

## L. A. Opera

Rossini's *The Turk In Italy*

By Robert F. Adams / Special to CASA

**O**N SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH, L.A. Opera premiered a new production of the comic opera *Il Turco in Italia* at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Signifying the Italian *Bel Canto* repertoire, this opera was written and first performed at Milan's *Teatro alla Scala* in August of 1814. Ignored until the 1950s, when Maria Callas helped resurrect its reputation, this opera has been growing in popularity. In this latest version, LA Opera has put together a magical evening of theatre, possibly becoming the highlight of the current season.

For starters, the cast is fashionably dressed in costumes that echo Hollywood from the 1940s as well as Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. The action takes place by the Naples sea-side. Various colorful monolithic sets were wildly inventive and included a classic travel-trailer, Moorish architectural elements, and festive overhead lighting. This production had visual panache including an

endless stream of beach-loving gypsies, buff stagehands, and men outfitted in tuxedos, striking poses in various suggestive tableau

in the background. The work by the costume and set designer Herbert Maurauer collaborating with the director Alex Weidauer were constantly amusing.

This is a comedy of fallible human relationships in the tradition of the drama buffo rife with complications, mistaken identities, and jealous lovers. An unmistakable threat of human dysfunction lurked just below the surface throughout. The work suggested a Pirandellian "play within a play" approach and

featured an interesting character, the poet Prosdocimo, convincingly portrayed by Thomas Allen, who comically influenced the action of the characters, sometimes ineptly.

The Georgian soprano, Nino Machaidze, a rising star in European opera houses,

portrayed the lusty Fiorilla, and she delivered an assured performance. This is a woman who seeks the ability to define her life course, especially in matters romantic and social, which suggested a contemporary heroine. The arias are stylized and Ms. Machaidze was able to attain the challenging vocal gymnastics including several rapid-fire arias.

The other lead singers were also adept at meeting Rossini's demands and were fully complemented by the orchestra and large chorus. Maestro James Conlon conducted with an energetic pace, a master of musical precision on opening night. Popular with the audience, the torrential rain just outside the theatre was completely forgotten with the enchanting work presented. *Il Turco in Italia* was well worth the trip to see this rarely performed work from one of opera's great masters.

There are additional performances through March 13th, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles. For tickets, call (213) 972-8001 or visit [www.laopera.com](http://www.laopera.com).



Nino Machaidze as Fiorilla

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