

**Review: WNO Play Opera Live**

**By Suzanne Cleave**

***WNO Play Opera Live at Theatre Royal Plymouth***

It's not often you get treated to a full orchestra experience on a Sunday afternoon, but last weekend it happened, thanks to the Welsh National Opera bringing their Play Opera Live to the Theatre Royal Plymouth.

The production was preceded by a number of activities in the theatre foyer, such as a treasure hunt, crafts and wig demonstrations.

Once everyone took to their seats, and the lights dimmed, we were taken on a journey of operatic favourites, and for many of the young faces in the audience this was their first foray into the world of opera, as was probably the case for many of the adults too.

First to join the orchestra was Harry Sever, the energetic conductor, and to Tom Redmond, the presenter, a musician and presenter who has introduced over 350,000 young people and their families to classical opera. That's no mean feat, but Tom was perfect for the role. He introduced each piece of music with contagious enthusiasm and encouraged plenty of audience participation!

Opera, he said, was a way of telling a story, and while some of the pieces were solely orchestral, others, such as Dvorak's Song to the Moon from Rusalka and Mozart's Non piu andrai from The Marriage of Figaro, were brought to life with the exquisite voices of soloists Aaron O'Hare and understudy Harriet.

There were plenty of familiar pieces, such as Giacchino's Into Darkness, better known as the theme to Star Trek; Bernstein's Mambo and I Feel Pretty from West Side Story, and a moving version of Somewhere Over the Rainbow.

Another touching moment was the arrangement of the traditional Scottish song, Loch Lomond, where the orchestra swapped their instruments for their own voices.

As well as introducing opera to the audience, Play Opera Live also highlighted the importance of the orchestra. Tom reminded everyone it's usually the singers who get all the applause, but the orchestra is equally as important. "Opera is nothing without the

orchestra,” he said. Each section of the 80-strong Welsh National Opera’s orchestra, from the strings and woodwind to the brass and percussion were introduced and given their time to shine.

The afternoon was brought to a close with presenter Tom telling the magical story of The Firebird, with the orchestra providing the music from Stravinsky’s Berceuse and Finale.

There were many shouts of ‘encore’, and plenty of happy faces of the young audience members who had just begun their journey into opera.