

Friends of pera

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA – LINCOLN

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Cosi Combines Beautiful Music, Moral Ambiguity

Cosi fan Tutte, a story of fiancé swapping, disguise and deceit, is perhaps the finest example of Mozart's comedic skills. It seems strange that exchanging lovers at will is a staple of comedic plots since, if one really considers the emotional toll of such an exchange, real-life swaps seem more nightmarish than funny. In the opera, the trauma is quickly shaken off by a pithy phrase – “*Cosi fan tutte*,” concludes Alfonso at the end of the opera, “Women are like that”—and the consolation that there's been a lesson well-learned.

And yet Mozart's music is gorgeous and doesn't seem to match the uneasiness of the plot. Such contradiction offers interesting opportunities for directors of the opera. Some productions underplay the disturbing elements, setting the opera as a spring break farce in Florida. In contrast, one production depicted Don Alfonso as the devil himself.

Neither extreme seems to catch the full complexity of the word/music pairing. One reason the opera is so popular today is that Mozart is unwittingly modern in challenging his audience to decipher the contradiction of beauty intertwined with moral ambiguity. UNL's production does not deny the ambiguity of the plot, yet employs a beautiful, classic set with mostly traditional stage direction. Hopefully this vision will allow you to decide for yourself how to react. Does the music allow you to transcend the uneasiness of the plot? Or do you remain mired in the human frailty of



the characters? Maybe you leave with the hope that music can make even the ugliest of situations seem a little more bearable. Whatever the opera means to you, *Cosi* is like that.

The UNL production is directed by Ariel Bybee, and features graduate students Jaime Reimer as Fiordiligi, Jonathan Yarrington as Ferrando, Thomas Gunther as Guglielmo, and Kyle Sandall as Don Alfonso. Undergraduates Anna DeGraff and Sarah Smith portray Dorabella and Despina, respectively. Tyler White will conduct the UNL Opera Orchestra.

Cosi fan Tutte

By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Thursday, Nov. 8 12 Noon
Friday, Nov. 9 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, Nov. 11 3:00 p.m.

Kimball Recital Hall

11th & R Streets

Adults \$20
Faculty, students and seniors . \$10

Tickets available at the door or through Lied Center Box Office, 472-4747

Opera Preview talk by Ariel Bybee in Kimball Hall Lower Lobby at 6:45 p.m. on Nov. 9 and 2:15 p.m. on Nov 11.

Friends of Opera Reception

Friends of Opera members and their guests are invited to a reception on stage following the Friday, November 9 performance. Principal cast members will attend.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Friends,

By now you know the happy news that UNL Opera took *The Most Happy Fella* to the Waterford Festival and won a whole bunch of crystal. Without trying to sound too much like Paul Harvey, I'd like to share with you "The Rest of the Story."

International travel can be stressful, even brutal. Taking 50 young performers and crew, plus 30 family members and supporters, to a musical festival across the ocean is a huge undertaking. Hats off to Jim Ford and Ariel Bybee for their calm leadership and good planning that resulted in a memorable trip for all. Hats off, as well, to our UNL student performers, who included us "senior" travelers in their plans, their conversations and their celebrations. By the time the trip ended, I think we all felt we were truly part of one team!

At Waterford, performance day is a killer, especially when you come from across the sea. The Festival runs for 10 consecutive nights. Each show gets about 11 hours in the Theatre Royal before the curtain rises. Our tech crew arrived before 9 a.m. to begin installing the set (carefully packed and shipped from Lincoln in August) and programming the lighting system. At 10 a.m., while the techies kept working behind the curtains, conductor Tyler White began rehearsing the orchestra, two-thirds of whom were local Waterford musicians. At about

10:30 a.m. the cast began a music-only rehearsal with the orchestra. The schedule called for that rehearsal to last until 1 p.m. with the cast to return at 2 p.m. for an on-stage tech rehearsal until about 4:30 p.m.

In fact, the music rehearsal ran until 2 p.m. The cast got a one-hour break and returned at 3 p.m. By about 4:30 it was clear the tech run would last well into the supper hour. Our friends at the Waterford Tower Hotel, a block from the theatre, hastily arranged a soup-and-sandwich meal for the cast about 6:15. The performers ate quickly and went to their rooms to do hair and makeup before returning to the theatre at 7 p.m. for an 8 p.m. curtain.

I went backstage about 7:30 for some pre-show photos. Despite the grueling day, the electricity and energy level were so high I thought the theatre roof would explode. It certainly showed in the performance. Our UNL performers grabbed the audience in the opening scene and captivated them the entire show.

A unique aspect of the Waterford Festival is that after a performance, the Adjudicator gives comments. Adjudicator David Turner obviously loved UNL's show, as would be evidenced two nights later at the awards ceremony. At the conclusion of Turner's comments, about 11:30 p.m., the cast ended their nearly

14-hour performance day with a well-deserved party.

The rest, as they say, is history: six major awards, including the International Trophy signifying the best overall production. This effort, however, is about so much more than crystal trophies. It's about unprecedented generosity - thank you Jim and Rhonda Seacrest. It's about cooperation and collaboration - thank you Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts. It's about extraordinary vision and creativity - thank you Ariel Bybee and Jim Ford. It's about exemplary leadership - thank you Bill Shomos and Tyler White. It's about skill and perseverance - thank you Will and Kathryn Cover. Especially, it's about youthful energy combined with great talent combined with hard work - thank you UNL students.

Overall, it's about a group of people of different ages who cared enough about each other, and invested enough of themselves in each other, to bring out the best in each other. And that, my friends, sparkles even more than Waterford Crystal.

Sincerely,



Don Burt, President

Friends of Opera Board of Directors

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Friends of Opera is a tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation supporting opera at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and throughout Nebraska.

Amahl Returns in December

For the fifth consecutive year UNL Opera will perform Gian Carlo Menotti's Christmas classic, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. As in recent years, the production will result from the collaboration of UNL Opera, Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln Arts Council and Friends of Opera.

Principal adult roles will be portrayed by UNL students. A public school student plays the role of the title character, Amahl. The Shepherds' Chorus will be an honors choir selected from the six public high schools. Stage direction will be provided by Dr. William Shomos, UNL Director of Opera, and Dr. Peter Eklund will be musical conductor.

Free public performances of *Amahl* will be held on Saturday, December 8 at The Johnny Carson Theatre (Lied Center for Performing Arts) at 1:30 and 4:00 p.m. Advance reservations are required, and seating is limited. To make reservations, call 472-2494. Additional performances for selected elementary classes also will be held in December, with webcasts available in the schools.

The one hour production tells the story of a young crippled boy, Amahl, who lives with his widowed mother, as he is transformed by his encounter with the Three Kings who are seeking the Christ Child. Commissioned for television broadcast in 1951, Menotti's opera was a great success, and for years was televised on Christmas Eve. Although the story involves the journey of the Three Kings, its message about the true spirit of giving transcends denominational boundaries.

WOW! WOW! WATERFORD!!

Shown at right are the cast and crew of UNL Opera's production of Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*, photographed in the historic Theatre Royal, moments after being awarded the International Trophy, signifying best overall production at the 49th Waterford International Festival of Light Opera. In addition to the International Trophy, awarded to co-directors Ariel Bybee and James E. Ford, Adjudicator David Turner also honored UNL's team with the following awards:

Best Set to Will Cover for adaptation of a set designed by Laurel Shoemaker.

Best Choral Presentation to UNL students Thom Gunther, Jake Bartlett and Adam Fieldson for their portrayal of the three chefs in "Abbondanza."

Best Musical Direction to UNL Orchestra conductor Dr. Tyler Goodrich White.

Best Female Singer to UNL student Anna DeGraff for her portrayal of Rosabella.

Best Male Singer to UNL Director of Opera Dr. William Shomos for his portrayal of Tony.



This was the first time in the 49-year history of the Festival that an American production has won the International Trophy. The American victory was well-received by the Irish hosts. Festival Registrar Geraldine O'Shea wrote, "We too were very happy your group won the international trophy. It's a great boost for the profile of the festival that the 2007 winners came all the way from the U.S. It shows other societies that they can travel huge distances and still be successful. I hope the proud memories you have will stay with your group for years to come."

Wesleyan Presents Lighthearted Scenes

Prepare for an evening of rollicking fun as the Nebraska Wesleyan University Opera Workshop Class presents *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Opera*. The class, consisting of both music majors and non-music majors, will present lighthearted scenes from operas such as *Die Fledermaus*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Magic Flute*, and more. Don Burt will serve as special guest host and narrator. You won't want to miss it. Performances are November 12th and 13th at 7:30 p.m. in O'Donnell Auditorium, 50th and Huntington, on the Nebraska Wesleyan University campus. Admission is free.

Met Audition Changes Date and Location

The Nebraska Metropolitan Opera Auditions Committee has announced that the Nebraska District Metropolitan Opera Auditions will be held on Saturday, December 1, 2007, at 12 noon at the Sheldon Theatre located in Sheldon Art Gallery, 12th and R Streets. Admission is free.

Calendar of Events

NOVEMBER 8, 2007
Così fan Tutte, UNL Opera
Kimball Recital Hall, 12 noon
Tickets: 472-4747

NOVEMBER 9, 2007
Così fan Tutte, UNL Opera
Kimball Recital Hall, 7:30 p.m.
Opera Preview, 6:45 p.m. in
Kimball Lower Lobby
Reception for Friends of Opera members
and guests on stage after the production.
Tickets: 472-4747

NOVEMBER 11, 2007
Così fan Tutte, UNL Opera
Kimball Recital Hall, 3:00 p.m.
Opera Preview, 2:15 p.m. in
Kimball Lower Lobby
Tickets: 472-4747

NOVEMBER 12 AND 13, 2007
***A Funny Thing Happened on the
Way to the Opera***, Nebraska Wesleyan
University Opera Workshop Class
O'Donnell Auditorium, 50th &
Huntington
7:30 p.m., free admission

DECEMBER 1, 2007
**Metropolitan Opera Nebraska
District Auditions**
Sheldon Theatre (Sheldon Art Gallery)
12 noon, free admission

DECEMBER 8, 2007
Amahl and the Night Visitors, UNL
Opera and Lincoln Public Schools
The Johnny Carson Theatre, Lied Center
for Performing Arts
1:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.
Admission is free, but advance
reservations are required. Phone William
Shomos, 472-2494.

FEBRUARY 21, 22 AND 24, 2008
Dead Man Walking, UNL Opera
Kimball Recital Hall

