



La Scala Plans EU350,000 Gala Dinner Amid Lawmakers' Protests

Dec. 5 (Bloomberg) -- Milan's La Scala opera house is going ahead with a 350,000 euro (\$444,000) gala dinner after the Dec. 7 opening night of Verdi's "Don Carlo," even as politicians criticize such ostentation amid the global economic slump.

The dinner for 850 guests will be held in the courtyard and halls of Palazzo Marino, the headquarters of the city council led by Mayor Letizia Moratti, the organizers told reporters at the theater today. The costs of the event will be paid for by sponsors Eni SpA, Bayerische Motoren Werke AG, American Express Co. and Rolex, La Scala spokesman Carlo Maria Cella said.

Pierfrancesco Majorino, the local head of the center-left opposition Democratic Party, is among policymakers who have asked Moratti to cancel the dinner because of the "extremely delicate and dramatic economic and social" situation. Italy, the third-biggest economy in the euro region, last quarter slipped into its worst recession for 12 years.

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and soccer star David Beckham and his pop star wife Victoria may be among the VIPs attending the premiere, according to press reports.

The menu, prepared by Relais & Chateaux's Da Vittorio chefs Enrico and Roberto Cerea, includes Milan's traditional risotto with saffron and veal with bone marrow dishes. About 140 chefs and waiters will be preparing and serving the dinner.

"The menu as well as the location arrangements are strictly linked to the opera," Cerea said. "It's the one day when Milan is under the spotlight of the world, so we also want to offer some typical dishes."

Opening the Season

The La Scala opening night, held for the past 42 years on Dec. 7, a holiday celebrating Milan's patron Saint Ambrogio, earns the theater about 2 million euros and is the city's biggest social event of the year. La Scala and a union representing musicians and singers agreed earlier this week on a new contract, averting a strike that threatened the opening night.

The new "Don Carlo" is the four-act version of Verdi's 1867 grand opera that's set during the Spanish Inquisition. It features Giuseppe Filianoti and Stuart Neill as the hero, and Fiorenza Cedolins and Micaela Carosi as Elisabeth de Valois, and runs through the holiday season to Jan. 15.

About 450 magnums of Bellavista sparkling wine will be offered to guests at the gala dinner, said Mattia Vezzola, one of the company's wine experts. "We're proposing a wine from 2004 because it's one of the best years in the past three decades and it's when La Scala reopened after the restructuring."

Guests will also be able to admire "The Conversion of Saul" by Caravaggio, which will be exhibited at Palazzo Marino until Dec. 14.