

NOVEMBER 2009

ballet.*magazine*

REVIEW

Atlanta Ballet

'The Magic Flute'

October 2009

Atlanta, Cobb Energy Center for Performing Arts

by Pamela Gaye



© Charlie McCullers

[Atlanta 'Magic Flute' reviews](#)

['Magic Flute' reviews](#)

[Clark in Atlanta reviews](#)

[Winkler in reviews](#)

[recent Atlanta Ballet reviews](#)

[more Pamela Gaye reviews](#)

Mark Godden's *The Magic Flute* shone as Atlanta Ballet's full-length season opener fraught with whimsical and amorous interludes coupled with a mixture of stellar solo performances by dancers Christian Clark, Christine Winkler, Joshua Reynolds, and others. Accompanied by the Atlanta Ballet Orchestra conducted by Jeff Holland Cook, and supported by vocal soloists and chorus of the Georgia Tech University choral ensembles, *Flute* dazzled audience with its rich diversity of visual scenic effects, iconic props, and technically challenging solos. The performance I saw contained the best dancing I have seen in some time from both Clark and Winkler. The latter's, performance as The Queen of the Night alternated between breathtaking adagio movements revealing flowing classical lines juxtaposed with starkly angular poses suggesting regal allure. As Sarastro, Joshua Reynolds projected a commanding yet stern presence, reminiscent of a Graham, counterbalancing throughout the ballet the diminutive lyricism of Nadia Mara in the role of Pamina.

Iconic props linking the electronic age of the present to enlightenment principles of truth, love, and redemption of the past forecast onstage a panoply of symbols that alternatively frame and disarm choreographic patterns. In the opening scene, Tamino, danced by Clark, stares at a black box television screen only to be awakened from his dream state by a stark, abrupt cutting of the cord by a hatchet. A blackout, and explosion ensue as the stage darkens, leaving its audience riveted with shock and surprise. Visually, a long unwinding white cord spanning one-third of the stage is transformed into a serpentine shape that, when cut, changes into a phallic symbol betokening self-obsession. The realm into which the hero, Tamino, (performed by Clark) is led before being lulled into a dream state is then followed by a scene wherein sacks of white dust, resembling clouds, explode onstage suggesting a serpentine pattern. These are in turn overturned by childlike figures that descend, mid-stage, on a singular silver barre lit with strobes. Enter in turn three 'Glamazons, superbly danced by Anne Tyler Harshbarger, Kristine Necessary, and Kelsey Yip who perform consecutive pas de deux with Clark that then serve to transition to the entry of Papageno, danced by John Welker. In a role that couples comedic technique with agile elevation and style, Welker's Papageno must endure a punishment of a shackled phallus for his wandering flirtations. Yet throughout the ballet, through classical vocabulary assigned to the legs and lower torso laced with upper body port de bras and angular gestures, choreographic patterns emerge that are breathtaking. As narrative, often referred to as Mozart's masonic opera, *Flute* reifies the quest for truth and the ultimate finding of true love, all recast as visually eclectic ballet.



Nadia Mara & Christian Clark in *The Magic Flute*
© Charlie McCullers

Set against backdrops against which are cast shifting layers of lighting, color, and danced segments, *Flute* is performed with compelling movement ranges that allow each member of The Atlanta Ballet to show forth his own individual style. Classically integrated legs and feet, coupled with angular-expressive use of the upper body seem a feature of Godden's choreography that blends well with technical ranges of dancers Winkler as a gothic-inspired Queen of the Night, Mara as a bewitched Pamina, and Reynolds as the wisdom-inspired Sarastro. Christian Clark's jumps and elevation never cease to amaze and are coupled with spirited turns en l'air in passé suggesting an heroic Tamino naïve yet spirited with zestful élan in quest of a lyric ethereal Pamina. Replete with surprises *Flute* integrates quixotic uses of scenic space with props and sound, forming a magnificent onstage collage, one that weds the modern to the mystical.

As stunning opener for its 80th season, Godden's *The Magic Flute* was well chosen. Atlanta Ballet can certainly excel with works of this genre creating a mixture of of vivid performance values, all which show forth on the part of this company a rare and renewed self-fashioning. In summary, the performance reigns for this reviewer one of the company's best, casting its spell over Atlanta audiences for seasons to come.