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# Rigoletto – Opera San Jose delivers another classic

Rigoletto's so direct and so fast paced, it's as if the bel canto world of Bellini and Rosetti never happened.



**CY  
ASHLEY WEBB**

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## Rigoletto



4 out of 5 stars - 'Smashing'

Directed by Brad Dalton  
Conductor - Joseph Marcheso  
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Resident tenor Kirk Dougherty as the Duke of Mantua in Opera San Jose's 2014-15 season opener Sept. 6-21.

Leaving the opera, someone murmured incredulously, "this is San Jose?" Like it or not San Jose is to San Francisco as Worcester is to Boston. However, gems like Opera San Jose make such comparisons unseemly. A resident company that grooms young voices for international careers, **Opera San Jose** selects its material carefully, aligning it with their young voices as well as their venue, the California Theatre, a 1927 vaudeville and film house. Their season opener moves from strength to strength. With powerful singers in all key roles, it astounds and amazes.

Don't miss General Director Larry Hancock's pre-opera lecture. Talks by luminaries such as John Prescott and Scott Fogelsong aside, pre-concert talks are too often lame affairs. Hancock's wasn't. Corraling his listeners into a handful of rows in the back of the theatre, he stepped into the audience to lecture. While his unlikely positioning may have been a one off to accommodate people busy on the stage, his close proximity suggested a *Gemütlichkeit* inconceivable on anyone's opening night. Not only did his remarks about Verdi and Rigoletto work well for newbies and mavens alike, his comparisons about the challenges of staging Otello with Rigoletto would have been the drive work the effort.

*“Suffice to say that Opera San Jose negotiates such suspense that even those familiar with the story might entertain the notion of a different outcome.”*



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Opening night clearly belonged to Matthew Hanscom (Rigoletto), Kirk Dougherty (Duke of Mantua), and Isabella Ivy (Gilda). Hanscom dominated every scene he was in with a stamina that didn’t stop. Dougherty a smooth actor – so smooth that he almost even dupes the audience at moments as to whether he’s fallen for Gilda; Ivy’s mellifluous soprano gives Gilda a depth not always evident in other productions.

Edgy opening chords build anticipation as the curtain opens on a traditional staging of Rigoletto. All eyes are on the demonic-looking Rigoletto (Matthew Hanscom), costumed brightly as jester, as he wends his way through the richly costumed court of ladies in headdresses and courtiers in fall front breaches and great coats, deftly goosing courtiers and setting up their wives as the Duke of Mantua (Kirk Dougherty) opens with *Questo O Quella* (*Mid the Fair Throng*). Fast-paced and light, action flows easily between the Duke, Rigoletto, Ceprano (John Bischoff), Marullo (Daniel Cilli) and others. This cast maintains this buoyant sense the curse scene in which il Conte di Monterone (Evan Brummel) delivers “tu che un padre rida al delore” – a parent’s curse on you both – to the Duke and Rigoletto.

## Stage Lighting

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The action pauses briefly as the courtier scene ends and Rigoletto removes his makeup before going home. Stripped of his jester’s garb, we realize the magnitude of deformity to both body and mind. However, instead of lingering here, the scene operates as a palate chaser so you can better appreciate the exquisite duet between Rigoletto and his 16 year old daughter Gilda (Isabella Ivy), just recently home from the convent. Their voices intertwine and dance around each other a rare moment of unalloyed joy,

*Veglia O donna (Safely guard this tender blossom)*. However, such joy doesn’t make good opera. We quickly realize that Gilda is a caged bird and Rigoletto is the operatic equivalent of the monster mother, taking sustenance from his offspring, who turns to the Duke for sustenance.



Resident baritone Matthew Hanscom as Rigoletto and tenor Kirk Dougherty as the Duke of Mantua.

However lithe and supple, the exchange between Gilda and Rigoletto is just a warm up for

## Glinda’s Bubble (Video)

BACKSTAGE



BTS: ‘Wicked’ at Broadway San Jose (Outtakes)



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## SEPTEMBER

1 - 20 SEP  
AUG BATS’ SUMMER IMPROV FESTIVAL  
Bayfront Theater  
Event Type : Theater and Live Performances

10 - 14 SEP C2SV TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE + MUSIC FESTIVAL  
Event Type : Music Silicon Valley

12 SEP AN AUDIENCE WITH MEOW MEOW  
A NEW MUSICAL PLAY  
Berkeley Repertory Theatre  
Event Type : Theater and Live Performances

## OCTOBER

No Events

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Isabella Ivy. The Duke had been eavesdropping – and quickly enters to profess his love just as soon as Rigoletto exits. Here the real operatic fireworks begin. Gilda’s clearly been in the convent too long as she fails to see the Duke for the smooth operator that he is. All her pent up energy is released in a splendid showcase of Ivy’s operatic pyrotechnics. Gilda is not an easy role – and Ivy brings it the depth it merits. This duet ends quickly though, when Gilda is kidnapped by courtiers who have blindfolded and masked her Rigoletto to aid in the kidnap. The kidnappers flee – leaving Rigoletto to realize what he has done.

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And that’s *just* the first act... This isn’t an opera that you dip in and out of. You’re there for the duration. This Rigoletto’s so direct and so fast paced, it’s as if the *bel canto* world of Bellini and Rosetti never happened. Opera San Jose’s traditional staging reminds you just how different Verdi was from his predecessors - something not contemplated by Michael Mayer’s 2012 staging of Rigoletto in Vegas, with the Duke of Mantua as a casino owner.

The remaining two acts are equally strong – and if you’re unfamiliar with the plot, I’ll avoid being the spoiler. Suffice to say that Opera San Jose negotiates such suspense that even those familiar with the story might entertain the notion of a different outcome. Part of this is due to conductor Joseph Marcheso, who came to the podium after David Rohrbach’s retirement. Marcheso’s hardly a stranger to Opera San Jose, having worked extensively with them in the past. However, if this Rigoletto is his first opera as musical director and principal conductor, it’s hard to imagine anyone else in that role.

The only catch with this performance is that it won’t be around long. *Rigoletto* closes on September 22nd.

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Photo Credit: Pat Kirk



**CY ASHLEY WEBB**

Cy spent the ‘80’s as a bench scientist, the tech boom doing intellectual property law, and the first decade of the millennium, aspiring to be the world’s oldest grad student at Stanford where she is interested in political martyrdom. Presently, she enjoys writing for Stark Insider and the SF Examiner, hanging out at Palo Alto Children’s Theatre, and participating in various political activities. Democracy is not a spectator sport! Cy is a SFBATCC member.

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