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Capital Fringe Reviews: *Puppet Ballet* and *Padrevia*

Among the sometimes wacky performances of the Capital Fringe Festival are some unexpected offerings of the more mainstream variety, with a twist. An adventurous little company called [Opera Alterna](#), which presented two [new operas](#) by local composers at last year's festival, returns with an earnest production of [Thomas Pasatieri's](#) 1967 melodrama [Padrevia](#). The company is making the revival of Pasatieri's concise, neo-Romantic operas a specialty, after [presenting two of them](#) at the 2008 Fringe Festival. Pasatieri, writing his own libretto, adapted a tragic story from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the [first novella from Giornata IV](#), a day on which all the members of the brigata told stories of love that ended badly. Tancred, the Prince of Salerno, loves his only daughter, Gismonda, so much that he keeps her isolated from all other people in his palace. Reaching adulthood, she finds love by arranging to meet with Guiscardo, who tends the palace garden. Needless to say, Tancred catches the lovers in the act, leading to a violent conclusion, a verismo shocker that could pass at times as the fourth act of Puccini's *Il Trittico*.

Opera Alterna's simple production by director Jay D. Brock, with bare-bones sets (designed by Rick Lenegan) and costumes (Anna Lathrop), is basic but visually effective, as experienced at the opening performance on Sunday afternoon in Studio Theater's small Mead Theater. Leading the cast was baritone Tad Czyzewski, whose performances with the company have been a highlight, and the snarl at the top of his baritone voice was particularly effective. Soprano Daniele Lorio brought a dramatic edge of pathos to the role of Gismonda, although an overactive vibrato gave a (perhaps appropriately) shrill hysteria to Pasatieri's frequent pushing of the part into the high range. Tenor Siddhartha Misra had a pleasing sound with more raw potential than overall polish, while Chris Dwyer gave the spoken role of the narrator a disturbing, wild-eyed quality. Pianist Nicholas Catravas, playing a reduction of the orchestral score at the unfortunately out-of-tune piano, elucidated all of the varying styles, from overblown Puccini, to dissonant clashes, and back to lush Korngold chromaticism. Worth a listen for the chance to hear a rarely performed contemporary opera, but not for the faint of heart.

This production will be repeated on July 16 (8:30 p.m.), 17 (11 a.m.), 21 (6 p.m.), and 24 (6 p.m.).

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Although I saw it earlier on Sunday, [Pointless Theater Company's](#) condensed version of Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, for puppets, would have been the perfect [unicorn chaser](#) after the blood and cardiectomy of *Padrevia*. The performance of opera and ballet by puppets goes back to the [17th century](#) and the beginning of both genres, a tradition both noble and scurrilous that was hinted at in this lighthearted production by the recently formed troupe of former University of Maryland students, based in College Park. Tongue-in-cheek narration adapted from Charles Perrault's [fairy tale](#), only part of which is likely familiar to many readers, knitted a few disjointed scenes together. The action was portrayed by both actors and puppets, to the accompaniment of recorded excerpts of Tchaikovsky's [famous ballet score](#), at The Mountain, a ground-level theater at Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church.

The dance scenes (choreography by Lee Gerstenhaber) were appropriately balletic, not so much for the leaps and twirls of the puppets, which were graceful enough, but for the involved coordination of the puppeteers -- three for each puppet -- who had to intertwine and cooperate with their own grace, both within and in front of a simple set backdrop (designed by Patti Kalil and Matt Reckeweg). The portrayal of Carabosse, the bitter old fairy who places the curse on the king and queen's beloved daughter, was particularly memorable, especially when she transformed into a terrifying dragon. The distillation of a rather long work into a fast-moving half-hour would be a good introduction to the genre for small children, with plenty of groan-inducing humor for adults along the way.

This production will be repeated on July 17 (11 a.m.), 21 (6 p.m.), 22 (6 p.m.), and 24 (1:15 p.m.).

By [Charles Downey](#) in [Arts and Events](#) on July 12, 2010 3:30 PM [0 Comments](#) [0 Likes](#) 939 Views

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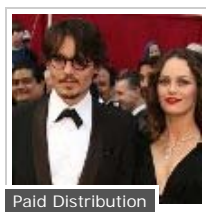
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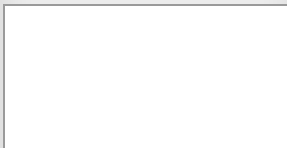
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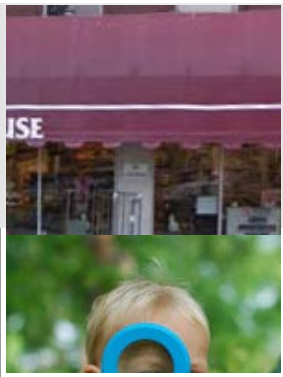
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