

Jan 30, 1980

HAWAII CLIPPING SERVICE
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PHONE: 734-8124
Victoria Custer Elaine Stroup
HONOLULU ADVERTISER
JAN 30 1980



Gimi Beni: "We have to be treated like plants."

Playing the opera for laughs

By PIERRE BOWMAN
Advertiser Staff Writer

There he was, Gimi Beni, cavorting about the stage of the Blaisdell Concert Hall, getting lots of laughs, in grand opera yet. The deal is called the buffo role — the one that gets the laughs. You have to sing terrific, but you have to play it light at the same time. Two weeks ago, in Mozart's "Don Giovanni," there was Beni, real buffo as Leporello, the wicked Don's side-kick, singing up a storm, getting those laughs. Some terrific.

Friday, Sunday and Tuesday, Beni will do the buffo bit again, this time in the Hawaii Opera Theater's production of Donizetti's "Don Pasquale."

Who is this guy, this guy who gets the laughs?

A somewhat complex bundle, it turns out. "Come on in," he says, flinging open the door to his room at the Pagoda Hotel annex. "It's not the Ritz, but it's home."

He notes, almost immediately, that not only is it not the Ritz, but that it's noisy, with garbage trucks paying early calls, and people vacuuming the swimming pool even earlier.

But with the air-conditioner on, opines the reporter, you can hardly hear anything, right? Beni casts the air-conditioner a baleful eye.

"We shouldn't use the air-conditioner," he says, the "we" being opera singers. "We have to be treated like plants."

One hasn't even a moment to ponder opera singers treated as plants before Beni immediately moves to a new topic: Bricktop, the legendary cabaret singer-proprietress for the F. Scott Fitzgerald Lost Generation in Paris, later

in Rome, and in her 80s four years ago as the toast of New York in a Manhattan come-back.

It turns out that Bricktop and Beni are rather thoroughly intertwined, and the whole business is unusual for the opera world. But that's ahead of the story.

Beni was the loudest singer in grade school, and the loudest in high school, too. They figured he ought to take voice lessons on that basis.

"When I started to practice, you can imagine what the neighbors thought," he says, immediately breaking into a rather robust burst of bass vocalizing to drive the point home. "One night they called the police."

Beni says he just kept singing as the squad car pulled up outside, parked, and eventually drove away. The Philly Police, apparently, were his first critics; they decided that what he was doing was music, rather than a disturbance of the peace.

Beni dabbled in little clubs in New York, played cocktail piano for awhile, and specialized in "pop stuff, especially funny songs, something the guy next to you doesn't do."

Then, 25 years ago, he won a Fulbright fellowship to study opera in Rome and decided to give up the nightclubs and the rooms filled with cigarette smoke. He also figured he could meet his cousins who lived in Rome.

As it turned out, he did make it to Rome, made his opera debut as Don Pasquale with the Rome Opera in Spoleto in 1955, but did not abandon the nightclub scene.

He had heard of the legendary Bricktop, knew she was running a chic club in Rome, and longed to meet her.

One night, at a movie, the lights came up

after "The End," and sitting right behind Beni was a guy he knew well from America: he'd even sung at his wedding in the Bronx. One thing led to another, and the guy turned out to know Bricktop fairly well.

The next thing Beni knew, he was in Bricktop's intimate basement boite, amid the hand-carved furniture and needlepoint wall-hangings. It wasn't too much later that Beni found himself leading a double life: opera part of the time, and singing at Bricktop's, where kings and princes were among the clientele.

It was heady business.

Beni explains that the club was very small, and that he'd be standing and singing mere feet from the audience.

"I'd be singing and I'd look, and my god, it was Ava Gardner. Or Henry Fonda. Or Anna Magnani sitting there breaking match sticks. Or King Farouk, who sent out for milk because he didn't drink and ate peanuts out of their shells, and threw the shells on the floor," says Beni.

Eventually, Beni went back to America, began a working career in opera, and then chucked it all to return to Bricktop and Rome, where he lived in her duplex penthouse along the Tiber River and performed in her club.

"I did mostly musical comedy," he says. "But once I did a satire on a duet from 'Carmen.' I'd stand up and tell the audience there was a special treat, that as a guest that evening I had an operatic soprano. Bricktop would never allow opera in the club. It was strictly American. So everyone would moan. And then, there was Bricktop in a shawl, a red

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PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS
JAN 28 1980

PACESETTERS



Tomita Gill Peterson Chun Oshiro Peralto Chong Takata

Fujio Tomita has been named vice president and general manager for Aquila Holdings Hawaii, Inc. Formerly he was with Pacific Construction.

Susan D. Heatherly has become sales representative for the firm.

Pacific Resources has promoted **Thomas A. Gill** to coordinator of information systems planning. He joined the company in 1976.

Tom Yoneyama has been appointed vice president of Dale Pratt Advertising, Inc. He was with the Department of Education before joining the company in 1978.

Milton Saito and **Guy Peterson** have joined Gasco, Inc. (The Gas Company). Saito is market planning

motive group of Servco Pacific, Inc., automotive distribution group.

He will be staff manager.

Carol B. Sander, senior secretary in the public relations department at Alexander & Baldwin, Inc., has been promoted to supervisor of public relations services. She has been a senior secretary at A&B for 11 years.

Vince and Judy Sykes have opened a real estate firm, Sykes & Sykes Properties, Inc.

He was formerly brokerage manager of Grubb & Ellis Residential, Inc. She was a managing broker with Grubb.

Kenneth Wilson has been named general manager of the Kona Lagoon Hotel at Keauhou-Kona. He was with Regent International Hotels in Puerto Rico previously.

Arthur J. Labrie has been appointed director of management information systems for Amfac, Inc.'s hotels and resorts group. He will be responsible for coordinating the information systems of the continental hotels and restaurants and Hawaii resorts divisions.

John W. Herkes has been named director of sales for Princeville, the Kauai resort. Formerly director of marketing for the Kahuku Sugar Mill, he will be responsible for sales efforts with Princeville Corp.

Group Travel Unlimited, Inc., has named **David A. Randall** chief executive officer. He will be responsible for Conference Consultants International, a new subsidiary, as well as the travel firm.

He returned to America, got serious about an opera career when he became a charter member of the Metropolitan Opera Studio in New York in 1960, and his career has taken off to such an extent that he has back-to-back bookings through most of the year.

But he doesn't confine himself to singing. He translates opera from Italian to English, has directed a variety of productions in a variety of companies, and in 1977 presented himself in "Forever Figaro," a one-man show about Rossini, the flamboyant opera composer.

Beni hopes to stage and star in "Forever Figaro" in the summer in Yonkers, N.Y., at a

theater owned by the man who introduced him to Bricktop in Rome. In summer 1981, he hopes to present a show about Bricktop herself that he has written.

Beni calls St. Petersburg, Fla., home these days and is active with the fledgling opera company in that city.

Mostly, though, he's on the road, doing the buffo roles, quite successfully.

"I do the characters instinctively," he says. "When I got to Rome, I had to do auditions. They took one look at me and said, 'Oh, Don Pasquale.' They were right. I just knew the character. Maybe it was one of my uncles or something. Then I did all the other buffo characters. I did them instinctively."

"And the music tells you. Mozart is all nuance. Donizetti is somewhere between Mozart and Rossini, so Don Pasquale is a little more refined."

Danilo Lopez and **Dennis Sagocio** are now with Robert C. Smelker Associates as architects with the firm.

Duty Free Shoppers has promoted **Erv Kau** to Hawaii division personnel manager. He joined Duty Free in 1979 after 10 years as personnel manager and assistant corporate secretary for Pacific Insurance Corp.

Raymond P. Ludwig has been named general manager of the Outrigger Canoe Club. He was formerly assistant manager and acting manager. He succeeds **Norman T. Riede**.

Luke & Luke Realty, Inc., has made the following staff appointments.

Marion Joy, to branch manager.

Carol Iseri, to broker in charge.

Elsie Chun, to director of education.

Grace Patterson, to director

Valerie M. Peralto has been named general manager of the law firm of Altman, Dixon & Associates, Hilo, Hawaii.

She was an accountant with Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co., CPAs, previously.

The **Kauhale Makai**, a condominium resort at Kihikihi, Maui, has hired **Peter Joyce** as general manager. He was formerly with the Outrigger Hotel.

Servco Financial Corp. has appointed **Reginald Chong** branch manager of the Hilo, Hawaii, office. He was with Realty Finance, Inc., for 15 years.

Garret Takata has been promoted to the company's Moanalua branch. He joined the firm in 1978.

Retired Lt. Col. **Edward K. Shikata** has joined the auto

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FEB 2 1980

Rainbow spikers lose

The University of Hawaii men's volleyball team dropped a 3-2 match to the local Outrigger Canoe Club last night at Klum Gym on the UH campus.

The Rainbows lost by scores of 11-15, 10-15, 15-8, 15-6 and 12-15. Hawaii coach Dave Shoji attributed the loss to numerous mental errors by the Bows in the first two games, before they came back to take the next two games.

The Rainbows are now 1-1 and will face Brigham Young-Hawaii next Friday at Klum Gym.

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FEB 1 1980

Sports today

Baseball

Collegiate, University of Hawaii-Manoa vs. University of Hawaii-Hilo, 7 p.m. at Wong Stadium. Season opener for the Rainbows and first of a three game set with the Vulcans. Admission is \$1.50 for adults, \$1 for students and 50 cents for children.

Honolulu Senior A League, Waialae vs. Kailihi, 6:30 p.m. at Ala Wai Field. No admission charge.

Soccer

Oahu Interscholastic Association, matches at school fields. Castle at Kailua, Kalani at Farrington, Kaiaheo at McKinley and Aiea at Pearl City. In a girls match, Lilehua vs. Mililani. No admission charge.

Oahu Soccer Association, doubleheader at Ala Wai Field. At 6 p.m. Rainbow Coaches vs. Olympic, 8 p.m. Mililani vs. The Team. No admission charge.

Softball

Hawaii High School Girls State Tournament, semifinals at Roosevelt Field. Losers' bracket. Kaiser vs. Kamehameha at 2 p.m. followed by Losers of yesterday's Hilo-Kaiser game vs. losers of Pearl Kauai vs. Baldwin at 3:30 p.m. In semifinal action, Castle vs. University High at 5 p.m., with top-seeded Hilo vs. Pearl City at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$2 for adults and \$1 for students.

Volleyball

Collegiate, University of Hawaii vs. Outrigger Canoe Club, 8 p.m. at Klum Gym. The Rainbows' shot for their second straight win of the season. Tickets are \$1.

Wrestling

Oahu Interscholastic Association, matches at school gyms. Radford at Waipahu, Pearl City at Waianae, Lilehua at Moanalua, Waialua at Campbell, Farrington at Mililani, Kalani at Kailua, Kaiser at Kaimuki and McKinley at Kahuku. No admission charge.

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HONOLULU STAR BULLETIN
FEB 2 1980

Isle File

OCC Hands UH Men Setback

The Outrigger Canoe Club handed the University of Hawaii men's volleyball team a 15-11, 15-10, 8-15, 6-15, 15-12 defeat last night at Klum Gym.

Despite the loss, UH Coach Dave Shoji said he was "encouraged" by his team's performance as it gears up for first-year competition in the Western California Athletic Conference.

The UH men's next meet is against BYU-Hawaii on Thursday, Feb. 8, at Klum gym.

Waialae Women Top Bowlers

The Waialae Women's Bowling Club No. 1—Barbara Tanaka, Dorothy Nakagaki, Myung Yul Semmers, Mabel Kugiya and Carol Takahashi—won the "A" Division, and the Hickam Hopefuls—Sharon Steltz, Barbara Long, Yuki Borst, Theresa Hendrix and Cindy Hanlin—won the "B" Division in the annual Championship Tournament of the Oahu Women's Bowling Association. Other winners: "A" Division—Addie Stephens and Michelle Stephens (doubles), Rebecca Kamp (singles and all-events); "B" Division—Laura Santiago and Melinda Lee (doubles), Velma Costa (singles), Joann Nakamoto (all-events).

Little Joined by ILH Coaches

University of Hawaii basketball coach Larry Little will be joined by the coaches of the seven Division I ILH basketball teams as guest speakers Monday at the Quarterback Club luncheon at Flamingo Chuckwagon.

Softball Champs in Tourney

Texas Woman's University, the defending intercollegiate women's softball champions, will join the six-team field for the Hawaiian Intercollegiate Softball Tournament, March 16-22, in Hilo. Besides the host Hilo Comets, the other teams are University of Northern Colorado, Utah State, Golden West College, and the University of Northern Iowa.

Track and Field Meet Tomorrow

The University of Hawaii and Athletic Conference will host a track and field meet at the UH's Cooke Field Sunday, with the first events starting at 9 a.m.

Competition will be held in age group and open divisions, with entry fees of \$1 for high school students and above and \$5.00 for grade school students.

Radford, Moanalua Grapple

Radford and Moanalua, only unbeaten wrestling teams in the OIA, tangled this afternoon in the Menehunes' gym. Radford defeated Waipahu, 58-6, and Moanalua dunned Lilehua, 45-13, yesterday to set up the showdown.

BYUH Women Bow to Shasta

Shasta College of California held off Brigham Young-Hawaii, 66-64, last night in a women's collegiate basketball game at the losers' gym in Laila.

Tammi Anderson and Renee Webster each scored 16 points for Shasta, which improved its season record to 10-8. Game honors, however, went to BYUH's Taeao Lolota, who tallied 24 points. Alicia Hohoepa had 15 for the home team, now 2-8.

The teams meet again tonight at the BYUH gym.

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WAIKIKI BEACH PRESS
JAN 25 1980



Waikiki after the turn-of-the-century. The two buildings pictured are the Moana Hotel and the Outrigger Canoe Club. --Bishop Museum Archives photo