

OPERA

Lavish 'Aida' never falters through Verdi's score

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

"Aida" is noted for its spectacle almost as much as for Verdi's magnificent music. Yet, the story of "Aida" is intimate, a love triangle full of jealousy, secrecy and unrequited feelings complicated by the demands of patriotism in a time of conflict.

The Michigan Opera Theatre production is lavish, even eye-popping at times, but not so overwhelming that it drowns out that intimate story and Verdi's sonorous, complex and breathtaking music.

"Aida" is set in ancient Egypt during a time of war between Egypt and Ethiopia on its southern border. Aida is in prison, held prisoner as personal slave to the pharaoh's daughter, though her own royal status is unknown to the Egyptians.

Radames, the Egyptian's greatest warrior, has become

Aida's fervent lover even as he is about to be named commander of the Egyptian forces against her homeland. The pharaoh's daughter, Amneris, is in love with Radames and suspects that Aida is her rival.

At Wednesday's press night, Marquita Lister, who is scheduled with the alternate night cast, was substituted for an ailing Camellia Johnson. If there was an adjustment problem it was undetected by Wednesday's audience. Lister gave rich, warm, emotion-laden reading to her performance as the tortured Aida, torn by her love for her husband and her father and her love for Radames. Even as she skillfully soared through "O patria mia," a duet to her lost home, she also reached into the depths of emotion on "Ritorna vincitore." Her duets with father and with her lover were heart-rending. And her acting was as con-

"Aida"
What: Giuseppe Verdi grand opera set in ancient Egypt performed by Michigan Opera Theatre.
When: 2 p.m. today; 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4; 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5.
Where: Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway, Detroit.
Tickets: (313) 874-SING (7454) or (248) 645-6666.

vincing as her singing.

Fabrizio Armillato's Radames was sung with a glorious, full tenor. He and Lister had song these roles together in San Francisco and their familiarity was evident in the duets. But Armillato is more singer than actor and he was of the "stand and deliver" school of opera singer.

He is stiff and unconvincing as a great warrior. But the love duets are still very effective.

Irina Mishura as Amneris comes from the opposite approach. She is, perhaps, an actress first who bends her singing for its greatest dramatic effect. Her mezzo cuts sharply through the trills and rages fitfully in her solos. Her commendation-lamentation scene was clearly the most popular moment in Wednesday's performance. This local singer has won a devoted following for her emotional style.

Another actor-singer is the incredible Mark Rucker who's Amneris, the Ethiopian king, in every bit the raging patriot, the calculating warrior. Rucker's baritone is clear, properly aged and emotionally expressive. His acting is intense and fluid.

Kenneth Bell's thrilling bass and dignified manner capture

the essential dignity of Ramsis, even as we are likely to see him as the villain.

Conductor Steven Mercurio has created a musical fabric that never falters through one of Verdi's most honored scores, rich with lush, swooning love songs, triumphal military marches, a variety of dance rhythms and religious chants (more Francis than Egyptian). The orchestra is outstanding.

Director Roman Terleckyj keeps the whirling mechanics of this play moving smoothly from intimate duets and trios to the lavish marches and dances. Though this production doesn't have live elephants or camels, it does have the incredible dance talents of Wayne State University and Casa Tech High School and the performances of Renaissance High's R.O.T.C. and the Rackham Symphony Choir.

Baayork Lee's choreography is entrancing.

The costumes and sets from the San Francisco Opera are as stunning as you would hope in a production of this caliber. Visitors to the DIA's "Splendors of Egypt" exhibit will note the attention to detail in Douglas Schmidt's sets. The Nile bank scene drew complimentary gasps of approval from the audience.

But it's not the sets or the professions that make "Aida" special. It is Verdi's understanding of love in conflict and his beautiful music that make this one of the great experiences.

Armillato and Mishura are scheduled to perform again Saturday, Oct. 4, with Camellia Johnson. Lister is scheduled to perform at today's matinee and Sunday, Oct. 5, with Jan DeNolfo as Radames and Eugenio Granewald as Amneris today and Kathleen Segar on Oct. 5.

ART BEAT

BIRMINGHAM MUSICALS 1997-98 PROGRAMS

The Birmingham Musicals, recipient of the Birmingham Bloomfield Cultural Arts award in 1996, begins its 72nd year of providing a forum for trained musicians, scholarships and range of community outreach programs.

Musicals programs are held 1 p.m. the second Thursday of the month at the Community House in Birmingham, 380 S. Bates Street. Visitors and new members are welcome.

All programs are videotaped by Bloomfield Community Television, and air on public access channels.

The following is a list of the Musicals's programs and contacts: Choral Ensemble, Judith Premia, (248) 642-1873; String Ensemble, Florence McBride, (248) 641-4796; Music-in-hospitals, Martha Gelder, (248) 644-7845; Auditions, Collette Buser, (248) 626-1432; Music Teacher's Registry, Bonnie Brooks, (248) 644-2994.

For general membership information, Linda Irwin, (248) 475-5978.

\$22 MILLION TO STATEWIDE ARTS GROUPS

Nearly \$22 million in arts and cultural grants were awarded in mid September to arts and cultural organizations throughout Michigan.

The competitive grants were chosen by the 15-member bipartisan Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, a branch of the Michigan Department of Consumer & Industry Services.

Grant applications were evalu-

ated through a competitive, peer-panel review process, which made recommendations to the Arts Council. Awards were based on geographic distribution, diversity, balance among funding programs, offerings to underserved communities, and delivery of quality programming and services to Michigan residents.

Among those receiving grants are: Lyric Chamber Ensemble, Matrix Theatre Company, Very Special Arts, Center for Creative Studies, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Detroit Historical Museum, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Zoo, Michigan Opera Theatre, Museum of African American History, Music Hall, Birmingham Bloomfield Symphony, Detroit Chamber Winds, Eisenhower Dance Ensemble, Paint Creek Center for the Arts, Plymouth Symphony, Cranbrook Academy of Arts.

TOP 100 CRAFT RETAILER

CarolJames Gallery of Jon, I Oak was named one of the 100 Best Retailers of American Craft at an awards reception held in August at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia.

The ceremony was held in conjunction with the Philadelphia Market of American Craft, a trade show where artists exhibit their original designs in production and limited edition work to craft retailers from across the country.

More than 15,000 professional craft artists from throughout the country were pulled by NICHE magazine, the exclusive national trade publication for craft retailers and sponsor of the awards

program. Criteria for selection included treating artists with courtesy, paying on time, promoting and marketing, and mentoring emerging artists.

Carol James Gallery is located at 301 S. Main Street, Royal Oak; (248) 541-6216.

ARTSERVE NAMES NEW CHAIR

Larry Garberding has been named the first chairman of ArtServe, an organization established in May with the consolidation of Arts Foundation of Michigan, Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan, Business Volunteers for the Arts and the Michigan Alliance for Arts Education.

As an umbrella organization, ArtServe's objective is to assist and inform individuals and organizations in Michigan through education, professional services, networking, support of artists and cultural organizations, volunteer assistance and collaborations.

Garberding is executive vice president and chief financial officer of Detroit Edison. He also serves as treasurer and chair of the finance committee for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and board member of The Nature Conservancy and the United Way of Southeast Michigan.

SHAWGUIDO AT SOFA IN CHICAGO

Shaw Guido Gallery of Pontiac will participate in the Fourth Annual Exposition of Sculpture, Objects and Functional Art: SOFA Chicago 1997. The exposition is held at Chicago's newly renovated Navy Pier, Oct. 17-19.

Two new artists, represented by Shaw Guido, will debut at

this year's SOFA: Keisuke Mizuno and Deborah Sigel.

Mizuno works primarily in a representational style whereas Sigel's work is mainly abstract.

MADONNA UNIVERSITY TO FEATURE OUTSTANDING PIANIST

One of the world's top young pianists will be in concert at Madonna University 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4 at Madonna

University, 3660 Schoolcraft at Levan, Livonia.

Pianist Joel Ross Hastings, who was chosen from hundreds of applicants as one of 35 pianists (ages 19-30) throughout the world to compete in the 10th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition this past spring, will perform in Kresge Hall. The program will include the "Tocca-

ta in F-sharp minor," Johann Sebastian Bach and "Sonata in C major," Ludwig van Beethoven. Hastings will also play Chopin, Scriabin and Barber.

Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$4 for students. Reservations are required, call (313) 432-5700.

What has thirteen thousand legs, wears sneakers and can help you reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke?

If you said the American Heart Association's Metro Detroit American Heart Walk, then you have the right answer. The Heart Walk is a fun-filled day for the whole family at the Detroit Zoo. Not only will you have fun walking with the animals and learning how to reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke, but you can also make a difference. The funds raised during this



event help to support research and education programs in the Metropolitan Detroit Area. So come join 6,500 walkers, the Detroit Lions' Robert Porcher, and Miss Michigan, Kimberly Stec on Saturday, October 4, 1997. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and the walk begins at 9:30 a.m. Call (248) 557-9500, to find out how you can join the Heart Walk or pick up a brochure at your local Rite Aid or Naturalizer Shoe Store.

- The Heart Walk is sponsored by:
- Major Sponsors: CHRYSLER FUND, MCARE (A PLAN FOR LIFE), Naturopathic Institute
 - Hospital Sponsors: Beaumont, OMIC (The Detroit Medical Center), PROVIDENCE, ST JOHN Health System
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Two-man grilling buddies' Mad Dog and Merrill offering practical tips and outdoor grilling recipes from hors d'oeuvres to desserts served with helpful helpings of comedy as seen on programs like CBS' This Morning

Showcase of Distinctive Homes pictorial display of new homes

National Kitchen & Bath Association members Garage Sale of cabinets, counters and discontinued items plus proceeds will benefit Habitat for Humanity

LAST DAY Closes at 7 PM

Thurs. & Friday 2:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.
Saturday 10:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m.
Sunday 10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Regular Admission: Adults \$8.00; Seniors \$4.00; Children 6-12 \$3.00; Children under 6 FREE

ADMITTANCE: Special Family Ticket, includes 2 adults and all the children, \$9.00 available only at Farmer Jack