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Verdi's "Aida" at Regina Opera Company



A VIEW
FROM
THE CLIFF
BY CLIFF KASDEN

The pounding of the tympani. The crashing of the cymbals. Prepare for battle in ancient Egypt!

Yes, Verdi's unforgettable masterpiece "Aida" is part of this year's New York Opera Fest. The venue is the popular and surging Regina Opera Company.

At the opening performance, a large crowd responds to another sterling performance with thunderous applause and shouts of bravi and bravo! The growing popularity of Regina, now in its 48th season, is unquestionably due to the troupe's impeccable performances. That includes onstage, in the orchestra pit (Gregory Ortega-conductor, Christopher Joyal-concertmaster), the creative teams (Francine Garber-Cohen, Linda Cantoni) and the solid support system.



A scene from Regina Opera's production of "Aida."

Photo by Colleen Smith

The story itself revolves around devoted but doomed Aida. She is an Ethiopian captive who serves the royal family. She is played by sopranos Carami Hilaire and Dilara Unsal.

On Saturday, Hilaire exudes a magical combination of charisma, passion and humility. Her warrior lover Radames — played by tenors Jose Heredia and Paolo Buffagni — must choose between love and loyalty with dire consequences.

Egyptian princess Amneris is portrayed by mezzo-sopranos Lara Tillotson and Erica Koehring. At the opening performance, Tillotson commands a strong presence onstage. Despite her character's regal arrogance, she manages to gain the audience's sympathy with her powerful voice, and conflicted emotions.

The struggles between baritone Amonastro (Peter Hakjooon Kim/David Robinson as Aida's father), the King

of Egypt (Bass Peter Ludwig/David Tillstrand) and bass Ramfis the High Priest (Hyong Sik Jo/Antoine Hodge) offer stirring counterpoints to the many subplots that drive the majestic story.

The towering scenery (Linda Lehr-stage director and set design) filled with Egyptian hieroglyphics and an enormous symbolic eye, enhances the pomp and power of this stately melodrama.

The graceful dancer-high priestesses (Wendy Chu, Kelly Vaghenas, Kirsten Reynolds) are elegant and mesmerizing. The huge ensemble filled with well costumed noblemen and women (Marcia C. Kresge, Tamara Belgrave—costumes), slaves and soldiers is a pleasure to behold.

Kudos to the high priestess (Aida Carducci/Christa Hyllon), the messenger (Justin Scott Randolph/Lindell O. Carter) and the entire ensemble too numerous to acknowledge by name.

For information on this and future productions, go to www.ReginaOpera.org, call 718-259-2772 or "Like" them on Facebook. As always, save me a seat on the aisle.