



Review: Washington National Opera Presents Verdi's 'Don Carlo' at the Kennedy Center

by David Friscic on March 5, 2018

"Peace and transcendence can only be found in death" seems to be the eternal thread that runs through Verdi's operatic masterpiece, **Don Carlo**. Presented by the Washington National Opera, the gloom and doom of this libretto is sustained throughout by Verdi's masterful music and Tim Albery's sensitively controlled direction.



Quinn Kelsey and Eric Owens in Don Carlo. Photo by Scott Suchman.

The pace of the production is stately and measured as befits such somber subject matter. The theme of romantic love being thwarted by oppression and fatalism and the theme of love being crushed by the cruelty of the Inquisition run dramatically throughout the opera.

Conductor Philippe Auguin conducts with evocative control that transitions into fiery crescendos with ease, and the Washington National Opera Orchestra performs with stellar instrumental synergy under

Auguin's direction. The Libretto by Joseph Mery and Camille du Locle is hauntingly poetic and often says that only heaven and the afterlife can bring joy and peace to mortal beings.

Tenor Russell Thomas as Don Carlo has a powerful yet natural stage presence. Mr. Thomas particularly shines in his aria in the opening scene when he sings of his love for Elisabeth. Mr. Thomas' beautiful tenor tones also soar in the wonderful duet of camaraderie that he sings with his friend Roderigo, Marquis of Posa (Duet: "Dieu, tu semas dans nos ames/Dio, che nell'alma infondere"). Mr. Thomas' duet with Elisabeth as he longs to meet her again in Heaven shines with transcendence (Duet: "Au revoir dans un monde ou la vie est meilleure"/ "Ma lassu ci vedremo in un mondo migliore") .

As Elisabeth of Valois, Soprano Leah Crocetto superbly portrays a woman torn between true love for someone she can never have and submission to her powerful royal husband. Ms. Crocetto's gorgeous soprano is sweetly comforting in the aria she sings to her departing lady-in-waiting (Aria: "Oh ma chere compagne"/ "Non pianger, mia compagna").



Leah Crocetto in Don Carlo. Photo by Scott Suchman

A highlight of Ms. Crocetto's singing was her sorrowful aria of despair as she kneels before the tomb of Charles V (Aria: "Toi qui sus le neant"/ "Tu che le vanita").

As Philip II, King of Spain, Bass-Baritone Eric Owens strikes a commanding tone throughout the proceedings. His deep vocal resonance was thrilling to listen to. Owens shines most particularly when he laments that Elisabeth has never loved him and that he will truly be at peace in the tomb (Aria: "Elle me m'aime pas"/ "Ella giammai m'amo").

The fiery Princess Eboli is portrayed with appropriate tempestuousness and sly humor by Mezzo-Soprano Jamie Barton. Ms. Barton's resonant deeper tones transitioned easily and swiftly into a thrilling and shimmering upper-register.

Ms. Barton's aria after she confesses her sins to her Queen and curses her beauty and pride (Aria: "O don fatale"/ "O don fatale") was an act of operatic vocal mastery that left the audience **enthralled and mesmerized by her sheer artistic brilliance**. **During this aria, Ms. Barton made fluid transitions from one mood to another with a panoply of interpretation that was nothing short of breathtaking.**

As **Rodrigo, Marquis of Posa, Baritone Quinn Kelsey** possessed a velvety smooth voice that was natural and a delight to hear throughout all of his scenes. Especially beautiful to the ear was his aria upon dying (Aria: part two: "Ah, je meurs, l'ame joyeuse"/ "Io morro, ma lietto in core"). Bass **Andrea Silvestrelli** created an imposing and unforgiving Grand Inquisitor. Mr. Silvestrelli's scenes admonishing King Philip are particularly imposing.

The scenic design by **Andrew Lieberman** is intriguingly functional, yet manages to be atmospheric and of the historical period presented. A raked stage highlights the action and a series of geometrically patterned windows adds depth to the stage. Lighting design by **Thomas C. Hase** was highly dramatic and atmospheric in effect. Another interesting touch was Costume Designer **Constance Hoffman's** striking use of blacks, light browns, and greys. The **Washington National Opera Chorus** under the direction of **Steven Gathman** performed beautifully.

The **Washington National Opera** has presented a production of **Don Carlo** full of the sorrows that signify the human condition.

Running Time: Three Hours and 15 minutes, including one 25-minute intermission.

Washington National Opera: Verdi's Don Carlo plays through Saturday, March 17, 2018, at the Kennedy Center – 2700 F Street, NW, in Washington, DC. For tickets, call (202) 467-4600, or purchase them [online](#).