

Music soars in Metropolitan's 'La Boheme'

By MARTIN SCOTT KOSINS

Review

For a single week in May each year, the dignity that is Detroit's Masonic Temple is restored to her through a capacity audience. They come formally dressed and eager to hear the touring company of The Metropolitan Opera.

This year opening night offered Puccini's masterpiece "La Boheme," a story of struggling artists in Paris in the early 1800s. Rodolfo, a poet, is in love with Mimì who is terribly ill and who dies at the end of the opera.

As in most Italian operas, the storyline hangs by a thread. But the music soars and seldom fails to give full pleasure to the willing listener.

The present production is on loan from the Lyric Opera of Chicago. At first notice one was disappointed that the Detroit version was minus tenor Luciano Pavarotti and conductor James Levine. So it is with touring companies.

ONE DID not miss Pavarotti so much after hearing tenor John Alexander in the role of Rodolfo. In appearance, he is perfect for the role—handsome and dashing.

His voice is clear with no strain in the upper register. Further, his phrasing and breath control are admirable, making the most of Puccini's ever-unwinding melodic lines.

Many times, however, one could not hear the lower notes of Alexander's solo or ensemble singing. The fault here lies with conductor Jan Behr and shows why one does feel the absence of an Ehrlich or Levine on the podium.

Both men are superb accompanists, placing the vocalist first—even changing dynamics of the scene to fit a particular singer's weak or strong points.

Maestro Behr chose suitable tempi and followed the singers very well. But the orchestra was too loud in many instances, judging from my position in the auditorium. Thus, many vocal passages were covered.

ORCHESTRALLY we are spoiled by recordings of "Bohème" led by

Toscanini and Beecham. We are used to full, lush-sounding string sections and expert balances.

The Met's touring orchestra was just average. Often the violins sounded skimpy and the winds out of tune.

Yet, basically the production on the whole was a strong one. Vicente Sardiñero was a pleasing Marcello, though again, much of his singing was "lost" to the orchestra.

Marilyn Nieka was excellent as Marcello's lover Musetta, and chorus and ensemble work was clean and well blended.

The starring role of Mimì was sung by Renata Scotta and she was spectacular: Constantly on pitch, with a full rich soprano voice that never tapers into shrillness, even in the highest passages of her part.

HER VOICE is capable of the full range of dynamic shadings. She was never covered by the orchestra, yet her voice was never forced.

In the third act, Mimì sings a farewell to her lover, "Donde Lieta Uscì," one of Puccini's most haunting arias. Here Scotta was hypnotic, modeling every line with the deepest feeling.

Rag-a-Muffins to do 2 plays

Rag-a-Muffin Players will present two children's shows "Pinocchio Strikes It Rich" and "A New Cinderella" on June 4 at 1 and 3 p.m., June 5 at 2 p.m. at the Stagecraft Playhouse, 176 Bowers, Clawson.

Admission is \$1. For reservations call Diane Hawkey, 543-0384.

Rag-a-Muffins are also presenting the two shows along with a Theatrical Party on special days in June, for

groups such as Scouts, who would like to work on their Drama Achievement Awards. Theatrical terms and techniques will be taught through audience participation games, skits and make-up.

Groups will be limited in size and also scheduled according to their age. Call Jack Janney 547-5990 or Pat Zumhagen 398-5289 for a group reservation.

In Act One, the "Waiting for Spring" aria, and again in the lovers' duet, Scotta scored not only with her voice, but with a pert, understated acting style.

All duets by Scotta and Alexander achieved a unified team effort. But the opera was Scotta's from beginning to end.

The sets by Pier, Luigi Pizzi were simple and effective, reflecting the dreary ghetto life of the artists.

ONE COULD argue with some of the staging, however. In one segment, the four principles were set

off too far toward one wing of the stage. Thus much action was lost visually, while the voices were muffled by the curtains.

And the few flakes of snow, when snow was called for, really amounted to no effect at all.

One thought passed through my mind at the end of the evening: That the simplicity of Puccini's melodies are the secret to their great emotional strength.

If modern opera composers would ponder this, we might really add some fine music to the opera repertoire.

'Red Beard' film scheduled


One of the most expensive films ever made in Japan, "Red Beard" directed by Akira Kurosawa, will be shown by Detroit Film Theatre at The Detroit Institute of Arts auditorium on June 3 at 8 p.m. Award-winning director Kurosawa ("Rashomon," "Throne of Blood," "Seven Samurai") tells the story of a 19th-century physician, played by Toshiro Mifune, and his relationship with an ambitious young doctor who

joins him at work in a slum clinic. Hailed by Time Magazine as "a masterpiece by one of the world's great filmmakers," the 1965 film will be shown in Japanese with subtitles. Tickets at \$2 for general admission and \$1.50 for students and senior citizens are available at the Detroit Institute of Arts ticket office.

For further information, call 832-2730.

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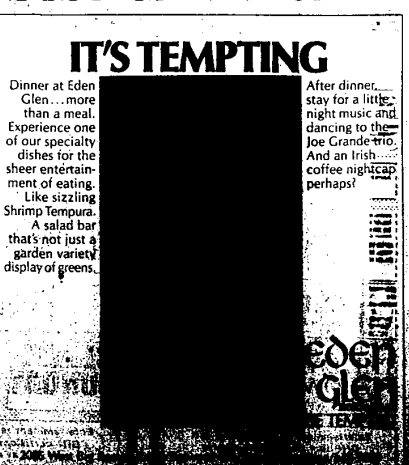
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