

Adams: The Theater Also Is A Grand Opera House

The author, William Adams, is the stage director of The San Diego Opera, artistic director of Starlight and an associate professor at San Diego State.

By WILLIAM J. ADAMS

Amid the general excitement of unveiling San Diego's Civic Theater, the opera buff wants most to know if the new house will meet the special needs of the lyric stage.

The question is not academic since virtually everything about opera is exaggerated. All the requirements of symphony, ballet, theater, plus certain unique considerations combine to tax the average theater far beyond its capabilities.

In its first year the Civic Theater must be prepared to meet these demands for three opera organizations: our own new company, The San Diego Opera; the Metropolitan Opera's National Company (tentative booking), and the annual visit by The San Francisco Opera Company.

While preliminary conclusions can be made about the suitability of the theater for operatic production, the crucial answers will come only under repeated performance conditions. To allay any fears, however, it can be stated categorically that the opera house is a triumph in most of its salient features.

First, from an audience point of view, one is grateful for the easy access to the building and convenient adjacent parking. The foyer accommodates large crowds

easily, and the ticket office is centrally located.

But the most distinguished achievement is auditorium spaciousness coupled with a sense of intimacy with the stage even from the farthest location. Happily, continental seating for an audience of 3,000 is utilized (that is, continuous unbroken arcs of seats with entrances only from the extreme sides).

The entire theater is air-conditioned, with individual air ducts for each seat. A major factor for opera, of course, is the quality of sound. This all-important property must be judged at a later time, but the acoustical engineer is reported to be enthusiastic about the results of preliminary tests.

For the production side of the theater, the picture is equally bright. The orchestra pit is on an elevator so that the conductor can choose the orchestral height. It can contain almost 100 players which means that virtually all but a Wozzeck-sized orchestra could be employed.

Operas such as "Aida" require magnitude in stage space as well. San Francisco's "Turandot," for example, could not be presented at the Fox Theater, and the company frequently had to display partial settings locally. While our new stage cannot rival many European houses, the 56-foot proscenium with excellent depth and height is adequate for the most spectacular scenery. The off-stage space is not lavish enough to use stage wagons for shifting entire sets, but it is more than sufficient for handling complex productions with a

generous 50 lines for flying scenery. The loading dock at the rear of the stage allows trucks to drive from the street right onto the stage if needed. There is a large horse-shoe-shaped cyclorama (skydrop) fronted by a scrim curtain. For the uninitiated, just accept that these are elements which add greatly to theatrical illusion. The stage lights are the latest equipment with a control board of 60 dimmers, and an amazing electronic card system which allows the operator to pre-set 100 light changes.

To handle large opera casts there are 10 group dressing rooms, eight of which are on stage level. In addition, there are two star dressing rooms, handsomely appointed.

There is also a large rehearsal hall the size of the main stage specially designed with ballet bar and wood floors so that rehearsals may be held while performances are playing in the theater.

It must be admitted that our new theater will serve the needs of grand opera much better than those of intimate opera. Such works as Mozart's "Così fan tutti," Brittan's "The Turn of the Screw" and Stravinski's "The Rake's Progress" are much more effective in a smaller house. Perhaps San Diego will eventually emulate the Los Angeles Music Center, the Lincoln Center, La Scala, and other important establishments by providing a small lyric theater for this valuable part of the operatic repertory.

In the meantime, we may all look forward with glad expectations to The San Diego Opera and the Civic Theater double operatic christening with "La Bohème," the first production of opera for each.

SDS Plans 1-Act Comedies

Three one-act comedies will be presented at 8:30 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday in the San Diego State Campus Theater.

The plays are "Aria da Capo," by Edna St. Vincent Millay, directed by Paul H. Jozwicki; Anton Chekhov's "The Boor," directed by Michael Hoffer; and Peter Shaffer's "The Private Eye," directed by Steven Maynard.

The cast for Miss Millay's play will include John Bell,

Diane Grinker, Glenn Dobyns, Jim Chovick and Mike Morey. Tony Kretowicz is stage designer, with costumes by Karen Crickard.

Lorraine Recchia, John Marlow and Jim Eggleston will perform in the Chekhov play. Julia Frampton is costume designer.

The cast for the Shaffer play will include Don Asmann, John Schak and Kathleen Butler. Barry Owen is stage designer and Miss Butler, costume designer.

Music, Drama And Dance On Civic Theater Calendar

The Civic Theater's opening night concert Tuesday leads the new facility's schedule of concerts and theatrical events tentatively booked through June. These are the dates and the performers:

Tuesday, Jan. 12—Opening night concert of the San Diego Symphony and operatic stars Dorothy Kirsten and Brian Sullivan.

Wednesday, Jan. 13 — Ed-

ward Albee's explosive drama, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

Friday, Jan. 15—The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company's "H.M.S. Pinafore."

Saturday, Jan. 16—Zubin Mehta directing the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.

Jan. 26—Violinist Robert Gerle performing with the San Diego Symphony.

Jan. 30—Youth For Christ presenting the "Splendor of Sacred Songs."

Feb. 5—Pianist Van Cliburn.

Feb. 7—Paul Kletzki conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Feb. 9—Earl Bernard Murray conducting the San Diego Symphony.

Feb. 11—Mexico's colorful folk dance group, Ballet Folklorico.

Feb. 21—Dancer Igor Youskevitch and his troupe, Ballet Romantique.

Feb. 23—Pianist Malcolm Frager performing with the San Diego Symphony.

Feb. 26—Maria Tallchief dancing with The San Diego Ballet.

March 9—The Hague Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Willem Van Otterloo.

March 16—Contralto Marian Anderson.

March 23 — Violinist Tossy Spivakovsky performing with the San Diego Symphony.

March 28—Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra with Zubin Mehta conducting.

March 30—Classical guitarist Andres Segovia.

April 6—San Diego pianist Donna Clitsome appearing with the San Diego Symphony.

April 20—The San Diego Symphony's closing concert of the season.

April 22—Pianist Leonard Pennario in the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Final Concert of the Season.

April 30—The Smothers Brothers.

May 5 through 8—The San Diego Opera presenting "La Boheme," starring Lee Venora.

June 4 — Grand Old Opry.

For 'La Boheme': Three Firsts Set

The San Diego Opera's forthcoming production of "La Boheme" will make local operatic history in three ways.

For one thing, it will be the first opera presented in San Diego's new Civic Theater—an experience in itself, for it affords San Diegans a setting with the acoustical and production facilities and the comfort for grand opera as it should be seen and heard.

In the second place, "La Boheme" will mark the debut of The San Diego Opera. The troupe, sponsored by the San Diego Opera Guild, will place San Diego among cities with professional opera companies—providing a showcase for the talents of local singers, musicians and technical theater people.

Thirdly, "La Boheme" will, according to stage director Dr. William J. Adams, represent a new and fresh approach to opera. "La Boheme" will be presented as theater rather than as a stylized, tradition-encrusted art form.

"We want to crack the old operatic traditions," Adams said. "We want to clean out the cobwebs. We want to find our own validity and not to be bound by what someone else has done. The result will be something anyone can enjoy from a theatrical standpoint."

To this end, the opera will be sung in English so it will be intelligible to all who attend, Adams said. The cast and chorus also are being selected so that they fit the parts visually and dramatically. "They won't be just singers in costume."

In "La Boheme," the San Diego Opera will attempt to capture and capitalize on two factors.

One is the spirit of the gay and exciting Paris of the 1830-40 era. To capture this, scene designer Peggy Kellner is designing the skyline of Paris to serve as a backdrop, taking advantage of production facilities at the new Civic Theater.

The second factor is the extreme youth of those who appear in "La Boheme."

"We want to capture and depict the universal spirit of youth and idealism, the charm and romance that can make sense out of the libretto.

"If we can project these two factors, the whole thing will come alive in an exciting way most San Diegans have never seen in opera before."

"La Boheme" will be presented May 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the Civic Theater with soprano Lee Venora and tenor Nicholas Di Virgilio in the lead roles. Walter Herbert, general director of the Houston Grand Opera Association, will be artistic director and conductor.