



BWW Review: Mesmerizing, Tantalizing PARADISE at Lincoln Center Festival

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by Richard Sasanow

While the opera is undoubtedly a showcase for soprano Qian Yi, known as The Woman, the ornamental traditional style--where several notes are sung to a single syllable--and flexible pitch provide an obstacle to total involvement by the Western ear. The role calls for her not only to sing and act but dance (choreographed by Gwen Welliver) as part of the emotional journey she takes, whether dreamy, erotic or feisty, and she is fearless--totally enthralling in every part of her performance. The sound nonetheless presents a formidable challenge to warm to.

In comparison, the more familiar, tonal Western idiom of the music assigned to the quartet of male singers, who portray the Elements, shows off the composer at his most alluring, to my ears at least. Their roles are supremely well sung by tenor Yi Li (notable in his duet with Qian Yi), baritone Joo Won Kang and bass-baritone Ao Li. But it is the standout voice of countertenor John Holiday (whom I first heard on the same stage at John Jay's Gerald Lynch Theatre in Vivaldi's CATONE IN UTICA) that I

won't soon forget. His pure sound--often singing higher than Qian Yi--was sure and infinitely expressive.

Designer Ma's physical vision of The Woman's journey--from rapturous dream, to the new world of the black garden, to the fireflies that take the form of a man and, finally, the white flower that enable her to be reborn--was stunning, aided by the costumes of Melissa Kirgan and Xing-Zhen Chung-Hilyard, the video design of Austin Switser, the interactive video of Guillermo Acevedo, the sound by Lew Mead and the lighting by Lihe Xiao adapted by Andrew Cisna. In particular, I was taken by the use of crumpled black paper, which transformed into the garden and that, in the end, almost magically disappeared, falling like the ashes after a volcano has erupted.

Yes, there were many challenges in accompanying The Woman on her journey in PARADISE INTERRUPTED--but it was certainly worth the trip.