

'La Traviata' tried and true — and touching

Opera Review



Violetta (Aline Kutan) and Alfredo (Eric Fennell) declare their love for each other in the Green Mountain Opera production of "La Traviata."

Photo by Michael Slobodian

By **Jim Lowe** Staff Writer - Published: June 22, 2008

BARRE — Grand opera takes on a decidedly different flavor when presented in an intimate theater such as the 600-seat Barre Opera House. Green Mountain Opera's production of Verdi's "La Traviata," which opened Friday, took on an intimacy that brought its powerful story and music right into the audience's lap. (There may be a few tickets remaining for this afternoon's final performance.)

The Waitsfield-based Green Mountain Opera Festival, now in its third year, brings together international soloists, as well as young professionals, which are combined with a local professional orchestra and community chorus, to perform a major opera production each June. It's not a visiting company, but Vermont's own regional opera company.

"La Traviata" is Verdi's beautiful tear-jerker about Violetta, a 19th century Paris courtesan who finally finds true love with a younger man, Alfredo, only to have it ripped apart by his father, Germont, who wishes to save the family name. Its tried-and-true repertoire and Friday's heart-wrenching performance hit the mark.

Montreal soprano Aline Kutan, in her first time in the role of Violetta, delivered a brilliant, sensitive performance. Although she sang beautifully and accurately with a pure voice, in the first act she seemed miscast, too young and innocent-sounding. But her performance in the second act took on real depth. The quiet moments were particularly powerful, tearing at the heart-strings, as she finds that she must leave her newfound love.

That scene took on even more power with the intense, sensitive performance of Canadian baritone Theodore Baerg as Germont. Baerg, whose voice is deep, rich and pliable, was convincing as the man who arrives condemning a woman only to find that he really cares for her.

Alfredo was sung by American tenor Eric Fennell who, though with a smaller top to his voice than the other two principals, delivered a sensitive performance. In a supporting role, soprano Erica Miller as Violetta's maid Annina Supporting gave a strong performance; other supporting roles were not so strong.

Francis Graffeo, former director of the Knoxville (Tenn.) and Eugene (Ore.) operas, led the able orchestra in a sensitive accompaniment. In the first act, the violins had some fuzzy intonation in the unison passages, and the entire production, directed by Opera North's Ron Luchsinger, was a bit stiff. However, everything took off in the second act, and the finale was delivered in all its devastating beauty.

The chorus, directed by Tim Tavcar, save for a few rough moments, was just fine. Choreography, including a delightful quartet of young local dancers, was directed by Carla Cordero Wuthrich of the Vermont Ballet Theater School.

Physically the production was most attractive, set in post World War II. The minimal set implied all the appropriate elegance, with excellent costumes by the Opéra de Montréal's Anne-Seguin Poirier and lighting by Julie Duro. Green Mountain Opera's production was completely traditional, but that made the music and the story be the stars — as it should be.