

Protecting state's natural beauty at heart of North Country Opera sequel

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
STAFF WRITER

Ann Arbor playwright, poet and musician Jay Stielstra integrates the husband-and-wife relationship with the politics of land conservation in his sequel to *North Country Opera*.
On stage Saturday-Monday, May 3-5 at The Ark in Ann Arbor, the folk musical, aptly titled *North Country Opera Continued*, takes up where Stielstra's original story, but 20 years later - just in time for the first *North Country Opera* production's 20th anniversary. *Politics* "is a little more overt," in the sequel, said Stielstra, a longtime Ann Arbor resident who grew up in Ludington and wrote the dialogue and songs for both *North Country* musicals.
Stielstra, now 69, said he wanted politics to impact a fictional marriage because he

believes our private lives cannot be separated from public issues.
In *North Country Opera Continued*, the story's original lead characters Michael and Sari, now married and the owners of the Bushcherry Bar in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, meet moral and marital conflicts after the arrival of two land developers intent on turning the pristine region into a tourist attraction.
Dissatisfaction with urban life and the rewards of rural living are themes in *North Country Opera*, whereas land conservation is firmly pitted against land development - and a marriage - in the sequel.
"Sari has never been out of the town and is in her mid-40s. She thinks maybe she should make some money," explained Stielstra. "Michael has thrown off his commercial interests long ago to come and be with her."
North Country Opera

Continued is a two-act musical and contains about 13 songs performed live on acoustic guitar, electric bass, fiddle, banjo, mandolin and dobro, which sounds a bit like an Hawaiian guitar.
"The sound of my music has more of a country sound than pop. There's country folk and pop folk. Mine is more on the country side - with a little blue grass influence," said Stielstra.
A regular performer at several Michigan venues and a songwriter with works recorded by other artists, Stielstra is often referred to as Ann Arbor's "poet laureate."
Dave Siglin, program director at The Ark, goes farther. Stielstra "should be the poet laureate of the State of Michigan," he said. "His songs can be compared with those of any songwriter in the country as far as I'm concerned."

FOLK MUSICAL

What: North Country Opera *Continued*, a folk musical sequel by Ann Arbor playwright, musician and poet Jay Stielstra.
Where: 8 p.m. Saturday, May 3, and Monday, May 5; 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Sunday, May 4.

Where: The Ark, 316 South Main in Ann Arbor.

Tickets: General admission, \$20, students and individuals with a union card or fishing license, \$15, call (734) 763-TKTS or TicketMaster at (248) 645-6666.



'North Country Opera Continued' stars Michael Smith, a guitar player and singer with the Cadillac Cowboys, and Tracy Komary, chair of Washtenaw Community College's Performing Arts Department.

FILM BEAT

Film beat lists alternative film theaters, special movie events and local flicks. Listings and movie information can be submitted to: Nicole Stafford, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 801 East Maple, Birmingham, Mich. 48009 or e-mail: nstafford@oe.homecomm.net.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE. Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit, (313) 833-3237, www.dia.org/dit. Adult admission, \$6.50, senior citizens, full-time students with valid identification and DIA members, \$5.50. Discount tickets available in book for five for \$25. Films screened Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. All Monday shows are in the evening.

REDFORD THEATRE. 17360 Lahser in Detroit, call (313) 537-2560. Regular admission, \$3.

REDWOOD AND VIEW AT THE MAGIC BAG. 22920 Woodward, Ferndale, (248) 544-3030, www.magicbag.com. Movie nights on Wednesdays and Thursdays in small theater setting with full bar. Must be at least 21. Doors open at 8 p.m., films start at 9:30 p.m., box office hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., \$2.

MAIN ART THEATRE. 118 North Main at 11 Mile in downtown Royal Oak, (248) 542-0180. Adult evening admission is \$8.50. Matinees before 6 p.m. and admission for seniors and children is always \$6.

MAPLE ART THEATRE. 4135 West Maple in Bloomfield Township, (248) 542-0180. Adult evening admission is \$8.50. Matinees before 6 p.m. and admission for seniors and children is always \$6.

MICHIGAN THEATRE. 603 East Liberty, Ann Arbor, (734) 668-8463, www.michtheatre.com. Adult admission, \$8, students and senior citizens, \$6.25, Michigan Theater members, \$5.50. Films are shown daily.

STATE THEATRE. 233 State St., Ann Arbor, (734) 761-8667 or www.michtheatre.com. Adult admission, \$8, students and senior citizens, \$6.25.

UPTOWN BIRMINGHAM 8. 211 South Old Woodward Ave. in downtown Birmingham, (248) 644-3456. Adult admission is \$8.50 in the evening and \$6 for matinee showings before 6 p.m. Admission for seniors age 55 and older is \$5.50 all the time. Admission for children age 12 and under is \$5.75 all the time.

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