

Thursday, October 25, 1979

(F11)

Few cheers

'Joan of Arc' concludes opera's season

With the final production of the 1979 season, the Michigan Opera Theater proved conclusively that there is really no valid reason for the long neglect of Tchaikovsky's "Joan of Arc." It's not that bad, and the music itself is as lush and melodic as one could expect from the man who gave us "Swan Lake."

On the other hand, there is no cause for loud cheers at the opera's re-emergence. It's not that good, and a production as polished as the MOT's merely emphasizes Tchaikovsky's problems with the operatic form. He knew little about writing for the human voice, and less about creating the dramatic tension essential to opera as theater.

Let it first be noted that Michigan Opera Theater has concluded its ninth season firmly established as a company of national stature. "Joan of Arc" was not an adequate rendering of a surefire warhorse. It was a stretch and a challenge and it paid off handsomely, thanks to the talent assembled.

Attractive but fairly standard sets and costumes (from the Canadian Opera Company) became richer and more exciting under the skillful lighting of Marilyn Rennagel. Conductor Kurt Klippelster led the orchestra in a poised and supportive reading of the unfamiliar score. Director Michael Montel molded principals, chorus and supporting performers into a fluid, unified whole — at least to the extent allowed by the shaky libretto, which Tchaikovsky fashioned himself from a Schiller play.

Montel's imaginative staging overcame more of the problems inherent in this "Joan" than anyone could have

expected, largely by using the chorus as an amorphous character whose changes from scene to scene provided a connecting structure missing from the text.

Supporting roles were well sung and well acted, particularly the Dauphin of Richard Versalle and the Donois of Edward Huls. As the king's mistress, Carol Sparrow sang well and displayed a figure so spectacular several times in the audience were nearly decapitated in their husbands' haste to commandeer the binoculars.

As Lionel, Joan's spurious love interest, Andreas Pouliomenos displayed voice and presence that made one wish the role offered him a chance to do something besides look puzzled.

Mignon Dunn had long wanted a chance to sing this role, and she relished every scene. (Indeed, she was having such a good time being burned at the stake she actually seemed to scramble over several soldiers in her eagerness to get on with it.)

Vocally, Dunn paced herself carefully. Her Joan wielded a mean sword, scolded the Dauphin, and fell in love like a floppy puppy.

Finally, however, one must come back to Tchaikovsky's problems with the operatic form. His melodies are lovely, but his arias do not make effective use of the voices for which they were written. He has similar problems with the libretto.

"Joan of Arc" is essentially a series of tableaux vivants, with no effective impetus moving us from one to the other and no depth to the characters portrayed. The best efforts of all, while commendable and interesting to watch, could not supply what isn't there.



Mignon Dunn as Joan prays along with David Herendeen as a warrior in the Michigan Opera Theater's production of "Joan of Arc."

Intermission

Goblins, ghosts shock? They only excite readers

Apparently, any ghastly characters planning to roam the streets in search of treats this Halloween aren't going to be a threat to most of the readers who responded to a recent Observer and Eccentric Intermission poll. Chills bring thrills to most of those who answered our question:

DO YOU ENJOY HORROR MOVIES?

The five most interesting responses, in the opinion of our staff, received a gruesome mask to kick off the Halloween spirit. The winning comments are listed below:

Debbie Turk of Farmington wrote, "With the day-to-day chatter about things that matter, I find I need time to relax. Be it ghost or goblin or creature that crawl, a movie that stars them is best of all."

SHIRLEY NICOL OF BERKLEY commented, "I never get tired of those horror movies, with Chaney and Karloff and Bela Lugosi. The mummy, the werewolf and Frankenstein's Bride are the ones that would make me want to hide. They scared me so much, but I

didn't mind — the show way back then cost only a dime. Yea, I still love them and whenever I can, I watch them on TV again and again."

Cindy Foster of Rochester responded, "Horror movies tantalize and excite their unsuspecting viewers. Piercing under your epidermis, the movies tickle your every vertebra. No one sits clutching moistened Kleenex during thrillers. Oh, I do enjoy the momentary scare!"

Amy Alkon of Farmington Hills expressed disillusion with scare flicks, "I have a penchant for titillating horror movies. However, producers have the audacity to lampoon us by producing inferior, ennuï movies which they lure the public to with captivating promulgation."

Roxanne Victor of Bloomfield Hills said, "The horror movies of the '70s are simply displays of blood and exist only for their shock value. As a devoted fan of the science fiction and monster movies of the '60s, I continue to hope for a return of horror movies with a 'message.' Those movies had social value

and taught against discrimination based on fear or ignorance. Today's horror movies depict the unknown as malevolent and without purpose."

Honorable mentions included the following entries:

Bob James of Southfield, "I'll sit tight for fright, but gore gets the door."

Lisa Mullen of Birmingham, "I enjoy seeing horror movies because to be scared out of your wits is fun. When you go to see a movie that costs \$3.75, you want to get your money's worth."

Bill Riley of Farmington Hills, "I like horror movies very much. They really turn me on. I like the blood and all the other things like scary masks. I don't like the ones that are rated 'R' though."

Vivian Byrd of Birmingham, "I hate horror movies. I never go to see them... ever. My kids, however, ages 8 and 11, adore those old Godzilla, etc., flicks that pop up on Channel 7 now and then. They are limited to one hour of TV per day, except during monster week."

Apples

They get the squeeze at all the cider mills

A stop at a cider mill is as much a part of fall as raking leaves or following football. At many nearby mills, visitors can watch apple harvesting and see pressing while sipping fresh cider and eating warm doughnuts.

Michigan ranks third in the nation in apple production and first in production of Jonathans and Northern Spies — two favorites for making cider. Mills range in size from tiny roadside stands to huge businesses with hydraulic presses.

Right now is peak apple-picking season. The Automobile Club of Michigan says cider prices should range from \$1.50

to \$2.80 per gallon, with doughnuts going from \$1 and \$2.20 a dozen. Some mills let customers bring their own containers to save about 25 cents a gallon.

To watch pressing operations, it's a good idea to phone ahead since pressing schedules vary according to the availability of apples.

Some mills have wagon rides, tours, antique and gift shops and animal farms.

We've provided a map of cider mills close to home. Information is below.

- 1 WEIERS, 603, W. 13th, Monroe (241-3782); open through mid-Nov.
- 2 APPLE HILL ORCHARD, 4280 Wills Road, Milan (434-2600); 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily through Nov. 5, noon to 5 p.m. weekends Nov. 5 to Dec. 30.
- 3 WASHEM'S, 6580 Judd Road, Milan (482-2342); 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 4 ALBER ORCHARD, 13911 Bethel Church Road, Manchester (428-7758); through April, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 5 SALINE ORCHARDS, 3333 Saline Road, Saline (429-0959); 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mon-Fri, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekends.
- 6 WARD'S ORCHARDS, 5565 Merritt Road, Ypsilanti (462-7744); open all year, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily.
- 7 SOUTH HURON ORCHARDS, 38025 S. Huron Road, New Boston (753-9380); open daily.
- 8 DEXTER, 3695 Central, Dexter (426-6510); through Nov., 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 9 HURON FARMS, 3431 N. Zeeb Road, Dexter (426-3919); open through Nov., 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fri-Sun.
- 10 FOREMAN CIDER BARREL, 50850 W. Seven Mile, Northville (349-1256); open through Jan. 30, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 11 PARAMENTER'S, 714 Baseline Road, Northville (349-3181); open through Nov. 18, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.
- 12 WARNER'S ORCHARD, 5970 Old U.S. 23, Brighton (229-6504); open through April 15, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 13 FRANKLIN, 7450 Franklin Road, Franklin (626-2959); through Dec. 1, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mon-Sat, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sun.
- 14 DIEHL'S ORCHARD, 1478 Ranch Road, Hilly (634-8981); through Nov., 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily; Nov.-March, 10
- 15 YATES, 1950 Avon Road, Rochester (581-8300); through Nov., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, Dec.-May, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fri-Sat, noon to 6 p.m. Sun.
- 16 APPLE BARREL, 57500 Van Dyke, Washington (781-3121); through Dec. 2, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tue-Sun.
- 17 PAINT CREEK, 4483 Orion Road, Goodison (651-6361); 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 18 KEATINGTON, 2359 Joslyn Court, Lake Orion (891-2811); 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 19 HY'S, 6350 W. 37th Mile Road, Romeo (788-3511); through Nov., 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 20 STONY CREEK, 2961 W. 32 Mile Road, Romeo (752-2459); 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- 21 VERELLEN ORCHARDS, 63280 Van Dyke, Romeo (752-2989); through June 1, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily.

'40 carats' poses question

By BARBARA MICHALS

Can a woman of 40 love a much younger man without making a fool of herself?

That's the timeless question posed in "Forty Carats," the charming Jay Allen comedy that opened the season for St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook.

The skilful St. Dunstan's cast imbues the show with warmth as well as humor. Nearly all the players are well cast and highly believable.

In the lead role, Nancy Brassett brings great vitality to the character of Ann Stanley, a sensible, sedate, and successful businesswoman. While vacationing in Greece, Ann meets a free-spirited 22-year-old man who rescues her when her car breaks down.

After two divorces, Ann has lost interest in men, but she sheds her inhibitions and succumbs to the romantic Aegean and the power of ouzo, a Greek liqueur. She is confident she will never see Peter Latham again, especially since she has given him a phony name and telephone number.

As Peter, John Shirk is buoyant with irresistible boyish charm.

MUCH TO Ann's chagrin, Peter pops back into her life when he comes to call for her 17-year-old daughter, Trina. Over Ann's vigorous protests, Peter wriggles his way back into her heart.

In supporting roles, Betsy Todd and Gertrude Thomson contribute strong comic talents. Ms. Todd is delightful as Ann's cynical, wise-cracking secretary, and Ms. Thomson is outstanding as Ann's colorful, eccentric mother. Both women love to meddle, trying to push a reluctant Ann into the arms of a wealthy client.

Complications arise when Ann's mother, something of a free-spirit herself, takes immediately to Peter and tries to match him up with Trina. Trina, played convincingly by Janet Spector, has her own ideas about a beau and, ironically, finds Peter too immature for her taste.

Further complicating Ann's life is the omnipresence of her ex-husband, Billy Boylan, a ne'er-do-well actor. R. Joseph Dabbs does an exceptionally fine job projecting Billy's innate lovelessness. Dabbs is almost too appealing

in the role, nearly eclipsing the weak side of Billy's character.

BILL STUDEBAKER seems ill at ease in the part of Eddy Edwards. Ann's rich and eligible client, Eddy's personality is so poorly defined throughout that anything he does lacks credibility. The fault may lie in the direction rather than in the acting.

In small roles, Aggie Meldman and Ralph Todd are amusing as Peter's stodgy upper-crust parents. Aside from the problem with Eddy's character, director Nancy Scott and assistant director Mary Anne Wilson have melded the players into a smooth-functioning company. Individual scenes are well paced.

However, 13 scene changes spread over two acts is troublesome at best. St. Dunstan's intervals between scenes seem interminable, and the background music used between scenes is too muted to do anything except add to the general noise.

"Forty Carats" concludes its run Friday and Saturday evenings, Oct. 26 and 27. Curtain time is 9 p.m.

Station to hold pumpkin contest Oct. 27

WDRO-FM (93) will sponsor a free pumpkin carving contest Oct. 27 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Tel-12 Mall.

Gift certificates will be given to all participants. Grand prize will be a

"Super Scope" stereo system. Prizes will also be given in each age classification.

Participants must bring their own equipment and, if needed, decorations.

The pumpkins will be supplied free.

Age classifications are 6 and younger, 7-11, 12-17, and 18 and older. Children 6 and younger must decorate only. Children 7-11 should have parental supervision.