

6 Questions. DoeHEAD David Kanzeg

Jaelyn Molyneux, Calgary Herald

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With adultery, financial ruin and social stigma The Ballad of Baby Doe has all the grand dramatics befitting an opera. But more than that, the story of a wealthy silver magnate and his beguiling wife living on the American frontier circa 1880 has gained a hint of rock-star status--at least that of an old-school rock star who, after 50 years in the biz, still has a dedicated base of groupies. In the case of Baby Doe, the diehard fans willing to travel wherever they can to see it are affectionately known as DoeHEADS. Among the fans making their way to Calgary is Leyna Gabriele, who played the lead in its first staging in 1956, as well as DoeHEAD co-founder David Kanzeg, who is revved up to share his knowledge of all things Baby Doe at Calgary Opera's community symposium Saturday afternoon. First, Kanzeg took a few minutes to answer questions from Swerve's Jaelyn Molyneux.

How does a touring-opera fan club begin? "It grew out of an idea a friend of mine had to celebrate the opera in some form. Over dinner we thought: Why don't we form a group that is like the Deadheads? That is, to travel and see the show as a way of supporting the group, which is similar to what the Deadheads do for The Grateful Dead. We are not by any means a vast hoard of people. We're a small group of people who find the means to see the production."

How many times have you seen Baby Doe on stage?

"I'm coming up on 27 performances. I've traveled from San Francisco to Boston."

When was your first taste of Baby Doe? "I caught it by chance on the radio when I was a teenager and was immediately attracted to it. And then I discovered that it was a real place with a landscape that one could actually visit. I first saw it live in 1976--the New York City Opera with Ruth Welting in the lead role."

How much time do you DoeHEAD? "It depends what's going on. Leading up to this Calgary performance, I've spent a fair amount of time on it. This morning I was going over talking points for the symposium. Last week I was putting together a Powerpoint presentation. It takes up time that I might be spending doing frivolous things. "

What is it about this opera that inspires so much dedication?

"It's the music. That's what drew me in the beginning and that's what has kept me focussed. It's different every time I see it. Just like any music, The Ballad of Baby Doe is subject to lots of interpretations. Sometimes Baby Doe (pictured) comes across as more catty than she was. Sometimes she's played more demure."

How important is the Internet in spreading the word of the DoeHEADS? "(At first) we thought we should use it as a repository or central address for people who were interested in the opera.

It's a kind of legacy with the best bibliography and all kinds of articles and speeches. It's the one place where you can find all the information you need about the opera."

The Meet Some DoeHEADS community symposium is Saturday, Jan. 26, 2 p.m. at the Jubilee Auditorium. The opera is Jan. 26, Jan. 30 and Feb. 1 at the Jube. calgaryopera.com.

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