In Review

Monterone with his burly, muscular bass, although typing that role as an Arab sheik, complete with white robe and hood, remains questionable.

Conductor Nicola Luisotti seemed to have easy control over the Met Orchestra, which blasted out Verdi's colorfully descriptive orchestrations with welcome exuberance. Lighting designer Kevin Adams's dazzling storm effects seemed almost crucial to Act III's breathless momentum toward its doomed conclusion. The Met Titles translation has enjoyable touches of the vernacular: one of the Duke's pickup lines is rendered as "Your movie-star looks really light up the joint."

—Joshua Rosenblum

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Philadelphia

IN MIDWINTER, Opera Philadelphia presented the North American premiere of Robert Carsen’s 1991 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream in a run of four performances at the Academy of Music (seen Feb. 15). The handsome, acoustically friendly theater, 162 years young, was the perfect setting for Britten's intimate operatic gloss on Shakespeare's comedy, and for Carsen's imaginative, witty staging of it, first seen at Aix-en-Provence almost twenty-eight years ago and subsequently mounted by several other companies, including English National Opera and Teatro del Liceu in Barcelona. The Philadelphia revival was directed by Emmanuelle Bastet, a veteran of several presentations of the Carsen Dream, and Shelby Williams was responsible for the snappy revival choreography, originally the work of Matthew Bourne. The staging makes its points neatly, weaving and unweaving with admirable clarity the various plot threads involving fairies, Athenian lovers and rude mechanicals. Michael Levine's original designs for costumes and settings remain droll and potent; only the lighting, credited in Philadelphia to Adrian Paut, seemed hastily achieved and out of focus.

Corrado Rovaris, Opera Philadelphia's protonic music director, conducted stylishly, moving with élan from the cool, moonlit interludes for Tytania and Oberon to the swift, impetuous quarrels that occupy the quartet of lovers and the chatty meanderings of Bottom and his fellow amateur actors. Opera Philadelphia cast every role from strength, but the artist who made the biggest hit with the audience was actor Milos Yerolemou, in the nonsinging role of Puck. Britten's first Puck was Lorca Massine, the sixteen-year-old son of choreographer Léonide Massine; most subsequent stagings have used a teenaged actor or dancer to emphasize the character's youthful impetuosity. Yerolemou, best known for his work as Syrio Forel in HBO's Game of Thrones, was a surprisingly stocky, mature Puck—and a delightful one. The Cypriot actor knocked his comic speedballs out of the park and literally threw himself into the action with abandon, including a perfectly timed jump off the stage into an empty prosenium box.

The fairy world was ruled by the Oberon and Tytania of American soprano Anna Christy and English countertenor Tim Mead. Christy sang with luminous tone and crisp articulation and acted with ladylike vigor, delivering the full measure of the queen's petulance and lust. Mead looked handsome and sang with musically care, but he had little air of command; his Oberon was too relaxed and reticent a presence to drive the action of the midsummer night's revels.

Matthew Rose's practiced Bottom the Weaver—firm, virile and generously scaled—led the band of mechanicals. All of the Pyramus players were in good form, with Miles Mykkanen an especially eager, energetic Fluute and Brent Michael Smith an aptly pithy Peter Quince. The four principal fairies—trebles Jack Cellucci (Cobweb), Timothy O'Connor (Peaseblossom), Payton Owens (Moth) and Evan Schaffer (Mustardseed)—sang with admirable charm and sweetness, as did the members of the Philadelphia Boys Choir who comprised the fairy ensemble, although the last choral section of Act II ("Now until the break of day") could have been delivered more cleanly. Soprano Georgia Jarman, mezzo Siena Licht Miller and tenor Brenton Ryan realized the full comic and lyric potential of Helena, Hermia and Lysander; baritone Johnathan McCullough, an attractive, well-sung Demetrius, lagged behind his colleagues dramatically. Evan Hughes and Allyson McHardy came close to stealing the show as Theseus and Hippolyta, dominating their scenes with charisma, aristocratic hauteur and superlative singing. —F. Paul Driscoll

Dead Man Walking

Atlanta

Atlanta Opera continued its 2018-19 season with Dead Man Walking.
In Review

Michael Mayes
and Jamie Barton in AO’s Dead Man

productions. The role fits Mayes’s instrument and comportment like a glove: the opera could have been written for him, and his interpretation of the character is definitive.

Zulun cast every role in the opera, even the smallest, with first-rate voices. It was a reunion of leading men and women who have sung here in Atlanta under his watch. Maria Zifchak, who sang Mrs. Lovett in Atlanta last summer, proved that she is a consummate vocal chameleon as Mrs. Patrick De Rocher. Zifchak’s aria, “I am a mother,” was understated and endearing. Tenor Jay Hunter Morris, a former Pagliacci Canio here, sang the role of Father Grenville with ample voice. Bass Kevin Burdette, a perfect Pirate King in Atlanta’s Pirates of Penzance two seasons ago, portrayed the warden George Benton. Bass-baritone Wayne Tigges, last seen at AO as Wagner’s Dutchman, was a mesmerizing Owen Hart, spearheading the four grieving parents of De Rocher’s two victims. Amy Little (Kitty Hart), Justin Stoltz (Howard Boucher) and Maria McDaniel (Jade Boucher) were likewise regal in their agony and delivered one of the most important moments in the show, “You don’t know,” with devastating force.

—Stephanie Adrian

Elektra

Chicago

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO’S Elektra revival was threatened by a polar vortex that plunged the Windy City into record-breaking subzero conditions that necessitated cancellation of the dress rehearsal—the first time a dress rehearsal had been omitted at Lyric in more than forty years. At the opening on February 2, however, the company delivered a searing performance of Strauss’s elemental drama that conquered with interpretive subtlety as well as seismic force.

Lyric’s Elektra was Nina Stemme, in a thrilling company debut. Although an announcement was made that Stemme was suffering from a knee injury, her meticulously crafted,