

ARTS

Carmen brutally slain

Carmen
Edmonton Opera Association
Jubilee Auditorium

review by Peter West

I enjoy operas, especially by Bizet, and I was looking forward to *Carmen*. It's been repeatedly advertised and we've been led to expect that it was going to be something special.

And so it was. It was the most disappointing night of opera I've suffered in the last three years. It was vocally unexciting, dramatically weak, and dragged on tediously almost till midnight, by which time a considerable proportion of the audience had already left. I stood at the Main Entrance, watching them leaving in droves at the end of Act III. What was so wrong with *Carmen* that it made so many abandon their expensive seats?

Joy Davidson, we were told, has sung the role more than two hundred times. That's just how she came across on Thursday night. She is supposed to excite - to tease - to infuriate - I only found her dull and totally lacking in charisma. No doubt I was spoiled by seeing a Canadian, Huguette Tourangeau, sing the same role in the Sydney Opera House a few years ago. I don't know what was wrong with Joy Davidson, but at times - notably in the famous phrases "L'amour - L'amour" - I couldn't even hear her.

Other members of the audience that I spoke to had the same reaction. It didn't help when overexcited members of the chorus stood in front of her while she was singing.

The second drawback of Thursday night's performance was Jon Fredric West's Don Jose. The role is demanding both dramatically and vocally. It was sung adequately, but not until the last act did we get any sense of the hopelessness and bitterness that drives Don Jose to kill Carmen. Again, this was a role that left its audience disappointed.

No performance can succeed when its two principals are so ineffectual. Michele Boucher performed creditably in the dramatically difficult role of Micaela, and captured attention with the power of a fine

soprano voice. But of the major roles, only Boris Martinovich's Escamillo really seized one's attention. "The Toreador Song" is meant as a tour-de-force: it must excite attention and make the audience crane its neck if it is to work at all. The role is short but demanding, and Boris Martinovich filled it very well.

Some of the best work was done in the ensembles and, occasionally by the chorus. The smugglers all sang and acted exceptionally, making the Second Act lively, the Third excellent in parts. Katharina Megli's Mercedes was superb: why wasn't she allowed to sing Carmen, as she has done elsewhere? Iris Marie Fraser's Frasquita was also excellent: *this* was a voice that thrilled me, and one that I hope to hear again. Lary Benson and Ross Thompson, as smugglers, were enjoyable to watch and to listen to. Duncan Paterson and the other members of the boys' chorus sang and acted energetically, and a final word of praise must be given to the orchestra: the entr'actes were played ravishingly, and other work was almost flawless. The fine work here stood out in what was otherwise a dull and tedious production.

So the EOA has done what seemed impossible: it has managed to make a mess of *Carmen*. The best thing that could happen to this production would be to replace the two principals with people who are adequate in the roles. Next time, EOA, try and find a hero and heroine who look as if they might conceivably fall in love. The love scenes were embarrassingly awful: tubby men do not look sexy in tight black pants, and the scene in which Don Jose lay astride Carmen was gross in the extreme.

Second, try and find people who can sing more powerfully. Of the major roles, only Micaela and Escamillo came anywhere near expectations.

Third, clear the stage of all the donkeys, horses, carts and other paraphernalia; they don't make up for indifferent singing, and the cup that was knocked off the table in Act II lay at Don Jose's feet for ages before he kicked it away. Finally, don't give us great expectations of an opera when you can't guarantee a great performance.



Photo: Ray Giguere

The Nylons, singing in the tenement prior to hitting the big time.

A capella con brio

The Nylons
SUB Theatre

review by Geoffrey Jackson

I went to see the Nylons last Friday night expecting to see a group of singers do some old songs. I was very pleasantly surprised by the polished and entertaining show they put on. The Nylons are not just some white clones of the Platters, they are fine performers of musical theatre.

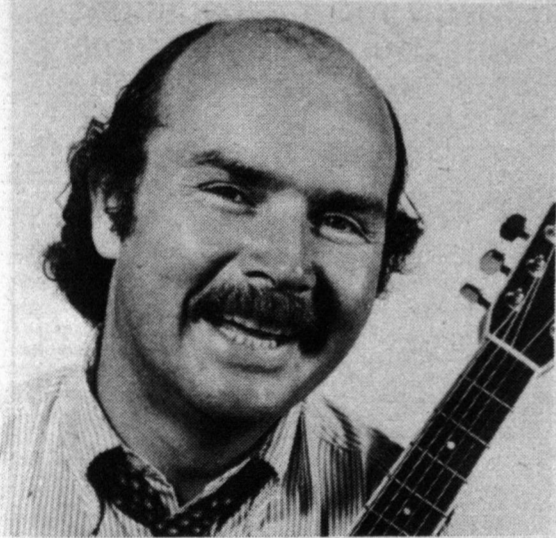
Instead of just running through the old favourites they turned each number into a story. The fine production of the show accented this effect. The first half of the show was done on a set depicting rundown storefronts and grimy tenements. This suggested their humble beginnings. The second half of the show moved to a glossy high-tech set depicting a futuristic skyline. The connection to their better fortunes was obvious.

The point here is that the Nylons come across more like four quality performers acting the part of rags to riches singing stars. Everything they do is filled with a highspirited sense of camp, camp at its best. They never take themselves too seriously. At one point they even went so far as to do a boogie version of "Flight of the Bumblebee" while wearing ridiculous bee costumes.

Musically the show was fine. These men have obviously put a lot of dedicated work into the songs. The singing is full voiced and confident, the pitch it always dead on, and the entries and cutoffs sharp and clean. Their material was an entertaining mixture of old and new, with a strong accent on nostalgia. They did an especially fine job on *Love Potion Number Nine*.

I happened to be sitting behind the sound mixer for the show so I had a closeup view of another area where the Nylons have put well-spent effort. The sound was meticulously done. Their sound man was constantly adding echo and taking it away, adjusting the balance for every number. Considering how monotonous a *capella* voices can become, it was surprising how much variety of sound they were able to obtain.

The audience loved them, giving them a well-deserved standing ovation. It was an evening of grand musical theatre. I think that the natural progression for the Nylons would be to move to even more drama in their shows. Perhaps they should even consider some sort of musical revue in the Broadway style. They certainly have the style and panache to pull off that sort of material.



Tom Paxton, before BFA...



...and after

Up and Coming

GALLERIES
BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) Exhibition; SUB Art Gallery, Thursday April 1 to April 19; Admission free.

See this exhibit and judge for yourself if these budding artists really deserve to get their degrees.

MUSIC
Tom Paxton; SUB Theatre; Saturday April 3; 8:00 p.m.; tickets at SUB and Mike's.

A veteran folkie who has been around at least as long as Bob Zimmerman. I only heard one song of his set last year at the Edmonton Folk Festival - a nifty, topical number about the Abscam scandal or something, which had the audience lathered up in no time flat - so I'll

cautiously wager that the concert will be a good one.

St. Cecilia Orchestra with Fordyce Pier, Trumpet Soloist; Convocation Hall; 8:00 p.m.; admission free.

The program includes *Concertino for Trumpet, Piano and String Orchestra* by Andre Jolivet, Brahms' *Tragic Overture*, Sibelius' *Finlandia*, and a suite from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*.

READINGS AND SPEAKERS

John Pass; Humanities AVL-3; Thursday April 1; 12:30 Noon; free admission.

The press release says Pass is "one of the most accomplished lyric poets of his generation." It seems to me I have been reading praise like this all year in the flak sheets. Do we really have that many artistic geni in our world today? I doubt it, although for all I know Pass may be one of the few.

Oh, yes: the press release also contains the *de rigueur* typo - "subtly" spelled "subtley."
J. A.

SELECTION

THANK YOU

TO ALL MY

POLL STAFF

for a job well done. Thanks to all of you who offered your services but were not needed.

David Tharle
Chief Returning Officer

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