



BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY... Pedro Armando Rosales as Rodolfo and Kristen Sampson as Mimi perform in the Little Opera Company's production of Puccini's *La Bohème* on March 4 and 5 at Union County College.

Strong Cast an Audience Pleaser in LOC *La Bohème*

By BRAD TINFOW
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

CRANFORD — The Little Opera Company (LOC) staged Puccini's *La Bohème* on March 4 and 5 at Union County College.

Kristin Sampson (Mimi), Pedro Armando Rosales (Rodolfo), Chad Armstrong (Marcello), Sadie Dawkins Rosales (Musetta), also Mr. Rosales' real-life wife, Erik Kroncke (Colline) and Jeremy Boland (Schaunard) sang the principal roles. Mr. Boland substituted for Michael Turray, who informed the LOC on Friday afternoon that he was ill and would be unable to perform.

Robert Butts conducted, and Fausto Pineda directed. Several adults and students in the Young Artist Program inhabited the lesser roles and comprised the ensemble in the street scene in Act II.

The printed program provided synopses of the four acts, but various student narrators also summarized the plot prior to each curtain. Some of the young speakers recited from memory and impressed the audience with their poise and expressiveness.

In addition to revealing the cast changes over the P.A. system, an announcer stated that Mr. Rosales was "under the weather," but would still perform.

The first act begins with repartee between the poet Rodolfo and the painter Marcello, two of the four bohemians who occupy a garret in Paris. The orchestra's part, which is integral to the drama, is rife with pauses, quick entrances and tempo changes that require the ensemble to respond as a unit with split second timing. The reaction time for these mercurial sections was non consistent among the instrumentalists. Some were professional (non-union), and the rest were from the community, including a talented high-school violinist and two college-age brass players.

There was only one cello and one bass on hand, which caused a noticeable thinness in the bottom half of the score. An electronic piano attempted to fill the gap, but was only marginally successful. The size of the orchestra, which varies from one production to another, is a function of limited space and a tight budget.

The scenery on the fairly small stage was well-constructed and picturesque. The only awkward scene was at the end of Act II, when virtually the entire cast was onstage. The parade of two soldiers had to carefully snake through the crowd to avoid knocking someone over.

The costumes were colorful, well-fitted and appropriate for the period.

Overall, the singing was first-rate. Mr. Rosales' lyric tenor was fine in his middle voice, but his lower and

upper registers thinned out a bit, most likely due to his not being totally healthy. He had no problems hitting or holding any of his high notes. There was no question that he is gifted with a fine voice, as he showed flashes of great vocalism.

Mr. Armstrong's robust and melodious baritone was ideal for Marcello, as he depicted his tempestuous relationship with Musetta perfectly. Although he faltered while singing softly on some higher notes in the fourth act, he generally sang extremely well, with good breath control and long, flowing phrases. He was excellent dramatically, looking very confident and dashing on stage.

Mr. Kroncke and his dark-hued bass were effective as the philosopher, Colline. He nailed his touching aria "Vecchia zimarra," in which he says goodbye to his coat before selling it. His rendition aptly conveyed the somber mood of the last act. The tone quality of his voice reminded one of the late Russian bass Boris Christoff.

Mr. Boland, a lively Schanard, did a fine job after having attended only one rehearsal. His voice, while expressive, sounded light for Puccini, especially when singing alongside Mr. Armstrong. His solid acting and stage presence gave no indication that he had stepped in on short notice.

Ms. Rosales was a delicious and flirtatious Musetta, with a powerful and pretty coloratura soprano that was times appropriately strident. Her "Quando me'n vo'" was sung to the hilt, as she made it nearly impossible for Marcello (and the audience) not to succumb to her charms. Her high-pitched laugh was also loud and boisterous. In the more serious final act, her voice became more lyrical and expressive, and its simple beauty was readily apparent.

As Mimi, Ms. Sampson was in a class by herself. Her voice was rich, full and ringing from bottom to top. She had the means to convey whatever mood or emotion the libretto demanded. No matter how high or how softly she sang, the sound was supported, the vibrato spinning, the timbre consistent and the phrasing perfectly shaped. Beyond the technique, carry and expressiveness of her voice was an irresistibly gorgeous sound. Last, but not least, she actually coughed like someone who was gravely ill.

If the audience reaction was any indication, the production was a great success. If added funds would make a difference in the number of players in the orchestra, I would encourage donations from those who appreciate opera (at a bargain price) or who would like to learn about it. There is no other art form that even comes close.



KARATE CHOP... Moms joined their daughters at Karate n Motion for a special all girls' class celebration to prepare for an upcoming mom-and-daughter event. Monthly family events are part of what makes Karate n Motion more than a martial arts school. On Friday, March 24 at 7 p.m., Karate n Motion is hosting a special game night just for moms and their daughters. This event is open to the public. For more information, call (908) 233-6440.

Faculty Show Featured At Summit Arts Center

SUMMIT — The March Faculty Show is now up at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, located at 68 Elm Street in Summit. The monthly exhibit of recent works by the faculty at the arts center can be viewed on the first and second floor galleries; the show runs until March 31.

Featured this month are: Gerry Heydt, Jessica Lenard, Kit Sailer, Nancy J. Ori and Ellsworth Ausby.

Ms. Heydt has taught classes and workshops at the Arts Center in outdoor landscape painting, oil painting and life drawing.

Ms. Lenard's work is included in eight museum collections and in many private collections throughout the country. She was most recently chosen for the Rutgers Center for Innovative Printmaking Grant.

Ms. Sailer earned her BFA from Syracuse University and has received a NJ State Council on the Arts Fel-

lowship and was Artist-in-Residence at the Newark Museum.

Ms. Ori is respected internationally as a corporate photographer and video producer. She teaches photography both here and abroad and has been affiliated for many years with the Ansel Adams Workshop in California.

Mr. Ausby is a recent addition to the faculty at the Visual Arts Center. He hails from Brooklyn and has been an instructor at the School of Visual Arts in New York, where he has taught painting for the last 25 years.

The March Faculty Show at the Visual Arts Center can be viewed during regular hours: Monday — Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call (908) 273-9121 or visit online at www.artcenternj.org.

Arts & Entertainment

Different 'Buzz' with WHS's Superstar Rock Opera

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

WESTFIELD — Comparison is an inevitable occurrence in our world. So when I heard that Westfield High School (WHS) was producing *Jesus Christ Superstar* on the heels of the Cranford Dramatic Club's (CDC) stellar production of the same Webber/Rice rock opera, I thought that no group could rival theirs.

That night in Westfield I understood the apples and oranges theory of comparison. WHS's version took a more traditional route than the CDC presentation, yet was impressive in its interpretation and presentation.

Because of the large deep and wide stage, WHS was able to take advantage and build an ingenious set (thanks to Roy Chambers and his crew) that could accommodate almost 40 students on various levels.

Three levels of steps and a raked ramp were flanked with two towers that doubled as staging platforms for a number of the performers. They worked well functionally and visually.

Under music director Bill Matthews, the vocals were controlled and focused. To his credit, great emphasis was placed on diction so that barely an indistinguishable word was sung.

A nice balance between the vocals and large orchestra was reached for most songs. A few of the solo voices, though, were lost from the upstage choral performers who could have used microphones.

There were so many notables in this production that one is hard pressed to begin to mention them all.

Foremost was senior Steve Markowski, who played Judas. His talented solos offered an incredible range of notes and emotional breadth.

Nick Williams' Jesus was traditional in build, hair, facial hair and white tunic. Nick's portrayal was admirable especially in his passionate vocals addressing Jerusalem.

The three priests Annas (Max Lazar), Caiaphas (Connor Davis) and the "Third Priest" (Mike Noblett) excelled in setting the somber and sinister tone. Resonant, strong voices boomed forth their indictments against Christ with only a few *basso profundo* notes that were slightly out of reach.

Michael Kimmel and Lisa

Weinsrott's lighting on the priests was especially effective. While bathed in shadows, the priests took on an "other world" feel.

Mary Magdalene, Chloe Zeitounian, portrayed a sympathetic prostitute whose only concern was Christ's welfare. She did a poignant version of "I Don't Know How to Love Him" and "Could We Start Again, Please?"

The choreography by Lorinda Haver and WHS alumnus Megan Rodd was enthusiastic and took on a frantic yet controlled slant at times. In the number "Hosanna" particularly, the orchestra, vocals and dance meshed to a spectacular crescendo.

Pontius Pilate, Maurice Blackmon, presented a haunting, mature voice of "American Idol" quality.

Director Joe Nierle used the large stage advantageously. Judas seemingly ran a marathon throughout most of his songs without skipping a beat or losing his breath. His excellent vocals prevailed above the pulsing brass, tambourine and drums in "Just don't say I'm Damned for all time."

In the Last Supper scene in Act II, a lovely blend of tenor voices became one voice.

Especially effective was the Garden of Gethsemane scene with the black sky/star curtain. Jesus' face in the hooded cloak, however, was visually too constricting. Even the precise pin spotlight on him wasn't enough illumination for his song "Take this cup from me."

An unusually strong soprano section of the chorus was a treat. Maid by the fire Jennifer Kujawski, a senior, did an outstanding job.

The "You're the Great Jesus Christ" number with Herod (Aaron Eisenberg) and the girls showed the cast could cut loose in the campy number complete with kick line and gold lamé outfits. The audience ate it up and begged for more.

The bloody lashing of Christ was made more realistic with the strobe light effect. The gigantic cross from the tower proved dramatic and was offset by silver and white costumes.

Magnificent lighting of Christ in his snow-white tunic was breathtaking with ethereal effectiveness, complete with the star curtain and smoke.

All in all, this traditional *Superstar* was a magical, memorable experience for audience and performers alike.



Susan M. Dougherty for The Westfield Leader and The Times
I DO KNOW HOW TO LOVE HIM... In early March, the Westfield High School's production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" proved there were more stars in the show than just one in this rock opera written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

WF's Roosevelt School To Stage *Guys and Dolls*

WESTFIELD — This month Roosevelt School will stage the musical comedy *Guys and Dolls*. It is based on a short story by Damon Runyon and describes the romance between a gambler and a prim and proper Missionary girl, Miss Sarah, (played by eighth grader Sharon Faktor).

Audience members will learn if it's possible to be lucky in cards and in love since the shows second romantic plot involves the commitment shy gambler, Nathan Detroit and Miss Adelaide (seventh grader Georgia Gleason), a couple who have been engaged for 14 years but haven't yet taken a walk down the aisle.

The cast and crew of sixth, seventh and eighth graders have rehearsed since January and have enjoyed working on this classic of the Broadway stage. The show is filled with memorable characters, such as smooth talking Sky Masterson (played by eighth grader Michael Rosin), enterprising Nathan Detroit (eighth grader Dan Berman), the agreeable Nicely, Nicely Johnson, (eighth grader Julian Seltzer) the determined Harry the Horse, (sev-

enth grader Chris Mench), slick Benny Streetstret, (eighth grader Sean Killecullen), gruff Lt. Brannigan (eighth grader, Dylan Hirtler) and the tough gangster Big Jule (sixth grader Tyler Varian).

The musical by Frank Loesser opened on Broadway in 1950. With a list of recognizable songs, the audience (particularly those above age 35) will recognize "Luck be a Lady," "Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat," "A Bushel and a Peck," "I've Never Been in Love Before" and a host of other memorable tunes. Marlon Brando and Frank Sinatra portrayed Sky and Nathan in the original film version. More recently, Peter Gallagher and Nathan Lane reprised these roles on Broadway.

Guys and Dolls will run on Friday, March 17 and Saturday, 18 at 7:30 p.m., and on Sunday, March 19 at 2 p.m. All performances will be held at Roosevelt Intermediate School on Clark St. in Westfield. Tickets are \$8 in advance and \$10 at the door. For more information, contact Roosevelt School at (908) 789-4560.



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Watercolorist Kristin Havyar's 'Stavanger, Norway,' the town where Ms. Havyar's grandmother was born.

Artists' Showcase Brings Community Together

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Friends of the Mountainside Public Library recently held an Artists Showcase to raise funds for library programs and special library needs.

The event, which had been previously scheduled for the weekend of the blizzard in February, was held on Sunday, March 5. The showcase drew 19 area artists and craftspeople, who displayed their talent on tables set up around the library stacks and in the library meeting room.

"We are thrilled at the turnout," exclaimed Suzanne Streeter, Friends president. "The library is about books, but this is another way to utilize the library to bring members of the community together."

Library Director Miriam Bein was working the floor, interacting with the artists and buyers alike. "There is such a variety of art here," she said, adding that all combined, the showcase offered photographs, oil and acrylic paintings, origami, collage, drawings and much more.

"All of the artists are reporting that they are doing very well," she added. "They are all excited to be selling."

Westfield artist Linnea Rhodes

brought more than 32 paintings and drawings to the Showcase and sold more than half of them. "This has been a totally positive experience," she remarked.

The artists paid a fee to set up a table and were given suggestions on how to price their work. "The result is a lot of affordable art," said Ms. Rhodes.

Additionally, the artists were asked to contribute one piece of artwork to the library that was then included in a silent auction.

Watercolorist Kristin Havyar of Morris County had many beautiful paintings of the country of her heritage, Norway, on her table. She also reported selling some of her pieces. But for Ms. Havyar, the spirit of the day extended far beyond the sale of her artwork.

"Even if I hadn't made any sales, the day would still have been worth my effort," she said.

Money raised by past fundraisers organized by the Friends of Mountainside Public Library has gone towards purchasing of library furniture, adding to the library's DVD, CD and audiotape collections and funding special programs for children as well as adults.

Oratorio Singers to Present Mass in Time of War

WESTFIELD — The 80-voice Oratorio Singers, soloists and orchestra, under the baton of Trent Johnson, will present their 26th-annual concert with performances of Franz Josef Haydn's *Mass in Time of War*, (Paukenmesse) and the world premiere of Trent Johnson's new and contemporary *5 Psalms for soloists, chorus and orchestra* at 3 p.m. on Sunday, March 19, in the sanctuary of the First United Methodist Church, One East Broad Street in Westfield.

Soloists will be soprano Nicole Barrow-White, mezzo-soprano Emily Howard, baritone Jonathan Prescott and tenor Rufus Müller.

Haydn's *Missa in tempore belli*, one of the last settings of the Mass that he was to write, was composed in 1796 while Austria was at war with France and the young Napoleon was still conquering Europe. Its use of martial instruments such as the timpani and trumpets, and their unexpected use in the Agnus Dei, has given rise to the Mass' nickname *Paukenmesse* or *Kettledrum Mass*. Many can envision distant cannon blasts depicted in this music.

The world premiere of *Five Psalms for soloists, chorus and orchestra*, written by award-winning composer and conductor Trent Johnson, features Mr. Johnson's audience-accessible, yet modern settings of five psalm texts.

Nicole Barrow-White, a native of East Orange, performs with Opera Ebony, a New York-based opera company. She is a member of Elmwood United Presbyterian Church where she sings with several of the choirs.

Mezzo-soprano Emily Howard sings many different genres and styles with equal intelligence and ability. Opera wife, she has sung dramatically high-flying roles such as Azucena in *Il Trovatore* (Di Capo Opera, Verismo Opera of New Jersey) and Baba in *The Medium* (Liederkrantz Society) as well as comic tour-de-forces such as Katisha in *The Mikado* (New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players).

Bass Jonathan Prescott is a veteran of more than 800 performances in eight languages in Europe and the

United States. Recent appearances have included Basilio in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Wotan in Austria's new production of Wagner's *Die Walkure*, the Grand Inquisitor in Tuscon's *Don Carlo* and performances of the Verdi *Requiem* with the Kansas Symphony.

Tenor Rufus Müller has established a distinguished reputation for opera and oratorio throughout Europe, Scandinavia, Japan and in North America. He has worked with many leading conductors including Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Roger Norrington, Ivor Bolton, Richard Hickox, Nicholas McGegan, Gustav Leonhardt, Frans Brüggem, Trevor Pinnock, Philippe Herreweghe, Joshua Rifkin, Andrew Parrott, Nicholas Kraemer and Ivan Fischer.

General admission for this concert is \$20 at the door, \$15 for seniors and students. The church and sanctuary are handicap accessible. Advance tickets are available in the church office. Large-print programs will be available. For concert information, call the church office at (908) 233-4211 daily from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Parking will be available in the church parking lot, nearby lots and on adjacent streets.

Trailside Offers Guided Meditation

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders scheduled an evening of guided meditation for adults, ages 18 and older, at Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside on Thursday, March 23, from 7:30-9 p.m.

This program teaches how to use one's own powers to quiet the mind. Sandy Miller, a spiritual healer with degrees in Education and Shamanic studies, will lead the event. While relaxing, the self-healing will relieve stress and its symptoms.

The fee for this workshop is \$10 per person for Union County residents and \$15 per person for out-of-county participants. Everyone who attends is encouraged to bring a pillow and small throw blanket. Light refreshments will be served. Pre-registration is required because space is limited.

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