

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

TOSCA

BY GIACOMO PUCCINI | APRIL 18, 22, 24, 26, 2015

**'TOSCA' AT KAUFFMAN CENTER, ONLY THE BEST;
LYRIC OPERA CAN TAKE PRIDE**

April 20, 2015

By Floyd Gingrich

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Kansas City Lyric Opera is presenting a sparkling production of Puccini's classic opera, 'Tosca.'

Saturday night, April 18, Kauffman Theater was full of expectant patrons; they were not to be disappointed. The sets were gorgeous, the costumes were delivered by time machine, the blocking was expert (thank you, director, Garnett Bruce) and the singing was only good.

From the time escaped political prisoner, Angelotti (Scott Michael) stumbled into the church of Saint Andrea Della Valle, until Floria Tosca (Melody Moore) leaps to join Baron Scarpia (Gordon Hawkins) in God's court, the evening was pure joy, visually and aurally. Giacomo Puccini's Tosca fulfilled all requirements, and exceeded a few. There were no minor parts filled with minor players, every sung line was pure, fine opera, audible to the very back row.

Puccini's 1900 opera was informed by Richard Wagner, Without imposing artificial grandeur, Puccini announces characters by their orchestral themes; characters do not come on stage by surprise. The brassy Scarpia theme, Tosca's romantic melody (also used in a duet) and others, all help to connect this masterpiece, brilliantly played by members of the KC Symphony, conducted by the Lyric's own maestro, Ward Holmquist.

Julien Robbins as the Sacristan provided some early comic relief as the bumbling custodian of all that is holy. When it came time for him to sing, his buoyant, round baritone was at the ready, to fill the 1800-seat room with convincing sound, whether angrily commanding, or subtly conniving.

Gordon Hawkins' Baron Scarpia was magical. With no memory of Mr. Hawkins in a kinder role, he was the personification of satanic malevolent arrogance. His ability to facially illustrate every emotion, his callous habit of satiation of evil desires at his victims' expense, and his liquid, far-reaching baritone voice was never strained while overpowering every sound he was given to match.

Melody Moore, as Floria Tosca, was a women's woman a century early. Her jealousy contributes to her own doom, which she seems to prefer over the alternative of life as a shrinking violet. Her unyielding strength portends her end, but she won't go out meekly. Her mezzo-rich soprano was always controlled, always on the rich notes, whether at a blood-curdling fortissimo, or at a sonorous pianissimo, easily glistening anywhere in the house.

James Valenti was a great Cavaradossi to be paired with Ms Moore. Neither singer held back for the other, which made for some really dramatic ensembles, particularly when Scarpia was added to the mix. This tenor does not go fuzzy when faced with the middle of the bass clef, he's got it all. His ability to spin the highest notes into the softest, audible, sigh, caused listeners to beg for the note to continue forever. Alas, inhalation must occur.

Ben Wager's (Angelotti) bass matched well with Mr. Valenti; his fatalistic urgency made for good drama as well as music. The death-defying duet with Cavaradossi gripped the audience with the plot set-up, and brought it into the suspense. Scott Wichaël, as Spoletta, Terence Murphy's Sciarrone, Micah Welch as a Shepherd Boy, and A Jailer, played by Matt Black (hurrah for the home team) all filled their parts with aplomb, causing one to wonder how a company the size of Kansas City's could afford such consistent talent.

Easily ignored, but totally indispensable, the chorus (director, Mark Ferrell) was totally professional, both in voice and blocking, to make the show come to life. Their costumes were as carefully created as the lead singers', their voices added the sense of a real, populated place.

The opera will be repeated April 22 and 24 at 7:30 pm and Sunday, April 26 at 2:00 pm; don't miss out on this opportunity to take in this vibrant production. To those who make such fine productions happen in what is often as a flyover cow town, what it takes is no secret. A multitude of volunteers and donors work tirelessly for the 48 hours of magic a year. Thank you.