

John Zei (Napoleon)
and Emily McKnight
(Josephine)

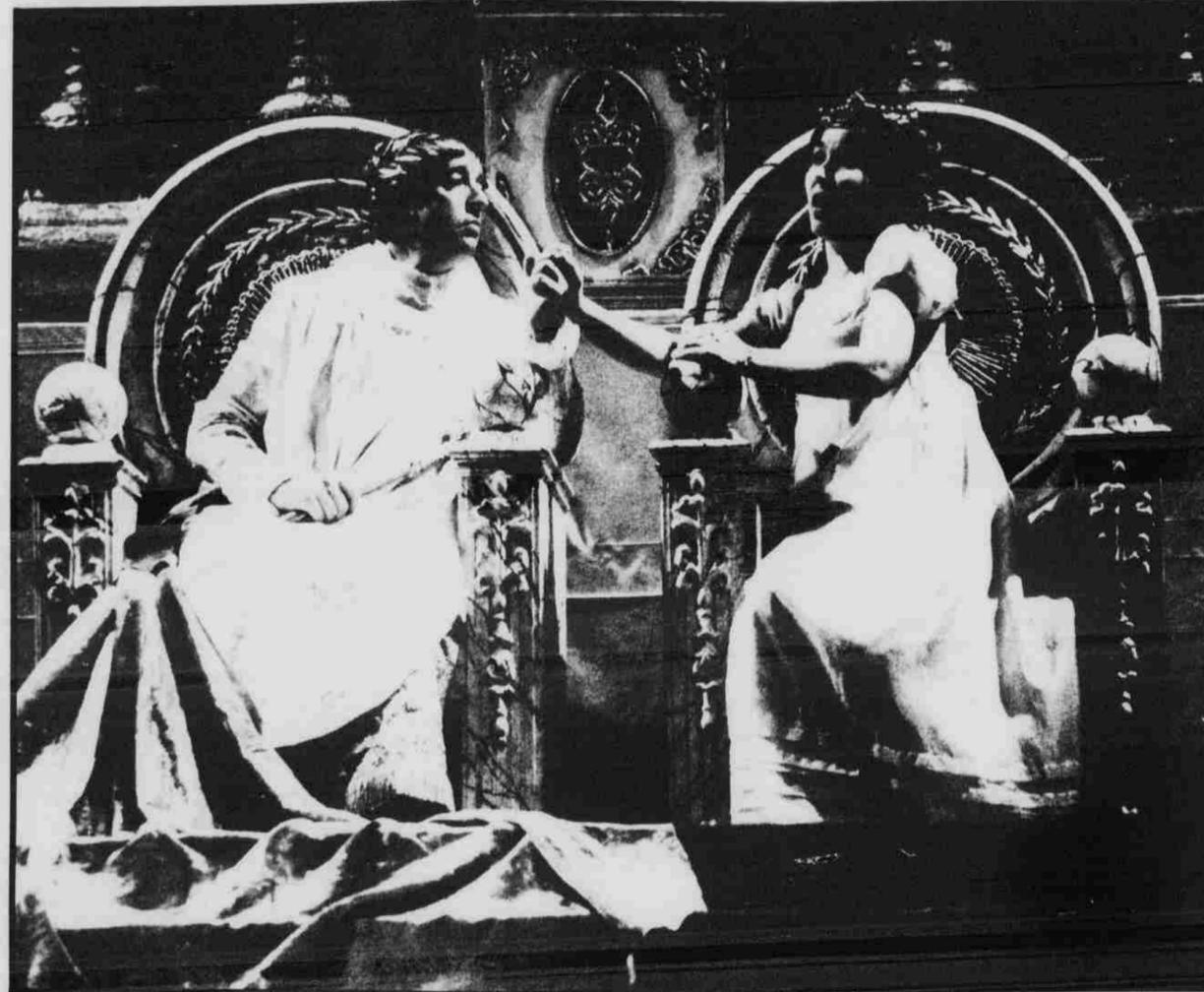
EMPEROR & COMPANY



McKnight
and Zei



Zei with
mistress
Jeanne
Dietrich



A brand new libretto and brand new score is a double challenge for the cast of *Napoleon*. With no other recordings to hear or no way to learn how someone else has sung or acted a role, it allows no copying.

Faculty member John Zei will sing the role of Napoleon with another faculty member, Emily McKnight singing Josephine.

Zei, a veteran performer, felt this is probably the most difficult role he has ever had from both vocal and dramatic aspects.

"The role is not only different because of the mixed media involved but because we see Napoleon in key moments of his life, with all the peaks building to overpowering emotions," Zei said.

Napoleon's mother shaped his life, Zei said, as the opera shows her urging him to return to France from exile. Zei found that the phrase "everything I have, I owe to my mother" was coined by Napoleon.

Two of the most obvious characteristics of Napoleon were his violent temper and oppressive moodiness, but around them are lighter moments,

some very tender," Zei said.

Synthesizing these two sides of Napoleon has involved deciding what the libretto wants to project to the audience and intentions of the director, according to Zei.

Napoleon's memory of Josephine appears in the opera in the form of McKnight. "I want to bring a beautiful, sensuous feeling to Josephine," she said. "Josephine enjoyed life and deeply loved Napoleon even during her affairs with other men. I try to develop her character from a childish love to a woman capable of great sincerity."

Characters around Napoleon are characterized by the function they perform for him.

"Joseph, Napoleon's brother, was made king of Spain and given the dirty work within the family to do. He is the one to deliver the divorce to Josephine. The man was a social climber and snob, not a military man, who got scared and left," said graduate student John Gruett, who plays Joseph.

John Brandstetter, who plays one of Napoleon's generals says he feels the cast

has had an ideal chance to see how all the trappings, libretto, and score are conceived and brought together, a chance a classic opera with characters and music already well-known doesn't give.

The battlefield of Borodino, Napoleon's first setback, provides the background for the events of *Napoleon*.

Tschetter and Wallis visualized the set as they wrote, a stylized battlefield retaining the vivid emotional impact of war.

"I needed a multiplicity of playing areas so the design first planned for that. Then I started cluttering up various areas making them suggestive of the horror and confusion of the battle that has taken place," Tschetter said.

The entire action of the play occurs as flashbacks and flash-forwards in Napoleon's mind, recounting the major portions of his life and predicting future occurrences.

Napoleon recounts previous campaigns, coronation, battles, exile, life with Josephine, relatives, mistresses and the burning of Moscow and consequent retreat.

Bill Wallis
(Duroc)



Napoleon and generals

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