

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

DON GIOVANNI

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

GIOVANNI GOES NOIR

Kristine McIntyre's direction of a film noir "Don Giovanni" a stunning success, capturing the essence of this opera's power and moral struggle.

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By Sarah Young



The ultimate womanizing sociopath has taken up temporary residence at the Kauffman Center. Don Giovanni has come to the Lyric Opera. The Lyric's production of Mozart's opera opened on Saturday night to an enthusiastic and appreciative audience, who encountered a Don Giovanni reconceived in the style of film noir by director Kristine McIntyre. With a stark cityscape set designed by R. Keith Brumley accompanied by the dramatic lighting design by Marcus Dilliard, the atmosphere of this production matches the barren and desolate soul of Mozart's antihero whose life is a long, evil road to destruction. In a palette of blacks, whites, and grays, costume designer Mary Traylor's creations are chic and sophisticated and fully evocative of a Philip Marlowesque world.

This vision of Don Giovanni fits baritone Daniel Okulitch like a glove. A veteran in the role himself, he brings the appropriate self-absorbed persona to Mozart's rake, but can also convey the Don's malevolent charm. He comes into his own particularly in the final scenes of Giovanni's confrontation with the Commendatore. Okulitch's is a smooth, beautiful baritone, splendidly controlled and expressive. All of the voices in this production are first rate. As Donna Anna, Rachelle Durkin's crystalline voice was particularly impressive in "Non mi dir," which she owned with precision and expression. Elizabeth Caballero returns to the Lyric as Donna Elivra, a role that seems tailor-made for her dramatic, clear tone and commanding stage presence.

Samantha Gossard was stunning as the feisty, sexy Zerlina. Her singing was meticulous and her physical energy on stage was electric. KC Lyric Young Artist Rhys Lloyd Talbot joined her as a charming, luckless Masetto with a bright, pleasing baritone.

As Don Ottavio, Mathew Plenk delivered a flawless "Il mio Tesoro," showcasing his technical precision and textual sensitivity, and Richard Wiegold's Commendatore oozes vocal gravitas.

Joshua Bloom was spectacular as Leporello. He had great comic timing and a rich, expressive baritone particularly effective in combination as he recounted the Don's conquests in "Madamina."

Conductor Gary Thor Wedow returns to the Lyric to lead the orchestra in this streamlined score that adheres primarily to the original Prague performance in most musical choices, although it does remove the final sextet. Wedow's conducting was brisk and exciting.

Da Ponte's libretto makes clear that Giovanni's fate is sealed the moment he commits murder. The Commendatore is his Angel of Judgment shadowing him through his last days, ready to exact moral retribution. This film noir concept is a viable interpretation of Don Giovanni; it highlights the underlying darkness, full of betrayal, sexual conquest and domination, and murder. There are always some incongruities between text and setting when removing a libretto from its historical context; there are some here that are occasionally distracting and Giovanni's final punishment, while not traditional, is consistent with this concept. However, McIntyre's direction is a stunning success, capturing the essence of this opera's power and moral struggle.