



SUPERB: Hurn Court Opera's production of *The Magic Flute* featured terrific performances from young singers on the up

An unexpected feast of top drawer opera

REVIEW

The Magic Flute, Hurn Court Opera - Regent Theatre, Christchurch

It is not often that one's expectations are thoroughly surpassed, especially in the world of opera.

I was invited to review Hurn Court Opera's production of *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) at the Regent Theatre in Christchurch, and at first imagined some 'enthusiastic' amateur operatic ensemble awaited me.

A little research soon revealed my error, the company's singers are most definitely professionals - young performers in the final years of study or just embarking on their careers. However I still did not expect one of the most enjoyable nights at the opera I have ever experienced.

Some of these singers were not just already fit for performance with an established company,

they were among the better singers I have seen in their role. In particular, James Atkinson as Papageno showed off a terrifically lyrical baritone voice, singing with great projection and at higher and lower ends of his range with apparent ease. He was also the stand out stage performer (clearly the role helps) with great comic timing.

Joanna Songi as Pamina was another revelation. Though she was not quite as consistent overall, her rendition of the

'suicide' aria was very powerful.

In the briefly seen but memorable role of the Queen of the Night, Eleanor Penfold was a striking stage presence, more otherworldly than hammy, which was a refreshing change.

She had better control and clarity during the infamous coloratura of *Der Hölle Rache* than some more seasoned singers I have seen, and with more experience will no doubt begin to refine her rendition into something more personal.

James Hutchings' Tamino and the queen's three attendant ladies were all also singing at a high standard, and acting well. Some other singers were clearly voices in development, but gave glimpses of a fine finished product.

The other star of this show was

the Regent itself. Who would have thought this little Christchurch institution would have the best opera acoustic on the south coast? Every note and every word was projected with crystal clarity, and the balance between singers and small orchestra was perfect. Quite the contrast to straining to hear Rodolfo, Leporello and Tosca from the circle of the Royal Opera (or the *Mayflower* for that matter).

They won't be staging *Aida* any time soon, but I sincerely hope the Regent will follow up on this with more small scale opera performances.

The well-deserved full house and standing ovation at the end of this performance showed I am not alone in this wish.

WILL FRAMPTON

All-star sextet set to swing into Lighthouse