

Review: Don Procopio (Lost and Found Opera)

by [Will Yeoman](#) on June 15, 2016 (June 15, 2016) filed under [Classical Music](#) / [Opera](#) / [Comment Now](#)

★★★★☆ It's on for young and old in this hilarious update of Bizet's rarely-performed opera buffa.

Vasto Club, Perth
June 14, 2016

In innovative Perth-based company Lost and Found Opera's previous production, the blood-drenched *Médée* by Milhaud, a nurse sat knitting by a prison cell like a lone Fate. It was therefore startling to see in this very different production of Georges Bizet's 1858 opera buffa *Don Procopio*, a chorus largely comprising real-life Italian nonne (drawn from a nearby aged care facility) busily knit throughout the entire two acts, in the end producing baby onesies.

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 *Médée* in a hotel room, a synagogue and an insane asylum respectively.

However in *Don Procopio* Lost and Found lose all inhibitions and find the maximum hilarity in what, as de Mallet Burgess writes in his programme note, "is a wedding comedy in a space that sees over two weddings each month and lies at the heart of a vibrant Italian community" – in this case, the Perth suburb of Balcatta's Vasto Club.

The action took place within and around the audience, many of whom were seated like guests at a wedding – indeed, many had paid extra to partake in the wedding feast; the stage proper was reserved for a small instrumental ensemble of strings, winds and accordion and a chorus largely comprising the aforementioned women from the Myvista Aged Care facility.

In this English-language version by de Mallet Burgess, 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 longueurs in Act Two (indeed, the highlight came early in the form of Alasdair Kent's wonderful *Serenade* – “Come to me, my beautiful love in the stillness of the quiet night” towards the end of which he is joined by Condipodero in a glorious duet), this opening night performance was an absolute delight, the mix of gloriously garish, sometimes deliberately tacky set and costume designs by Sally Phipps, 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.

Keywords

[Lost and Found Opera](#) , [Bizet](#)