

# LYRIC OPERA

## KANSAS CITY

## LA TRAVIATA

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

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### LYRIC OPERA'S 'LA TRAVIATA' ENJOYABLE MUSICALLY AND VISUALLY

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By Libby Hanssen

**THE★STAR.**  
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Verdi's "La Traviata" is one of the operas so instilled in our culture that people tend to be more familiar with it than they think. The toothsome melodies find immediate, delightful refuge in one's brain, and the plot appeals to society's fascination with the heart of gold trope.

But it is never an assured success, no matter how familiar and beloved. The vocal parts are challenging and more so is conveying the psychological development of the characters.

Lyric Opera of Kansas City's production, which opened Saturday night in Kauffman Theatre, was a fairly forthright interpretation. David Gately directed a busy stage, with distracting crossings and extraneous secondary movement. Ward Holmquist conducted the Kansas City Symphony, a forceful, yet not overbalancing presence.

The production used sets and costumes designed by Desmond Heeley for the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Richly layered, realistic, corseted costumes glittered and shimmered in silks and sequins. The sets had a mottled, indistinct touch of opulence, though the props and furniture were undersized, even rickety.

Soprano Joyce El-Khoury was the noble-hearted courtesan Violetta, altering her vocal style to suit the mood, from the effortless trills in the flippant Act I to a marrow-deep weariness of body and spirit in Act III. Her voice was warm through her range and the pianissimos delicate, though there was a consistent hitch in her portamenti. She handled the range of emotions well, especially Violetta's final forgiveness and release.

Her love interest Alfredo was performed by tenor Scott Quinn as infatuated and self-satisfied. Quinn relied on his vocal match to El-Khoury and mark-to-mark acting.

But it is Violetta's complex relationship with Alfred's father Giorgio, performed by Anthony Michaels-Moore, which brings the story its perennial intrigue. Here, they were candid, demanding sympathy and respect, yet wanting their own way. Michaels-Moore's baritone had a demanding edge, well suited to reprimanding Alfredo (though I could have used more snap in the stage-slap).

Ashley Wheat was subtly effective in the small role of Annina, with refreshingly unobtrusive acting, while Clark Weyrauch as Gastone was enjoyably flamboyant.

The chorus, exhibiting excellent vocal cohesion, had fun with their role in the drunken frolic, and mighty moral support in Act II. Dancers from Kansas City Ballet enlivened the party scene, too, with Tempe Ostergren dancing the gypsy role with flirty, twirling vivacity.

Despite opening-night flubs, the performance indicated a sturdiness of concept, visually enjoyable and musically satisfactory.

