

"The Magic Flute" charming and whimsical"

By Pierre Ruhe

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Mozart himself, in a dapper red coat and white powdered wig, makes an appearance at the start of the Atlanta Opera's "The Magic Flute," one of many charming conceits in this convincing new production shared with Indiana University's professional-quality Jacobs School of Music.

In Tomer Zvulun's stage direction, the singers react naturally to each other and communicate directly with the audience. The almost-capacity crowd Saturday night laughed merrily at the jokes and cheered mightily when the music turned athletic and epic

It helps, too, that they had a good dragon. Puppets are in vogue in theater and opera these days, and this "Magic Flute," which premiered in Indiana in November, is wonderfully whimsical without being hollow -- a difficult balance.

Pierre Ruhe is classical music critic