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OPERA SAN JOSE 2011-2012 SEASON WILL OPEN WITH MOZART'S IDOMENEO In a Once in a Million Production

**Exclusive interview with OSJ Production Director and General
Manager LARRY HANCOCK
By Iride Aparicio**



Tenor CHRISTOPHER BENGOCHEA as IDOMENEO

Photo by Chris Ayers

SAN JOSÉ, California – The Opening night of the 28th SEASON of OPERA SAN JOSÉ at the

California Theatre, on September 10th, will be unparalleled. The “Season of Legends,” as the 2011-2012 Season is called because of its glorious repertoire, will open with the San José premier of **IDOMENEO: KING OF CRETE**, the ópera seria written by **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART’S** (1756-1791) and the Opera the musical world considers his masterwork.

The popularity of **IDOMENEO** (Idomeneus) derived not from Homer’s tale of the Trojan war, in which Idomeneo plays a distinguished role, but from Virgil and early medieval sources including the Trojan saga of Diktys.

Idomeneo’s myth received little attention until the publication of *Les Aventures de Telemaque, fil d’ Ulysse* (The adventures of Telemaque, Ulisses’ son) written in 1693-94, by the French Roman Catholic Archbishop, theologian, poet and writer **FRANCOIS de SALIGNAC de - MOTHE - FÉNELON**, known as **FRANCOIS FENELON** (1651-1715).

In 1689, when King Louis XIV named **FENELON** governor of the royal grandchildren, **FENELON**, who had studied under a private tutor during his youth and had a good grounding in Greek language and classics, decided to write *Telemaque*, a novel based on Greek mythological characters in which Idomeneus, the king of Crete, kills his son. Because the novel was a thinly-veiled attack to the French Monarchy, when it was published, in 1699, it became one of the most popular works of the century.

A few years later, in 1705, **PROSPER JOLYOT CRÉBILLON**, used the plot of *Telemaque* to write a play, and to give motivation to his characters, he added rivalry in love between father and son. **CRÉBILLON’S** drama provided the model for the first musical version of the novel: *The tragedie Lyrique Idomenée*, a five-act libretto written by **ANTOINE DANCHET** which was set to music by **ANDRE CAMPRA** and produced at the Paris Opera in 1712.

DANCHET’S libretto was the model for **GIOVANNI BATTISTA VARESCO’S** libretto (the one used in **MOZART’S** opera). **VARESCO** translated it to Italian and reduced it to three acts by getting rid of the double love theme, where both father and son were in love with Ilia. He also simplified the plot, reduced the number of deities and left **ALBACES** as the only confidant of the king. **MOZART’S IDOMENEO** premiere on January 29, 1781, at the Hof Theatre in Munich.

IDOMENEO relates the story of Idomeneo the Cretan King returning home after ten years fighting in the Trojan War. As he approaches the Cretan shore, he encounters a terrible storm so to save his ship from drowning and everybody’s lives, Idomeneo promises to Neptune, the God of the sea, to sacrifice the first person he sees on land in his honor. Unfortunately, that person is Idamante, the king’s son.

While his father was away, Idamante has fallen in love with Ilia, the prisoner daughter of the Trojan king, who is secretly in love with him. The problem is that Idomeneo wants Idamante to marry Elettra, (daughter of King Agamemnon)

Instead of killing his son and without telling him why, Idomeneo decides to exile the prince sending him with Elettra (also called Electra) to the Isle of Argos. Feeling cheated, Neptune, tries to force the king to fulfill his promise by sending a sea monster to destroy Crete and its people. What happens next was related by **MOZART** using two different endings.

Since **MOZART** wrote two endings with different music for “**IDOMENEO**,” and some productions disregard completely the character of Arbace (the king’s advisor) to shorten the opera, we decided to interview Mr. **LARRY HANCOCK**, the Production Director and General

Manager of OSJ, to ask him some questions.

CWB: Why did you select IDOMEDEO?

LH: I have no role at all selecting the season's operas. "The Season was selected far before. We (OSJ) selects our Seasons three years in advance. My job was to help Irene (OSJ General Director IRENE DALIS who had a car accident and was away recuperating for a few months) in the selection of stage Directors, but this was precise with IDOMENEO that will be directed by stage director BRAD DALTON (pictured below)



CWB: IDOMENEO is considered Mozart's best opera, do you agree?

LH: It is the largest thing Mozart ever put together. He never created work like this before. The opera was a commission by the elector KARL THEODOR in 1780 for a fair in Munich. In writing it, Mozart happened to have the greatest orchestra in the world because the elector had enticed the very best musicians in Europe to work for him. Mozart was only 24 years old when he arrived in Munich in November and the Opera premiered in January, shortly after his 25th birthday.



CWB: I understand that his orchestrations are wonderful.

LH: They are. he (Mozart) never before had done something this complex. The mood changes are constant, the powerful expressions. For this production, "

What Mozart did in applying his dramatic sense to the Opera Seria is that he replaced the popular *Da Capo* exit arias with carefully engineered musical bridges, and reduced the ensembles and chorus.

LH: Mozart wrote his opera for high voices, because as you know his first Idamante which in the Opera is a boy about 18 years old, was a castrati, (a male singer castrated before puberty in order to retain his soprano or alto voice) which means that if a man sings the part he must have a very high voice. Opera San José is doing one of each versions. In one version a mezzo soprano (BETANY COFFLAND) will sing the role of Idamante, and on opening night, the role will be sung by AARON BLAKE, a tenor. Another two major roles in the opera written also for high voices are the role of Ilia (the daughter of the Priam the late king of Troy) which is sung by a soprano and the role of Elettra. (The prince's daughter of Agamemnon) sung by another soprano. Because Mozart wrote two different versions of the Opera we are combining them selecting the best music from both. For the production, the orchestra will be conducted by GEORGE CLEVE (see picture above) the founder and music director of the Midsummer Mozart Festival."

CWB: IDOMENEO is called an Opera Seria. What is Opera Seria?

LH: Opera Seria, is a name fashioned around 1720. It is a reform of a previous Opera (Opera buffa) which was an Opera that had gods and goddesses and monsters and special effects and flying machines, comic characters, chorus and dance, all that stuff put into the pot together. Some folks decided that since that type of Opera was not noble enough, and had become "popular with the people," it needed to be thrown out, so they decided that Operas needed to be enlightening, of preaching morally, and always address a moral dilemma of some royal person. This (style) opera became the rule for all Europe, except France. "

When Mozart came, later, the art form had lost its grip but he tried to put in his Opera all the things that Luis XIV liked. Because of it, IDOMENEO is a mixture of two different kinds of forms. It is also the largest work MOZART ever attempted”.

Mr. Hancock explains to us that a Production of the degree of quality and length of IDOMENEO could not have been possible without the financial help of Dr. DAVID PACKARD (a Ph. D. former professor and noted philanthropist who is also a classical pianist and loves Mozart’s music) Through THE PACKARD FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS, (Which is not associated with the DAVID & LUCILLE PACKARD FOUNDATION) his non-profit organization which is dedicated to the archeology, the music, the film, the historic conservation and education, Dr. PACKARD, who is also very well informed in Minoan civilization and Art, (Art related to the culture of Crete that flourished between 3000BC to 1100AC) hired a designer (STEVEN C KEMP) to recreated their buildings in the opera’s sets, using archeological photographs from the Minoan Sites. The photos were also utilized to recreate the tapestry and paintings on the walls and ceilings of the sets and every prop used in the production including all the furniture and the jewelry.

IDOMENEO will also have the beautiful costumes designed specially for the work by Costume Designer JOHANN STEGMEIR, and to change the moods of the opera visually, along with its music, the lighting of Lighter Designer CHRIS OSTROM. IDOMENEO promises to be a once in a million production.

