

By Darrell Halen, Telegraph Correspondent

"The Magic Flute," written by Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, is one of the most celebrated operas ever produced. Two performances of this popular story of love and intrigue are coming to New Hampshire.

"It's a great fairy tale," said Lilliane LeBel, who chairs GSO's board of trustees.

The story is set in a kingdom where Tamino, a handsome prince, is sent by the Queen of the Night to rescue her kidnapped daughter, the beautiful princess Pamina. Tamino is joined on the journey by the queen's comical bird catcher, Papageno, and is given a magic flute to help him through the troubles he will encounter during the trip.

The production of "The Magic Flute" marks the beginning of GSO's fourth season. Although previous GSO shows were terrific, according to Artistic Director Philip Lauriat, "The Magic Flute" is the finest production the organization has produced.

What makes this show so good, he said, is the singers who signed on to perform. Lauriat said he's thrilled to have such high caliber performers working with him.

One singer Lauriat said he is particularly pleased to have onboard is Barbara Kilduff of Andover, Mass., who is making her GSO debut with her performance of the queen. Kilduff's resume includes leading roles at the Metropolitan Opera and in Europe, including performances in Berlin, Vienna and Zurich.

"I'm delighted that she's coming up to sing for us," Lauriat said.

Tamino will be played by tenor Jason Karn of South Carolina. Karn has sung throughout the United States, including performances at Natchez Opera and Opera Boston.

Theresa Cincione will perform the role of Pamina. Cincione, who describes her character as "young, innocent and full of hope," has sung regularly at the Metropolitan Opera since her 1996 debut. She has also performed with Chicago Lyric Opera and Seattle Opera.

Papageno will be played by baritone David Kravitz, a regular Boston Lyric Opera performer. He is making a return to GSO, performed the role of Figaro in its production of "The Barber of Seville" two years ago.

The role of Sarastro, the man Tamino must rescue the princess from, will be sung by Eric Jordan. Jordan has performed with the San Francisco Opera and Opera Theater of St. Louis.

The principal characters are joined by other terrific singers, according to Lauriat.

"The level of the rest of the cast is really high," he said.

Lauriat said the opera's storyline runs the gamut from outrageously silly to very serious.

Audience members can expect to find the story uplifting and touching, Cincione added.

"They will definitely laugh," Cincione said. "People are sentimental. They might cry."

Papageno, who Lauriat describes as a "lovable, simple sort," provides many of the show's funny moments.

"Papageno is a very comical character," Cincione said. "He's hilarious."

A team of professional musicians, many who hail from New England symphonies, will provide the music.

"The orchestra is very good," Lauriat said.

And the show is visually appealing, too, he added. Lauriat said the stage scenery is beautiful and the costumes, designed and made by professional designer Marcia MacDonald, who GSO brought in from Illinois for the job, are gorgeous.

Producing "The Magic Flute," one of the most beloved operas, fits the organization's mission, according to LeBel.

"Granite State Opera is devoted to creating opera of the highest artistic quality for the benefit, enrichment and education of its audience," she said.

LeBel said her organization strives to make opera an accessible experience for all people. "The Magic Flute" will be performed in English and its storyline is easy to follow, she said.

"We want people to feel that they can go to the opera and have a good time," LeBel added.

LeBel said GSO strives to provide top-notch operas. The organization does so, she said, by creating its own shows instead of hiring a company to put on the operas. By doing so, she said, GSO can ensure high artistic quality.

LeBel said Nashua area residents will find "The Magic Flute" to be worth the drive to Concord. It's a wonderful opera audiences will enjoy in a theater with great acoustics, she said.

GSO has come up with a unique idea to encourage people to make the trip. Audience members who bring their receipt from paying the highway toll during their trip to Concord that day will be treated to three tokens to pay for the toll on their trip home.

LeBel also encourages folks to bring their kids to the show.

"It's a great story for children," she said.

The appearance of a serpent-character at the show's beginning will draw children's interest and the plot will keep them engaged, LeBel said.

"The Magic Flute" is directed by Bob Lawson, a Franklin Pierce College faculty member who has won numerous awards and who has had his productions performed at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The shows will be the culmination of only three weeks of rehearsals by the cast and production crew, some of whom haven't worked with each other before.

The team, committed to delivering a pair of terrific shows to their audiences this week, have enjoyed a wonderful rapport during their brief time together, Kilduff said.

"We've all just hit it off," she said.