

## Flight

SEATTLE  
Seattle Opera  
4/3/21

**T**HE MUSEUM OF FLIGHT, which suspends historic aircraft in its three-million-cubic-foot, six-story T. A. Wilson Great Gallery near Seattle's Boeing Field, was a spectacular setting for Seattle Opera's film of *Flight*, the 1998 airport opera by composer Jonathan Dove and librettist April De Angelis.

First, in the Seattle Symphony's Benaroya Hall, conductor Viswa Subbaraman, with thirty-one musicians onstage and ten solo singers in the auditorium, all safely spaced, recorded a reduced orchestration of the score, which sounded fulsome. Then, under director Brian Staufenbiel and film director Kyle Seago, the cast enacted their roles, by day and night, inside and outside the museum. Imagery ranged from the humdrum (ground traffic on Interstate-5) to the breathtaking (eight singers individually superimposed on the



Randall Scotting's Refugee in Seattle Opera's film presentation of *Flight* at the Museum of Flight.  
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cockpit's control panel as a plane soared into the sky). Subscribers and press viewed the film online beginning April 3; single-ticket buyers will see it beginning April 23.

Partly and loosely inspired by Mehran Karimi Nasseri's eighteen-year stay at Charles de Gaulle Airport, *Flight* dramatizes the plight of the Refugee who bothers travelers with "magic stones" and pleas for help, gazes at the goddess-like Controller in her tower, and evades the Immigration Officer's "inexorable" tread (in eleven/eight time!). Of the seven travelers stuck overnight at the airport, five seem on paper to be banal butts of humor, oversexed and/or self-deceptive: Bill and Tina seek to revive romance with a sex manual; the Steward and Stewardess grope and more at any chance; the Older Woman, at fifty-two, pins hope on a twenty-two-year-old "fiancé." That leaves the married Minskman and Minskwoman, he an optimistic diplomat, she unhappily pregnant.

An excellent cast brought each of the ten principal roles to life. Randall Scotting's cool, lovely countertenor was perfect when the Refugee sang in Act III of the cold he had endured as a wheel-well stowaway: voice and orchestra executed icy, downward glissandi as an upward shot placed him against the cold glass and steel of the museum rafters. Soprano Sharleen Joynt was focused, intense and dazzling in the Controller's stratospheric flights, up to F; immaculately attired, when a storm knocked out the phones in her tower she fled into the "fierce night" and returned muddled, "grubby" like the travelers she looked down on. Bass Damien Geter was a solid, ultimately compassionate Immigration Officer.

Tenor Joshua Kohl made "predictable" Bill more likable than I thought possible, while soprano Karen Vuong gradually revealed winning lyricism as Tina. Vocally and visually, baritone Joseph Lattanzi was an ultra-smooth Steward. Mezzos Sarah Larsen, a sportive Stewardess, and Margaret Gawrysiak, a resilient Older Woman, were expressive of voice and face. Bass-baritone Aubrey Allicock was a strong Minskman who finally, warmly gave voice to his conjugal love. As the Minskwoman, the character who develops most, Karin Mushegain movingly progressed from reluctant to birthing to triumphant mother, finally scaling down her rich mezzo to cleanly sung baby-talk cooing.

Despite high levels of acting and directing, and august precedents in *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, the mad shenanigans of *Flight*'s nocturnal Act II—the homoerotic encounter between Bill and the Steward, the women getting "stinking" drunk, their violence toward the Refugee—were unpersuasive. But the music is better than the book. Conducting and orchestra were powerful in the planes' two takeoffs and one arrival. Subbaraman judiciously balanced the several large ensembles, which range from Rossinian patter to Wagnerian grandeur. — Mark Mandel



Sarah Larsen, Joseph Lattanzi and Joshua Kohl  
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