

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

TOSCA

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

EMOTIONAL PERFORMANCES AND ORCHESTRAL ENERGY IN LYRIC OPERA'S 'TOSCA'

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The Lyric Opera of Kansas City is closing its 2014-15 season in high dramatic style with Giacomo Puccini's "Tosca." The lush production, memorable score and principal singers cast an allure in Kauffman Theatre on Saturday night.

Puccini and librettists Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica created a taut melodrama of love, coercion and betrayal, appealing to raw emotions in a show that has remained popular since it premiered in 1900. Directed by Garnett Bruce, this production maximized drama and tension with deft humanizing moments, though a surplus of supernumeraries confused the focus with superfluous staging activity.

Melody Moore sang the title role with tremendous spirit and acted with subtlety. Her "Vissi d'arte" was gorgeous, emerging from a bitter silence, and the simple staging allowed her to explore the character's heartbroken introspection.

James Valenti, as Cavaradossi, was a standard heroic tenor, with an aching quality to his voice in "E lucevan le stelle," if a little strained in the upper reaches of the range.

They had a great emotional connection and blended timbres with a matched intensity evident in the intimacy of their a cappella moment.

Gordon Hawkins' Scarpia entered with an attention grabbing flourish and full voice, though the baritone did not always carry in the ensemble pieces, and maintained a menacing, if restrained, persona.

Julien Robbins offered overt humor as the sacristan, more bumbling than vindictive, while Scott Wichael was a weasely Spoletta.

Artistic director Ward Holmquist conducted the Kansas City Symphony through the invigorating score. Although the end of Act I lost vitality in the Te Deum, the orchestra pushed to the edge in Acts II and III with terrifying brass chords, interrupting or building tension. There were also exquisite quieter moments,

such as the clarinet solo in Act III.

The chorus sounded solid, and the children's chorus brought a sweet, playful quality.

R. Keith Brumley designed evocative sets with deep, angled perspectives, poignantly lit by James Sale's lighting design. The cross-shaped spotlight on the fallen Scarpia was out of keeping with the generally realistic scheme, though, even if the red tinting during the torture scenes worked. Lena Rivkine's costumes were detailed and period-appropriate, with fittingly opulent gowns for Tosca, with Alison Hanks designing wigs and makeup.

Unfortunately, the final moment of Act III was marred with the awkward detail of a bouncing flash of the mattress behind the scenery as Tosca leaped (or rather, trust-fell) off the parapet.