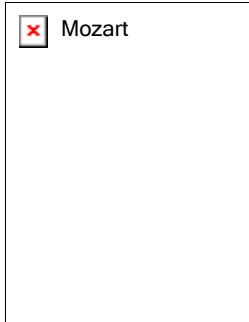




Cincinnati Opera: Don Giovanni



— **The opening night of Cincinnati Opera's 1999 Summer Festival on June 17 was a performance of *Don Giovanni***, which made it clear that this is one of the top opera attractions that the Midwest has to offer. I had never before seen a live



performance of this work, and had been anticipating this event for quite a while. The performance lived up to my expectations, if not exceeding them.

— One of the demanding points of this opera is that it is essential to have a first-rate star in the title role. Cincinnati certainly had that in the Swedish baritone Peter Mattei, making his American Opera debut. Mattei has the perfect voice, and also looks the part. He is a full 6'3", and brought the famous seducer to life with every movement. The seduction scene with Zerlina in the well-known duet "La ci darem la mano" was so realistically sincere, one easily forgot that it was Don Giovanni, no model of sincerity, singing. Mattei was also a fairly violent Don, reaching for his sword when he lost patience with Leporello, vehemently singing the Champagne Aria while dragging Leporello by the hair, and flinging a glass of water in Donna Elvira's face when she had come to his house begging for his affections. The most tender moment of the portrayal was the serenade, "Deh vieni alla finestra," in which Elvira's maid, very young, actually came and embraced him.

— Another high point of the evening was the Donna Elvira of Christine Goerke. She has a gorgeous voice, and an enormous range which was used to great effect in the performance. Her entrance aria, "Ah, chi mi dice mai?", was sung with furious determination to find the man who had wronged her. "Ah fuggi il traditor" was filled with indignation, and in the Act 1 quartet there was no question of who was telling the truth. Miss Goerke's voice said it all; Giovanni is a very bad man, no denying it. Then, in the aria, "Mi tradi," one was given a real sense of the dilemma that she was in. She knows it's a sin to love someone like Giovanni, but she does anyway. The comic moments with Leporello at the beginning of Act 2 were a treat as well, one that had the audience rolling in the aisles.

— As Donna Anna, Lauren Flanigan was fantastic. Like Miss Goerke, she possesses a large voice, one which can be heard easily in the ensembles. "Or sai chi l'onore" was thrilling, and the recitative before it, extremely difficult, was done with dramatic intensity. "Non mi dir" was persuasive, and served well as an affirmation of her feelings for Ottavio.

— Michele Bianchini's Leporello was a winner. He has a deep bass voice which met the buffo qualities of the role well. He was also a fine actor, with the amount of humor appropriate for this character. The Catalogue Aria deservedly brought the house down. Scott Piper's Ottavio was sweet in tone, and "Dalla sua pace" was very nice indeed, and it showed us how much he cared for his fiancée, Anna.

— The Zerlina of Elisabeth Comeaux was quite strange, as it sounded as if she were marking in some spots, like the duet with Giovanni and her aria "Batti batti o bel Masetto." Her entrance words were nearly inaudible, but luckily she was a convincing

actress, and was most effective in "Vedrai carino."

▬ Dean Ely's Masetto was another gifted performance, and he made a rather violent Masetto. He actually slapped Zerlina before "Batti batti." Perhaps it is better this way dramatically, because the translation is "Beat me, beat me" which would mean that he is a wife-beater, which he probably isn't. This was just a stern lover's slap. David Michael's Commendatore was impressive.

▬ The performance was conducted by Klaus Donath, who had just about the perfect tempi throughout the entire program. There was good playing from the orchestra, though the ensembles seemed a bit ragged, and the chorus seemed a bit under-rehearsed, but luckily, they have a very minimal role in this opera.

▬ The production was directed by Nicholas Muni, the Artistic Director, and overall it was a very satisfying production, with the trapdoors in the stage used to good effect during the Catalogue Aria, and an interesting ending to Act 1. Giovanni pulled a cord which caused his dining hall roof to collapse, providing him an easy escape. There were some things that I didn't get, though. One of these occurred in the Act 1 quartet, when Elvira entered with Giovanni's Catalogue. Surprisingly, Giovanni snatched it and spread it out on the floor for all to see, but I would think that this would be the last thing that he would want to be displayed. Then again, perhaps he was bragging! The ending, for whatever reason, had Giovanni walking through the aisles through the audience, while the sextet gave their moral denouement. There was probably something symbolic, but it was hard to see what Muni was getting at. Other than these minor details, it was a very pleasing staging.

▬ After the performance, I came backstage and met Miss Goerke, a fellow Internet-connection. She was an extremely kind person, and was impressed at my height (6 feet even and still growing at 14.) I also met another Internet friend, known by many as Ragbert, the designer of this Opera Jamboree website. She and another friend chatted with my father and me, and Miss Goerke, who is in Santa Fé right now for *The Dialogues of the Carmelites* by Poulenc. She is singing Madame Lidoine.

▬ Cincinnati's remaining performances consisted of *The Turn of the Screw* by Britten on July 8 and 10, and Gounod's *Faust* on July 15 and 17th, with the talented British tenor Paul Charles Clarke in the title role. Cincinnati continues to impress, as it will no doubt do in coming seasons.

▬ *Adam Cioffari*

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[TOP of PAGE](#)

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