

F-M Civic Opera brings excitement to Fargo-Moorhead

By Ana Rusness

Bustling with excitement and last minute preparations, the F-M Civic Opera Company office is alive with frantic efforts to prepare a worthy welcome for acclaimed performer Peter Schickele.

Professor Peter "P.D.Q. Bach" Schickele will act as the Master of Ceremonies for the Civic Opera's Millennium Gala March 4. In this role, the wild and crazy satirist will emphasize the vibrant, expressive nature of the dramatic artform. It is through passionate experiences like this the Civic Opera company hopes to expose new people to the art form and raise money for their non-profit organization.

The Millennium Gala will feature performances of music spanning the past millennium, an aria auction, a silent auction with surprising offerings and a chance to celebrate the successful restoration and revitalization of this region's own opera company.

Schickele, the entrepreneurial host of Public Radio International's "Schickele's Mix," is also one of Fargo's own. Now a serious, highly-respected composer and music historian, spent his teenage years in Fargo. It was here that Schickele's main interest shifted from theatre to music. The Nitso Theatre, located in the Schickele basement in Ames, Iowa, became a rehearsal space for Schickele and his bassoon.

Schickele first studied music theory

from Sigvald Thompson, conductor of the Fargo-Moorhead Orchestra. At one point Fargo's only bassoonist, he branched out into practically every genre of music, including classical, jazz, rock and folk ensembles. Schickele left Fargo-Moorhead in 1953 to attend Swarthmore as their only music major. After composing and conducting four orchestral pieces, intense training and graduation, Schickele began his M.S. studies at the Julliard School of Music in New York City.

In 1959, he and several friends formed Composer's Circle, a group that held workshops, presented concerts and discussed the art of music.

After a brief teaching stint, the magic of the silver screen called Schickele. In 1965 he wrote his first feature film score for *Crazy Quilt*, began an arranging-writing collaboration with Joan Baez and staged his first P.D.Q. Bach concert. Over the following years, the number of concerts Schickele presented increased. He intertwined music and drama in other ways, forming The Open Window, a chamber-rock group which existed for three years. The Open Window featured Schickele on piano, electric piano, electric organ, electric harpsichord, electric keyboard bass, recorders, light percussion, and singing vocals. Appearances with the Cleveland Orchestra, Louisville Orchestra and Chicago Symphony lead to the mixed media product, "Three Views From The

Open Window."

Johnny Carson, the Smothers Brothers, Dick Cavett, Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops, David Frost and Mike Douglas hosted the talented Schickele on television, due in part to the over one hundred compositions he has composed over the years. In 1993, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers awarded "Schickele Mix" the Deems Taylor Award.

Another Schickele product, *The Definitive Biography of P.D.Q. Bach*, released by Random House Books, tells more of Schickele's tales, in English and German. *The Peter Schickele Rag* also offers up-to-date information on Schickele's touring schedule and recording information, rounds, crossword puzzles and "whatever else strikes Mr. Schickele's fancy."

The Fargo-Moorhead Civic Opera Company will follow their Millennium Gala with a production of "The Merry Widow." The Fargo Theatre will host the April 7 and 9 performances. Tickets for and information about Opera events can be obtained by calling (701)239-4558.

The rich artistic background of Peter Schickele illustrates the Opera's belief that children should be made aware of the wide assortment of art forms available to them. Becky Sundet-Shoenwald, Office Manager of the F-M Civic Opera, feel that children enjoy the combination of music, drama, and some-

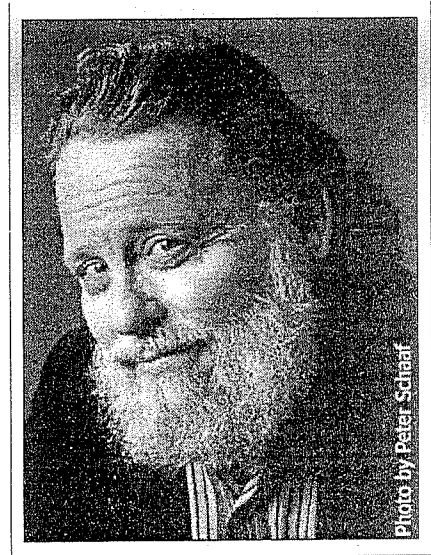


Photo by Peter Schaaf

Peter Schickele

times dance.

"Operas tell some of the greatest tales, the greatest love stories of all time," Sundet-Shoenwald said.

The growth of opera's popularity has prompted the Opera company to imagine and work towards the idea of an event similar to the Millennium Gala to become an annual event, like the Symphony Ball, around the same time every year, so people can anticipate it when they look at their calendar.

Following the Millennium Gala and the April performances of "The Merry Widow," the F-M Civic Opera plans on increasing the awareness of opera's availability to people of all ages, including children.