

OPERA
**SCOTTISH OPERA: THE
MAGIC FLUTE**

THEATRE ROYAL, GLASGOW

★★★★★

'I FEEL as if I've been drugged!' exclaims Nicky Spence's wide-eyed Tamino near the start of Thomas Allen's sparkling yet rather hallucinogenic new production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* for Scottish Opera. And seeing the show's smoke-belching Victorian chimneys, Isambard Kingdom Brunel lookalikes and morris-dancing miners, it's hard not to share his sentiment.

Allen finds a neat parallel for the elusive masonic symbolism of Mozart's final opera in the golden age of Victorian science, but you could hardly accuse his steampunk aesthetic of offering a reappraisal or critique of the work. He focuses instead on the sheer populist entertainment value of the piece, citing Glasgow music hall as an inspiration in the programme. And his production

is something of a riot from start to finish, finely crafted, vividly characterised, and teeming with telling detail, from the Magritte-like floating boy guides to the voluptuous yet lascivious ladies sent by the Queen of the Night.

There's hardly a weak link in the exceptional cast. Richard Burkhard's hilarious wide-boy Papageno threatens to steal the show (making the most of Kit Hesketh-Harvey's arch English translation), and Mari Moriya's dark Queen sparkles both visually and vocally. Laura Mitchell has some limpidly beautiful moments as a fragile Pamina, and Nicky Spence glows as Tamino. Conductor Ekhart Wycik summons sprightly playing in the pit, rich yet transparent.

There might be some rather clunky set-changes, and the production's remarkable theatrical exuberance fades slightly in the second half, but it's a thrilling show, expertly executed, and most importantly, a real hoot.

DAVID KETTLE