



Individual stamp on production

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REVIEW: What: The Phantom of the Opera Who: Hamilton Operatic Society When: Until May 24 Where: Founders Theatre, Hamilton Director: David Sidwell Soloists: Roy Snow as The Phantom and Julia Booth as Christine Daae Reviewed by Sam Edwards

Give thanks to your particular deity for David Sidwell.

Phantom is a show performed so many times and seen by so many people that most performances, especially amateur, have become tired derivatives of Joel Schumacher's film version or sincere-but-wanting presentations of the score with costume and a best imitation of Frank Spencer.

Sidwell, however, as he has done so often in the past, puts his own individual stamp on this production, and the result delighted the opening night audience.

After the prologue in which there is a vital clue to the ending, the first scene, a rehearsal for an opera, came in like slapstick. All the operatic cliches were booted, the audience had some laughs, and the indications were that this was going to be a comic melodrama. That would have been so inappropriate that one wondered how Sidwell was going to reset the tone for a story which contains tragedy and pathos as well as humour.

That man is a pro. He brought on Julia Booth. Booth is not a fulltime actor. She even makes a living by teaching, but her role tonight had all the qualities of a top professional performance. The clear and expressive soprano was highlighted by a deliciously unforced top register, she communicated a real understanding of the emotional chaos in which her character found herself, and her stage presence was both stylish and convincingly honest.

That in no way diminished Pamela Wallace's fresh and lively performance as a raddled old diva in her operatic decline. Neither did it shade the other leads. While Phantom Roy Snow's stage presence was somewhat understated, his voice was an exhilarating contrast to the lighter baritone of Kyle Chuen and on the occasions when Chuen and Snow sang in trio with Booth, there was a wonderful balanced collective power.

Apart from a couple of first night moments, when the male chorus began to set their own speed against the orchestra, for example, this was a performance characterised by enormous discipline.

The ovation received by the orchestra was small reward for their intelligent, and at times moving, interpretation of a difficult score. Choreographers Fairhead and Boyes provided originality and elegance, and production designer Allan Lees supported the mobile cast and dramatic narrative with sets which were both visually stimulating and dramatically practical. This really is Hamilton Operatic Society at its best.

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