

Opera

Too much for four hours

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OP THEATRE CRITIC

120 Songs
For The Marquis De Sade
Vancouver East Cultural Centre
Until March 16
Call 604-251-1363

Modern Baroque Opera (MBO) has definitely challenged itself with its newest project, *120 Songs For The Marquis De Sade*. The opera is rich with beautiful music, talented singers and actors, and an intriguing storyline; too rich actually. Halfway into the three-act, four-hour play my interest was lost and never regained.

MBO tries to do too much on stage. The Marquis De Sade has a very interesting, active, and long life. It is impossible to tell his

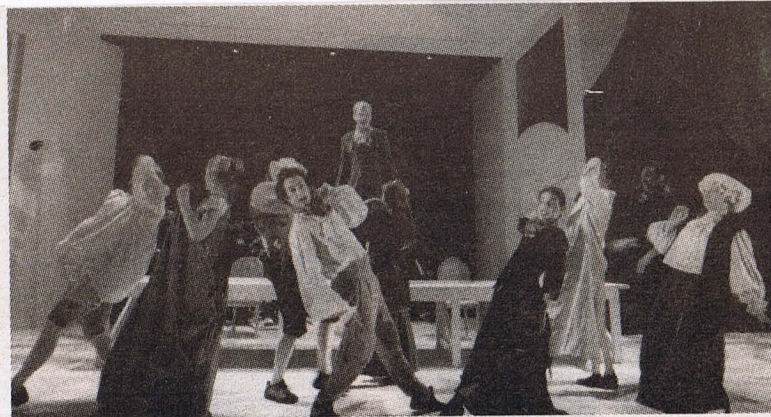
entire story in one play without boring the audience. After a while it begins to feel like a history textbook—in this year this happened, then in this year this happened, etc. The creators, composer Peter Hannan and Librettist Peter Hinton were on the right track when they broke the story into three acts. Each act tells the story of a different part of Sade's life, and the play would have been much stronger if they had concentrated on only one of these stories.

Act one is by far the strongest. The Marquis (Michael Douglas Jones) is a young man with an enormous, and fairly deviant, sexual appetite. He is forced to marry Pelagie (Phoebe MacRae), a plain girl who is ruled by her mother, Montreuil (Karin Konoval). After the marriage he retreats to his

home in the country where he and his valet (Peter Hurst) seduce everything in sight. Pelagie discovers she has a taste for his sexual preferences and joins in the fun. A young girl eventually accuses Sade of rape and Montreuil convinces King Louis XV to jail him without trial. After serving seven months he is released, but banned from Paris. He and his family return to the country where they continue their debauched ways until Sade is arrested again, and sentenced to jail for life.

This act is successful because it tells an interesting story about a fascinating man. Sade is crude and forceful, but he is still lovable. He is surrounded by a host of rich and wonderful characters that help create the intriguing world of the Marquis De Sade.

In Act Two the story starts to lag. Sade is imprisoned and the



years pass one scene at a time with very little happening. Many of the wonderful characters from act one die, and the new characters are neither interesting nor sympathetic. They seem to be around just to provide the audience with information. By act three the focus of the play switches from Sade to the political climate in France in the late 1700's. Aging Sade has lost all of the heart that made him lovable, becoming a selfish, mean old man. The intriguing plot and vibrant personalities of the first act are gone, and there is nothing to replace them.

The last hour of *120 Songs For The Marquis De Sade* becomes an exercise in counting down the final thirty songs.

Through all the problems with the length and storyline, the actors do a phenomenal job switching from character to character and keeping the energy of the opera high. They are on for four hours, a challenge even for the most seasoned performers. With such a talented cast and interesting subject, MBO could really put together a wonderful opera. They just have to be a little more selective with what they choose to portray.