

Singer reaches a goal: On stage with the Met

Ara Berberian will play the role of the marriage broker in the Metropolitan Opera production of Strauss's "The Bartered Bride" at the Masonic Temple in Detroit at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, May 26. He laughingly refers to the role of the matchmaker as "I've Made Mine."

By SHIRLEE IDEN

Looking back, Ara Berberian can remember two major ambitions in his life. Twice he undertook important life decisions and gave his all. The first time, he turned his back on a career as a major league baseball player. The second try for a career in opera is alive and well.

Interviewed in his spacious Southfield home which overlooks the Rouge and Franklin rivers, Berberian said many think it odd that he continues to live in Southfield since he is busy year-round with music and travel.

"We've lived in Southfield since 1956," he said. "My family moved to this home when I was in the army. It was surrounded by farmlands then."

"Living in New York means living in Manhattan and it's no life for a family. I lived in Greenwich Village when I was single and it was terrific. I went to auditions, coaching, tutors, concerts, everything, and it's OK when you marry too."

"But after a couple of kids, you can't do it — you must commute 14 come to the city for a 10 a rehearsal and then look around for something to do."

Berberian finds commuting from Southfield far better and finds he gets home long enough stretches to enjoy home and family. He and his wife, Ginny, have three children: Harry, 12, Suzanne, 10, and Ada Jon, 4. His father, Harry, also lives with them.

Before deciding on an operatic career, Berberian received an undergraduate degree in economics and a law degree, both from the University of Michigan.

But his love of singing was something that was part of him from childhood.

"When I was about 7 years old," he remembered, "I had an older sister who played the piano. I would sing along

with her. By the time I was 10 I really knew my stuff."

"BY AGE 13 I was taking piano and violin lessons also. My father only bought opera records. That didn't rub off on my three sisters, but it did on me."

As a young teen, Berberian's father took him to see "La Traviata" and he was enthralled.

"The doorman knew my father and offered me an usher's job," he said. "I saw all the operas that week and later more than 125 Detroit Symphony Concerts, many more operas and ballets."

"I had my Social Security Card at age 13, but I never told my friends I had a job at night."

Berberian said he would preach against any individual going to music school for voice training.

"You can be an instrumentalist prodigy at age 10, but a voice has to mature," he contends.

A native Detroit, Berberian loves all kinds of music and said he always knew that of all things in life, he was singled out to have a voice.

At 17, as a high school student, he first began voice studies, continuing at Culver Military Academy and the University of Michigan with Dr. Kenneth Westerman.

"People say to me all the time, 'God gave you a voice,' but I say, no. God gave you a voice too. He gave me the discipline and the drive," Berberian said.

Despite his drive for a career in the arts, Berberian is a man of many interests.

"I love to work with woods, to restore and finish things and work with leather too," he said. "Now we're building a barn as a craft center."

"I STAY" physical by riding the tractor and raking leaves."

The proposed barn will be built by graduate degree in economics and a law degree, both from the University of Michigan.

His wife, Ginny, said her husband's not like a typical opera singer at all.

"When he's home, he doesn't sing at all," she said. "He gets into his overalls and works around the house."

Concert dedicated to pianist's memory

On Sunday, June 3, Detroit and Florence, Italy will come one step closer as "sister renaissance cities."

At 3 p.m. the Pastiche Wind Quintet will present its spring concert at Orchestra Hall in memory of pianist Christine Rinaldo.

All proceeds from the event will be toward the establishment of a University of Michigan scholarship fund in her name.

Prior to her untimely death in Rome last November, Miss Rinaldo had been instrumental in arranging a cultural exchange for the Renaissance Cities Program. In September 1977, she and Italian flutist Roberto Fabricciani made their American duo debut at Detroit's Orchestra Hall. On Nov. 3, the Pastiche Wind Quintet arrived in Florence to represent Detroit in the cultural exchange. Two days later, Miss Rinaldo, age 26, died of cardiac arrest.

"We were in a state of shock," said Tom Barna, Pastiche's executive director. "We had gotten very close to Chris-

ture, and she was to be our guide for the Italian tour. The state of confusion was unbelievable."

With the encouragement of Miss Rinaldo's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Rinaldo of Bloomfield Hills, the wind quintet was able to reconstruct their tour despite the tragic circumstance, dedicating it to Miss Rinaldo. Barna said, "The June 3 concert is our way of promoting Christine Rinaldo's memory as a gifted musician. It is highly appropriate that it take place in Orchestra Hall, where she made her American debut."

The U-M scholarship fund will also be a "sister" to the Christine Rinaldo Memorial Prize of the Amici della Musica of Arezzo, Italy.

Tickets to the memorial concert are \$10, \$6, and \$3 (for students, seniors and low-income individuals) and are available at Hudson's, Detroit Institute of Arts and Orchestra Hall. For further information, call Midtown Associates, 831-7171.

In his undergraduate days, Berberian sang in a number of choruses, in Gilbert and Sullivan and opera workshops. He practiced for one year during which he sang in the bar association glee club.

"My turning point came when I was drafted," he said. "Being in the army gave me the chance to sing with the U. S. Army Band and Chorus and it was terrific."

"I was encouraged about my singing when I was chosen to be a soloist while in the army."

Berberian sang regularly for people in the highest echelons of government. "I became soloist at the Presbyterian Church where Ike worshipped and sang before the president in the White House many times."

"It was just incredible. And I thought

if I can endure the pressure of singing before presidents, Queen Elizabeth and John Foster Dulles, I must have the right metabolism."

Berberian's competitors in the army were graduates of such prestigious schools as Eastman, Curtis and Juilliard.

"I took three voice lessons a week, spending all my money," he recalled.

While he was in law school, he made his operatic debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra. And he liked the feeling. In the army, he lived off the base not far from a Methodist church.

"I told them I needed a place to practice and they gave me a key," he said. "I could practice any day or night and I did. I'd go there at all hours even after a concert."

"That's when I decided to give it all I had." Ready to be discharged from the army, he could have re-enlisted for a legal career, but declined.

An acquaintance from Detroit told him about an opera company in Woodstock, N.Y.

"Straight from getting discharged, I went there," he said. "I wanted to get this nagging notion of being an operatic performer out of my system."

"I didn't want to be 40 years old and say — but I chose to be a lawyer. I wanted to give it my best, but fail."

Berberian didn't fail and has supported himself by his singing ever since.

He recalled the other time he "gave it all he had" during law school days. "I was signed by the Philadelphia

Athletics as a pitcher and I went to their training camp. I realized that 90 percent of my time was spent either in the bullpen, in the locker room, or shagging flies," he said.

"Shagging flies you run around a ball park and it's 30 degrees outside and it's awful. After one summer I hated it."

He said his all out try for a singing career was an exact parallel, except that he succeeded and he loves it.

His parents, content to have a lawyer son, were not as happy during his fledgling years singing in the Catskills and living in Greenwich Village.

"My father would say: 'I lost my son,'" Berberian remembered.

Success didn't come overnight. But after a long struggle, he was put under contract with a management company.

Photographer follows route of Alexander

Thousands of words have been written to explain, explore and express the conquests and travels of Alexander the Great more than 2,200 years ago.

Now, a collection of modern photographs offers a look at much of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and where Alexander fought and eventually died.

"To the Indus with Alexander the Great" is an exhibition of 50 photographs on display at the Detroit Institute of Arts from Tuesday, May 29 through Sunday, July 22.

The color and black and white photographs were taken by George R. Booth Jr. of Wayne State University. The exhibition was organized by Professor Bernard Goldman, also of WSI.

The photos reveal that much of the area today remains as Alexander saw it in the 4th century B.C. Across the countryside the small villages and agricultural communities retain their ancient visual and organizational character. The massive mud brick walls of Balkh, Afghanistan, still rise above farmlands just as they did during the many months they sheltered Alexander's troops. Food is still prepared over open fires, oxen continue to drag wooden plows and grain is sifted by tossing it into the wind with a large fork.

The sharp lens of Booth's camera also records the changes. A nomad standing before his ageless black tent wears a Timex watch. The buffalo-hide sandals are now made of plastic. The girls use hairpins to hold their long braids in place. And, the transistor radio has replaced the lute and shepherd's pipe.

"The life and landscape seen in the photo exhibition will fully succumb to the modern world by the next generation," Goldman said.

Photos representing scenes close to those which Alexander knew include the Gate of All Nations, Persepolis, Iran; Khyber Pass, Pakistan; people and houses of Afghanistan; Afghan camel caravan; and an exceptional view of the Indus, a mighty river in Pakistan, which marked the end of Alexander's journey and the beginning of his return to Babylon, where he died at the age of 33 in the year 323.

"To the Indus with Alexander the Great" is at the Detroit Institute of Arts after visiting large and small communities across Michigan as part of the museum's "Show on the Road" program since 1978.

The exhibition is installed in the art institute's main building, near Kresge Court. It is on view during regular museum hours 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Admission is free.

Photographer Booth, accompanied by Goldman, made three trips to the Middle East and most of the photos in the exhibition were taken during trips in 1970 and 1977. Booth is head of the still photography department at Wayne. He has exhibited in shows in Detroit, Lansing and Toronto, Canada. He lives in Dearborn Heights.


Goldman is professor of art history at Wayne, specializing in Ancient Near Eastern Art. He lives in Bloomfield Township.

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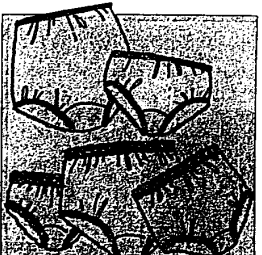
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