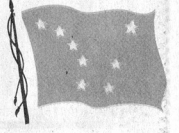




Daily News-Miner

The Voice of Interior Alaska



'The Telephone' rings for Opera Fairbanks

FAIRBANKS - It will be a short but filling night of music when Opera Fairbanks presents "The Telephone" along with a series of arias at the Pioneer Park Theatre. The event is a fundraiser for Opera Fairbanks.

The program features a 16-piece orchestra conducted by University of Alaska Fairbanks graduate student Emerson Eads, while the show-opening arias, mostly culled from major operas such as "La Traviata," "Rigoletto," "The Elixir of Love" and "Don Pasquale," also receive piano accompaniment by Jamila Hla Shwe.

The lone aria not from an opera was composed by Eads, who selected "I Carry Your Heart With Me" because it fits the evening's overall theme.

"The arias are essentially about relationships and the connection is love," he said. "It's easy to tie them together" with "The Telephone."

"The Telephone" relies on repeated miscommunication and interruption for a comedic and at times tragic feel. Ben, sung by baritone Brandon Michael, wants to propose to Lucy, sung by Kristen Hutchinson, but Lucy's continual obsession with the telephone — the persistent receiving and making of calls — leaves Ben exasperated in his efforts to speak with her. Ben attempts to hug, tickle and tease her from the phone but to no avail.

Though the 30-minute opera was composed in 1947 (and the stage setting is true to the time period), it remains timely in this technologically obsessed society of the 21st Century.

"'The Telephone' is easily updated for people who are always on their

Black-Berrys or cell phones," Eads said. "The libretto may be dated, but obviously the idea of technology taking over intimacy is an interesting and timely subject."

Stage director Carrie Baker, an assistant professor in performance at UAF, explained that this type of performance requires the singers to be more physically engaged than many traditional operas that typically position vocalists toward the audience. Ben, constantly vying for attention, is in near-constant motion about the stage as Lucy manages to avoid his pressing question. "My goal was to avoid that presentational style of acting opera often falls into," Baker said. "I think the actors have developed a really good relationship on stage."

They stand out as well, in stylish 1940s attire — crisp suit and colorful evening gown — against a mostly white stage setting.

"It will be simply elegant," Baker said. "Against the white set they will be a big splash of color. It will be very engaging."

Intricacies in the music should prove engaging as well. Though Gian-Carlo Menotti wrote the opera, he asked Samuel Barber to arrange the music. Barber took the idea of the telephone and inserted it into the music via orchestrational gymnastics. A clarinet generates an occasional dial tone, while a "phone" seems to ring throughout.

Eads noted that the format of this opera — the interruptions — are challenging for the singers, particularly for Ben who repeatedly gets caught short of singing his proposal aria. "He's al-



ways ready to give this aria, then he gets cut off," Eads said. "It's very exasperating for him." That frustration eventually drives Ben out of Lucy's apartment. His only means of proposing becomes a phone call — of course — from a booth on the street. The call morphs into the evening's only duet.

Does Lucy accept his offer of marriage?

It might be worth a call to find out.

IF YOU GO

What: "The Telephone" and other vocal favorites, a fundraiser for Opera Fairbanks

When: 7:30 p.m. today

Where: Pioneer Park Theatre

Tickets: \$50 at If Only... A Fine Store, In My Element and Operafairbanks.org
Information: Operafairbanks.org