

Opera a breath of fresh air

OPERA IN THE PARK

Die Fledermaus (Johann Strauss)

WA Opera

Supreme Court Gardens

REVIEW NEVILLE COHN

As the saying goes: when the going gets tough, the tough get going. And this was splendidly apparent at this performance of Johann Strauss' evergreen *Die Fledermaus*.

Despite an unwanted, chilly and too-brisk wind that caused costumes to billow as well as a noisy rumble over the speakers, professionalism carried the day, not least on the part of conductor Richard Mills who resorted to a heavy hammer to hold down the pages of his score.

Here was an ensemble of singers and instrumentalists (of the WA Symphony Orchestra) which seemed to relish bringing a much-loved work to sparkling life. And an estimated 20,000 opera lovers, including many young children, thronged the lawns of Supreme Court Gardens to experience the City of Perth's annual gift to its citizens.

Fledermaus was simulcast to audiences in Bunbury, Geraldton and the Northbridge Piazza.

Katja Webb brought the part of Rosalinde delightfully to life, especially in the masquerade ball scene where one could savour the quality and agility of her lower range. She was particularly impressive in the *czardas*, as was David Hobson as Eisenstein who tries to charm Rosalinde, blissfully unaware that it's his increasingly indignant masked wife he's chatting up.

Jennifer Barrington, too, seemed to relish her role as Adele, the chambermaid flaunting her charms in her employer's ball gown. Christopher Lewis did well as the policeman sent to escort Eisenstein to prison.

Director Andrew Foote's deft touch was everywhere apparent in this semi-staged production that glittered with detail. Louise Fenbury strode around the stage, an effective Prince Orlovsky. Christopher Lawrence did well as the policeman and Robert Hofmann was a convincing Dr Falke. The chorus was in fine fettle.

Big video screens on either side of the stage and in the crowd provided excellent image quality and the amplified sound was at its best halfway back from the stage. **C**