

Thursday, January 27, 1983 O&E

Area soprano sings role of beautiful loser

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

FOR BIRMINGHAM RESIDENT and coloratura soprano Jan Albright, singing the part of Elsa Schraeder in Michigan Opera Theatre's production of "The Sound of Music" is a totally different experience.

"She is not like any character that I have played," said Albright. "She doesn't win."

In the stage play of "The Sound of Music," Elsa Schraeder is a wealthy

widow from Vienna who is engaged to the Baron. Unlike the movie where it is almost a cat fight between Maria and Elsa, the stage play portrays the Viennese lady in quite a different perspective.

"She is a strong person who has carried on her husband's business after his death. She knows her place and can stand on her own two feet. She doesn't need the Baron, but it would be nice," Albright said.

THERE ARE TWO solos not in the movie that Albright will sing. "How

Can Love Survive?" (Act 1) and "No Way To Stop It" (Act 1), which add dimension to the character.

"Elsa truly loves the Baron, but completely disagrees with his philosophical approach to life. She is a survivor. She believes if you smile and are charming and don't have any confrontations everything will be alright. You just play life day by day."

But as the story tells, the Baron couldn't be forced into smiling his way along with the "Anschlus" the German take-over of Austria. Finally Elsa realizes the incompatibility of their two philosophies and bows out.

For Jan Albright, the 34 years she and her husband Michael Albright, now with Kelly Services of Troy, spent in Germany helped her to better understand this musical.

"We talked with the people in Germany. We had German friends. We spent time in the Alps," she said. "I think because of that experience I have

a better comprehension of the character."

The attractive, slim, redheaded Albright was talked into taking this part by her sometimes accompanist, David DiChiera, MOT's general director. Albright has sung with the company since 1971 in over 13 different roles both at Music Hall and on tour.

She has sung everything from minor parts to major ones such as Musetta in "La Boheme," Lucia in "Lucia di Lammermoor," Marietta in "Naughty Marietta" and Adèle in "Die Fledermaus."

BESIDES THOSE OPERA roles she has sung with nearly every symphony in Michigan, countless oratorio and solo engagements and now is a member of the voice faculty at Oakland University.

Two of Albright's students are also singing in this production. Colleen Downey is Lisa and Irene Onken will sing Sister Margarina.

"I have discovered teaching and I am hooked on it," said Albright, a graduate in music education of Indiana University. "I teach both at Oakland University and at my home nearly six days a week."

Albright's husband shares her interest in music. He serves as her vocal coach as he also studied voice for four years at Indiana University even though he graduated with a business degree. He is a substitute singer at Metropolitan Methodist Church where his wife is soloist with the choir, and he sometimes joins the MOT chorus.

A few years ago when Albright decided to go to New York to seek a career in opera, it was her husband who encouraged her.

"To have that kind of life, one really must be a gypsy," explained Albright. "You find you are in Detroit one day and Los Angeles the next. When I stayed in New York and was rehearsing for an opera I was doing, I found

that I missed my home, my children and my family."

Albright considers herself lucky to have had so many major roles with the MOT and so many opportunities to sing throughout Michigan so she can be near her family. From time to time she will accept an engagement with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. In May she will sing the role of Musetta with the Dayton Opera Company.

"I love singing with the Michigan Opera Theatre," she said. "Over the years I have met so many fine musicians and watched their careers develop. David has become a major figure in opera in the United States and he developed the company into a major company."

"The Sound of Music" opens Friday evening at 8 p.m. at the Music Hall. This will be followed by performances on Jan. 29, 30, and Feb. 2, 4 and 5. For more information and tickets call the Music Hall box office at 663-7680.



Jan Albright will portray Elsa Schraeder, who loves the Baron, in "The Sound of Music," at the Music Hall in Detroit.

Young people perform in musical

Bloomfield Hills and Troy residents will sing featured roles in the Michigan Opera Theatre production of "The Sound of Music."

The award-winning family musical written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II is part of MOT's mid-winter opera season, opening Friday and continuing through Feb. 12 at the Music Hall Center in downtown Detroit. A total of 15 performances is scheduled.

Julie Lepper, 11, of Bloomfield Hills will perform the role of Von Trapp Family member Brigitta and Julie Barker of Troy will understudy the role and perform with the full cast at a matinee Feb. 9.

Julie Lepper was a model at age 2 for the Eastman Kodak Co. in her native Rochester, N.Y., for several years. In addition to working as a model, she has studied ballet, tap dance, piano, gymnastics and baseball.

This performance is her debut with MOT.

JULIE BARKER, 11, is a multi-faceted singer, dancer and cheerleader. She has been a member of the Kid Connection, modeled at Oakland Mall, participated in TV commercials and appeared in three Oakland theater productions.

Three other Oakland County residents selected for featured roles are David New, 17, of Auburn Heights; Jeffrey Duncan of Highland Township and Kelly Boczek, 7, of Huntington Woods.

David New will play Rolf, the character who has a crush on the oldest Von Trapp family girl, Liesl. Jeffrey Duncan will sing the role of Friedrich, oldest boy of the Von Trapp Family, and Kelly Boczek will sing four performances of the role of Gretl, youngest of the Von Trapp Family.

A senior at Brother Rice High School in Birmingham, New has sung with the MOT chorus in fall 1982 productions of "The Haunted Castle" and "Lucia di Lammermoor" and has sung leading roles in many musical theater productions at Brother Rice High School, Mercy High School and Will-O-Way Repertory Theatre.

Jeffrey Duncan is an active athlete in football and baseball. He has modeled clothing in numerous Detroit-area shopping centers, participated in several radio and TV ads and sang and acted in local theater productions. "The Sound of Music" marks his debut with MOT.

Kelley Boczek has pursued a TV commercial career in Detroit. Her heavy schedule of acting and dance lessons that has taken her to the stage in two Lathrup Village Theatre productions.



Julie Lepper plays Brigitta Von Trapp

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