



BWW Reviews: San Jose Finds a Rare Pearl in Bizet's THE PEARL FISHERS

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by Harmony Wheeler



Google the "Pearl Fishers Duet" and you'll find almost every famous opera singer has sung the exquisitely beautiful song. It's one of those songs that makes it to Hollywood, but that you likely only recognize when you hear it. But many don't recognize the story behind it, one that plays out in a three-act opera titled "The Pearl Fishers"

and composed by the creator of the immortalized opera Carmen. One could watch the first act of the opera alone and leave satisfied, having heard the best the opera has to offer. [Georges Bizet's](#) gorgeous score as a whole, however, has plenty to recommend it, and a timeless romance filled with the overhanging threat of death makes watching it unfold a bittersweet experience.

San Jose Opera's production of the less-often performed opera testifies to the opera's strength as an individual work of art. Andrew Whitfield and Anthony Quartuccio, who take turns conducting, lead a flawless orchestra as best friends Zurga and Nadir are torn over the striking Leila, who has sworn to avoid temptation and love as she prays every day for the safety of the island's pearl fishers.

While the men who sang at Saturday night's performance (the opera is double cast) struggle with vocal support at times, Zachary Altman (Zurga) and James Callon (Nadir) deliver a chilling duet. Altman carries much of the production with his strong presence and incredible voice, while soprano Melody King clearly deserves to make it to the Metropolitan Opera stage some day. King, who sings the role of Leila, exhibits extraordinary control over her voice and glides over her difficult high notes.

The three leads are backed by one of the most spirited and well-acted choruses ever likely to be seen on a stage. And choreographer Lise La Cour adds extra action to the production with a group of talented dancers who seamlessly weave into [Charlie Smith's](#) stunningly designed island setting. San Jose's production also features wonderful, detailed costumes by Elizabeth Poindexter, a lovely lighting design by [Pamila Gray](#), and efficient stage direction by [Richard Harrell](#).

As always, San Jose Opera provides supertitles to make the French opera easy to follow, but audiences quickly get caught up in the absolute splendor of the production. The famous Pearl Fishers duet makes six minutes well spent, but the full two and half hour opera has many more treats in store, especially at San Jose Opera's notable interpretation, which plays through September 23 at the gorgeous California Theatre (which happens to have very comfortable seating and lobby organ music as pre-show entertainment).

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THE PEARL FISHERS

Through September 23

San Jose Opera

At the California Theatre in Downtown San Jose

www.operasj.org