

Pavarotti's 'Luciano' a good investment

By JEFF GROVE
Assistant Arts Editor

Pavarotti. Even people who would never think of setting foot in an opera house know the name and have probably heard the voice. His first film, *Yes, Giorgio*, will be released this summer. His autobiography was a best seller. Last week, ABC gave him a television special. Tenor Luciano Pavarotti, the epitome of opera to the general public, is a marketable item. Capitalizing on his success, London Records has just released *Luciano*, an album of the music Pavarotti performed on his TV show. All in all, the album is a creditable achievement. Pavarotti's voice has not been at its best lately. In an attempt to compete with the more versatile Placido Domingo, Pavarotti has taken on operatic roles which demand too much of him, and his voice has suffered. But this recording gives us the old Pavarotti. All the selections are re-releases from various London recordings of the mid-1970s. His youthful exuberance, still exists in these recordings. The first side features the tenor in six of the most sure-fire arias in all opera, while the second side consists of seven songs and a hymn. The album opens with the famous "Vesti la giubba" from Leoncavallo's opera *Pagliacci*. Immediately a feel-

ing of genuine heartbreak emerges even if the listener doesn't know that the aria is sung by an actor who must perform a comedy despite the knowledge that his wife and best friend, his co-stars in the play, are lovers. Pavarotti's laughter and sobs may be unrealistic, but his singing is convincing.

From Donizetti's comic opera *The Daughter of the Regiment* comes "O mes amis ... Pour mon ame," in which the great Luciano tosses off nine — count 'em, nine — high C's. A couple of them are slightly pinched, but who doesn't get chills on hearing a C, whatever its quality? The best performed aria is "E lucevan le stelle" from Puccini's *Tosca*. An erotic vision of a woman, this is an impassioned farewell to live by a man who will be executed within the hour. Pavarotti invests the piece with a feeling of resignation to death and contentment with memories.

The final cut on the first side is "Di quella pira" from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. The hero, learning that his mother is about to be burned at the stake as a witch, resolves to save her life. The chorus, supplied by the Vienna Opera, is exciting, and Pavarotti is too — at first. But the ending is strained, and his desperation high B-flat almost cracks.

Other cuts on the first side, competent but not striking, are "Celeste Aida" from *Aida* and "Che gelida manina" from *La Boheme*.

Side two presents a more mellow Pavarotti. Standouts are the beautiful "A Vucchella" with its ceaseless ebb and flow, the seamless line of "Vanne, o rosa fortunata," and the martial rendition of "Marechiaro." But the real achievement of this side is the album finale: Franck's "Panis Angelicus." Pavarotti's singing here is nothing short of heavenly, and a boys' choir is used well.

Nine conductors direct seven different orchestras in the course of the album, so the listener gets a variety of interpretive quirks. But Luciano Pavarotti's voice, so consistently even and glowing, unifies the album far more effectively than the most powerful conductor could. The only deficiency the album has is its lack of texts and translations. This will immediately turn off John Q. Public; and even Pavarotti's regular fan, the opera lover, will be lost after the first side.

Still, the album is a good investment if you don't already own the albums from which the selections were snipped. As a sampler of some of Pavarotti's better work, *Luciano* is important and certainly welcome.

Lauded film based on Betts' story

"Violet," a half-hour film based on a short story by Doris Betts, Alumni distinguished professor of English, received an Academy Award for best short feature at the recent Oscar ceremony.

Based on Betts' story *The Ugliest Pilgrim*, the film was adapted and directed by Shelley Levinson at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. The story was originally published in Betts' 1973 story collection, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award.

The story and film both tell of the pilgrimage of a scarred North Carolina girl who leaves Spruce Pine, North Carolina to take her facial disfigurement to a charismatic faith healer in Tulsa, Okla.

Previous awards won by Betts include the North Carolina Medal for Literature and three Sir Walter Raleigh awards.

Simon film

Comedy-drama depicts a parent-child reunion

By KAREN ROSEN
Staff Writer

Neil Simon's new comedy *I Ought to be in Pictures* is another wrinkle in the saga of kid meets parent for the first time; kid moves in and fights with parent; kid and parent finally understand each other. The audience has a few laughs and sheds a few tears, then leaves the theater with a warm feeling.

Review

Sound familiar? That's because last year Simon's *Only When I Laugh* also depicted a parent-child reunion. But in *I Ought to be in Pictures*, based on Simon's Broadway play of the same name, the emotional level isn't as high, and the characters aren't as bizarre. The actors still rapidly rattle off jokes as they do in most Simon films.

The character who thinks she ought to be in pictures is 19-year-old Brooklynite Libby Tucker, played by Dinah Manoff. Tucker drops in unexpectedly on her father, Herbert, a down-and-out Hollywood writer, who spends more time at the racetrack than at the typewriter.

Sound like a plot from Simon's *The Odd Couple*? Close. Walter Matthau, who played one half of the odd couple, here plays the diffident Herbert Tucker. Herbert never writes a word on screen. The bearded Matthau—comfortable in this type of role—displays his trademark grimace from the moment he shuffles out of his bedroom and mistakes Libby for the cleaning lady.

Manoff is the chatty, wisecracking Libby, whose voice is reminiscent of a Yiddish grandmother. (Libby regularly consults her dead grandmother.) Libby wants her father to help her get her foot in the film studio door. Manoff, whose real-life mother is actress Lee Grant, gives a credible performance.

Ann-Margret plays the third and final major character, Steffy. She quietly steers Herbert and Libby together after they have their spats. Ann-Margret has one of her least glamorous roles, looking almost dowdy in her working-class clothes and square-rimmed glasses. Steffy, a studio hairdresser, wishes her on-off relation-

ship with thrice-married Herbert had more substance.

Ann-Margret's performance is restrained, a far cry from her nightclub act, and very effective.

Herbert Ross, who directed Simon's *The Goodbye Girl*, has a talky film on his hands in which each line invariably builds toward a punchline. It's pure schtick, and Matthau's character should have had the sense to put some of his snappy retorts on paper. Other jokes were a bit timeworn, and they seemed forced when nobody was within earshot to hear them.

The movie has some touching moments, particularly a scene in which Libby reads Emily Dickinson's poems about her father to Herbert. They both get contagiously teary-eyed.

I Ought to be in Pictures gives us a good dose of the life-is-tough-especially-in-show-biz spiel, but it's Neil Simon, so it's entertaining.

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