

THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

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One Ounce Opera's *Fresh Squeezed Ounce of Opera II*

Austin's One Ounce Opera juices the night away

REVIEWED BY WAYNE ALAN BRENNER, APRIL 14, 2017, ARTS

They did it last year, and now they've done it again this year.

Austin's One Ounce Opera, not content with their gang of free-range goldenthroats staging bits of classical opera's greatest hits in unusual-for-opera venues, not satisfied with the hilarity of crossing vocal performance with *Jackass*-like stunts as a fundraiser, held a competition for new works.

The works were 15, maybe 20 minutes each, works that are more like sketches than full-blown narratives, and were submitted by composers from all over the world. And the best were chosen and, after much stagecraft and rehearsing, presented in a one-weekend showcase.

They called it *Fresh Squeezed Ounce of Opera*.

Last year was the first time the One Ouncers did this, and they staged the winners in a show at the Museum of Human Achievement – that odd yet inviting venue that maybe nobody's supposed to know about, kind of, but everybody kind of does know about? Because, FFS, the venue is right there next to Canopy? And that was a fine event, replete with comedy and drama and, as ever, those amazing voices often given full sonic throttle in service of the narrative or thematic expression conjured by diverse compositional hands.

So when OOO set out to do this *Fresh Squeezed Ounce* thing again, we figured it'd be at least as enjoyable a gig as the one in 2016 – and it was – and, look at that, once again staged in the Museum of Human Achievement.

This year's iteration featured compositions from Austin's Rain Nox ("Problems," an anthology of characters showcased in a fitness center setting), the San Francisco-based Liam Wade (whose "The Stranger the Better," with lyrics by Vynnie Meli, was a comic deconstruction of *A Streetcar Named Desire*), and Peter Michael von der Nahmer and Kate Chadwick, with their delightful and absurd brat-in-a-video-game-store romp called "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

And that's some good stuff right there, well performed, evidence that the mannered art form commands relevance even in these more casual times. Even if, sometimes, it works so effectively due to the oddness of the vignettes being presented operatically in the first place, you know? Like, "This situation is already a warped or at least acute representation of reality – and note how much more pointed that perspective is, when it's expressed in opera form."

But, ah, I haven't yet mentioned the second piece of this year's Fresh Squeezed collection. Which was a piece called "Remembering Landscape," with music by Marvin J. Carlton and lyrics by Madeleine St. Romain, directed by OOO's head honcho Julie Fiore, performed by Robert LeBas, Julie Silva, and Maureen Broy Papovich.

And I've singled it out, because it singled me out. Because that "Remembering Landscape," more thematic than narrative, transcended the rest of the enjoyable night it was part of. Because the music and the words used to evoke oblique structures of memory and distinct landscapes were as striking as they were sublime. Because the complex vocals and simple movements of the three performers – now voicing solo, now as a pair, now as a trio – were staged and rendered on the frugal set in such a way that the whole thing did a little welcome breaking-and-entering into the house of what a person might call their soul.

So, yes: *Fresh Squeezed Ounce of Opera II* from OOO.

And here's hoping there will be another one next year.

One Ounce Opera: *Fresh Squeezed Ounce of Opera II*

Museum of Human Achievement, Springdale & Lyons

www.oneounceopera.org

April 7-9

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