

NATIONAL CAPITAL OPERA SOCIETY
Newsletter

August 1992

SOCIÉTÉ D'OPÉRA DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE
Bulletin

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Louis Quilico sings for the NCOS

To celebrate Canada's 125th anniversary, the National Capital Opera Society, in cooperation with the National Arts Centre, is presenting a benefit recital in the NAC Theatre on Saturday 24 October 1992, at 7:30 pm; Louis Quilico, Canada's famous operatic treasure, will be the featured performer. He will be joined, at his request, by a young singer. The result will be a celebration of Canadian achievement in the arts; money raised will go to the society, enabling us to continue our promotion of opera, particularly through the Brian Law Opera Scholarship.

Tickets for the recital cost \$35 and \$45 and are available at the NAC box office and at Ticket Master (755 1111). And despite what you might or might not read elsewhere, the starting time really is 7:30 pm.

Following the recital, there will be a coffee-and-cake reception sponsored by Morgan Tours. Join us and meet Mr Quilico! Tickets for the reception are only \$10 and their quantity is limited. So order now by calling 592 6721.

MC

Summary of forthcoming local events

These are the local events taking place before the next *Newsletter*. Each is mentioned in more detail elsewhere in this one.

Louis Quilico	Benefit recital	24 October	7:30 pm	National Arts Centre
<i>La Cenerentola</i>	Opera	10, 12, 14, 16, 18 September	8:30 pm	National Arts Centre
<i>Aida</i>	Opera video	21 September	7:00 pm	Ottawa Public Library
<i>The Flying Dutchman</i>	Opera video	20 October	7:00 pm	Ottawa Public Library
<i>Andrea Chénier</i>	Morgan Tour	26 September		Montreal Opera

Have you donated to the Brian Law Scholarship?

On Monday evening, 18 November 1991, the Opera of the National Arts Centre was filled to capacity as Ottawa bade adieu to a major figure in the music community for the past twenty-five years, Brian Law, as he departed for the green pastures and woolly sheep of New Zealand. Many spokesmen from that community expressed to Brian their appreciation for his many gifts and contributions to choral, symphonic, and operatic music. We in the NCOS were delighted when Brian allowed us to establish The Brian Law Opera Scholarship in recognition of his many years of involvement in opera—with the National Arts Centre Festival Ottawa and later productions, with Opera Lyra Ottawa, and with the Opéra de Montréal.

In the previous *Newsletter* a form was enclosed for your donations to the endowment fund established by the Society. *Now is your opportunity to show your*

appreciation of Brian Law's talents in a very tangible way—make your contribution today, and speak to your friends! Make your cheque payable to the National Capital Opera Society—Brian Law Fund. While the fund is growing and the NCOS has made a solid contribution to it from their recent fund-raising ventures, we have not yet reached our goal of a \$15 000 trust fund from which we will be able to make scholarship awards of \$1000 annually, beginning in January 1993. We now know the date of the first competition for the Scholarship: 21 January 1993: buy your 1993 diary now and set aside this date.

It is up to us all to make the Scholarship fund a viable project of the National Capital Opera Society. Won't you join us?

Bobbi Cain
Chairman of the
Brian Law Scholarship Committee

Rossini on CDs

This bicentennial year celebrating Rossini's birth in 1792, the number one Rossini opera is *The Barber of Seville*, and the best recording available is not the newest but the Maria Callas and Tito Gobbi performance on EMI CDS 7 47634 8. Yes, I know Maria Callas specialized in tragic heroines; but I also know a great singing actress when I hear one, especially when she is singing with another master of the stage. Don't miss this performance. If you must have the latest sound, try Agnes Baltsa and Thomas Allen on a Philips recording conducted by Neville Marriner—it is excellent, but still not as remarkable as the one previously mentioned.

An earlier opera by Rossini, *L'italiana in Algeri*, in the DG 427 331-2 recording with Baltsa and Raimondi, conducted by Abbado, is also an essential purchase. Of this opera Stendhal said that it was music that “makes one forget the sadness of the world.” The recording is a masterpiece technically and the ensemble singing, especially at the end of Act I, is unbelievable.

The next “must” is the opera of which Donizetti said that if Rossini wrote Act I and Act III, God must have written Act II. Composed to a French text, *Guillaume Tell* is often performed in Italian. Fortunately there are two excellent versions available, the original on EMI CMS 7 69951 2 with Bacquier, Caballé, and Gedda, conducted by the great Verdi champion Lamberti Guardelli, and the Italian *Guglielmo Tell* with Milnes, Freni, and Pavarotti, conducted by Chailly (London 417 154-2). The advantage to the latter set is that it includes an English translation of the text.

If I have left out *La Cenerentola*—although there is a very fine recording on Philips 420 468-2 with Baltsa, Ariaza, and Raimondi—it is because the August issue of *The Gramophone* has announced that a new recording with Cecilia Bartoli as Cinderella and Chailly conducting is forthcoming. Like everyone who went to Lanaudière last summer, I was captivated by this dazzling young singer and would recommend that you wait for further word before spending your

money on a fourth great Rossini opera. On the other hand, one might well question the possibility of a better bass than Raimondi in the role of Magnifico.

But what of all the other operas by Rossini? Remember that many of these were crucial to the development of great opera composers like Meyerbeer, Donizetti, and Verdi. First of all we'll look at recent digital recordings. A few years ago the release of *La Donna del Lago* (CBS M2K 39311) and *Maometto Secondo* (Philips 412 148-2) created sensations, as here were two major Rossini works rarely performed and given outstanding interpretations by masters like Samuel Ramey, who sings in both operas. You probably know that Rossini wrote many more serious operas than the comic ones he is most noted for, and here are two excellent examples. The former is to a libretto inspired by Sir Walter Scott and has much delightful music, more authentically Scottish than Donizetti's *Lucia*. *Maometto* has many exciting moments and was used by Rossini to create another opera, *Le siège de Corinthe*.

More recently there has appeared the world premiere recording of *Il viaggio a Reims* (DG 415 498-2), being sung this season at Covent Garden, and containing a who's who of contemporary Rossini singers, all under Abbado. This opera was written as a *pièce d'occasion* and has rarely been performed. However, the quality of the music and the singing earned the recording the "best of the year" award from *The Gramophone*. If you think you've never heard any of this opera before, you may be familiar with *Le Comte Ory* (Philips 422 406-2). This opera was performed in Ottawa not too many years ago, and the recent recording has such great voices as John Aler, Sumi Jo, and Gino Quilico, under John Eliot Gardiner. Rossini borrowed extensively from the *Viaggio* for this opera. But a real Rossini fan will want to have both. Another recent and excellent recording is *Zelmira* (Erato 2292-45419-2), not a great drama, but certainly an occasion for some excellent singing by Cecilia Gasdia and Chris Merritt under the direction of Claudio Scimone.

Of the older recordings, Rossini's first big hit *Tancredi* is only available on a flawed live performance (albeit recorded in the theatre

where the first performance was given), but the singing of Marilyn Horne and Lella Cuberli makes this recording attractive (CBS M3K 39073).

The people of Milan were not convinced that Rossini had written another great comic masterpiece like *L'italiana en Algeri* when his new opera *Il turco in Italia* was produced at La Scala. The current CD (EMI CDS 7 493442) does contain some elegant singing by Nicolai Gedda, but it will take a newer, livelier performance than this to convince me that the Milanese weren't right.

Semiramide has just been revived at the Met (you may have seen the telecast recently) and the London recording (425 481-2) boasts Joan Sutherland in the title role and Marilyn Horne as her son / potential husband / potential murderer, with Richard Bonyngge presiding over the orchestra. Both Sutherland and Horne sing magnificently.

Philips has just released three Rossini operas recorded in the years between 1975 and 1981. *Otello* (432 456-2) cannot be compared with Verdi's opera of the same name. But there are some good things in the first two acts, although the plot changes are downright bad, and Act III has some glorious music. José Carreras leads the six—that's right, six—tenor roles in this opera and is joined by Frederica von Stade and the ubiquitous Samuel Ramey.

Carreras, with Montserrat Caballé this time, sings *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra* (432 453-2) in a slice of British history that only an Italian opera librettist with the improbable name of Giovanni Federico Schmidt could think up. This opera is notorious for the fact that the overture is taken from an earlier opera and is used again as the overture to *The Barber of Seville*. If you have ever wondered what it would be like to hear someone dressed as Queen Elizabeth I singing a variation on *Una voce poco fa* from you know what, then this is the opera for you. Actually, it is Rosina in Rome singing a variation on what the Queen first sang in Naples.

The revised Italian version of *Mosè in Egitto* (420 109-2) with Raimondi and June Anderson has wonderful choruses and great religious scenes. If you are fond of Verdi's *Nabucco*,

you might want to investigate this stirring drama. The first performance was a disaster because the Red Sea failed to part at the proper moment in the last act.

Finally there is *La gazza ladra*, whose overture was made so famous by Beecham. The Sony recording (S3K 45 850), while made in 1990 and featuring Katia Ricciarelli, Ferruccio Furlanetto, and (of course) Samuel Ramey, was recorded live and has some of the deficiencies that stem from a live performance. Incidentally, although hearing the overture might lead one to think that this

is a rollicking comedy, it is no such thing. Rather it is a near tragedy based on quite a horrible true story.

Now if you are not inclined to rush out and buy all these operas (as I have) there are excellent selections of arias and extracts—those by Marilyn Horne and Cecilia Bartoli come to mind and are highly recommended. There are other operas by Rossini that are available on CD but I don't have them. I bet Jeff Morgan does!

MK

A real Spanish opera on CD

As a recent article by Murray Kitts in these pages reminded us, many operas are set in Spain; and there is much Spanish music that is familiar to us. Indeed, this year's gala featured both these aspects. But of Spanish opera, set in Spain and written by Spaniards, most of us hear little or none. It was therefore with considerable interest that I read this little article in the Spanish newspaper *ABC* (7 August 1992).

It is not often these days that recordings are made of Spanish operas, different as they are from the usual theatrical repertoire. It is even rarer when the recording is the initiative of a leading foreign recording company. Such is the case, however, with *El gato montés* that Deutsche Grammophon recorded last December in Torrelodones, Province of Madrid. It goes on sale today in the Spanish market.

This "first international recording" on CD of *El gato montés* is interpreted by the same principal soloists, orchestra, choir, and director as in the Seville production at the Teatro de la Zarzuela. Plácido Domingo, Verónica Villarroel, Juan Pons, Carlos Chausson, Mabel Perelstein, Carlos Álvarez, and Amalia Barrio repeat their roles. Only Teresa Berganza, the "Gipsy" on the disk, was not in the stage cast.

"It was Plácido Domingo who suggested the idea of recording *El gato montés*," says Pal Christian Moe, Director of Vocal Productions at Deutsche Grammophon. "We are interested in exploring new repertoire, and, at the same time, creating a project around this singer who would have a new profile before an international public."

After discussing it with Domingo, the management at DG decided to invite maestro Roa, the Symphony

Orchestra of Madrid, and the chorus of the Teatro de la Zarzuela. "They were all going to participate in the stage production of this work," says Moe, "and they were in any case the natural choice once it had been decided to work with Spanish artists for reasons of authenticity, style, and language. Afterwards, Domingo, Roa, and I settled on the cast.

Moe says that the revision under "the capable hands of Miguel Roa" was already under way and was necessary because the musical materials were found to be in a pretty primitive state. "In this case, revision did not mean altering the basic form of the work but preparing the score and the different instrumental parts for publication once they were edited and corrected."

Although the German company refuses to give cost figures for this recording, they do hope "to sell as many as a 'pop' title. That means," explains Moe, "that a public wider than that of Spanish-speaking countries can discover this work through the recording." He adds, "If *El gato montés* sells well, we will be keen to record more Spanish works."

I have not heard any of this opera, and all I know about it I gathered from other articles in the same newspaper. The work was written by Manuel Penella in 1916 and is set in Seville and other parts of Andalucía. It rests on a folklore basis and contains characters and situations typically Andalusian—bullfighters, bandits, fortune-telling gypsies, passionate lovers' rows. Sounds like Carmen? "They've nothing to do with each other, neither in arrangement nor in form," says Roa. "*El gato montés* is what in theatre slang we call a first act work. This act is splendid, but then it's hard to maintain tension. In any case, the music is eminently

theatrical, always subordinate to the situation, although some license is permitted such as in a romance for the soprano.” Roa points out that the outstanding virtue of *El gato montés* is its enormous melodic richness. There is infinitely less vulgar music than in other, more famous works. “Penella has great inventive capacity. He has a brilliant palette of colours that it is difficult to resist.

But you must resist. If you follow your instincts, you drown the singers. You must conduct the work with great moderation.”

I hear rumours that Murray Kitts has already bought these CDs. If they are true, then he will know the identification numbers that ABC did not give.

JMC

Celebrate *La Cenerentola*

Of Opera Lyra Ottawa’s several performances of *La Cenerentola* in September this year, the final one will be on the 18th. As mentioned in the June *Newsletter*, members of the National Capital Opera Society are invited to attend together on that evening. Following the performance, we plan to have a special get-together for our members. We will be

reserving several tables in the National Arts Centre Café; members will pay for their own drinks and dessert. The Society will invite the principal artists from the cast to join us for a toast to opera. If you are interested in celebrating with us, please call Peggy Pflug at 226 5482.

MC

Membership renewal

The 1991 membership year ended on 31 December. If our records show that you have not yet renewed for 1992, then there is again a coloured ring around this piece of text. A renewal form for 1992 membership was in the June *Newsletter*. Please renew

now: your support is important to the Society.

Those who fail to renew should save this *Newsletter*, for they will not be getting the next one. The reminder next time will be for the 1993 dues.

Opera within reach, 1992-1993

The start of a new opera season is a good time to list all the forthcoming operas within reasonable reach of Ottawa. First, the operas that demand no travel at all:

Ottawa

This season’s Opera Lyra Ottawa productions are:

La Cenerentola, by Rossini. 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18 September.

La traviata, by Verdi. 10, 12, and 13 March.

Toronto

The Canadian Opera Company is performing:

Rigoletto, by Verdi. 19, 22, 25, 27, and 30 September and 2, 5, 8, and 10 October.

Werther, by Massenet. 26 and 29 September, and 1, 4, 7, and 9 October.

Don Giovanni, by Mozart. 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27, and 29 November and 2, 4, and 6 December.

Così fan tutte, by Mozart. 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, and 28 November and 1, 3, and 5 December.

Hänsel und Gretel, by Humperdinck. 15, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, and 30 January and 2, 5, and 7 February.

Bluebeard’s Castle, by Bartók, and *Erwartung*, by Schoenberg. 22, 26, 28, and 31 January and 3 and 6 February.

Tosca, by Puccini. 2, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17, 20, 22, and 25 April.

The Bartered Bride, by Janacek. 8, 10, 13, 16, 18, 21, and 24 April.

Montreal

A Morgan Tour for NCOS members pays a visit to L'Opéra de Montréal on those dates marked by asterisks. (The tour to the two Romeo and Juliet operas, which are on consecutive nights, includes an overnight stay in Montreal.) The telephone number for Morgan Tours is 722 7572.

Andrea Chénier, by Giordano. 12, 14, 17, 19, 23, and 26* September.

I Capuleti e i Montecchi, by Bellini (in concert). 4* December.

Roméo et Juliette, by Gounod. 21, 23, 26, and 28 November and 2 and 5* December.

Lucia di Lammermoor, by Donizetti. 27 February and 1, 4, 6, 10, and 13* March.

Madama Butterfly, by Puccini. 17, 19, 22, 24, and 28 April and 1* May.

Die Fledermaus, by J. Strauss. 29 and 31 May and 1, 3, 5, and 7 June.

Hamilton

At the furthest distance we consider within reach for the purposes of this summary, there is Opera Hamilton with the following productions:

Nabucco, by Verdi. 10, 13, 14, 16, and 18 September.

La Cenerentola, by Rossini. 26 and 28 November.

Madama Butterfly, by Puccini. 1, 6, and 8 May.

Opera Lyra Ottawa news

Opera Lyra urgently seeks volunteers to help with their telemarketing on Tuesday evenings. Would anyone who is interested or willing please call Maria Wade of OLO at 233 9200? Maria Wade is now Acting General Manager.

The planned production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in the 1993-94 season will be using the National Arts Centre Orchestra for the first time. This marks recognition of the ever-improving standard of OLO's productions.

Opera screenings at the Public Library

This season we are not continuing with opera films at the Bytowne because of a dwindling audience and the lack of suitable films that are available. Instead, the NCOS and Counterpoint Classics will present in 1992-93 a series of benefit screenings of operas, using advanced laser disk technology. The picture is projected onto a large screen, and the sound is hi-fi and stereophonic. The room has good acoustics.

The shows will be on Monday nights (except for 20 October) at 7.00 pm in the auditorium of the Ottawa Public Library at Metcalfe and Laurier streets. The first three screenings are:

Aida, by Verdi. 21 September 1992. Plácido Domingo, Aprile Millo, Sherrill Milnes. Metropolitan Opera, James Levine. Subtitles.

The Flying Dutchman, by Wagner. 20 October 1992. Simon Estes, Lisbeth Balsev. The Bayreuth Festspiele, Woldemar Nelsson. Subtitles.

Operatic Double Bill. 30 November 1992.

- "An Evening with Joan Sutherland and Luciano Pavarotti." Metropolitan Opera highlights of *La traviata*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Rigoletto*. Richard Bonyngé conducts. And—
- "Pavarotti in London." A Royal Albert Hall gala with Kurt Herbert Adler conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

All events are \$7 at the door. For further information, call 721 0172 or 830 9827.

Discount for members

The A and A store in Sparks St has recently gone out of business, leaving Counterpoint Classics the only place where NCOS members can obtain discounts. The good news is that Counterpoint's discount has increased. Presentation of the membership card is required when making purchases.

Counterpoint Classics, Murray St. 20% off each regularly priced CD.

Back issues of *Opera News*

One of our members has a few years of back issues of *Opera News* that she would like to give away. If you would like to have them, call Jenny Birks at 745 4648. A donation to the Brian Law Scholarship fund from the lucky receiver of the magazines would be most welcome.

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