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A Venetian Carnival in Full Bloom and Glory

Volksopera of Vienna, 03.11.2025 [ENA]

From the moment the overture's first shimmering tones filled the auditorium, the Volksoper's staging of Johann Strauss's exuberant operetta proclaimed itself a joyous, beautifully realised affair. Under the deft baton of the conductor (name not specified in the programme excerpt) the orchestra displayed a lively sense of rhythm and colour: the strings were sprightly, the winds crisp, the harp and percussion touches.

The performance is delicate yet confident—exactly the palette that Strauss's comedy both demands and rewards. This production succeeds on multiple levels: musically, theatrically, and in its visual imagination. The libretto's carnival-in-Venice setting might lend itself easily to kitsch, but here the direction, design and performances all resist lazy caricature. Instead, the ensemble creates a world that is richly atmospheric, playfully decadent and emotionally generous. Vocally, the cast rose to the challenge with skill and enthusiasm. The Duchy and his entourage, the senators and their masked wives, the gondoliers and servants—all were treated with attention to vocal quality, dramatic timing and characterisation.

The leads delivered strong, committed performances, supported by a full, responsive ensemble that never let the pacing falter. Particularly notable was how the sung lines were given space to breathe, even in the operetta's more frenzied moments; ensembles and chorus worked with clarity and purpose. Visually, the production turned Venice's carnival into something at once traditional and inventive. The costumes matched the masked-ball theme with flair—rich fabrics, gleaming colours, sumptuous design—while the staging combined sweeping gondola imagery, lantern-lit canals and grand ballroom sequences, all lit and choreographed to heighten both the spectacle and the intimacy.

The set transitions flowed with an ease that kept the evening in continuous motion, yet each scene had dignity: you sensed the pleasure of the carnival, the undercurrent of intrigue, the flirtations and disguises, the social games.
Highlights abound: the nocturnal gondola serenade in Act I was dreamy and evocative; the masked ball in Act II moved with graceful pace and invited real audience delight; the final act's resolution found its mixture of farce and forgiveness in balanced relief—not overplayed, not rushed. At its best, this production gives the audience exactly what a great Strauss operetta can: melodic abundance, rhythmic elegance, comedic sparkle and just enough emotional warmth.

It is worth emphasising the quality of the ensemble's support. The chorus, a vital element in this work, sang

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with clarity of diction and richness of tone—the carnival crowds, the masked guests, the gondoliers—all evocative without feeling staged or generic. On the orchestral side, the pit band responded to the stage's dramatic requirements: the waltz rhythms floated when required, the faster polkas laughed and raced, the quieter moments hushed before the next flourish. Conductor and musicians maintained the right mix of brightness and refinement.
What makes this particular production memorable is its combination of respect and freshness.

The heritage of Strauss's operetta is honoured—the melodic lines, the balletsque waltzes, the buoyant rhythms remain intact—yet the direction and design lend them renewed vitality. There is no sense of mere museum piece; instead, the operetta feels alive as entertainment, as theatre, as celebration. The audience's warm standing ovation confirmed that they sensed this vitality.
If one were compelled to identify minor reservations, they would be very slight. In a couple of scenes the pacing could have been marginally tighter—some transitions between set changes felt a touch hesitant, as though the staging was catching its breath.

In one or two of the fast ensemble numbers in Act II the vocal balance tilted slightly toward the pit orchestra, meaning some lyrical text projected less strongly from more remote seats. But these are almost trivial notes in what is otherwise a triumphant evening.
In conclusion: the Volksoper Wien's production of Eine Nacht in Venedig is a noteworthy success—musically assured, theatrically imaginative and emotionally rewarding. For lovers of operetta and theatre alike, this performance offers both lush melodic indulgence and breezy comedic pleasure, executed at a consistently high level. Truly, an invitation to Venice in carnival splendour you would not want to miss.

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