Blonde," in which she "updates" Shakespeare to the requirements of 1898 Broadway, and an Act III pageant, in which she glorifies the American girl (herself, naturally). In his City Opera debut, Richard Whitehouse was stodgy even for the English lord he played, but he sang with a true operetta baritone, lightweight and ingratiating. Lentz kept a firm grip on his character's implausible transit from playboy to union boss to war hero, and he delivered his songs with clarity and point. He was the vehicle for one of Alden's favorite visual effects — stripping the tenor to his underwear — but he maintained his dignity.

DUDLEY, SOUSA'S AMERICAN GIRL

Jonathan Sheffer conducted with hands nearly as heavy as Alden's. Sousa's flavorful score contains ingenious waltzes, cakewalks and more (heroically restored by Jerrold Fisher), but Sheffer treated everything as marching-band material. Designer John Conklin's unit set, a shiny box trussed with iron beams and gaslights, looked best suited to the glassworks in Act II, less suited to the drawing room of Act I and unsuited to the Army camp of Act III; Mark McCullough kept it all glowing with blue, red and amber lighting. Gabriel Berry's costumes reinterpreted turn-of-the-last-century styles in a Crayola fever of bold, saturated colors. Victoria Morgan provided the choreography.

WILLIAM V. MADISON

SEATTLE

Seattle Opera's first production specifically designed for the Mercer Arts Arena — the company's temporary home until the new house is completed, in 2003 (it is hoped) — was Strauss's *Salome*. The set was semi-abstract, the costumes were semi-historical; the lighting, though occasionally related to the stage-action, seemed mainly designed to provide a series of pretty contrasts. All lacked dramatic consequence. Strong voices were needed on this set (full of dead spaces), in this arena, with a huge orchestra (the score calls for 105 musicians) playing in a large, open, out-front pit. Fauré called *Salome* "a symphonic poem with additional voice parts," and this production sometimes sounded that way. Though Gerard Schwarz conjured a sumptuous sound, full of spine-tingling details, from his orchestra, the singers occasionally suffered from what felt like heavy-handed underlining. Even Richard Paul Fink, a solid, vocally centered Jochanaan, disappeared once or twice in the orchestral tsunamis.

Thomas Studebaker, dressed like an errant tank-commander from Rommel's Desert Corps, sang a sweetly clear Narraboth, but his suicide was clumsily staged, the nadir of Sharon Ott's unfocused, erratic direction. Joyce Castle made a spectacular Herodias, wearing the best costume onstage and singing well, a harridan of royal lineage. Peter Kazaras (Herodes) had a much harder time competing with the orchestra. Gustav Andreassen (as the First Nazarene) and the quintet of Jews (William Saetre, Mark Tevis, Steven Goldstein, Wesley Edwin Rogers and Rob Toren) were all in fine fettle on both nights I attended the opera. I'd never realized before how obviously the quintet anticipates the musical chaos in the final act of *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Salome depends for its kick, its magic and its mystery on the woman who sings the Judean princess. Happily, Speight Jenkins (the general director) alternated two strong singing actors for the title role. Nina Warren has won praise for her Salome, especially in Germany. Warren (April 6) was always audible but not always appetizing: loud, sometimes undigested sound, sharp because constantly pushed. Her princess was petulant, coarse (her mother's daughter), lascivious and frankly impatient.

KAZARAS, CASTLE:
SEATTLE'S *PARENTS TERRIBLES*

All the notes were there; the voice was imperious but the interpretation unsubtle. Her movements looked calculated, and she sang the role without convincing one that she knew more than the director had told her about it.

What a contrast the Salome of Eilana Lappalainen (April 5)! At first young, bewildered by the Baptist's magnetism and her own sexual awakening, Lappalainen's princess was carefully colored, vocally, from scene to scene, growing stronger and more terrifying after Herod asks her to dance. Her dance of the seven veils is simply the best I've ever seen (including Welitsch, Borkh and Stratas — on film, perhaps the greatest Salome ever). Lappalainen's extraordinary physical lightness and agility, her diverse vocal palette and her grasp of the character's complexity were deeply moving. When she sang (addressing Jochanaan's severed head) "If you had seen me, if you had looked at me, I know you would have loved me; and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death," one felt she had touched the quick of Strauss's magnificent portrait of this legendary princess. Lappalainen reprises the role for New York City Opera in the fall.

JOHN F. HULCOOP

COSTA MESA, CA

Ecstatically acclaimed — in some quarters, at least — at its San Francisco Opera premiere, in 2000, *Dead Man Walking* has already grown new legs. A wholly new production of the Jake Heggie/Terrence McNally heartstring-tugger, introduced by Opera Pacific in Costa Mesa's Orange County Performing Arts Center in April for a five-performance run, now moves on to engagements at Cincinnati Opera (July 11), New York City Opera (Sept. 13), Austin Lyric Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Pittsburgh and Baltimore Operas. (Meanwhile, designer Michael Yeargan's original San Francisco production gathers no dust, being slated for a run at Adelaide's South Australia State Opera in August 2003.)

Portability was, of course, the principal mandate of Broadway director Leonard Foglia's new staging (seen at the premiere, April 16). In place of San Francisco Opera's prison panorama, with inmate-filled cell-blocks, tricky lighting effects and a veritable Stonehenge of massive stage pieces, designer Michael McGarty offered an open-spaced, abstract look. Panels of chain-link or clear plastic move up and down, suggesting nothing so much as a chorus of unmanned guillotines; on spiraling staircases on both sides, again enclosed in chain-link, guards and prisoners in constant motion create a harrowing sense of the frame around a soulless machine. Sister Helen and Joe DeRocher enact their colloquy on small raft-like surfaces with a beam of light between them symbolizing the separation of their souls across a space that could be a narrow river or an interplanetary void.

This open space is, indeed, the principal triumph of this reborn *Dead Man*. Operagoers who find comfort in Heggie's listener-friendly musical gestures and McNally's simplistic wordplay — and even the growing chorus of those who don't — are set free to react to the humanistic concerns of Sister Helen Prejean's harrowing Death Row memoir, without confronting the informational overload of San Francisco's grandiose visuals. Opera Pacific's artistic director, John DeMain, conducted a taut, driving performance punctuated by wrenching bursts of fury from Henri Venanzi's small, expert chorus.

As Sister Helen, Kristine Jepson — who alternated with Susan Graham in San Francisco — gave an altogether satisfying performance, somewhat less frazzled than Graham's larger-than-life theatricality but ultimately most touching. (In the last two performances, Theodora Hanslowe assumed the role.) Repeating their San Francisco roles were John Packard as DeRocher and Frederica von Stade — for whom Heggie is virtually house composer — as his mother. Packard and von Stade summoned maximum sympathy, both for the characters they had been enlisted to portray and — in the view of one listener at least — for themselves. One wished that they had been vouchsafed stronger, more defining music.

The true-life Sister Helen attended the Opera Pacific premiere and, beaming approval, took her bow onstage at the end. Outside the hall, peaceful protesters collected signatures against capital punishment. One had to assume, therefore, that both this beautifully spirited, compassionate woman and the cause her book has evoked consider themselves well-served by having their thoughts made into operatic grist. Some, however, might disagree.

ALAN RICH

SARASOTA

As part of artistic director Victor DeRenzi's ongoing twenty-four-year traversal of Verdi's complete oeuvre, Sarasota Opera this season offered a genuine repertoire curio with *Le Trouvère*, the rarely performed French version of *Il Trovatore*. Unlike *Don Carlos* and *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, which were originally written in French and now receive occasional mountings in their original versions, *Il Trovatore* seems so much a part of Italian blood-and-thunder drama that it's jarring to encounter the opera in its Gallic recasting. *Trovatore* was hugely successful from its premiere in 1853, yet Verdi was frustrated by artistically dubious productions of his operas in France and spent much time battling copyright cases in the Paris courts. If he reworked *Trovatore* himself, Verdi reasoned, he could better protect his work, as well as produce a healthy financial windfall.

In addition to the language switch, there are some less obvious changes in *Le Trouvère*, including minor orchestral rescoring and some extra lines for Azucena in the dungeon scene. Most jolting is