

Review

Romeo and Juliet, Peterborough Opera, St Peter's Church Oundle & St John's Church Peterborough, April 14/15

This was anything but a tragedy

by Joe Conway

The two corpses lay length-wise opposite each other, feet pointing inwards, heads towards each end of the stage. The white-clad figure, stage right, lay in front of the Capulets who also wore white. The black-clad figure, stage left, in front of the Montagues also wearing black.

The two symmetrically placed bodies were Tybalt and Mercutio, the location was St Peter's Oundle, and this was the climax of Act Three of Romeo and Juliet by Charles Gounod, as performed by Peterborough Opera.

It was also the beginning of the tragic sequence of events which rapidly leads to Juliet's apparent death

by poison, and Romeo's genuine death by the same means. When Juliet awakes in Act Five it is too late. Romeo is already dying, and Juliet has no option but to join him by stabbing herself. Though not before the doomed lovers sing a final, surprisingly tranquil duet.

In the eponymous roles Karen Davies made a sympathetic, innocent-looking, but vocally competent Juliet, her rich-toned voice enhanced by a tasteful vibrato. Normally Romeo's is a tenor role but in this performance he was sung by soprano Lyndsey Evans. Lyndsey's bell-like, silvery voice contrasted nicely with Karen's, occasionally even rising above it.

As well as Romeo's there were two other parts written for men which were sung by women. As Mercutio mezzo-soprano Liz Williams made a stunning impression in Act One, with some fiery acting and passionate singing aided by a swift vibrato.

Equally outstanding was Ann-Marie Walsh as Stephano. In this production Ann-Marie began the second half, her gloriously full-bodied voice taunting the Capulets. A move which soon resulted in the two dead bodies I mentioned at the start of this review.

In more conventional casting, bass Martin Muir made a solemn, rich-toned Friar Laurence and an even more imposing Duke who, by exiling Romeo, precipitates the final crisis. Hap-

pily Martin apparently also has the useful ability to raise people from the dead, which he did just in time for the curtain call!

Marie Hayes was a hard-working Gertrude, Juliet's nurse, Colin Pendrill was Juliet's father, and Michael Hammond Tybalt. The chorus of around 20 made a pleasantly rich-toned sound as partygoers and wedding guests. Though there were times when it wasn't clear whether they were taking part in a concert performance or a theatrical production. No praise is too high for musical director and accompanist Kate Wishart. As the first she drove the music forward, achieving perfect ensemble with the singers. As the second she played through an entire vocal score of 265 pages. Phew!

