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The star in Opera San Jose's twin bill of Giacomo [Puccini](#)'s *Sour Angelica* and Gianni Schicchi was soprano Cecilia Violetta López. From her first phrases as Angelica, the heartbroken aristocratic young lady hidden in a convent after a love affair, her voice sounded warmer, deeper, more mournful than the supporting cast of bickering sisters. She contoured phrases with grace and passion that clearly set her apart as the main character. In this one-act opera it is especially important to do this with the voice as she gets no help from her costume-- almost the entire cast is dressed as nuns.

The only non-nun character was played by Patrice Houston, who delivered a powerful performance as Angelica's evil aunt, the

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Princess. Her magnificent mountain of a dress billowed in sickeningly lavish contrast to the nuns' simple habits. Her song was ice cold with rigid phrases and a steely timbre-- in striking contrast to López's pleading cries. The rest of the cast sang with lightness that conveyed charming innocence of a sheltered upbringing and pure piety. Puccini's sister in real life spent time as a nun because of the

family's dire financial situation. This subject was very close and real to him and it comes out in the music-- the compact opera delivers a deep emotional punch.

López was also magnificent as Laretta in Gianni Schicchi. Her O mio babbino caro was a show-stopper, setting the bar high for the entire opera. Supporting her was tenor Alexander Boyer as Rinuccio blending with Lopez in sweet harmony. The rest of the bubbly cast were rousing with their comical energy and swift mood swings-- giddy when they think their inheritance is at hand, and agonized when it is about to slip away. Again López played into the role of the girl apart from the fray-- the one character not in pursuit of worldly things and just singing about love. In the title role of Gianni Schicchi, baritone Zachry Altman, on stage with an enlarged plastic nose, led the cast with jovial spirit.

The set design by Charlie Smith featured a colonnade of slender white arches that doubled as both nunnery courtyard and bedchamber for the dying bequether. It worked as both-- amazing how a few wood panels and fancy drapery can totally transform a set from minimal stone courtyard to the home of a wealthy Florentine. The orchestra sounded stronger and more energetic than usual under maestro Joseph Marcheso, sometimes to the point of drowning out the weaker singers.

The production runs until April 28 and concludes Opera San Jose's 29th season. Next year's lineup includes best-selling repertoire favorites: Falstaff, Don Giovanni, Madama Butterfly, and Hansel & Gretel. (AGAIN)

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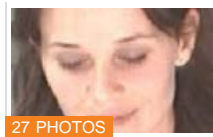


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Beeri Moalem is a freelance violist, violinist, and composer having performed around the world in ensembles varying from klezmer band, to string quartet to 100-member symphony orchestra. Visit his website at www.beeri.org

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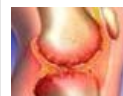
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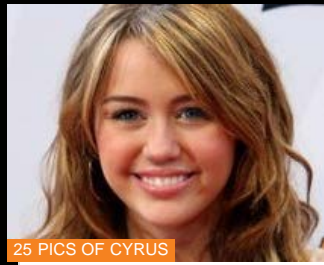
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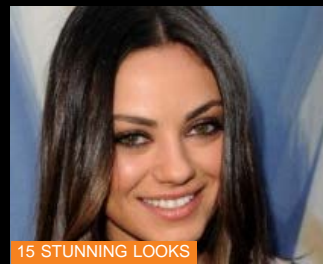
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