

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

THE ITALIAN GIRL IN ALGIERS

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

LITITALIA SIMPLE, BUT FUN

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By Kelly Luck

KCSTAGE

Rossini's "L'italiana in Algeri" is probably not the first thing you think of when considering the works of that particular composer. Of course, when your big brothers are William Tell and the Barber of Seville, it can be easy to be overshadowed. But the fact of the matter is, the Italian Girl has seen a surge in popularity since the latter half of the 20th century. This is fortunate, as it is an extremely enjoyable example of opera buffa that deserves to be better known.

In Algeirs, the Bey Mustafa (Patrick Carfizzi, Bass) has grown tired of his wife Elvira (Heather Phillips, Sopr) and orders his servant Haly (Elliot Emerson Brown, Bar) to find him an Italian girl, because they're just so terribly exotic, you know. Just by chance Isabella (Irene Roberts, Mezz) crash lands with her would-be lover Taddeo (Ben Wager, Bass) and they are immediately captured. Isabella has been in search of her lover Lindoro (Taylor Stayton, Ten), who has been promised his freedom if he will take Elvira with him back to Italy. Isabella conspires with them and Elvira's friend Zulma (Samantha Gossard, Mezz) to get Mustafa to take Elvira back and teach him a thing or two about women in the process.

As operatic plots go, L'italiana has a simple one, but it's still rather enjoyable. Carfizzi's Mustafa is a buffoon, a would-be alpha male who thinks he knows all there is to know about handling women. He's the sort of love-to-hate villain that makes for a very satisfying denouement when he is, inevitably, utterly bamboozled. The production is an interesting one on several points: firstly, it is set in the 1930s, allowing for our heroine to arrive (and depart) by air, and David C. Woolard's costumes are absolutely gorgeous. Robert Innes Hopkins' set design is... well, I won't spoil it. Suffice to say it was worth a surprised and delighted chuckle.

Generally the company has done a good job of letting the material do the work, something that does not always happen with the comic operas, though admittedly there were points where it did cross over into just plain camp. Stayton impresses as a young tenor and is definitely worth keeping an ear to. Brown does well as Haly, a role that is either Tenor or Bass depending who you ask but more often than not gets a baritone (long story. Don't ask). Gossard and Wager continue the tradition of secondary characters being almost as interesting as the primaries, though in this case they've got a real run for their money. Ms Roberts' Isabella brings all the dynamism and gusto to the performance the role demands, but in the end it is Carfizzi's show to walk away with. He is so deliciously into his role that we cannot help but be swept along.

As mentioned before, L'italiana is finally getting the attention it deserves as a piece of comic opera. This is a good performance, done with a very light and facetious touch, and by all means enjoyable. One hopes that the success of this production leads to further works of Rossini, including some of his more serious fare that has in recent years fallen by the wayside.