

Contemporary Opera Studio presents "Socrates", "Christopher Sly"

April 7, 1972

Contemporary Opera Studio, developed jointly by the San Diego Opera Company and the University of California, San Diego, will present a double-bill program of "Socrates" by Erik Satie and the comic "Christopher Sly" by Dominick Argento on Friday and Saturday, April 21 and 22.

To be held in the recently opened UCSD Theatre, Bldg. 203 on the Matthews Campus, the two performances will begin at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$2.00 for general admission and \$1.00 for students.

The Opera Studio was formed in the winter of 1971 to perform unusual works, and innovative productions of standard works, which, because of their unusual nature, could not be profitably performed by the main opera company. The developers of this experimental wing of the downtown opera company hope it will become a training school, emphasizing the theatrical aspects of opera, for young professional singers.

The two operas to be performed make use of a wide range of acting techniques and musical effects demonstrated in acting and movement classes of the Opera Studio.

"Socrates," written in 1918, is a "symphonic drama" based on texts translated from Plato's "Dialogues." The opera is unusual in that women take the roles of Socrates and his companions. Director of "Socrates" is Mary Fee. Double cast in the role of Socrates are Beverly Ogdon and Cathy Campbell.

Erik Satie, composer of "Socrates", is was very much a part of the artistic life of Paris near the beginning of the 20th century. His friends included Debussy, Ravel, Cocteau, and Picasso. He collaborated with the latter two in creating the ballet "Parade." Satie's biting wit, anti-sentimental spirit, and his economy of writing signaled the end of the Romantic period in French music. His influence is seen in the works of Les Six, Stravinsky, John Cage, and a large number of later American composers.

"Christopher Sly" was written in 1968 by the American composer Dominick Arpento. The libretto, by John Manlove, is based on the first episode of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," which introduces a play within the play. Shakespeare ends "Taming of the Shrew" with the inner play, leaving the outcome of the Christopher Sly episode to the audience's imagination. Sly, the town drunk, while asleep, is put in the bed of a lord, and all the members of the lord's household try to fool him into believing that he is the lord of the manor. Manlove has completed the unfinished story in a most amusing fashion.

Argento has composed numerous ballets and operas which have been performed in the U.S. and Europe. He considers opera his specialty. His most recent piece, "Colonel Jonathan and the Saint," was performed this season by the Denver Opera Company, and received rave reviews.

Coordinator for the studio and musical director of "Christopher Sly" is Thomas Nee, conductor of the La Jolla Civic-University Orchestra and UCSD associate professor of music. Dance coach and stage director for "Christopher Sly" is Floyd Gaffney, acting associate professor of drama at UCSD. Gaffney was formerly with the Alwin Nikolai and Catherine Dunham Dance Companies. Assistant director of "Christopher Sly" is Elliot Swift.

A musical coach for the studio and musical director of "Socrates" is Howard Wells, formerly coach and accompanist from the Metropolitan Opera touring company. Mary Carol May and Hollace Koman are both coaches and accompanists from the San Diego Opera touring company and part of the Contemporary Opera Studio staff. Thomas Simmons will play the part of the tinker Christopher Sly.

Guest lecturers and participants in the Contemporary Opera Studio program have been Walter Herbert, General Director of the San Diego Opera Company; Eric Christmas, UCSD acting professor of drama and director of UCSD Theatres; Dr. Jan Popper, Director of the UCLA Opera Workshop; Dr. John Stewart, Provost of UCSD's John Muir College, acting chairman of the Department of drama and professor of English literature at UCSD, and Kenneth Gaburo, UCSD professor of music and composer and director of several innovative works in music theater.

Performances of the operas will also be given at the Palomar College Drama Studio, Friday and Saturday, April 14 and 15, and at the San Diego City College Auditorium, Thursday and Friday, May 18 and 19.

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