

IU Offers 'Parsifal' Next Sunday

Opera Will Get Complete Staging

By HENRY BUTLER
Times Staff Writer

BLOOMINGTON, Apr. 2.—When the curtain rises on Indiana University's production of "Parsifal" next Sunday, Hoosiers will see something new in student opera.

The Palm Sunday presentation of Wagner's last musical drama will be one of the few complete stagings of that great musical essay in medieval-religious legend yet produced in the United States, outside of the Metropolitan Opera House.

"Parsifal" has had innumerable "cut" versions arranged for concert and done by symphony orchestras with soloists. But the tremendous four-hour opera seldom has been attempted by any but the biggest professional companies.

That's why Dean Wilfred C. Bain of the IU School of Music is lending the school's fullest support to those experienced pace-makers, Conductor Ernst Hoffman and Stage Director Hans Busch, in their current venture.

MESSERS. HOFFMAN AND BUSCH last spring won national recognition for their IU music school staging of Offenbach's "Tales of Hoffman," and the world premiere of Kurt Weill's American folk opera, "Down in the Valley."

Now they're working together on the kind of project crusty old-line professionals might deem impossible. Even the most ardent supporters of amateur opera might be intimidated by opera guide books and the opinions of commentators into thinking that students can't do "Parsifal."

But they're doing it down there at IU. As they did last spring, they're cutting right through the traditions of the Diamond Horseshoe and other operatic vested interests and coming out with financially economical but artistically effective results.

THE WAY to get things done is to do them. That's the slogan Messrs. Hoffman and Busch seem to work with. Judging from their previous successes and listening to them talk now, you can safely bet they'll get results.

"Parsifal" is one of the toughest problems they could tackle. A typical Wagnerian re-writing of old legend into a libretto Wagner could work with, "Parsifal" deals with one sequence in the endless story of the Holy Grail—the sacred chalice of the Last Supper.



Learning their way around the runway-and-riser stage arrangement being constructed for Indiana University's production of "Parsifal" next Sunday are Mary Alice Hensley of Martinsville and Tom Merriman of South Bend.

From Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," Malory's "Morte d'Arthur" or even Mark Twain's irreverent remarks about the sacred goblet in "A Connecticut Yankee," most of us know something of the Grail legend. In the legend, only the knight who was pure in heart and dead could hope to find the Grail and, having found it, absorb some of its virtue.

But 18th-Century Sir Thomas Malory and 19th-Century Alfred Lord Tennyson have given us a practical British slant on the whole matter. Wagner gives us a mystical German version, refined from medieval German and French sources.

To complicate matters, Wagner has been accused of introducing into his libretto some notions from the pessimistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer.

MESSERS. HOFFMAN AND BUSCH will clear up some complications next Sunday by having their students sing the opera in English—almost, though not quite, an American premiere of the music-drama in the language we think we know.

Wagner's music, with all its "leit-motiv" orchestral announcement of characters and problems in the drama, cuts down operatic prima donnas to normal human size, Mr. Hoffman believes. "The orchestra sings the melodies in Wagner," says Mr. Hoffman, who, incidentally, did the translation of Wagner's book.

Both Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Busch think the music and the religious and philosophic ideas in "Parsifal" are much more

Seis Landmark In Student Music

important than scenery and all the other traditional striving for stage realism.

THEY'RE UP AGAINST a kind of "Hamlet" problem, and they're solving it in probably the most sensible way. Mr. Busch, the remarkable ex-GI who works as stage director for the Stockholm Royal Opera, brought back from Sweden a set of doll-house models for the mobile steps, stages and altars.

As in last year's IU opera productions, drapes, lighting and movable step and runway units will take care of the scenery.

In the Act I sequence where the principals walk from the forest to the Montsalvat castle, Wagner wanted moving scenery. That might have been all right for Bayreuth in 1882, just as the shade-roller canvas backdrop for the Roman arena treadmill chariot race in Lew Wallace's "Ben Hur" still seemed okay on the American stage before World War I.

"We want to get away from the heavy Bayreuth tradition. We want to use as little scenery as possible," Mr. Busch says.

Mr. Hoffman adds, "We hope to make 'Parsifal' an annual event at Indiana University. It is the greatest modern religious music drama."

Our Bedell Is One Smith Who Has Stayed 'Big News'

Uncle Here One of General's Ardent Fans; Recalls Early Leanings Toward Military Life

NOT EVERY Mr. Smith goes to Washington and stays big news, but Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith of Indianapolis has been an exception. President Truman recently named him commander of the First Army, with headquarters at Governor's Island, N. Y. The appointment followed his resignation as ambassador to Russia, a post he accepted in February, 1946.

Those newspapers tucked under the arm of his 30-year-old uncle, Paul Bedell, for several decades have carried stories about his nephew. Mr. Bedell, living at 230 N. Oriental St., has been working at clothing stores and stopping at newsstands in Washington Street for 60 years.

For the past 25 years he has been employed at L. Strauss & Co. Mrs. Bedell usually knows when Gen. Smith is in the news reels, for she's a cashier at the St. Clair Theater.

"HE'S BEEN a soldier from the time he was big enough to walk," his uncle recalls. Broomsticks substituted for muskets and riding horses for cavalry for Bedell Smith and his brother George when they played soldier at an old fire engine house near their home in Ashland Avenue. George Smith also is in Washington, in the revenue department.

Mrs. D. S. Callahan, who lives with the Bedells, isn't one bit surprised about her nephew's brilliant career. "He never talked unless he had something to say," she remembers.

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