

September 20, 2021

Lyric Theatre

“Master Class”

Terrence McNally, author

Michael Baron, Director

Jan McDaniel, Musical Director

Review by Franci Hart, OKC Friday

Natalie Cordone energetic portrayal of Maria Callas in Lyric’s Tony and Drama Desk Award winning “Master Class” was masterful. With so much of the drama in soliloquy, expressing Callas’ opinions about art, Cordone had the audience entranced, eagerly awaiting her next revelation.

“Master Class” is set in the 1970’s towards the end of the great Callas’ career. She is giving a master class at Julliard and the audience plays the students. Manny (Jan McDaniel) is the ever patient accompanist, obviously used to dealing with explosive, artistic personalities. The bored and not too helpful stage hand is played by Josiah Brooks who manages to convey a myriad of emotions with little or no lines. The students, Sophie (Jennie Rupp), Sharon (Macy Trussell) and Anthony (Christopher Richie) sing or try to sing arias from Bellini, Verdi and Puccini. Sophie only gets one note out before being stopped. Sharon runs off the stage sick to her stomach and Anthony actually challenges Callas. Rupp, Trussell and Richie, when Callas finally allows them, sing beautifully.

But “Master Class” is not an opera or even about opera. It is about art, what it takes to be a great performer and about Callas. It is funny. It is rude. And, it is, most of all, entertaining. Callas, as she is instructing the students, drops hints of her difficult childhood and what it was like to be unattractive and fat. Through beautifully staged flashbacks, Callas’ relationship with Aristotle Onassis, her family and first husband are revealed. In these flashbacks Cordone displays her virtuosity and skill, playing each character that Callas is reminiscing about.

Cordone’s Callas is egotistical, rude, bullying and charming. Cordone makes a really unlikeable stage personality likeable.

“Master Class” will run at Myriad Garden’s Water stage through October 3. It is highly recommended.