

Cast excels in 'Il Trovatore'

By PATRICIA BEACH SMITH

Review

The Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) chose the right opera to initiate its policy of presenting some performances in the original language.

"Il Trovatore" could have been the prototype for many afternoon television shows. Its plot (plots?) wouldn't make any more sense in English.

But even when the plot gets too thick, there is never a dull moment — because Verdi knew how to write melodies. Fortunately, the cast assembled for MOT's opening night presentation also knew how to sing the melodies. In combination with stunning stage settings and laudable stage direction, Monday night's performance was one that will long be remembered.

Additional performances of "Il Trovatore" will be presented at 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 6:30 p.m. Sunday at the Music Hall Center in Detroit.

TO SAY THAT the story is a dark mystery would have been a good way to describe the only minor flaw in the production. Most of the time it was too dark on stage to see the characters. And there was certainly no reason to hide the sets or the performers, all of which were handsome.

The entire cast, including the chorus, had depth, rarely seen in MOT's productions. From Martina Arroyo to the gypsy chorus, the talent was astounding. The conducting of W. Anthony Waters was steady and supportive. The MOT orchestra sounds better than ever.

The most outstanding performer of the evening was Diane Curry, a daz-

zing mezzo, whose interpretation of the wizened Azucena was spectacular. One wonders why Verdi never thought up another sub-plot to include a duet between the two lead females.

That would have been firecrackers, Monday. As it was, the vocal performances were as engaging as the acting. A rare combination.

Francisco Ortiz as the swashbuckling Manrico proved himself a world-class tenor after a slightly slow start in the first act. He is also a good actor and the dream of every soprano — a tall tenor.

While the Count Di Luna's role is not long, it can be special if someone of Andrew Smith's stature performs it. Lucky Monday and Sunday patrons will have heard his gifts. A rich, capable voice and a spellbinding acting ability let Smith give the role Scarpa importance.

FROM THE BEGINNING of the first scene it was apparent the MOT chorus was "different." With the addition of "artist-interns" the chorus has gone up about 16 notches on the "good" stick. Not only was the diction superb, but the acting was dependable and interesting.

More lively direction might have helped some sequences where the muses seemed too bunched together, but on the whole the MOT chorus was a

fresh, outstanding part of the production.

One set after another showed the glory that is Sormani of Italy, the designer. Especially entrancing were the Tiepolo-like moonlit arches in the second scene of the first act and scene two of the second act, with its striking convent scene looking for all the world like a Caillebotte painting. The encompassing of the Count was a fairland of brightly colored tents and flags — a wonderful pageant.

The voices matched the sets in splendor. Ms. Arroyo was at her best in the first act. In rapid succession she sang, "Tacea la notte placida," in which she showed fantastic control of her voice — and later in the more spritely yet equally demanding "Di tale amor che dirsi."

The contrast between these two arias showed the range and facility of Ms. Arroyo's vocal abilities. Later in the opera, she seemed perhaps tired, but still stately.

THE DEMI-BACCHANAL in the beginning of the second act was grossly overshadowed by Azucena. Ms. Curry used the dark and shadowy parts of her voice to intone the misery she obviously felt in her Azucena's gypsy heart.

In the rocky setting of the gypsy camp, the drama was heightened. Her duet with Manrico was a show-stopper, despite Mr. Ortiz' occasional rhythmic lapses.

During the convent scene of the second act, Smith as the Count, was stupendous in his ardor of Leonora. He has an almost unbelievably powerful voice. Sometimes he sounds a touch

dry, but the timbre and richness help overcome this slight problem.

The final offering of the second act, a brilliant quartet with chorus, was marvelously presented Monday. In this, Norman Andersson as Ferrando was more confident and aided the quartet in its success. Otherwise Andersson was no match for the powerful voices surrounding him, despite his obvious youthful talent.

Azucena scored again with a rousing finale to the first scene of Act III. Her stepson Manrico did not fare as well in the second scene of the same act. In the famous tenor aria he appeared to be pushing, and thereby flattening many of the notes of this difficult ditty. Yet commanded attention with his compensatory acting.

LATER IN the fourth act, the drama mounted when he and Azucena incanted the elegant "Ai nostri monti," a touching scene in a dungeon. But touching is all the last half of the last act can expect to be called, thus directed.

It was a very disappointing close to an otherwise entrancing performance. That may be inherent in the opera and not the fault of the production, but after vocal pyrotechnics from all sides for three acts, the fourth seemed absolutely anti-climactic — a denouement at best, better handled as a continuing saga told once again by Ferrando. Who knows?

It was clear from audience reaction that Monday night's presentation is what MOT's supporters look for in opera. "This is like caviar after peanuts," one listener suggested.

Thursday, September 27, 1979

(O7D)



Martina Arroyo sings the role of Leonora with Francisco Ortiz as Manrico in "Il Trovatore."



The Puerta del Sol Entrance Gate in Toledo, Spain, is one of the attractions shown in "An Artist in Spain," travel film narrated by Frank Carney.

Travel adventure series announced

The Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce again this year will present a travel adventure program.

Five family-oriented programs will be held at the Walled Lake Western High School auditorium. Showtime is 2 p.m.

The first show will be Sunday, Nov. 11, with Dr. Frank Carney presenting "An Artist Sees Spain."

The Sunday, Dec. 9, film will be "England by Canal Boat" narrated by Fran Reidelberger. Ralph Franklin will show "The Canyon" on Sunday, Jan. 13.

"The New Panama" will be featured Sunday, Feb. 10, narrated by Clint Denn. Last presentation of the season Sunday, March 9, will be "Bahamas Holiday" with Dennis Glen Cooper.

EACH PERFORMANCE is an 1½

color film narrated in person by the photographer.

Funds obtained from the travel adventure series are used by the Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce for projects within the community.

Season tickets are available at the chamber of commerce office, 520 N. Pontiac Trail, Walled Lake, from 9 a.m. to noon, Monday-Friday; the Walled Lake Consolidated Schools Community Education office, lower level Walled Lake Junior High, 615 N. Pontiac Trail, Walled Lake; and Richardson Community Center, 1485 Oakley Park Rd., Commerce Township. (across from Walled Lake Central High School).

For information call, 624-2828 or 644-2428. Season tickets for the five shows are priced for general admission and for senior citizens (65 and over). Individual show tickets also are available.

Sumi painting class scheduled

The traditional Japanese form of painting by simple single brush strokes will be taught this fall at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association by Mary Bowman.

The class begins Oct. 2 and runs each Tuesday from 9 a.m. to noon for 10 weeks. Mrs. Bowman has visited Japan many times and over long periods to learn the art from the Japanese masters.

She said it is more easily learned

than Western approaches to painting, and can be done by almost anyone. A minimum amount of materials are required, and the facility with the brush, Mrs. Bowman said, "is easily learned."

No previous art training is required for the class. Those interested in registration information on the class should stop by or call the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, 644-0866, 1516 S. Cranbrook at Fourteen Mile, Birmingham.

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