

OPERA REVIEW

Notre Dame Opera shows versatility

By MARY KINGSBURY
Scene Writer

This past weekend the Notre Dame Opera and the Notre Dame Music Department teamed up to offer a dynamically contrasting combination of drama. Encompassing both aspects of the Greek theatre masks, the Notre Dame Opera moved its audience from tears to mischievous laughter. Everything about the performance, from its charming scene design to its superb vocal depth, was at a level nothing short of professional.

The opening Puccini opera "Suor Angelica," is the only all-female opera composed to date. It includes a chorus and is the first opera Notre Dame has ever performed in Italian. The English translation was provided in supertitles. Rebecca Paul brilliantly mastered the role of Sister Angelica, a 17th-century nun who has been forced into a convent by her relatives for having a baby out of wedlock. As the plot develops, Sister Angelica blossoms into a saintly, selfless woman — a favorite among her fellow nuns. With characters varying from the decrepit old abbess (Katy Nichols) to a chubby social butterfly (Mary Willoughby), the atmosphere of the convent



"Suor Angelica" hit the more serious note of the pair of operas, focusing largely on sin and grief.

provided comic relief to an intense plot.

The cheerful environment of the convent is shattered midway through the act, when Sister Angelica's scheming aunt appears with news of the death of Angelica's son. Holding a striking resemblance to Ezma from Disney's "The Emperor's New Groove," Mary Waltner's villainous performance led to the climax of the opera. Distraught by the news of her son's death, Angelica poisons herself. Immediately regretting her sinful action, Sister Angelica pleads to the Virgin Mary to intercede for her forgiveness. Rebecca Paul's moving interpretation of a mother's virtuous longing for her child juxtaposed with the gravity of mortal sin yielded much acclaim from the audience.

The opera concludes with the Virgin (Jamie Piloni) and son (Giovanni Stroik) appearing as a sign of God's forgiveness. Sister Angelica dies peacefully, envisioning herself in heaven holding her beloved child. As the orchestra faded, everyone in the house held their breath in a moment of awe, followed by thunderous applause and standing ovation.

A 20-minute intermission followed, allowing the performers and the audience to change gears from the tender "Suor Angelica" to the racy "Mamelle de Tirésias."

To start the second half with a splash, Rebecca Paul reclaimed the stage, this time wearing horns and dragging a mortified Nicholas Tonazzi fully clad in loincloth and a cape. A spoof on a Wagner opera, the disappointed diva leaves the stage when the conductor shows her that the composer of this score is Poulenc. His "Mamelles de Tirésias" (The Breasts of Tirésias) is subtitled an "opera buffa in a prologue and two acts" (libretto by Apollinaire). The score is sensuous, mysterious, insinuating and at times has a very cabaret-like feel. This opera was performed in English, which worked well to convey its humor.

A bit risqué, but utterly hilarious, the cast of "Mamelles de Tirésias" completely captivated their audience with anticipation of what could possibly come next. The prologue set the stage with Michael Shaw, in the role of the Director, wearing nothing but lingerie from the waist down and dancing with a whip. Lauren Price (Therese) and Paul Appleby (le Mari) opened the act in a lover's spat. The character



"Mamelle de Tiresias" provided a great deal of comedy along with vibrant color.

Therese (Price), in protest to her husband's continuous plea for sex, proceeds to unzip her blouse and pop her oversized breasts (two large latex balloons) and grow a beard. A complete gender reversal occurs when le Mari (Appleby) embraces motherhood by birthing 40,000 children in hopes to repopulate the town of Zanzibar.

The fanciful plot encompassed everything from Gabriel Torres and Nicholas Tonozzi parading around the stage on roller-skates to Eric Petrucci dancing around in a diaper as one le Mari's newborns. At one point vocal music professors Georgine Resick, Joan Troyer and John Riley-Schofield chimed in from the audience, and the cast united to proclaim the lesson of war: make love and multiply. To finish off the evening, a cascade of latex balloons drop from the ceiling, symbolic of the return of Therese's breasts, "Les Mamelles de Tiresias."

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PLAY REVIEW

Shakespeare with a twist

By MARIA SMITH
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What do you get when you take "Twelfth Night" of the 16th century and into the 1980s?

An Illyria built on rock and roll.

In the Not So Royal Shakespeare Company's performance of Shakespeare's comedy, Viola, Orsino and Olivia got down to U2, Huey Lewis and the News and other icons of '80s rock.

Senior Elizabeth Grams, who played Feste the fool, had a chance to give some musical renditions of Shakespearean lines that hailed even farther back to the 1970s.

It is not uncommon to use gimmicks like this to give the plays by the most beloved playwright of the English language a little bit of a distinctive flair. The '80s twist was aptly chosen for the audience — Notre Dame party people are almost always glad to hear some good '80s tunes.

And in NSR's performance, it was indeed the party people who benefited the most from the '80s spin. In this particular performance of "Twelfth Night," Shakespeare's clowns reigned victorious. Sir Toby Belch, played by Brandon McGirr; Air Andrew Aguecheek, played by Emmanuel Zeroudakis; Fabian, played by Marty Schroeder and Maria, played by Meghann Tabor, stole the show from their straight-man counterparts.

Joe Garlock gave one of the best performances with his tongue-in-cheek portrayal of the dour Malvolio. The shtick between these five actors was undoubtedly the highlight of the show. The drunken, guitar-loving clowns brought to mind the unmotivated beer-loving high school graduates of "Dazed and

Confused" or "Say Anything." Belch and his friends were appropriately annoyed when "the man" Malvolio tried to get them down.

Unfortunately the musical focus also obscured some themes — several lines were lost to loud music and as amusing as the dance numbers could be, they didn't always gel with the more serious scenes. Some of Feste's lines, although well set to their music, were difficult to understand.

Virginia Woolf once called Shakespeare one of the few "androgynous" writers, that is, one whose writing is neither distinctively male nor distinctively female. Shakespeare not only had a talent for dynamically portraying both male and female characters, but a fondness for working with both simultaneously. Some of Shakespeare's most memorable characters appear in his "transvestite comedies," dressed in the guise of the opposite gender and often wooing characters of their own sex more or less accidentally.

NSR has shown a fondness for these transvestite comedies this year. "As You Like It," the play chosen for first semester, centers around Rosalind, a beautiful heroine who charms all sorts of people in the guise of a young man named Ganymede.

The famous love triangle between Viola, Orsino and Olivia in "Twelfth Night" is another case of mistaken identity. Viola dresses as a young man and calls herself Cesario in order to find employment in Orsino's house, but finds herself falling in love with him. Orsino sends her as a messenger to woo Olivia, who develops a passion for the youth she believes to be Cesario. Therefore, for the majority of the play each is unappreciated in unrequited love.

The gender-blurring theme was perhaps more effectively developed in the fall performance, with

Grams in the role of Rosalind — so many characters fall for the so-called Ganymede that the issue of gender identity is hard to ignore. But the awkward chemistry between Viola, played by Liz Clouse, and Olivia, played by Molly Kealy, was certainly palpable. The union between Viola and Orsino at the end, when Viola's true identity is revealed, emphasize the importance of a good character which reaches above and beyond the turbulent relations between genders. Both of these plays, and all of these characters, certainly highlight a question about the degree to which gender roles are merely a construction.

Some of the fine points of the Shakespeare's language are almost inevitably lost in college productions, and "Twelfth Night" was no exception. The plot was a little bit difficult to follow at the beginning and the details of how Viola ended up dressed as a man in Orsino's household were certainly not clear. But the difficulty of reading Shakespearean English, let alone performing it, creates a charitable audience and as the play progressed the plot became easy to follow. Grams and Garlock stepped up to the Shakespearean challenge most successfully, but other actors were not far behind.

The actors' big-shoulder power suits and jean jackets were as effective as most costumes seen on the college stage — the reminder that Shakespeare's plays transcend time and place is always welcome.

In the spectrum of the Shakespearean world, "Twelfth Night" is neither Shakespeare's best play nor NSR's best performance, but both have more than a few virtues.

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