

Arts & Entertainment

NJSO Celebrates 85th Year, Valentine's Day at Prudential Hall



The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra presented "Bravo Broadway," a romantic evening of song. Notable Broadway singers, from left to right, Melissa Errico, Gary Mauer and Susan Egan headlined a program that ranged from time-honored classics, such as *My Fair Lady*, *Chicago* and *Funny Girl*, to newer hits, including *Wicked* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

NEWARK – Many women in the audience at New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's (NJSO) Bravo Broadway, on February 16, carried single roses or wore red in honor of Valentine's Day.

With a roll of powerful tympani, the strains of "Some People" from the popular musical *Gypsy* signaled that everything would be "Coming up Roses."

Prudential Hall at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) provided the glorious setting of the electric night, which celebrated the 85th season of the NJSO and the debut of conductor Jason Howland. A composer, musical supervisor and producer, Mr. Howland has conducted on Broadway for 12 years.

Tenor Gary Mauer started the evening with *Gypsy's*, "All I Need is the Girl," displaying why he had performed on Broadway and in traveling Broadway productions throughout America and Singapore for years.

From that upbeat number, the smooth sound and the rhythmic syncopation of bongo drums and maracas of Cole Porter's "Begin the

Beguine" flooded up to the highest tier of the acoustically superior auditorium.

Then, the female vocalists were introduced: Susan Egan, who starred in Broadway's *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and Melissa Errico, who made her Broadway debut as Cosette in *Les Misérables* and recently starred in the California revival of *My Fair Lady*.

Mr. Howland kept a wonderfully brisk tempo for "I Could Have Danced All Night," which Ms. Errico sang with aplomb.

Making his NJSO debut, Mr. Howland interspersed bits of his personal history and colorful anecdotes, so that the audience might better know him.

He spoke of losing his first church job, when he was a teenager, after playing a rendition of a Guns 'N Roses piece during communion. With that confession, he removed his jacket, revealing a sketched skull on the back of his vest.

The orchestra presented selections from *West Side Story*, penned by one of Mr. Howland's favorite composers, Leonard Bernstein. The trombone and brass section sparkled in "Tonight." A haunting French horn,

piano and harp led the melodious strings for an ethereal musical moment in "Somewhere."

The percussion section shone in the cacophonous "America," which came to a dramatic halt for a poignant "Maria" duet by Ms. Errico and Mr. Mauer.

The varied evening also featured numbers from the musicals *Chicago*, *Cabaret*, *Finnegan's Rainbow* and *Hairspray*.

The second act brought trios and solos that showcased the qualities of the vocalists. Especially outstanding were the trios of Abba's songs from *Mama Mia* and "I'm Not Getting Married Today" from Sondheim's *Company*.

Memorable solos included Ms. Errico's emotional version of "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina," from *Evita*, which featured a majestic orchestral accompaniment.

Ms. Egan gave a dramatic rendition of "Defying Gravity" from *Wicked*. Mr. Mauer's "Music of the Night" from *Phantom of the Opera* literally stopped the show with his command of crescendo and phrasing.

Blockbuster tunes — from classic Broadway to contemporary shows — blossomed under Mr. Howard's baton, with the orchestra providing a rousing complement to the superb voices.

A quick costume change for the vocalists and the hilarious "Age of Aquarius" encore left the audience humming all the way home.

Pirates of Penzance Sails in to Kean, Capturing Audiences at Wilkins

By SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

UNION – A mammoth black flag sporting a bone-white skull and the single word "Pirates" adorns Kean University's Wilkins Theater, signaling that *The Pirates of Penzance* has set sail, and theatre fans should not miss the "pirated" boat.

When the musical opens, the ship, "This Ain't the Pinafore," docks on the rocky shores of Cornwall, England, on February 29, 1869, and 13 pirates meander onto the stage followed by Ruth (Kelly Bennett), the caretaker of Frederic (Jeff Ronan), a 21-year-old pirate celebrating both his birthday and the end of his apprenticeship.

In Ruth's confession of "When Frederic was a Lad," she sings that she was instructed to give Frederic to "pilots" when he was 5 years old, but due to her hearing problem, she mistook the word for "pirates."

Thus begins a series of misunderstandings, mix-ups and confusion that make for a hilarious night of music and mayhem in the two-act comedic opera written by Gilbert and Sullivan.

Director Holly Logue's version of the classic is the modernized one Joseph Papp brought to New York City's Central Park, featuring a more swash-buckling Pirate King and lead character Frederic, and broader humor than the 1879 original.

Early on, the Pirate King (Jules Jorgensen) tells Frederic to operate his life "always in the dictates of your conscience." This proves to be the pivotal statement on which Frederic's very existence and the opera's story revolves. Thereafter, a dozen maidens, in their pastel-colored, knee-length bloomers and matching tops and parasols, carrying butterfly nets and badminton rackets, come on the scene ready for an afternoon of frolicking by the sea.

Frederic, who has never seen a female — except for his caretaker, 47-year-old Ruth — is agog with the lovelies

but is especially enthralled with Mabel, (Kristen Bussiere) while Edith (Lacey Jones) and Kate (Stephanie Chelton) and the other sisters titter and giggle over the handsome lad.

Enter their papa, Major General Stanley (Kevin Gilbert), cradling his adorable caramel-colored canine, Pea-Coat the Pekinese.

When the pirates return, confusion ensues.

The second act is set in the moonlit ruins of Tremorden Castle, with the General blubbing, his daughters running around in nightgowns, Ruth and the Pirate King breaking and entering, and policemen dancing while chasing pirates. It's marvelous musical madness.

From the first number, the visual effects are a smorgasbord of delectable delights. Great lighting designed by Nadine Charlsen showcases the massive sienna of brown/black craggy cliffs.

The gigantic stage is afforded even more space with an extension into the first few rows of seats, all the while hiding the crisp 13-piece orchestra, nicely directed by Warren Helms.

Alexis Forster's excellent costuming includes colorful touches and an authentic "puffy-shirt" for the Pirate King, as well as delicate period pieces for the

ladies. Fight captain Eric Woodring's vision of sword-fighting and stunt coordinator Rick Sordelet's choreographed flying leaps provide great fun for the sword-swinging pirates and audience alike.

The Police Sergeant (T.J. McNeill) leads the bumbling cops, who all affect wonderful Charlie Chaplin-esque moves and Ray Bolger-like ("The Scarecrow" in *The Wizard of Oz*) legs thanks to Kean's resident choreographer Michele Mossay-Cuevas.

Megan Bussiere as coquettish Mabel, T.J. McNeill as the rubber-legged tap-dancing Police Sergeant, Jeff Ronan as the heroically dutiful Frederic, Kelly Bennett as the Irish old maid Ruth, Jules Jorgensen as the dashing Pirate King and Kevin Gilbert as the hilarious Major General turn in especially fine performances.

Daughters Kate (Stephanie Chelton), Edith (Lacey Jones) and Isabel (Samantha Giustiniani) are memorable.

When Mabel and Frederic fall in love, the other girls wonder "What Ought We Do?" In response to the girls' cry, theatre goers know the proper response; instead of "Talking About the Weather," it is time to hop aboard for a rollicking good time.



A ROLLICKING BAND OF PIRATES WE...Kean University's Premiere Stages presents its take on the popular Gilbert and Sullivan comedic opera, *The Pirates of Penzance*. Above, the pirates, from left to right, Eric Woodring, Justin Friedman, Ralph Saro, Shabazz Green, T.J. McNeill, Charlie DelRisco, Matt Ruf, Jules Jorgensen and Greg Scalera prepare to pounce.

TEEN AND YOUTH ARTWORK

Children's Specialized Hosp. Displays County Teen Arts

MOUNTAINSIDE – The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders announced that the 2007 Teen Arts Traveling Exhibit is on display at the Children's Specialized Hospital, located at 150 New Providence Road in Mountainside, through February 29.

The exhibit consists of 60 pieces of art selected from more than 600 visual artworks shown at the 2007 Union County Teen Arts Festival, held in March, at Union County College in Cranford.

The Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, in the Department of Parks and Community Renewal, administers the annual event.

"The artwork in this exhibit is exceptional. The fact that the artists are teenagers makes the show even more outstanding," said Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski, liaison to the Union County Cultural and Heritage Advisory Board.

The 2007 Teen Arts Traveling Exhibit includes works by:

Mountainside

Scotland Preston, Deerfield School;

Scotch Plains

Kevin Aubourg, Union County Vo-Tech Heather Pasko, Union County Vo-Tech Sayeed Dean, Hillcrest Academy-South

Westfield

Bryan Chen, Edison Intermediate School Dan Mandelbaum, Edison Intermediate Monica Sousa, Beadleston HS

Kathia Salguero, Hillcrest Academy North For information about the Teen Arts

IKEA Elizabeth Hosts County Artwork

COUNTY – Artwork from various schools in Union County is being showcased for the Art Educators of New Jersey's (AENJ) Youth Art Month, an annual observance each March in New Jersey to emphasize the value of art education for all children and to encourage support for quality school art programs.

Union County's IKEA Youth Art Month exhibit held at IKEA Elizabeth on Ikea Drive in Elizabeth, from now through March 31. Artwork from students in grades K to 12 is on display, and each student artist will receive an award.

Youth Art Month celebrates the state's talented youngsters. Youth Art Month provides a forum for acknowledging skills that are fostered through experience in the visual arts.

Visitors to the IKEA Youth Art Month Exhibit will see a variety of media, such as pastels, acrylic paints and pencil. Three-dimensional projects, drawings, paintings, prints and photographs are exhibited to showcase the art programs throughout Union County.

All artwork is also on view at artsonia.com/unioncounty1.

Downtown Westfield Celebrates Art Month

WESTFIELD – For the 13th consecutive year, the nationally proclaimed Youth Art Month is being celebrated in March. Seventy downtown merchants will display artwork produced by approximately 400 students from the Westfield Public Schools.

The displays include paintings, drawings, sculpture and painted furniture designed by students from kindergarten through 12th grade from each of Westfield's nine public schools.

In addition to the downtown displays in March, this is the first year artwork will be exhibited at the Westfield Memorial Library. In the two new large display cases, erected during the library's renovation, visitors may view artwork marking Westfield children's artistic development throughout the ages.

Linda King, fine arts supervisor, commended the students, teachers and local merchants for making this annual event possible.

"These exhibits represent a sampling of the wonderful art created by hundreds of Westfield students under the direction of our 19 art teachers. Also, be sure to attend the District Art Show at Westfield High School in the month of May," she said.

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* Membership tickets not honored on Benefit nights
March 7 Benefit Performance is \$25 for Westfield Historical Society

Call 908.232.9568 For membership & Group Sales

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