

also sang Oswald and Merlin. The large young cast included Lieve Buzard as Arthur, Madison Marie McIntosh as Emmeline and Cupid and Marisa Karchin as Matilda and a radiant Venus. Jason Wirth led the skilled instrumental septet (with the ubiquitous Remmers on guitar and tambourine).

But the spring's best *Dido* came from a more unlikely source, with more unlikely casting. MASTERVOICES used to be called the Collegiate Chorale, and put on chorus-heavy concert performances of operas at Carnegie Hall. Now it's renamed itself and formed a partnership with NEW YORK CITY CENTER (the original home of NYCO). Its new music director is Ted Sperling, who has a Broadway background, and it will devote itself to English-language, semi-staged (for now, at least) productions of operas and operettas. Sperling can enlist Broadway stars, and for this *Dido* Kelli O'Hara (Broadway's reigning diva, along with Audra McDonald) sang the title role, with Victoria Clark as the Sorceress. O'Hara was operatically trained and took on Valencienne in the Met's *Merry Widow* early last year. There, she sounded sweet but a little pallid. Here, subtly amplified (the solo singers wore body mikes), she delivered a superb Dido, proud and heartbreaking, her voice strong, her phrasing sure, her bearing regal. Clark properly camped it up but sang well, too, and the more traditionally operatic singers did not contrast unduly with their Broadway castmates. Elliot Madore was a soft-grained but affecting Aeneas and Anna Christy (Belinda) and Sarah Mesko both sang a number of roles. Sperling's handling of the Orchestra of St Luke's, playing period instruments, sounded idiomatic, and the chorus, on risers in the back, sang surely without becoming overbearing. The choreographer Doug Varone provided helpful (semi-)staging, with his black-clad dancers at Dido's death particularly moving. David Korins was the 'scenic consultant', and Christian Siriano provided several fabulous gowns. Broadway's Michael John LaChiusa—who also has operatic leanings—composed a harmless, occasionally charming 15-minute prologue wherein three muses commented on the story about to unfold.

The LITTLE OPERA THEATRE OF NY took on *L'Amant anonyme* (1780), the only surviving opera of the six composed by the Chevalier de Saint-Georges. Born Joseph Boulogne in 1745, he was the son of a French plantation owner in Guadeloupe and a slave, Nanon. His father shipped him off to France when he was seven; one wonders if mother and son ever saw each other again. In France he received a proper education and enjoyed lively success as a violinist and composer, along with dangerous run-ins with the various factions during the revolution and Terror. His career was hampered by racism, but not crippled. He died in 1799.

The music is good, more complex than your standard *opéra-comique* piffle, but the Little Opera Theatre's production, with Philip Shneidman as adapter and stage director, seemed misguided. The same singer was both the anonymous lover and the principal narrator of the plot and its background, thereby confusing the issue of whether the lover was being rejected out of Léontine's fear of love or disdain for a mulatto. On March 19 the cast (one of two) was headed by Everett Suttle as the Chevalier/lover Valcour, Jennifer Moore as Léontine and Jesse Malgieri as their friend Ophémon. All were solidly unexceptional, and the Baroque septet led by Elliot Figg at the inaudible harpsichord was fine. But there was too much talk and too little faith in the score's ability to stand on its own terms.

An oddity—another small-scaled performance but not by an established company—was ORPHIC MOMENTS, a conceptual operatic event that took place on March 23 and 24



■ *Opera off Broadway: (l.) Little Opera of New York's 'L'Amant anonyme', with Jennifer Moore and Everett Suttle; (r.) Mastervoices's 'Dido and Aeneas', with Elliot Madore and Kelli O'Hara*

(I saw the second performance) at NATIONAL SAWDUST, the new, hip Williamsburg/Brooklyn vanguard performance space, the Poisson Rouge of that by now not-so-newly-hip neighbourhood.

The programme was assembled by the countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo along with the young, much-talked-about composer and conductor Matthew Aucoin. Their concept focused on the moment of Orpheus's fateful decision to look back at Euridice, depicted in Aucoin's opening 20-minute *scena* *The Orphic Moment*. The twist was that he wanted her to die twice, because that unleashed his true love, his own voice and music. Aucoin's music didn't exactly attain Gluckian heights, but it was compelling in its more astringently modern manner. Costanzo has a commanding voice, although when he pushes for amplitude (which he does in large theatres but hardly needed to do in a space seating 145) he loses quality. At a more modest volume, however, his singing has a nice plangency, he has a good trill and he looks good (as did everyone; costumes were by Irina Krushilina).

After the Aucoin, long narrow boards with exotic snacks were slid along each row, allowing audience members to 'dine' during the 'wedding banquet' to snippets from Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Vienna version), played in lieu of the actual opening scene of that opera. There followed the opera itself, continuing through Amor's announcement of the happy end. At which point both Orpheus and Euridice up and die, and Aucoin tacks on a rather cursory coda. This was odd, and inconsistent, but the real problem was how Aucoin's *scena* contradicted Orpheus's evident love for Euridice, as evinced in Gluck's music and Calzabigi's libretto.

Oh, well: Costanzo sang Orpheus nicely; Kiera Duffy made an appealing Euridice, doubled by the dancer Bobbi Jene Smith; Jana McIntyre was the cheerful Amor. In the