




La Traviata, Upstairs at Gatehouse - review

Kireon Quirke

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Here's a repertoire standard relocated and sexed up for a modern, Basque-obsessed audience. Such concepts are pretty much par for the course on the surgent Opera Fringe but Kit Hesketh-Harvey's production backs it all up with great music, a heck of a lot of verve and a riveting central performance.

La Traviata (goes the spiel) is a burlesque club above a bar in east London where Alfredo falls for Violetta, the stripper with a brain tumour. The club is meant to be seedy but rough-and-ready opera singers are hard to find, so it's more like a saucy fancy-dress night in Fulham. No matter - there's a sense of fun abroad, the set is basic but pretty, and the chorus of cabaret performers, while ragged at times, deliver vim aplenty. The [house band](#) is superb. The score shimmers still, though reduced for the clarinet quintet by MD Stephen Hose, and come the interludes the string players revel in their solos. But the stand-out is Violetta, as it should be.

Anna Jeruc-Kopec is a Polish soprano and has the vowels to prove it. Hesketh-Harvey's English translation departs her mouth mangled but Verdi's notes come with a coquettishness and vulnerability that goes straight to the senses. They're beautifully controlled too, her first act tour de force explosive, yet not too large for this box of a theatre.

Other performances are rougher but decent. Joe Morgan's Alfredo has an endearing boyish charm and his singing improves throughout. He's almost matching his lover by the time she dies. The only disappointment last night was the audience - surprisingly subdued for a press performance.

Highgate should be more grateful: this is top stuff.

Until March 3 (upstairsatthegatehouse.com)

La Traviata
Upstairs at The Gatehouse
The Gatehouse
Highgate
N6 4BD

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