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‘Florencia en el Amazonas,’ ‘Patience & Sarah’ and ‘Le Comte Ory’ Reviews

A singer sails the Amazon; a couple escapes prejudice; an erotic pièce de résistance

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Nadia Petrella and Elsa Quéron in ‘Patience & Sarah.’ PHOTO: MARIA BARANOVA

The new NYCO has a lot of company. Dozens of small opera companies now dot the New York landscape, and this spring their umbrella group, the New York Opera Alliance, showcased their activity with a festival of over 50 events. One was the return of “Patience & Sarah,” an opera about a lesbian romance by composer Paula Kimper and librettist Wende Persons that had its premiere at the Lincoln Center Festival in 1998. Last week, the Paula Kimper Ensemble gave it a robust, semi-staged hearing, in a new, wind-centric orchestration for seven musicians, at the Players Theater.

Based on a novel by Isabel Miller, which was in turn inspired by a true story, “Patience & Sarah” is a sweetly positive tale about the struggle of two early 19th-century American women to overcome familial prejudices about gender and class and go off “pioneering” together. Well-constructed, if a bit long, it is a work whose tonal palette evokes Copland-style Americana, especially in the hymns and folk tunes that turn up periodically. It was a flattering frame for soprano Nadia Petrella, smoldering as the well-to-do painter Patience White, and especially for mezzo Elsa Quéron, fierce and determined as the illiterate Sarah Dowling, who has been brought up as a boy in order to help her struggling farm family. Also impressive were Michael Kelly as Parson Daniel Peel and Duncan Hartman as Pa Dowling. Ms. Kimper conducted and Douglas Moser directed the simple but effective staging.