

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

REP THEATER'S "TENOR" IS IN GOOD VOICE

By Geisel

There's a saying that goes, "You can't beat the classics." Well, maybe you can, by going to see Mammoth Lakes Repertory Theatre's production of the comedy "Lend Me A Tenor," which opens this week at the Edison Theatre. Ken Ludwig's madcap skewering of opera opened on Broadway in 1989, a recent work by comparison to the tried and true standards. But it's well on its way to becoming a new classic, thanks to soaring popularity, including a recent 2010 run on Broadway, directed by Stanley Tucci and starring Anthony LaPaglia and Tony Shaloub.

The date: Sept. 8, 1934 ... the place: a hotel suite in Cleveland, Ohio. World famous tenor Tito Merelli, known to his fans as "Il Stupendo," is booked to sing the lead in the legendary opera "Otello," which the Cleveland Opera Company is producing as a gala fundraiser. But Merelli is barely checked into his hotel room when chaos ensues. Merelli's hot-blooded wife, who mistakes an autograph-seeker hidden in his closet for a secret lover, leaves him a note

saying she's leaving, this time for good! A distraught Merelli accidentally takes a double dose of tranquilizers ... and passes out. The high-strung and nervous Mr. Saunders, the company's General Manager, is so determined that the show will go on (for his own financial sake), that he asks his assistant Max — an aspiring tenor himself — to impersonate the opera star.

That sets off a riotous, door-slamming, dress-dropping chain reaction of mistaken identity, plot twists, double entendres, innuendo, and constant entrances and exits.

The tickets are sold, the stage is set, and both the production crew and the 30-piece orchestra are on the clock. Can Saunders and Max avert "un disastro gigantesco" (a gigantic disaster)?

Ludwig's play uses highbrow subject matter, but works on a mass audience level because it uses straight-up classical farce as its model ... no intellectual spins, no playwright egoist abstractions. The action is tight and timed to near perfection, and the dialogue is so sharp



From left: Alice Suszynski, Jimmy Ogburn, Greg Young and Erica Sutch. PHOTO COURTESY: MLRT

and rapid fire it should come with tracer rounds!

The local cast features Chuck Scatolini, "tutto eccellente" (excellent) as "Il Stupendo" Tito Merelli. Greg Young is affably amped up as scheming opera company manager, Mr. Saunders, who desperately needs to switch to decaf espresso. Tim Casey is simply lovable as the mousy, put upon gopher/factotum Max, who dreams of an operatic career and is in love with Saunders' daughter Maggie.

Erica Sutch, a scene-stealer in SCT's

production of "Twelfth Night" last summer, is first-rate as the forthright, yet flirtatious Maggie, who as it happens has a crush on "Il Stupendo." Alice Suszynski is MAR-velous as Julia, the blue-blooded, overexcited chairwoman of the opera board, who knows how to make an entrance ... and how to dress when making it. Lynne Blanche is slinky and sexy as the ironically named soprano, Diana, who's been "flinging" her way through the men in the company and now has her sights set on "Il Stupendo."

Jimmy Ogburn is sidesplitting as the star-struck, but streetwise Bellhop. And MLRT veteran Juliana Olinka is elegante, yet "molte spezie" (saucy and spicy) as "Il Stupendo's" jealous wife, Maria.

The sets are another triumph for MLRT, not distracting, but adding Art Deco flair to the production. Costumes are pretty much period perfect, right down to the spats on Saunders tuxedo shoes. (FYI, "spats" are the white things covering his black shoes ... they were really popular back in the day. The point is they look great!)

Another in a line of great comedy presentation, this could be director Shira Dubrovner's best of the lot so far. As hard as she and the cast evidently worked on the timing and delivery, "Lend Me A Tenor" is a comedic "giro turistico de forza" (tour de force) that hits all the right notes!

"Lend Me a Tenor," plays through Feb. 26 on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 7 p.m., and Sunday afternoons at 4 p.m. Tix: \$20 General Admission, \$18 Seniors and Students. Group rates and buy outs available. RSVP to Shira Dubrovner at 760.934.6592 or e-mail shira@mammothlakesfoundation.org.

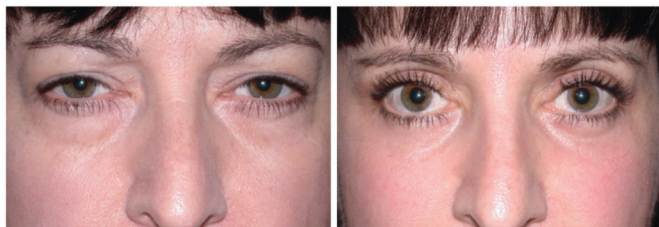
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