Youl's musical prowess commands the stage in this shrewd and brutish role with her velvety rich tone.

After a short interval (with delicious snacks) we return to find the stage re-set in a new era for *Gianni Schicchi*. Performed by a similar cast of mainly emerging WA opera artists, this toe tapping, tantalizing comedy provides a welcome change of pace from the depths of despair we were transported to in *Suor Angelica*.

In the role of the young lovers *Lauretta* and *Rinuccio*, Bella Marslen and Tom Buckmaster perform these innamorati characters with youthful charm. Buckmaster sings the role of *Rinuccio*, his dark, resonant tone and understated acting beautifully complimenting

Marslen's interpretation of Laretta. Singing a well known, crowd favourite aria such as *O Mio Babbino Caro* is never an easy feat, especially when it's sung in English. However, Marslen performed the aria skillfully with a focused, clear tone and musicality beyond her years.

Performing the titular role of Gianni Schicchi was Robert Hoffman – a FFO veteran and well-loved comedic Perth musician. Hoffman executed the role with flawless comedic timing highlighting Schicchi's wicked streak through his vocal and physical performance. Special mention must be made for Ava Charleson, Perry Joyce and Ruth Burke for their extremely entertaining performances in both operas. The depth of character development in each of the ensemble members was clear as they each brought compelling, nuanced quirks to their characters.

It's a pleasure to see opera presented in this engaging and relatable way, while mentoring and showcasing the next generation of emerging local opera singers.

Angels & Devils is running until Saturday 28th August at Claremont Showgrounds. For more information head to freezeframeopera.com

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