

# Elton John, Tim Rice update *Aida* with pop music

BY SUSAN B. TAUBER  
STAFF WRITER

The name's the same. The story line is the same. And that's where the similarities end.

The Fisher Theatre is playing host to *Aida* for four weeks. This isn't the same *Aida* as the opera written by Giuseppe Verdi in 1871.

It's the Broadway hit *Aida* written by the successful *The Lion King* duo — composer Elton John and lyricist Tim Rice.

Giuseppe Verdi wrote the famous opera at the age of 68. It became only one of several operas — *Nabucco*, *I Lombardi*, *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, that made Verdi's name immortal in the world of music. He's known today as the greatest of the operatic composers.

Verdi based *Aida* on an existing story. John and Rice did the same, only with a more modern twist to the age-old love story.

"It's very interesting to see how a contemporary composer looks at an story from opera in new terms," said David

D'Cherrie, director of Michigan Opera Theatre. "Nothing will replace the masterpiece, *Aida*, just like the musical, *Rent*, won't replace Puccini's *La Bohème*. I hope people will enjoy the new *Aida* and then when MOTO redoes Verdi's opera in a few years from now, they will come and see what a great opera composer did with it. They might just find they enjoyed the traditional opera just as much as they did the

## AIDA

**What:** John Elton/Tim Rice musical, performed by the national touring company

**When:** 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays; 2 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, 7:30 p.m. Sundays through Oct. 5. And a 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 2

**Where:** Fisher Theatre, 3011 West Grand Boulevard, Detroit

**Tickets:** Through Ticketmaster at (248) 645-6666, by going to the Web site [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com), at all Ticketmaster outlets and at the Fisher Theater box office. Groups of 20 or more can get special rates by calling (313) 872-1132

"If Verdi were in the audience of our *Aida*, I think he would like this rendition," said Jeremy Kushnier, who portrays the male lead, Radames, in the national tour produced by Disney Theatrical Productions. "This is a really good show. Even if people aren't fans of Elton John music, they are going to fall in love with it."

The musical *Aida* opened March 23, 2000 on Broadway. It earned four 2000 Tony

awards — Best Score, Best Lead Actress in a Musical (Heather Headley), Best Scenic Design (by Bob Crowley) and Best Lighting Design (by Natasha Katz). *Aida* also earned the 2001 Grammy Award for the Best Musical Show Album.

**LOVE STORY**

*Aida* is a story about the Nubian princess, Aida, who is stolen from her country, Nubia, at a time of war between Egypt and her country. Radames, an Egyptian army captain, is aboard the boat that takes Aida and other Nubian captives back to Egypt.

Once they arrive, he sends her to his betrothed, Egyptian princess, Amneris.

Radames has promised to marry Amneris. But like all love stories, things get complicated after Radames and Aida fall in love. The story ends when the lovers Radames and Aida are both buried alive in a tomb beneath the sands of the Egyptian desert, where they can spend an eternity together.

If you're familiar with *The Lion King*, you know the burial scene will be handled with kid gloves.

The John/Rice *Aida* production brings a modern bent to the story. It begins in a 21st century museum, where a man and a woman touring an Egyptian exhibit find themselves attracted to each other.

There are touches of humor added to the dramatic story, such as in the show-stopping number, *My Strongest Suit*, with its strong Motown songs.



AIDA tells the story of two star-crossed lovers on the banks of the Nile. It's in production at The Fisher Theatre.

Amneris, played on the tour by Kelli Fournier, sings the comedic song complete with a fashion show unlike any other. *Aida* marks Fournier's Broadway debut.

She's also a veteran of other stage roles and television credits.

Paulette Ivory portrays Aida. She hails from London's West End where she's had a musical career. She's also been in television, in films and is a recording artist.

Kushnier is from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He originated the role of Ren in *Footloose* for his Broadway debut and played Roger in the national touring company of *Rent*. He

also performed in the original Canadian companies of *The Who's Tommy* and *Rent*. Kushnier joined *Aida* in February 2002. He takes time off from work in musicals to promote his band, whose debut compact disc, *In Time*, came out in the spring.

Kushnier said parents can bring their families to see *Aida*. "There is something for everyone in this story," he said. "It is definitely a different musical than *The Lion King*."

"Whether one comes to see the costumes or the staging or to hear the music, they will walk out loving the story."

Elton John described *Aida* in this way: "It's truly a pop musical with spoken dialogue. It has all kinds of recognizable song types with very urban-base rhythm and blues and gospel-inspired songs. It's my version of what *Aida* should be in a modern way."

"What makes *Aida* so interesting to me is that the story is so great, so pertinent," he added. "It's a beautiful, complex love story, where bigotry and hatred are swept out the window and love, compassion, forgiveness and understanding triumph. In this day and age, I'm a great believer in the human spirit triumphing over evil in any way."

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## CRAFT CALENDAR

**Wayne County**  
St. Edith School Crafters needed for fourth annual show held 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 9, at the school, 15089 Newburg. Livonia. Call Diana at (734) 462-6037 or JoAnn at (734) 464-9370. St. Aidan Parish Fall show: The Livonia parish is looking for crafters for its 19th annual craft show, 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 19th. For more information, or an application, call (248) 477-8942 or (734) 427-4571. Delta Kappa Gamma Show: Crafters need for 16th annual juried show at West Middle School in Plymouth 9 a.m.

to 4 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 19. Call Terri (734) 416-6165.

**Fall festival:** St. Damian Parish in Westland looking for crafters for its fall show 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 12. For more information, or an application, call (734) 421-6130.

**St. Robert Bellarmine Church:** Crafters wanted for annual Christmas Bazaar at St. Robert Bellarmine Church in Redford, Oct. 26. Table rental \$25; call Harvey call (313) 937-1141 and (313) 533-5255.

**Fall show:** Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Dearborn has tables available for its 21st annual craft show on Saturday, Oct. 26. Eight-foot tables are \$25. Call (313) 562-9246 for information.

**Schoolcraft College:** Crafters of every ilk may apply for a spot in the 2002 Fall Craft Show at Schoolcraft College Saturday-Sunday, Nov. 9-10. With 150 crafters, this show is one of the premier venues in the area and attracts crowds of more than 2,000 people. The show is juried, and a limited number of exhibitors are accepted in each category to maintain a balanced representation in each craft. Crafters are

asked to submit a photograph of their work with their application if they have not been accepted for a previous show. The show features all types of handmade crafts including painting, sculpture, pottery, jewelry, textiles, needlework, photography, glass, leather and woodcarving. For an application, call Marjorie Lynch at (734) 462-4400, Ext. 5008. Schoolcraft College is at 16600 Haggerty Road, between Six and Seven Mile roads west of I-75.

**St. Theodore Confraternity of Christian Women:** Table rental is \$20 for the

annual craft show, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 12, in the parish social hall, 8200 North Wayne Road, Westland. Reserve a table at (734) 261-8357.

**Christmas Craft Show:** St. Thomas a Becket Catholic Church, 555 S. Lilley Road in Canton is accepting applications for its annual Christmas show 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 7. Call Donna Whitaker, (734) 981-0123 if you're interested in participating.

**St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church:** Crafters needed for annual Holiday Bazaar on Oct. 26 at the Redford

church. Call (313) 937-2880 to reserve a table.

**Churchill High School PTSA craft show:** The school PTSA is accepting applications to fill for more than 150 booths at its 11th annual arts and crafts show on Oct. 19.

The show runs 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Call (734) 523-0022 for an application.

**Kimball High School 21st Annual Golden Harvest Arts and Crafts Fair:** 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 19, at the school, 1500 Lexington Blvd., Royal Oak. Crafters still needed. Call Mary Smith at (248) 585-0803.

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