

Newsletter • Bulletin

Winter

1997

Le Hiver

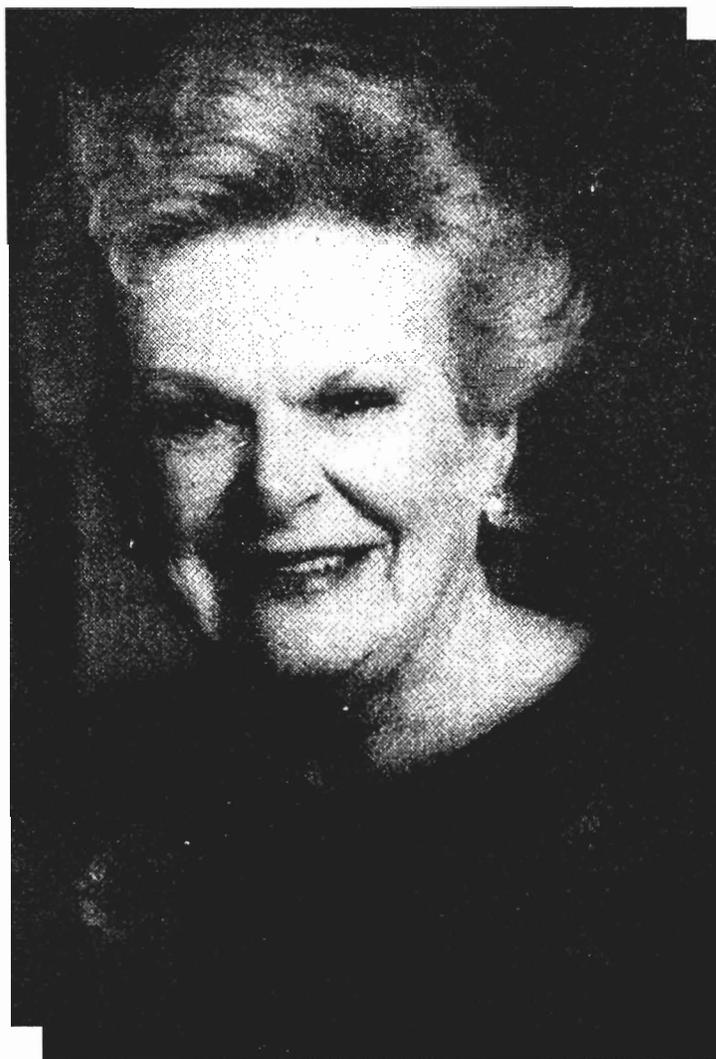
P.O.Box 8347, Main Terminal, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H8 • C.P. 8347, Succursale principale, Ottawa, (Ontario) K1G 3H8

Brian Law Scholarship Gains Added Prestige

It is with great pleasure that we announce that Maureen Forrester has agreed to become the Patron of the Brian Law Opera Scholarship. We are very honoured that Ms. Forrester has allowed her deep admiration for Brian Law to become a living passion as she agrees to lend her name and patronage to this prestigious scholarship sponsored by the Society.

The next Brian Law Scholarship competition will take place at the First Unitarian Congregation, 30 Cleary Avenue, on February 8, 1997 at 6:30 P.M. A preliminary jury of Barbara Clark, Thomas Annand and Sandra Graham chose the five finalists on November 30. They are Kimberley Briggs, soprano; Hilary Knox, mezzo-soprano; Adele Kozak, soprano; Julie Ann Nesrallah, mezzo-soprano and Nathalie Pilon, coloratura soprano. The winner will be selected after a concert performance by the five finalists. The jurors for the competition are Roxolana Roslak, Head, Faculty of Voice, University of Toronto Faculty of Music; Dixie Ross Neil, Opera and Vocal Coach, McGill University Faculty of Music, Montreal; Guillermo Silva-Marin, Toronto Operetta Theatre and Opera in Concert, Toronto.

This will be an exciting evening of music — fifteen operatic arias in all. So, mark your calendars and join the fun. Tickets are \$10 for the competition and \$40 for the competition and after-concert dinner. For additional information and reservations call Bobbi Cain at 255-0124.



Maureen Forrester C.C.

Celebrity Auction

I wish to thank all those who attended the Celebrity Auction on September 28 and I wish that all of you had felt moved to do so. During that evening I was very embarrassed as the food that was served by the Westin Hotel was nice, but not what had been ordered, and certainly not "Chocolate and Strawberry" desserts. I felt that we had gypped our attendees out of the advertised desserts, and told the hotel so. It turned

out that there was a whole fridge full of strawberry and chocolate desserts that the caterers had forgotten to serve. Printed below is the letter of apology from the Westin Hotel, and you should know that they refunded a considerable part of the bill. This is a sad tale, especially considering that we lost close to \$400 on the event that was supposed to be a fundraiser.

Bobbi Cain



THE WESTIN HOTEL
Ottawa

Executive Offices

Friday October 18, 1996

Ms. Bobbi Cain
President
National Capital Opera Society
P.O. Box 8347
Main Terminal
Ottawa, Ontario
K1G 3H8

Dear Ms. Cain,

Thank you for your letter dated October 6, 1996, regarding the problems you experienced during your event at The Westin Hotel, Ottawa, September 28, 1996.

It is always disappointing to learn of failures of the Hotel to live up to the high expectations of its customers. The Hotel industry is a very "people" oriented business; and because of this, we have to rely on many different people in order to get the job done. Try as we might, we do sometimes fall short of the high operating standards that we set for ourselves. In the case of your event, we seemed to have fallen short on several occasions, and I would like to offer you my sincere apologies.

I was glad to read that on the whole you were pleased with the many staff members involved in your function. You can be assured we will make every effort to make your next event at The Westin Hotel a complete success.

Again, I would like to offer you my sincere apologies for our shortfall and for any embarrassment the oversight caused. I thank you for bringing this to our attention and trust that you will give us the opportunity to redeem ourselves should you require our services on a future occasion.

Sincerely yours,


Lyle Pauls
Director of Operations

LP/tr

From the President....

I first want to extend to each of you my best wishes for the upcoming holiday season. The fall has been such an interesting time for us. We enjoyed the fabulous singing of Shawne Elizabeth and Kelly Robertson, and had such a good time at our celebrity auction. We may have had troubles, but we all had an enjoyable time. Then there was such excitement as we looked forward to "An Encounter with Ben Heppner. Ben's illness and inability to fulfill his engagement at the N.A.C. was a shock to us all, especially as we worked frantically to cancel the "Encounter". We must remember how badly Ben Heppner felt about this, and we look forward to re-scheduling the evening when the N.A.C. and Ben can come to an agreement for another concert. They are working on it.

There is much to look forward to as we enter the new year. Please remember that you are members of a very important organization and we need your active support. Cheers.

Bobbi Cain

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Montreal's *PEARL FISHERS*

It's fairly easy to dismiss Bizet's 'other' opera as being much inferior to *CARMEN*, as only having one big tune (not true) and as condemned by that eminent music critic, Corno di Bassetto (a.k.a. George Bernard Shaw). Given the revival in interest in this opera, probably due to the famous CD entitled *The Pearl Fishers Duet*, the production in Montreal suffered from the inadequacy of the tenor, Claude-Robin Pelletier. Let us assume that this was a temporary problem since M. Pelletier seems to be singing fairly regularly all over the place.

But even with this notable deficiency I found much to enjoy in this production. The sets from The Washington Opera were spectacular in a M.G.M. sort of way, with massive idols, some multi-faced, some in ruins; one almost expected to see Esther Williams dive into the sea from a convenient promontory or see Gene Kelly doing an athletic dance number. The use of a scrim curtain over the front of the stage during the entire opera added to the 'soft-focus' effect of the scene imparting an exotic quality.

The dance numbers were in keeping with the setting and well executed. Orchestra and chorus were vigorously conducted by Jacques Lacambe with excellent results, only marred by some off-stage entry lapses by the chorus.

Lyne Fortin was in fine voice and managed to look seductive even in a costume bejewelled on almost every square centimeter. Gaetan Lapierre's excellent baritone voice helped to make the famous duet somewhat enjoyable and made up for his rather wooden stage presence. The only other solo role was well sung by bass Jean-Clement Bergeron. *(continued on Page 4)*

PEARL FISHERS

(continued from Page 3)

All in all, this was a most pleasant and enjoyable evening – not for those who think opera is the highest art form, perhaps – but for those who enjoy enchantingly beautiful music and the evocation of exotic places and customs. If this opera cannot be compared with the greatest operatic masterpieces it can be compared with an opera like Delibes' *LAKME* which also has a big duet and an even sillier story with a heroine who dies by eating a poisonous flower.

With the singers all coming from the province of Quebec (the conductor as well), I can't complain this time about pronunciation. Also I must credit Patrice Saint-Pierre with the staging which was quite in keeping with the opera and almost made up for his disastrous *BARBER OF SEVILLE* not long ago.

There are three recorded versions on CD, none of them completely satisfactory. The one that I treasure the most has the great Leopold Simoneau as Nadir (Philips Opera Collector 434 782-2) but this is a Mono recording of forty years ago. EMI 5 66020 2 – recorded in stereo about ten years later – has Nicolai Gedda and Ernest Blanc for the great duet, but it has also Janine Micheau who is not one of my favorite singers. The most recent recording EMI CDS749837 (available for loan from the Ottawa Public Library) should be outstanding, with Barbara Hendriks, John Aler and Gino Quilico singing and Michel Plasson conducting, but isn't. For further details see the *Penguin Guide* review.

M. K.

Opera

Almost forty years ago in the auditorium of the then Technical High School I saw a performance of Gounod's *FAUST* by the Ottawa Grand Opera Company. Even allowing for such a passage of time I believe that I enjoyed that performance, and others that I have seen, more than I enjoyed the one presented by Operas Lyra. Why?

Certainly Opera Lyra's principal singers were all more than adequate in their roles given some of the handicaps imposed by the director. It seems to me that a performer is affected in acting and singing by the type of costume he or she is wearing. How could Alexander Savtchenko cut a dashing figure as Mephistopheles in a costume that made him look afflicted with dropsy or elephantiasis? (A scatological explanation for his appearance in this costume – not fit for inclusion in our newsletter – has also been offered.)

Joanne Kolomyjec did her best to be a convincing Marguerite, subjected as she was to a kind of beauty contest in her first appearance, and given inappropriate costumes in the latter acts.

Clifton Forbis certainly can sing the role of Faust but was hampered by stage direction which kept the singers away from the front of the stage and by a directorial interpretation which made it almost impossible for them to do their best work. For example, Act II was spoiled by *THE BED*. The Bed dominated the stage. No matter what action was going on no one could forget about *THE BED*. Forget about the loveliness of the music, the delicacy and tenderness of the love scene praised so highly by Berlioz among others. No one is really concerned about that. They are looking at *THE BED*. Marguer-

Lyra's Flawed *FAUST*

ite doesn't live in a '... demeure chaste et pure...' All she owns is a BED and she seems to go around in a nightgown.

Marguerite doesn't have a spinning wheel either, so we cut the King of Thule aria which precedes the famous Jewel Song. This ballad is essential to the action of the opera as it provides an introduction and contrast with the brilliant Jewel Song. Since the soprano can sing the more difficult aria it is indefensible to omit the ballad from the opera.

In Act III we got rid of THE BED only to have it replaced by THE HORRIBLE BLOODY APRON. This dominates everything now. Valentin, splendidly sung and acted by Russell Braun, in this version of the opera is not berating his sister for being pregnant outside of wedlock; oh, no! That's too old fashioned. With THE BLOODY APRON Valentin and everyone knows that Marguerite has aborted or miscarried her child. For a man to curse his sister with his dying breath for having sexual relations before marriage seems to me to be much worse than cursing her for killing her child.

I would like to commend all of the singers in the minor roles, especially Christine Harvey-Findlay as Marthe Schwerdtlein (a marvelous name but misspelled in the programme). The use of the 'Devils' accompanying Mephistopheles was an interesting touch, allowing the director to exercise her obsession with movement on the opera stage in a subtle and acceptable way.

Before we get to the final scene a word or two about the chorus and orchestra. The latter was

splendid and well conducted by Timothy Vernon. The chorus was quite small and the choral numbers limited. At least half of the choral introduction of Act I, Scene 2 (Act II of the original) was omitted. What a shame! So much great choral work left out in a production in a city which can boast of choral groups second to none. Why even do this opera if important parts are going to be cut? The use of amplification for the chorus in the church and prison scenes is definitely to be discouraged. An adequate chorus doesn't need electronics to be heard.

Going back again forty years a dreadful thing happened in the final prison scene on stage at Ottawa Tech. Shortly after the music started one of the main prison walls fell down. After the audience managed to compose itself the great trio 'Ange purs, ange radieux!' began. Forgotten was the accident. Swept up by the wonderful ever soaring music the cry of 'Sauvée' for Marguerite really meant something to that audience. Although driven to madness and living in the past (rather spoiled in Opera Lyra's production by having apparitions instead of letting the music and singers do the work), Marguerite was indeed saved.

Jeanette Aster provided her audience with an ending that was unfocused and unclear; an ending which spoils the effect of the music in my view. I prefer an ending which is clear and which I can grasp in terms of the music, even if some of the scenery does fall down. Why spoil the beauty and greatness of this masterpiece with a contrived and banal ending?

M.K.

Opera Book Review

A most promising new series called "Great Voices" has been initiated with the publication in English of Titta Ruffo's autobiography, *My Parabola*. This book contains an extensive set of notes, a list of the artist's roles, a chronology of performances, a complete discography, and a CD in a plastic pouch containing some of his most celebrated recordings.

All very interesting, you might say - but the real interest lies in the account of the life of the great singer himself. Here's the story of a son of a poor Italian iron worker who discovers that he has a voice and, in spite of all difficulties, becomes one of the most celebrated singers of the early twentieth century. The book is amazingly frank - how many persons would confess that their 'Christian' name, i.e. Ruffo was bestowed on them by their father to commemorate a favorite dog of that name who had just died. Christened Ruffo Titta, he became Titta Ruffo on stage. The relatively unschooled youth had to take advantage of any opportunity to learn his art despite his father's opposition.

When already beginning a successful career he spent his time reading Hugo so that he could more fully interpret the role of Rigoletto; his great success in Thomas' *HAMLET* he attributed to his study of Shakespeare. This is a story of a man who is committed to art and who always maintains an appreciation of his fellow man. There is a wonderful sense of the generosity and nobility of the Italian character in practically every chapter, not to mention the sense of fun. In his day he performed at all the great op-

era houses in the world, even in St. Petersburg during the 1905 Revolution. His illustrious career was truncated by his sister's marriage to a leading Socialist, Matteoti, who was murdered by the Fascists in 1924.

Fortunately this rather expensive book is available at the Ottawa Public Library (780.92 R925) under the title: *Ruffo: My Parabola*. A second volume with a biography of Renata Tebaldi has been announced. No opera lover will want to miss the delightful and moving account of the life of Titta Ruffo and hear some samples of his art. M.K

Texaco-Metropolitan Opera Schedule

(Starting time is 1:30 p.m. unless otherwise indicated)

- Dec 14 — L'Elisir d'Amore
- Dec 21 — A Midsummer Night's Dream
- Dec 28 — Hansel and Gretel
- Jan 4 — Tosca
- Jan 11 — La Boheme
- Jan 18 — La Traviata
- Jan 25 — Cavalleria Rusticana \ Pagliacci
- Feb 1 — I Puritani
- Feb 8 — Le Nozze di Figaro
- Feb 15 — La Forza del Destino
- Feb 22 — Wozzeck (2:00 p.m.)
- Mar 1 — Aida
- Mar 8 — Billy Budd
- Mar 15 — Cosi Fan tutte
- Mar 22 — Carmen
- Mar 29 — Das Rheingold (2:00 p.m.)
- Apr 5 — Faust
- Apr 12 — Die Walkure (12:30 p.m.)
- Apr 19 — Eugene Onegin (12:30 p.m.)
- Apr 26 — Fedora (12:30 p.m.)
- May 1 — Rusalka (12:00 p.m.)

Opera Within Reach

OTTAWA

Opera Lyra

Opera R.S.V.P., Feb. 4 & 5

Die Fledermaus by J Strauss. March 8, 10, 12 & 14

All performances will be in the Opera of the National Arts Centre. Information: 233-9200

MONTREAL

L'Opera de Montreal

Rigoletto by Verdi. February 15, 17, 20, 22 & 26; March 1

Jenufa by Janacek. March 22, 24 & 27; April 2 & 5

Carmina Burana by Orff and *Hiver Dans l'ame* by Prevost. May 5, 9 & 10

Turandot by Pucini. May 31; June 2, 5, 7, 11 & 14

All performances are in the Salle Wilfred Pelletier in the Place des Arts. Information: (514) 985-2258

HAMILTON

Hamilton Opera

Popera (Opera's Greatest Masterpieces) Jan 30 & Feb 1

Carmen by Bizet. April 12, 15 & 17

Information: (905) 526-6556 or 1-800-575-1381

TORONTO

Canadian Opera Company

Beatrice et Benedict by Berlioz. Jan 21, 24 & 29; Feb 1, 6 & 9

Dialogue des Carmelites by Poulenc. Jan 25, 28 & 30; Feb 2, 5 & 7

Manon Lescaut by Puccini. Apr 12, 15, 17, 20, 23 & 25

All performances are at the Hummingbird Centre. Information: 1-800-250-4653

Opera in Concert

L'italiana in Algeri by Rossini. Jan 26 at the George Weston Recital Hall at the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts. Box Office: (416) 366-7723

Rusalka by Dvorak. April 6 at the Jane Mallett Theatre. Box Office: (416) 366-7723

Toronto Operetta Theatre

A Night in Venice by J. Strauss, Jr. Dec 27, 28, 30 & 31; Jan 3 & 4

The Beggar Student by Millocker. April 30; May 1, 2 & 3.

Sundays of Comedy and Romance

"Canto Latino; A musical Adventure in Latin America and Spain" with the Arte Flamenco Spanish Dance Company. Feb 14 & 16

"Continental Variety; An Operetta Cabaret". April 13
All are at the Jane Mallett Theatre. (416) 366-7723

Upcoming Local Events

1997

February 5 & 6 **Opera R.S.V.P.**

- 8:00 P.M., in the Opera of the National Arts Centre
- an Opera Lyra concert production

February 8 **Brian Law Scholarship Concert**

- 6:30 P.M. at the First Unitarian Congregation, 30 Cleary Avenue
- N.C.O.S. competition

February 9 ***LA CENERENTOLA***

- 7:30 P.M. at Alumni Theatre, Carleton University
- For additional information and reservations call Carleton University Alumni Office: 520-3636

March 8, 10, 12 & 14 ***DIE FLEDERMAUS***

- 8:00 P.M. in the Opera of the National Arts Centre
- an Opera Lyra production