

Opera and baseball mix in San Francisco

By LISA LEFF, Associated Press Writer Fri Sep 28, 9:57 AM ET

SAN FRANCISCO - When the fat lady sings Friday, her audience will be eating peanuts and Cracker Jack.



Putting a major league twist on efforts by U.S. opera companies to bring their art to the masses, the [San Francisco Opera](#) plans to broadcast its latest production at the city's baseball stadium while it's being performed live across town.

Instead of rooting for their downtrodden home team, thousands of people are expected to fill AT&T Park's field and lower stands to watch Saint-Saens' "Samson and Delilah" starring Olga Borodina and Clifton Forbis on a jumbo video screen.

"We are going to have fun. We are going to sing 'Take Me Out to the Opera.' We are going to have tailgate parties, load up on the garlic fries, get our blue bloods here clotted up," said the opera's general director, David Gockley, who will welcome the satellite spectators from the stage of the [War Memorial Opera House](#).

Gockley, a baseball fan, came to [San Francisco](#) from Houston last year with the goal of doing more to "democratize" the company, to "open it up, air it out" and make it more accessible to new patrons, particularly young people. The first production he oversaw was simulcast to a truck-mounted screen in a public plaza near City Hall. He spoke admiringly of the [Metropolitan Opera's](#) decision to project its season-opening performance of "Madama Butterfly" last year on a giant screen in [Times Square](#).

"It gives a sense to the city that you are celebrating opera in one of the most hallowed places of the city," Gockley said. "You do that, and all of a sudden opera takes a more important and central role in entertainment, in society."

Exporting carefully choreographed theater productions to remote locations requires more than setting up a handful of tripods. The free "Samson and Delilah" simulcast has its own director, Frank Zamacona, a veteran of documentaries and rock concert footage whose clients have included [The Grateful Dead](#). He has not been shy about letting lighting and makeup departments know when their techniques won't translate well to the big screen.

The changes won't be dramatic enough for the theater audience to notice, but could make a big difference for those in the ballpark, said Zamacona. For example, he asked to have the wig that Forbis wears to play the luxuriously tressed Samson refitted so the netting that holds it on would not be visible during close-ups.

While watching a video of an earlier performance this week, Zamacona noticed that in one scene the staff carried by a character obscured Samson's face from a certain camera angle. He made a note to ask the singer to hold the prop differently.

"No longer can (the cast) get away with, 'I'm not feeling well, so I'm not going to be all the way on.' People will notice," he said. "With high-definition, you can see every pore."

Baseball has inspired opera in the past, most notably William Schuman's 1953 "The Mighty Casey," an opera based on "Casey at the Bat." "The Summer King," based on the life of Negro League great [Josh Gibson](#), is currently under development by American Opera Projects, a [New York](#) company devoted to bringing works by new composers to the stage.

But the [San Francisco Opera's](#) simulcast is thought to be the first pairing of grand stage spectacle and major league sports of its kind.

The opera plans to use the show's three intermissions to both enlighten audience members and perhaps enlist them as future paying customers. During the breaks, behind-the-scenes interviews with the cast and opera staff, even scenery changes will be shown on the screen.

People who attend the ballpark simulcast will be offered a half-off promotional rate for certain performances during the remainder of the season. Because the offer only will be available through the Internet, Gockley said it will give him a tool for gauging how well the ballpark experiment worked in producing opera fans. About 20,000 people have pre-registered for free tickets to the show.

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