

West Palm Beach

Candide is the *Don Carlos* of musical theatre. With a history not unlike Verdi's much-revised masterpiece, Bernstein's operetta drawn from Voltaire's classic satire has gone through many a rewrite since its 1956 premiere on Broadway. There are at least four revisions that have been frequently performed, including the 1988 Scottish Opera edition of the score that Bernstein subsequently conducted with the London Symphony Orchestra and a cast of opera singers (Jerry Hadley, June Anderson, Christa Ludwig, Nicolai Gedda et al.) for a recording that aficionados consider definitive.

Now there's another reincarnation of *Candide*, and it received its first performance at PALM BEACH OPERA on February 23. Billed as 'the 2004 New York Philharmonic Version', it is based on a semi-staged concert directed by Lonny Price for the Philharmonic, when Marin Alsop conducted. For his adaptation, Price relied a lot on Hal Prince's 1973 revival, known as 'the Chelsea Version', which introduced a libretto by Hugh Wheeler to replace the original by Lillian Hellman. Bernstein's publisher, Boosey & Hawkes, gave the opera company permission to expand the Price concert version into a full staging. It featured a steeply raked set, a sequence of predictable projections by Jerome Sirlin and an abundance of folkly costumes by Hallie Dufresne.

Palm Beach's *Candide*, directed by Jay Lesenger and conducted by David Stern, was an enterprising undertaking, but it didn't really solve the problems that have spawned so many different performing editions of the work. On the plus side, it was great to hear numbers that are dropped in other versions, such as Dr Pangloss's syphilis aria 'Dear boy' and the Cunegonde-Old Lady duet 'We are women'. However, like Price's concert version, the new staging has a slap-happy quality that undercuts the sparkling wit of Bernstein and his lyricists, and Voltaire's universal wisdom is given very short shrift.

Miles Mykkanen, the tenor who sang the title role, might be the best of all possible Candidates, an appealingly earnest young optimist in lederhosen whose rich rendition of 'It must be so' was a highlight. Alisa Jordheim made a tour de force of 'Glitter and be gay', with its coloratura pyrotechnics, but she was less engaging in Cunegonde's other numbers. Ron Raines was excellent in the mainly narrative role of Voltaire/Pangloss. Denyce Graves brought loads of diva shtick to the Old Lady. Tobias Greenhalgh camped it up as Maximilian, and Kasia Borowiec's Paquette was a frisky delight in the Eldorado sheep scene. Stern led the orchestra in a swift, scintillating account of the great overture.

■ *Miles Mykkanen and Alisa Jordheim as Candide and Cunegonde at West Palm Beach*



Nina Bernstein, one of the conductor-composer's daughters, was in the audience. 'I'm a *Candide* junkie,' she said during the interval. 'The great thing about *Candide* is you never know what show you're going to see.' JOHN FLEMING