

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

CARMEN

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

CARMEN, AT THE LYRIC OPERA, REVIEW

April 25, 2016

By Frank C. Siraguso

The Lyric Opera's Carmen is a beautifully staged and orchestrated production of Bizet's tale of love gone wrong.

At its heart, *Carmen* is the story of the abusive love affair between the free-loving gypsy Carmen and the tightly buttoned brigadier Don Jose that leads both to their demise. In another time *Carmen* might have been fodder for film noir. The tragic story of boyfriends or husbands killing their girlfriends or wives is familiar today in our news headlines, if not our actual lives. The only difference is that *Carmen* has a much better sound track.

At the end, why does Carmen feel the need to speak to the jilted Don Jose, who has fallen into drunken decrepitude. Why, when she left him for the toreador Escamillo, did she keep wearing the ring Don Jose gave her? Why can't Don Jose admit that it's over and move on? Why do any of us do things like this? Maybe it's that obscure object of desire.

The die is cast from the very beginning. Micaëla (Janai Brugger) comes to the town square to deliver a note to her fiancé, Don Jose, a soldier on duty there. Not finding him, Micaëla starts to leave but all the soldiers start hitting on her and teasing her until, nearly in tears, she manages to escape.

All the soldiers and the men who work in nearby businesses are lusty louts who ogle not only Micaëla but also the women workers of the cigarette factory who come out to the square during their break. The women also indulge in romancing some of the men but Carmen is the only woman who can meet the men on their own level.

As Carmen, Zanda Svede plays the role an almost offhand physicality. She teases, hoists her skirts and answers the men's taunts in kind. When they ask when she will love them, she says maybe tomorrow, maybe never, but not today. Carmen prides herself on her ability to choose and leave her lovers without attachment.



So even she is surprised – and it takes a while to realize this – that she has fallen hard for Don Jose. Maybe it's because he's the only soldier there who doesn't seem to care or pay any attention to any of the women in the square. When the officer Zuniga (Jeffery Beruan), evidently new to the post, asks Don Jose if the women in the cigarette factory are good-looking, Don Jose tells him he doesn't know and is not interested.

Rafael Davila's Don Jose is devout, stiff-necked and quick to anger. When Carmen throws a flower that hits him in the chest, you can almost see the steam coming out of his ears. Until she stops to think about it, and he's hooked. And so is Carmen.

Despite the tragic storyline, all the cast members seem to be having great fun. Svede, obviously, enjoys being Carmen, without camp, I might add. The actors playing fellow gypsies Frasquita (April Martin) and Mercedes (Samantha Gossard) are equally spirited. Of all the actors, though, I think Cory Crider plays the toreador Escamillo with a joy that just shines.

It's that spirit that takes the sting out of the tragedy, at least somewhat. *Carmen* is no comedy but is exciting to see. After the final curtain, as we were all leaving the theater, I overheard a woman tell her companion that she enjoyed watching the children's chorus so much she forgot to look at the translation screen. I agree. The Lyric Opera's *Carmen* is a beautifully staged and orchestrated production of Bizet's tale of love gone wrong.