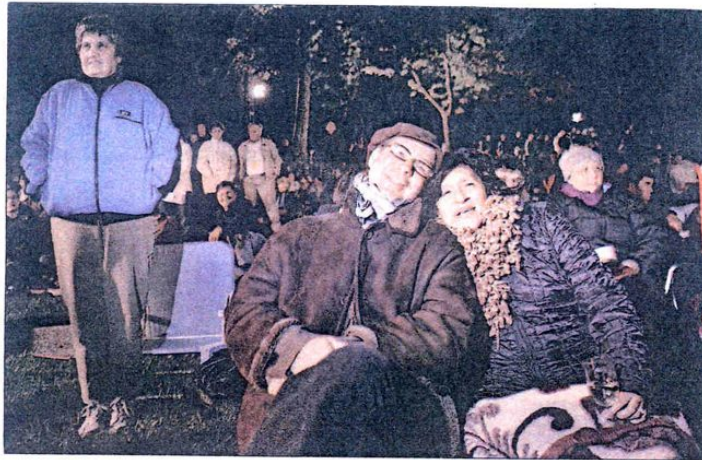


# San Jose Mercury News

October 9, 2006

# a+e

ARTS+ENTERTAINMENT [www.mercury.com](http://www.mercury.com)



Carsten Hast and Donna Satriopoulos sing along during Friday night's simulcast of "Rigoletto" at Stanford's Frost Amphitheater. San Francisco Opera had hoped the free performance would draw novice opera watchers, but newbies were hard to find.

## 'RIGOLETTO' PATRONS GET CHILLS

FREE OUTDOOR SIMULCAST AT STANFORD DRAWS MOSTLY THE TWEED SET

By Colin Seymour  
With more than 3,000 people at Stanford's Frost Amphitheater — and an additional 9,000 in San Francisco — watching a free San Francisco Opera simulcast Friday in the chilly outdoors, the expectation was that novice opera watchers would be among the gathering.  
The satellite simulcast of Verdi's "Rigoletto" from War Memorial Opera House is part of a community outreach venture spearheaded by new San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley, whose strategy is to bring opera to the people — rather than waiting for the people to come to opera. By doing this, it is hoped, opera will gain a wider audience, although newbies were hard to find Friday.  
Off-site simulcasts of operas worked for Gockley when he ran Houston's opera company. And the SFO's simulcast experiment in May proved successful when more than 8,000 gathered in San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza to watch "Madama Butterfly."

Gockley and the San Francisco Opera (SFO) are on the cutting edge of an opera-world attempt to make the venerable concert production accessible to more people.  
Last week, the SFO announced that it would launch a series of podcasts that will feature interviews with stars of its productions. The company tested this concept with an initial "Bravol! Chloé" lecture called "Opera 101," featuring conductor Sara Jobin. The goal is to help people get the most of the opera experience by hearing the music, learning about the story and hearing about the production from insiders. These podcasts can be downloaded from the SFO's Web site or from Apple's iTunes Web site.  
New York City's fabled Metropolitan Opera is also taking its productions to the people. In September, the company announced an agreement to create "Metropolitan Opera Radio" with Sirius Satellite Radio.  
The Met also said it says it will broadcast six of

**'Rigoletto'**  
By Giuseppe Verdi  
Where: Non-simulcast performances at War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco  
When: 7:30 p.m. Monday, Thursday and Oct. 26-27 p.m. Sunday and Oct. 29, 8 p.m. Oct. 21  
Tickets: \$25-\$85; (415) 864-3330; [www.sfoopera.com](http://www.sfoopera.com)

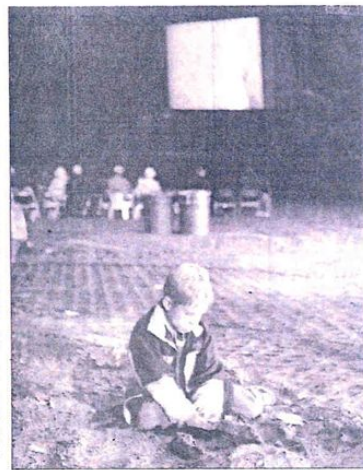
See 'RIGOLETTO,' Page 3C

## 'RIGOLETTO' | Patrons get chills

Continued from Page 1C  
this season's Saturday matinee performers live to move theaters in the United States, Canada and Europe.  
The Met, like the San Francisco Opera, is experimenting with outdoor simulcasts. This year, the Met's season opener, Puccini's "Madama Butterfly" was broadcast live in Times Square.  
Friday's simulcast of SFO's production of "Rigoletto" at Stanford dovetailed with the Stanford Arts Initiative's outreach goals. "From my perspective," said Jenny Blüfeld, the new director of Stanford Lively Arts, "this is very much in the spirit of finding ways to break down the barriers between art forms and audiences that we know will absolutely enjoy the art form but may not have the comfort level" or be able to afford it.  
At this kind of event, the expectation would be to find the modern equivalent of Shakespeare's groundlings, or the Bay Area equivalent of Guadalupe peasants in nosebleed seats at the Ballet Folklórico, among the usual tweedy arts patrons at Stanford.  
Instead, the tweed set predominated, happy to accept the SFO and Stanford largess.  
"It could have been warmer, but other than that, it couldn't have been better," said Dave Ehrhardt, 69, of Los Gatos, accompanied by his wife, Jan, college buddy Dick Mol of Los Altos and his wife, Ellie Moll. The theme wasn't whether opera is palatable but whether seeing it at Frost beat seeing it in a

traditional setting such as inside San Francisco's War Memorial.  
This was an opera crowd. They knew the plot of the production: Hunchbacked Rigoletto is an extremely unpleasant court jester, treated abjectly by everyone in his midst except his gorgeous daughter, who only recently has re-entered his life. When Rigoletto's boss, the Duke of Mantua, seduces the daughter under false pretense, Rigoletto hires an assassin. Alas, it's the daughter who ends up dead.  
Throughout the production, the entire crowd sat raptly in place. It was pretty plain many knew "Rigoletto" or weren't seeing it for the first time. Those who couldn't wait until intermission to hit the bathrooms timed their exit accordingly, right after Rigoletto's daughter delivered her famed "Caro Nome" aria.  
Still, there were opera newbies in the audience.  
Paul Keller, 48, acknowledged this was his first opera. "It was outdoors, and it was free," Keller said. But it turns out the 48-year-old Palo Alto chemist is a symphony buff.  
This was the first opera for Sou Cheng, a 30-ish Stanford graduate student from Singapore and Hong Kong, but she had seen musicals such as "Les Mis" and "Cats" in Singapore and London.  
Even the teenagers present, Gunn High School juniors Stephanie Hoffman and Naomi Schechter, for instance, were not novices. It turns out Gunn has an opera club, and Stephanie is

president.  
The Peninsula-Stanford community, one of the most affluent and well-educated in the world, clearly has its fair share of opera lovers.  
They liked this one. The wrenchingly beautiful baritone of Paolo Bonolis seemed to be a unanimous hit. He is to "Rigoletto" what Christine Brewer is to SFO's "Tristan and Isolde" (see review, back page).  
The transmission received praise, too. Although the 18-by-32-foot screen seemed a mile distant at the back of the amphitheater, it was comparable from my dead-center perch near the front to large-screen, high-definition TV despite glare from floodlights and Friday's full moon.  
The picture quality accentuated the high caliber of acting, according to Dave Ehrhardt, who at intermission exclaimed, "You can't see like that in a theater."  
The screen was high enough that no bovine hands or 6-foot-9 fellow patron could obstruct the view.  
Whether opera is better in a 50-degree amphitheater than a pricey, 70-degree auditorium remains debatable, and Bill and Diane Vaughan of San Carlos are still torn. They have seen both SFO simulcasts, counting their Friday visit to Stanford, where Bill Vaughan was a student in the 1960s — and they plan to see "Rigoletto" at War Memorial this month.



Alexei Romanov, 6, plays in a pile of sand while "Rigoletto" is shown on an 18-by-32-foot screen Friday night at Stanford's Frost Amphitheater.

Contact Colin Seymour at [csymour@mercurynews.com](mailto:csymour@mercurynews.com).