Playful, raucous *Orpheus* comes to Sac State

You wouldn’t think a myth about the Greek land of the dead could be turned into a light opera filled with energetic vocals and plenty of humor, but that’s exactly what Jacques Offenbach did with his masterpiece *Orpheus in the Underworld*.

The 1858 comic opera, best known for the song now dubbed the “Can-Can,” will be performed by Sacramento State’s Opera Theatre at 8 p.m. May 2 and 3, and 2 p.m. May 4 on the main stage of the University Theatre.

The original myth tells of Orpheus’ heart-rending journey to get his wife, Eurydice, back after she is taken by Pluto, god of the underworld.

But in Offenbach’s version, Orpheus is rather happy to be rid of Eurydice and only reluctantly goes on his quest after being pressured by the personification of Public Opinion.

“Offenbach is the predecessor of Gilbert and Sullivan,” says Opera Theatre Director Omari Tau. “His tunes are playful, bouncy, effervescent, hummable and, at the time of their composition, were considered quite bawdy and raucous.”

Sac State soprano Vanessa Martucci plays Eurydice. Orpheus is played by alumnus Anthony Tavianini. Jupiter is portrayed by regional professional baritone Donn Bradley, and Sac State Voice Professor Robin Fisher portrays Cupid. All the roles are sung in English.

A nine-piece chamber ensemble directed by Music Department alumnus Paolo Reyes will accompany the vocalists.

Opera Theatre is returning to the University Theatre after about five years of staging smaller productions at the Music Recital Hall or other spaces.

“The larger size of the space is actually very exciting,” Tau says, “because we will be able to present French operetta in a way that is appropriate – with spectacle, dance, sets, lighting and costumes.”

The production is a collaboration between the Music and Theatre & Dance departments. Tau has high praise for the contributions of Theatre & Dance Chair Melinda Wilson Ramey and lighting director Ron Reisner, and he notes that Dance
alumnus Diego Campos is the choreographer for a troupe of six dance students taking part in the production.

And Tau has a message for people who are unfamiliar with opera. “Forget what you think opera is,” he says. “This show will blow your expectations out of the water!”

Tickets for all three performances are $10 general, $7 for seniors and $5 for students, and are available at the University Ticket Office, (916) 278-4323 or www.csus.edu/hornettickets.

For more information about the Music Department, visit www.csus.edu/music or call (916) 278-5191. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Craig Koscho

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