

Apprentice from page B1

gram allows young apprentices to work with the company for a maximum of two years. In the meantime, Hughes is adding another production to her resume thanks to the Michigan Opera Theatre program. She opens in the role of Ellen in Leo Delibes' *Lakme* Saturday, May 11, at the Detroit Opera House. Aline Kutan performs the lead role of the Brahmin priestess whose love for a British soldier ends in tragedy.

"It's a wonderful way to get your feet wet," said Hughes who's apprenticed with the Toledo Opera and worked with regional companies like the Comic Opera Guild and Ohio Light Opera. "With most programs you sing in the chorus but at Michigan Opera Theatre you sing minor roles. The experience is invaluable. It takes a while for the voice to develop. They provide a vocal coach who is usually very expensive to work with. During rehearsal we get to work with international singers."

"*Lakme* is a wonderful production in French with beautiful music that's never done. One of the principals is baritone Malcolm MacKenzie, the friend of the British officer Gerald. We had the opportunity to sit down with him and asked how he got started and found his agent. I learned that becoming a professional is 50 percent voice and 50 percent business sense."

Working with international singers is one of the highlights of the program for Eliza Warner, as well. Of course, singing roles in the company's productions of *Carmen*



Young apprentices: Matthew Tuell (second from right) and Eliza Warner (far right) were in Michigan Opera Theatre's production of *Carmen* last October.

men and *Anoush* was equally as thrilling. Warner plays Rose, the sister of Ellen in *Lakme*. The two characters add comic relief to the tragic story.

"We see how polished they are, technically their singing, and how they carry themselves on stage," said Warner, an Ann Arbor resident who graduated with a master's degree in voice performance from the University of Michigan School of Music in 1999. "We observe and take in and take note. We ask advice. Did they need to live in New York?"

"The program also gives us practical experience. For me, the biggest challenge was singing Armenian in *Anoush*. It was completely foreign to all of us."

For Matthew Tuell the most difficult aspect of the training is forming relationships with cast members only to part. The Lansing tenor is in his seventh production with the company. He plays Hadji, the lifelong servant and protector of *Lakme*. In fall, he'll return to Michigan State University to finish his degree.

"The hardest thing is to stay when the cast comes and goes and being so busy with the overlapping of spring productions," said Tuell. "I was in *Orelia* and the last week of performances was the first week of rehearsals for *Lakme*. We'd rehearse three hours a day and have a 7 o'clock makeup call and be on stage until 11:30."

"But it's a really terrific experience, being on stage, working

with a number of directors and colleagues. I found out about the program while in the Utah young artist program where I could only sing in the chorus. The coach told me MOT was auditioning a number of tenor roles for apprentice. It's the highest level I've been able to work at."

Providing experience on the professional stage was what David DiChiera had in mind when he founded the program 21 years ago. He's especially impressed with this season's apprentices.

"They're very disciplined and committed," said DiChiera, director of Michigan Opera Theatre. "This is an avocation that needs physical discipline, developing the apparatus for singing but you have to bring all the understanding of language and movement. It's a multi-faceted art form, a marriage of theater and voice. The program is what trains young artists to become successful professional singers, to stretch themselves to see if they have what it takes. It's a transition from talented student to young professional and singing roles is an important experience."

DiChiera said Matthew Tuell is an example of how the program, which is funded by various endowments, furthers the talent of young artists.

"He's had an incredible amount of experience because of the variety of roles. Character acting in *Falstaff* brought out personality I never knew was there."

"I'm excited because we're expanding the apprentice program with an endowment gift to be announced in full."

Fest features outstanding tango dancers

BY KEELY KALESKI WYGONIK
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Ginka Gerova Ortega, artistic director of Music Viva! got some great last minute news, Fabian Salas and Carolina De Rio, star dancers in the Argentine film, *The Tango Lesson*, will be performing at the Festival of World Music and Dance, *Fire and Spirit*, Friday, May 10 at Smith Theatre on Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills. Tickets are \$16 in advance, \$18 at the door, or \$25 reserved. Call (248) 522-3667 for tickets and information.

Also performing is Biakuye (Unity) African Drums Ensemble, singer Shu Ping, the Motor City Milongueros Tango Dancers, the Tango Para Siempre Group, and Grupo Musica Viva featuring Ortega on flute, Emily Kistler, cello, Glenn Bering, percussion, Julian Devoux, bayan, and Juan Herrera, guitar.

"I'm very much into world music now," said Ortega who was trained as a classical flutist and studied with Jean Pierre Rampal. "I like the melodies and rhythm. The soul of Latin music is flute. I am surprising myself by how much of what I love is so easy - it just comes to me."

Ortega heard Biakuye in Ann Arbor and was very impressed with the group's authenticity. One of its members, Mark Stone, is a scholar who has studied west African music.



Ginka Gerova Ortega

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Ginka Gerova Ortega
Flutist

"What I am trying to do is create new sounds and instrumentation," said Ortega as she explained the music of Grupo Musica Viva. "This kind of combination of instruments is very rare, therefore you hear a new kind of sound with a classical base, but a new twist that explores different colors of the instrumentation. We are exploring the music of Latin America and taking it to another level."

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