Haslemere Herald

Review by Ann Pinhey

Rossini’s final opera, Count Ory, was first performed in 1828. The work is a comic tale of seduction and disguise that is humorous and, at times, delightfully farcical. Some of the music is taken from Il viaggio a Reims written three years earlier, and contains some of Rossini’s most colourful orchestral writing.

Count Ory spends much of Act 1 disguised as a hermit and in Act 2 impersonating a nun, all in an absurd attempt to ensnare a resistant young countess, Adèle.

Lynn Binstock is the director of this engaging work which was lively, colourful and inventive. The terrific cast was headed by John-Colyn Gyeantey as Count Ory. His slightly goofy charm, deft comic timing, vocal agility and easy high Cs, were superb.

His intended lover, Adèle, was beautifully sung and acted by Alexandra Hutton, who had charisma and a commanding presence. Her voice has a silvery sparkle and her coloratura was effortless.

Amy J Payne as Adèle’s companion, Ragonde, was resonant and authoritative. Her passage work was impeccable and she sent her top notes into the stratosphere with ease.

Isolier, Count Ory’s page, was sung with full, rich tone by Gillian McIlwraith, who handled the bel canto demands well.

The entire cast of this wonderful production was very strong, including the warm, clearly enunciated singing of Ricardo Panela as Ory’s friend, and the rich bass of John Savournin as Ory’s exasperated tutor.

The chorus – as usual in any Opera South production – were excellent, totally committed in voice and action, with clear diction. I particularly enjoyed the male chorus dressed as nuns in the slapstick scene, where they break into a stash of wine and indulge in a bawdy drinking song.

The beautiful Trio at the end is one of the highlights of the opera but very ambiguous. Ory sneaks into Adèle’s bedroom but is staggered to find her in bed with Isolier. The scene is an elaborate, subdued but sensual Trio. The seduction becomes a confused tangle of limbs in the dim light.

The costumes and set were a delight. Mark Austin, the new, excellent Music Director of Opera South, conducted a stylish, buoyant performance of this enchanting work.

Congratulations Opera South for treating us, once again, to an evening of very high standard music making. It was a joy and a privilege to hear such an outstanding performance.