

Reviews get feedback

Bar, 'Don Pasquale' critics blasted by readers

'Pasquale' critic lacked knowledge, opera experience

I've read with some amusement and a great deal of dismay many of the arts reviews in the Daily Nebraskan and willingly attributed it to a lack of experience or unfamiliarity with the vehicle presented on the parts of student reviewers. However, Julie Naughton's irresponsible review (Daily Nebraskan, Nov. 12) of last weekend's "Don Pasquale" opening simply must be addressed.

Let me emphasize that I had nothing to do with the production as a School of Music faculty member. She is correct in saying the opera's plot is a dud (most operas are) and I agree that collegiate productions should be presented in their original language. However, the compensatory action on stage — especially the commedia dell'arie touches — was enlivening and, for observant spectators, just plain funny.

The orchestra played bravely, not beautifully. The singers were not too soft; in many cases, the orchestra was too loud. Diction, for the most part, was excellent — even from the chorus. The variety of voice types was particularly noteworthy.

If Ms. Naughton gleans her impressions from intermission chit-chat, I'd advise her to seek out people from whom she can gain knowledgeable, but not partial or prejudicial, information. Sending some people to review an opera is as misguided as sending me to review a football game. I may enjoy it — win or lose — but I don't get too critical given my lack of expertise.

James Hejduk
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Review was not music criticism, or good journalism

We write in response to Julie Naughton's Nov. 12 review of "Don Pasquale" presented by the School of Music.

Ms. Naughton failed to address all pertinent issues regarding direction, staging, scenery, costumes, acting, musicality, interpretation, etc. What she has given us is a look at her "lukewarm" response to the most accessible style of opera. Unfortunately, her response is indicative of the 20th century public's response to art music in general, and opera in specific.

Perhaps if Ms. Naughton had first educated herself, which is a journalist's responsibility, she could have posed more interesting questions than what may have motivated the audience to attend.

For instance, she could have asked what cuts, if any, were made in the original music and libretto? Was the use of soft backdrops, as opposed to more solid dramatic scenery in keeping with the light-hearted style of comic opera? (She thought they "looked unprofessional.") If the "pace" of the production was not adequate to hold the reviewer's attention, and by extension the audience's, is that the fault of the composer or the director? (She blamed the composer.) Can the success of a performance, or the quality of individual performances, be measured by the size of the audience on opening night? (She seems to think so as per her opening paragraph.) Or, can we expect an individual voice to out-sing an entire orchestra?

We agree with her observation that there were some imbalances here. However, there are limits to what even the most highly developed operatic voice can achieve. Wouldn't it make more sense to ask the orchestra to tone it down? But then, not much of her review made any sense. For example, if Ms. Naughton felt that the plot was easy to "get lost in" what rationale could she possibly have for

requesting to see it done in Italian? Perhaps she also feels that the theater department's recent productions of the works of Chekov should have been done in Russian! We question her definition of "professional," and propose that she confuses the professional with the dramatic. Apparently, she perceives humor, minimal props, and soft-drops as deficiencies. Again, she failed to ask whether the appearance of the set isn't in keeping with the commedia dell'arte style. She also failed to observe that the simple, but sincere humor of this 19th century (not 18th century) opera reflects a different age than our own; she never considers the possibility that if the production failed to hold her attention it is not the fault of the opera, but the result of a lazy mind that has been lulled by a culture's passion for overt and easy entertainment, as found in the quick-fix 30-minute sit-com, to which she so readily compares it. Notice, she never mentions whether this "comic" opera ever even made her laugh.

We feel that Stephen Bobst's performance was not the only noteworthy one. Both Kurek and Rook displayed accomplished lyricism and vocal facility, particularly in their exquisite love scene duet, which by the way was in Italian. Konvalin, as Dr. Malatesta also gave a solid performance. By Sunday's performance Konvalin had overcome the orchestra and volume — handicapped by the sheer precision of his diction!

Ms. Naughton has a lot of nerve to assume that the whole audience fell asleep as she was prone to do. Her lack of interest surely stems from her lack of knowledge of the subject. Her assumptions as to why the audience was in attendance were irrelevant to any serious music criticism, but they are certainly a clue that she resented being required to attend for the sake of writing a review.

We agree with one other assessment: The music department needs better publicity of its student productions. But this superficial fault is no criterion by which to judge the value of Donizette's opera as a "showcase" for student talent, which she attempted to do. She only needed to read the program notes to know that "at any rate, and in any form, Don Pasquale... is one of the brightest jewels of the crown of the comic opera repertoire."

Granted, Ms. Naughton is an unfortunate victim of an era that does not aspire to mature insight, which has traded its invaluable arts for the immediate profits of the popular. However, that does not excuse her

from the fact that her review is neither music criticism, nor good journalism. If she had been slightly informed, she could have at least asked interesting questions. Then perhaps her review would not have lacked the enthusiasm that she simply failed to perceive in Friday's performance.

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school of music

Lynn Jacobson
master of music
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Drinkin' review should stress bar diversity, benefits

Well, it appears to be that time again. When the Daily Nebraskan reporters huddle up, discuss their game plan, and then break to the local hooch parlors for a couple of hours, time enough to gather information for their "review" of the establishment, I assume. Unfortunately, their lack of research and obvious narrow-mindedness has resulted in the largest insult of the year, thus far.

I've been disappointed, as I'm sure many others have been as well, in various reviews and articles you have printed in the past. Now, I'm afraid, you have hit an all-time low.

In your Nov. 8 edition of the Arts and Entertainment supplement Diversions, aptly titled, "Drinkin' in Lincoln," the focus was placed on the bar scene of downtown Lincoln. You provided a brief review of just a handful of local pubs/clubs that was, to say the least, in poor taste. I'd rather not go into any detail on any one article in particular, but would instead question your motives on grossly unfavorable reviews. I don't really think these bars deserve such insults and I'm quite sure that not one of your reporters thought to look at the big picture before abusing these night spots. I'll do my best to provide you with this "better late than never" insight.

Lincoln is a thriving college town. On almost any given night a student can find an in-house or backyard party complete with an assortment of attractive males and females and a charitable amount of alcohol to be consumed. But sooner or later, after nine or ten of these get-togethers, one tends to desire something more. That's where the bars come in handy! Believe it or not, for those who are "of

age" and even the lucky few who aren't, the bar scene seems to be the popular choice of partying these days. So why may I ask would the most influential piece of mass media on campus make a conscious effort to degrade these establishments? I'll admit, not everyone can fit into the selective crowd at O'Rourke's, and not everyone can tolerate the alternative sounds of The Underground, but that's the beauty of living in Lincoln. Within five square blocks of pavement, a person can hit more than a dozen different bars and clubs that'll satisfy anyone's needs. Whether it's pool, darts, shuffleboard, comedy, dancing, blues or just plain socializing — downtown Lincoln has got it all! Why not let the students decide for themselves which places to avoid

and which places to call home? I have only two pieces of advice to offer:

- Show a little respect for those establishments that trust their advertising with you. It's just not good business to bite the hand that feeds you.

- Pardon my lack of a better phrase, and if I may be so bold as to speak for the licensed establishments of Lincoln, if you don't like the way the businesses are being run, then please stay the hell out!

Negative publicity is tolerated by none, especially if it comes from a source with its own chequered past.

Chris Humphrey
senior
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A complete set of instructions for the first-time smoker.

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