

Scott Cantrell

Opera review: A visually stunning 'Traviata' and yet ...



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Published: 14 April 2012 12:23 AM

Another night at the opera, another *Traviata*.

The version imported from Florida Grand Opera and mounted Friday night by the Dallas Opera is certainly a visual spectacle. Designer Allen Charles Klein supplies a semicircle of heavily draped shutters that serve effectively as backdrops to two over-the-top party scenes, a vine-hung patio outside Alfredo's country house, and, with lights and furnishings draped in black, Violetta's bedroom.

The party scenes are riots of red-and-gold Victorian attire. Choreographer Rosa Mercedes whips up plenty of kicks and twirls for the gypsy and toreador entertainers. **Thomas Hase lights everything most effectively.**

There are some fine musical and dramatic assets, too, although on opening night they didn't always combine compellingly. The Greek soprano Myrtó Papatnasiu, in her American debut, certainly captures Violetta's every flicker of emotion: by turns carefree and desperate, amazed at falling in love, excruciatingly conflicted at the sacrifice demanded by her lover's father, alternately hopeful and despairing as she struggles against the dying of the light. She certainly defies the clichés of zaftig operatic consumptives; at the end, she's persuasively frail.

She has amazing vocal technique: top notes pinpointed, high flourishes effortlessly tossed off, sure commands of crescendo and decrescendo in any register. But her middle register often takes on a metallic nasal resonance that takes some getting used to.

James Valenti is a *very* tall Alfredo, and a handsome one, but he's a bit stiff physically. His mobile and highly expressive tenor can take on baritonal warmth in lower passages, then blaze on high. Like Papatnasiu, he knows the power of pianissimo, and uses it most effectively.

Laurent Naouri brings physical and vocal gravitas, and more than usual sympathy, to the role of Germont. Somewhat surprisingly, the standout among the other characters is Susan Nicely's warm-toned Annina, Violetta's maid. The other singers do their jobs, but with no particular distinction: Amanda Crider as Flora Bervoix, Aaron Blake as Gastone, Tim Mix as Baron Douphol, Mark McCrory as the Marchese d'Obigny and Ethan Herschenfeld as Dr. Grenvil.

Stage director Bliss Hebert manages the blocking and interactions effectively. But the prelude pantomime of Violetta first groping her funeral monument — a recurrent image throughout the production — then grasping at a lost party scene gilds an already sentimental lily.

Conductor Marco Guidarini clearly knows his Verdi, and he gets finely characterized playing from the orchestra if not always flawless coordination with the singers — usually because of singers' rhythmic laxity. The chorus, prepared by Alexander Rom, sings rousingly.

PLAN YOUR LIFE: Repeats at 2 p.m. Sunday and April 29, and at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 21 and 27 at Winspear Opera House, 2403 Flora. \$25 to \$250. 214-443-1000, dallasopera.org.