

'Desert Song' theatrical oasis

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

Talent abounds when Northville's historic Marquis Theatre can cast 21 singers in the 1920s hit opera "Desert Song" who look and act their parts.

These are singers who had no trouble with Sigmund Romberg's challenging music and delivered acting that was just as exceptional.

The Lawrence of Arabia superman plot sets an unlikely British society columnist who writes for the Paris Daily Mail with several French generals in the Foreign Legion and a single woman from the convent who has set out for an adventure into the middle of an Arab desert in Morocco.

An unhappy jilted lover, Azuri, with a knife in her belly dancing skirt, deals with the situation when her man, the volatile Captain Paul Fontaine turns his attentions on the newly arrived French lady, Margot.

The general's morose son, Pierre, is really the brilliant leader of the Arabs who dons a red mask and cape as the Red Shadow. He is the Robin Hood of the desert, or the Lone

Ranger of the west, who comes to rescue the Arabs from their merciless dilemma of French rule and heavy taxation.

DAVID NELSON designed sets of subtle desert colors accented with gilded drapery materials and blended with Inge Zayli's lush costumes to give the feel of spaciousness of the stage. Victorian wicker furniture also gave the 1920s look of elegance.

The Marquis Theatre has motivated its backdrops to quicken the eight scene changes in the two act opera.

Aaron Hunt, a singer/dancer/actor and a single woman from the convent who has set out for an adventure into the middle of an Arab desert in Morocco.

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entails moving constantly back and forth between self assured leader of the Arabs to the high pitched sound of a crouching Pierre. It was most real if not touching.

Acting kudos must go to Lori Monson, the knife carrying dancer, Azuri, and to Jeffrey Woolley who comically portrayed Benjamin Bonny Worthington Kidd III, a misfit if there ever was one. Monson's acting set up the entire balance of the show. She brought out Paul Fontaine's (Paul Silver) real personality in their violent confrontations. She gave the show credibility in her expounding of the treatment of the native people and she set up the light-hearted ending. Woolley provided the comic relief of the foil role to perfection.

Elizabeth Wingert must be recognized for her castanet dancing in the

All Ben Ali harem. Michael Oll's tenor voice is beauty especially in "If One Flower."

Broadway revivals are a fascinating reflection of earlier times. This show reflects the anger of the native peoples over colonial rule in Africa as early as 1925, long before the revolutions took place. It is serious comedy. French stories with British jokes ("Les Miserables," "Phantom of the Opera") are still loved by Americans.

"Desert Song" will continue at the Marquis Theatre, 135 E. Main, Northville, weekends through Oct. 29. Performances Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Sunday matinee at 2:30 p.m.

Chopin on DSO program

Alexei Soltanov, gold medalist at the 1989 Van Cliburn competition, performs Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra tonight and Friday, Oct. 20 at 8 p.m. and on Saturday, Oct. 21 at 8:30 p.m.

Under the direction of guest conductor Raymond Harvey, the DSO also performs Barber's symphony No. 1 and Dvorak's "New World" symphony. All three concerts are at Orchestra Hall.

Conductor Raymond Harvey is currently music director of the Springfield (Mass.) Symphony. He has also served as Exxon/Arts endowment conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and associate conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic.

A guest conductor with many of the great American orchestras, he made his Detroit Symphony Orchestra debut last March.

Harvey conducted the New York Philharmonic at the 1988 American Symphony Orchestra League convention and as a result, was invited to conduct the orchestra the next season for its popular Young People's concerts.

Ticket prices range from \$45 to \$16. Call 567-9000 for more information.

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