

Reviewer Gives Whole-Hearted Approval

Premiere Of Kloster's 'Ethan Frome' Tonight

By DON LAMBERT

The curtain opens tonight on the world premier performance of "Ethan Frome," an opera that combines the best in music, theater and art.

This combination is what makes the opera unique. William

Kloster, instructor at Ottawa University, who wrote the opera, has emphasized the vocal aspects of the opera, as he should. But, by

careful use of an unusual set, visual aids, children's choir, dance, color combinations and symbols, he has achieved a

powerful production.

The opera will be performed at 8:15 tonight and Sunday night in the Ottawa Memorial Auditorium. Tickets, which are free, but which should be reserved, are available at Butler's Music Store, the OU

student union and at the door.

Kloster spent several years writing the opera, an adaptation of a novel of the same name by Edith Wharton. Basically, Kloster set lines from the novel to music. The novel itself is very moving but the thrilling music of

this opera is what takes it beyond the novel.

The main characters bring any theater piece to life and the three leads of this opera, combining considerable musical and theatrical talents, really breathe life into this work.

Susan Franano, of the Kansas City Lyric Opera, plays Mattie, the hired girl who falls in love with Ethan. Mrs. Franano, who made her debut recital in Carnegie Hall in 1970, has a beautiful lyric soprano voice that she has mastered to achieve the young, sometimes innocent, sometimes not so innocent qualities of Mattie.

In addition, Mrs. Franano shows the tragedy of her situation and manages to foreshadow the disaster to come.

Mrs. Franano also had a string of praises for the opera itself. "This is the best 20th Century opera I've been involved in and that has been quite a few," she said.

She pointed out that so often, modern opera becomes abstract and hung up on theatrical aspects. But Kloster, through use of solos, duets, trios, quartets and the chorus, has followed classic opera style.

Mrs. Franano also praised the efforts of Ottawa University and the community for presenting the opera. She explained that one usually finds this kind of support only in Europe.

John Lennon, an instructor at Emporia State, plays the lead, Ethan Frome. It is a difficult part because Ethan is both strong and weak. With his very powerful voice, Lennon gives the feeling of Ethan's trap—his love for Mattie but his dislike of his wife.

"This is one of the few modern operas that is both singable and listenable," Lennon said.

Lennon is preparing to direct and sing the lead in Emporia's

March production of "Faust."

Betty Kloster, who plays Zeena and who calls herself the inexperienced member of the cast, certainly doesn't show it. Mrs. Kloster, wife of the director, has sung this fall for the first time with the Kansas City Lyric Theatre.

She has been studying voice the last three years under Lennon. And, she admits she has been caught by the roar of the grease paint and hopes to continue singing.

Minor character roles are sung by Delvin Sutton an OU graduate now teaching vocal music in Kansas City, and Edward Coulter, who has sung four years with the Kansas City Lyric Theatre.

Twenty-nine musicians make up the orchestra. The group, under the direction of Kloster, comprises mostly members of the Kansas City Philharmonic orchestra.

Any operatic work needs the dramatic qualities, in addition to the music, to bring the work to the stage. Steven Biddle, head of the OU drama department, has directed the production. He explained the score is the primary element of the opera but he has helped supply some of the details which allow the characters to react.

"The singer has an advantage over the traditional actor," Biddle explained. "He can be even more expressive because he can do so many things with his voice."

The set, designed by Joseph Hutchinson, head of the OU art

department, brings the visual aspects to the stage. By his use of vertical black lines, he has created a feeling of imprisonment and frustration.

"Ethan, and all the characters in the opera, are trapped by such things as the Protestant ethic, the Victorian era and their New England surrounding," he explained.

The opera begins in a New England church and the set is easily transformed into the two-story home of Ethan Frome.

"We intended the set to show suggestive realism," Hutchinson explained. "We wanted the audience to get the feeling of the work without getting bogged down in detail."

Hutchinson has achieved several unusual visual effects by the use of a scrim, or the projection of slides onto a large sheet of cheesecloth.

"We were striving for an old tin-type effect," Hutchinson pointed out. The use of blacks, whites and grays and scant lighting gives this effect, in addition to showing the desperation of the situation."

Ottawa University's 22-member chorale, under the direction of Joyce Stuermer, which performs many public relations functions for the University, provides the backdrop of vocal music. Assisting is a children's choir directed by Carole Sandstrom.

The chorale was transformed into dancers who do a step near a Virginia Reel by Becky Johnson, OU modern dance instructor.



FINISHING TOUCHES—Tonight is opening night of the lyric opera "Ethan Frome," by William Kloster. At left, two of the lead characters, John Lennon and Susan Franano, perform a scene in the



first act. At right, Kloster pets his daughter's cat, Lucia, who performs the role of "The Cat."