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Festival aims to bring opera back to earth

The Sylvan Opera Festival in Haverford will present the singers in an intimate setting. No storm, please.

By Kayce T. Ataiyero
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

HVERFORD - It was opening night of the first Sylvan Opera Festival last September, and artistic director Harold Evans was putting last-minute touches on the show when an unexpected guest took center stage by storm.

"It was a nightmare. We were all set to go on, and here comes Hurricane Floyd," he said. "Suddenly, we had no costumes, no electricity, and two inches of water in the [orchestra] pit. It was just a nightmare."

The storm forced Evans to move the show to Rosemont College and have singers go on without costumes. This year, when the second annual festival opens at Centennial Hall at the Haverford School on Saturday, Evans hopes for a packed house and clear skies.

"We're hoping that the weather is a little more friendly this year," he said. The festival will run through Sept. 23. This year's featured program is "Oper'issimo - A Celebration of Operatic Song and Dance."

The theme is the relationship between opera and dance, and the festival will feature a variety of events, including a lecture on opera and a family day celebration. Evans said the goal is to bring the opera to fans as well as newcomers.

"We want to build a love for opera by bringing it to audiences in intimate settings that make them feel like they are a part of it," he said.

"We're playing in an intimate 650-seat auditorium, and it's different, because it's not the usual way to hear opera, but it is the best way to bring the audience and the performance together. And there's nothing more thrilling than to have the excitement of a first-class opera right up close in your own backyard."

Michele Capalbo, a soprano who will perform at the festival, said the best thing about the festival is giving a local audience the chance to experience international operatic talent.

"[The audience] is definitely going to hear a fine orchestra and tunes that are popular to them. They will recognize some of the tunes and be exposed to some they have never heard of. It should be a good mix," she said.

"They are going to get some sights and sounds from artists from around the world who have shared their work with people from around the world. It should be really great."