

THEATER

Powerful voices put muscle into 'Samson'

Michigan Opera Theatre presents "Samson and Delilah," 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, June 11-12, and 2 p.m. Sunday, June 13, at the Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway (one block east of Woodward Avenue), Detroit. Tickets \$18-\$95, call (313) 237-5100 or (248) 645-5555.

BY MARY JANE DOERN

SPECIAL WRITER

Those Philistines really know how to throw a smashing good party. In their shimmering gold costumes, with exotic ballet dancers, the mammoth gold gilded temple columns, and choral singing that literally raised the roof, it made the Detroit Opera House stage look like something out of a Cecil B. DeMille film.

Then in the middle of all this frivolity, suddenly the gold costumes turn to brilliant aqua and this hefty Hebrew Samson crashes the party. He was a real hit.

Let us all drink to this Court of Dagon and Irina Mishura. As the seductress Delilah in Michigan Opera Theatre's production of Saint-Saens' "Samson and Delilah," the Bloomfield Hills mezzo-soprano sizzled in her performance Saturday evening, bringing to doom the strong man Samson of the Hebrews — kind of a Monica Lewinsky of the ancient world.

Mishura is beautiful, and costumed in fuchsia, she commanded the action during the entire second act. She out maneuvered Samson, sung by Mark Lundberg and matched up beautifully with Gregg Baker as the High Priest of Dagon. Together their Act 2 duet "Il faut, pour assouvir ma baine" was the evening's climax.

Baker has as much muscle in his voice as he does in his biceps, something we got a better glimpse of in his magnificent past performances of Crown, and John the Baptist.

The electricity in the second act didn't come from the thunderstorm. It came from the friction

between these dynamic voices in the clash of wills, passion and powerful singing.

Mishura was silky smooth in her seductive "Mon coeur, s'ouvre a ta voix." Samson's costume gave an awkward impression rather than one of masculine strength. As the Samson trying to gain Delilah's favor, Lundberg seemed ill at ease in these seduction scenes though his singing was powerful. His aria in the millstone scene was touching.

"Samson and Delilah" is simply a fabulous mix of tension and excitement. The action of this familiar biblical story moves quickly. What is surprising is the composer's use of oratorio style with the choruses.

With Suzanne Acton's training and conductor Christian Baden's special attention, the Michigan Opera Theatre chorus made the two choruses "Hymne de joie" and "Arretez, o mes freres" glorious. The MOT chorus never sounded better. Neither has the orchestra, under Baden's tight control.

The wonderful thing about this Saint-Saens opera is the all the characters have great solos if not long roles. James Patterson, a MOT regular, does a satisfying job sinking those bass notes as the sageacious Old Hebrew.

War has touched only the opera's story, but also the production. Yugoslavian director Dejan Miladinovic was caught in the present war and unable to fulfill his commitments here in Detroit. So the French master director Bernard Uzan filled in with his usual impressive results, comprehending the French literature with greater sympathy and understanding, which always makes a satisfying production.

No French opera is complete without a ballet. Dancers Erlanda Ziemlisch and Sara Viale were wonderful and made that party scene even better. Keeping these party scenes at a superior artistic level is what MOT has to be to do keep Delilah's favor.

Humidity dampens play at Outdoor Greek Theatre

St. Dunstan's presents "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" at 8:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, June 10-12, at the Cranbrook Outdoor Greek Theatre, 400 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills. Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors ages 62 and older, and students ages 18 and older. For more information, call (248) 644-0527.

BY HELEN ZUCKER

SPECIAL WRITER

St. Dunstan's attempt to exhumate "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying," directed by Edgar A. Guest III and Peggy A. Lee, gets an A for phenomenal effort and a C for production.

The 29-member cast, the huge technical staff and the musicians valiantly battled heat and mosquitoes but seemed to have so much on their minds that the drama behind this musical has no edge.

Production values dominate. The set, designed by Michael J. Brooks and Nancy Craig, based on James Thurber drawings, is ingenious.

Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock, Willie Gilbert and Frank Loesser wrote the book and music for "How to Succeed" at a time when many Americans, not only hippies and beatniks, were protesting against sexism, conformity and corporate values. Protest is lodged at the heart of this musical, but St. Dunstan's gives us a fond look at the end of the '50s, the beginning of the '60s.

Y. Jamie Mistry is spirited as Finch, the boyish master of manipulation who works his way from the mailroom to the boardroom. Finch moves well, and he delivers a smooth rendition of "I Believe in You," the show's best song. Mistry seems like a nice guy though; it's hard to believe he's Finch, a totally self-

absorbed spinmeister who was once a window washer.

Jan Casai as Rosemary, the secretary who wants to marry Finch and move to New Rochelle, stands for everything Gloria Steinham marched to change. When Casai, a nice woman, sings "Happy to Keep His Dinner Warm" I couldn't help thinking of "The Stepford Wives." Despite her wily ambitions, Rosemary is supposed to be spunky.

Keith Lepard as Biggley, Finch's boss, is a walking cliché. He's meant to be, but Lepard takes it a bit too far. The fact that Lepard seems to be a kind man also gets in the way. Amy Lynn Smith is very fine as Smitty, Rosemary's sarcastic friend and fellow secretary. Smith seems to understand the world she inhabits, and she sings with energy.

Scott MacDonald as Frump, gives us a believable baby. As the nephew of the boss and Finch's rival, it's hard to believe he's "stupid," as Biggley keeps saying. Maybe nasty? Whatever, MacDonald is fun to watch as he winds himself into tantrums. Krystyn M. Irvine as the obligatory sexpot, the boss's mistress looking for "advancement" as a secretary, tries on a Marilyn Monroe hairdo, dress and walk. Irvine strains a bit, but is very cute as the Treasure girl who can't tell a lie on television.

Margie Brooks as Miss Jones, the soul of the coffeepot hour, and Biggley's secretary, and Heather Bell and Miss Krumholz try to lend a bit of snap. John Roberts stands out as Bratt, the smarmy personnel manager, as does John Schore as Gatch.

Musical director John M. Thurlgait conducted the mostly unmelodic score with energy, and his orchestra was right there with him.

Fisher season heavy on the musicals

The Fisher Theatre's 1999-2000 Playgroup Subscription Season gives the audience what it wants: musicals.

It opens in October with "Footloose" and continues in December with "Martin Guerre." January brings the non-musical "Art" followed by musicals "Fosse" in March and "Cabaret" in April.

"Footloose" is based on the 1984 movie about a free-spirited kid who reminds the town that it's no sin to be young, and "Footloose" is a solid-gold musical hit. "Let's Hear It For The Boys," "Holding Out for a Hero," "Almost Paradise" and the title song along with explosive dancing, it's a singing, swinging story with a heart.

December's offering is musical in a completely different mode. Martin Guerre, a soldier who returns after seven years at war has been reported dead. His wife accepts him but questions about his true identity begin to emerge. Composed by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schonberg, creators of "Les Misérables" and "Miss Saigon," "Martin Guerre" has drama and suspense

and a memorable score. It won Olivier Awards for Best Musical and Best Choreography and ran for more than 700 performances in London.

What is art and what is friendship, and can either be defined by the other? Three friends discuss the newest acquisition by one, a minimalist painting that evokes spirited responses, and exposes biases, opinions and conflicts among the men. The art of friendship is explored and probed on many levels. "Art" is a challenging, enticement and funny play.

Bob Fosse's Broadway theater credits reflect his originality, his flair, his flamboyance and his genius. The musical "Fosse" celebrates his stunning dance numbers from stage, film and television. Numbers from "Sweet Charity," "Pippin," "Little Me," "The Pajama Game," "Dancin'" "All That Jazz," numbers Fosse performed on television's "The Ed Sullivan Show," "The Colgate Comedy Hour," his choreography for "Liza with a Z" and a number he choreographed for Gwen Verdon for a 1968 Bob Hope special are only part of his legacy.

"Cabaret" is a musical that jolts its audience with shock and surprise. It was first produced in 1966, revived in 1987 and won the Tony Award for Best Revival of 1998. In its earlier production, the menace of Nazism was clear but less threatening. This one is bawdier, raunchier, with an overlay of approaching terror. It's a powerfully realized show of enormous emotional strength.

Subscribers receive priority seating, have full exchange privileges, have their tickets sent to their home or office, receive advance notice of non-subscription shows, including more musicals this season, have a special subscriber telephone number and may renew their seats each season.

Prices range from \$125 to \$295 per subscription. A \$75 per seat deposit holds the subscription with the balance billed later.

Subscriptions for the 1999-2000 Fisher Playgroup Season are on sale at the Fisher Theatre Subscription Office. For more information, call (313) 872-1000 from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Fridays.

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