Graffiti art by RETNA pops in Seattle Opera’s Aida

New-to-Seattle production includes Jessica Lang choreography

May 5-19, 2018
McCaw Hall

This May, two different artistic genres—street art and opera—are coming together for Seattle Opera’s Aida. Acclaimed stage director Francesca Zambello was looking to create something unique when she asked the graffiti artist RETNA (born Marquis Duriel Lewis) to collaborate with her on a new production of Verdi’s masterpiece. RETNA created the bold visual backdrops for Aida with his same distinct style, a type of graphic lettering and illuminated script that has earned him commissions from Usher and Justin Bieber.

Inspired in part by ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, RETNA seems like a natural fit to design for an opera originally set in Egypt. And in fact, he describes the role of a graffiti artist as similar to that of a scribe.
“In ancient times, scribes were always part of working with the government with music, with the hieroglyphics on the wall, promoting who was in power, what the culture was like.”

The word “graffiti” comes from the Italian word graffiato, which means “scratched.” And while some may dismiss it today as a practice that’s against the establishment, the word “graffiti” in art history books often refers to pictures that were “scratched” onto a surface, be it a rock, a church—or perhaps an ancient Egyptian temple or wall.

RETNA’s eye-catching visuals are not the only instance of artistic collaboration in Aida. The creative team includes visionary contemporary-dance leader Jessica Lang, whose work Seattle audiences may recognize from Pacific Northwest Ballet or Meany Center for the Performing Arts.

Like these modern-day collaborators, Verdi was also a groundbreaking contemporary artist of his time. Whether pointing out moral hypocrisy in La traviata, or questioning patriotism and the relationship between church and state in Aida, Verdi was committed to telling stories about the time in which he lived. It’s a tradition that continues at McCaw Hall with this Aida, the story of a princess who has been taken as a prisoner of war by a rival nation. When she falls in love with a military commander on the opposing side, her inner struggle between love and duty will lead to a tragic end.

“We are living in a politically-charged time,” said General Director Aidan Lang. “We all know what it’s like to have certain loyalties—whether it’s to a country, to a political belief, or to a cause—and then have our personal lives complicated by those beliefs.”

Aida includes performances by Leah Crocetto in her company debut as Aida—a role shared with Alexandra LoBianco. Additional company debuts include Milijana Nikolic and Elena Gabouri as Amneris; as well as Brian Jagde and
David Pomeroy as Radames. Returning artists include Gordon Hawkins and Alfred Walker (who share the role of Amonasro), and Daniel Sumegi (Ramfis). The opera also includes performances by Eric Neuville (The Messenger), Clayton Brainerd (The King), and Marcy Stonikas (High Priestess).

Aida opens Saturday, May 5, and runs through Saturday, May 19. Tickets are available online at seattleopera.org, by calling 206.389.7676, or in-person at the box office located at 1020 John Street (two blocks west of Fairview). Box office hours are Monday-Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Groups save at least 20 percent: 206.676.5588 or groups@seattleopera.org.

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Aida
Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni
In Italian with English captions

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall
Performances: May 5, 6m, 9, 11, 12, 13m, 16, 18, 19, 2018

Approximate Running Time: 3 hours including one intermission
Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m., matinees at 2:00 p.m.
Premiere: Dec. 24, 1871, Cairo Opera House

Cast:
Aida Leah Crocetto* (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19)
Alexandra LoBianco (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Amneris Milijana Nikolic* (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19)
Elena Gabouri* (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Radames Brian Jagde* (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19)
David Pomeroy* (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Amonasro Gordon Hawkins (May 5, 11, 13m, 16, & 19)
Alfred Walker (May 6m, 9, 12, & 18)
Ramfis Daniel Sumegi (All dates)
Messenger Eric Neuville (All dates)
The King Clayton Brainerd* (All dates)
High Priestess Marcy Stonikas

Original Stage Francesca Zambello
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>E. Loren Meeker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Director</td>
<td>John Fiore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>RETNA*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artistic Designer</td>
<td>Michael Yeargan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set Design</td>
<td>Anita Yavich*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costume Design</td>
<td>Mark McCullough</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lighting Design</td>
<td>Jessica Lang*</td>
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* Company Debut

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