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Fine Arts Festival offers Mozart opera

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For weeks some 140 students and faculty members in the University of Montana School of Fine Arts have been caught up in the demanding, exhausting, rewarding and exciting business of producing a full-scale opera on campus.

The opera, Mozart's "The Magic Flute," is the most ambitious project of the three-week program of lectures, recitals, exhibits and other features of the Montana Fine Arts Festival-18th Century. The festival, devoted to an in-depth exploration of the towering achievements of the Age of Enlightenment, will be in session at the University May 9-29 and will treat 18th-century art, music, drama, literature, history, science, theology, philosophy - and opera.

Dr. Charles W. Bolen, dean of the School of Fine Arts and producer of "The Magic Flute," has scheduled performances of the Mozart masterpiece in the University Theater May 11, 13, 14 and 15 at 8:15 p.m. and May 12 at 2:30 p.m.

Boris Goldovsky, founder of the New England Opera Theater and former emcee of the "Opera News of the Air: feature of the Metropolitan Opera Saturday broadcasts, will lecture on "The Magic Flute" Thursday, May 12, at 8:15 p.m. in the Recital Hall.

Heading the opera cast is guest artist Nicola Moscona, Metropolitan Opera basso, in the role of Sarastro, high priest of Isis and Osiris. His understudy in the part is Edd Blackler, Missoula, a senior music major and a seasoned performer in University shows.

Janet Boyer Kenney, Missoula, is cast as the Queen of Night, and Elsie Mielke, Harlowton, as her daughter, Pamina. Lee Mathews, Sunburst, plays Prince Tamino, and Doug James, Missoula, portrays Tamino's companion, the bird-man Papegeno. Melvon Ankeny, Victor, sings the part of Monostatos, a Moor in the service of Sarastro.

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The cast includes Bert Brewer, Don Collins, Anna Dahlstrom, Doug Dunnell, Linda Porter James and Don MacDonald, all of Missoula; Dennis Burns and James Selway, both of Dillon; Ruth Silvius, Fort Benton; Judith Stowe, Great Falls; Susan Emrick, Conrad; Susan Hove, Polson; Diane Morrow, Baker; Ira Robison, Valier, and Gary Guthrie, Livingston.

Dr. Firman H. Brown Jr., chairman of the Drama Department, is director of the production, and John L. Lester, director of the Opera Workshop, is musical director.

Other fine-arts faculty members involved are Richard H. James Jr., designer and technical director; Eugene Andrie, orchestra director; Dr. Joseph Mussulman, chorus director; George D. Lewis, assistant musical director, and Gayle Cornelison, technician. Austin Gray, a sophomore music major from Neihart, is costume designer.

Dean Bolen notes that few opera plots are so studded with inconsistencies as the one concocted for "The Magic Flute" by the librettist, Emanuel Schikaneder. But for all its cliches and absurdities, the dean points out, the story has interest because of the Masonic influence evident in it.

Mozart and Schikaneder were active Masons, Dean Bolen said, and many students of opera find in "The Magic Flute" symbolic references to Masonry, especially in the significance the opera attaches to the mystical meaning of numbers and to the ideals of manliness, equality, justice and fraternity.

Despite its faults, the libretto is concerned with a noble theme and is, according to Dr. Goldovsky, "actually a story of man's spiritual growth, his progress toward wisdom and light."

And even for those who find the improbable plot a stumbling block, the opera is redeemed by the sublime music of Mozart.