

THE ACTOR'S RESOURCE

BACKSTAGE

Part of the NY International Fringe Festival

Tim Gunn's Podcast (A Reality Chamber Opera)

Finding Fresh Talent in the Fringe

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By David Sheward

Don't laugh, but there are similarities between opera and reality television. Emotions are heightened to extreme degrees in both forms of entertainment, and audiences can be just as passionate about contestants being eliminated as a soprano losing her great love. Composer-librettist Jeffrey Lependorf combines the two formats in a delightful little guilty pleasure.

Tim Gunn's Podcast (A Reality Chamber Opera) uses the actual online commentary of the famous fashion expert from an episode of the hit series Project Runway, on which Gunn serves as mentor and father figure for the contestants. When Gunn describes the importance of the episode's challenge, Lependorf's score slyly mocks the self-importance of the whole enterprise and the fashion world in general with grand, sweeping tones. He also finds fascinatingly appropriate dissonant sounds to accompany personality clashes between mismatched designers who must work in teams.

Baritone John Schenkel gives a performance gliding from joy over the right person winning the challenge to horror over a poorly designed gown ("It looked like it was made from a log!"). Singing solo for a solid hour is no mean feat and, to quote Gunn himself, Schenkel definitely makes it work.

Presented by Make It Work Productions as part of the New York International Fringe Festival

At the Jazz Gallery, 290 Hudson St., NYC.

Aug. 13-23. Remaining performances: Thu., Aug. 14, 6 p.m.; Sun., Aug. 17, 4:30 p.m.; Fri., Aug. 22, 5:15 p.m.; Sat., Aug. 23, 10 p.m.

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