

February 15 Vallejo A&E Source: Soprano makes Verismo debut in ‘Tosca’



Larissa Lorenz makes her Verismo Opera in Vallejo debut in Puccini’s ‘Tosca.’ CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

By [Richard Freedman](#), Vallejo Times-Herald

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No doubt Larissa Lorenz is thrilled to grab the lead role in Puccini’s “Tosca,” presented this Thursday through April 1 by the Verismo Opera Company in Vallejo.

But the North Bay soprano has managed to carve another niche or two along the way — performing for the grade-school young and the senior residents home old.

“I essentially started cold-calling every retirement community I could find, asking if they had a piano and if they’re open to an opera performer,” Lorenz said by phone.

As it turns out, there was a need.

“It’s been wonderful and rewarding,” she said.

Eventually, continued Lorenz, “I had the idea to do some outreach to kids. They’re going to be our audience members (some day). So same thing ... I did cold calling, reaching around in the dark to see if anyone would be interested.”

Though the schools have been a challenge with budget limitations, Lorenz has found it rewarding “just trying to do outreach to kindergarten to fifth grade, trying to find light-hearted pieces.”

Lorenz interacts with the young audience, asking questions about the piece she performs.

“A lot of times, these kids are spot on,” she said. “They really grasp how fun it was to listen to the music and not only grasp what’s going on, they get involved.”

Lorenz just might be the only professional opera singer raised in Pollock Pines, about 15 miles east of Placerville.

“It was a blessing to grow up in the middle of nature,” she said. “But as I got progressively older in my early 20s, I made the decision that I had to go to the Bay Area because there wasn’t any proper opportunity as far as local (opera) training.”

Apparently, a wise move. In 2013, Lorenz was awarded a scholarship from the North Bay Italian Cultural Foundation and in 2015 she placed second in the NATS Redwood Empire Chapter competition. She frequently performs with Goat Hall Productions, San Francisco’s Opera on Tap, Pocket Opera Company, The North Bay Stage Company, East Bay Musical Chairs, the Jarvis Conservatory, and recently performed in the world premier of composer Richard Evans’ “Ireland’s Poet-Patriots” at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

“I always knew from a very young age” this was her destiny, Lorenz said. “I knew I was passionate about singing and opera.”

Not that her choice was always obvious.

“For a while, I felt very lost and isolated,” Lorenz said.

Eventually, she realized that “if you’re going to chose something you’re passionate about and end up doing it the rest of your life, why not opera? I love opera. So I made the decision to jump into it feet first. It was a very naive choice. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. Being naive and the courage of youth got me through it and gave me strength to continue. I learned about the career and how hard it was.”

Basically, “I fell in love with the performing, the singing, the learning and became passionate about outreach along the way and sharing it with others,” Lorenz said.

Sometimes, she has to educate the public on the misconceptions about opera.

“It’s funny. Some people think opera is ‘park and bark.’ Someone comes out in the middle of the stage, stands there and sings. And that it (opera) isn’t interesting,” Lorenz said. “I say it’s quite the opposite. Past and present composers write these incredible stories told through music and the voice. I feel opera can awaken all these emotions out of the audience and really get them invested in the entire story. You get whisked away by the music.”

As Floria Tosca — Lorenz handles the multi-cast role March 3, 18 and 25 — there’s love, lust, jealousy, deception, torture, murder and suicide. Just another day at the office.

“People can relate to the story,” said Lorenz, figuring her pre-show ritual at the Mira Cultural Community Center’s Bay Terrace Theatre will be her standard preparation.

“Right before I go on, I like to have a moment to myself,” she said. “It’s almost like a meditation. I sit there and reaffirm all the hard work that’s been put into learning the role. I like to remind myself, ‘When you step on stage, you’re no longer singing for yourself. You’re singing and performing for the audience.’ That’s a great reminder.”

Opera is a team effort, noted Lorenz.

“When you show up to rehearsal, you not only learn your part, it’s to learn everybody else’s part, which is very important,” she said. “Performances can easily fall apart at the seams. It takes a big collaboration on everyone’s part.”

Nearing her Verismo debut, “I’ve learned so much from not only Fred (artistic director Withrop) but everyone involved,” Lorenz said. “It’s been wonderful to collaborate with other singers.”

Verismo Opera presents “Tosca” at the Mira Cultural Community Center’s Bay Terrace Theatre, 51 Daniels Ave., Vallejo, Feb. 14-April 1. General \$30, seniors and students \$20, children 12 and under free. For more, visit verismoopera.org.

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