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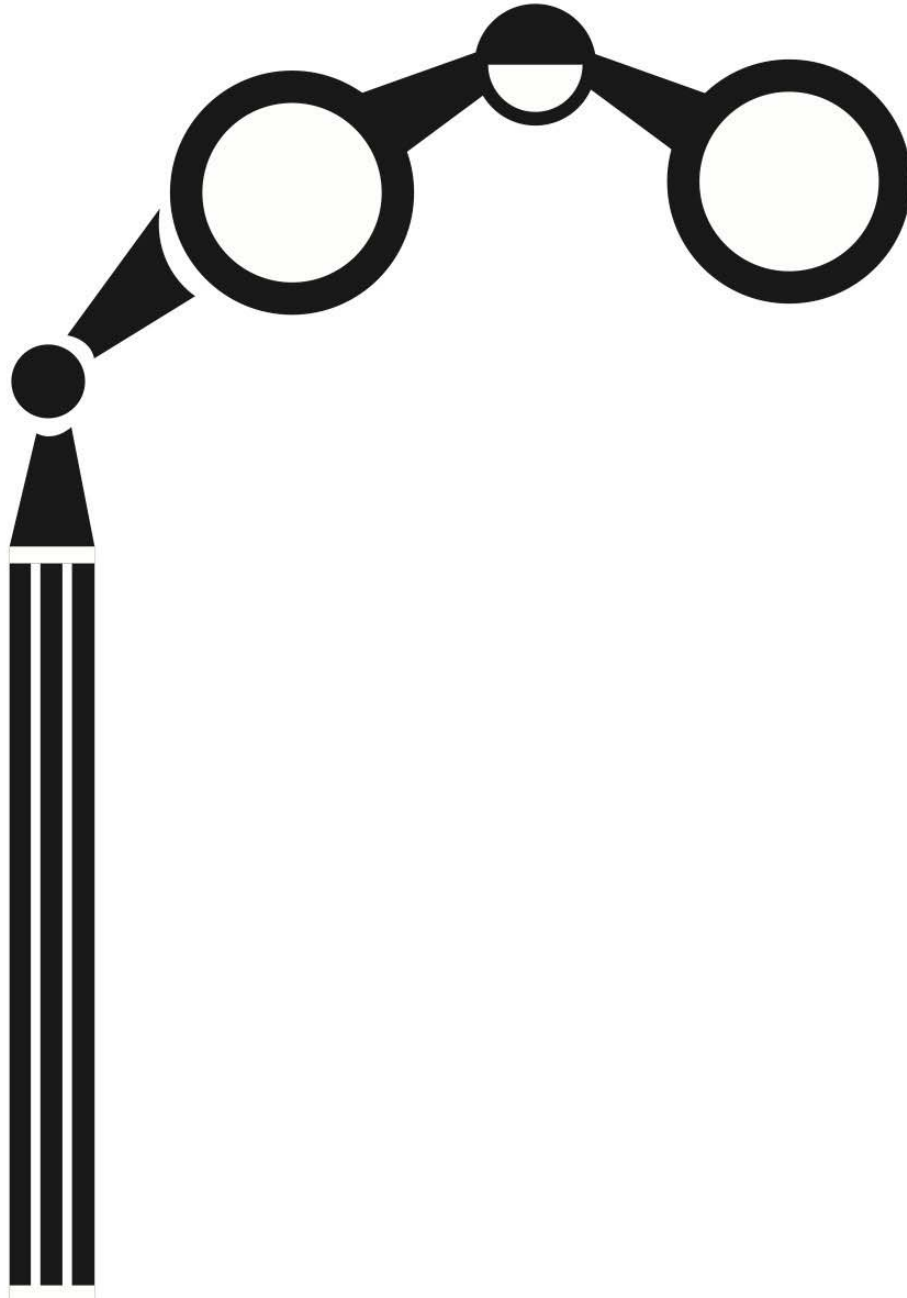
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# UMD Opera Studio brings classic operas to a modern crowd

APRIL 28, 2016 BY ADAM QUANDT

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BY HARLEY ROACH | The Statesman

A full-length opera in a foreign language can be daunting to many first-time opera goers, but the UMD Opera Studio offers a unique solution.

Opera Studio Scenes is an event put on by the Opera Studio once a year and features well-known songs and movements from some of history's most memorable operas, bound together by an original narrative.

This year's story will be a sci-fi thriller titled "Stargait: An Interstellar Journey!"

Based on the "Stargate" franchise, the plot follows a crew using a "Stargait" portal to find their way back to Earth. However, they make a few stops in other worlds on the way. Each world is represented by a scene from a classic opera.

"Some scenes are fun, some are sad, some are spooky and they cover lots of different centuries," director Alice Pierce said. Pierce also wrote the script that weaves each unique scene into a broader story.

The Opera Studio often takes similar liberties with its other shows by adding creative twists to help bring traditional operas to a modern audience.

"I find that when the general public hears the word 'opera' they expect to be bored," Niki Stevens, who will be student-directing one of the scenes, said.

Stevens is one of several students who will be involved in the behind-the-scenes aspect of the production.

“We are spreading out in different directions with student directors and student accompanists and hope to do more in the future,” Pierce said.

Pierce also noted that another UMD student, Lexy Land, will be assisting the faculty accompanist Jacqueline Holstrom with the piano.

A smaller venue like the Weber Music Hall can be a challenge for dramatic productions, since it doesn’t allow much room for sets or acting. However, since the show will utilize a single piano as its accompaniment, there will be ample space not only for the performers, but also for the central piece of the set, the “stargait.”

Though much of the featured music will come from English-language operas, other songs will be Italian and German. To assist the audience in understanding these songs, the cast will display supertitles on the screens inside Weber Music Hall.

“I’ve been an opera fan for a long time and I think the thing that helps newcomers enjoy opera is understanding the music,” Katie Kosovich, who will be running supertitles for a portion of the show and singing in a scene from “Madama Butterfly,” said.

“Stargait” allows fledgling opera fans a chance to acquaint themselves with the art, while also allowing opera veterans a chance to enjoy classics in a new light.

“We have a great cast and we’re having a lot of fun. The audience should have fun too,” said Stevens.

If a musical, multilingual sci-fi adventure interests you, head over to Weber Music Hall at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 28 or Friday, April 29. Tickets are available online or may be purchased at the box office.

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