



Miss Saigon: Love doesn't lose appeal



By **John Terauds**
Entertainment
Reporter

Miss Saigon

★ ★ ★ (out of 4)

By Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil. Directed and choreographed

by Barry Ivan. Dancap Productions.

To Aug. 1. Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, 145 Queen St. W. 416-644-3665 ([dancaptickets.com](#))



Ma-Anne Dionisio is Kim and Chloe Stanford is Tam in the Dancap Productions revival of Miss Saigon at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

CHEOL JOON BAEK PHOTO

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It's heartwarming to see that *Miss Saigon*, the blockbuster spawn of 1980s mega-musicals, has not lost a whisker of its appeal in the two decades since it opened on the London stage.

The show, which ran in London and then New York City for 10 years, opened the Princess of Wales Theatre for Mirvish Productions in Toronto back in 1993. In the lead

was a young local singer named Ma-Anne Dionisio, who taught us that, even in a cynical, war-torn world, it was fine to dream of finding true love in a night of anonymous, connubial bliss.

Now, 17 years later, *Miss Saigon* is the first musical to be presented at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, thanks to Mirvish's arch-competitor, Dancap Productions.

And Dionisio is back in her rightful place as Kim, the young Vietnamese girl in search of a better life in the arms of a Yankee soldier in 1975, at the end of the Vietnam War.

Clearly older, Dionisio brings an extra layer of emotion to her role, if memory of her first crack at the part is correct. Her voice has filled out and gained power — so much so that she sets everything around her aglow whenever she is on stage.

That's a good thing, because this touring production, which originated with the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, is clearly a low-budget affair. Its fly-away little sets barely manage to fill the grand-opera-scale stage at the Four Seasons Centre, and some of the costumes clearly came from the by-the-pound bin at the Goodwill store.

Even better news is that the rest of the cast is up to Dionisio's exalted standard. Before you know it, the set becomes just background noise as everyone delivers honest, strong performances lifted by a uniformly high vocal standard.

Kevin Gray, another favourite from the Toronto production, is also back. His repeat turn as the Engineer — the sleazy barman who keeps the currency of love flowing wherever he turns his lecherous gaze — pushes the envelope of extroversion, without ever totally chewing up the fragile scenery.

Director-choreographer Barry Ivan has had to work magic with a limited supporting cast. Here, again, the show comes up looking a bit thin in the big ensemble pieces, especially the Engineer's show-stopping "American Dream" number in the final act. But neither does Ivan ever get in the way of love and the sacrifice Kim must make to promise a better life to her son.

Conductors and orchestras don't get enough credit in Broadway-style musicals. In this production, Shelley Hanson does an outstanding job in guiding a local band of musicians through the alternately sweet and spiky score.

Miss Saigon's longevity and still-current feel are a tribute to its creators — composer Claude-Michel Schönberg and lyricists Richard Maltby Jr. and Alain Boublil — as well as this ultimately satisfying production. It's safe to dream of love in a war-torn and cynical world, even in 2010.

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