



Parsons Dance sizzles in tale of tragic love set to rock versions of opera hits

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By

David Parsons makes it extremely hard for a dance audience to forget "Remember Me," his hour-long tale of sex, jealousy, love and – what else? – death set to rock versions of immortal opera excerpts.

You can't take your eyes off the fever-pitched choreography – or Parsons' marvelous dancers – even when your ears need a rest from hyper-activated Puccini, Bizet and friends.

Parsons Dance brought "Remember Me" to the Ohio Theatre on Saturday as part of a program presented by DanceCleveland and Opera Cleveland. Like that apt collaboration, the New York dance company teamed with a Manhattan neighbor, East Village Opera Company, to devise this sizzling mix of sensuous physicality and hip musical arrangements.

The piece compels opera lovers to leave prejudices at the door, if possible, and give in to 21st-century transformation. Parsons knows a great opera tune when he hears one, and he also knows how to create striking images out of (mostly) foreign texts.

The slight narrative that propels "Remember Me" – whose title is a line in Dido's beloved aria, "When I Am Laid in Earth," from Purcell's "Dido and Aeneas" – was woven together by Parsons and the two lead singers from East Village Opera Company, Tyley Ross and AnnMarie Milazzo.



Eduardo Patino

Members of Parsons Dance perform artistic director David Parsons' "Remember Me," which was part of the New York company's program Saturday at the Ohio Theatre.

REVIEW

Parsons Dance and East Village Opera Company

The work tells of two men (danced by Eric Bourne and Miguel Quinones) vying for the affection of a fetching woman (Sarah Braverman), who chooses the former, only to be imprisoned by the latter. It isn't betraying the gods of opera to reveal that all of the characters are dead at the end.

And then sent to heaven. Parsons tacks on a dreamy epilogue that finds the cast vibrating to a newfangled variation on the Act 1 love duet from "Madama Butterfly" while the onstage singers assure us that "love is everything."

Actually, the dance is virtually everything in "Remember Me." Parsons' movement language is a seamless blend of fluidity and angularity fueled by intricate arm patterns and arresting interactions.

Even when the meaning of the words is tweaked to suit the dramatic contexts, Parsons provides intense emotional underpinning through quicksilver nuances and surprising physical and visual twists. Inspired by the music, the projections accompanying each scene add colorful dabs of passion and atmosphere.

Braverman, Bourne and Quinones thrust themselves into their roles with tireless vigor and expressivity, and their colleagues were ultra-dynamic. Milazzo – who wrote the vocal arrangements for "Next to Normal," the musical two theaters away in PlayhouseSquare – and Michael K. Lee sang the opera arrangements with powerful and poetic panache.

Quinones opened the night with an early Parsons work, "Caught," a magical feat of dance and theatricality that uses strobe lights to give the impression the performer is suspended in air. It's a piece that requires perfect timing for the intended dazzlement to be achieved. Thanks to Quinones' buoyant virtuosity and bull's-eye lighting cues, the intended occurred.

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