

Opera star to make triumphant homecoming

Kevin Connors is eager to perform at benefit show

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

OTTERFING, GERMANY — A local boy who made good is about to give the hometown folks a big treat.

And Kevin Connors is hoping that his operatic debut in the United States will be the first of many appearances on this side of the globe.

"I'd like to make the break into the North American opera world sometime," remarked the 28-year-old Connors in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from his suburban Munich home.

The East Rochester native will be the featured performer at a benefit concert for the Sisters of Mercy on Saturday, May 8, at Our Lady of Mercy High School, 1437 Blossom Road.

Show time is 8 p.m. Connors' concert will feature songs from various operas, operettas and other well-known musicals such as *West Side Story*.

A rising star with the prestigious Munich Opera House, Connors was persuaded to appear at Our Lady of Mercy through a local "connection."

"It helps to have an aunt as organizer," joked Connors, whose aunt, Sister Nancy Whitley, RSM, has served for several years as coordinator for Sisters of Mercy fundraisers.

The tenor, who attended McQuaid Jesuit High School and later graduated from East Rochester High School, owes his musical roots to this area. He began his professional training at the Eastman School of Music while also serving as musical coordinator at St. Jerome's Church, 207 Garfield St. S., East Rochester.

Because he's lived in Europe since 1985, Connors' recent accomplishments are not widely known here. He continued his studies in Salzburg, Austria, where he graduated with high honors in 1988 from the Mozarteum of the University of Salzburg.

Connors' current operatic repertoire consists of 26 roles sung in five languages. As one of approximately 40 regular soloists at the Munich Opera House, he performs several works by Wagner, Strauss and Mozart.

He has sung for as many as 500,000 people during an outdoor concert in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His most prestigious guests to date have been former first lady Barbara Bush and Boris Yeltsin's wife, Naina, who both saw him performing *Carmen* last



Opera tenor Kevin Connors (far right), a rising star with the prestigious Munich Opera House, will be the featured performer at a benefit concert for the Sisters of Mercy. The May 8 concert, which will take place at Our Lady of Mercy High School, marks the East Rochester native's operatic debut in the United States.

Photographs courtesy of Kevin Connors



Connors' current operatic repertoire comprises 26 roles in five languages. Here he is in costume for the role of *Traumfresserchen*.

year in Munich. Connors has numerous television and radio appearances to his credit as well.

According to Connors' aunt, fame has not had any effect on the singer's disposition.

"He has always been a happy person; he loves people. He doesn't consider anybody to be beneath him," said Sister Whitley. She added that her nephew will be appearing free of charge on May 8.

Connors' hectic schedule featured 80 operas and 45 concerts last year. In fact, just four days after his show at Our Lady of Mercy, he is scheduled to perform in Amsterdam.

"I have this theory that I should take at least one day off from singing each week, but it never seems to work out," Connors remarked.

The arrival of twin babies for Connors and his wife, Rebeca, a Spanish soprano whom he married in October of 1991, has added to an already packed schedule. Son Aaron and daughter Liana arrived on Feb. 24.

"It's interesting, holding a baby in your arms while you're rehearsing."

Connors laughed. He added that he "has a wonderful wife. When I tell her I have to perform the next day, she takes care of the babies during the night so I can get some sleep. An opera singer has got to have his vocal cords rested; if you don't get enough sleep, it affects your performance."

Although Connors might prefer to someday move his family to his native country, he pointed out that career opportunities are harder to come by in the United States.

"There are 170 opera houses in Germany, and you can work here for 10 months per year. America doesn't have that yet," he explained. "But it would be nice (to return to America), maybe by the time I turn 30. I'd like to audition for some conductors or agents in America."

EDITORS' NOTE: Tickets are still available for Kevin Connors' show at \$20, \$15 and \$10. Call 716/288-4956 for information.

Organizers seek help for Rochester march

ROCHESTER — March for Jesus, an annual celebration held throughout the United States and Europe, will take place in Rochester for the first time on Saturday, June 12.

Christians of all denominations are scheduled to gather for the event, which will be held in downtown Rochester. Participants will sing music geared especially for public praise marches, and also display balloons and banners, as they walk along city streets. The march will begin at the corner of West Main and Broad streets and end at Manhattan Square Park.

*March for Jesus is not a protest.

By boldly declaring our faith in such a positive way, shame is broken and Christians are stirred up to be more than a silent witness, said local co-organizer Peter Izzo, a parishioner at St. Ambrose Church, 25 Empire Blvd.

This event attracted an all-time high of more than 600,000 marchers in 142 U.S. cities and 25 European countries last May, according to a press release on the march.

Churches and other organizations interested in becoming part of the Rochester March for Jesus should contact Izzo at 716/288-4425, Louis Meleo at 288-8065 or Bernice McGrath at 377-0341.

Anita Anissi, D.D.S.

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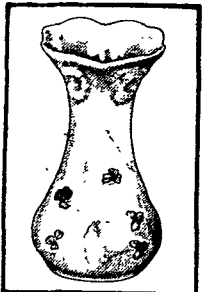
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