

Love triangle takes center stage at Michigan Opera Theatre

BY LINDA ANN CHONIK
STAFF WRITER

Giuseppe Verdi probably would have appreciated the fact that Michigan Opera Theatre artistic director David DiChiera waited 15 years to bring the Italian composer's *Il Trovatore* to the stage again. It wasn't because DiChiera didn't long to hear the famous Anvil Chorus. Rather he lacked the extremely talented soloists to perform the lead roles.

DiChiera's dream to once more hear the haunting *Miserere* of the final act comes true with the opening of a new co-production with Opera Pacific and Florentine Opera of Milwaukee Saturday, Oct. 12, at the Detroit Opera House.

"It's one of the most performed operas since it was premiered and became so well known," said DiChiera. "The hurdy gurdys would go around playing the music with their monkey and collecting pennies. The music is just so beautiful and the most difficult to cast well. It needs four exceptional singers - tenor, soprano, mezzo and baritone. That's always a challenge. Verdi singers are not as plentiful as they once were."

DiChiera scoured the world to find a cast worthy of the Verdi opera. Russian tenor Victor Afanasenko alternates with American Jeffrey Springer in the role of Manrico who's separated from his brother at birth. Later, the wealthy Count di Luna becomes his nemesis.

American soprano Indra Thomas and Italian soprano Isabella Saeco vie for the attention of the brothers as Leonora, lady in waiting to the Queen of Aragon. Ukrainian baritone Yuri Noshayev and his Chinese counterpart C.Y. Lino trade off dueling with Manrico for her affection.



The Michigan Opera Theatre last presented *Il Trovatore* in 1988 at Masonic Temple.

"It was a two year project," said DiChiera. "The costumes were built in Belgrade as well as the new scenery. There are some very grand interesting pieces that symbolize elements in the story. In the convent scenes there are huge walls and stairways and in the midst of it all a stained glass rose hangs over it. An enormous chain hovers over the prison scene. It's exaggerated."

The story and theatrical aspects of opera are what drove DiChiera to found the Michigan

Opera Theatre in 1971. This season's productions were programmed with those elements in mind. The theme of the season - Objects of Desire - focuses on revenge, wealth, lust, fidelity and redemption.

Don Pasquale, Donizetti's comic opera about a greedy uncle trying to keep his nephew from an inheritance, comes to the MOT stage Nov. 9-17. *Don Giovanni*, Mozart's opera based on the legendary conquests of Don Juan, follows April 26 to May 4. Fidelity is key to the

Viennese opera. *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss Jr. May 17-25. DiChiera bills it as "an evening of pure romance and champagne with music people will know and love."

MOT's first opera of the new century debuts June 7-15. Currently at the New York City Opera in Lincoln Center, *Dead Man Walking* was composed by Jake Heggie. It is based on the true story of Sister Helen Prejean, a nun who tries to comfort a victim's family as well as redeem the man she sees within

the monstrous murderer. "We're co-producing it with eight opera companies," said DiChiera. "It delves deeper into emotional levels than the novel and the Academy Award winning film, and the nun who's story it is plans to come for the production."

But opera isn't the only art practiced at Michigan Opera Theatre. A Dance Series has gradually grown to include internationally acclaimed companies. This season the more than 225-year old Bolshoi Ballet revives *Swan Lake* Nov. 20-24. The tale was first performed by the Bolshoi in 1877.

"Bolshoi means big. It will take 130 dancers to do *Swan Lake*. It brings you into another world of fantasy," said DiChiera. "Alvin Ailey returns in March (12-15) and The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago closes the season in

MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE

What: Giuseppe Verdi's romantic tragedy *Il Trovatore*

When: Saturday, Oct. 12 to Sunday, Oct. 20, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday

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