

Robert O'Hearn

Professor of Opera Theatre

There is no American theatrical designer more closely associated with the world of opera than Robert O'Hearn. Several of the most important productions in the Metropolitan Opera repertoire since the opening of Lincoln Center in 1966 have been Robert O'Hearn productions. Highlights of his long list of Met credits start in 1960 (at the old Met) with *L'Elisir d'Amore* and include the famous *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1966), *Hänsel und Gretel* (1967), and the wonderful *Der Rosenkavalier* (1969) and end with *Porgy and Bess* in 1985. His productions have been the benchmark of excellence both here and abroad. His international career spans 60 years, from his first professional stage production in 1948 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, until the present IU Opera Theater production of *A Wedding*.

Bob is a Hoosier native, born in Elkhart, Indiana, on July 19, 1921. He is also a graduate of Indiana University, receiving his B.A. in 1943. In 1948 he became a fixture at the Harvard University Brattle Theater designing numerous productions over the next few years. The artwork of those productions is now part of the Harvard University Theater Collection. Bob remained associated with the Brattle until 1952, when he turned his attention to New York and Broadway. Starting in 1953 he served as assistant designer on such legendary productions as *Kismet* (1953), *Pajama Game* (1955), *My Fair Lady* (1956), and *West Side Story* (1958).

By 1960 he was designing in his own right at the Metropolitan Opera, where he became a regular for the next 25 years. His other U.S. credits are quite extensive, including the New York City Opera, New York Shakespeare Festival, City Center Theater, American Ballet Theater, New York City Ballet, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Boston Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera, Houston Opera, Ballet West, Los Angeles Civic Light Opera, and the San Francisco Ballet.

Bob's international credits are no less impressive. In 1965 he designed *Porgy and Bess* for the Vienna Volksoper. This began a long association with European opera houses that included *Porgy and Bess* at the Bregenzer Festspiele, *Otello* at the Hamburg Staatsoper, *Swan Lake* in Strasbourg, *Die Meistersinger* in Karlsruhe, and *Der Rosenkavalier* with the Canadian Opera Company.

Before joining the Jacobs School of Music (JSOM) opera studies faculty in 1988, Bob served as professor at the Studio and Forum of Stage Design in New York City (1968–1988). He has also given guest lectures and classes at Carnegie Mellon University, Brandeis University, and The Pennsylvania State University.

He has had a tremendously positive impact on the JSOM, bringing high artistic standards and great professionalism to all his design assignments. Bob's designs are elegant and always theatrically sensitive and form the mainstay of the IU Opera Theater

repertoire: *Peter Grimes*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Wozzek*, *Falstaff*, *Carmen*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Arabella*, *Manon*, and *Nozze di Figaro*, to name but a few.

As a teacher Bob has been a wonderful firsthand resource for the development of opera design during the second half of the twentieth century. Students have sought him out for his great depth of knowledge of the art of theatrical design. He has always brought to class a relaxed and approachable teaching style that has made him much admired by both students and fellow faculty.

During his long and impressive career, he has worked with a veritable *Who's Who* in opera production and performance and has brought with him to IU a great wealth of knowledge on everything operatic. Bob's 20-year tenure with the JSOM has been a significant part of the 60-year history of the IU Opera Theater, and it is important to note that he is the first American-born principal designer to serve in that post. As the history of the JSOM and the IU Opera Theater continues to be written, it will no doubt, remember Robert O'Hearn as a key figure in the development of even higher standards of artistic achievement.

C. David Higgins