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La Traviata at Opera San José



Rebecca Davis as famed courtesan Violetta in Opera San José's *La Traviata*. Photo: R. Shomler.

They had me at the overture. Under the reliable, sure direction of conductor **David Rohrbaugh** and the flawless playing of the opera orchestra, I heard it with fresh ears – the story arc with moments of gaiety, swells of passion and the foreboding minors of tragedy. Before it ended, the rising curtain revealed a breathtaking tableau, dimly seen, of a giant portrait of a beautiful woman far upstage and as the crepuscular light slowly lifted, Violetta stands fixed with her back to the audience as if contemplating the painting. And when **Rebecca Davis** sang her very first notes, commanding the stage with her voice and presence, a shiver of thrill went through me. We were in for a ride.

I thought because I knew the tale – a doomed courtesan dying of consumption sacrifices her one chance of love and happiness to protect her lover's family and his future respectability by turning him away, only to have him return at her dying moment filled with remorse – that I could stay aloof from the mounting power of the moments. But no, the intensity of the performances, the soaring music and theatrical spectacle inexorably drew me into the story and left me with wet eyes for the sad beauty of it all. Simply, Opera San José's production of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* is a triumph.

Rebecca Davis gives a bravura performance as the pleasure seeking Violetta who succumbs to the passionate love of an ardent young man. She sings with heartrending passion, her splendid technique supporting her soaring emotion. She is set like a solitaire diamond in a production superb in all ways.



Rebecca Davis as Violetta and Michael Dailey as Alfredo in Opera San José's *La traviata*. Photo: R. Shomler.

The company has surrounded Ms. Davis with fine singers, most notably tenor **Michael Dailey** who as her lover Alfredo, sings his passion with an ecstatic sweetness. They are well matched and utterly believable. Baritone **Evan Brummel** as Alfredo's stern father Giorgio softens with regretful compassion the harshness of his request that Violetta abandon Alfredo. And the opera chorus is sterling, shaking the rafters with their power.

The physical beauty of the production is world class. The unit set by **Erik Flatmo** consists of an off-center parquet platform with a compound rake and forced perspective walls that are richly dressed to suggest in turns Violetta's ballroom, a country house and her bedroom. **Chris Maravich's** lighting is exquisite – moody, yet unobtrusive. I especially appreciated the long, long second act cue that faded the light in miniscule, undetectable increments from day to twilight. Together with Elizabeth Pointdexter's sumptuous costumes, the production is a visual feast.

Director **José Maria Condemi**, whose brilliant hand was so evident in last year's *Barber of Seville*, wisely kept it simple for this story letting the action be natural and unforced. The director's gift for comedy grinned for fleeting moment when Alfredo sings of his domestic bliss while absent mindedly polishing his rifle; one more stroke of the cloth would have taken the audience over the edge into bawdy. Condemi creates one gorgeous picture after another. His staging of Violetta's dramatic end allows her domination of the stage to continue even in death.

This cast performs February 18, 21 and 26 while **Jouvanka Jean-Baptiste, Alexander Boyer** and **Torlef Borsting** lead the alternate cast on February 16, 19, and 24 at The California Theatre in Downtown San Jose.

Neil Simon's *Rumors* at Pintello Comedy Theater

A jam-packed opening night crowd gave Pintello Comedy Theater a giddy response to their raucous, hyper-