

Bold project with impressive result

The Importance of Being Earnest

Composer & Conductor: B Tommy Andersson

Librettist & Director: William Relton

Set designer & Costume creator: Marika Feinsilber

Light designer: Anna Wemmert Clausen

Performers: Sebastian Durán, Richard Hamrin, Vivianne Holmberg, Nils Hübinette, Emma Sventelius, Ingrid Tobiasson, Francine Vis, Hannes Öberg, The Vadstena-Academy Orchestra.

It is rather bold to commission a new opera based entirely on the witty spiritual dialogue with its ambiguities, the sharp vocabulary and cutting aphorisms in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). The plot is frankly speaking daft, although it is possible to see contemporary structures in the protagonist's monumental self-sufficiency, identity games and superficial cynicism. And that is what we actually do in the Vadstena-Academy's new opera production at Vadstena Castle.

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The set designer Marika Feinsilber has created an ingenious set, where flower-coloured wallpaper in the first act's fashionable London flat turns into the second act's countryside garden with the magic of light design. The beautiful costumes harmonize with the environment and signal the British aristocracy in the late 19th century. The British director William Relton knows his Wilde and has successfully reduced and processed the original drama into an efficient libretto. The opera is sung in English, with screened subtitles in Swedish

The composer B. Tommy Andersson, whose opera "William" about the relationship between William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe became a great success in Vadstena in 2006, has realized that the music must follow the melody of the English language melody and that the text must be inevitably heard. To the libretto's fast exchange of vocal lines and repartee, he has composed a sophisticated musical subtext with quick accents, a driving pulse, contemporary colour, precise timing and few but important resting points. The singers are texting with pleasurable energy and the orchestra is absolutely focused.

Wilde's cheeky and elegant mocking with social conventions and identities is very amusing in William Relton's production; he has oxygenated the acting with playfulness and a wealth of fine details. Fabulous mezzosoprano Ingrid Tobiasson is a wonderful, monstrous and majestic Lady Bracknell, a flagship of conventions, double standards and biting acid.

At the centre of action there are two extravagant youngsters, keen on pleasures and with a free relationship to the truth. They are performed by young expressive baritone singers with personalities: Sebastian Durán plays the intently romantic, but a little bit wild, Jack and Hannes Öberg the impulsive hedonistic dandy Algernon.

Their shared predicament is that the young women, Gwendolen and Cecily, intend only to marry a man named Ernest. The mezzo-soprano Francine Vis and soprano Vivianne Holmberg make them intriguing and sharply characterised; they are, at the same time, coquettish and hard-boiled. Emma Sventelius' Miss Prism and Nils Hübnette's Canon Chasuble are romantically matched with their round shaped spectacles and ill-concealed lustful desires under a cautious surface. Richard Hamrin performs his dual roles as an impeccable, freshly pressed valet and discreet but headstrong butler with superb comic timing.

An impressive, vocally compelling and integrated ensemble, together with a vibrant orchestra at Vadstena Castle, perform a sparkling, vital and entertaining musical comedy.