

Diablo Light Opera Company

P. O. Box 5034 • Walnut Creek, CA 94596

Contact

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For Immediate Release

Aerial and Illusionary Wizardry

Diablo Light Opera Will Pull Out All Stops for 'The Wizard of Oz' With Cast of 44 (and Toto, Too)

The Diablo Light Opera Company will be taking audiences down the yellow brick road--and high into the atmosphere--in a splashy, music-filled production of "The Wizard of Oz," opening Aug. 29 and continuing through Sept. 27, at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek.

Tickets (\$23-\$32) are on sale at the center ticket office, 1601 Civic Drive, (925) 943-7469, www.dlrca.org

The production will include all the familiar music from the movie version that starred Judy Garland in her blue-checked dress and ruby red slippers and "The Jitterbug," a number dropped from the classic 1939 MGM film.

The show will also feature actors suspended and soaring above the stage. It is only the second time since the center opened nearly 13 years ago that flying effects will be used.

Special illusionary effects, including a tornado, will add to the spectacle and excitement of the production, said veteran producer Helene Harks.

With a cast of 43 (and Toto, too) and an 18-piece orchestra, the production and its budget will be on a scale similar to Diablo Light Opera Company's spring production of "Ragtime" which drew critical praise and standing ovations from near-record audiences, Harks said.

"We're pulling out all the stops to make this an exciting, charming show for families and theater-goers of all ages," said Harks, who has produced more than 15 shows for DLOC in the 40 years she has been affiliated with the company. "You'll definitely know you're 'not in Kansas anymore' --and maybe not even Walnut Creek."

Starring in the coveted role of Dorothy is Madeline Trumble, a talented 13-year-old performer, of Berkeley. In June, she mesmerized judges and 300 others in attendance and won a first-place prize in the youth division of the San Francisco Bay Area Cabaret Competition with her rendition of "Over the Rainbow," the classic ballad from "The Wizard of Oz."

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Trumble said she's always loved the movie, its songs and the ruby red slippers that Judy Garland wore in the film. When Trumble was two, she received her first pair ("with all the glitter and stuff")--reproductions, of course. Since then, she's gone through 10 pairs.

Other cast members include veteran actor John Hetzler of Martinez in the dual role of Professor Marvel/Wizard of Oz; Pam Koepf, Concord, Wicked Witch/Almira Gulch; Judy Ryken, Walnut Creek, Glinda/Aunt Em; James Koponen, Pleasanton, Scarecrow/Hunk; Robert Shotty, Union city, Tin Woodsman/Hickory, and David Collins, Novato, Cowardly Lion/Zeke.

The show will be directed by Byron Peters, whose other shows for DLOC include "High Society," "Evita," "Hello, Dolly," and "Carousel." He has also directed shows for Contra Costa Musical Theatre and The Willows Theatre. When not directing, Peters is a voice and acting teacher, specializing in radio, television and multimedia.

Cheryl Yee Glass will conduct the orchestra.

"The Wizard of Oz" is Diablo Light Opera Company's final show for 2003. The company opens its new season next February with Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The King and I."

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Follow the Yellow Brick Road

Diablo Light Opera Plans Festivities for Opening of 'The Wizard of Oz'

Patrons attending the August 29 opening night performance of the Diablo Light Opera

Company's production of "The Wizard of Oz" are invited to enjoy pre-curtain festivities outside the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek.

Beginning at 7:15 p.m., the Tin Man, Scarecrow and Cowardly Lion will be available for photos for those who bring cameras.

And to guide the audience into the theater for the 8 p.m. curtain, DLOC is installing a 45-foot-long yellow brick road on the walkway leading to the center's entrance.

"We think everyone--especially kids--will enjoy the fun as well as getting into the spirit of the show," said Keith Barlow, DLOC's managing director.

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Special Wizardry

Characters Will Soar to New Heights in Diablo Light Opera's 'Wizard of Oz'

Diablo Light Opera Company's production of "The Wizard of Oz," opening August 29, will include a dazzling effect seen only once before in the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts since it opened nearly 13 years ago -- characters suspended and flying above the stage.

The last time audiences saw such a spectacle in the center's Hofmann Theatre was in the California Theatre Arts presentation of "Peter Pan" in 1997, according to Scott Denison, the center's general manager.

In "Oz," DLOC will fly Dorothy, the Wicked Witch, Glinda, and the Wizard himself through intricate mechanical systems arranged by ZFX, Inc., a Las Vegas-based firm specializing in theatrical flying and other staging illusions. The company, which will also simulate the effects of a tornado in "Oz," has "flown" such Broadway stars as Cathy Rigby in her famous role of "Peter Pan."

To ensure that everything works on schedule and that the safety of the performers is not comprised, ZFX will have trained technicians on hand for all performances, which end Sept. 27.

According to ZFX, here's how it all works:

If you know what an Etch-a-Sketch is, you have a pretty good idea of how the systems

work. Two operators are required. One person controls vertical movement, and the other controls horizontal. All components for the system move on an I-beam track suspended above the stage. For side to side movement, the control rope is manipulated in a fashion similar to the curtains in your house: to move left, pull the left side rope, to move right, pull the right side rope.

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Vertical movement is achieved through the operator simply pulling down on his rope. To lower a character, the operator simply does a controlled slip of the rope through his hands.

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Through the rehearsal process the two operators learn to function as one to enable the positioning of an actor anywhere in the air that the limitations of the space and equipment will accommodate.

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The Schedule

**‘Oz’ Will Be Presented in 19 Performances
Beginning August 29, Ending September 27**


Here is the complete performance schedule for Diablo Light Opera Company’s production of “The Wizard of Oz” at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek:

Thursdays 8 pm: □□□□□□□□ September 11, 18, 25

Fridays 8 pm: □□□□□□□□□□ August 29, September 5, 12, 19 and 26

Saturdays 2 p.m. □□□□□□□□ September 13, 20 and 27

Saturdays 8 pm: □□□□□□□□□□ August 30, September 6, 13, 20 and 27

Sundays 2 pm  August 31, September 7 and 14

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