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### TIMES BULLETIN

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## 'Porgy and Bess' set to kick off on NPAC stage

BY ED GEBERT

Times Bulletin News Writer

It was 75 years ago when George Gershwin's "Porgy & Bess" premiered on stage in Boston. Next week, a new production premieres at the Niswonger Performing Arts Center in Van Wert.

Producer Michael Capasso is excited to bring a brand new production of the operatic classic to the public. "The drama is such that anyone can embrace it. "It's about real people and everyday life. It's American folk opera, is what it is. It's in English, so everybody can understand it. And it has plenty of hit tunes," he shared. "We thought it was time to bring it back to the public, and the 75th anniversary really, I felt, was the right time to do it."

The performance in Van Wert is the kickoff of a five-year commitment for the show. Capasso explained, "The initial portion of the tour is 31 cities in 6 weeks. Then we have some time off, then go back out and do some longer sit-downs. We go to Charlotte for a week, we go to Boston for a week, we go to Hartford for a week. Then we're looking at Mexico and Europe very shortly. I have a five-year commitment to the Gershwins to tour Porgy & Bess for five years. This is the beginning of what is going to be a long run."

The show itself has run for years at theaters all across the country and around the world. Many members of this cast have sung their roles in other productions. But according to Capasso, the new rendition will look completely different than past presentations. The costumes will be more than just burlap and denim. The colors will be reminiscent of Charleston, South Carolina. The set is designed in a new way. "In our production, the set turns and glides around the stage in such a way that we're able to make it look seven different ways to make it look a little more interesting," said Capasso.

The company has been rehearsing in New York for six weeks and is ending a two-week technical rehearsal period. Putting together a production with new costumes, new sets, and a new cast has been a long process.

"Everything is new, including the staging and in many cases some people are new to the roles, which is good," he pointed out. "We didn't want just to put out another Porgy & Bess with people who have done it a million times to go about it like they are doing their homework. We wanted something new and vital that has an energy to it."

With Van Wert being the first stop of a five-year run, the crew will take the opportunity to rehearse the load-out and the load-in. The performance is set for the 18th, but the company will begin arriving here on the 16th.

Once the curtain closes on the NPAC stage, the show heads for Columbus. But those who attend will likely still be humming the songs - "Summertime," "I Got Plenty O' Nuttin'" and "It Ain't Necessarily So."

"It's a great piece of American history," remarked Capasso. "It's a tremendous piece of American musical history, and I think that people will really, really enjoy it if they come to see it. Van Wert is going to get the premiere performance of this entire new production."