

# Verdi opera highlights Met's week

Verdi himself knew "Simon Boccanegra" was an opera that had inherent problems when it premiered in 1857. Last week, though, when the Metropolitan Opera brought its new production of this opera to Detroit's Masonic Temple with sets and costumes from the Lyric Opera of Chicago and Simon himself, baritone Sherill Milnes, there were no problems.

The evening's success goes largely to the Zurich Opera's permanent conductor Nello Santi. Conducting the Met orchestra always in perfect tempo with the singers, never at a volume over the level of his voice, the Italian-born Santi was masterful.

WHEN JAMES McCracken was in Detroit to sing "Aida" with Michigan Opera Theatre, he said Santi was one of his favorites. By Saturday evening, it was obvious that Santi is also one of Detroit's favorites when he showed more of his finesse with the Rigoletto score.

Milnes is one of America's leading baritones and is famous for his portrayal of Simon. Like Milnes, the historical Simon was a giant physically as is his figure on his tomb in the Museum of Ligurian Sculpture and Architecture in the Church of St. Augustine in Genoa.

The 50-year-old Milnes is a 23-year-old adventuresome corsair when the prologue opens on Sept. 23, 1339, the day the real Simon was popularly acclaimed the first Doge of Genoa. With slower movements and mannerisms, Milnes ages himself 25 years for the first act when he has become a wise and noble leader.

THE BRILLIANT 27-year-old soprano, Aprile Millo, sang the role of Amelia, Simon's daughter who was lost while he was on a sailing adventure.

Millo is a member of the Metropolitan Opera Young Artist Development Program and made her debut with the



Mary Jane Doerr

Met in December 1984. She is marked for a successful career because of the breadth and height of her voice. Bass Paul Pliska was marvelous as Andrea Simon's enemy in his two arias with the baritone, the first delivered in vengeance and the second in the mood of conciliation. Tenor Vasile Moldoveanu was always on pitch as the straightforward Gabriele Adorno, who is to marry Amella and follow Simon as Doge.

THE COSTUMES of the Lyric Opera were somewhat ornate and not in keeping with the historical period of great austerity in Genoa when jewels and

furs were abolished. They were effective, though, and in keeping with the style of the sets.

With the exception of Millo, this was the same cast that performed "Simon Boccanegra" in New York City and on national television in April.

The superior quality of the singing, the acting, and the musical delivery of this production varied vastly from the mediocrity of the Met's other touring productions.

This was an evening that will rank as one of the greatest in the Met's 26-year history in Detroit. It is this operatic grandeur that will be missed with the Met's departure.

second runs  
Tom Panzenhagen

## Going to the movies is different in Fiji

When in Fiji, do as the Fijians do, someone once said. On a recent jaunt to that South Pacific island, I attempted to do just thousands of Fijians do every day — go to the movies.

In Fiji you have to go to the movies because there is no television. No television means no "Teatime Movie," "Saturday Showcase" or "Sir Graves Ghouly Presents."

Video is becoming more and more popular in this former British protectorate, but relatively few Fijians have it. And those who do watch their rental movies on little monitors that resemble computer screens.

So going to the movies was the order of the day. After all, one can lounge at seaside, sipping Fiji Bitter beer, for only so long before a certain torpor sets in — not to mention a certain sunburn. Since there's not much to do in Fiji that isn't directly related to sun, sea and sipping Fiji Bitter, a movie made good sense.

THE FIRST PROBLEM, as always, was deciding what to see. The Fiji Times, replete with listings of movies playing all over the 200-mile-long main island of Viti Levu, provided several possibilities.

Of course I wasn't about to forgo the delights of the Fijian climate and lush landscape for a chance to see "Ghostbusters," "Bachelor Party," "Revenge of the Nerds" or "Body Double" again, all of which were playing at theaters in Fiji's two largest cities, the capital Suva, and Nadi, where the international airport sits.

Also showing were "An Officer and a Gentleman," "The Falcon and the Snowman," "The Bounty," "Romantic Comedy" and "The Spy Who Loved Me" — a selection to rival what's usually available on Detroit-area screens.

I wanted to see a Fijian film. Unfortunately, that was impossible because they don't make movies in Fiji. So I settled for the next best thing — an Indian movie.

Not a cowboy and Indian movie but an Asian Indian movie, which are the rage on Fiji where half the population of one-quarter million is of Indian descent.

AGAIN THERE WERE numerous possibilities, and the ads for the movies made each one seem enticing. "Zamana," which the ad writers proclaimed "has proved a super hit." The movie's distributors probably were responsible for the next line: "Get more out of life! Come and see our movie."

"Yudh" also caught my eye, particularly with its cast list that read: "Starring the dynamic duo Jackie Shroff and Anil Kapoor with Hema Malini, Tina Munim, Pran, Danny and Shatrughan Sinha."

A review of "Yudh" on the same page outlined the plot. "A crime wave sweeps over Bombay City, the factory vans are shot at and the monthly payroll of the workers looted. The worst hit is industrialist Mr. Dayal (Madan Puri). He would have been liquidated if his friend the top industrialist of Bombay Mr. Chinoy (Danny) had not taken him into partnership."

Sounds like a job for Dirty Harry. The review also explained the movie's title: "Yudh" is about the eternal 'Yudh' which exists in every society between the upholder of the law and the lawbreaker, the police force and the criminals," it read. Oh, that "Yudh," I mused.

MAKING THE CHOICE of a movie more difficult were "Nija In the Dragon's Den" starring Conan Lee, the twin bill "Mother India" and "Fate Out," and "Majestic Thunderbolt," which the ad writers boasted as "This year's big action-packed production."

India, incidentally, annually produces about 10 times more movies than Hollywood, so there was an abundance of other flicks from which to choose.

And then I discovered the night's dinner specialty would be goat curry, and my desire to spend the evening at a movie, munching Fijian popcorn, suddenly were dashed.

I never did make it to a show. But my bartender that night recounted "Majestic Thunderbolt" to me scene by scene. It wasn't the same as being there, but it was better than Fijian TV.

## 'Eugene Onegin' has little to recommend it

By Mary Jane Doerr  
special writer

"Eugene Onegin" is an opera with little scenic effects and even less dramatic movement. The opera by Tchaikovsky has three very nice arias to its credit.

Overall it demands major singers in the roles of Tatyana, Lenski and Gremin to give these arias as any degree of splendor against an otherwise boring and often annoying musical composition and chamber music styled orchestration.

The Metropolitan Opera Company's production of "Eugene Onegin" last week accentuated all of its weaknesses. Conductor Thomas Fulton gave the orchestra members marvelous solo opportunities to be heard far over the sound of his singers.

Natasha Rom, a Russian-born naturalized American citizen, sang Tatyana in a voice that wasn't well focused on

### review

top and with a tight vibrato. Her beauty and acting though (and probably her Russian) were worth noting even if her voice was not.

Joseph Rouleau sang Gremin's third act aria in the spirit if not in the spirit quality. His 25-year career abroad and only recent debut at the Met

indicates he has bestowed his talents elsewhere.

Windsor-born Canadian Victor Braun sang the little role of Eugene Onegin with a clear, strong, baritone voice.

There was little on which to judge the quality of Braun's voice. His acting was excellent.

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