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OPINION

Review: A Spirited 'Light in the Piazza'

A youthful cast and chamber ensemble combined for a highly creditable performance.

By **Douglas Townsend** July 19, 2009

Recommend

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Tamara Cashour, the musical director, conducted a highly creditable musical performance of "The Light in the Piazza." For this production, at the South Orange Performing Arts Center, the original Adam Guettel orchestra score was arranged for using seven instruments and piano, with Ms. Cashour herself playing the piano while she conducted the chamber ensemble and singers.

The musicians played with considerable spirit, adding musical color and support for the fine singing of the principal actors. Kudos are due Ms. Cashour, who did yeoman duty in bringing the musical portion of this production to life.

Leslie Potashner, the director, also served in a dual capacity. Not only did she direct, but she was also responsible for the large projected photographs of Florence, which provided the scenic backdrop for the action. These constant reminders of the architecture and statuary of Florence created an immediacy and a mood for a play, whose main character is really the "light in the piazza."

Clara Johnson and her mother, Margaret Johnson, were at the center of the action. The roles were meaningfully performed by Pia Vanderstreet (Clara) and Gabriell Visser (Margaret).

Vanderstreet, a recent college graduate, displayed a fine, lyric soprano voice, the breadth and quality of which she adjusted with a very professional technique. She never failed to capture the mood and meaning of the music. She also displayed fine sensitivity to the emotional needs of her character, Clara.

Gabriell Visser, who played Clara's overly-protective and somewhat domineering mother, Margaret, showed off her experience and skill most effectively in the Second Act. Here the veteran Ms. Visser's acting and singing abilities came shining through. She acted and sang with insight and an authority that made us believe in the character, Margaret, and her transformation into a person with whom we could sympathize.

Zachary Wobensmith, who played Signor Naccarelli, acted the bilingual role of "pater familia" with conviction. His son, Fabrizio, was played by Ben Rosenbach, a recent high school graduate who will be attending NYU's Tisch School of the Arts in the Fall. The difficult bilingual role (Italian/English) perhaps required a more experienced singer/actor, but Mr. Rosenbach made a valiant effort and succeeded in making us believe that he was an adolescent attempting to become an adult.

Charlotte Tucci, the soprano who played Franca, the sister-in-law of Fabrizio and the wronged wife of Giuseppe, proved herself to be a very able musician and dramatic actress. Although still a college student, Ms. Tucci performed her role with clarity, vitality and energy. She displayed a range of emotional intensity with apparent ease. Her musical pitch was perfect, even in the high register of her voice; and her diction was excellent throughout her singing. She appears to have a bright future in opera and/or musical theater.

Editor's note: Douglas Townsend, a composer-writer from New York City, is professor emeritus from CUNY and has written both opera, choral and musical theatre. "Light in the Piazza" has its final performance Sunday at 3 p.m. at SOPAC. See [here](#) for further information.

