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Column: MUSIC REVIEW

Groups unite for a groundbreaking Gluck opera

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Article Text:

ALBANY -- Friday night's performance of Christoph Gluck's 1762 opera, "Orfeo ed Euridice" by the united efforts of Mosaic-Arts, Aoede Consort and Nacre Dance Company was a groundbreaking event at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

With a cast of only three singers, a five-member dance group and the consort of 10 singers and a pianist, the more than 90-minute drama unfolded with remarkable energy, intensity, interest and wonder.

Some of that came from stage director Kelly Hutchinson, the founder of Mosaic-Arts, who had the two leads and dancers going up and down the church's center aisle, much to the delight of the large crowd.

Nacre choreographer Beth Fecteau had the dancers work as a unit with flowing gestures in tunics or flowing Grecian garb and barefoot a la Isadora Duncan.

They evoked the mood of the music or scene and were especially effective as the black garbed Furies who chased Orfeo when he entered the underworld and as the blessed spirits in the Elysian Fields.

The Consort sang only occasionally but their pianist and founder Dan Foster played non-stop on the piano. Lighting was minimal, there was no set per se, and costumes were pertinent.

It was the three singers who galvanized the crowd. Although most people probably didn't speak a word of Italian, the singers' focus on their characters was so concentrated that the plot was easy to understand.

This libretto by Ranieri de' Calzabigi was a happy ending with Orfeo bringing Euridice back alive from the Underworld.

Aleksandra Romano in the pants-role of Orfeo was fabulous. Her rich, lustrous contralto filled the church with thrilling tones.

Every part of her voice showed control, an effortless support, and resonance that allowed her to spin out the long lines with great fluidity.

Her chest tones had wonderful edge and color. She sang with great feeling, often caressing the sound. Romano also showed great stamina: she had to sing most of the three acts.

Soprano Vedrana Kalas as Euridice matched Romano for passion and eloquence. Their very long duet in the final act was moving and meaningful.

When she collapsed in Orfeo's arms, some audience members gasped. And, when she was brought back to life by the cheery Amor, sung by soprano Julie Norman, there was another gasp.

With so much effort in this production, it deserves a repeat performance.

Memo: