



‘DOUBLE TROUBLE’

BY ENDANGERED PRODUCTIONS

REVIEWS

Sydney Arts Guide	2
Stage Whispers	6
Theatre Travels	10
Night Writes	12
Weekend Notes	14

June 2021

SYDNEY ARTS

GUIDE



THEATRE

'DOUBLE TROUBLE' BY ENDANGERED PRODUCTIONS AT CUSTOMS HOUSE.

21 JUNE 2021 PAUL NOLAN [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



*Above: Damien Hall as Bastien, Lesley Hall as Bastienna and Ed Suttle as Dr Colas.
Photo credit : Marion Wheeler.*

What do you get when you mix two out-of-the-box vocal works neatly accompanied from the stash of Baroque and Classical masters with slick production, clever direction across a well set stage design in a gorgeous room with full voices and great visual comedy keenly costumed ?

The answer is a great escape from the bad weather, fragile health environment, recent fractured arts scene to enjoy a rollicking socially relevant updated double bill of fun secular works from Mozart and Bach.

This cracker classical music cabaret style performance came to us from dynamic newcomer **Endangered Productions**, already with several regional tour locations under their tight production-values belt.

At this event in Customs House's elegant 'Barnet Long Room', organised with round tables, bar and snacks, the wit and dramatic genius of Bach and Mozart was a treat. We were treated to quite an electric update in snappy English translation from the German. Both halves of this double bill featured hilarious modern and local references to lighten the challenges of the status quo in our post-2019 society.

The troupe of five singers and actors was admirably supported in the elegant and intimate venue by a tight sextet of string, keyboard and wind players led by **Peter Alexander**.

This band provided pre-production music from the featured composers and beyond as we took to our tables. Attention to musical and sympathetic accompaniment duty in delivery of the musical complexity and swiftly changing styles in the dramatic pastiches was solid and substantial throughout for both the venue and these works.

Three singers with much concert, theatre and operatic experience brought colourful voices and compelling acting skills complete with formidable comic timing to the Customs House stage.



*Bastien (Damien Hall) attempts to win back Bastienna) Lesley Braithwaite in Mozart's Singspiel.
Photo credit: Marion Wheeler.*

The cast and directing team of **Christine Logan** and **Anne Wynter** ensured these snappy versions two more-than-masque works brightened our once more masked worlds. In the opening Singspiel *Bastien and Bastienna*, penned effortlessly by a pre-teen Mozart, the elements of this early genre were present alongside some more modern parlour@ stage antics.

In vintage frock, Bastienna (**Lesley Braithwaite**) delivered sweet folk-like over her temporarily lost love, Bastien (**Damien Hall**)

The turning of both pained protagonists to a rather Freudian therapist offering his magic/astrology/life coaching to unravel the predicament was perfect Singspiel and svelte, short, sitcom fare.

There was considerable stage chemistry between Bastienne and her bumbling Bastien's fine vocal delivery and lost-in-love expressions. The role of the Doctor was brought to life with commanding voice and character both onstage and in audience interaction by **Sydney Chamber Choir** regular, **Ed Suttle**.

At times the clarity of English text delivery was momentarily blurred as trained voices delivering the complex lines over the instrumental tapestry. Snippets of the brilliant translation were missed which was a shame as it was all subtle genius to match the music. Maybe some surtitles on the video screen backdrop could have been an option worth considering.



Above: Ed Whittle (Father), Damien Hall (Barman) and Lesley Braithwaite (Lisa) in Bach's Coffee Cantata. Photo credit: Marion Wheeler.

In Bach's *Schweigst stille, plaudert nicht* ('Be Silent-do not chat'- or the *Coffee Cantata*) which followed the group truly levelled up. They turned Bach's elaborate musical exploration of caffeine addiction distracting a daughter from the typical girl-finds-boy life goal to a bar scene romp.

The set and same cast from the Mozart was now transformed to a modern bar complete with live TAB race footage and wicked ubiquitous espresso martinis from dashing barmen giving lost girls comfort in the time of coronavirus.



Above: Damien Hall and Lesley Braithwaite at the bar in Bach's Coffee Cantata. Photo credit: Marion Wheeler.

Trouble, family and flirting plus a lot of rejoicing in the coffee flavour frothed over the chuckling crowd as the performers and creatives for the second time treated us to a cup and saucer combo of soaring melodic lines over a dazzling instrumental saucer in a visually stunning and bustling café.

Well-packaged entertainment, hospitality and nicely wrought wit was consistently served throughout this night as **Endangered Productions** paid respect to musical genius past, bringing it successfully to the present. We look forward to future shows from this assembly of talent.

Braithwaite, Hall and Shuttle bring a wealth of experience to their performances. In pieces such as these, the ability to act as well as sing is essential – as is being able to inject comedy in just the right way at just the right moment. It requires dedicated rehearsal based on insightful direction – and Christine Logan's direction is deft and wise. She allows her cast to inject melodramatic comedy – a fluttering eyelash, a suggestive wink, raised eyebrows, a little celebratory dance move – as well as ensuring they sustain the depth and variety of the music and the veracity of the characters. It's a lot to put together and Logan and her cast have done so very effectively.

There are some very funny moments – Shuttle's nonchalant depiction of Colas, Braithwaite and Hall's little 'jive' at the end *Bastien and Bastienna*; Shuttle's studying of the Form Guide as Lisa has yet another cocktail; Braithwaite showing the 'tiddly' effect of those cocktails as she takes a selfie; Hall shaking cocktails in time to the music. And it will be hard to forget Braithwaite relishing her delivery of a very contemporary teenage "whatever" in response to her father's threats.



The small orchestra had some lovely moments as well. Mozart's little overture to *Bastien and Bastienna* introduced the production beautifully, and the piano, cello and flute had special moments in *Coffee Cantata*.

Endangered Productions aims to give "professionals, enthusiastic amateurs and keen community members" opportunities to keep being involved in the "inclusive, creative world of theatre" and to use the skills of those with long experience to mentor and educate others. The integrity, attention to detail and enthusiasm which they have approached in this production certainly suggests they can achieve that goal.

Carol Wimmer

Photographer: Marion Wheeler

Stage Whispers

Double Trouble



Mozart and Bach at Play. Endangered Productions. Barnet Long Room, Customs House. 18 - 20 June, 2021

As its title suggests, this production is about fun as well as music. Producers Christine Logan and Peter Alexander have translated and adapted two short comic operas by Mozart and Bach to present a program that reveres the music of the two maestros as well as highlighting their delightful takes on romance and relationships.

Bastien and Bastienna is Mozart's short parody of the opera *Le devin du village* by [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#). When Bastienne thinks that Bastien has left her for another woman she seeks advice from Colas, a soothsayer, who suggests that playing hard-to-get will win him back. Logan and Alexander have cleverly reset the scene in the 1950s and made Colas a Freudian psychiatrist, adding a satirical touch that is wryly effective.

Bach's *Coffee Cantata*, written in the 1730s, is about a father's concern for his daughter's interest in the new social scene, especially the coffee houses. In this 2021 interpretation of the mini comic opera, it is "espresso martinis" that are the father's concern. The translators add another nice little satirical 'twist' by matchmaking the daughter and the bartender, thus allaying the father's anxiety!



The Barnet Long Room at Customs House and cabaret style seating provided just the right ambience for a production such as this – intimate, good acoustics, warm and friendly. Designer Sandy Gray used minimal props and colourful overhead projections to create her sets, including a ‘Freudian’ couch for *Bastien and Bastienna* and a bar complete with a TV tuned to a sport channel for *Coffee Cantata*! The carefully chosen costumes added colour and verisimilitude to each setting, especially the steam punk outfit designed by Miriam Lohmann for Lisa, the daughter, in *Coffee Cantata*.

But what of the performers! Apart from Karen Lambert, who graces the stage very seductively at the beginning of *Bastien and Bastienna* as Bastien’s temptress, the three characters in each piece are performed by Lesley Braithwaite, Damien Hall and Ed Shuttle. They are accompanied by Stevie Walter (keyboard), Rebecca Irwin and Jennifer Taylor (violins), Greg Ford (viola), Pierre Emery (cello) and Isabeau Hanson (flute) conducted by musical director Peter Alexander.



Braithwaite, Hall and Shuttle bring a wealth of experience to their performances. In pieces such as these, the ability to act as well as sing is essential – as is being able to inject comedy in just the right way at just the right moment. It requires dedicated rehearsal based on insightful direction – and Christine Logan's direction is deft and wise. She allows her cast to inject melodramatic comedy – a fluttering eyelash, a suggestive wink, raised eyebrows, a little celebratory dance move – as well as ensuring they sustain the depth and variety of the music and the veracity of the characters. It's a lot to put together and Logan and her cast have done so very effectively.

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Carol Wimmer

Photographer: Marion Wheeler



Review: Double Trouble – Mozart and Bach at Play

Review By Anja Bless

Endangered Productions is a not-for-profit professional theatre company specialising in rarely-performed music theatre and through *Double Trouble – Mozart and Bach at Play* it has given audiences the opportunity to step back in time and enjoy these famous composers as they may never have seen them.

The double bill features 12 year-old Mozart's romantic comedy opera *Bastien and Bastienna* and JS Bach's *Coffee Cantata* performed by the joyous trio of soprano Lesley Braithwaite, tenor Damien Hall, and bass baritone Ed Shuttle. The chosen venue for the Sydney showing was the heritage Barnet Long Room in Customs House, which lent to the classical and Baroque atmospheres and allowed the room to be filled with the music of the chamber ensemble.

Bastien and Bastienna is a romantic tussle between a jilted and a repenting lover and one of the famous composer's earliest operas. Adapted by Artistic Director Christine Logan to a mid-20th century New York, the tale follows Bastienna (Braithwaite) whose lover, Bastien (Hall), has left her for a richer woman. Before fleeing for shame she visits Colas (Shuttle), depicted in this production as a therapist and aspiring hypnotist. Colas helps orchestrate the reunion of the two lovers, but not before a lover's quarrel. Braithwaite's comedic timing shines alongside Hall as her counterpart, although at times her softer soprano is difficult to hear over the ensemble from the back of the room. Hall's repentant lover as Bastien is endearing and amusing, and Shuttle's Colas entertains in his meddling as he watches the results of his plan unfold. However, the German accent used by Shuttle makes it at times hard to understand what he is saying, particularly on the quicker lines.

The small set has been used effectively, quickly being transformed from a luxury apartment, to a maid's bedroom, to a therapist's office in rapid fashion by the supporting ensemble. However the wings, barely used, were probably unnecessary and limited the space for the performers on stage.

After a brief intermission, the cast and set transform for Bach's *Coffee Cantata*. The tale follows the troubled Lieschen (Braithwaite) whose addiction to coffee (in this interpretation a euphemism for cocktails) weighs on her father Schlendrian (Shuttle). As they bicker over her addiction, the narrator (Hall) watches on. Braithwaite's characterisation and physical comedy is particularly strong in this performance as she embraces Lieschen's rebellious nature. Shuttle is stronger in his performance as Schlendrian, searching the audience for a husband that can save his daughter. Hall is a beguiling observer as his dual role as narrator and bar tender, and though he unfortunately missed some of his high notes, the physical comedy as he and Lieschen match on a dating app had the audience giggling.

Personally, I preferred the stronger, more bolsterous music of Bach's cantata, however the chamber ensemble led by Music Director Peter Alexander was consistently excellent throughout both performances.

The styling and modern take for *Coffee Cantata* was a clever translation by Logan and Designer Sandy Gray, switching the coffee shop to an underground bar helped carry across the comedy of Bach's work, as an addiction to coffee is hardly unusual in modern Sydney.

Overall, *Double Trouble* was a delightful evening out, you almost felt as if you were in the courts of a European palace, enjoying the new comedy from your favourite composer over a glass of wine or cup of tea. More casual and intimate than a typical evening at the opera, Endangered Productions is putting the ideal of socially inclusive and accessible musical theatre into practice.



JUNE 21, 2021 BY [NIGHTWRITESYDNEY](#)

Double Trouble | Endangered Productions

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Image by Marion Wheeler

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Johann Sebastian Bach are two of the most grand, well-known composers of the 18th century but they also had frivolous, comic sides. In *Double Trouble*, Endangered Productions brings together two short operas to laugh at some of the unchanged tropes of humour and human nature.

Written when Mozart was just 12-years-old, *Bastien & Bastienna* tells the story of a troubled couple and the sneaky tricks they play on each other to prove their love and devotion. Bastien (Damien Hall) is a bit of a two-timer, seen out on the town with another woman (Karen Lambert) while Bastienna (Lesley Braithwaite) seeks guidance from Freud devotee Dr Colas (Ed Suttle) on how best to hold on to her man. Unsurprisingly, deception and misunderstanding ensue.

Translated by Christine Logan and Peter Alexander, this rendition of the opera was a classic romantic comedy with the added twist of a few jabs at psychoanalysis and the gullibility of people in love. The production design with set by Sandy Gray and lighting by Michael Schell made good use of the limited furniture options by incorporating a projection screen on which cityscapes and psychedelic images led the audience through the characters' inner and outer surrounds.

In Bach's piece *Coffee Cantata*, the plot continued on similar themes of women demanding agency from the men in their lives. This time the young daughter (Lesley Braithwaite) wants her father (Ed Suttle) to stop nagging her about marriage and leave her to her own devices. Director Christine Logan reimagines this silly opera set in a cafe and full of devotion for the miracle drink coffee in a bar with the daughter waxing lyrical about espresso martinis instead. Costuming by Miriam Lohmann also brought the cantata into the 21st century with a rebellious punk aesthetic for Braithwaite and a stuffy hat and tie for Suttle.

The accompanying musicians with Stevie Walter on keyboard, Isabeau Hansen on flute, Rebecca Irwin and Jennifer Taylor on violin, Greg Ford on viola, and Pierre Emery on cello provided a delightful musical backing to the antics onstage, particularly with Walter's versatile keyboard lending weight to the opposing wills in the *Coffee Cantata*. The two operas were short, simple romantic comedies with predictable plots that reveal interesting insights into the unchanged story comforts we've sought out for centuries. Who doesn't love a happy ending? But there is charm to be found in simplicity and the performances by Braithwaite and Hall, in particular, were bright and cheery, whereas Suttle added a warm gruffness, especially as the hassling father figure. People and our stories haven't changed a lot since Mozart and Bach's time which is reassuring at the very least.

Double Trouble ran from June 18th – 20th at Customs House.
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Double Trouble: Mozart & Bach at Customs House

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by [Gypsy Rose](#) ([subscribe](#)) Event: 18/06/2021 - 20/06/2021

It was a double bill of double trouble

The double bill plays *Double Trouble- Mozart & Bach* was packed with opera music, love, laughter, and coffee!

Christine Logan directed *Double Trouble*. Peter Alexander conducted the orchestra with Stevie Walter on keyboard, Isabeau Hanson on Flute, Rebecca Irwin, Violin 1 & Jennifer Taylor Violin 2, Greg Ford on Viola, & Pierre Emery on Cello.



Image Courtesy from Marion Wheeler

This cheeky double bill transformed the heritage Barnet Long Room in Customs House into a wonderland of superb music and performance in an intimate setting.

The plays were based on two of the greatest composers, with both Mozart and Bach being influenced by the woman in their lives.

The first play, Mozart's early opera romance *Bastien & Bastienna*, featured Bastienna (Lesley Braithwaite), Bastien (Damien Hall), Dr Colas (Ed Shuttle), and Rich Woman (Karen Lambert).



The operatic romp, *Bastien & Bastienna*, is set in the 1950s and showcased two countryside lovers. Bastien loves materialism and rich women. He cheats on Bastienna with a rich woman, and Bastienna is madly in love with him and wants Bastien back.

She visits Dr Colas, who helps her to try to get Bastien back. Bastien also sees Dr Colas as he realises he has lost Bastienna, and he wants her back!

The performance featured laugh out loud moments with witty comments, especially from Dr Colas.



Coffee Cantata featured Lesley Braithwaite as the Daughter, Damien Hall as the Barman and Ed Shuttle as the Father.

This modern adaption showcased Bach's poking fun at the temptations of coffee through the power struggle between a grumpy father and his coffee-addicted rebellious daughter. This comedy was tweaked a little to add an occasional 'espresso martini' to be relatable to 21st-century parents.



The father and naughty daughter are both given two brilliant arias in where they tell the audience all about themselves. The barman eventually steps in, and reconciliation takes place. The audience is then taken on an emotional journey.



Both performances featured an overhead projector to set the scene, which captured the ambience of the times in which each piece took place.

Overall, the cast did a spectacular job showcasing the mischievous mayhem by Mozart and Bach, and it was a delight to watch spectacular performers own the stage!

