

An operatic portrait of Puccini...

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Even those with a casual acquaintance with opera have probably seen or heard something from Puccini's "Tosca," "Madama Butterfly" or "La Boheme."

But you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone, even opera fans, who have seen the composer's "Edgar" on the stage.

This week Kansas Citians will have a chance to see Puccini's first completed opera, a youthful morsel with flashes of the greatness that would bloom in later verismo masterpieces.

At 8 p.m. Friday and 2 p.m. Aug. 14 at the Folly Theater, the Civic Opera Theater of Kansas City opens its 21st season with "Edgar." Andy Anderson is conductor and stage director of this semi-staged production.

"It's a love triangle. Actually it's a love square," Anderson said of the story. "Boy and girl are in love, but boy (Edgar) has loved another girl before that. And the girl has loved others, too. Several others. It happens that the boy's best friend, Frank, is in love with the girl he loved earlier."

And on it goes.

"It's very Carmenesque," Anderson said.

The musical language, he added, is that of the Wagner and Verdi that the young Puccini was hearing at the time.

"In a lot of ways, it's the Puccini that we've come to know, with a twist." The female lead sings in a florid bel canto style, he said, while the other characters are more in keeping with the later Puccini.

"The orchestra is thick and lush, like all his other operas," Anderson said.

This "Edgar" marks the inaugural collaboration between the Civic Opera Theater and the Civic Orchestra of Kansas City, which Anderson also directs.

The cast includes Robert Grady in the title role, Bruce Burstert as Frank, Megan King as Fidelia, Stacey Uthe-Stofferahn as Tigrana and Phil Etherton as Gualtiero, the father.

Tickets cost \$18 (\$15 for students and seniors, \$10 for persons in groups of six or more). Call (816) 235-6222.