

Portland Opera presents mixed take on *Caesar*

SHELBI WESCOTT
Associate Copy Editor

Opera.

The very word floods the mind with images of fat, long-haired, Viking women shrieking and belting foreign phrases to a crowd of uptight rich people.

The majority of Americans don't associate the words *entertaining* and *opera*. And to be honest, operatic music is an acquired taste and certainly not for everyone. Many Oregonians would be surprised to learn that Portland houses one of the top opera companies in North America.

The Portland Opera is acknowledged nationwide as a leader in producing outstanding visual and musical performances. On March 27 they premiered George Frederick Handel's historic portrayal of *Julius Caesar*, written originally in 1724.

Handel's operas are noted for their vocal virtuosity and not necessarily for story or plot development. This is because during the Eighteenth Century, people attended operas specifically to hear the sensational vocal talent. The artists in the Portland Opera's *Julius Caesar* were vocally amazing. Their technique and control added richness to the musical score and libretto. Not one principal character's

performance was anything less than exemplary throughout the show. This was to be expected from this company.

One interesting twist to this particular production was the modernization of Roman clothing and props. Guards to Caesar carried Uzis, and wore leather pants and sunglasses. Curio, Caesar's right-hand man, sported a briefcase. Cornelia, the leading ingenue, sauntered about wearing a mini-skirt and high heels. And in the final celebration scene, the principals casually sip their martinis.

However, the Egyptian characters kept clothing and props true to the period. The mix of modern and period clothing was distracting. During one scene, an Egyptian attempts to fight with his sword and a Roman pulls out his sub-machine gun. You can guess who won that struggle.

Unfortunately, despite the array of vocal and musical talent, the opera fell short of expectations. Many audience members found themselves anxiously waiting intermission or the final curtain, and others simply left during intermission and never came back.

There are several reasons *Julius Caesar* failed to captivate and amaze even the most enthusiastic opera attendees. First of all, the opera ran close to 3 1/2 hours in length (short-

ened by from Handel's original 4 1/2 hours). And, with the exception of a few amusing moments, the staging was droll and dry.

Also, director Ken Cazan took the subtle sexual innuendoes in Handel's libretto and exploited them on stage to an uncomfortable level. His allusions and portrayal of sadomasochistic behavior, oral sex and rape were (as one review for *The Oregonian* stated) "immature" and certainly superfluous. Granted, the story revolved around a sexually charged man (Julius Caesar) and an equally sexually charged woman (Cleopatra), but much of the story was lost by forcing the focus on that one aspect.

There were moments in the opera that were amusing and entertaining. One involves a 7-year-old boy who unknowingly sits on a dead man. The young boy served as a wonderful contrast to the otherwise crude and obscene performances of his older colleagues. (The actors themselves were not responsible for the production's faults; rather the responsibility lies with the director.)

Overall, *Julius Caesar* did not accurately represent what the Portland Opera is capable of producing. My only prayer is that first-time opera attendees were not turned away from opera because of this performance.

Better luck next season, Portland Opera!



SHELBI WESCOTT / Clackamas Print

Juliana Rambaldi, right, portrayed Cleopatra in the Portland Opera's production of *Julius Caesar*. Corbin Wescott, left, played an Egyptian child. The dog, Hannah, is Rambaldi's.

Buffy steams up the screen

ANGIE DASCHEL
Associate Editor

If you've never seen *Dangerous Liaisons*, then you will probably enjoy *Cruel Intentions*, an update of the novel *Les Dangereuses Liaisons* by Pierre Laclos. If you have seen the classic film starring John Malkovich and Glenn Close, *Intentions* seems like a cheap rip-off. Both films are based on the French novel, but comparing them is much like comparing apples to oranges.

Cruel Intentions stars Sarah Michelle Gellar (*Scream 2*) as Kathryn, a rich, coke-sniffing high school socialite with a love

for anything sexual. Ryan Phillippe plays Kathryn's step-brother Sebastian, an arrogant prep school stud who also excels in the subject of sex. Together, they light up the screen with thick sexual tension and a delightfully snobbish playfulness.

Sebastian prides himself on being a major player: when he sets out to bed a girl, he does it, no matter the consequences. He also keeps a journal, each page containing graphic descriptions

of all his conquests. After a while, though, Sebastian tires of sleeping with socialites and decides to take on a real challenge. He finds an article in *Seventeen* that profiles a young woman, Annette Hargrove (Reese Witherspoon, *Pleasantville*) who intends to remain a virgin until she finds love. Conveniently, Annette is the daughter of the new headmaster at

ing to be a good, tasteless, nasty romp in the world of teenage sex, then the film succeeded. The characters were vivid and there was enormous shock value from the kiddies from the WB network (Joshua Jackson, "Dawson's Creek" and Gellar) in nearly every scene. For example, Jackson played a flamingly gay drug dealer, a far cry from his role as Pacey on "Dawson's Creek."

And Miss "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" Gellar gets to yell, in rather vulgar language, that she wants to have sex and she also performs a same-



INTERNET

Kathryn and Sebastian's school.

Sebastian and Kathryn make a bet on the seduction of Annette. If Kathryn wins, she gets his sports car. If Sebastian wins the wager, he receives a night of passion with Kathryn. Various other sexual favors and plots are also devised by both. All goes according to plan, until Sebastian actually falls in love with Annette and she becomes more than a twisted bet.

If *Cruel Intentions* was simply try-

sex kiss.

However, if the film was attempting a *remake of Dangerous Liaisons*, something was lost in the translation. Important plot events were changed or completely left out, and the ending was almost laughable, it was so contrived. Rent *Dangerous Liaisons* if you want a good drama with a great cast and powerful themes, but see *Cruel Intentions* just for the guilty pleasure of it.

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