

forces, not quite of symphonic proportions, but larger than a chamber orchestra, enabling him to tease out the subtle intricacies of the score. The mellow slow movement, with its superbly played woodwind and horn interludes, was exquisite. There were times when the string textures sounded a bit thin but overall this was an illuminating recalibration of this war horse.

Likewise, Brahms' Academic Festival Overture, but while the declamatory horns and trumpets were suitably grand, Brahms' witty references to irreverent student songs of the time surely needed a less serious approach.

SUSAN NICKALLS

Seen on 8 October, 2015

OPERA

SCOTTISH OPERA: CARMEN

THEATRE ROYAL, GLASGOW

They sing a lot about love in Bizet's *Carmen*, but as Scottish Opera's splendid revival production shows, it's really all about sex.

Not that there's anything X-rated about Benjamin Davis's vividly fresh reworking of Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser's 1999 staging. With a singer as sensual and powerful as Lithuanian

mezzo Justina Gringyte in the title role, there doesn't need to be – she commands the stage, alternately spitting out or sliding deliciously around in her vocal lines, imperious one minute and fragile the next.

It's an astonishing performance, and one that US tenor Noah Stewart as her obsessed lover Don José doesn't even attempt to match – although when he lets his soaring voice shatter his character's stalwart reserve, it's clear there are seething passions beneath his well-behaved exterior.

Ironically, it's only with

Roland Wood's toreador Escamillo, flamboyant but thoughtful all the same, that Gringyte's *Carmen* shows any sense of true affection.

The production's spoken dialogue is, probably unavoidably, a bit variable – some singers relish the rather outdated French, while others struggle to make it convincing – but when they sing, they're a very fine bunch, with Nadine Livingston as a touchingly sincere Micaëla completing the excellent front line.

The Scottish Opera choruses – both children and adults – are exceptionally well-drilled and

full of strong characters, and the orchestra plays like a dream under conductor David Parry – light, lithe, punchy and powerful.

It's a serious production, dark (quite literally so) at times, but it finds provocative ways to prod and poke at the opera's themes of lust, power, rejection and revenge, to enthralling effect.

DAVID KETTLE

Seen on 5 October, 2015

Theatre Royal, Glasgow, tomorrow (11 October), 13, 15 and 17 October, and on tour around Scotland



↑ Justina Gringyte in the title role commands the stage with an astonishing performance