

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

CARMEN

BY GEORGES BIZET | APRIL 23, 27, 29, AND MAY 1, 2016

BWW REVIEW: CARMEN AT LYRIC OPERA OF KANSAS CITY

April 26, 2016

By Alan Portner



Opera aficionados will be delighted with “Carmen” the concluding production of the 2015-2016 Lyric Opera season. Georges Bizet’s four act bravura opera “Carmen” takes place in Spain, but is sung in Bizet’s native French. There is spoken dialog between songs (also in French).

The Lyric Opera organization has brought to Kansas City audiences incredible voices from the most honored companies and teachers internationally. The Kauffman Center’s (opened in 2011) excellent acoustics make opera sung without amplification possible.

“Carmen” tells the tale of a darkly beautiful and sexually liberated gypsy girl named Carmen and her Spanish soldier lover, Don Jose. “Gypsies” in 1875 Europe compose a violently discriminated against minority. European society portrayed them as thieves and scoundrels. Gypsy women earned their keep by enticing the male population. For 19th century Europe, “Carmen” must have seemed racy stuff.

The opera opened to mixed reviews at the Opera-Comique in 1875 largely because audiences were scandalized by the content and by diversions from classical opera forms. Bizet did not live to see “Carmen” become one of the most frequently performed and popular operas.

As the play opens, we meet Micaela (Soprano Janai Brugger). Micaela is fiancé to Don Jose. She is pretty, conservative, and approved of by Don Jose’s Mother. Don Jose is content and uninterested in Carmen, but Carmen becomes very interested in Don Jose. Eventually, Don Jose’s resolve crumbles to the gypsy girl’s entreaties.

Carmen has become an addiction for Don Jose. He pursues Carmen to his own eventual destruction. Carmen in the meantime falls for handsome matador Escamillo (Baritone Cory Crider). Don Jose begs for another chance with Carmencita. Carmen refuses Don Jose. He falls into a rage and murders her, the love he cannot have...

The sexy bad girl, “Carmen” is portrayed in this production by mezzo-soprano Zanda Svede. Ms. Svede

is a fellow at the renowned San Francisco Opera. She definitely has the looks, the glamour and the voice for the role.

Tenor Rafael Davila is Don Jose who appropriately hails from the Puerto Rico Conservatory of Music. Mr. Davila earned his Masters' degree at UT Austin under the supervision of Metropolitan Opera tenor William Lewis. He has performed widely both nationally and internationally.

"Carmen" shares some of the most familiar music in opera. From the opening few bars of the overture, the audience feels immediately at home. Most recognizable is the "Toreador Song."

"Carmen" has undergone significant changes since Bizet first offered his 1200 page draft. Director Jose Maria Conde. Director Conde shows the audience a very traditional approach to this production. The actors work in a very presentational style that mirrors how the play would have been presented in early productions. This production might have benefited by taking advantage of stagecraft advances and a more 21st century acting style. Certain sections could have been condensed resulting in a final product that may have seemed to move the action along faster. The cast of thousands could have a better idea of the reasoning behind their entrances and exits. Leading actors could better relate to each other.

