



© Anna Merkulova, Jon Vallejo and Ayaha Tsunaki as Carmen in the production by Dresden Semperoper Ballet. Picture: Ian Whalen, supplied by Adelaide Festival

FESTIVAL Adelaide Festival review 2019: Carmen

Peter Burdon, The Advertiser
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Carmen

Dance

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Swedish choreographer Joahn Inger's 2015 *Carmen*, written first on Madrid's Compañía Nacional de Danza de España and now presented by the Semperoper Ballet Dresden, is a *Carmen* like no other.

Within a minute, as the first blinding trio fills the stage and grips the imagination, you know you are experiencing really extraordinary dance – little wonder Inger won the Benoit de la Danse for the work.



© Ayaha Tsunaki and Jon Vallejo in Carmen. Picture: Ian Whalen, supplied by Adelaide Festival

Both homage and interpretation, the deeper, baser motives that drive both Carmen and her suitors Don José, Zúñiga and the Toreador are vividly drawn out.

Carmen is all-conquering, leaving her admirers helpless in her wake, while the menfolk are left uniformly powerless. An uncompromisingly erotic thread weaves through the piece.

The first act sees Carmen (a sultry and flirtatious Ayaha Tsunaki) casting her spell over the men in turn, but it is Don José (Jon Vallejo, the star turn of the night) who really falls for her. He has a palpable loathing of the officer Zúñiga (a noble, grand Gareth How) who contemptuously strips him of rank, and of the handsome Toreador (Christian Bauch, haughty) as they vie for Carmen's curves.

In the second act, a very dark piece indeed, José confronts not only his demons, but everyone else's. It does not end happily.



© Ayaha Tsunaki and Jon Vallejo in Carmen. Picture: Ian Whalen, supplied by Adelaide Festival

The other dancers of the Semperoper Ballet Dresden are uniformly excellent, whether in small ensembles or in epic unison sequences.

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A simple yet imposing set from Curt Allen Wilmer is superb, serving as everything from bullring to nightclub to prison.

Bizet's score features mostly in terrific arrangements by Russian composer Rodion Shechedrin, with additional, more aggressively contemporary music by Marc Alvarez.

• Peter Burdon

