

Entertainment

Prize winning opera featured

The Consul
Convocation Hall
February 7 & 8, 8 pm

by Juanita Spears

For all of you out there who cringe at the mention of opera, Sandra Babbel, lead soprano in the production of *The Consul*, has something to share with you.

"I wasn't a big opera fan all my life. Opera to me used to mean big fat Italian men singing music in a language I could not understand. But today I would define it as the culmination of all art forms — stage, sets, costumes — its a visual, oral, musical and aesthetic stimulation that I don't believe can be captured in any other way. The only thing better than watching an opera is being in one."

The Consul, considered by many to be Menotti's greatest work, was premiered in New York's Ethel Barrymore Theatre on March 15, 1950. It was a great success and ran for about 8 months. The work received the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics Award. It has been translated into 12 languages and performed in over 20 countries.

The popularity of the opera is due in part to the universality of its plot. The score simply states: the time is the present in a European city. It opens as John Sorel (a patriot fighting to free his country from a police regime) returns to his apartment wounded after the police had interrupted a secret meeting, but he manages to flee just in time when they come to arrest him.

The rest of the opera centers around his wife, Magda Sorel, as she tries to obtain visas

for her family so that they can leave the country to join her husband. Magda, a strong, stoic figure slowly crumbles under the pressure as her loved-ones are taken from her and she begins to believe in the futility of their struggles. In the end, the young couple fall prey to the system they so gallantly fought to resist.

The Consul has special meaning for Babbel: her parents were born in the Ukraine. Her father was arrested one day for failing to produce valid travel documents. Imprisoned and flogged, he realized that he was facing sure death. On the tenth day of his imprisonment he escaped and for the next 4 weeks travelled only by night. Finally he found his wife and two small children and they quietly slipped across the border into Germany.

This happened in 1938 not long before the Nazi regime rolled into Poland, and the rest is history. The Babbel family emigrated to the United States in 1956.

"This opera is like my family before I was a part of it. That is why it really means a lot to me to play Magda. I envision her as the strong, stoic person my mother must have been at that time." Babbel sees the opera as a musical and dramatic challenge.

Babbel admits that the production of *The Consul* is a big step for the Music department to take, but confidently states that there is nothing happening in rehearsals at the moment that can't be fixed before curtain time.

Even though she is very excited about performing in this opera, she admits that "I haven't been bitten by the opera but



Sandra Babbel (foreground) lead of *The Consul*.

exactly."

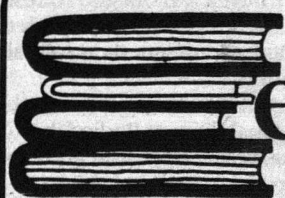
Babbel feels that her voice is suited to both opera and leiter, a luxury not all sopranos have. Therefore, she's not "closing any doors that might lead to other performance opportunities."

Babbel expects to receive her Masters of Music degree at spring convocation. She hopes to attend Northwestern University next fall in the post graduate performance program.

Other members of the cast are Shauna Still who will perform as Magda Saturday night,

Edwin Green as John Sorel and Viola Walbank as the mother. Alfred Strombergs, music director, Alan Ord, stage director and Theresa O'Hara, set designer are among the many who have worked since September to present this opera.

Curtain time is 8 pm Friday and Saturday, Feb. 7 & 8 in Convocation Hall in the Old Arts Building. Tickets are available at the door or from the department of Music 3-82 Fine Arts Building (432-3263). \$6.00 Adults, \$3.50 Students/Seniors.



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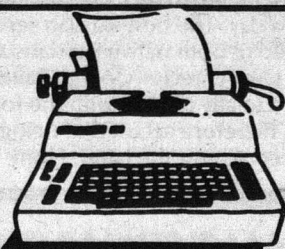
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