

OPERA REVIEW

This bat soars

DIE FLEDERMAUS by Johann Strauss II, Carl Haffner and Richard Genée (Canadian Opera Company). Runs to November 3 at the Four Seasons Centre (145 Queen West). \$12-\$325. 416-363-8231. See Continuing, page 60. Rating: **NNNN**

Considering its frivolous plot about a lavish ball, marital infidelity and the power of bubbly, it's easy to think of **Johann Strauss's Die Fledermaus** as the theatrical equivalent of Viennese pastry: rich and insubstantial. But director **Christopher Alden's** fascinating new production for the **Canadian Opera Company** makes you see and savour new layers in that confection.

Taking his cue from the fact that Vienna was also the birthplace of psychoanalysis, Alden and designer **Allen Moyer** (who collaborated on the COC's stunning Flying Dutchman) dominate the stage of the **Four Seasons Centre** with an oversized pocket watch, which sometimes swings back and forth as if to induce hypnosis to uncover your deep, dark secrets.

That's just one symbol in this highly suggestive look at the undercurrents of sexuality and decadence beneath the facade of 19th-century European bourgeois respectability. Rosalinde (**Tamara Wilson**) bids goodbye to her husband Gabriel von Eisenstein (**Michael Schade**), who's about to serve a short jail term; unbeknownst to both, they will soon meet each other – and their maid Adele (**Ambur Braid**) – at the world-weary Prince Orlofsky's (**Laura Tucker**) party later that night.

None of them understands, however, that they're all under the influence of Dr. Falke (**Peter Barrett**), a sinis-



ter man who has a lot in common with Bruce Wayne. (The title translates as The Bat.)

Fledermaus is best known for its sumptuous score, including some of the most famous waltzes ever penned. The trick in any production is making those tunes seem fresh, and **Johannes Debus** (perhaps it's his German background) does just that, letting us feel as if we're riding a wave of music with his buoyant, spontaneous conducting.

The singers are a delight. **David Pomeroy** steals all his scenes as Rosalinde's opera-loving paramour, Alfred; Barrett's rich baritone redefines the word "authoritative"; Wilson's voice has ample power and a silvery sheen; Schade is a fine comic singer; and Braid, a knockout in a gold and fur outfit in act two, sparkles like an uncorked bottle of champers.

The work itself isn't the most efficient – the finale takes eons to arrive – but this smart, sexy production will make you see and hear it in a new light.

GLENN SUMI