

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

DON GIOVANNI

BY W. A. MOZART | SEPTEMBER 26, 30, OCTOBER 2, AND 4, 2015

LYRIC OPERA CAPTURES MENACE OF 'DON GIOVANNI' IN STYLISH FILM NOIR PRODUCTION

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The Lyric Opera of Kansas City's film noir production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Don Giovanni" was a successful, stylized modernization.

Director Kristine McIntyre's concept works for the opera, with its violence, ambiguous morals, beautiful women, ominous setting and, of course, the unrepentant leading man. Mozart's genius score, with poetic and humorous libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte, thrilled Saturday's audience in the Muriel Kauffman Theatre.

Daniel Okulitch played Don Giovanni as an arrogant, selfish playboy/mob boss. Richly voiced, his tuxedoed Giovanni used force when charm failed. Joshua Bloom, as his accomplice Leporello, matched Okulitch's vocal power and provided facile delivery, humanizing humor and nuanced acting.

Three strong women challenged the Don's insatiable efforts. Elizabeth Caballero was a fierce, though conflicted, Donna Elvira, with stunning entrances and a marvelous voice. Rachele Durkin, as Donna Anna, gave a sympathetic performance, her voice, like the character, more restrained. Samantha Gossard played Zerlina as a woman well aware of her wiles, with a strong voice and presence of being.

Tenor Matthew Plenk was a tender Don Ottavio, though the character is oddly unsympathetic and pushy. Rhys Lloyd Talbot played the jealous, out-of-his-realm Masetto, and Richard Wiegold was the foreboding Commendatore.

The production team created a convincing film noir universe with R. Keith Brumley's gloomy back-alley-to-nightclub sets, lighting by Marcus Dilliard casting looming shadows, and Mary Traylor's tailored, elegant costumes, enhanced by Alison Hanks' wig/makeup design.

The orchestra, conducted by Gary Thor Wedow, aptly conveyed Mozart's intent of tension and drama, though sometimes at odds with the vocalists. The competent chorus succinctly and playfully fulfilled their scenes.

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While conceptually and vocally the production succeeded, there were some confusing directorial choices, along with awkward, obvious stage combat.

Don Giovanni's descent into hell is a test of a stagecraft, though here, reliant on a fatal tussle with a pistol, the challenge was avoided. Having Giovanni die by accident instead of by demonic vengeance was underwhelming, though thankfully McIntyre eschewed the epilogue sextet that lightens the ending, choosing instead the dramatic final chords of the Don's demise.

Similarly, the deceased Commendatore appeared to Giovanni throughout Act 1, lessening the impact of his cemetery entrance (though, if he found an overcoat in the underworld, why not shoes?)

Additionally, the decision to amplify his voice, either for volume or an otherworldly timbre, overbalanced the entrance of the trombones, undercutting Mozart's brilliantly psychological moment of menace.