

Carmen: Bizet's tour de force at Dallas Opera

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Good things come to those who wait, the saying goes.

So it was at Sunday's performance of The Dallas Opera's "Carmen," one of the world's most popular operas.

It took a while for Georges Bizet's story of a gypsy girl ruled by her fickle heart to get rolling, but once it did, sparks, music and voices flew through the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House.



Dynamic French mezzo-soprano Clémentine Margaine is making her American debut in a role she will surely sing for a long time to come, but her first-act aria, "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle," most commonly known as "Habanera," lacked the lust normally associated with the overt seduction of hapless soldier Don José, sung beautifully by tenor Brandon Jovanovich. (Portuguese tenor Bruno Ribeiro will take over for the November performances.)

While the vocals were spot on, the chemistry between the gypsy rebel and her latest conquest didn't ignite until the end of Act II, when Don José's jealousy begins to flare. Imprisoned for a month for letting Carmen escape, he finds her in a tavern with her friends, plotting a crime.

He knows he shouldn't desert the army, but he has no choice after attacking his lieutenant who makes the mistake of flirting with Carmen.

Jovanovich, a tall, commanding figure on stage, shows incredible tenderness for his ailing mother and Micaela, the girl he left behind, but he cannot control the passion he feels for Carmen, and his angry reactions to her brash behavior foreshadow the coming danger.

By Act III, the couple is in trouble. The flush of new love is waning in Carmen. She advises her soldier to return home to his mother. And, her pretty head has been turned by a dashing bullfighter, Escamillo (sung by Dwayne Croft), who makes a brief but impressive appearance in Act II to a rousing Toreador Song ("Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre"), one of the opera's most popular arias.

Micaela, a role sung beautifully by soprano Mary Dunleavy, searches for the pair in the mountains, vowing not to be cowed by the woman who stole her one true love.

