

Opera shallow and trite

The Edmonton Opera Association concluded its 1974-75 season recently (March 13, 15, 17) with a production of Puccini's opera *Manon Lescaut*. Styled as a lyric opera by its composer, this verismo opera does have its drawbacks, which the EOA's mounting of the opera merely underscored. By today's standards its libretto is trite, the characters shallow even for Puccini, and the action static - all of which prove tiresome to watch. The point being that this is not a dramatic opera but a singers opera which abounds with much beautiful vocal writing and inspiring orchestral effects.

Irving Guttman's staging was as static and superficial as the work itself. It did little to draw attention to whatever dramatic elements the libretto may contain. To have Manon wander aimlessly around in circles in Act I is tiresome; to have the chorus members stand with hands clasped singing to the conductor during Act I is ludicrous; to have the choristers commenting upon the elegant travelers alighting from their coach when many of them quite obviously cannot see the travelers is incongruous; and to have Lescaut, who is supposed to be trying to sway the sympathy of the men towards the plight of Manon and Des Grieux during Act III, instead sing to the group of imprisoned harlots is

absurd. The primping of Manon in Act II was strikingly embarrassing.

The sets, designed by John Naccarato, were inconsistent in quality and effect, ranging from the (for the most part) charming Inn and courtyard scene (Act I); through the rather one-dimensional almost shabby boudoir scene (Act II); and the atmospheric, if not realistic, harbour scene with its unfortunate prison (Act II); to the cardboard rocks and trees and tie-dye sky in the last act which was positively the most ghastly set that I've ever encountered anywhere.

Lighting by David Hignell was ineffectual for the most part and in Act IV, although appropriate to the situation, I found it excessively harsh.

Costumes, designed by Suzanne Mess, who for some reason seems to enjoy a monopoly on costume design for operatic productions across Canada, also varied greatly in quality. They ranged from the very pleasing costumes for the chorus, Des Grieux, and Edmondo (in Act I) with emphasis upon warm brown and rust shades; through the non-descript yellow gown with its uncomfortably contrasting blue cape for Manon in Act I; to her tiresome Act II gown which was further enhanced by a hideous wig.

Tenor Eramanno Mauro, in the role of Des Grieux, proved to

be the strongest performer vocally. His is a reasonably large dramatic voice which projects easily and which possesses a full round tone, a secure top register, and ample flexibility. What one missed at times, however, were subtleties in shade, colour, and shaping of lines. Dramatically Mr. Mauro appeared somewhat wooden in his movements - more awkward than spontaneous - but his vocal intensity was sufficient to carry him through, for the most part, effectively.

The Canadian-Italian soprano Maria Pellegrini made her long awaited debut with the EOA in the title role. Miss Pellegrini possesses a pleasant but comparatively small voice, a fact which was especially noticeable in the first three acts where her lower and middle registers could rarely be heard distinctly, being frequently overwhelmed by the orchestra, Mr. Mauro, or other vocal ensemble work. Her high notes, however, were strong and secure and projected clearly. In the Act II Dancing Lesson she executed some beautiful, even, and well-controlled trills; and in her aria *In quelle trine morbide* she displayed some lovely sustained pianissimos. But these are isolated points: vocally the performance was generally unfocused. It was only in Act IV, curiously, that Miss Pellegrini presented anything that could be described as remotely dramatic or musically involved singing. Intentionally or not, Miss Pellegrini seemed to underscore, by her rather detached and obviously staged approach, the fact that Manon is a shallow and ungrateful role dramatically.

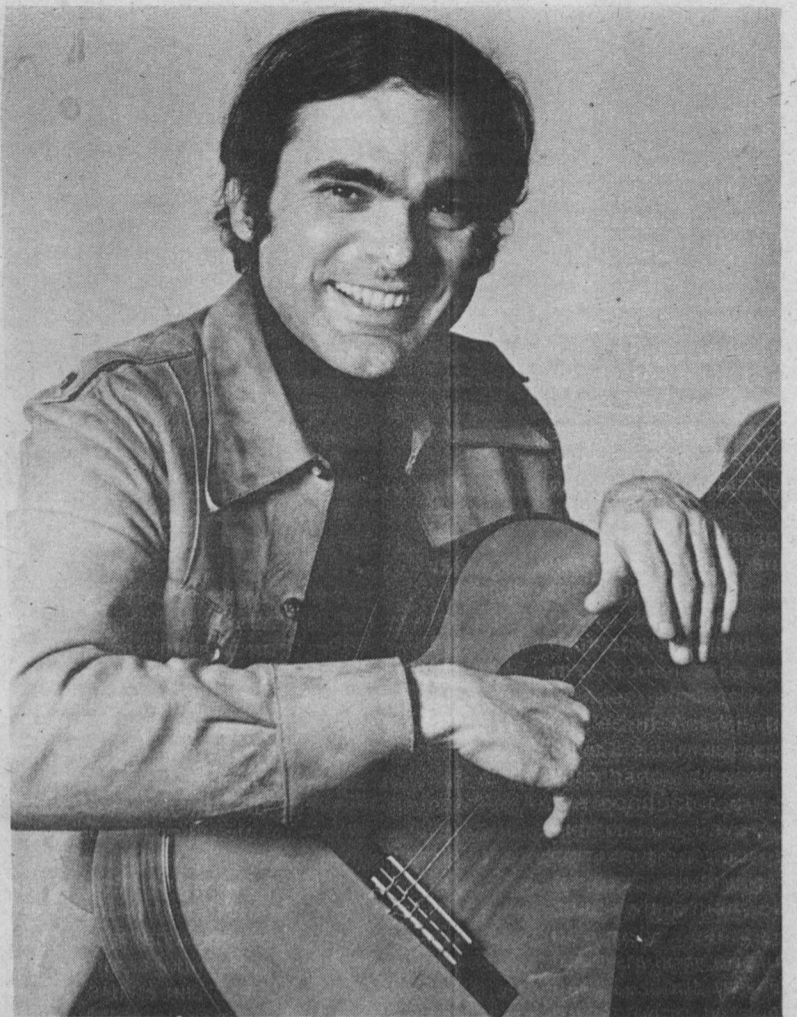
Alan Monk (Lescaut) came as a pleasant surprise, especially after his performances earlier this season as Escamillo in EOA's production of *Carmen*, where intonation presented serious problems. But here the baritone was secure and rich sounding.

Ronald Bermingham, bass, presented a comedic portrait of the elderly Geronte which may not be dramatically sound but provided relief for the viewer.

Wolfgang Oeste (Edmondo) looked well in the part of student and friend of Des Grieux and possessed an appropriately youthful vocal quality. He doesn't, however, possess a large voice, and was unable to project - effectively - without

continued on page 11

arts



New York Jazz guitarist

New York jazz guitarist Gene Bertocini and his trio will be in Edmonton this week, presenting a program which will be basically jazz oriented but will also include classical works, folk pieces, Brazilian music and contemporary pop songs.

In presenting an evening with the guitar, Gene Bertocini will explore the instrument as a source of many moods, as a spectrum of musical colors and, as Berlioz said "as a complete orchestra." As a musician he is involved with the many faces of the guitar; his experience has brought him in contact with the totality of the musical world.

Guitar playing has remained a challenge to him because "it's a never-ending mystery. There is no real school of guitar playing. Every guitarist plays differently because he sort of delves into the guitar in his own way. The fact that you can play the same note in four different places means that to learn one

note is four times the work it is on any other instrument. Then if you start thinking about playing two notes together, you have four square the amount of work. Learning all of the harmonic structure of the guitar is a lifetime job."

Bertocini's early work encompassed five years of recording, night club and television appearances with the Merv Griffin Show and the Johnny Carson Tonight Show. He uses the classical or Spanish guitar, the rarely heard 12-string guitar and the ubiquitous electric guitar on everything from Chopin (with improvisations) to Gershwin to Burt Bacharach. Edmonton jazz enthusiasts can experience this musician's skill first hand at the Captain's Cabin March 21 at 8:30 p.m.

Guitar has provided Gene Bertocini with a lifetime of love. He likes to recall the words of classical guitarist Segovia: "The guitar is the only instrument you caress."

Quiet film on death and renewal

Love (Edmonton Film Society, Mar. 24, SUB Theatre, 8 p.m.)

As the final entry in their International series, the Film Society presents an exceptionally fine Hungarian film about death and renewal, made with a sort of serene melancholy, a rich understanding of the tone and textures of mortality. It is a quiet movie, of short focus but great perspective in its untroubled contemplation of the measure of loss.

An old lady (Lili Darvas) nearly 100 and dying with dignity and resignation from the kind of fatigue that cannot be diagnosed or reversed, lies all day in her bed, tended by her maid and by her daughter-in-law Luca.

Luca encourages the old lady's reveries and replenishes her fantasies with letters apparently from her son Janos, who is said to be making a film

in America. In fact, he is a political prisoner, serving a ten-year term for some unspecified crime against the state. Luca keeps this from the old lady, and instead constructs letters with elaborate lies about his success and about the richness of America.

There is not a moment of grandiloquence or sentimentality in the screenplay and the direction of Koroly Makk is precisely orchestrated to reveal

each separate tone and facet in his three characters. Darvas, once a leading lady with Max Reinhardt and the widow of Playwright Ferenc Molnar, has an air of slightly tenuous regality about her. She suggests both the old lady's crustiness and her vulnerability without patronization.

The film is shown with English subtitles, and, since this is the last film in the series, single admission tickets will be sold.

Annual spring concert by Choir

This Saturday marks the culmination of a season's effort by the University of Alberta Concert Choir, as they present their annual spring show. The Spring Concert is a regular event on campus.

The program includes relaxing works of a sacred and secular nature. Sacred works include music by Schutz, Sweelinck, Dressler, Brahms

and Vaughn Williams. Secular works include Randall Thompson's *American Mercury*, several Robert Shaw Negro Spirituals, and music by contemporary composer Earl George.

The concert by the 60 voice Concert Choir will be held this Saturday, March 22 in Convocation Hall at 8 p.m.

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ATTENTION ALL JEWISH STUDENTS

Passover services will be held at Beth Israel Synagogue, 119 St. and 102 Ave. on March 26th at 7:30 p.m.

All Jewish Students are invited.

For further information contact Rabbi Aranov at 488-3835



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