

Quick note here on *Master Class* with Tyne Daly at the Vaudeville Theatre on The Strand. We scored two in stalls from TKTS in Leicester Square for half-price yesterday, and found ourselves in the same seats we had for *Duet For One* [back in 2009](#). Odd, that.

The show? Well, a revival, so no new ground broken here. Daly was stirring in her portrayal of Maria Callas, past her performing years and teaching a master class to aspiring young performers. Daly's performance is almost mask work, something which is alluded to in the script when she tells a student, "Always wear the mask." Playwright Terrance McNally tells us as much about how he sees opera as he does about Callas herself, and to be quite honest it is the scenes of instruction, Callas one-on-one with a student, which are the most enjoyable.

There are two long scenes of exposition "about her relationships with Ari Onassis or her first husband" which while quite revealing windows into her soul, slow the pace of the show and risk losing the audience. The instruction, however, is the thing. In the first act Callas is working with Sophia, a young soprano who lacks confidence. What is striking about this scene is how much Diane Pilkington, under Stephen Wadsworth's brilliant direction, is able to get out of the few lines she has. Through the character of Callas, McNally channels his true love of opera. He dissects, one after another, great aria, like so many Faberge eggs, revealing that inside, under all that surface beauty, lies all the basest of human emotions. As he teases through the entrails of the wounded animals he finds inside, we see Sophia gain new appreciation for the words she has been singing but seldom understanding. Tears don't just fall, they spring from her face (and ours) and rain down her blouse.

All the singing performers were well within their range and beyond capable to their roles. Garret Sorenson, as tenor Anthony Candolino ("Call me Tony!") nearly brought down the house. Soprano Naomi Connell, after nearly losing our sympathy with her obstreperous manner, finds her match with Lady Macbeth's letter scene from Verdi's opera.

All in all a good show. Interesting that our first art exhibit was Big Art, in the form of Freud's Portraits at NPG, and now our first show is Big Theatre on the West End. Don't expect much more of this "we have several more shows booked, but all are off or off-off West End."