

MUSIC

Review: Minnesota Opera's finely sung 'Rinaldo' opens the new Luminary Arts Center

The fun production features imaginative costumes and staging.

By Rob Hubbard Star Tribune | NOVEMBER 25, 2022 — 5:00AM

George Frideric Handel was the baroque era's master of the earworm. Take as evidence Minnesota Opera's new production of his opera, "Rinaldo." It's fairly bursting with lovely laments of love and resignation that give way to fast, fun, argumentative duets.

And fun is a fine description of this staging, which transplants a tale of the Crusades to 1980s Wall Street, turning what was once early-18th-century Christian propaganda into a wry commentary on capitalism.

Full of imaginative costuming and staging ideas, it's also finely sung and acted, and that comes through clearly in Minnesota Opera's new North Loop venue, the Luminary Arts Center.

Formerly known as the Lab Theater and the Guthrie Lab, it always has been a capacious, three-story subterranean square of a room that clearly began life as a riverside warehouse. As a performance space, it's a classic black box, or, more accurately, a brick box, one in which an audience on risers looks down upon the floor-level performers. At 224 seats, it's invariably intimate.

It proved a fine setting for this "Rinaldo." Not only do those heart-tugging arias work particularly well at close range, but it's possible to admire the details on Tyler M. Holland's wild,

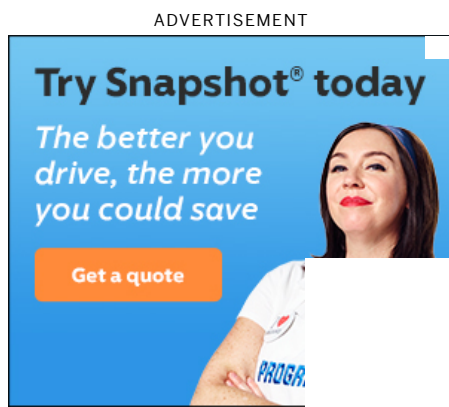


DAN NORMAN

Symone Harcum as Almirena and Patrick Terry as Rinaldo in Minnesota Opera's "Rinaldo."

wonderful costumes and also admire how much the singers are inhabiting characters who could be caricatures in less subtle hands.

Giacomo Rossi's libretto is all about love amid warfare, with sorcerers and psychics aiding each side in what was then a Christians-vs.-Moors story. In Minnesota Opera's version — the brainchild of director Mo Zhou — old money does battle with new, the silly-suited aristocracy trying to either swallow or merge with a successful startup where the leaders dress in pointy-shouldered, flame-emblazoned leather jackets, bodices and codpieces.



But, at root, "Rinaldo" is a love story, as a hero wishing to marry into a family business sees his beloved abducted by the enemy. As he mounts a rescue, both he and his fiancée charm their way into the hearts of their rivals' leaders, thanks largely to Handel's lovely arias. But that doesn't mean there won't be a climactic battle, this one on a stock trading floor.

If you're not used to baroque opera — and not that many get performed around here — they're customarily written more for high voices than low. Hence, our Rinaldo is a countertenor, Patrick Terry. A University of Minnesota grad who's gone on to an international career, Terry proves a captivating protagonist with a powerful voice and an endearingly vulnerable stage persona.

Also inhabiting the upper register is Christina Hazen as the plaid-suited head of the conventional corporation who sings some fine laments of her own, delivering them with a pure tone and a conflicted heart. But the most beautiful solos are

offered by soprano Symone Harcum as Rinaldo's love interest, Almirena, including a sad showstopper that remained in my head hours after the final curtain.

Among the new-moned outlaws of this adaptation, both Keely Futterer and Charles H. Eaton prove mightily memorable — Futterer as a power-hungry sorcerer bent on seduction and Eaton as a swaggeringly charismatic baritone with a versatile voice and a touch of Freddie Mercury.

Under conductor Emily Senturia, the Minnesota Opera Orchestra does everything one could wish with Handel's sumptuous score, eloquently capturing both its beauty and pulse-quickening vigor and providing the foundation for a richly enjoyable opera.

Minnesota Opera's 'Rinaldo'

When: 7:30 p.m. Sat., 2 p.m. Sun., 7:30 p.m. Tue. and Dec. 2 and 3.

Where: Luminary Arts Center, 700 N. 1st St., Mpls.

Tickets: \$50-\$80, available at 612-333-6669 or mnopera.org (<https://mnopera.org/season/2022-2023/rinaldo/>).

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