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**ENTERTAINMENT**


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**REVIEW**

# Tenor MacDonald highlight of UQAM's Contes d'Hoffmann

**ARTHUR KAPTAINIS**  
*Gazette Music Critic*

Count your blessings: now there are three music faculties or departments in Montreal eager to stage operas from the standard repertoire, complete with orchestral accompaniment. This weekend, UQAM is presenting Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* in Salle Pierre Mercure.

Unlike Salle Claude Champagne at the Université de Montréal, this downtown concert hall is easily transformable into an opera house. UQAM apparently enjoys the further advantage of a budget. There were real sets and costumes, the former modest but sufficiently evocative of Europe to eliminate strain on the imagination of the viewer.

What the Opera Studio under Colette Boky lacks, judging by the Friday performance, is a stable of singers sufficiently deep to present this demanding score. Solo performances varied widely in quality.

At least the school was able to secure the services of a promising tenor for the title role. Probably singing at less than full steam to preserve his voice through four performances, Jean-Pierre MacDonald nevertheless held the stage with his ripe, leonine tone, swarthy good looks and energetic acting. A few irregularities of production and pitch need to be worked out, but there is clearly a real tenor budding somewhere in that throat.

The three leading ladies also had their good points: agility from Suzie Armstrong as Olympia, warmth from Halyna Wolanska as Giulietta and a brilliant top from Anne-Karine Lefebvre as Antonia. This last gave an awkward account of the *Tourterelle* song but still brandished a voice worth cultivating.

The same could not be said for the many baritone villains and tenor lackeys infesting this production, who ranged from mediocre to voiceless. Given the current expert preference for deleting the interpolated *Scintille*

*Diamant* aria, it is a shame Boky permitted it to stand – and be slaughtered.

There was a distinctly Gilbert and Sullivanish aroma to the male choruses of the prologue and epilogue: mixed-sex choruses reached some reasonably professional heights.

The orchestra, bolstered by a handful of teachers, also left something to be desired, although the robust conducting of Martin Foster atoned somewhat for the lapses in intonation.

To experience this production shortly after *The Magic Flute* at the U de M is to wonder about the benefits of consolidating the two schools. Their current resources, in many respects, are complementary. Still, with acceptable theatrical values and isolated vocal highlights, the final performance today merits a look.

✦ *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* by Offenbach, 2 p.m., Salle Pierre Mercure, 300 de Maisonneuve Blvd. E. Tickets: \$15 general; \$8 students. (514) 987-6919.