

ENTR'ACTE

Newsletter of the Opera Supers of Iowa City
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Spring opera, FLEDERMAUS was an artistic success even though it did not draw full houses. Perhaps we can get larger audiences for the summer offering of the twin-bill CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA and PAGLIACCI. These will be real operas for all your favorite supernumeraries will be performing. I have recovered sufficiently from my hip replacement surgery to go on stage for these productions and Mel Sunshine will also be available. I missed not having been able to perform in FLEDERMAUS. Although I was listed in the playbill as one of the jail inmates, I had "escaped" and watched from the audience. There will be some surprises in the supernumerary listings for CAV this summer, so get your tickets. If you cannot attend why not make a donation, equivalent to the ticket price, to the Opera Theater or the School of Music Opportunity Fund.

This issue of the newsletter is the last for the current volume. The offer I made to step down (or aside) for someone else to take on the editorship of the newsletter still holds.

Arthur Canter

A SPECIAL FAREWELL TRIBUTE TO ELEANORE BOWERS

Our Eleanor with-an-e will have retired from her position as Costume Supervisor for the Opera Production Unit in July by the time you read this. Therefore she will not be attending to our needs for the summer operas. We are saddened that she leaves the Unit but are happy that she will be around Iowa City for a while trying out new things and a new freedom, if being a grandmother gives one that freedom. Your editor has enjoyed an association with Eleanore for the past seven years ever since he started "supering" with the BORIS GOUDUNOV production. It has been fun backstage, getting fitted, properly pinned up (or down) and just engaging in chit-chat. We will all miss the supervision she has given to the Strike Party food operations and distribution backstage. The Supers Potluck supper to be held on the Saturday, August 1, between the two performances of the opera will be in honor of Eleanore, giving all of us the chance to express our affection and appreciation.

MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES, MARCH-JUNE, 1992

The March 17th meeting was taken up by considerations of ways to promote DIE FLEDERMAUS with downtown merchants. Bill Nusser attended the meeting to offer his advice and help with details. A brief meeting was held on March 30th to review what various volunteers had been able to accomplish in contacting merchants and getting opera displays set up. The plans for the Strike party were also reviewed. The situation for the summer opera was discussed. The meeting of May 4th drew a large number of Supers in anticipation of a recital to be given by students of the Opera Class at the close of the meeting. Before the recital a number of announcements were made and the "postmortem" of FLEDERMAUS given. The plans for the summer between-performance potluck were made. Pam Stewart offered her place for the event. It was suggested that a "guest book" be used for future parties. The opera student recital was given in the Opera Rehearsal room and was a

great success, enjoyed by the Supers, students and friends and relatives of the singers. The meeting of June 6th was well attended despite the inability of a number of regulars to be present. It seems that there are always enough Supers to make these meetings worthwhile. It was agreed by the group to assist Wayne Neuzil for his benefit recital planned for Sunday July 19 at the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church. The Strike Party for the summer opera will be managed as usual by Anna Stranieri and her committee. It was announced that Eleanore Bowers would be retiring as of July. The members present expressed the wish to do something in recognition of Eleanore's service. The needs for supernumeraries for the CAV/PAG performances were brought up. The rest of the meeting was devoted to a report by Dr. Nelson about the future of the School of Music and thoughts about the Performing Arts sections of Music, Theater and Dance of the university. Problems of finances, deficits, raising funds, public relations, ways of reaching wider audiences, etc. were all frankly discussed by the group. The meeting ended with a short party to present Mona Shaw with a birthday cake. On June 18th, a number of the Supers were able to attend a Program of Arias presented by the Opera Theater students in Macbride Hall as part of the Iowa Festival.

MASCAGNI, LEONCAVALLO AND CAV/PAG

Both operas are short works and are commonly given on the same program, thus the familiar designation "Cav and Pag". However, be prepared to sit for over an hour for each opera. The stories for each are probably well known to the Supers and will be covered in your playbills. A few notes about the background of the composers and the works follow.

Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945), before CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA, was an impoverished young music-teacher who for a number of years was trying to eke out a living in Cerignola, Italy. In 1888, Mascagni saw an announcement of the second contest sponsored by Casa Sonzogno, the Milan music publishing house, for a one-act opera by a young Italian composer. The first Sonzogno competition had been won by Puccini with LE VILLI (1884). Mascagni had been working on an opera based on the Heine play, WILHELM RATCLIFF, a goal that dominated his thinking until he achieved it later. For the competition he turned to the one-act play "Cavalleria Rusticana" (1884) by Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), adapted by its author from his own short story of the same name (1880). Mascagni had seen the play for the first time when he was a student in Milan. There is an interesting story and controversy about whether Mascagni did or did not get permission from Verga to turn the work into an opera before submitting it to the contest. Sonzogno and Mascagni were sued by Verga on the matter. In any event, it seemed that Mascagni had misgivings about the worthiness of his one-act opera and had the inclination to submit instead an act from RATCLIFF which he had been working on. According to the composer, he was deterred from this by Puccini who is claimed to have said to him "You still have the idea of Ratcliff ? Listen to me: Guglielmo can never be your first opera; first think of making a bit of a name, sacrificing a part of your ideals, and then later you can assert yourself." And make a name for himself Mascagni did! He won first prize in the Sonzogno contest and had a smashing success with the premiere of CAVALLERIA on May 17, 1890 attended by a small and skeptical audience gathered at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome. Overnight, Mascagni found himself a national celebrity and, more than any other work, his CAVALLERIA was considered responsible for the vogue for verismo opera. Who remembers Mascagni for his fourteen other operas, two operettas, church music, choral music, orchestral works and many songs ? Who has heard GUGLIELMO RATCLIFF (first performed at La

Scala in 1895), the opera the composer regarded as his masterpiece? His second opera, L'AMICO FRITZ (1891), was enthusiastically acclaimed by audiences but it couldn't match CAV. Mahler favored L'AMICO FRITZ and considered it to be an advance on the earlier opera. It is rarely performed today as are few of Mascagni's other operas. Some of them have been revived recently and appear on CD's. These include IRIS, LODOLETTA and PARISINA.

Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1858-1919) is also remembered chiefly for one opera. The fact that he was the son of magistrate is of interest in this regard. His father was the judge at a trial of an actor who had murdered his wife in a jealous rage after a performance. It was the memory of this trial which Leoncavallo had attended as a child that inspired him to write the libretto for his opera PAGLIACCI. His first opera on the story of the ill-fated English poet Thomas Chatterton ended in a fiasco as the impresario who was to produce the opera disappeared with the funds just before the première, leaving Leoncavallo almost penniless. He was obliged to give up his plans and earn a living by giving piano and singing lessons. He became an accompanist to soloists singing at cafe concerts and thus began to travel widely. Returning to Italy Leoncavallo started on an ambitious project to write a Wagnerian-style operatic trilogy of the Medici and Renaissance Italy. While waiting in vain for a performance of the first of these operas, I MEDICI, he began work on the short two-act PAGLIACCI. It has been written in some accounts that Leoncavallo wanted to submit PAG to the same 1888 Sonzogno competition that Mascagni won but the evidence is that PAG was written in five months as a result of the enormous success of CAV in 1890. PAGLIACCI was first produced at the Teatro dal Verme in Milan on May 21, 1892. As happened to Mascagni, Leoncavallo won overnight success and fame with the one opera. This was a triumph that he was never to repeat. His originally spurned I MEDICI was finally staged in 1893 but was such a failure that he gave up on the idea of a trilogy. He composed an opera, LA BOHEME, based on the Muerger novel. It was quite well received in 1897 at the Teatro Fenice but his adaptation was overshadowed by Puccini's opera on the same subject which had been premiered in Turin only a few months earlier. One might speculate how popular the Leoncavallo BOHEME might have become had Puccini not written one first. It is rarely performed but has been recorded. Another verismo work of Leoncavallo, ZAZA, is performed now and then. It too may be heard on recordings.

RANDOM THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

In the recent DAILY IOWAN "University" issue there was a section touting Hancher Auditorium performances which one hopes would inspire students to attend the events there. However I could not help but be amused at a statement with words to the effect that in the course of the 20 years of Hancher's existence, over 3 million visitors have entered the auditorium. If that figure was meant to refer to a total of different individuals it would be typical of misused and misleading statistics that are based on numbers without regard to their sources. What the 3 million represents is either the total number of admissions by tickets or the combination of tickets sold and issued (there are complimentary ones, you know) and tabulations of entries to the hall by people taking tours, attending graduations, etc. In any case, these are not independently derived units. Most admissions are repeaters, i.e. persons going to more than one event a season. I, myself, have probably contributed about 600 of the total admissions over the 20 year period. If I were typical of Hancher-goers, then on the average, only 5000 different persons bought tickets for Hancher. But I am not typical. How

many different ~~of~~ individuals have entered Hancher over a twenty-year period? The ticket office with their computerized records could probably derive a reasonable ~~on~~ true estimate. To illustrate the absurdity of statistics based on ~~non~~-independent events, let's determine an estimate of student attendance of Hancher events from the 3 million figure. Assume that only 10 per cent of the audience is made up of students, on the average (some would like to believe it is 20). Then, 10% of 3 million is 300,000. Three hundred thousand students have attended Hancher events over the twenty-year period? That amounts to at least half the student body each year! Nonsense! Why do I bring this up? Producers, impresarios, directors, etc. ought to have realistic notions about their catchment areas, sizes of the audiences they can attract, and actual numbers of individuals who will be entering their facility and circulate around their area during a performance season. Local merchants would like to know. If the entire population of the state of Iowa travelled to Iowa City during a twenty-year period they would have spent enough money to make this town an outstanding tourist spot. Our two opera performances on a weekend can attract an audience of two to four thousand persons, or about 5% of the population of Iowa City. That's a lot better than Chicago or any big city can do with opera.

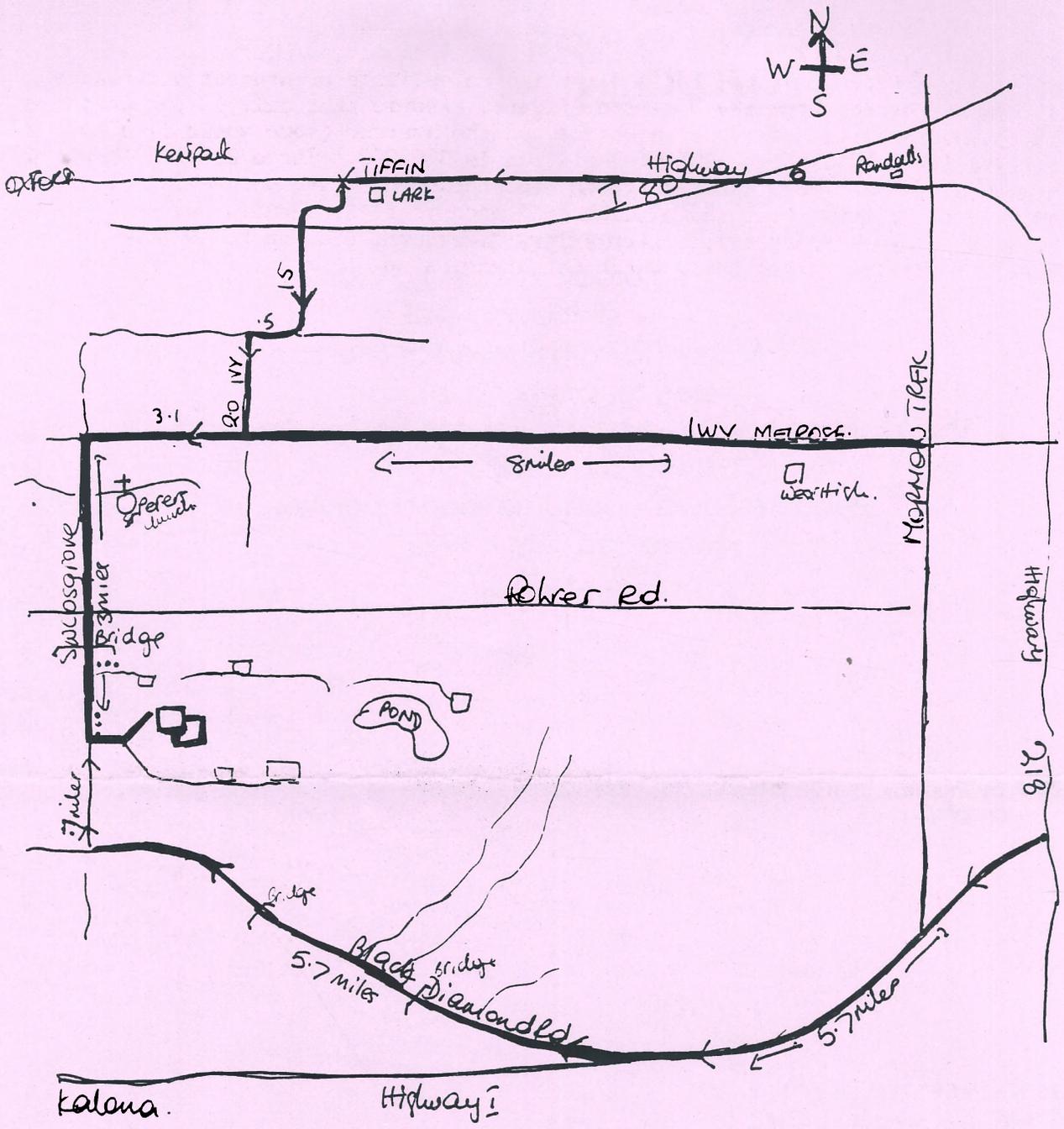
Just think of the money Hancher could have raised if a fifty-cent surcharge had been added to each ticket for renovation purposes. This idea comes from Miriam Canter, only she suggests a \$1.00 surcharge to be added to the price of a ticket, all surcharge money to be put in a special fund earmarked for repair and renovation.

REMINDERS: Wayne Neuzil recital, Sunday July 19, at 7 p.m., Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Iowa City.

Supers Potluck Supper, August 1st. Details as to time and place will be sent you by postcard.

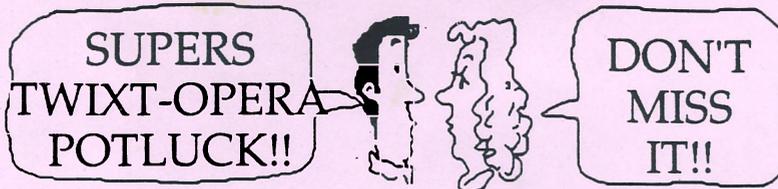
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30 Brookfield Dr.
Iowa City, IA 52245



Mark & Pam Stewart.
 Plenty of parking on the drive.
 Pagar Mailbox. Phone. 683-2323

Take Melrose. 1WV. for 8 miles
 to S.W. Cosgrove. Turn Left (south)
 At 3 miles Turn Left into Drive with
 3 mailboxes - Turn left again &
 you are there!



OPERA SUPERS OF IOWA CITY

Twixt-opera Potluck
Saturday, August 1, 1992
at the home of
Mark and Pam Stewart at 6:00 p.m.
(see map other side)

This event celebrates the performance of Cav/Pag and
honor the service of
Eleanore Bowers, costume shop supervisor
who retired July 1, 1992

Please come!



R.S.V.P. by Thursday, July 29: Miriam Canter, 338-1217, if you will be coming and what you will be bringing.



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