

Record crowd turns out for children's opera

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

If anyone were to ask what is the most often produced opera in America, in most cases the answer would be "Carmen" or perhaps "La Bohème."

But that is wrong. Last year, there were 733 performances in the United States of "Little Red Riding Hood," making contemporary American composer Seymour Barab's opera the most often produced opera in the U.S. Currently, the show is touring China.

Last weekend in Temple Beth El's Handelman Social Hall, a spellbound audience of nearly 1,000, mostly little children, witnessed the reason why. Karen DiChiera's high energy stage direc-

tion of a troupe of three locally well-known artists kept children (as little as two years old), engrossed for nearly an hour.

Seymour Barab himself flew in from New York City to see the three performers, soprano Maria Cimarelli (Little Red Riding Hood), mezzo-soprano Barbara Youngerman (mother and grandmother), and baritone Mark Vondrak (hunter and the wolf) give what he termed as one of the best performances he has ever seen of his piece, now nearly 25 years old.

THIS OPERA HAS appeal. Barab uses his sophisticated musical talent as a composer to give his rhyming libretto rhythm. Of course, having three such strong vocalists who know how to enunciate helped.



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Now 70, Barab is a cellist who has performed with orchestras all over the country since he first joined Stokowski's All American Youth Orchestra when he was 17. He is a founder of New York's Musical Antiqua.

He updates this famous Grimm fairy tale cleverly, not tastelessly as Sondheim does in "Into the Woods" where "Little Red" is raped by the wolf.

The story is still bad publicity

for wolves which because of its popularity even the movie "Dance With Wolves" will not change, but Barab's version is extremely funny.

Slightly dizzy Cimarelli is "Little Red" who is dying to get out of doing her homework. When sick grandmother calls on the telephone, she jumps at the chance to take her a basket of food, including some soda pop.

Cimarelli's coloratura voice ex-

ceeds as usual, especially when she imitates R. Luther Bingham's expert piano accompaniment of a mockingbird — a wonderful introduction to opera techniques.

Youngerman takes the dual role of the mother and the grandmother and comes up with a "patter" song to rival any of the similar Gilbert and Sullivan routines.

VONDRAK TURNS HIMSELF into a wolf on stage so as not to frighten the little children. Instead they laugh at his song "I'm the wolf, ha, ha, ha, ha." Vondrak easily turns the children on with ingratiating acting.

Apparently director DiChiera opted to reverse the first part of the opera, having Vondrak turn himself into the wolf with his back

to the audience not to frighten the children, rather than in the theatrical way Barab wrote it — with the actor making himself up as the wolf and suddenly taking his coat off. She ends the opera with the three singers dancing around the wolf's costume.

The simple moveable sets featuring a bright green and brown forest are perfect for taking this show to schools throughout Michigan.

Here in Bloomfield Hills, the opera was given in connection with Michigan Opera Theatre Community Programs as part of the Loren B. Fischer Cultural Arts Series for Children. What a beautiful tribute by the parents of a 17-year-old daughter who died a number of years ago.

Fill people pictures with impact

Recently I was in Mexico and made some photographs of some of the local people. I realized as I was shooting that a certain thought pattern and method of photographic preparation had gone through my mind that helped me to capture natural, strong images on film.

I thought I would share these with you today in my column with hopes that you will bring home some impact-filled people pictures on your next photo venture.

To begin with, I'd recommend using 400 speed films in either color or black and white. Higher ASA films

will enable you to hand-hold at a safer, faster shutter speed and use a smaller aperture to increase depth-of-field.

A medium telephoto lens such as 135mm (or telephoto zoom) will allow you to move in close and fill the frame while keeping at a comfortable, non-intimidating shooting distance.

IF TAKING candid of people, try to attract a minimum amount of attention to yourself. Blend in with the surroundings and become a quiet observer of what's going on.

Pre-determine exposure and focus by pointing your camera at an object near your subject. Then quickly move the camera to the subject and snap the shutter. Fumbling with your camera controls while aiming at the subject may cause them to move away and you'll lose the shot.

There may be times when candid won't work. If so, simply ask permission to photograph. Most often, people will cooperate, especially if a few coins are offered. Check local customs, however. In some countries, people may take offense at being offered money.

However, a couple of pesos was all it took to get permission to photograph the mother and child shown here. And having my camera pre-focused with exposure pre-determined enabled me to concentrate on capturing the spontaneity of the moment.



photography

Monte Nagler

A thorough familiarity with your camera equipment is essential if you are to operate quickly and unobtru-

sively. One further note: If photographing in a foreign land, no photo release is required.



Pre-determining exposure and focus helped Monte Nagler obtain this impact-filled photo-

graph of a mother and child in Matamoros, Mexico.

Short Shots

• The Friends of the Ferndale Public Library will hold their 16th annual photo contest and exhibit Feb. 12 to March 2. Opening reception and award presentation is 7:30 p.m. Feb. 12.

Competition, black and white and color, is open to all area non-professional photographers. Entry fee is \$5 per category, limit, two prints per category.

For entry form, send stamped, self-addressed envelope to Friends of the Ferndale Public Library, C/O Photographic Committee, 222 E. Nine Mile, Ferndale, 48220.

• Alan Lowy Photographic Studio of Farmington Hills will host photo sessions in January and February. The sessions, 10 a.m. to noon and 1-3 p.m. Sunday, will be a boudoir/lin-

erie model session and the winterfest, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 10, will feature models in indoor and outdoor winter fashions. This one will be held at Camp Wathana in Holly. For information on either event, send a stamped self-addressed No. 10 envelope to Alan Lowy Photography Studio, C/O Michigan Photography Workshops, 28830 W. Eight Mile, Farmington Hills.

• A workshop on photographic documentation of artwork will be held 7-10 p.m. Jan. 31 at Detroit Focus Gallery, 743 Beaubien, Detroit. It will be conducted by Jay Jurma and will be a lecture demonstration. For information, call the gallery, 962-9025 noon to 6 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday.

• Michigan Photographic Historical Society will meet at 2 p.m. Saturday at Halsted Gallery, 560 N. Woodward, Birmingham. Tom Halsted, gallery owner, will talk about the joys and pitfalls of his specialty. Program is open to the public at no charge.

• Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester Hills offers a five-session Black and White Photography Workshop on three Tuesday evenings and two Saturdays beginning Feb. 12. Workshop participants need the background of a basic photography class. For information, call the Center for the Arts, 851-4110.

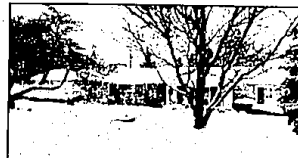
• Monte Nagler's basic photography classes begin this month — Tuesday, Jan. 22 at the Farmington/Farmington Hills Community House (477-8484) and Wednesday, Jan. 23 at the Community House of Birmingham (644-5832).

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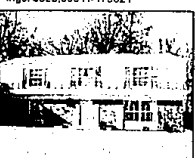
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