

# Opera brings comedy, drama and a parade of pageantry

By SUSAN TAUBER KLEIN

Where can you find comedy, drama, heartthrob romance, lust, and pageantry all in one week?

Where can you see theater at its best—with sets, costumes, choreography and staging done by the experts?

Where can you go to hear musicians play familiar and unfamiliar melodies written by some of the world's most famous composers?

You can find all of this at Detroit's Masonic Auditorium from May 22-27. That's the week when the Metropolitan Opera from New York City makes its 25th visit to Detroit. Seven operas will be performed by many of the greatest singers in the world of operatic music.

Thousands of people from all over Michigan and surrounding states will flock to the Masonic that week. Tickets have been on sale for the performances since February and many of the shows are sold out.

It's puzzling why so many go to see the Metropolitan Opera, brought to Detroit by Detroit Grand Opera Association, Inc., and why so many others decide to not go. Some of them even turn up their noses at the mention of the word opera.

David DiChiera, music faculty member at Oakland University, and his composer-music teacher wife Karen have ideas about why people don't like opera.

"OPERA IS AN unfortunate word," said DiChiera. "In Italian it means 'work.'" Mrs. DiChiera said another problem is also the stereotype shown to the public before they even see a performance.

"People first see on television a parody of opera singers before they see an opera. They see someone dressed up in a Viking hat and pigtail," Mrs. DiChiera said.

Opera is entertainment, a multimedia theater, they both said. Jan Albright, voice-opera teacher at OUI, agrees.

"No other theater offers music, dance, costumes and scenery the way opera does," she said.

Yet many people still don't like it because they don't understand it, was the consensus. Opera is a story set to music, and there can be many types of operas just as there are stories.

"Asking if you like opera is the wrong phrase. There's 17th century

opera, 18th century, Italian, contemporary opera—like 'West Side Story.' If people have gone to one opera and didn't like it, they say they don't like opera. Chances are they chose the wrong one to go to. Did you know the Broadway play 'A Little Night Music' is considered an opera?" Mrs. DiChiera asked.

THE SEVEN OPERAS the Met is performing are good examples of how different operas can be.

The productions this season are (in order of performance) "Thais" by Jules Massenet, "Cavalleria Rusticana" by Pietro Mascagni and "Pagliacci" by Ruggero Leoncavallo, "Boris Godunov" by Modest Musorgsky, "La Fanciulla del Teatro" by Gaetano Cappi, "Rigoletto" by Giuseppe Verdi, "Don Giovanni" by Wolfgang Mozart and "Madama Butterfly" by Giacomo Puccini.

"Thais" is not an opera for the novice opera goer to see," DiChiera said. "Singing the lead role will be Beverly Sills. It's the lure of super star Beverly Sills that will overcome an opera that no one's ever heard of and make people attend."

"Thais" is also the opening night performance, when people dressed in their finest silks and satins attend to be seen as much as to hear the opera.

"Thais" is a wonderful story," DiChiera said. "It's about a courtesan, beautiful Alexandri, and about a monk who makes it his godly duty to save the prostitute."

"Boris Godunov" is also a wonderful story. It's a great work about a people but also about the spiritual breakdown of a man. It's also not an opera recommended for the first go-round."

FOR THOSE who want to venture into the world of opera and attend a production by the Metropolitan Opera, the other operas are good ones to try.

"For 'La Fanciulla,' all you have to do is sit back and listen to it," said Mrs. DiChiera. "It has a lot of beautiful music with beautifully sung trills and runs," DiChiera added.

Mrs. DiChiera described the others: "Rigoletto"—a lusty drama with lots of musical hit tunes that people will recognize; "Don Giovanni"—offers fun; "Pagliacci"—rusty, and "Madama Butterfly"—luscious heart-throb.

However, before you attend any

opera, whether this is your first performance or your 100th, you have to do some preparation.

"If you go to a baseball or football game without knowing the rules, it's not as much fun. It's the same for opera," said Mrs. DiChiera.

"You don't want to go see 'Madama Butterfly' and walk into the second act to hear the famous aria 'Un bel di, vendremo.' You want to enjoy the entire opera," DiChiera added.

To be able to get the most out of an opera, you need to get a recording and try to follow the libretto with the story while you're listening to the record.

"Instead of watching television one night, listen to an opera," suggested Ms. Albright.

By familiarizing yourself with the story and the music, you'll be able to see the relationship of the music to the emotions in the story, especially when the orchestra has similar melodies as the singers. You'll want to know why the orchestra is playing that theme and what it means.

"If YOU ARE familiar with what the themes denote, you can associate details of the drama with what the composer has done," said DiChiera.

Another reason to becoming familiar with the story and the music is that

performances are done in the original language of the opera. The seven performances this year will be sung in French, Italian and Russian.

"There's a place for singing in both the foreign language and in English," said Ms. Albright. The Metropolitan Opera usually performs operas in their original language. But the Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) performs operas in English.

Ms. Albright has sung many leading roles with the company since 1971. Mrs. DiChiera tours with MOT, going into schools to introduce children to opera. She's coordinated a coloring book for children on the life of opera composer Giuseppe Verdi.

There are three weeks left before the Masonic Auditorium is transformed into a dreamland with a different tale told each night. You have plenty of time to check out a record from the library, or to buy or borrow a record and expand your world of musical theater to include opera.

Then go down to the Masonic one night and try theater like you've never experienced before.

You may become one of the opera lovers Ms. Albright described.

"It's the person who says he's going to try one opera who becomes the opera addict."

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## Used books needed

Book collection barrels are now in Farmington area supermarkets to receive donations for the Farmington Branch American Association of University Women's next sale.

Work towards the annual fall sale starts now for chapter members who use the proceeds of their biggest fundraising effort to provide scholarships, support community projects and the Farmington Community Libraries.

Marjorie Conover and Evelyn Bibb, 1978 co-chairmen of the sale, ask residents to keep the sale in mind while spring cleaning.

Books can be dropped off in the barrels at A & P, on Farmington Road south of Grand River; Kroger, on Grand River and Ten Mile; Chatham, on Eleven Mile and Middlebelt; or Great Scott, on Fourteen Mile and Middlebelt or Thirteen Mile and Orchard Lake.

The library on Twelve Mile will accept used books. Persons who request that books be picked up from their homes are asked to call Nan Goshorn, 474-0637.

THE FALL sale is the 28th sale of used books put on by the group, and will be the 11th year members have

used Livonia Mall for the four-day event.

Dates this time around are Sept. 21-24. The Farmington branch boasts it is one of the biggest and most successful AAUW book sales in the state.

Members are sorting, pricing and packing books now at the Farmington Hills Library into categories of fiction, non-fiction, texts, collectables, how-to, travel, children's literature, cooking, ecology, and medical. The books will be stored there until fall.

Ms. Conover and Ms. Bibb work with their committee headed by Gretchen Peterson and Dede Adams. The marking sessions are directed by Perle Briggs and Nancy Davis.

They accept all kinds of books, paperbacks, records, special interest magazines or reference materials.

The Farmington libraries get first choice of the books if the staff believes the donated books will be a good addition to their collections.

Librarian Gordon Lewis said approximately five percent of the books received end up on the library shelves.

Persons who wish to donate a sizeable number of books may request a receipt for income tax purposes.

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