

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 pick-up 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 Plaut, seemed hastily achieved and out of focus.

Corrado Rovaris, Opera Philadel-



Philadelphia's *Dream*, with Georgia Jarman, Brenton Ryan, Siena Licht Miller and Johnathan McCullough

phia's protean 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 Miltos 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 proscenium 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 musicianly 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 Flute 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.

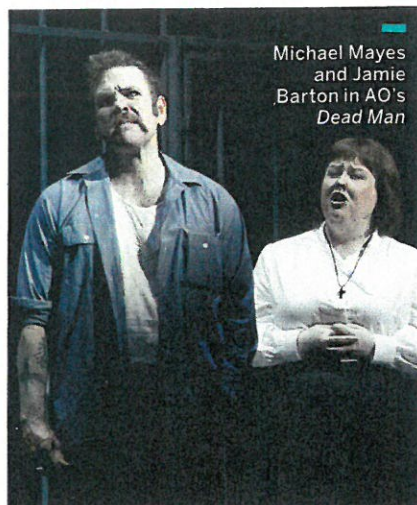
Soprano Georgia Jarman, mezzo Siena Licht Miller and tenor Brenton Ryan realized the full comic and lyric potential of Helena, Hermia and Lysander; baritone Johnathan McCullough, an attractive, well-sung Demetrius, lagged behind his colleagues dramatically. Evan Hughes and Allyson McHardy came close 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*,





Michael Mayes  
and Jamie  
Barton in AO's  
*Dead Man*

the adaptation by Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally of Sister Helen Prejean's memoir recounting her prison ministry at the Angola State Penitentiary in Louisiana in the early 1980s. On February 2, with both the composer and Sister Helen in the audience, and a cast filled with first-class singers, the company presented a gritty, unsettling show, a coproduction with the Israeli Opera, directed by AO general and artistic director Tomer Zvulun.

*Dead Man* presents an onstage rape and murder (as well as brief nudity), likely startling the sensibilities of some regular patrons more accustomed to onstage deaths in opera that are less graphic. Nevertheless, the action was tastefully done and essential to the drama. Within this text-driven and tense opera, Zvulun attempted to create movement whenever possible. Don Darnutzer's digital projections onto a cinderblock set designed by R. Keith Brumley helped accomplish this, creating ambiance as well as change in venue. The Atlanta Opera Orchestra, led by Joseph Mechavich, played the meandering score with precision.

Jamie Barton, an international-class mezzo-soprano and a Georgia native, navigated Heggie's tricky speech rhythms and fluid key signatures for Sister Helen. Making her role debut, Barton was adept at establishing the sincerity and empathy that Sister Helen must demonstrate. The convicted killer Sister Helen counsels, Joseph De Rocher, was sung by baritone Michael Mayes, a veteran of several *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.

Zvulun 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 Stolz (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,

intriguingly cerebral account of the vengeful Greek princess betrayed little sign of indisposition, apart from an understated final dance. The soprano was in galvanic vocal estate, with blazing top Cs and B-flats and the requisite dynamic control for a sensitively rendered recognition scene with Orest, sung by baritone Iain Paterson, who also made a notable Lyric debut.

Elza van den Heever delivered a superb, achingly feminine Chrysothemis graced by laser-focus brilliance in the upper register and an exceptionally intelligent use of text. The vocal blend of van den Heever and Stemme in "Elektra! Schwester! ... Hörst du denn nicht" was ravishingly beautiful. The Klytämnestra was the formidable mezzo-soprano Michaela Martens, whose magnetically conceived performance left one torn between reluctant sympathy and outright revulsion. Tenor Robert Brubaker scored another attention-grabbing house debut with his responsively sung, deftly characterized Aegisth.

There was an unusually impressive group of serving maids in Lauren Decker, Mary Phillips, Krysty Swann, Alexandra LoBianco and an affecting fifth maid from Ann Toomey; the opening scene was fabulous. Eric Ferring wielded an attractive tenor as the Young Servant, while the admirable baritone Philip Horst made a welcome house return as the Tutor. Susan Foster



Nina Stemme  
as Elektra  
in Chicago

© JEFF ROFFMAN (DEAD MAN), © CORY WEAVER (ELEKTRA)