

Musical masters bewitch their audience

BY **BRADLEY WINTERTON** AND **DAVID CHEN**
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It was almost impossible to fault the marvelous operatic double bill from the Taipei Symphony Orchestra (TSO) on Friday evening. *Gianni Schicchi* in particular shone out as the masterpiece it is, but even the slighter *Il Segreto di Susanna* was delightful throughout. In particular, Wu Bai Yu-Hsi (巫白玉璽) excelled himself in both the leading male roles. Vocally he has always been unimpeachable, but this time his acting attained new heights as well. As the crafty Gianni he was ideal, and when he broke into a dance of elation with the relatives he was about to trick you felt he was genuinely happy even so, just as he had been genuinely moved

by his daughter's famous appeal. His hasty and emphatic dictating of all the final bequests to himself was unforgettable. This was a richly complex interpretation from every angle.

Yang Lei (楊磊), singing out with real vigor and conviction as the young lover Rinuccio, also deserves the highest praise. His voice had never sounded better, and this seemed a high point of his singing career. Chen Pei-Chi (陳珮琪) as Zita and Liao Chong-boon (廖聰文) as Simone had fewer opportunities to display their powers in this compact work, but both were very strong nonetheless, and ideally cast. Julian Lo (羅俊穎) as Betto added his strong bass voice in stalwart support throughout. And if Lo Ming-fang (羅明芳) as Lauretta slightly lacked power in *O Mio Babbino Caro*, she missed nothing of the famous aria's expressiveness and tenderness.

Marti Fischer-Dieskau deserves the highest praise for his commitment and discretion as conductor. The TSO has never sounded better, and every detail of the subtle and innovative score could be heard clearly in the fine acoustic of Taipei's Metropolitan Hall. Everything was ideal, from the tempi — never eccentric — to the gorgeously rich fortes and crystal-clear pianissimos.

All in all, this production by Tseng Dau-hsiung (曾道雄) was a stunning occasion. The set by Chang Yi-cheng (張一成) for *Gianni Schicchi* proved as effective as her one for *Il Segreto*, with the dawn over Florence seen through a high window a fitting background for the lovers' final mini-duet. The costumes of Kao Yu-po (高育伯), both historically authentic and sumptuously made, were indicative of a major talent.

This glorious double-bill was an occasion to treasure. The more operas TSO can stage in the future the better.

