



# THE MARQUEE

By Barbara Bladen

Up to five years ago, opera was all vocal. Today it's more in the realm of musical drama. Even its comedies are well acted.

Before teachers like Marilyn Heinmiller of Cal-State College, Hayward, came along to correct all those awkward poses, stiff stances and phoney histrionics, singers would display such bizarre mannerisms as holding their stomachs, craning their necks, and sticking out a thumb on hitting high notes.

Between private instruction from her San Francisco home

and studio work at the college, the cheery, bright-eyed singer has sopranos falling over parapets, tenors leaping over stair rails, baritones being run through with a sword and soubrettes crying over a rejected lover, all without losing a note, their balance or their poise.

"The Do's and Don'ts of Operatic Acting" and "Operatic Pantomimes" are much like the acting courses at American Conservatory Theater. But Marilyn emphasizes there is a big difference between acting for theater and opera.

"It's in the musical timing. A composer gives the singer a road map for how long to hold an emotion and a gesture. Method acting just wouldn't work. If you only have four bars in which to swallow poison, that gasp has to come right on cue with the conductor's beat.

"Singing is a state of mind, something you can't precisely define. You can't feel for the singers. Their body is their instrument and it's intangible, unlike playing a violin.

"I try to give them things they can put in a notebook and make it all less mysterious. It's one thing to have feelings, but great emotions, but another thing to learn to exteriorize that."

Her own background augers well for expertise. She was the youngest member of the St. Louis Grand Opera Company, was awarded a scholarship to Tanglewood, the Berkshire Music Festival, and another to the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Mass., with additional study in New York.

A protegee of Boris Goldovsky, world-famous opera stage director and conductor, she was his assistant at the Stanford University Opera Workshop. Her demonstration lectures have been on records and television and are in demand by Bay Area church, social and school clubs.

"Even that faceless mob, the opera chorus, benefits from

learning how to react, move and project realism. But the attitude of students in the west is different from in the east where training is a 12-month a year dedication. In California, singers take vacations and rests. In New York they'll stab in the back to get a walk on. Here

they aren't interested in working hard unless they get a lead role.

"Opera is always under-rehearsed. The tenor and soprano usually shake hands before going on stage and playing a love scene. Singers have to learn to be their own stage

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director to plug in all the gaps that might arise. Technical knowledge is a security blanket in learning to cope with new situations."

It always makes for better au-

dience enjoyment. Singing alone isn't what makes such divas as Maria Callas, Anja Silja, Mary Costa and Joan Sutherland so great. They're superb actresses, too.