

Sets, costumes dazzle the eye

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

"Die Fledermaus," the first collaboration between Michigan Opera Theatre and its partners, Opera Pacific and Dayton Opera, is a dazzling new production of Tiffany-styled, pastel-colored sets designed with the Masonic Temple stage in mind.

Although it first opened in February in Irvine, Calif., home of Opera Pacific, Johann "Waltz King" Strauss's greatest operetta opened Saturday evening here in Detroit, the second in MOT's spring grand opera series.

The pink, purple and salmon sets were accented with green and framed with a creamy pink milk glass Tiffany proscenium with a glass bat (fledermaus) at the center. Scenic artist Alan Kimmell's sets, a collage of a panoramic overview of Vienna as a backdrop, with Stephansdom and the Donau Canal in the background. Charles Caine's costumes followed through with a fresh airy look with lush fabrics.

Viennese conductor Franz Allers's firm support from the pit leading the MOT orchestra enhanced

the production. The constantly changing rhythms of Strauss's score were always in check.

The sets and the music were irresistible, but the acting was not. Surprisingly, as the cynical Prince Orlofsky, Jo Anne Worley sang the mezzo aria "I Hitler" quite well and didn't upset anyone. She could easily have done so with her expert voice projection. Her characterization of the prince was masterful.

As Frosch, Stratford actor Eric Christiansen blended enough of the traditional jokes with a few of his own antics to bring fresh humor to the famous Act III scene.

Seclusive Italian tenor Rico Serbo (Alfred), who last year was MOT's despicable American tenor in "Madama Butterfly," carried Act I with his irresistible humor and egotistical antics.

Ballet dancer Adam Shankman is probably the best dancer seen at Masonic since the American

Ballet Theatre appeared there.

The rest of the cast was made up of strong leads, such as Marilyn Mims as Rosalinda, Andre John as von Eisenstein, and Evelyn de la Rosa as Adina, all of whom sang in the production in California.

Somehow director Michael Montel's blocking wasn't tight and the supposed-to-be smashing Act II did not thrive with Karen Axenbergs choreography. The result was a faltering Act II and a boring Act III.

The English words and jokes were always clear. Rosa slowed her "Mein Herr Marquis" to bring out the words, but if she and the other women had lowered their voices for their speaking lines it could have relieved the monotony.

Orlofsky's motto "Chacun a son gout" must prevail. The sets and the costumes are a must for everyone to see and worth the entire production.

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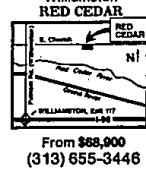
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