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Tosca

SAN JOSÉ
Opera San José
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Opera San José's production of Puccini's *Tosca* was all of a piece. Seen at the final matinée of the eight-performance run, on November 28, with a cast that included three members of the resident company, the production was exceptionally strong. Much credit goes to director Sandra Bengochea's fine handling of the blatant sadism of Scarpia and his henchmen, which was reflected in the face and body language of everyone onstage, and her avoidance of melodramatic, "shabby little shocker" excess until the very end.

Central to the performance's success was the wonderfully sung and acted Tosca of Rebecca Davis. Quite beautiful, with eyes that darted, flirted and defied, Davis gave a complete portrayal of the role that lacked only a gut-wrenching chest voice. It is no small feat to deliver such a credibly acted Tosca and voice one's high notes with full, rounded tone.

Christopher Bengochea (director Bengochea's husband) offered an extremely ardent Cavaradossi. Although his singing was not so powerful as that of his Tosca, and twice he pushed his top notes to the point of cracking, Bengochea has a throaty tenor that is more convincing in suffering than in loving rapture. Another throaty singer, OSJ resident artist Torlef Borsting, produced a beautifully sung Scarpia; his finely judged sadism offered considerable compensation for a voice that lacks malicious bite. Both men died convincingly, without wallowing in spasmodic excess.

Resident artist Krassen Karagiozov's powerful Angelotti was superbly sung and acted. The other resident artist, Isaiah Musik-Ayala, mercifully avoided the oft-encountered unctuous portrayal of the Sacristan. Especially convincing was Michael Mendelsohn, a superb character actor whose Spoletta delighted in torture without once going over the top.

Erik Flatmo's three sets were simple in design and quite effective. Scarpia's apartment was especially striking, with a host of candles and candelabra suggesting both palatial elegance and the fiery exchanges to come. The shadows Kent Dorsey's lighting cast around Cavaradossi's eyes during "E

lucevan le stelle" were especially effective. Principal conductor David Rohrbaugh's orchestra sounded a bit sluggish at the start of the opera but offered effective support.

The only major misstep was the closing. Given how many lines Tosca has to sing as she traverses a rather short ramp to the parapet, director Bengochea had everyone temporarily freeze in place as Tosca delivered her final lines. Passing through a silent-film time warp is not the best way to elicit sympathy for a diva about to plunge to her death. □

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