

## FREEZE FRAME

## A singer-sculptor who's carved out his niche

■ Maurice Stern, tenor and sculptor, who sings the role of Bacchus in two performances of Seattle Opera's "Ariadne auf Naxos" (Jan. 20 and 25).

by Melinda Bargreen  
Times music critic

During Maurice Stern's student days as an aspiring opera tenor, he indulged in his favorite hobby of sculpture by using a couple of aspiring actor buddies as models.

One was Dustin Hoffman. Another was Robert Duvall.

The life-size sculptures of both actors — now stored in Stern's in-laws' home in Bellevue — remind Stern not only of a lot of wild "untellable stories," but also of beginnings for all three friends. It was Hoffman, who was already starting to get recognition as an actor, who helped finance an audition tour for the young singer.

And Hoffman later got Stern a job as an attendant in the Psychiatric Institute in New York City, where the young actor had previously worked. The job entailed serving meals and playing cards with "mental patients at various stages of convalescence," as Stern remembers it: "It was there that Dustin amassed his perceptions about idiot savants which later resulted in his magnificent portrayal in 'Rain Man.'"

Later, Stern ended up sharing the same director with Duvall: Bruce Beresford, who directed Du-

vall's Oscar-winning performance in "Tender Mercies," also directed Stern in the leading role of Dick Johnson in Puccini's "The Girl of the Golden West" at the Spoleto Festival (Italy) in 1985.

Stern is in Seattle now to rehearse another role that might be reminiscent of student days: Bacchus, the killer tenor role in the Strauss opera "Ariadne auf Naxos." Like the other "Ariadne" cast members, Stern originally was signed to sing in Wagner's "Tannhaeuser," the opera chosen by company general director Speight Jenkins for this time slot.

But after learning that the company's "Tannhaeuser" sets had sustained water damage, Jenkins had few alternatives: Rebuild the "Tannhaeuser" sets (very expensive and time-consuming), create a new production of that or another opera (even more expensive and time-consuming), or find the best available production to borrow that could employ the same performers. Jenkins chose the last option.

Bacchus is a new role for Stern. Seattle, however, is certainly familiar territory for the tenor, who lived here for five years in the 1970s when he taught at the University of Washington School of Music and at Cornish Institute.

"While I was teaching here," Stern remembers, "my voice developed into a dramatic tenor, al-



Mike Siegel / Seattle Times

Tenor Maurice Stern, who will be appearing with the Seattle Opera, carved this life-size figure of actor Robert Duvall.

Please see **STERN** on G 4



# This singer-sculptor has carved a niche

---

## STERN

continued from G 3

---

though I didn't do much singing outside of a few concerts at the UW and a few orchestral and opera appearances (in Honolulu, Detroit, Houston and Reno)."

Dramatic tenors sing heavyweight repertoire, designed for large, mature voices that can handle certain Italian and German operas. At the extreme end of the dramatic repertoire is the heroic (helden) tenor, that rare creature so in demand for Wagner's "Ring" and a handful of other crucial roles.

When Stern discovered that he had become a dramatic tenor, he headed for Europe, where his first engagements were in Linz, Austria, in "Turandot" and "Tannhaeuser." After those 1979 performances, he was engaged at the

Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Dusseldorf, where he and his wife, Molly, still maintain an apartment (in addition to one in New York City).

He studied with the fabled tenor Franco Corelli in New York for three years: "I picked up his vibes and soaked up his aura."

Among the international engagements of the past few seasons were some performances in northern Italy of "Die Fledermaus," where the conductor was Hermann Michael — the same maestro who leads Seattle Opera's "Ariadne" performances ("I like him and his conducting very much").

In this country, Stern's engagements have included opera and concert performances with the Detroit Symphony, Honolulu Symphony, Wichita and Kansas City symphonies; he is set to sing Radames in "Aida" for the Greater Miami Concert Association, and other leading roles in Utah, Austin and Colorado.