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# >> ENTERTAINMENT

## MUSIC REVIEW



MICHAEL COOPER PHOTO

Tamara Wilson in Canadian Opera Company's *Die Fledermaus*.

# A lot of rich, racy, randy fun

**Die Fledermaus isn't for the opera purists**

**RICHARD OUZOUNIAN**  
THEATRE CRITIC

Time to break out the champagne! The Canadian Opera Company's production of *Die Fledermaus*, which opened Thursday, is so rich, racy, randy and irreverent that it's bound to draw the ire of opera purists and bluenoses, but anyone who's looking for a scintillating way to look at Strauss anew should hurry on down to the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

*Die Fledermaus* is such a veritable chestnut that it ought to be roasting over an open fire this time of year. Its farcical plot about marital high-jinx in late 19th-century Vienna isn't likely to offer surprises and its score may please the ears and set the toes a-tapping, but it's hardly rooted in deep dramatic truth.

Enter director Christopher Alden, who sees this not as a tried and true bonbon you serve to Auntie and her friends at Thanksgiving but as a slice of Freudian revelation that must be seen to be believed.

We begin with a giant watch sus-

pended over Allen Moyer's amazingly mutable set and a flurry of bats suddenly swoop across the sky while the "real" bat, Dr. Falke, appears with giant wings, looking not unlike Dracula.

Yes, "fledermaus" means bat in German and most productions kind of skirt around that. But Alden embraces it, allowing all of our best Nosferatu-fuelled sexual fantasies to take off, fuelled by Peter Barrett's aptly spooky performance.

Rosalinde lounges in a canopied bed, played to ripe perfection by Tamara Wilson, while her husband, Gabriel (a masterpiece of dithering masculinity on the ropes by Michael Schade) tries to sneak in one last fling before going to jail for losing a meaningless lawsuit.

But Falke, our bat, has revenge in mind over a practical joke played on him the in past and the whole evening is meant to be one of those parties that goes horribly wrong and horribly right at the same time.

By the time we get to Act II, which is the orgy of your dreams (or nightmares), the joint is jumping. A giant staircase keeps revolving, Constance Hoffman's costumes frequently embrace drag without be-

coming one and Paul Palazzo's lighting uses colours I haven't seen since Studio 54 closed.

Wow! Laura Tucker turns Prince Orlofsky, partygiver supreme, into a pleasure-sated lesbian instead of a tiresome "trouser" role. Ambur Braid drops her maid's gear to emerge in finery as the best Adele ever: sexy, sparky, sensational.

By the time the chorus's five bat-girls are moving in sexy circles, you'll want to stay forever. And when James Westman shows just how lovely a man in a ball gown can be, the whole thing becomes triumphant.

Space forbids me cataloguing all the dramatic and musical delights of this production. One must just say that conductor Johannes Debus makes Strauss's score seem edgy and fresh, almost as though Strauss had just had a one-night stand with Kurt Weill.

Don't tell yourself that you've seen *Die Fledermaus* before. You haven't. This is an eye and an ear opener that will thrill all adventurous opera lovers.

And Ms. Braid, I'll be waiting by the stage door. Bring the bat girls with you.