

# Italy's La Scala removes Leonard Bernstein's "Candide" from 2007 program

The Associated Press

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ROME: La Scala opera house has canceled a production of Bernstein's "Candide" that features a scene with actors dancing in underwear while wearing masks of world leaders including President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

La Scala said in a statement that the decision was made after artistic director Stephane Lissner watched a performance Tuesday at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris, where the production is being staged until the end of this month.

The opera "was not in line with La Scala's artistic program," the Milan theater said in a statement issued Thursday evening. It did not elaborate.

In the production directed by Robert Carsen, actors wear masks of former Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, U.S. President George W. Bush, French President Jacques Chirac and Russian President Vladimir Putin as they dance in their underwear and ties featuring their national flags.

La Scala spokesman Carlo Maria Cella said Friday that this scene "was only part of the problem, and a small part... It is only three minutes."

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Cella said Carsen's production largely modified Bernstein's original work, including inserting new text, and that the final product "rather than being close to the original, is based on it to create a peculiar work."

"It is not a value judgment. Carsen is a wonderful director who's made beautiful shows," said Cella, speaking from his Milan office. "It is an issue of compatibility with La Scala's program."

Cella said it had not been decided what production would replace "Candide," which had been scheduled for June-July.

Bernstein's "Candide" is a musical adaptation of Voltaire's satire against eternal optimism. The production directed by Carsen, a Canadian, is a follow-up to the Broadway play 50 years ago that satirized McCarthyism.

This one updates it to show how the world has lost optimism about idealized America.

"I don't think that the Milanese audience can be offended or shocked by one scene. It is satire and it is theater," Carsen was quoted as saying by La Repubblica, in comments that the Rome daily said were offered before La Scala announced its decision.

"'Candide' is political, social, intellectual satire — or else it is nothing," Carsen said. "I must give the audience the tools to understand, some references to our era."

In France, L'Express weekly called the production a "total success" but also said it was "cruel and vulgar, often cynical, sometimes right on."

La Scala opened its 2006-07 season on Dec. 7 with an extravagant production by Franco Zeffirelli of Verdi's "Aida."

Days later, tenor Roberto Alagna stormed offstage after being booed during a performance, making headlines across the world. Alagna was immediately replaced by a stunned understudy who wore jeans for the first two acts.

Zeffirelli defended La Scala's decision to pull "Candide."

"I don't think it's an act of censorship but just a way to intervene over a satire that is only a form of self-indulgent exhibitionism," he told La Repubblica.

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