

Met director says quality comes first

Anthony Bliss would rather "see the house close, than lower its standards." Bliss, executive director and chairman of the board of the Metropolitan Opera Company, takes the hard line when it comes to quality. He's grown up with it and he apparently doesn't intend to let quality suffer because of a thing like money.

He was in Detroit earlier in the spring to promote the company's Detroit tour which will open Monday with a performance of Bizet's "Carmen."

Appointed to his present post in 1974, the Met hoped that by supporting this kind of liner, yet sympathetic supporter of the company, Bliss would be able to turn around the company's problems with his well-developed business acumen. Whether or not he's been able to do that, remains to be seen.

"I would be a naive and a delusion to say that we've achieved anything yet," Bliss admitted.

"Now, it's a new ballgame in the old days they passed the hat at the end of a season that had operated in the red. Usually what came up in the hat would see them through that season's monetary problems."

"We can't operate like that anymore. Those resources have practically dried up with the tax structure the way it is now. To be perfectly frank, I suppose that during those years, we'd forgotten how to market our product," he said.

The Met has a new advertising campaign designed to reverse that course. Recently a very slick and persuasive advertising supplement appeared with the Sunday New York Times. Bliss calls the lack of the ad bits "A blow for civilization."

The ad extolled the virtues of this "national treasure." The play was "The private of contributing to civilization." It was the same shock treatment, especially for those who've listened to the Met on the radio for years without paying a cent towards the opera happening.

So far, the campaign has brought in more than \$1 million. The campaign was designed by a former J. Walter Thompson executive, Warren Pflaumer, who set up his own agency to service the Met account.

P.S.



Bliss said the Met enjoys a ticket subscription of 34,000, but he isn't sure if developing that further would be a sure way to success.

"I don't think people are willing to contribute themselves so far ahead and for that amount of money when they might not be able to attend some of the performances in the end."

Attendance this season has been at 85

Wayne slates shows

The seventh summer theater festival at Wayne State University, with an accent on musicals, has been scheduled for June 29 through Aug. 14 at the Hillberry Theatre and the Studio Theatre, downtown at the Hillberry.

The summer repertory company will present Stephen Sondheim's "Company," the 1976 Broadway musical hit, and Ned Simon's "The Good Doctor," the 1973 comedy with music based on stories by Anton Chekhov. For children, the company will offer matinee performances of another comedy with music, "Sacramento Fifty Miles," written by Eleanor and Ray Harder and based on the old tale "The Bremen Town Musicians."

"Company," directed by Russell Smith, will run from July 8 through 24 and "The Good Doctor," directed by Richard Spear, from July 30 through Aug. 14. Performances are Wednesday through Saturday at 8:30 p.m. The children's play, directed by Gary M. Witt, plays from June 30 through July 25. Performances are Tuesdays at 1

the rich Eastern elite" as one congressman, Bliss said, once called it.

"He maintains that the government, which represents a supposed broader base than this elite class, doesn't come up with more arts subsidy in the next 10 years, many of the country's major art entities are headed for extinction."

"The cost of one large jet plane would take care of all the arts for a year," he said. He is well served with such information.

"Private support simply cannot keep the pace," he said.

"There is no denying that it costs a lot to produce opera. There are no shortcuts—we cannot do it cheaply. Some people think the singers get paid too much. What is too much?"

"We also have a huge tax problem in this country, and we have to withhold 18 percent of their fee," he said.

"So what about the star system?"

"I wish we could get to the point where people would go just to hear the music, rather than just for the star singer or conductor. The Met's National Touring Company was designed to do that. If we could have sustained it for four or five years, I think it could have accomplished its aim."

Bliss said one of the problems of marketing opera is the time it takes and that it doesn't have the TV-draw advantage that sports do. He said more opera on television would increase the audience immeasurably.

"The Danny Kaye Look-in" on the Met reached more than 61 million viewers in 1975. But the expense of doing opera on television is incredible. Also, there are many singers who would not survive on TV because they don't look as great close-up as their voices sound, he said.

"We did performances in Sheep's Meadow in Central Park last summer and about 100,000 people saw them. For that many people to see an opera at the Met house, we'd have to do 25 performances," he said.

He said the Met is currently negotiating to take outdoor performances to six other New York state cities to help broaden the audience. He is serious about opera becoming a part of more people's lives.



ANTHONY A. BLISS

Exhibit set at Roeper

One hundred and eight artists and craftsmen will display their creations for purchase at Roeper City and Country School's first annual Scholarship Arts Festival.

The two-day event is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, on the Roeper grounds, North Woodland between Long Lake and Square Lake roads.

Artists and craftspeople include sculptress Roberta Amstutz; jeweler Mari Bernstein; painter Joyce Ellison, Charlotte Raymond and Georgia Robinson; fiber artist, Jacqueline Bergeward and potter, Bucki Kader, all of Troy.

Sculptor, Jason; jeweler, Marge Kaechle; painter, Lou Molnar and weaver Cynthia Savell, all of Birmingham will also be exhibiting.

From Bloomfield Hills are the star, William Nagengast, Jr. and painter, Bonnie Sabine. Rochester will have painters Dennis Dodson and Charles Gierke; sculptors Sam and Nina Sottile, painter and sculptress Rita Skoczen, and Isabele Schillare who does pen and ink drawings.

Also on hand will be candlemaker Robert Bradley of Farmington and Laazo Steiner, ceramist and potter from Southfield.

The Festival weekend will actually begin Friday, at 8 p.m. with an auction in the Domes area. All sculpture of the Park West Galleries will act as auctioneer for nearly 100 beautiful, imported and U.S.-produced prints donated by London Arts, Inc. in the Fisher Building. Included will be prints representing the contemporary school.

In recent years, the annual spring event to benefit the Roeper Scholarship Fund has played an increasingly important role in maintaining a school available to gifted youngsters from a cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds.

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