

“Rigoletto” at Opera San Jose

Notes by Paul Myrvold, Out ‘n’ About Magazine

September 7, 2014 at 1:10pm



Resident baritone Matthew Hanscom as Rigoletto and tenor Kirk Dougherty as the Duke of Mantua in in Opera San Jose's 2014-15 season opener Sept. 6-21. Photo: Pat Kirk

Ah, “Rigoletto”...surely one of the greatest, most evocative opera scores of all time. The story’s emotion and dramatic action – the anguish and hatred of the court jester Rigoletto as well as his jealous love for his sequestered daughter Gilda, the cruel nonchalance of the Duke of Mantua and his chorus of feckless courtiers, the amorality of the sinister assassin Sparafucile, as well as the swirling, climactic storm – are all there in the masterful score by Giuseppe Verdi. From the very first notes of the overture with its dramatic foreboding through to Rigoletto’s final searing *cri de coeur*, the music is heart clenching and under the nuanced direction of Opera San Jose’s musical director and principal conductor **Joseph Marcheso**, brilliantly, exquisitely subtle.



Resident baritone Matthew Hanscom as Rigoletto in Opera San Jose's 2014-15 season opener Sept. 6-21. Photo: Pat Kirk

In the title role, baritone **Matthew Hanscom** gives a masterful, titanic performance. He is powerful of voice and nimble in action. **Kirk Dougherty** as the Duke of Mantua, an erotomaniac who uses his power and charm to take what he wants from any woman and damned be he who challenges his authority, is suitably attractive and charismatic singing his role with a tenor's panache soaring and powerful when hitting the high notes, seductive and silky when wooing and gleeful in the famous demeaning aria "La Dona è Mobile" ("A Woman is Fickle"). Whether in solo, duet, trio or quartet, soprano **Isabella Ivy** shows great finesse and authority in the very demanding role of the innocent Gilda.



Resident tenor Kirk Dougherty as the Duke of Mantua and resident soprano Isabella Ivy as Gilda in Opera San Jose's 2014-15 season opener Sept. 6-21. Photo: Pat Kirk

Ever reliable in creating a character and displaying a voice of rich resonance, bass **Silas Elash** as Sparacifule wields his assassin's knife with coldblooded insouciance while his sister, the seductress Maddalena (**Lisa Chavez** in a gem of a performance), equals him in her callous disregard for human life. And the terrific male chorus sings (and moves) throughout with superb confidence and precision.

If there is a problem with "Rigoletto," there is no faulting this fine production. Rather it resides in the very structure of the piece and modern sensibilities. For example, the extended "addio" sequence at the end of Act I, scene ii is meant to be an endearing example of sudden passion and the reluctance of lovers to part. Actually, it is amusing for the wrong reasons. When after having stated the need to part quickly, the lovers engage in a rather extended series of "addios" that elicited a few chuckles from the opening night audience. And the final scene in which Rigoletto's plot to have the Duke killed goes awry and winds up with his daughter in a bag is famously absurd and the extended death scene undercuts the intended emotional response of the audience. Again, this is not to fault the production, which is excellent in so many, many ways.

The recording of "Rigoletto" starring Sherrill Milnes, Luciano Pavarotti and Joan Sutherland opened the world of opera to me more than forty years ago. I revere the score and the performers and thoroughly enjoyed Opera San Jose's production, the first opportunity I have had to experience it live on stage. "Rigoletto" is repeated September 11, 14, 19 and 21 at the California Theatre in Downtown San Jose.

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