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[The Opera Novice\(?\) returns for Mozart's Idomeneo](#)

by [Cynthia Corral](#)

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How many operas does one have to see before they're no longer a novice? I suppose I'm not in any way a novice now after attending my sixth opera on Saturday night, but I still have no expertise in what I'm talking about. However, I still think it's fun, I still love the music and singing, and I still think everyone should give it a try.

[Opera San Jose](#) opens their 2011-2012 season with [Idomeneo](#), the Greek almost-tragedy about the King of Crete and a broken promise to Neptune. It's about Kings and Gods, Queens and Slaves, Sea Monsters and shirtless Dancers. Despite how it sounds, however, there is not much action in this particular show. There is a lot of worry about tragic consequences, but nothing really comes of it, and the entire story somehow ends happily. But don't get me wrong, boring it is not.



Cast A: Christopher Bengochea as the king of Crete in Opera San José's production of Mozart's Idomeneo. Photo by P. Kirk.

Storyline is secondary in opera, and Opera San Jose never disappoints in the music department. I thought the singing was absolutely beautiful. The music by Mozart was played to perfection again by the orchestra and led by the great Maestro George Cleve. It is a long opera (almost four hours) and the music is non-stop. I cannot imagine being a musician in this orchestra and playing for four hours straight every night! But these are many of the best musicians in the South Bay, so I happily and gratefully welcome the chance to listen to their work. The arias are all very emotional, as is the story, and the very talented singers made you feel the emotions

behind their words.

The sets were gorgeous, and simpler than usual, on a grand scale. In fact, parts of these sets were so enormous they had to be constructed in an airplane hangar on Treasure Island. A few interesting smaller backdrops while the curtain is down give plenty of variety to help hold your attention. The costumes were the most impressive in this show. Ancient Crete is not a usual backdrop in opera, and it was a fresh look of sumptuous gold and brocade togas, gowns and, again, shirtless young dancers. The dancing was another new element in this show. I noticed no waltzes this time (I could be wrong), but there was a long and exuberant ballet at the end of Act III, and we loved it.



The Cretans rejoice at the heavenly proclamation. Image by Pat Kirk Photography.

Seasoned opera lovers should love this show and the music, and I definitely recommend it. The audience broke into a spontaneous “Brava!” after one of the arias, and the show received a standing ovation. Opera newbies might want to wait for the next show, as this is a pretty long production and the story moves a little slower than others. However, it is still perfect for the entire opera experience. Opera San Jose continues to be one of the only venues in San Jose where the audience is always dressed to the nines and this can be a really fun evening any time of year. Dress in your best evening wear and make reservations downtown for a great dinner, then head to the very comfortable theater and people-watch other opera patrons dressed in tuxedos and ball gowns. There is nothing fancier or more fun in San Jose!

For dinner, we recommend [Scott's Seafood](#) for going all out with the fancy, or the more moderately priced [Il Forniao](#) which also has delicious food and is right by the California Theatre.

[Idomeneo](#)

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