

When Ralph Rackstraw steps on stage this Saturday night, against a backdrop of the high seas and nimbly stepping "jolly jack tars," he will be the finished product of a process that has taken two months of rehearsal, approximately \$8,000 and a countless swarm of headaches — the least of which is a recent decision to cancel the opening night performance because of a conflicting high school basketball game.

Headaches aside, Eugene Opera! will open Gilbert and Sullivan's classic *H.M.S. Pinafore* in grand fashion as a tribute to the writing team's hundredth anniversary year. *Pinafore* also marks the company's fourth major offering to the community since their debut last year.

The opera company's beginnings are an example of what can happen when potential talent in the area is mustered into a unified effort. For several years the idea of an opera company had been bantered around amongst different minds. There were already several adequate orchestral organizations, an abundance of able theater people and vocalists, and some interest evident in audience support.

Phillip Bayles, the Opera's present music director and general manager, had been doing productions with University Theatre and the School of Music's Opera Workshop when the thought occurred to him and several others that yes, all these existing skills and enthusiasm could be molded into a working opera company, in spite of Eugene's relatively small size.



Avast ye! A merry group of able-bodied tars and salts grace the stage of Sheldon High Theater in Eugene Opera's production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Confused identity and dastardly subplots await the audience.



"But," emphasizes Bayles, "this could only be done on the community level."

"We are organized as a co-operative because the money to be generated by the performing arts is," he pauses, "whimsical, at best. On the other hand, in order to produce opera it takes a number of different people who are expert in a number of different fields." Expensive and complicated at best.

"On an hourly co-operative basis," he continues, "everybody who works for us, in any capacity, ends up having the same value, plus production, per hour. When we finish a show we share any proceeds that we made from the production. Everyone is the same." Thus, lead soprano, set designer and publicity director alike made 44 cents an hour on *Carmen*, nothing on *La Serva Padrona* and 30 cents an hour on Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*.

It's not much, admits Bayles. And there's a torrent of work behind the earning of even that spare wage, he also admits, while quickly downing a fast-food taco for a very late lunch on a fading Eugene afternoon. Seated in the small, hectic Eugene Opera! office on Pearl Street, those figures make one marvel not only at the persistence and dedication of the scores of Eugene residents involved in the productions, but at the possibilities of the future of the company. How long can that work level from so many involved be sustained at those token earnings?

"First of all," explains Bayles, "one of the main focuses this year is means to increase that hourly wage. We're in the business to produce opera, not to make money. On the other side, however, we have to make enough money that, if nothing else, people are able to afford the gas to come to the incessant rehearsals."

At present the company is seeking grants as well as working with two in operation. A \$40,000 CETA grant allows for four

CETA positions in the office. A City of Eugene Room Tax grant allows a reduction in ticket prices for students and senior citizens. Because regular tickets are "outrageously expensive," (opera being even more so outrageously expensive to produce) the grant puts up half the tab after students or senior citizens buy the tickets at half price. This policy begins with *Pinafore* and runs the rest of the season.

Bayles, 32, a rather charged individual who runs on some enigmatic form of energy akin to all performing arts devotees, was raised in Houston and came to Eugene eight years ago to enroll in the School of Music's masters program. Currently a faculty member at Umpqua Community College and conductor of the Eugene Community Chorus, he has spent all of his adult life conducting symphonic, operatic and choral performances.

Bayles is joined by theatrical director Joe Zirgo and 100 members of the community in the Opera's production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. A satirical and humorous operetta, *Pinafore* was an instant success when pirated versions were introduced in America. Much of the plot revolves around the thwarted passion of sailor Ralph Rackstraw for the Captain's daughter Josephine and Little Buttercup for Captain Corcoran, both yearnings beyond their lower class stature. As the suspense heightens delightfully, confused identity (or the fate of switched babies) is introduced as an absurd *deus ex machina*. The plot becomes so unlikely and so chock full of Victorian stock characters that even in its time its stabbings were gentle enough to be accepted without opposition from the same audience it was satirizing.

The role of Captain Corcoran, commander of the *Pinafore*, will be played by Lowell Chase, who has been involved in numerous musicals with Lane Community College for many years. Playing his lovely daughter Josephine is soprano Diane Eberts, choral teacher at Cal Young Junior High and former singer in the Chicago Opera. Her

admirer, and the gentle hero of the play, Ralph Rackstraw, is played by Guy Aydelott. Familiar to Eugene Opera! audiences as Don Jose in last year's *Carmen*, Aydelott is on the music faculty of Northwest Christian College.

Elwy Jones, owner and manager of Postal Instant Press plays Sir Joseph Porter, First Lord of the Admiralty. Jones has performed in a host of operas with the West Coast Opera, Sunset Opera and American Opera. As Little Buttercup, Mary Ann Wish has been active with several groups in Eugene: Very Little Theater, Lane Community College and Eugene Theatre Company, to name a few. She moved to Eugene from La Paz, Bolivia where she sang with the Bolivia National Chorus. Larry Evans, as Dick Deadeye, studies voice under Professor Neil Wilson at the University. He sang the role of Morales in *Carmen* and recently appeared as bass soloist in Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*.

The production will include a full chorus and orchestra drawn from the community. Performances will be held at Sheldon High Theater at 8 p.m. on Jan. 14, 29 and 21 with 3 p.m. matinees scheduled for Jan. 15 and 22. Tickets are \$6 general admission and \$8 reserved.

Eugene Opera! will continue their season with an April production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Brahms' *Requiem* sometime in May.

By Cheryl Rudert/Photos by Gregg Weed.



Phillip Bayles, music director and general manager, brings to Eugene Opera! a hard core persistence that keeps the company afloat in spite of the odds against a successful opera company in Eugene.

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Thursday, January 12, 1978