

# LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

## THE ITALIAN GIRL IN ALGIERS

BY GIOACHINO ROSSINI | NOVEMBER 8, 12, 14, 16, 2014

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KC'S LYRIC OPERA PRESENTS A RAMBUNCTIOUS, AMUSING  
'THE ITALIAN GIRL IN ALGIERS'

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By Libby Hanssen

**THE★STAR.**  
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For a genre that rarely presents a feminist role model, Gioachino Rossini's "The Italian Girl in Algiers" is a welcome respite. The Lyric Opera of Kansas City's production, which opened Saturday night, is a rambunctious, big-hearted show of impressive vocal talent, directed by Michael Cavanagh.

The heroine thwarts the men with the disadvantage of their vanity, goads the women to stand up for their rights and saves the day for herself and her countrymen.

Additionally, this version casts her as a pilot, already a leader before she crash-lands to fate in the Algerian oasis.

Rossini's score has a light, propulsive quality, hectic at times yet allowing each singer (and numerous wind soloists) a chance to savor the line. Leonardo Vordoni conducted the Kansas City Symphony, though the overture, while inoffensive, lacked the jolting "ta-da" of surprise in the sforzandi.

Mezzo-soprano Irene Roberts, in her Lyric Opera debut, was an engaging Isabella, fully confident in the situation; her voice assured, clear and delightful, especially during the gentler passages, with easy control of her range.

Taylor Stayton played her lover, Lindoro, striding heroically across the stage while belting out rather whiny lyrics, though he relished his Act 2 aria.

Heather Phillips was a hand-wringing Elvira, her joyous soprano ringing over the ensemble pieces, together with Samantha Gossard in the meatier, more devious role of Zulma. Elliot Harrison Brown played Haly, alternately threatening and amusing. The all-male chorus was robust and reliable.

That any of them kept their composure onstage with the basses' buffoonery, though, was a testament to their professionalism. The profoundly hefty voices of Patrick Carfizzi (Mustafa) and Ben Wager (Taddeo) contradicted their flamboyant performances.

Carfizzi exemplified the misguided arrogance of giddily lecherous self-satisfaction. Wager played his role of thwarted lover with a quivering, indignant reluctance, utilizing his lanky frame with captivatingly ludicrous movements.

Robert Innes Hopkins' set design was inventive and versatile, leaving the audience impressed with the pop-up stage and plane crash effect, and with David C. Woolard's sumptuous, exotic costuming.

Some of the sight gags fell short with repetition, but generally they maintained a high humor threshold, such as the instrumental miming of solo wind voices. The finale of Act 1, with its clamoring, clanging score and intricate onomatopoeic vocals, was chaotically goofy and, as the audience's laughter indicated, the work's high point.