

Solti a Hit With Britten Opera

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ST. PETERSBURG — A twilight atmosphere, with random shades enveloping the stage, tinted mirrors and elves fluttering about all abounded at the Mariinsky Theater Concert Hall when the venue played host to the company's new premiere, Claudia Solti's mysterious take on Benjamin Britten's opera "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

The visual aesthetics of Solti's production last week and the chamber feel to her show bridge her staging with the Mariinsky's most recent operatic offering, Daniele Finzi Pasca's rendition of "Aida."

Solti's approach to opera, however, is rather different from the philosophy of Finzi Pasca, who uses an operatic plot as a platform to make a humanitarian statement.

Solti, by contrast, followed not only the music but the libretto to the letter, and made sure that the slightest orchestral tingling was paired with a visual touch.

Again in parallel with Finzi Pasca, who promised the audiences a "very intimate 'Aida,'" Solti,

who refrained from commenting on her philosophy before the show, created a most delicate and tender production.

As it is clear from its title, Britten's 1960 opera is based on William Shakespeare's comedy of the same name. The plot revolves around the events surrounding the marriage of the Duke of Athens, Theseus, and the Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta, and takes place in three realities at once — in the forest, in a fairy land and under the moonlight.

The opera has two pairs — Lysander and Hermia (Alexander Timchenko and Yulia Matochkina) and Helena and Demetrius (Irina Matayeva and Vladimir Moroz) — who essentially run around chasing each other until they find some hard-earned peace.

The Mariinsky sang the opera in English. Maestro Valery Gergiev made a winning choice in recruiting the world-renowned bass-baritone Willard White — who in 2010 made a sensation in the title role in Bela Bartok's opera "The Duke Bluebeard's Castle" — to play the comic role of weaver Nick Bottom. It's a character that the singer has played often to international acclaim. Another great success was countertenor Artyom Krutko's first performance in the role of Oberon, king of the fairies.

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