

October, 2011

Don Giovanni (7/14/11), *La Rondine* (7/15/11)

NEW YORK CITY

Prelude to Performance | The Martina Arroyo Foundation

JOANNE SYDNEY LESSNER

Prelude to Performance, Martina Arroyo's summer workshop for emerging artists, presented full productions of *Don Giovanni* (seen July 14) and *La Rondine* (July 15) at the Kaye Playhouse. Both operas offered a sneak peek at some young singers with bright futures. The vocal honors in *Don Giovanni* went,



somewhat surprisingly, to Joshua Conyers in the title role. Giovanni has far fewer purely vocal moments than the other characters, yet when they came — in "La ci darem la mano" and "Deh vieni alla finestra" — Conyers poured forth a deliciously honeyed baritone that would seduce anyone. If his characterization was more hearty than suave, he still effortlessly summoned up a laser-beam look that communicated hidden danger and volatility. Luis Alvarado's Leporello was the perfect package, with a fine, firm voice, wonderfully fluid and idiomatic diction and a lovable presence. His catalogue aria was excellently sung, and he never overplayed his comic moments, which made him genuinely funny. Kudos to Zeshan Bagewadi for giving Don Ottavio a satisfying character arc while managing his long vocal lines with control and intelligence. "Dalla sua pace" was sweet, boyish and vulnerable, but he used "Il mio tesoro" to affirm a newfound maturity. Taesung Kim made a delightfully limber, goofy Masetto, clearly a handful for Zerlina, but worth it in the end. As the Commendatore, Ryan Speedo Green, a winner of the Met's 2011 National Council Auditions, was affectingly aggrieved in Act I and used his sonorously expressive bass-baritone to chilling effect in Act II. Covered from head to toe in silver paint, he kept impressively still, rendering his few small movements the more powerful.

The surprise discovery of Puccini's *La Rondine* was Jonathan Jurgens as Ruggero. His affable, all-American demeanor belies an open-throated Italianate tenor with a full, easy top, focused middle and real lyric bloom. His singing in the final scene was thrilling — all the more so given his youth and modest resumé. He was well matched by Yunnice Park's gleamingly sung Magda. Park successfully moved from elegant hostess to country girl in love, and if her middle register was occasionally underpowered, she more than made up for it with a soaring "Chi il bel sogno di Doretta." The secondary roles of Lisette and Prunier were in the sure comic hands of Katie Dixon and Marcos Vigil. Dixon is a natural soubrette, with a sparkling personality and top notes to match. Vigil deadpanned the self-important poet, which made his occasional losses of control (such as a sexy bite aimed at Dixon's neck) amusing and unexpected. There was excellent support from Isaac Gray as Rambaldo, as well as Laura Puzio, Joan Estep and Keiko Kai as Magda's trio of saucy friends. The men's chorus was particularly droll in their pursuit of Magda during the café scene.

