

'Carmen' heats up in love/hate scenes

Bizet's opera "Carmen" is a toned-down version of Prosper Merimee's violent story about a captivating gypsy woman who submitted to no laws other than her own momentary desires.

But the more lurid account easily makes its way into the opera's interpretation and is the source of continued fascination for this opera, a favorite since its 1875 premiere.

In Michigan Opera Theatre's latest production of "Carmen" at Masonic Temple this week, the heroine doesn't carve up lover Don Jose's face. But, Roman Terlecky's direction puts all that gypsy realism of the original story in a romantic and appealing setting, making the Seville



Mary Jane Doerr

cigarette factory much more steamy than usual.

The show is a lighted stick of dynamite. It explodes in Act IV with a friction-filled death scene between Humana mezzo-soprano Cleopatra Ciurca (Carmen) and Hungarian tenor Peter Kelen (Don Jose).

THE HATE SCENES between

these two surpass ordinary intensity. Ciurca has power to spare in her silky mezzo voice and turns up the volume in each of the opera's four acts. Kelen comes alive in the love-hate scenes, especially when he is the soloist.

Kelen spares his voice during his duets with Ciurca and soprano Stephanie Friede (Micaela) to grand-

stand held-over notes (for audience effect) in his truly fine delivery of the "Flower" Aria and in his last act confrontation.

Few tenors are ever out-sung by Micaela, but Stephanie Friede was unflappable. She made Kelen appear substantial in the normally entrancing duet "Ma mere, je la vois." Her "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante" is the show stopper.

Ciurca has moments where she is matchless — the card scene, "Ev vains pour eviler," and in the well-staged quintet, "Nous avons en tête," (where David Jackson as the gypsy Dancalro scores again in another acting triumph). Vocally Ciurca's "Habenera" and her "Siquidilla" are wonderful.

When not in specially orchestrated scenes, Ciurca resorted to boring hand-on-hip postures which could have been improved with better stage direction.

Credit for bringing Spanish authenticity to the production goes to Maria del Carmen, well-known area Spanish dancer and choreographer. In Act II, her castanet rhythms heightened the action. In the beginning of Act IV, she and two members of her Grupo Espana interpreted the conflict of the three lovers.

The credit for carrying the gypsy song, "Les Tringles des sistres," goes to Jerilyn Reford, soprano. Roberto Gomez, Barbara Youngerman, Stephen Bryant, and Tyrone Jolivet also had strong deliveries.

L'OPERA DE MONTREAL'S sets and costumes functioned well on the Masonic Temple stage. In Act IV, everything came to life with a moving bull ring and brightly acquired beaded costumes.

Suzanne Acton's chorus clearly enunciated French words and had strong vocal harmony, but struggled all evening with the orchestra's timing, especially in the final ballroom scene. The orchestra sounded unusually fine under conductor Joseph Rescigno.

The love triangle in "Carmen" never centers on Escamillo in most "Carmen" productions, but Mark Delavan rendered an alluring Toreador who could have captured Carmen's affections. Knowing Carmen, that isn't possible.

Herbig conducts truly outstanding program

The latest Detroit Symphony Orchestra program, under music director Gunther Herbig, demonstrated that some rare music can be sublime. The rare masterpieces were Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos, K.365 and the Symphony No. 10 by Shostakovich. The overture to Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" served as a light introduction to this universe of rich musical content.

Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos has been recorded many times, but a live performance of this remarkable work is hard to come by. This is true, of course, for any work that requires multiple solo roles and the scarce supply of outstanding duo-pianists makes the task of scheduling such a performance even harder. French sisters Katia and Marielle Labèque are highly acclaimed duo-pianists.

Mozart's concerto is probably the most substantial work of its kind, surpassing significantly Men-



Avigdor Zoromp

delascho's Concerto in A flat major, which was the scheduled choice on a few previous occasions.

Few events can match the reward of hearing this inspired Mozart concerto performed by such a gifted and outstanding duo. One important characteristic that distinguishes the Labèques from many other pian-duo teams is that they are capable of providing twice the refinement of a single pianist, without multiplying the noise level.

This quality was evident in the opening trill both pianos, which

sounded well-rounded and coordinated as if played by one person. Meticulously shaped phrases were the rule in this inspired performance. The keen perception and understanding of Mozart's style was evident in this approach, which avoided the 19th century grander and more voluminous sound in spite of many temptations to do so. In some places, though, I wish there had been some sparkle in the approach.

MAESTRO HERBIG is frequently accused of choosing a repertoire re-

stricted almost exclusively to German music. The Shostakovich 10th symphony was one example of his capability with a different repertoire.

Shostakovich, considered to be one of the 20th century's greatest symphonists, put treasures into most of his 15 symphonies. The 10th was written shortly before Stalin's death in 1953 and reflects the greater artistic freedom allowed following Sta-

lin's reign of terror.

The Scherzo of the second movement, which develops into a mad, daring orchestral storm, is a musical portrait of Stalin, according to the composer's memoirs. Subsequent movements feature the four-note theme that in German notation stands for the composer's initials, D S C H.

This monumental work, with many instrumental solos, will move

the audience if played with conviction.

Herbig brought out the inner themes and even the most complex portions came through with clarity and discipline. He brought direction to the music without stifling its spirit.

Many DSO programs can be described as highly competent. This is one of the few that was definitely outstanding.

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