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MSC OPAS announces season 17th year biggest yet for A&M organization

By Chuck Lovejoy

Of The Battalion Staff

Keeping the tradition of providing quality, world-class entertainment to the Brazos Valley, the MSC Opera and Performing Arts Society has lined up a 1989-90 season of music and theater events that promises to be its biggest yet.

This 17th OPAS season also brings change to the organization, as the 1989-90 school year will see the debut of OPAS Jr., a similar program aimed at the "young at art."

The OPAS Sr. season kicks off on Sept. 15 with a performance by the Houston Symphony Orchestra, Texas' oldest performing arts organization. The symphony will be under the baton of famed conductor Christoph Eschenbach.

On Oct. 13, the Moscow Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra will perform under the direction of Vladimir Spivakov, who is considered one of the world's greatest violinists. Spivakov personally selected the ensemble's members from Russia's finest string players.

A special event starring the Smothers Brothers will be held on Oct. 15. The popular comedy duo will perform a musical comedy routine with help from the Brazos Valley Symphony Orchestra.

The first theater program of the season will be held Oct. 27 with a performance of "Absent Friends" by the Missouri Repertory Theatre. The comedy takes a funny and affectionate look at friendship, marriage and life itself.

Grammy winner Michael Tilson Thomas will perform on Nov. 1. The classical pianist, who also serves as the Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, will take the stage with a program of classical standards and Gershwin favorites.

Rudder Auditorium will be transformed into the mighty Mississippi on Nov. 2 with a performance of the musical "Big River." The adaptation of Mark Twain's classic story is the winner of seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical of the Year.

To start off the spring semester with fanfare, the Summit Brass, America's premier large brass ensemble, will visit A&M on Jan. 23. The all-star lineup of performers is made up of musicians drawn from the country's major orchestras.

The musical "Me and My Girl" will be presented Jan. 26. The comic piece tells the story of free-spirited cockney Bill Snibson, who inherits the title of earl and finds his life hilariously changed.

An evening of contemporary American dance will be held January 30 when the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater takes the stage. Founded by native Texan Alvin Ailey, who is also the ensemble's artistic director, the troupe has set the standard in its class for more than 30 years.

On Feb. 8, noted Broadway actress Patrice Munsel will recreate her starring role in "Mame," one of Broadway's longest-running musicals.

Houston's Alley Theater will present "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf," playwright Edward Albee's satiric look at contemporary marriage, on Feb. 13. Albee himself is scheduled to direct the production.

Acclaimed violinist Joshua Bell will perform on Feb. 14. Bell made his Carnegie Hall debut four years ago at age 17 and has toured throughout Europe, Canada, Australia and Japan.

The 1989-90 OPAS season also will feature the classic tale of star-crossed love, "West Side Story." The electrifying Leonard Bernstein/Stephen Sondheim musical will be performed March 7.

The final scheduled event will be a concert by the world-famous Preservation Hall Jazz Band on March 23. The group's distinctive jazz stylings will serve as a fitting end to the season.

All performances for the OPAS season will be held in Rudder Auditorium and will begin at 8 p.m. on their respective dates.

Season tickets for the events may be purchased in the MSC Box Office before Sept. 15.

These are offered in series of music or theater (depending on the performance) or combination (all 14

shows). Prices vary according to seating. Student rates are offered. Although smaller, the OPAS Jr. season promises to be equally exciting for its patrons.

The OPAS Jr. program was created this year after two test events in the 1988-89 season showed an interest for youth and family-oriented programming in the Bryan-College Station area.

Anne Black, executive director of OPAS, said response to the new shows was very positive.

"They were very successful," she said. "That's encouraging because the program is designed to encourage arts education in the Bryan-College Station area."

"Of course, we also want to make sure we have people buying season tickets in 20 years," Black remarked.

The premier OPAS Jr. event will be a concert by guitarist and composer Tom Chapin. Although known for his musical work, he has also hosted several television shows, including the "Make a Program and the National Geographic Explorer" series.

On Oct. 29, "The Secret Garden" will be presented. The works USA production is based on the bestselling children's book of the same name.

The acclaimed Louisville Children's Theatre will perform "Wind in the Willows" Feb. 18. The costumes, makeup and sets highlight this witty tale of Mr. Toad and his friends.

Pianist Kathleen Roach will perform April 1. She is known for her multi-media concerts which combine narratives, music and visual arts to introduce children both to classical music and to the stories behind the music.

All OPAS Jr. events will be held on Sunday afternoons in Rudder Theater. Each show will be performed twice, allowing parents to choose either a 3 p.m. or 5 p.m. performance.

Season tickets for all four OPAS Jr. shows may be purchased in the MSC Box Office. The deadline for purchase of season tickets is this Friday.

Aggie Players plan comedies for '89-90

The 1989-90 Texas A&M Aggie Players' season may prove to be their funniest yet, as a majority of the productions scheduled by the organization are comedies.

A return visit by the Royal Shakespeare Company Alumni and others from the London theater scene also will highlight the season.

This will mark the 45th consecutive season for the Aggie Players, the oldest continuously producing theater company in the Brazos Valley.

The group's first production was "You Can't Take It With You" in 1946. Since then, hundreds of productions have been staged at a variety of locations throughout the Brazos Valley.

A presentation of the musical comedy "Little Shop of Horrors" will open the 1989-90 season in October. The Players' version of the story of an alien man-eating plant is based on the film by Roger Corman. It will be presented Oct. 5-7 and 11-14.

The second production of the season will be Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit," a comedy about a man who

invites a medium to his home for a seance and gets more than he bargained for, namely the return of his dead wife Elvira. The play will be presented Nov. 9-11 and 15-18.

One of America's longest-running musical comedies, "The Fantasticks," will be the troupe's third production. The love story is based on Edmund Rostand's "Le Romancers," with book and lyrics by Tom Jones and music by Harvey Schmidt, both Texans. The musical will run Feb. 15-17 and 21-24.

The fourth production will be the world premiere of a new translation of Antonio Mira de Amescua's "Gambler's House." Intrigue, romance and honor form the basis for this classic Spanish play in which an inept card player gambles all that is dear to him in search of the ultimate winning hand. The Players present it March 1-3 and 7-10.

America's most popular contemporary comedy, Robert Harling's "Steel Magnolias," will be the final production of the 1989-90 season. The play concerns gossip mill grinding in a beauty parlor in a small Texas town. The comedy will be performed April 19-21 and 25-28.

Also as part of their 45th season the Aggie Players again will sponsor the ACTER/Brith Theatre Company. This company, which features veterans of the Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre, will be performing a full-length play (which is yet to be announced) on Feb. 1 and 3.

In addition to their main productions, the Players also have announced the rejuvenation of the Fallout Theater, which will become a forum for the presentation of thought-provoking plays such as "Waiting for Godot" and "Strife Told."

Season tickets, which provide savings of 20-40 percent and include five performances of the Aggie Players as well as the ACTER/Brith Theatre play, are available in the MSC Box Office or may be reserved by calling the Aggie Players, 845-2621. Season ticket subscribers also will receive discounts on Fallout Theater tickets.

Art

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exhibits displayed in the future will be used mainly to develop specific themes of the Runyon Collection.

"What we might want to do is stage an exhibition of works by the 10 original American Impressionists," Arredondo said. "We only have two of the 10 represented, so we would borrow paintings from other institutions and thereby broaden the understanding of what exists in the Runyon Collection."

"Right now, we're bringing in a wide assortment of things, which is my idea of a really nice gallery, but because the Forsyth Center Galleries are primarily devoted to the Runyon Collection, I have a feeling that we will end up narrowing the focus of our operation significantly at that time (when the rest of the collection arrives)."

Reynolds said he hopes the gallery will always be able to accommodate temporary shows.

"I think we will always try to maintain enough flexibility and space that we can do some major traveling shows," he said.

"From everything that we're told by museum people and others that are in the visual arts business, it doesn't make any difference how fantastic your permanent collection is, that you really need to do some new and different things on a regular basis so that you can continue to attract people."

Arredondo borrowed a line from the film "Dead Poets Society" to il-

lustrate the importance of art at this university.

"Engineering is great, science is great, but art is what we live for," Arredondo said. "All new stuff is fine and dandy, but it's not what the essence of humanness is about."

"Texas A&M, in such an odd, peculiar way, was a quintessentially modern experience, devoid of texture, devoid of all those aesthetic qualities that were so prevalent in the 19th century in the eastern states and Europe. Here we more resembled late modernist architecture, just little boxes with windows, no texture, no color, no smell... all hermetically sealed, all run by machines. It just isn't enough for the human being to live in such an environment. We needed art."

People may scoff at the notion that an education is not complete without some form of art education, but Arredondo thinks art education is important.

"When you get into the business world, and you start having to deal with people who really are involved in the world, those people have highly refined experience bases," he said. "They've tasted great wines, they've gone to symphonies and operas, they've gone to museums."

These people have realized that there is more to art than simply viewing paintings on a wall.

Reynolds also stressed the importance of art at A&M.

exposure to quality art and so forth. "The Forsyth Center/Runyon Collection is really all about: putting quality art in the day-to-day environment of students," he said.

Reynolds said he envisions the MSC Visual Arts committee and possibly University Plus classes playing a role in bringing the students and faculty together, with students acting as curators for some of the temporary exhibits.

Besides the philosophical reasons for visiting the Forsyth Center Galleries, Arredondo pointed out other, more practical reasons.

"I'm amazed at how many people bring their girlfriends by, and how many girls bring their boyfriends by," Arredondo said. "They have great time walking around together. It's just a nice, quiet environment and they can talk about something and be together — it's very romantic."

Although the gallery has been open for several months, the "official" grand opening ceremony is scheduled for September.

Students are invited to attend Student Open House Reception Thursday, Sept. 7, from 4-8 p.m. in the MSC Forsyth Center Galleries.

The general public is invited to attend a lecture by Dr. Sidney Stein, Associate Director of the Louis Art Museum. The lecture, titled "From Satyrs to Yuppies: 20 Years of Cameo Glass," will be on Saturday, Sept. 9, at 8:30 p.m. in Rudder Theater.

A reception in the MSC Forsyth Center Galleries will follow the lecture.

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