



Operation Adelmo starring Adelmo Guidarelli, *The Clown Prince of Opera*

By Roy Sander, BistroAwards.com

Don't Tell Mama, New York, NY - March 27, 2010

At the top of the musical circus that is "Operation Adelmo," baritone Adelmo Guidarelli tells us that he is "aware of the fact that everyone hates opera." He then proclaims, without pause, irony, or apology, that he is going to sing opera. Which he does—in a way. It would have been more accurate for him to say that he's going to use opera as a hook on which to hang a mélange of jests, hi-jinx, and general merriment. It also would have been accurate to tell the audience that while they're not about to hear a lot of grand opera, they *are* about to have a grand time.

Don't go expecting the witty send-up that was Anna Russell's hallmark; her humor was more erudite and benefited from her audience's having at least some knowledge of the subject. The roots of Guidarelli's approach, on the other hand, lie in musical comedy or even burlesque, and his humor requires no more familiarity with opera than any sentient Westerner is likely to have without really trying. Indeed, had the title not already been taken, the show could have been called "Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies."

To ease his audience into opera, Guidarelli regales us with a multi-language operatic treatment of one of the most familiar songs ever written, one that has been sung by stars as diverse as Nelson Eddy, Donald Duck, Ethel Mertz, Elvis Presley, Johnny Depp, and Lawrence Tibbett. It's wonderfully silly. A bit later he takes a U-turn, and to illustrate how pop culture has stolen from opera, he gives us a rapid fire medley of "Kill the Wabbit" ("Ride of the Walküre"), the classic "No More Rice Krispies" commercial ("Vesti la giubba"), "Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah" ("Dance of the Hours" from *La Gioconda*), and a slew of other famous examples. Not only is this fun, it all sounds good, for Guidarelli boasts a commendable voice.

The sextet from *Lucia di Lammermoor* is delightfully presented with puppets, and there are two—count 'em, two—comic routines based on the most famous barber in opera: the first from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, the second from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*. And there is an ode to Spam.

Speaking of *count 'em, two*, there are two songs based on music by Chopin: "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" (Harry Carroll, Joseph McCarthy), performed with banjo accompaniment and audience participation, and "Oh, How I Miss You Tonight" (Joe Burke, Benny Davis, Mark Fisher) . . . A "Light Opera" segment that links baseball and the songs of Gilbert & Sullivan has individual elements that score . . .

The show offers more costume changes and props than you're likely to see outside of La Scala—all contributing to the evening's spirit of playfulness. Throughout the evening, Guidarelli is abetted by the voluptuous Miss Ruby (Ruby Laurance), who, clad in the reddest of red sequined dresses, strikes poses ranging from statuesque to blatantly but innocently sexual, serves as his dresser, plays a variety of instruments from simple percussion to trombone, and subjects herself to having her face shaved. Always blissfully clueless, she throws herself into the proceedings with gleeful abandon.

This confection was conceived, written, and directed by Mike Wills . . .

. . . I had a smile on my face from beginning to end.