

World-renowned vocalist Ute Lemper shines with Santa Rosa Symphony

By [DIANE PETERSON](#)
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Sunday, May 9, 2010

The Santa Rosa Symphony sailed through the exotic worlds of opera, ballet and cabaret theater Saturday night with Music Director Bruno Ferrandis at the helm and world-renowned vocalist Ute Lemper as his trusty navigator.

This is Lemper's maiden voyage to Santa Rosa — she normally appears on stages in New York, Berlin and Paris — and the star ratcheted the energy and excitement to glamorous, new heights during the season finale at the Wells Fargo Center for the Arts.

Even if you haven't heard of Lemper, you've probably seen her Teutonic features in luxury department stores around the globe, where her high cheekbones and deep-set eyes are reproduced on the faces of high-fashion mannequins.

But this stunning beauty is much more than a wooden bow maiden. She's a consummate actress and vocalist whose interpretive depth and savage honesty injected Kurt Weill's "The Seven Deadly Sins," with haunting authenticity during the second half of the concert.

Thematically, the program revolved around the idea of sin, and the magnetic pull between hell and heaven, darkness and light, the real and the ideal.

Mozart's Overture to "Don Giovanni" introduced this overriding theme with dramatic flair. The dark, crashing chords of the opening foreshadow the end of the opera, when Don Giovanni, who has killed the father of one of his female prey, goes down in flames.

Under Ferrandis, the orchestra tossed off this curtain-opener with sensitive dynamics and impressive, ensemble, especially in the strings.

In the prime slot before intermission, the orchestra glided through Tchaikovsky's Ballet Suite from "Swan Lake" with frothy abandon, proving that you don't need a big, heavy workhorse to provide a satisfying season closer.

Conducting with both passion and precision, Ferrandis lit a flame under the orchestra during the entire work, keeping the tempos brisk, the rhythms crisp and the folk dances lusty and full-throated.

For the most part, the orchestra polished its solos to a fine sheen. Harpist Randall Pratt tossed off his arpeggios with a lyrical flourish, and concertmaster Joe Edelberg sang with a rich, Itzak Perlman-like vibrato. The only disappointment was the oboe solo at the opening, which sounded a bit thin and strained.

Wearing a black, pleated halter dress that fell to the floor, Lemper sang Weill's "The Seven Deadly Sins" with regal and mesmerizing intensity after intermission.

Every nod of her head, shoulder shrug and raised eyebrow underscored the cynicism of this bitter morality tale, in which she sings the part of two sisters, one coarse and calculating, the other innocent and idealistic.

The all-male vocal quartet Hudson Shad sang the family passages quite effectively, combining the rich timbre of an operatic chorus with the simple harmony of a barbershop quartet.

Kudos also to the orchestra and Ferrandis for bringing just the right note of irony to this challenging score, with its haunting melodies and hypnotic rhythms. It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it exerts an irresistible charm, nevertheless.

After much shouting and applause, Lemper rewarded the audience with two exquisite encores: "Mackie Messer" ("Mack the Knife") from Weill's "The Threepenny Opera"; and Weill's "Youkali," a bittersweet lullaby written and sung in French.

If you've got tickets to Monday night's final concert, don't miss the pre-concert lecture with Ferrandis and Lemper, who is quite articulate on matters of music, history and politics. If you don't have tickets, beg, borrow or steal them. Lemper is a living legend, and she may not be back in Santa Rosa for a long while.

You can reach Staff Writer Diane Peterson at 521-5287 or diane.peterson@pressdemocrat.com