

Light Opera's opening weathers the storm

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

The thunderstorm Friday evening at the Marquis Theatre in Northville was not just a part of the plot of the favorite opera, "The Barber of Seville." It was real. So was the superb singing of the Light Opera of Michigan.

Unfortunately, however, the genuine thunder and lightning stage effects and tornado warnings did keep a good-sized audience from attending what was a fine performance by the fledgling opera company. Of the some 400 seats in the historic theater that has hosted such famous entertainers as Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin, only 60 were occupied by braver souls who were not intimidated by the threatening weather conditions and ultimately had the pleasure of witnessing a well-sung, professionally executed rendition of the most loved operas.

THE NEWLY FORMED opera company composed of some Michigan Opera Theatre trained singers

bolstered by several out-of-state professionals gave a well-executed, thoroughly logical performance, one that few theaters of the Marquis size would ever mount.

If this production is going to be the standard that artistic director/founder David Pullen and conductor Felix Resnick are going to set for the company, opera enthusiasts have a lot to look forward to as the program unfolds at the Marquis.

For anyone unfamiliar with Italian or with the humorous plot of American Revolutionary War supporter Beaumarchais and his 1775 play, these singers' enunciation was so clear and the acoustical properties of the hall so precise, the story was easy to follow.

Because of the excellence of the acoustics, none of the singers was "miked." This, in itself, adds to the pleasure of the music.

AS ROSINA, former Michigan resident Brenda Harris led a cast of nine evenly matched actor-singers with her splendid coloratura voice. "Uno voce poco fa" is the aria of arias for a coloratura soprano. (Al-

review

though the production was sung in English, this aria will always be known by its Italian first line.)

Harris executed it with grace, elegance and ease. Hers is a lyric voice but there is great power on top when she needs to use it. She was the 1986 first-prize winner of the Oratorio Society of New York Competition, the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in Connecticut and the Liederkreis Competition. Her voice training and masterful execution were evident Friday evening.

Conductor Resnick knows sound levels when conducting as he often demonstrates when he conducts the Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra. His well-chosen group of 23 instrumentalists responded well to his leadership, never at any time drowning out the singers.

Cliff Wilkins, an excellent accompanist, performed the harpsichord

recitatives, except when tenor David Troiano took over for the rondo from the "Vain Precaution" sung by Harris in the second act. Troiano accompanied her on the little harpsichord on stage. (This reviewer has seen Wilkins name spelled with one "l" not with two as it was in this program.)

THE SUCCESS OF any program rests with the conductor. Although Detroit Symphony violinist Resnick is primarily an instrumentalist, he led this show with great care and diligence.

Dr. Bartolo in this cast was the guardian of Hosina in more ways than one since Brenda Harris—who sang the role—is in real life Brenda Harris' husband.

As Bartolo, he had the acting, facial expressions, and prissiness of the role down pat, but his acting was not demonstrative enough to be dis-

cerned further back in the audience. Since there was a wealth of seats to choose from, this critic moved to the front row where Braden Harris' expressions were in clear view. A stronger acting performance is needed in this role to carry the show.

Leo E. Snook, assistant professor of voice at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., had a solid voice that carried his part of Figaro, the barber, well. His "Largo al factotum" certainly can be taken at its proper pace only in Italian, but Snook took it fast enough to sing it well in English.

Michigan residents David T. Troiano and Claritha Buggs are two excellent examples of the talent here in this area.

Mezzo-soprano Buggs is a 1984 winner of the Leontyne Price Vocal Competition and a graduate of the University of Michigan. The small part of Berta only allowed a brief introduction to her quality sound.

Besides being handsome and looking the part of Count Almaviva, Triano of Warren sang beautifully. His lyric voice blended well in the en-

sembles and the quality was maintained throughout the program. As the opera moved along, his acting became more expressive.

Franco J. Bertucci, as Basilio, was a little extreme in comparison to the others, in his makeup, but this extremity in his spirited stage action picked up the momentum of the show and enlivened the other cast members. He is a winner of the American Opera Auditions and a finalist in this season's Rosa Ponselle International Vocal Competition.

Dolly Scheibehaut's costumes were bright and functional and so were David Reynold's rotating sets.

With the quality production such as this available and so accessible, more people should take advantage of this opportunity to hear good music performed well—wear or not.

Mary Jane Doerr is a freelance writer living in the Detroit area. For the past six years, she has been a music critic for the Observer and Eccentric Newspapers.

briefly speaking

VAAL CLASSES

Registrations are being accepted for the fall term of art classes sponsored by the Visual Arts Association of Livonia (VAAL). For more information, call Shirley Cesar, 421-3207 or Marge Masek, 464-6772.

Classes offered include oil painting, watercolor, acrylics, collagraph printing and photography. Saturday morning classes for students ages 7-11 are also offered.

VAAL staff members include Marge Chellstorp, Ann Dase, Tom Halo, Jerrine Habsburg, Edie Joplich, Carol Kremk and Ann Sirm. The photography section is taught by Norbert Davert.

OPEN AUDITIONS

Midwest Dance Theatre Company open auditions will be 1:30-3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4, at 28841 Plymouth Road, Livonia. For more information, call 261-1334. The company plans several performances of the "Nutcracker" in area elementary schools and preschools.

SCHUBERT PROGRAM

"Schubert: From Song to Sonata"

will be held at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5, in Kresge Hall at Madonna College in Livonia. Robert Ward, guest artist and pianist, tempers performance with genuine sensitivity. The program is open to the public. There is no admission. For more information, call 591-5177. The college is at 1-96 and Levan, Livonia.

DEARBORN SYMPHONY

The Dearborn Orchestral Society announces the opening of the Detroit Symphony's 25th season with an anniversary showcase, which will be held at 8:00 p.m. Friday, Oct. 3, in Edsel Ford High School auditorium in Dearborn.

Opening the concert will be a presentation of instrumental solos and ensembles from the orchestra highlighted by special-effect lighting and staging.

Tickets are \$7 for adults and \$3 for students and may be purchased at the door. For more information, call 561-5782.

HOMERAMA

A multimillion-dollar cluster of 12 new "idea" homes by members of

the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan in Livonia continues through Oct. 12 at Deer Creek Subdivision off Eight Mile, between Farmington and Newburgh roads. Admission is \$4. For further information, call 569-0644. Renderings of the homes featured in the event are on display in the Livonia Mall.

A similar event is under way in Ann Arbor where the Washtenaw County Home Builders Association is presenting its second annual Showcase of Homes. This year nine builders have built 11 models for public viewing, incorporating the latest in design ideas and quality construction. Admission is \$3. For more information, call 996-0100.

PAPER ARTIST

Baker Street Interiors Ltd. in Livonia will present art work by Randee Goldsmith and Sara Kira in its Renaissance Room art gallery. Goldsmith, a paper artist from Farmington Hills, will show 16 pieces of her artwork. Sara Kira, a pottery artist from San Francisco, will exhibit her pottery, which reflects

contemporary styling.

NAME CHANGE

The Detroit Community Music School has formally changed its name to Center for Creative Studies/Institute of Music and Dance.

In announcing the name change, institute president Steven J. Nelson said, "While we are proud of our roots as Detroit Community Music School, it became obvious that our name did not adequately reflect who we were. We wanted our constituents to understand our affiliation with the Center for Creative Studies and we needed to affirm our commitment to outstanding dance instruction in addition to our fine musical programming."

PIPE ORGAN CONCERT

Livonia organist Tony O'Brien will be featured in a pipe organ concert at 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 11 sponsored by the Motor City Theatre Organ Society in the Redford Theater, 17350 Lakser, Detroit.

'DOCTOR FAUSTUS'

"Doctor Faustus," starring Rich-

ard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, will be shown at Madonna College at 1:30 p.m. and again at 7:30 p.m. in Madonna College's Kresge Hall. The classic tale, by Christopher Marlowe, tells of a scholar who sells his soul to the devil. The event is open to the public and there is no admission charge. Madonna College is at 1-96 and Levan, Livonia.

'WOMEN LOOK AT WOMEN'

"Women Look at Women," a Li-

brary of Congress touring exhibit of works by American women photographers of the past century, will be featured show for October in the Sarkis Galleries of the Center for Creative Studies-College of Art and Design, at 245 Kirby in the University Cultural Center area.

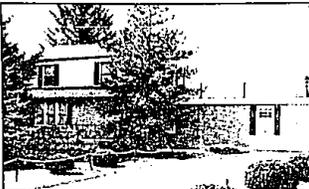
The Sarkis Galleries are open to the public Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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