

Don Imbroglia

Theatre Review by [Matthew Murray](#)

A show daring to subtitle itself "An opera you can't refuse" has three vital responsibilities to fulfill: It had better be an opera, it had better be irreverent, and it had better be darn good. *Don Imbroglia*, which is playing at the Lion as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival, meets all three criteria, and then some.

Writers Peter Hilliard (music) and Matt Boresi (libretto) have gone out of their way to satisfy both die-hard musical theatre fans and die-hard opera fans. The two camps, forever warring about the importance of singing ability, acting technique, amplification, and so on, tend not to agree about much. But when you apply a score of near-operatic weight and complexity to a silly, accessible story with strong popular roots, you get the kind of magic offering that might just be able to unite the two disparate camps.

And maybe, just maybe, lovers of mafia fiction? I'll skip the obvious and obligatory "soprano" (though one is cleverly made in the show) and confirm the title's suggestion that there are more than a few traces of *The Godfather* here, as well. It's a lot for any show to juggle, and imagining a contemporary crime-syndicate family singing about their pet cats, finding horse heads in bed, or justifying adultery might not be exactly easy. But it's precisely for that reason that *Don Imbroglia* works so well. You might know what to expect, but you can never be sure of what you'll end up getting.

Hilliard, Boresi, and director Jenny Lord have packed so many surprises into the show that to give away many of them would be to disrupt the delicate latticework of entertainment and intrigue that they've so convincingly assembled. I will say, though, that the first act details the events at the wedding of the Don's promiscuous son Dante, and the machinations of the other guests; the second act finds everyone, now grieving over a traumatic loss, forced to perform an opera to maintain the Don's illicit business dealings.

Boresi's libretto, entirely in English except for the opera (for which

supertitles are thoughtfully - and hilariously - provided), bursts with wit and charm as it sends up and adheres to operatic tradition. Hilliard's music is a fine match, attractively setting up everything from minor comedy numbers to heavily layered duets and trios to keening arias of Metropolitan breadth. Hilliard also quotes from a number of existing operas (to give you but one hint: the Don's cat is named Figaro), especially in a late wrapping-up-the-plot aria for the Don's scheming consiglieri Lascivo, but it's never overdone: For the most part, Hilliard reveals himself as an operatic pastiche artist of the highest order.

Hardcore opera lovers, however, might not respond well to this production's musical values, which include the use of an electronic keyboard (played by musical director Steven McGhee) and just three other orchestra members. They sound fine, but don't give the show the rich sound it would greatly benefit from. Similar problems arise in terms of the vocals, which decidedly skew toward a musical-theatre sensibility.

This is most obvious in the casting of Robert DuSold as the Don; his voice doesn't boom with the violent authority one expects from a comic opera's baritone patriarch. Nick Dalton's program bio lists credits like *The Full Monty*, *Damn Yankees*, and *1776*, and indeed his thin tenor would seem more suited to such roles than to the Don's intimidating, oversexed persona. Erica Schroeder makes no vocal impression whatsoever as Dante's girlfriend (no, not the woman he marries), and Broadway performer Raymond Jaramillo McLeod is barely basso and not at all profundo as the Don's bodyguard. But they're all terrifically funny and effective actors, particularly Schroeder, whose lusty outward ditziness wryly masks a thoughtful woman clawing to get out.

Much better vocals are provided from Valérie MacCarthy as Dante's bride, Wayne Schroeder as Lascivo, and Vale Rideout as the tenor who's dating the Don's daughter, Angelica. Oddly, the actress playing her, Arielle Doneson, gives the evening's least-effective performance: She's far too shrill at the top of her range to convey much youthful energy or rebellion with her voice, and the rest of her portrayal is equally stiff.

Don Imbroglia itself, though, is a lithe, lively evening that musical lovers shouldn't fear seeing in an opera house, and that opera devotees shouldn't shy away from in a theater. As much fun as it is, its most attractive feature is its ability to bring people together, something weddings, funerals, musicals, and opera excel at. But how often do you get them all in a single show?

New York Musical Theatre Festival

Don Imbroglia

Running Time: 2 hours, 15 minutes with one intermission

Lion Theatre, Theatre Row Studios, 410 West 42nd Street

between 9th & 10th Avenues

Sunday, September 25 8PM

Tuesday, September 27 8PM

Wednesday, September 28 1PM

Friday, September 30 8PM

Saturday, October 1 4:30PM

Saturday, October 1 8PM

Tickets online: [Theatermania](#)

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