

Romantic opera portrays European history

Concert preview

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

A beautiful singer meets a starving painter and falls madly in love. Yet her love is strained by an evil baron who holds her lover's life in his hands unless she surrenders to his blackmail.

Another love triangle spins out of control in Italian composer Giacomo Puccini's tantalizing opera, "Tosca," which will be performed in concert by the University Orchestra and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Oratorio Chorus.

Emil Aluas, musical director/conductor, said aside from being a love story, "Tosca" served as a historical document.

First previewed in Rome at the turn of the century, Aluas said "Tosca" illustrated the story of Italy's political and social turmoils 100 years earlier.

"It was the turn of the century in Europe. Europe was entirely in turmoil," Aluas said. "Rome in 1800, already Napoleon was in power. There was an incredible revolutionary spirit."

He said the three main characters, Floria Tosca, Mario Cavaradossi and Il Barone Scarpia each represented an aspect of history. Tosca, a famous singer, falls in love with Cavaradossi, a painter.

Cavaradossi, Aluas said, represents the revolutionary spirit born in the middle-class intellectuals. The baron is symbolic of the oppressive forces trying to extinguish the revolution. Tosca, who is trapped in the middle of this whole ordeal, represents Italy, which then was split between the Austrian empire and a collection of city-states controlled by individual noblemen.

“Each instrument represents somebody. You can hear the opera and you are absolutely moved.”

—Aluas
musical director/conductor

“These are some of the pillars in the story of 'Tosca,'" he said. "It's a very dramatic, short story in which Cavaradossi gives refuge to a new deserter, a revolutionary, as the start of the story."

Scarpia, as chief of police, discovers these revolutionary actions and arrests Cavaradossi. However, as in any good love triangle, Scarpia had an ulterior motive.

He starts trying to blackmail for sex, Aluas said. He tries to have Tosca in exchange for her lover's freedom.

Continuing the symbolism, Tosca, like the revolutionaries in Italy, murders her oppressive force, Scarpia. Cavaradossi is executed regardless. When Tosca realizes she has nothing left, she commits suicide.

"Italy was almost like a raped woman. Everybody held a piece of Italy," he said. "Tosca represents Tuscany, a region at the heart of Italy. Floria is a flower of Tuscany."

Aluas said this symbolism carried the opera to even greater depth.

"It's a dramatic story because everything that intrigues the three characters tells the (history) of Italy and the entire Western civilization."

Aluas said Puccini had even another message in "Tosca" — reality and the mystery of a woman's strength.

"He said, 'I'm not going to give you any more power stories where everything is beautiful,'" Aluas said. "'From now on I put you on the stage



Gerik Parmele/DN

Under the direction of Emil Aluas, Matt Norwood (left) sings the part of Sacristan. The University Orchestra and the Oratorio Chorus will perform Puccini's "Tosca" Thursday at Kimball Hall. Admission for the 8 p.m. concert is free.

to show you their real lives whether it's beautiful life or life with all the miseries and turmoil."

Aluas said Puccini was interested in the female psychology. Roles such as Tosca's explored the powerful mysteries women hold, he said.

Because of the financial investment involved, "Tosca" could not be staged as a full-fledged opera. Instead, it will be performed as a concert with the roles of Tosca, Cavaradossi and Scarpia alternating between three singers for each role.

"It's something new. It's a very big title, a very big and known opera," he said. "You can give an aesthetic value to the music itself without spending half a million on staging."

"Of course there won't be a visual show, but on the other hand, the essence of the score will remain. From a strictly musical point of view, Puccini is a very unique composer."

Puccini describes musically the smallest details of the characters, Aluas said.

"He works with aesthetic charac-

teristics — grotesque, cynical, contrast between beauty and sarcasm."

Aluas said Puccini had the ability to give music an entire story.

"Each instrument represents somebody," he said. "You can hear the opera, and you are absolutely moved."

He said this would make it easier for the audience to understand the opera, even though it wouldn't be a visual work.

"Tosca" will be performed Thursday, at Kimball Hall at 8 p.m. Admission is free.

The Connells to bring modest look to Lincoln

Georgian band follows British rock influence

Concert preview

The Connells, an alternative rock band, will perform for all ages Tuesday night at The Aftershock, 1330 P St.

Although Dave Connell and his brother, Mike, hail from Macon, Ga., their sound is a far cry from cotton fields, blues or southern rock. Instead, The Connells are influenced by the Kinks and Jethro Tull, bands stemming from British soil.

Yet, the six-man band is not prone to classic British behavior, such as smashing guitars on stage or wearing outlandish outfits. If anything, The Connells are likely to be cited for insisting they be allowed to maintain a normal flannel-shirted image — an attitude they've fought record labels and video producers to hold on to.

Lead singer Doug MacMillan

once said, "I didn't get into this business so somebody else could tell me what to wear. I got into it so I could drink beer."

Recently, The Connells released their fifth album, "Ring," on TVT Records, a New York label.

The album combines The Connells' flair for classic pop with rich guitar-oriented melodies like "74-75" and "Slackjawed," songs receiving airplay on college radio.

Bassist Dave has a hand in songwriting, but guitarist Mike composes the majority of songs, and he occasionally shares the vocal spotlight with lead singer Doug MacMillan.

George Huntley also sings, plays guitars and shows off on the mandolin now and then. Drummer Peele Wimberley and keyboardist Steve Potak complete the lineup.

Prior to the concert, a 3 p.m. meet-and-greet autograph party for The Connells will be held at the downtown Twisters, followed by a pre- and post-party at WC's, 1228 P St.

An alternative Canadian group, 13 Engines, signed to Atlantic Records, kicks off the concert at 7 p.m. Tickets are available for \$12.50 at the door.

—Jill O'Brien

Play takes viewer to new world

theater review

By Ann Stack
Staff Reporter

"The Empty Plough," written and directed by Kevin Lawler, is a mystical, mythical play about three friends and their strange journey from one world to another.

Lawler, a co-founder of the Blue Barn Theatre in Omaha, uses an underlying sense of symbolism and irony that runs throughout the play, lending itself to a different interpretation for every viewer.

The play begins in the desolate squalor and filth of an old, decaying inner city.

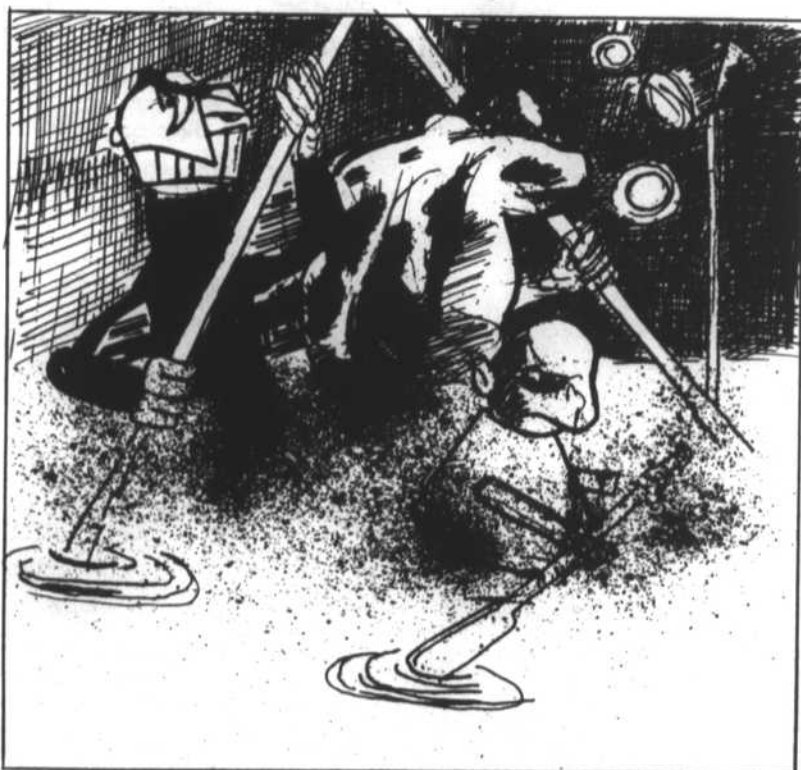
The three main characters — Fran the embellisher, Fern the dreamer and Vern the cynic — are doing their best to survive when two spirits take notice of them.

These spirits of "the other world," Lillian and her grandfather Joseph, watch the trio and decide to help them escape their reality.

Lillian takes human form and is discovered drowning by Fran. The three think she is magical and revive her. Lillian helps them unlock their secret yearnings for freedom from their situation.

She urges them to flee the city, and the three construct a ship from the trash around them and set off on a voyage across a mist-covered prairie.

The ship, as Lillian explains, is "something that carries you from one world to another and keeps you from



James Mehling/DN

sinking."

In the city, Fran, Fern and Vern were sinking, having nothing but their dreams to keep them afloat.

Guided by dream symbols and the stars overhead, they venture out across the prairie with no knowledge of where they're going or when they'll get there.

As food and water run out, the characters must look within themselves to survive, each handling the situation differently.

Out of the three, one remains on the voyage, and two move on to different realms.

The message of the play seems to be that all people must find the strength to make their own way through whatever journey they encounter.

Staged in the Lied Center's Johnny Carson Theater, "The Empty Plough" will run Thursday through Sunday, with evening performances at 8 p.m., a Saturday matinee at 4 p.m. and evening performance at 8 p.m., and a Sunday matinee at 4 p.m. Regular tickets are \$14; tickets are \$7 for students and children. Advanced reservations are strongly recommended.