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Saturday 19 April 1975

# ElU Operas Offer Variety of Moods

By WALTER LAZENBY

CHARLESTON — Tonight at eight o'clock Eastern's Music Theatre Workshop will give the final performance of its double-bill production of two brief twentieth century operas, Gian Carlo Menotti's "The Medium" and Giacomo Puccini's "Gianni Schicchi."

My remarks about the show pertain to Thursday night's preview, which used the same cast as tonight's show will have. (Some of the roles have been double-cast, to afford more students opportunities to perform.)

The libretto for the popular Menotti work includes a variety of moods — romantic moments, mystery, fear — but is dominated by irony: the irony of a medium, though aware that her seances are elaborately staged deceptions, coming to feel that she is

haunted by a ghost and baring her deception to her clients, who, again ironically, refuse to believe that they have been duped; the ironic impersonation which her daughter-assistant undertakes, divining that the mute gypsy loves her and acting out his declaration of love, accompanied by romantic violins; and the irony of the mistake which brings on the melodramatic ending.

The music particularly underscores the irony in the transition to the seance scene, where it is mysterious and slightly mocking at the same time.

It is rather haunting when at a happy moment the melody sung by a ghostly apparition becomes essentially the melody for the dissonant waltz, "Monica, Monica, Dance the Waltz."

It is rich and varied to ac-

company the changeable utterances of Madame Flora, now angry, now pleading, now reminiscent of horrors.

Though in this performance several moments of high intensity seem too tame, too nearly on a par with the context, the timing of stage events

## A Review

with the music is excellent. June Johnson especially, in the role of Madame Flora, sustains gestures and expressions through instrumental passages, so that no "gaps" in stage action appear. Also, she manages a wide range of vocal

effects appropriate to the role. Marianne Challis succeeds as both actress and singer as Monica, by means of controlled gestures and body movements, clarity of diction, and purity of tone.

The farcical Puccini piece, based on the stories of two historical persons mentioned in Dante's "Inferno," offers a nice contrast. It satirizes the greedy and hypocritical behavior of a dead man's relatives when they learn that he has left his money to monks.

The title character's cleverness enables him to regain for them some of their inheritance through a criminal ruse, but it also allows him to cheat them with impunity and acquire a dowry for his daughter.

To the almost classic example of the tables turned, the librettist Giovacchino Forzano added a subplot

featuring young lovers whose romance succeeds because the dowry comes to hand; hence the happiness of their triumph somewhat neutralizes the acidity of the satire.

The performance of "Gianni Schicchi" has less dramatic cohesiveness than "The Medium," in that those gaps I mentioned do appear in it.

But Roger Schoonover gives a spirited and vocally impressive portrayal of the trickster. As Lauretta, Debbie Gaule takes the most appealing and familiar song, her plea to her father to help the conspiracy succeed, and sings it with feeling.

Dale Furry exhibits considerably more maturity of voice than last year; B. J. Heft makes a hilarious cameo appearance as a physician; and in a totally gratuitous role Andy Lanman wins applause for his clowning.