

'Faust'--reason for rejoicing

Opera Review
by BILL WALLIS

If the Omaha Civic Opera's production of Gounod's "Faust" Saturday was an indication of the quality of performances which area opera fans may now expect from that organization, there is reason for rejoicing. The production was a complete success.

Credit for such a success must be divided among many dedicated people. Foremost of these is the artistic and musical director, Leo Kopp. Kopp, who has conducted the Lincoln symphony concerts for several years, is no stranger to Lincoln residents. The production had no awkward musical moments.

NATIONALLY - KNOWN stage director James Lucas added another production to his formidable qualification as one of America's best. Lucas' direction of crowd scenes (always a great problem) resulted in dynamic patterns which appeared and disap-

peared from the stage with ease and grace.

One of the great advantages of civic opera is that generous funding allows the acquisition of top professional talent for the more demanding roles and to supplement area talent. Professional and amateur performers were excellent and good in Saturday's "Faust."

The days of non-acting singers in professional opera are nearing a close. This became evident early in Saturday's production. Three Metropolitan Opera stars performed.

ENRICO DI GIUSEPPE, who portrayed the title role, is one of the best young American tenors on stage. As the opera opened, he was convincing as the ancient scholar poring bitterly over the useless knowledge to which he had dedicated his life. After his metamorphosis he played the role of the young Faust with vigour and competence.

His vocal performance was excellent and improved con-

stantly as the show progressed. His "Salut! demeure chaste et pure" in Act II was the vocal high point of the show; the high C in that aria was unforced, solid and beautiful to hear.

The role of Mephistopheles has been a forte for the bass-baritone since the opera's premiere in Paris in 1859. Joshua Hecht fulfilled the requirements of this demanding role with a large handsome voice and a formidable acting ability. He was sly, insinuating, facile, blood-chilling, humorous and, above all—evil.

JEAN FENN'S Marguerite was beauty to see and hear. She was captivating as the innocent and charming village maid Faust falls in love with; she was radiantly beautiful as he ardently courted her. Her rendition of the famous "Jewel Song" was delightful and she was startlingly pathetic as the seduced and deserted lover in Act III.

Her death scene in the prison was excellent; she teetered on the brink of madness as her lover attempted to rescue her.

These superb performances were augmented by local talent: Celeste Youngstrom as Siebel, a young suitor for Marguerite's hand, brought grace and beauty of figure, and a pleasing vocal effort to that role. Daniel Sullivan as Valentine, Marguerite's brother, presented a strong (though often pushed) baritone voice and a pompous stage figure. His duel with Faust and his

death in Act III were either awkwardly staged or awkwardly executed.

Dorothy Davitt as Marthe, the senseless widow who becomes enamored with Mephistopheles, was suitably flighty and handled the vocal demands of the role admirably. Robert Roberts as Wagner was inaudible.

THE CHORUS had its vocal ups and downs, but the numbers were lively, colorful and full of vigor. Valerie Roche, trained in England's Royal Academy of Dancing, was choreographer of the two short, but effective dances.

Technically, the production was not quite all one could wish for. The set pieces, which tended toward the abstract, proved distracting at times. Lighting was adequate, but some spotlight cues were clumsily handled, leaving major characters in shadows.

But these are minor points, which did not distract from the over-all high quality of the production. It was of sufficient excellence to engage the large audience for well over two hours with the ancient story of Dr. Faustus, who sold his soul to the devil for eternal youth.

DUE TO THE HIGH quality of individual performances by both professional and amateur performers, the audience saw a large number of beautiful moments, the type which can only be found in opera well done. These are the moments when the effect of all elements

of opera combine successfully to produce the great art which the term opera truly implies.

"Faust" gives area audiences much to look forward to in Omaha's two coming attractions: Leoncavallo's "I Pagliacci," and Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana," (which received a fine amateur production here in Lincoln last week) to be presented together April 16 and 18 with 8 p.m. curtain.

COMING

Soul Dinner and Dance

Fri., Feb. 13, 7 p.m.
Nebraska Union Ballroom

Exhibition of Recent Sculpture
by Mike Whitney through
March 8
Sheldon Art Gallery

Flick: "The Collector" Feb. 13
& 14, 7 & 9 p.m.
Nebraska Union Small
Auditorium Feb. 15, 7 p.m.
East Union

LaSalle String Quartet
Feb. 13, 8 p.m., Feb. 14, 10
a.m. Kimball Recital Hall

Kansas State University Con-
cert Choir Feb. 16, 8 p.m.
Kimball Recital Hall

— FREE DANCE —

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