

# “Fireflight” the Opera Debuts in Greensboro

GREENSBORO, NC — Inter-City Opera had a stellar night on Saturday with the opening of their newest production, “Fireflight.” The opera is an adaptation of the bestselling novel of the same name which has captured the attention of young and old alike since its release two years ago. Based on the story of a young woman who develops a romance with a time-travelling vampire, the story merges fantasy with romance and drama. Through a combination of spoken word, layered sound, and soaring operatic melodies, the new work defies genres.

The libretto has been carefully crafted from the novel by playwright Erin Jones, with contributions by the author of “Fireflight,” Glenn Henry. The music was composed by Noah Hudson with input from DJ Spooky X. The result is operatic complexity layered over hip-hop rhythms and traditional American songs in a powerful musical story that is thrilling while still emotionally intimate.

Narrated by the heroine, Josie, characters filter in and out of the story. When Josie takes psychedelic drugs given to her by the vampire Gareth, the characters become spooky aberrations of themselves. Her mother becomes a feral cat; her father, a television set. Absurdity meets harsh realism in this brave venture.

In the lead role of Josie, Sandra Elliot brings her soaring operatic soprano to death-defying heights. Even while suspended above the stage in a dream sequence, Elliot is able to bring precision and effortlessness to the role while still projecting a scrappy innocence. Her coloratura in her signature aria, “Death Becomes Me,” is razor-sharp.

As the vampire Gareth, Stuart Smith has the brawn and heft of a body-builder. In the second act when he appears shirtless, his raw sensuality is convincing and compelling. With a viral baritone voice, Smith moves easily between genres, moving deftly between operatic flourish and spoken word.

In the smaller role of Josie’s mother, Ellen, Delia Phillips offers warmth and concern, with a full sound and elegant lyricism. The other comprimario roles were convincingly portrayed by Harold Brown, Samantha Centers and Jennifer Hamilton. The chorus, drawn from local Greensboro residents, was reminiscent of a haunted house. The sound was full if a little uneven in the men’s section.

Joseph Aaronson leads a lean orchestra. Amy Winters directs with subtlety and detail. This co-production with Opera Charlotte is a bold venture into uncharted territory for Inter-City Opera. I for one hope we see more of this adventurous new direction. Judging from the audience members I saw around me, “Fireflight” may have been the first opera for a lot of patrons. Let’s just hope they return when the fare is a bit more conventional.

Darrin Stevens is a staff writer for the *Greensboro Gazette*.