

British Theatre Guide

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The Magic Flute / Impempe Yomlingo

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, adapted and directed by Mark Dornford-May
Young Vic
(2007)

This really exciting fusion of Viennese opera and African culture from the company that has also brought [A Christmas Carol](#) to London is graced by the most glorious singing imaginable, particularly from a group of tremendous sopranos in both leading and ensemble roles.

The first surprise is heralded in a lengthy overture, played on eight marimbas (gap-toothed xylophones to the uninitiated) on either side of the thrusting stage. With the help of a little percussion and a Magic Trumpet rather than flute, this is the entire musical accompaniment that is required to recreate Mozart's fairytale quest for love in the face of evil.

Strangely, the vibrant colour schemes used in this production, featuring pinks and oranges and greens, have something in common with the New York production design by the *Lion King*'s Julie Taymor, [reviewed](#) on New Year's Day. Beyond that and a great deal of energy, there is little else in common other than high-quality singing.

The main story sees the journey of tuneful Tamino (Mhlekaazi Andy Mosiea) in his search to find the perfect wife, Pamina, sung to perfection by Philisa Sibeko. She has own problems, in the form of her mother, The Queen of the Night. The black clad, serpent-haired Pauline Malefane in this role shows that she can compete with the best sopranos in the world, even though she only gets two relatively brief opportunities to show off her prodigious vocal range.

Comedy is injected by the gigantic, bumbling Thozamo Mdliva's Papageno, dressed in army fatigues but far from a soldier. This birdman, supported by a team of pink-tracksuited birds, constantly amuses with his inability to complete the simplest tasks, or for that matter stay silent when it could risk his friend's future happiness.

The tale was always destined to come out right in the end. Love and the Magic Flute which is trumpeted by conductor Mandisi Dyantyis, enable Tamino to live happily ever after, having rescued his betrothed from the evil, dreadlocked Sarastro (played by Simphiwe Mayeki) and his army of guerrillas.

Around the central characters, Mark Dornford-May has woven traditional operatic singing around Africa visual and aural delights. The whole features traditional African dance, wonderful musical arrangements that highlight the lead singing but also great chorus work.

This is seen and heard at its best in various female trios who make up teams of spirits working with and against each other often in modern dress. Several of these bring a smile to the face, especially three angels in pink nighties together with matching teddy bears.

This is a really lovely way to spend 2½ hours, enjoying exceptional singing, great music and a story that melds its European and African roots to great effect. This African extravaganza is highly

recommended as an alternative to the traditional English panto and could be paired with *A Christmas Carol* to give a great but not overly long day out.

Playing until 19 January

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)