

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

TOSCA

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

TOP-NOTCH OPERA

April 20, 2015

By James Henry



The Lyric Opera of Kansas City presented

Puccini's harrowing tragedy *Tosca* Saturday in the Muriel Kauffman Theater at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. Solid performances by the cast and orchestra combined with fantastic sets and lighting for a top-notch production.

James Valenti was a charming Mario Cavaradossi, lighting up the stage with his presence and lovely tenor as a foolhardy painter willing to die for the safekeeping of the whereabouts of his old friend Cesare Angelotti—performed nimbly by Ben Wager. Angelotti is wanted by Baron Scarpia, chief of police in Rome, and Gordon Hawkins was a robust and commanding Scarpia. Melody Moore, as Cavaradossi's diva lover and the central figure of the opera, Floria Tosca, gave an ardent portrayal of the series of emotional extremes experienced by the inauspicious heroine. Moore and Valenti had great chemistry—moments of jealousy and disgust were obvious, and the two made a good lover pair, especially in their final aria together. Hawkins' Scarpia was sinister, and his interactions with Tosca were just as engaging as those with her lover. Julien Robbins provided welcome and appropriately understated comic relief to the part of the Sacristan. Scarpia's minions Spoletta and Sciarrone were portrayed obediently by Scott Michael and Terence Murphy, respectively.

The orchestra was on point throughout the opera's three acts, with only a few questionable moments. The low winds were particularly solid when exposed, and the high winds were pristine. Raymond Santos' clarinet solo in the third act was hauntingly beautiful. Brass was in tune and articulate, and the horns get accolades for their fanfare in the third act.

The grand scene at the end of the first Act included a strong choral ensemble with a well-rehearsed and beaming children's chorus. The conflict in the second act contained plenty of action, and it was all impeccably timed—vocalists, orchestra, and offstage chorus built to a very well-executed frenzy. All parts were extremely well-coordinated throughout the show; even the most minute stage cues were perfectly aligned with the music.

Adding to the allure of the Lyric's performance are the sets and lighting design. The sets are built with a forced perspective that is particularly dynamic in the first and third acts, and the lighting effects during the dawn scene in the opening of the third act were phenomenal.

Tosca's themes of love and misery; hatred and desire; jealousy and revenge; and art and love make an approachable, entertaining opera. Puccini's orchestrations are tender, surprising, and dramatic, and never detract from the drama on-stage. The Lyric's production was impeccable.