

# LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

## LA TRAVIATA

BY GIUSEPPE VERDI | SEPTEMBER 26, OCTOBER 1, 3, 5, 2014

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### 'LA TRAVIATA' GLISTENS ON KANSAS CITY LYRIC OPERA STAGE, JOYCE EL-KHOURY SHINES

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By Floyd Gingrich

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Saturday's opening of the Lyric Opera of Kansas City presentation of *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) at the Kauffman Center

for the Performing Arts was a stunning success. The story of a mostly reformed consumptive courtesan who moves from the position of hostess-with-the-mostest to a sad shadow of what-might-have-been is a demanding bit of drama to convey to an audience; Joyce El-Khoury does it.

From the elegant opening party to the final, fatal, surge of energy, soprano, El-Khoury captivates the ears and hearts of the audience. The audience was totally won over with her anguished indecision in, *Sempre Libera*. She is not the unshadowed brilliance for long, as she alludes to her illness and must clear the party to another room so that she can rest a bit. This is not to be a musical comedy, or a ride away into the sunset fable. El-Khoury's charming facial expressions, vocal athleticism, and acting skills (down to the tiniest gesture or touch) endear her to all; not a gentleman in the audience would refuse to jump on stage to prevent the inevitable.

This is not to say that Scott Quinn as Alfredo Germont, or baritone Anthony Michaels-Moore as Alfredo's neanderthal father, Giorgio Germont, did not carry their parts, they did; the story belongs to Violetta - if she does not carry it, it doesn't get carried; she did.

Quinn's voice melted through the hall as he professed his infatuation with the seemingly inaccessible courtesan. His arching, sweet, highs conveyed his desire for her in a spiritual, as well as physical sense, that eventually won the love of this pearl-of-great-price, who sold all she had, and left the source of her continuing high life, to support an idyllic lifestyle with this interloper. As is common among tenors, the chest-range sounds were negligible, though not often required.

Baritone Anthony Michaels-Moore presented an unmitigated cad, whose scowling countenance had no relief, even when apologizing for the harm he had done. His extensive, Act II dialogue, was carried off well, and gave both singers the opportunity to fill out their characters, as Violetta is convinced that she must die among the Parisian partiers, rather than this devoted new-comer in her life. Germont seems to believe that she is just a hysterical woman making too much of a chest cold. *Di provenza il mar*, was flawlessly performed; it was more a severe argument than the verbal description of heaven-on-earth.

The Act III quintet can be a highlight of the opera; each character has serious personal issues to work out, with each rising and falling in a woven fabric of sound. The characterizations expressed in the parts were more good singing than personal reflections. Vocally, this may have been due to the preference for tenors and baritones with great highs, even if their lows are less brilliant.

The chorus and dancers personified riotous Parisian entertainments. Each one is an auditioned soloist, all singing as an ensemble of artists. The individual conversations and business during the action created a layered picture, like a museum-quality mural, filled with individual tableaux to form the whole. Skillful choral singing was accompanied by a continuation of individual characterizations, keeping the audience on the track of the developing plot.

As you can see in the accompanying slideshow, the sets and costumes left little to the imagination. They were sumptuous, plot supportive, and well detailed, with many, little, imaginative touches. Dressing men in (probably their own) tuxes was probably an acceptable economy.

The orchestra created moods when it needed to, and was totally supportive of the vocal sounds, creating no need for characters to scream over it. The sound was polished, and filled the hall with fast and slow, joyous and somber, as needed.

There is still time to reserve a seat for the other performances of *La Traviata*: Wednesday, October 1, 2014 7:30 p.m.; Friday, October 3, 2014 7:30 p.m.; and next Sunday, October 5, 2014, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. So much better than television.

Several individuals and groups sponsored a particular artist for this production. Contact Lyric Opera of Kansas City to sponsor artists, scenery, orchestra, or other projects that combine to create these miracles.