

***Les Contes d'Hoffmann*(7/11/13)**

NEW YORK CITY

Prelude to Performance | The Martina Arroyo Foundation

Martina Arroyo's "Prelude to Performance" summer program for emerging artists, now in its ninth year, featured *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (seen July 11) and *L'Elisir d'Amore* (July 12) at the Kaye Playhouse. *Hoffmann* has some big vocal requirements, and the young cast rose to the occasion impressively.



Won Whi Choi's tenor had the appropriate heft for the title role, and he veered credibly between brashness and vulnerability. One of his best moments was "Chanson de Kleinzach," which allowed him to play a bit physically and show a sly sense of humor. Although some top notes were constricted and pushed sharp, more rang true. As Nicklausse, Kirsten Scott grounded Choi with her warm, enveloping mezzo and soothing presence. She tossed off "Une poupée aux yeux d'email" with insouciance and let the gentle Muse shine through in "C'est l'amour vainqueur." Tall and dark with a fine, resonant bass-baritone, Yuriy Yurchuk was a brooding presence as

all four villains. His best turns were as Coppélius and Dr. Miracle, bringing an unexpectedly daffy touch to the former and focused malevolence to the latter. Benjamin Bloomfield made a sympathetic Crespel, a jolly Luther and a self-important Schlémil, while Walker Jermaine Jackson contributed an affable Nathanaël and a frazzled Spalanzani, complete with sissy run. Samuel Thompson's natural energy made Hermann seem like the kind of guy you could drink with for hours. As the four servants, Francisco Corredor stole every scene he was in, reappearing in each act with an entirely new and hilarious impersonation of the same harried soul.

Mizuho Takeshita aced Olympia's roulades with crystalline accuracy and blazing sustained notes above the staff. Lenora Green was an affecting Antonia, singing with sensitivity and proving a genuine, unforced actress. Keep your eye on Tamara Rusqué (Giulietta), who stood out recently as Diana in Manhattan School of Music's senior workshop production of *Orphée aux Enfers*. This polished young performer packs dramatic intensity, an intriguingly dark and flexible soprano and oodles of stage presence into a petite package. Chantelle Grant added a slightly demonic touch to Antonia's mother, and her trio with Antonia and Miracle was thrilling. Meroe Khalia Adeeb was a regal Stella. Director E. Loren Meeker put the emphasis on storytelling, with all five acts taking place in the simple Tudor-style tavern. This kept *Hoffmann*'s flights of fancy anchored to his original audience in the inn. The chorus was lively and engaged, and they sounded splendid, particularly the men. Conductor Robert Lyall kept matters well in hand from the pit. JOANNE SYDNEY LESSNER