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Chautauqua Puts on *The Crucible*

By ROBERT W. PLYLER

CHAUTAUQUA – An outstanding ensemble cast makes Chautauqua Opera's production of Robert Ward's 1961 opera *The Crucible* an artistic highlight of the season.

Ward, who studied at Rochester's Eastman School of Music, has closely set to music Arthur Miller's conscience-based play on the subject of the Salem Witch Trials, and on witch hunts in general.

The Chautauqua company has announced that this season's theme is "Bad Boys: although in this case, the bad boy of the plot is redeemed.

John Proctor is a hard working Puritan farmer in Salem, Mass. Although in love with his wife, Elizabeth, he has had a brief affair with Abigail, one of their servants. When he bows to conscience and ends the affair, Abigail accuses his wife of witchcraft, thinking that if Elizabeth is hanged, Abigail can take her place in the Proctor household.

The overwhelming theme of both the opera and the play on which it is based is how, when human beings feel forced to do the will of God – whether it's killing witches or flying

air planes into buildings – it somehow always manages to be the accuser's will that ends up being done.

Brian Davis has both the craggy good looks and the resounding baritone to dominate the stage as Proctor.

Janine Hawley was a good match for him as the loving wife who puts his good beyond her own.

Jane Ohmes was lovely and had a vibrant, rich soprano as the treacherous Abigail, giving the whole thing a hearty dose of believability.

The cast was uniformly strong and at the risk of leaving out many deserving singers, I'll single out Ethan Herschenfeld as the "expert on the supernatural," Deborah Selig as the Proctor's remaining servant, and Sabrina Elayne Carten as Tituba – the slave from the West Indies whose spooky stories and firelight dancing begins the hunt for witched in the community.

crossbeams kept the idea of the gallows present in every scene. Christopher Ostrom's lighting and Nancy Leary's costumes were spot on.

Jay Lesenger directed the production with his typical gift for catching and illustrating exactly the correct feeling to serve as a backdrop for the music.

The only negative in my view, to the entire production, was the Arthur Miller's text is so important to the story being told and that much text is never discernable when people sing, no matter how fine their diction is. It's long past time that Chautauqua joined the rest of the operatic world and projected some kind of supertitles with their performances.

The Crucible was reviewed in dress rehearsal, at the company's request. It will be performed Friday and Monday evenings in Norton Hall, on the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution.

IN REVIEW

The Chautauqua Opera Orchestra under conductor Jerome Shannon was an effective character in the story as well, and earned great praise.

Steven Capone's set was suitably grim and stark, and the frequent use of unpainted wooden beams and