

BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

With his new finale for Puccini's 'Turandot,' leading Italian composer Luciano Berio is reaching into the musical past to reshape Los Angeles Opera's aesthetic

By JAN BRESLAUER

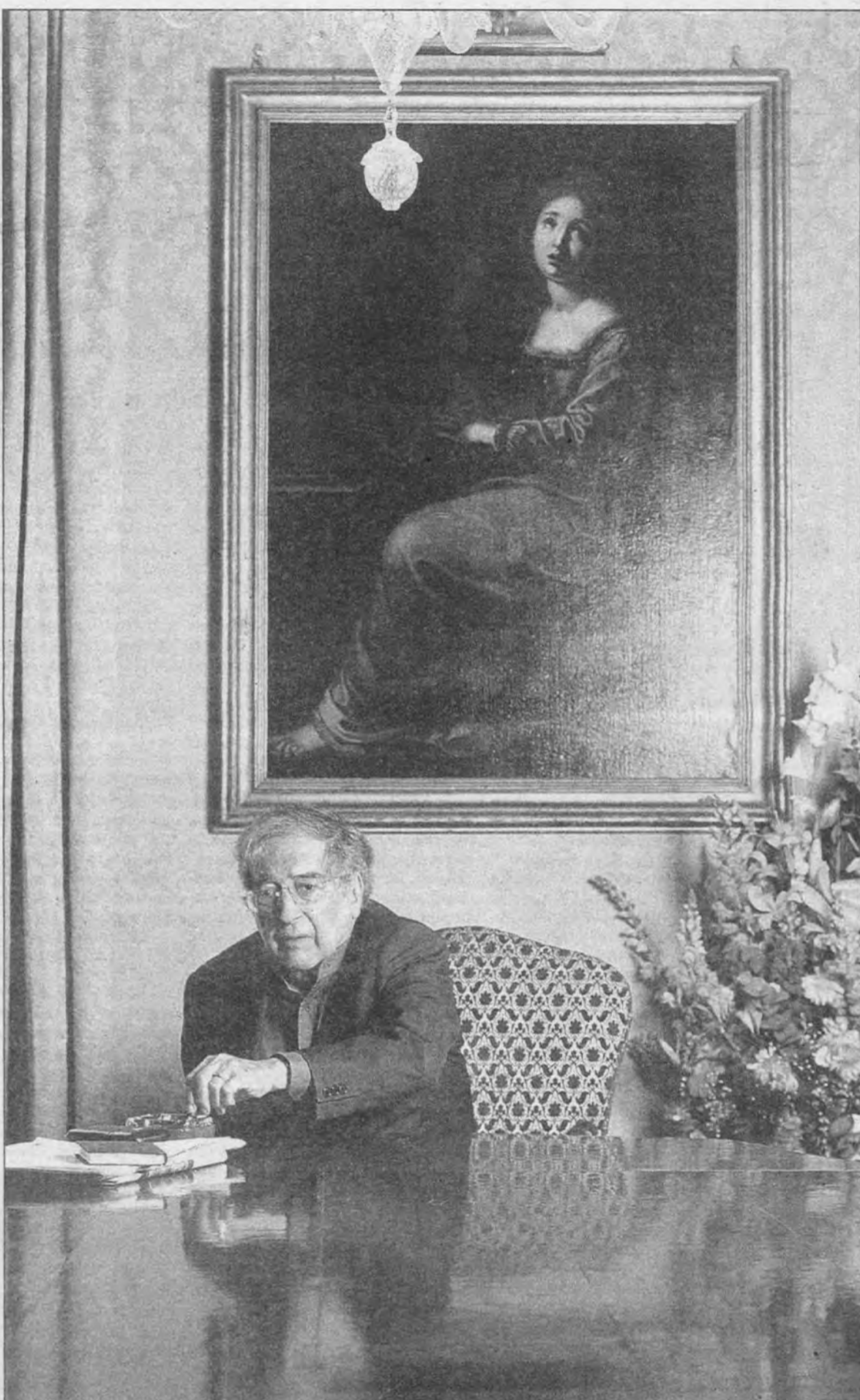
ROME—It's spring in the Eternal City, and the Piazza di Spagna teems with gawkers and idlers. A cascade of pink azaleas adorns the Spanish Steps, the famous gathering spot of English Romantics from Keats to Byron. The late afternoon sun burnishes the horse carriages and the Dolce & Gabbana and Missoni stores. Languor and renewal are in the air.

Just a couple of blocks away, Luciano Berio, arguably Italy's most important living composer, sits in his second-floor office at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Behind his massive wooden desk is a centuries-old painting of a lutenist. Strains of a Bach concerto waft into the room, and motorbikes whiz over the cobblestones of the Via Vittoria below. Subordinates pop in and out, cuckoo-like, with a "Maestro?" this and a "Maestro?" that. It's a dignified cacophony, and the feeling of expectation is as palpable as a rest between notes.

Founded in 1585 and famed for its chorus and orchestra (now under the direction of Myung-Whun Chung), Santa Cecilia, Rome's oldest musical institution, has never had a home to call its own. But on this weekend in late April, that's about to change.

During the next two days, Berio, Santa Cecilia's president for the past two years, will unveil the academy's first permanent base, designed by architect Renzo Piano.

"He built what we call the city of music: three im-



PAOLO SACCHI / For The Times

Luciano Berio in Rome. He has three projects with Los Angeles Opera, beginning with "Turandot."

Berio: After Puccini, He Will Tackle Monteverdi

Continued from Page 9
way, there's an archeological dig. Next to a movie house, a medieval turret has been turned into a bistro.

The tenses of time coexist in a similar way in Berio's music. He has incorporated earlier compositions by other composers into his own pieces and written adaptations of other composers' scores. In "Rendering," for example, Berio took Schubert's unfinished 10th Symphony and filled in the composer's sketches with his distinct sound. "Sinfonia," written for orchestra and the Swingle Singers, "samples" a movement from a Mahler symphony, only to reinterpret it with an array of quotations from other sources.

Part of an international cadre of avant-garde composers who came to the fore after World War II, Berio is a creative coeval of Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Ligeti and Luigi Nono. Yet unlike these other formidable Modernists, Berio has been known for a sense of harmony and lyricism—an Italianate quality—that makes him more accessible to the untrained ear.

His tendency to provoke and charm is as evident in his persona as his music. A short man dwarfed by his big wooden desk, Berio plays the role of commander with ease, even as he hints at resenting its obligations. His look is stylishly rumpled, a fleshy but still appealing face framed by a collarless gray shirt and plaid jacket.



Tenor Franco Farina plays Calaf in Los Angeles Opera's production of "Turandot," with Berio's finale. STEFANO PALTERA / For The Times

At moments, the maestro is almost puckish. More often, he's imperious and a bit cranky, not bothering to hide his impatience. When he feels he's said enough on one topic, even if it's only a few words, he orders, "Let's move." Then he flashes a big compensatory smile—the tactics of a man who's long gotten away with using charisma to balance impudence.

That was the case in the 1960s, when he was teaching at Mills College in Oakland, and later at Harvard and Juilliard. When he first came to the U.S., he was married to Cathy Berberian, an American soprano for whom he wrote some of his best-known compositions, including "Sequenza III" and "Folk Songs." Berio quickly established

himself as an iconoclast and provocateur, challenging conventional notions of genre, orchestration and narrative.

In the early 1970s, he returned to Europe and became director of Paris' electronic music hothouse IRCAM, the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique Musicale. Indeed, he's known for pushing classical music into the realm of computers, tape recorders and other nontraditional tools long before they were commonplace. At the same time, Berio has long held an interest in traditional folk music. In both cases, he's been driven by his desire to extend the use of the human voice.

Berio's works for the musical stage also rethink the relationship between sound and text. They include "Opera," created with New York's Living Theater, and "Un Re in Ascolta" (A King Listening), a meta-theatrical reconsideration of a Prospero-like figure, with a libretto by Italo Calvino. A recent opera, "Outis," uses fragments of

various texts in a meditation on the character of Ulysses.

Reviewing the 1996 La Scala premiere of "Outis," Times music critic Mark Swed wrote that "it breaks no new ground for Berio—one immediately recognizes the composer's sound, a kind of ocean of voices and instruments with ever-changing focus in which one regularly gets lost and then finds oneself again. But it is the work of a master, and it can hold the listener easily enthralled for its two hours."

Berio's latest project bridging past and present is the new completion of "Turandot," which he tackled at the behest of conductor Riccardo Chailly. The piece premiered in concert form in January, with Chailly and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, at the Music Festival of the Canary Islands. After L.A. Opera, it will be staged at the Muziektheater in Amsterdam in June and the Salzburg Festival in Austria in August.

"There's a tendency to a fetishistic attitude to Puccini, so you don't touch," Berio says. "Instead, if you go into the fabric of 'Turandot,' you realize how much Puccini suffered. Is that true that he couldn't finish because he died, poor man, or because he had problems to finish that opera with that libretto, which is really offensive, the quality of the libretto? The opera is full of contradictions, and so Puccini was tormented about it."

In "Turandot," which is based on a play by 18th century Italian playwright Carlo Gozzi, a steely Peeking princess sets about avenging a



FREDERICK M. BROWN / Getty Images

"I believe in the talent of Berio, and I believe it will bring a lot of attention and reactions."

PLÁCIDO DOMINGO
Los Angeles Opera artistic director

ravaged female ancestor by sending a gaggle of suitors to the gallows for failing to answer her three riddles. A prince named Calaf arrives with his father and their loyal slave Liu, who is secretly in love with Calaf. He correctly answers Turandot's riddles, but she still refuses him. Calaf then poses his own challenge, giving the princess a single day to learn his name; if she succeeds, he will go to his death. Liu is pressed to reveal Calaf's name but kills herself instead, and Calaf conquers Turandot with a kiss. Finally assenting to marriage, Turandot announces that the stranger's name is love.

When Puccini died, the third act was still a sketch, in terms of plot as well as music. He had already deviated from Gozzi's story—the sympathetic character of the slave girl and her romantic death were his additions. But then what? His notes left it a cliffhanger: What would the future hold for Calaf and Turandot?

Puccini's publisher, Ricordi, was not about to let a potential cash cow languish. So with conductor Arturo Toscanini, Ricordi commissioned composer Franco Alfano to write a finale. Unfortunately, nobody was particularly pleased with the grandiose, happily-ever-after results. Toscanini cut some 109 measures out of Alfano's score before he would even premiere it. Still, that's the version that's been playing opera houses since.

The major contradiction comes from the addition of the character Liu. "He needed to have a feminine

Rejoice. Recharge. Relax.
MOZART AND MORE



July 19 — August 4, 2002

Evenings with the Orchestra
Music in the Vines
Chamber Music Series
Music in the Missions
Afternoon Interludes
AKIDemie Family Series

FOR TICKET BROCHURE:
Call toll-free (877) 881-8899
or visit WWW.MOZARTFESTIVAL.COM

VOICEOVERS?

You've been looking for that ideal deep male voice for voiceovers, commercials, multimedia. I have that voice. Try me out at 415-863-2233. Leave a message if you agree. Bob - Broadband Media Group.

3719623 8528

Bustamante

• Pasadena • ANTIQUES SHOW

May 31 - June 2

Pasadena Center

Exhibition & Conference Bldgs
300 East Green Street, Pasadena, CA

Friday, Saturday 12 p.m. - 8 p.m., Sunday 12 - 5

235 Quality Dealers • Rare Treasures • Antiques, Decorative Arts & Collectibles

★ SAVE \$2. ON EACH GENERAL ADMISSION ★

General Admission: \$7., with this ad \$5. each

Senior Citizens (62+ years) \$4. Free Return Privileges

Bustamante Enterprises, Inc.
Box 637, Atwater, CA 95301 • 209-358-3134 • Show Office 626-844-6036

www.Bustamante-Shows.com THE SHOW'S WORTH WAITING FOR



PAOLO SACCHI / For The Times

Berio believes that Puccini intended "Turandot" "to end quietly."

presence that he could love," Berio says. "Musically it's beautiful, but dramaturgically, it doesn't make any sense. She's killed, and just 30 seconds after that, Calaf and Turandot are 'interacting,' so to speak.

"He doesn't know what to do with Liu," Berio continues. "But if you take Liu out, 'Turandot' is a very hard work, intense and very often aggressive. And then at the end, you see Liu dies and nobody cares about it. The story goes on, ignoring it completely. So you cannot present such a musically warm, intense character and then, pfffft!"

Puccini left some 30 pages of sketches laying out possible approaches to the third act, most of which Alfano ignored. It was in these pages, however, that Berio found inspiration for his version.

Berio also relied on germinal ideas in the score itself, including a reference to Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde" in the first act. "Wagner is always present," Berio says. "The first two measures contain the Wagnerian chords, the elements that he develops later."

Berio has created an ambiguous ending. "What Alfano did was heavy-handed," Berio says. "I think it was Toscanini's fault too, that he was convinced it should

have a glorious rhetorical ending. I'm convinced that Puccini wanted it to end quietly. All the premises of 'Turandot,' they don't go to a resolution, an ending, happy or unhappy. The sketches say a suspended ending, like a question mark."

According to Nagano, "Berio's ending concludes as the final and ultimate enigma... this being in stark contrast to Mr. Alfano's ending. The Berio finale is more organic. When asked recently whether the ending sounds more like Berio or more like Puccini, the most accurate answer I could think of was that the ending sounds more like 'Turandot.'"

Mindful of the challenge of the new ending, L.A. Opera enlisted a seasoned team, headed by veteran director Gian-Carlo del Monaco, with Audrey Stottler in the title role and Franco Farina as Calaf. The production is based on one Del Monaco did in 1991 for Leipzig Opera.

"The big challenge in any 'Turandot' production is for a director to work sensitively with the chorus, and Del Monaco is known as a master with that kind of direction," says Edgar Baitzel, L.A. Opera director of artistic operations. "His father [Mario del Monaco] was one of the most famous Calafs of the

last century. With his background and tremendous experience directing Puccini operas, we are confident that he was the right choice to bring the new ending to the U.S."

An added bonus is that L.A. Opera got the world premiere staging of the ending. "The world premiere was supposed to be at La Scala," Baitzel says. "But Berio did not deliver on time. We were second or third in line, in the lucky position of getting the premiere without paying one dime."

Berio's second commission from L.A. Opera, "The Coronation of Poppea," also calls upon the composer to supply what's missing from the original. Written in 1643, Monteverdi's final opera tells the story of the emperor Nero, caught between his desire for the power-hungry Poppea and his wife, Ottavia, who is driven to lethal scheming by his infidelity.

In the usual manner of Baroque composition, Monteverdi gave the opera primarily a vocal line and a bass line. Contemporary interpreters have supplied orchestrations that run the gamut from the inappropriately lush to stripped-down "period practice." Berio is expected to create something that will give a nod to Baroque tradition but will also be contemporary.

"Monteverdi was looking ahead at the same time he was very close to his own past and close to his own present, and because of that closeness, he could look into the future in a very new way," he says.

"The libretto could have been given to Fellini to make a film. It touches very heated subjects and at the same time with a great elegance."

Berio's plans are in keeping with that spirit. "I want to have a very multifaceted presentation," he says. "The orchestra is very

strange—four saxophones. Sometimes the singers will be characterized by a different way of singing, almost pop. There is going to be, I don't say 'commercial' music, but mannerisms that today's audience will recognize in the vocal technique."

As Nagano sees it, that makes perfect sense. "It would only seem normal that he contemplate respecting the provocative nature of Monteverdi's score... by incorporating the musical semantics of our time."

Even the final Berio-L.A. Opera project looks backward and forward. It's brand new but based on a particular biography. "I was very surprised when he came to me with the idea," Domingo says. "It will be about all my musical career. So I could be remembering certain moments, or having dialogues with composers and conductors that I've worked with, and from history. There could be many characters, but it might be a monologue—me having a conversation with Wagner, Verdi, Mozart, Callas and different people across my career. It could be the characters are real or you just hear them. Something based on me, that's where we stand."

Ask Berio to talk about the new opera, however, and he refuses. "I'm going to do something, but

it's too early to say, mostly because I have massive respect for Plácido," he says. Asked if there's a librettist, he retorts with an only half-sarcastic, "No, I hate librettists." All he will say is that "there will be a text, words, fragments of a story maybe."

Berio, having clearly spent what little patience he had for questions, decides that the interview is over. He stands, gestures across the room and offers another compensatory tidbit.

"Do you know who was the owner of this piano there?" he asks with insistent bonhomie. "Franz Liszt."

As if on cue, another visitor pops her head in the door. "In bocca al lupo," she gushes, invoking the opera world equivalent of "break a leg" to wish the maestro well for the opening of the new facility. Berio then turns from the Liszt piano to his young colleague, from the past to the future, and smiles. □

"Turandot," Los Angeles Opera, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 N. Grand Ave., L.A. Thursday, May 30, June 4, 6, 7, 9, 11 and 14, 7:30 p.m.; June 1 and 16, 2 p.m. Ends June 16. Tickets: \$30-\$165. Call (213) 365-3500.

Jan Breslauer is a regular contributor to Calendar.

**WEST COAST'S LARGEST
ANTIQUE AUTO
SWAP MEET AND CAR SHOW**

★ CORVETTE ★ PORSCHE
★ STREET ROD ★ VOLKSWAGEN
★ PRE '75 COLLECTOR CARS
GOOD TIMES! RAIN OR SHINE!
THIS SUNDAY 9am-2pm
JUNE 2
24 hr. info (714) 538-7091

FAIRPLEX ★ POMONA
www.pomonaswapmeet.com

**Dance to the
latest news beat.**



If you're not already
enjoying the savings and
convenience of home delivery,
call 1-800-426-3232.

Los Angeles Times
latimes.com 01HD205

**Santa Monica
Indian Art Show**

June 1st & 2nd



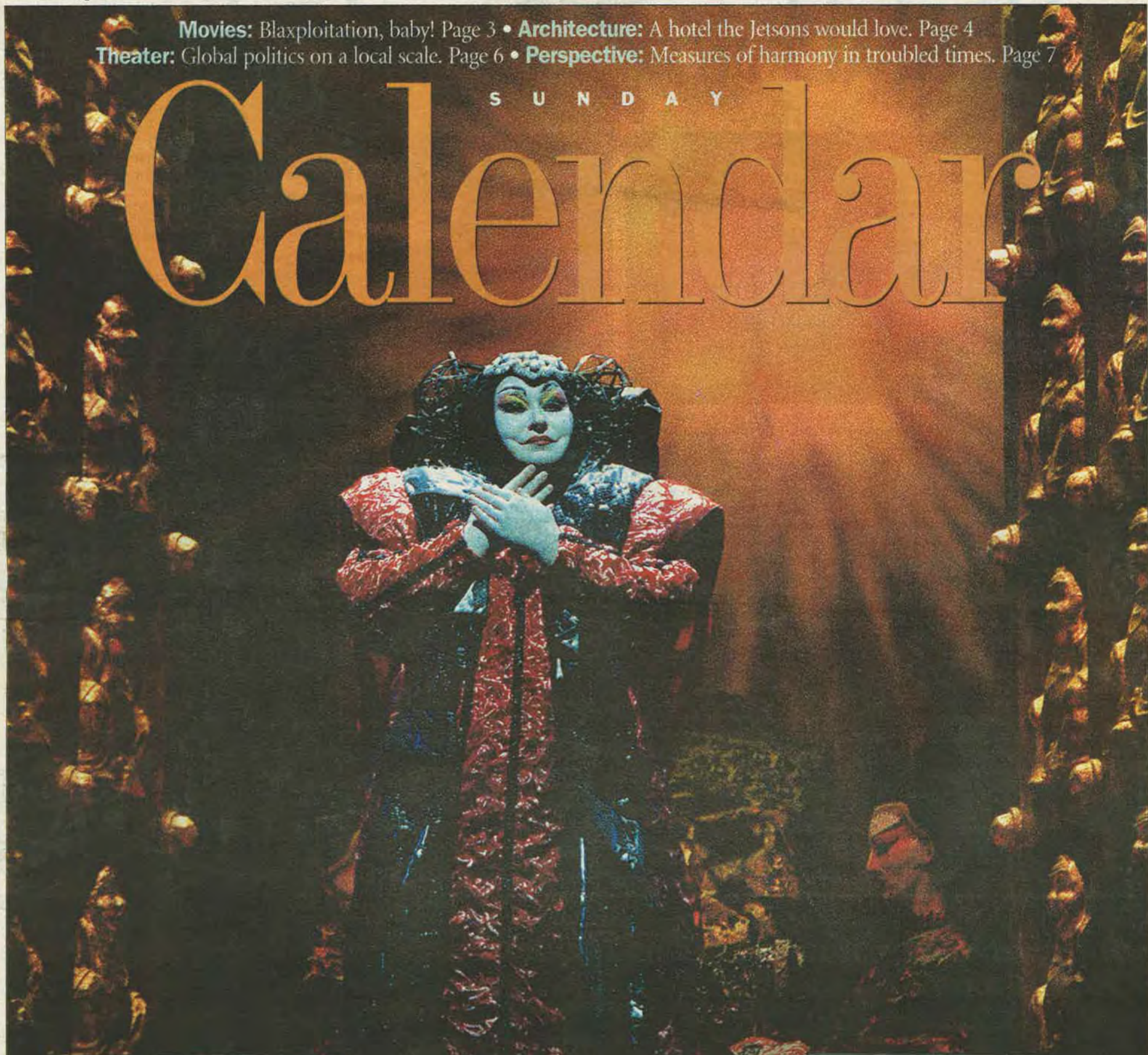
Santa Monica Civic Auditorium

Saturday 11 to 7 • Sunday 11 to 5
Admission \$7 • \$2 off with ad

Over 120 Exhibitors
Pre-Columbian • Indian • Latin American Art
Info: (818)905-9299 www.americanindianartshow.com

Movies: Blaxploitation, baby! Page 3 • **Architecture:** A hotel the Jetsons would love. Page 4
Theater: Global politics on a local scale. Page 6 • **Perspective:** Measures of harmony in troubled times. Page 7

S U N D A Y
Calendar



BEGINNING WITH THE END

Composer Luciano Berio's new finale of Puccini's famously unfinished "Turandot" is the first note in a key musical relationship with Los Angeles Opera. By Jan Breslauer. Page 8

w