

Italian Girl in Algiers: The perfect goodbye

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
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It ended the way it began.

In 1957, the Dallas Civic Opera's first production at State Fair Music Hall was Gioachino Rossini's *Italian Girl in Algiers*. Guilietta Simionato starred. Franco Zeffirelli made his American directorial debut in the lavish production.

This week, the Dallas Opera ends its long relationship with the music hall with a vibrant, boisterous rendition of the Rossini comedy. Next season, the company will be in their beautiful new home, the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House in the downtown arts district.

For me, it was the perfect way to say goodbye. There wasn't a bad note in Sunday's matinee. There was no nashing of the teeth, protracted death scenes or maudlin music. The sets and costumes were as bright and colorful as the singers and the orchestra. It was full of all the happiness and all the great spectacle music lovers expect in good comedic opera.

The plot of *Italian Girl in Algiers* doesn't matter much, other than to drive the comedic hijinks and provide a backdrop for some pretty spectacular slapstick. Egotistic Algerian ruler Mustafa tosses his loyal wife, Elvira, aside and orders up an Italian girl to fan his passions. He gives Elvira to Lindoro, an Italian slave, who pines for Isabella, his lost love. Isabella comes to Algiers in search of Lindoro, only to crash her bi-plane on the beach, bringing Taddeo, a stow-a-way suitor who refuses to believe she loves only Lindoro. The two are quickly captured by Mustafa's soldiers.

The confusion caused by Isabella and Taddeo's arrival in Mustafa's court is worthy of a scene or two in a Keystone Cops movie.

At the end of Act One, everyone is confused, singing at the top of their lungs. The zippy pace of the score was handled brilliantly by both singers and Maestro Graeme Jenkins. In fact, the Dallas Opera orchestra has rarely sounded better.

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In most productions, at least one person is miscast, a weak link if you will. Not so in this show. Everyone played – and sang – their parts to perfection. They made it look like so much fun, I forgot how hard they were working.

There are two more chances to see *Italian Girl* – Wednesday and Saturday evening at 7:30. Tickets range from \$15 to \$199. Call 214-443-1000 or visit their website at: www.dallasopera.org.

While saying goodbye is never easy, the Dallas Opera went out in style, head held high, laughing and with no regrets. It was a glorious and fond farewell.