

GAY CITY NEWS

VOLUME 2 • ISSUE 25 | JUNE 20 — 26, 2003
PERFORMANCES/REVIEW

Operatic Queens

June rarities brighten stages from Carnegie Hall to BAM

By DAVID SHENGOLD

Jay Meetze's valiant Opera Company of Brooklyn put on a highly enjoyable concert-with-piano traversal of Puccini's perpetually neglected 1917 demi-operetta *La Rondine* June 2. The (very) young singers had been well prepared and the edition incorporated Ruggero's "Parigi" aria from 1920 and the third act as revised in 1921 to 22. Christina Arethas gave a fully realized performance as Magda, the experienced courtesan who takes a shot at "innocent love" before bourgeois reality intrudes. Arethas' stylish and attractive singing, with glints of power in the soaring Act II ensemble (one of Puccini's highest achievements), guaranteed a compelling evening. Enrique Abdala made a pleasant dramatic impression as the naïf Ruggero, sounding best in the part's more lyric moments. John Zuckerman, engaging and engaged as the poet Prunier, negotiated the role's odd baritenor tessitura with skill. The very pretty soprano opposite him as Lisette—the "Adele" part, the lady's maid with theatrical dreams—sang with intermittent success but proved one of those young singers who have seemingly imbibed deep twinkly draughts of all the winsome soubrette mannerisms ever before seen. Some in the audience were charmed; I find this approach hard to bear at this point in my opera-going life. In the small part of Suzy, September Bigelow seemed to be sitting on the kind of fine, full mezzo that takes a while to develop; she showed alertness and unforced charm.

Neither neophyte nor experienced opera-goer should underestimate the pleasure to be had from this type of evening, which often provides fresh insights into the works performed. Meetze's current series at Brooklyn Heights' First Unitarian Church encompasses *Rigoletto* June 23 and 28 and Mozart's *Entführung* July 14 and 19, with an opera-with-chamber-orchestra series coming up in August in Brooklyn's downtown.

David Shengold (shengold@yahoo.com) writes for Playbill, Time Out New York, and Opera News, among other venues.