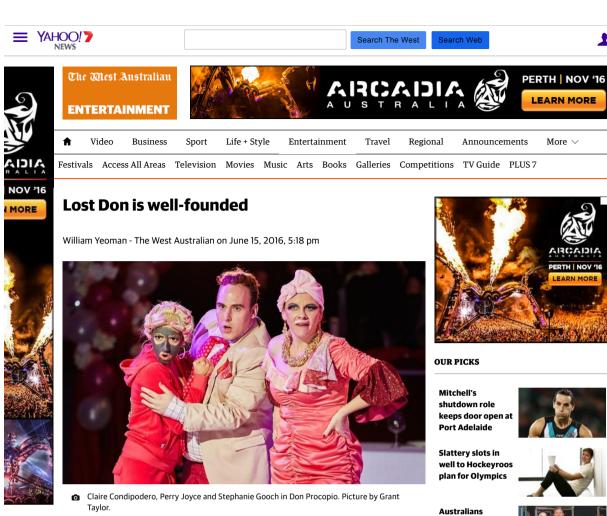
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OPERA

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Don Procopio (Bizet)

Lost and Found Opera

4 stars

The Vasto Club, Balcatta

REVIEW WILLIAM YEOMAN

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"Buona sera, benvenuto," the polite Italian gentleman says as he opens the door upon your arrival.

And so you are immediately plunged into the surreal, unpredictable world of Georges Bizet's 1858 opera buffa Don Procopio, which in Lost and Found Opera's wildly imaginative production dissolves the boundaries between performer and audience, reality and make-believe.

In an age when so-called innovative arts programming can be about as disruptive as reruns of The Bill on daytime television, Lost and Found Opera is one of the few genuinely disruptive - dare I say agile - arts organisations in Australia.

Since the small WA-based opera company's launch in 2013, artistic directors Thomas de Mallet Burgess and Chris van Tuinen have mounted intimate, intense productions of rarely performed works such as Poulenc's The Human Voice, Ullmann's The Emperor of Atlantis and Milhaud's Medee in a hotel room, a synagogue and an insane asylum respectively.

However in Don Procopio these guys are really letting their hair down with, as Burgess







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writes in his program note, "a wedding comedy in a space that sees over two weddings each month and lies at the heart of a vibrant Italian community" - Balcatta's Vasto Club.

The action takes place within and around the audience, many of whom are seated like guests at a wedding - indeed, many had paid extra to partake in the wedding feast; the stage proper is reserved for a small instrumental ensemble and a chorus largely comprising real-life knitting nonne drawn from the nearby Myvista Aged Care facility.

It is the day of the wedding. Young Donna Bettina (athletic soprano Claire Condipodero) is betrothed to the elderly but rich Don Procopio (baritone and mean mobility scooter rider Michael Lewis) thanks to her opportunistic uncle Don Andronico (suave baritone Paull-Anthony Keightley).

Of course Bettina is in love with dashing young Don Odoardo (even more suave tenor Alasdair Kent). But with aunt Donna Eufemia (a wonderful comic turn by soprano Stephanie Gooch) and outrageously camp brother Don Ernesto (the excellent Perry Joyce) in her corner, anything could happen...

Despite some longeurs in Act Two, this opening night performance was an absolute delight, the mix of garish costumes, physical comedy, engaging arias, duets, ensembles and choruses, audience interaction and Burgess's witty English translation ("My uncle's nerve is colossal/selling me to that crusty fossil") combining to make this Big Fat Italian Wedding a night to remember.

In short, Lost and Found Opera have done it again.

Don Procopio runs until Saturday night. Book at trybooking.com/KYHD

The West Australian

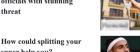




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