

# No sparks fly between Higgins, Eliza

Thursday, November 20, 1986 O&E (S.F. 10EX) 17E

By Mary Jane Doerr  
special writer

In the musical "My Fair Lady" the question is always "Will these fair lady is my fair lady?"

Does Eliza Doolittle stay with Henry Higgins after he has trained her to take her place in society or does she marry Freddy?

Friday evening at the Fisher Theater, she belonged to Michigan Opera Theatre which revived this 74-year-old George Bernard Shaw classic story in a new lavishly clothed production.

If Henry Higgins intended to move Eliza from the Covent Garden flower market to social circles next door, he has succeeded. She is now being staged in opera houses like MOT.

The production is a grand one but this "lady" was not quite so fair.

"Brideshead Revisited" star Simon Jones was anything but ordinary as Henry Higgins. He was obnoxious, rude, outspoken, insensitive, somewhat disheveled, more than Shaw had in mind for Higgins. Jones commanded attention throughout the show.

HIS PATTERN SONGS, "Why Can't The English?" "I'm an Ordinary Man," and "A Hymn to Him," were sung with the finesse of a Shakespeare-trained actor. His movements brought as much humor to the role as his lines.

Jones's superb acting was backed up by Robert O'Hearn's sensational sets, perfectly placed and built for the Fisher. They were beautifully accented with flowers and Charles Caine's exquisite, pastel Ascot gowns and enormous hats. Suzanne Acton's well-blended MOT chorus was exceptional, a feature not often heard in "My Fair Lady."

It was hard to imagine how Saint Paul's Cathedral could be west of Big Ben or how Big Ben could be north of St. Paul's from Covent Garden, but the gray and black painted backdrop with lighted windows was real enough to take the audience to London for the evening at the opera house.

Karen Alexander's choreography was traditional and took advantage of the space provided by the sets designed specifically for MOT. Cynthia Marotti as the Spanish dancer was a remarkable transformation from Anybodys in "West Side Story." Mark D. Flint did a commanding job of directing both the singers and the orchestra.

Stephen Lehou as Freddy has such a beautiful voice in "On the Street Where You Live," he could have sung all night. Geoff Garland missed enough entrances to make himself even more believable as Alfred P. Doolittle.

Local actresses Shirley Benyas and Virginia Person carried their parts well. But, Mrs. Higgins (Eleanor Phelps) stole the show. She had just a few lines but the way she delivered them was worth the price of the ticket.

JUDITH BLAZER, Eliza Doolittle, is a well-trained actress famous for her role in "As the World Turns." Her cockney was precise, her voice inflections always in tune with her part. Her Manhattan School of Music trained voice was adequate and her actions and movements were always in keeping with her character.

But she and Jones didn't connect. They gave us little to make us believe that Eliza was in love with Higgins. No sparks flew. No one's heart stood still. Jones was too robust, too powerful, too crude, too extraordinary to match



Mary Jane Doerr

Blazer's detached interpretation.

Shaw ended his play "Pygmalion" with Higgins telling Eliza to get him some cheese and a pair of gloves. She tells him to get them himself and leaves. When the show opened in London in 1914, Mrs. Campbell, as Eliza, ad-libbed her own part by re-entering the stage asking "What size?" The enraged Shaw later wrote an epilogue to the play explaining that Eliza marries Freddy.

In the 1938 Pascal movie with Leslie Howard, there is the more romantic Lerner and Loewe ending. Shaw objected to Howard as Higgins because he was too handsome, too appealing. The audience would want Eliza to marry him.

MOT's stage director Michael Montel ended his finely crafted production with Eliza toying with her hat, moving uncomfortably as Higgins delivered these famous lines "Where in the devil are my slippers?" along with lots of he-will-never-change. It led to a slow curtain. It left the impression she was considering whether to stay with Higgins or leave Freddy.

Given the lack of romantic spell cast between the two leads, the ending was closer to the original play. Shaw would have loved it.

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The 26-voice Oakland Chorale presents "Music for Brass, Organ and Choir" at 7:30 p.m. Sunday in Varner Hall, Oakland University, Rochester.

Director Lyle Nordstrom of the department of music, theater and dance has chosen the "Tublatte Deo" by Benjamin Britten and double choir works by Giovanni Gabrieli that include brass and organ. The works by Gabrieli will be accompanied

by period instruments such as lutes and theorbos. In a contrasting vein, works for piano and choir by 19th century composers Gabriel Faure and Robert Schumann will be featured.

Tickets are \$5 general admission and \$2 for OU students and senior citizens. For information, call the Center for the Arts box office, 370-3013, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

## On public radio

The Musicians of Swanee Alley from Oakland University will be heard on the American Public Radio program, "St. Paul Sunday Morning," at 10 a.m. Sunday.

The national program is carried on WFBE-FM in Flint. The music, from the Elizabethan courts and countryside, was recorded in Minneapolis this past spring. Musicians of Swanee Alley was founded in 1976 by Lyle Nordstrom of the OU department of music, theater and dance. Performing with the ensemble are Patricia Adams Nordstrom, lecturer in music at OU, and David Douglass, OU alumnus.

In its 10 years of existence, the group has toured throughout the United States and Canada and nearly every country in Northern Europe. The musicians appeared on the now-defunct CBS program "Camera 3" and at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's "Images" festival. Swanee Alley has been recorded for Harmonia Mundi and Focus records.

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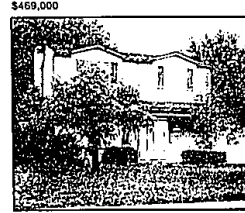
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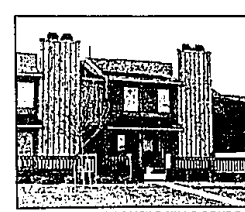
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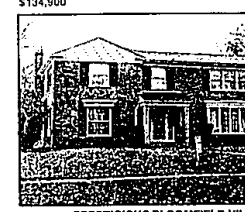
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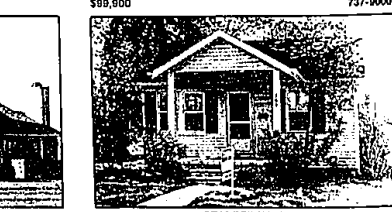
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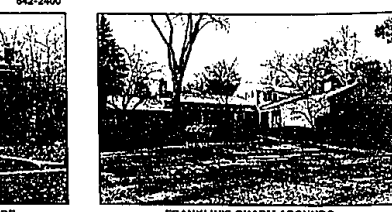
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