

Glitches mar excellent 'Figaro'

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

Michigan Opera Theatre needs a new opera house.

"The Marriage of Figaro," at Masonic Temple is absolutely enchanting. David Gately's stage direction is fast-paced. Beata Valente's "Dove sono" is seamless. Kathleen Segar's "Vol che sapete" sparkles. Festival Ottawa Opera's rococo sets complement the 18th century style costumes.

But, the splendor is lost. Forty-five minute intermissions to allow stage hands to push scenery around backstage stretched the opera into an exasperating four-hour marathon.

The backstage at Masonic Temple isn't large enough to accommodate today's opera sets. Gately's well-defined staging, especially in Act II, was thwarted by a sound system that buzzed continuously. Finally the sound monitors to the stage had to be turned off, making it difficult for the singers to hear the orchestra.

DESPITE THE technical problems, the casting of MOT general director David DiChiera was perfect, making this "Figaro" one of the best anywhere. Valente, an internationally renowned soprano, ill for her 1983 MOT debut, was anything but ill last weekend. Her demure, regal manner and her magnificently beautiful

voice is well-suited for a countess.

Cheryl Parrish acted a lively Susanna, but much of the role lies in middle-range recitatives, which fail to magnify her voice. Only in the final aria, "Deh! vieni," was there the excitement she is capable of producing.

Andreas Poulmunes was a handsome Count. David Kline was insightful as Dr. Bartolo, especially in his lyrics.

MOT has always been supportive of local singers and a number of Michigan singers were in this show. Segar starred as Cherubino in the company's 1983 production. He went on to sing with the New York City Opera and returned a polished, cap-

tivating performer.

Birmingham mezzo-soprano Jayne Sloder won the Detroit area Metropolitan Opera Auditions last year. Her tall, commanding appearance was an advantage for her humorous Marcellina role.

Detroit's David Jackson, who was a hit as Frederick in MOT's smash "The Pirates of Penzance," turned himself into the egotist, Alfred, in the company's state tour of "Die Fledermaus" and made a prissy Don Basilio in this production. Great actor.

THE SURPRISE of the evening was a burly Finnish baritone, Peter Salomaa, making his American de-



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but as Figaro. Salomaa recently recorded this role in Sweden with Arleen Auger for Decca. Only 27, he has accepted a contract with the Freiburg Opera for the next two years to stabilize his fast growing career.

Jeralyn Refeld, David Ludwig and Jose Medina also made strong impressions.

"The Marriage of Figaro" is Mozart's tribute to the breakdown of feudalism of the 1700s. The satire on society carries universal elements that have kept the opera in every repertoire for nearly 200 years.

Taffi Armenian conducted the MOT Orchestra with a sense of Mozartian style that never conflicted with the singers.

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The program is the second of four concerts in

the 1989 Kirk Recital Series. It is celebrating its 10th year as a Sunday series. Other dates include Sunday, Oct. 8 (Music for Strings), and Sunday, Dec. 10 (Bach's Christmas Oratorio). Kirk in the Hills is at 1340 West Long Lake Road.

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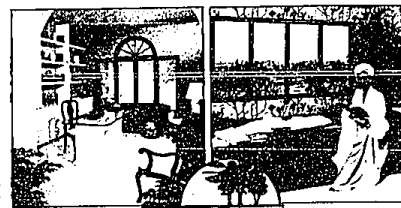
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