

Tchaikovsky's Queen of Spades was done magnificently by the Washington Opera. The lead tenor role was sung by Placido Domingo, who is also the Artistic Director of the company, so who's going to argue with his casting? His voice is still as clear and clean as ever, falling on the ear most pleasantly. Perhaps it's not as strong as once, and can't punch through an orchestral fortissimo as in the days of his prime, but still up there with the top of the field.

The lead soprano was sung by Galina Gorchakova, who was just magnificent. Terrific top notes, with great smoothness and no shrillness, and a lower register with a mellowness and richness that could be envy of many a mezzo. Perhaps too much vibrato now and then, but that seems to be endemic among sopranos these days. Elena Obraztsova sang the role of the grandmother. Her voice is perhaps in decline, but this is not a demanding role, and she is a great stage actress.

All of the other roles were very well sung and acted. The opera is really terrific, with a truly engaging story, which is more than can be said for most librettos (see Boheme, or Trovatore). The music is wonderfully romantically lush, but there is also, in a dance sequence, a delicious parody of Mozartean minuets. This work reinforces my opinion of Tchaikovsky as the greatest of the Russians and one of the world-wide greats, easily the equal of Brahms and Schubert if not quite up to the sublime level of Chopin, Mozart and Beethoven.

Domingo is really on his way to turning the Washington opera into a world-class company, using the strength of his name to attract world-class singers. Next season we'll have Kiri Te Kanawa, Rosalind Elias, Maria Guleghina, Anna Netrebko and, of course, Domingo. And announced in the role of Leonora in Fidelio is one Susan B. Anthony. Anyone heard of her, other than on the failed dollar coin? Or maybe the Opera is playing a joke to see if anyone is paying attention. ;-)

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