

Newsletter • Bulletin

Fall 2007

Automne 2007

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

Six Exceptional Finalists Selected for the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition

by Renate Chartrand

A record number of 17 young aspiring opera singers have applied for the Scholarship Competition to be held on Nov. 24. Our preliminary jurors, who met in early October, were able to recommend six finalists to compete for the top prizes.

Jonathan Estabrooks, baritone
Sharleen Joynt, soprano
Yannick-Muriel Noah, soprano
Kathleen Promane, mezzo-soprano
Maghan Stewart, soprano
Jillian Yemen, mezzo-soprano

Details of the finalists' education and operatic experience can be found on page 3.

At the competition they will each perform three operatic arias, at least one preceded by a recitative, with piano accompaniment. This is a thrilling experience for the members of the audience who will certainly try to pick the winner. Our distinguished panel of jurors will include tenor J. Patrick Raftery as well as sopranos Christiane Riel and Roxolana Roslak, on whom we have been able to rely at previous competitions. Our thanks to them!

It has become the custom for a previous winner to entertain us with a special recital of favourite arias while the jurors retire to choose the winners. We are delighted to announce that baritone **Joshua Hopkins** has agreed to join

us this time. He has had a stellar career since winning the Brian Law Scholarship in 2003. He was a member of the prestigious Houston Grand Opera Studio, a prizewinner in the 2005 Plácido Domingo Operalia Competition and received several major awards, most recently one worth \$15,000 from the Canada Council for the Arts. Last season he played Masetto in L'Opéra de Montréal's *Don Giovanni*, this season he is Marcello in Houston Grand Opera's *La bohème*, Papageno in Arizona Opera's *Die Zauberflöte* and a soloist in the *Messiah* at the NAC.

Finally the great moment of suspense, the announcement of the prizes, will have arrived. The winner will be awarded the 1st prize of \$3000 and the runner-up will receive the new 2nd prize of \$1500. In addition, a 3rd prize of \$500 is being donated by our board member, Cavaliere Pat Adamo.

As usual the audience will have the pleasure of meeting the contestants and jurors at the reception that follows in the adjacent hall. Refreshments will be served and, for those who wish, a cash wine bar will be available.

Joshua Hopkins Admission is \$20 for adults and \$10 for students.

For further information you may visit our website at www.ncos.ca. This promises to be a great evening. Mark your calendar:



Saturday, November 24, 7:30 pm

First Unitarian Congregation,
 30 Cleary Avenue (off Richmond Rd.)

President's Message

It is with great pride that we announce the six finalists for the Brian Law Opera Scholarship and wish to thank the screening jury for their expertise and judgement. It is a pride that all our members can share because of donations and support of money-raising projects which have enabled us to increase the prizes in value and number and thereby attract so many excellent entries. I promise you an outstanding competition to which you can invite all your friends to attend. Spread the word.

As for Opera alla Pasta, I can promise new furnishings, new equipment, and four opera showings that I'm sure you will enjoy along with all the usual good food. See you on October 28th.

I must pay tribute to Richard Bradshaw, whose contribution to opera has earned him a lasting place in the cultural history of Canada. Here in Ottawa, we have lost Kay Millard, one of the most loyal supporters of Opera alla Pasta and Kate Freke, an active member and contributor to our projects. We will miss them all.



New Members

John and Vera-Lee Nelson

N.C.O.S. Information

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For information: telephone 830-982
email: kmitts1637@ rogers.com

MISSING: two DVDs loaned at an Opera alla Pasta session. Verdi's *Nabucco* - the La Scala production conducted by Muti and Berg's *Wozzek* with Hildegarde Behrens. Please check your DVDs and report any finds to Murray Kitts.

CREDIT: in the Summer issue we failed to credit David Cooper Photography who was responsible for all the photos that were used in the Pacific Opera Victoria article.

Opera Alla Pasta — Sunday Afternoon at the Opera

October 28, 2007

Rossini's *IL TURCO IN ITALIA*

The performance starts at 2 P.M. at St. Anthony's Soccer Club. Dinner follows at 5 P.M.

Reservations required: 613-830-9827 or
kmitts1637@rogers.com

Finalists for the 2007 Brian Law Competition by Renate Chartrand

Baritone Jonathan Estabrooks, 24, began his musical training as a member of Opera Lyra Ottawa Boy's Choir and later the OLO Chorus, while studying voice with Laurence Ewashko. In 2006 he received the Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Toronto. With several scholarships, he is currently in his second year in the Master's Degree program in Vocal Performance/Opera at the Juilliard School in New York, where he will be playing Papageno in a production of *Die Zauberflöte*. On Canada Day he was a featured artist at the National Arts Centre, making his professional orchestra debut. His next goal is to become a member of a young artist-training program at an opera house in North America.

Soprano Sharleen Joynt, 23, grew up in Ottawa and studied with voice teacher Yoriko Tanno. She moved to Toronto, receiving a Bachelor of Music - Voice Performance from The Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory of Music in 2005. Sharleen continued her studies in New York for another Bachelor of Music from the Mannes College, The New School for Music, where she is presently in her first year as a Master's student. Performances include the roles of Damon in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Belinda in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Last April Sharleen was a prizewinner at the Palm Beach Opera Vocal competition. For next summer she is planning to travel to Germany to solidify her German.

Soprano Yannick-Muriel Noah, 28, began her voice training in Ottawa with Yoriko Tanno while studying architecture at Carleton University. In 2005 she became a member of the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio training program and continued her voice studies in Toronto with private singing lessons from Dr. Darryl Edwards and vocal coaching from Stewart Hamilton. She is covering several lead roles for COC performances, among them Elisabeth in *Don Carlos* and *Tosca*, and was one of the soloists of the 'Opera Under the Stars' concert in LeBreton Flats Park in June. In July Yannick-Muriel won several prizes at the Hans Gaber Belvedere Singing Competition in Vienna.

Mezzo-soprano Kathleen Promane, 29, and a native of Ottawa, earned a Bachelor of Music degree from Carleton University. She was a member of Opera Lyra Ottawa's Young Artist Training Program 2004-2006, playing the male lead in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. Currently she is in her final year in the Opera Diploma Program at the University of Toronto, where she was featured in the title role of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. At the Centre for Opera Studies in Sulmona, Italy, this summer, she performed lead roles in scenes of operas by Massenet, Mozart and Bellini. Kathleen plans to audition for opera companies in several Canadian provinces.

Soprano Maghan Stewart, 29, began her studies with a Bachelor of Voice Performance at the University of Toronto and went on to complete the Master of Music degree at the University of Ottawa in 2004. She was a member of Opera Lyra Ottawa's Young Artist Training Program in 2001-2004 and appeared in Opera Lyra productions of *Die Zauberflöte*, *Rigoletto* and *Salomé*. Currently she is in her second year of a Master in Vocal Arts course at Bard College Conservatory of Music in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. She was chosen for the inaugural class of a new program developed and directed by American soprano Dawn Upshaw and granted a full scholarship. Last season Maghan was the Regional Finalist (New York, NY) of the Metropolitan National Council Auditions.

Mezzo-soprano Jillian Yemen, 28, attended Canterbury High School for the Arts, then moved to Toronto. By 2005 she had received the degrees of Bachelor of Music and Master of Music in Operatic Performance from the University of Toronto. For Opera York she played Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* (Humperdinck). As a member of OLO Opera Studio, Opera Lyra's renamed young artists training program, she has again been Hansel and also performed in *Little Red Riding Hood*. For OLO main stage productions she has been the understudy for Rosina, Emilia and Mignon and will cover Donna Elvira in the upcoming *Don Giovanni*. Jillian is continuing her studies with voice teacher Neil Semer of New York, focusing on her technical development and exploring new operatic roles.

Opera Alla Pasta - the new, improved version by Murray Kitts

When opera lovers gathered for the final showing of last season of Opera alla Pasta they were delighted to see a brand new television with a wide LCD screen mounted high enough so that all could see subtitles and which delivered excellent sound. The room has also been completely re-decorated – not in opera motifs – but in a way to add comfort to anyone using it. Those attending were asked to select operas for the coming season and here are the results:

October 28, 2007 Rossini: *Il Turco in Italia*. Cecilia Bartoli and Ruggero Raimondi star in an excellent production from the Zurich Opera House conducted by Franz Welser-Most. This drama buffo has been described by one critic as a piece “full of double meanings, hypocrisy, smothered anger, forced smiles, and asides through clenched teeth”.

February 10, 2008 Tchaikovsky: *The Maid of Orleans*. Loosely based on Schiller’s drama this grand opera was an instant success at its first performance. It affords an opportunity for an outstanding soprano, in this case Nina Rautio, with support from other Bolshoi stars and the marvellous Bolshoi chorus under the direction of Alexander Lazarev to present one of Tchaikovsky’s most beautiful scores scarcely known in the Western world.

March 2, 2008 Rimsky-Korsakov: *Le coq d’or*. Incensed by the defeat of the Russian fleet in 1905 the composer adapted the legend by Pushkin to satirize incompetence in government in wartime. Kent Nagano leads an all-star Russian cast with the chorus of the Mariinsky Theater in a dazzling production at Paris Chatelet Theatre with fantastic costumes derived from the Japanese kabuki theatre.

April 20, 2008 – Mozart: *Bastien und Bastienne* and *The Impressario*. A hit of the 2006 Mozart festival, these two singspiels combined the talents of the Salzburg Marionette Theatre with those of a group of outstanding young singers accompanied by the Junge Philharmonie Salzburg under the direction of Elisabeth Fuchs. According to one critic this performance was “enchantingly comic”.

The DVD showings begin at 2:00 p.m. at St. Anthony’s Soccer Club. Following each showing, at about 5 p.m., there will be a delicious Italian buffet with salads, pasta, main meat dish with vegetables, dessert and coffee, all for only \$15.00.

Reservations are required at least three days before the presentation. Contact Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 or email kmitts1637@rogers.com.

MIGNON: A Neglected Treasure by Murray Kitts

In 1894, Ambroise Thomas attended the 1,000th performance of his opera *Mignon* first presented in 1866. This makes this opera one of the biggest “hits” in opera history. And no wonder. The libretto is based on the work of the great German writer, Goethe, and the music is one of Thomas’ finest scores.

The main musical interest in the work is a sort of singing contest between the childlike, naïve, lovable Mignon and her rival, the sophisticated, flirtatious Philine. Both Mariateresa Magisano as the former and Shannon Mercer as the latter gave outstanding performances at the Opera in Concert on September 30th. They were very well supported by tenor Stuart Howe as the hero, Wilhelm Meister, and bass-baritone Marc Belleau, the mysterious, somewhat demented wanderer who turns out to be Mignon’s father and a nobleman to boot. In supporting roles three members of Opera Lyra’s Opera Studio, Michael Carty, Chris Mallory and Lauren Phillips admirably performed their parts. Lauren Phillips, in the trouser role of Frederic which was originally a comic

tenor’s part, was especially effective in her one delightful aria. The OLO chorus, which really doesn’t have a great role in the complete opera, added greatly to the enjoyment of the occasion.

I followed the complete libretto closely during the performance and can tell you that more than a third of the opera was missing. However, Stuart Hamilton did his usual best to tie the musical numbers to the plot. The piano accompaniment and musical direction by Tadeusz Biernacki were truly phenomenal. To sum up, here is another of the neglected treasures of French opera. The Opera in Concert format is not ideal but it at least gives opera lovers some notion of what they are missing if they do not explore this field.

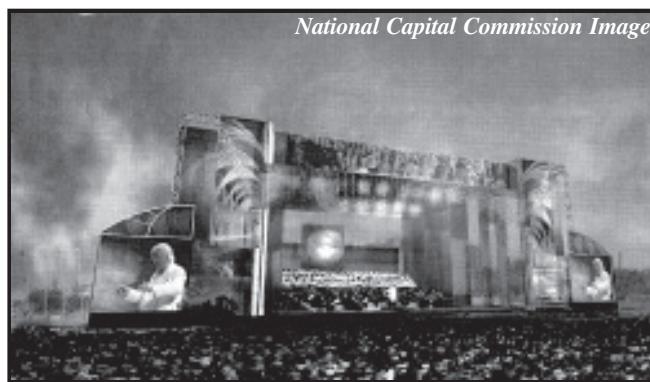
Finally, NCOS members present must have felt both joy and pride with the splendid career that Shannon Mercer is obviously making for herself, which was assisted by the Brian Law Opera Scholarship. We hope that her success will inspire the winner of the next competition on November 24th.

Opera Under the Stars by Renate Chartrand

Promising to be one of the most interesting operatic events of the year, even the dark, threatening clouds could not keep my friend and me from attending the opening night of Opera Under the Stars. It featured great Canadian singers, the Canadian Opera Company orchestra and the OLO chorus under Richard Bradshaw in the newly created LeBreton Flats Park.

Carrying our chairs we caught a free shuttle bus from the vast parking lot at Tunney's Pasture to the site. We arrived just in time for the Governor General's remarks, having missed many lengthy speeches commemorating the 150th anniversary of the choice of Ottawa as the Capital of Canada and the opening of the park.

Thanks to the surprisingly great quality of the amplified sound and three large screens showing close-ups we really enjoyed the opera highlights being performed. Isabel Bayrakdarian in *Semiramide*, Joni Henson in *La forza del destino*, David Pomeroy as *Faust*, Russell Braun as *Barber* and Robert Pomakov as *Boris Godunov* were wonderful. COC Ensemble Studio members soprano Yannick-Muriel Noah in *La forza del destino* and baritone Andrew Stewart as *Don Giovanni* made



great impressions. Both of them have an Ottawa connection and may well be part of our upcoming Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition. The *Pearl Fishers* duet closed the first half of the program.

Unfortunately light rain and a cold breeze had made us hide under capes and umbrellas, trying to keep warm and dry, so we decided to leave during intermission. Most people stayed though, especially the numerous young ones. Later I heard from someone who attended both evenings that the second night was absolutely gorgeous with the skies having cleared just in time and fireworks making a great ending.

On July 19 Richard Todd reviewed the subsequent NAC orchestra's concert in the Park and mentioned that the stage this time was set up on the opposite, the western, end of the site with disappointing electronic acoustics. Also, shuttle buses were no longer provided.

Considering the great loss we all feel about the sudden death of Richard Bradshaw since then, these COC concerts will be remembered as a truly special event in Ottawa. Mr. Bradshaw was always keen to get younger audiences involved and he succeeded in that.

Ottawa Pocket Opera by Renate Chartrand

Our city has a new opera company! Ottawa Pocket Opera will specialize in one-act and condensed versions of longer operas. It presented its first double bill on September 7 and 8 at St. Matthias Anglican Church on Parkdale Ave.

Director David MacAdam is an Ottawa tenor and voice teacher with plenty of experience in performance and staging. He inspired the mostly young singers to give remarkable performances with minimal sets and props. The first work was Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. The different character's feelings were expressed beautifully and of course English as the original language was a bonus.

After intermission came Mozart's *The Impresario*, which is really a spoken comedy with four great vocal numbers. The storyline had been updated and was highly entertaining, garnering plenty of laughs from the

large audience. Veteran soprano Shawn Elisabeth gave a hilarious over-the-top performance as Madame Goldentrill and David MacAdam himself was very effective as Mr. Angel. Several young singers/actors contributed enthusiastically.

For the young emerging singers, this was a great performing opportunity. Soprano Nadia Petrella (Dido), soprano Ellison Owen (Belinda/Miss Silverpeal) and mezzo Whitney O'Hearn (The Sorceress) were the most memorable. I arranged to have our poster, which announces the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition to potential applicants, sent to them all.

This enterprise is an interesting addition to Ottawa's operatic scene. I am looking forward to the company's next production and strongly recommend it to all opera lovers.

Expensive but Great: Opera Heaven in London!

by Shelagh Williams

We were in London for a week in June, carefully chosen for the wealth of wonderful opera singers and performances available at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden and the English National Opera (ENO).

I had always wanted to hear the Finnish dramatic soprano Karita Mattila, and lo and behold she was to portray Leonora in Beethoven's rescue opera *Fidelio*, as Covent Garden had imported the New York Met's 2000 production, designed for Mattila. It was quite drearily set in a mid-20th century South American dictatorship, by German director Jurgen Flimm, with sets by Robert Israel and costumes by his usual designer, Florence von Gerkan. Perhaps a bit more light from Duane Schuler would have helped! However, the production, under the baton of Covent Garden's new and popular Music Director Antonio Pappano, was musically uplifting. Most of the singers and the chorus were fine, though not exciting, and the lacklustre rehashed staging was of no assistance whatever. Having a multi-storey cell block rather than a hole in the ground for the prisoners to emerge from robbed the Prisoners' Chorus of much of its dramatic effect. However, Irish soprano Ailish Tynan as young Marzelline was truly devastated to find her beloved Fidelio was really the lovely Leonora, come to rescue her husband, Florestan. This left Marzelline to the unwelcome attentions of the rather surprisingly offensive young Jaquino of tenor Robert Murray. German tenor Endrik Wotrich in his Covent Garden debut was an intense Florestan and the tall veteran Norwegian baritone Terje Stensvold was a commanding, sinister governor Don Pizarro. But the whole was saved by the marvellous performance of Karita Mattila, who physically and vocally was superb. Unlike most other Leonoras I've seen, Mattila is tall - taller than most of the men on the stage! - slim, and athletic, and with very short hair, under a cap, appropriate manish mannerisms and fine acting, one was almost convinced this beautiful woman was a young man - especially from the back! Of course, when she opened her mouth, that magnificent soprano voice was a dead give away, but, hey, this is opera! There was a tremendous final chorus by the Royal Opera House Chorus to add to the outstanding Mattila and ensure a satisfying, if not

great, performance.

Over at the ENO they were just finishing the run for their first-ever staging of Britten's last opera, *Death in Venice*, and I wanted to hear British tenor Ian Bostridge in the lead role of Aschenbach. We were fortunate indeed to be able to get day tickets for the sold out final night - by queuing early! One of the reasons this is one of Britten's least performed operas is the large resources it demands, what with its umpteen characters, and need of dancers, additional chorus, and a large percussion section. Fortunately the ENO pulled out all the stops, enlisting director Deborah Warner with her design team of Tom Pye, sets, and Chloe Obolensky, costumes, which she uses for Britten operas. Between them and lighting designer Jean Kalman they produced a beautiful, evanescent, evocative staging, all floating curtains and shifting shapes and sun-dappled water, with gorgeous costumes, almost entirely white but with suitable accents. This was all to portray the Venice of a century ago, in which the story unfolded clearly and unequivocatively. As usual, the beautiful young Polish boy Tadzio, who catches Aschenbach's eye, plus his friends were played by dancers and gambolled about athletically and joyously. Musically, the production's large forces all coalesced into a shimmering whole, a tribute to ENO's debuting new Music Director Edward Gardner and the excellent voices and orchestra he led. Peter Coleman-Wright skilfully played the important, multiple baritone roles of the six death characters plus the voice of Dionysius. As with *Fidelio*, it is the lead role which makes or breaks the performance, and as the novelist Gustav von Aschenbach, Ian Bostridge was outstanding, even if he looked a bit young to die! He had the voice, the excellent diction, and the manner, moving from the lonely, uptight writer as he decayed mentally and physically to the decrepit cholera-infected man on the beach, watching Tadzio for the last time before dying. Unfortunately, there were some flies in the ointment to spoil the overall effect. First off, for some unknown reason, the ENO did not have surtitles, having seemingly dropped surtitles for operas in English, leaving us at sea and uncomprehending of some fine points of the

Expensive but Great: Opera Heaven in London! (continued)

opera, even though we had seen it before. Secondly, the ENO day seats are very poorly located! Nevertheless, it was a beautiful production, and well worth seeing.

Our final opera was Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at Covent Garden, with an A team of singers - the ultimate production! We waited until our very last day in London to get day tickets, as Anna Netrebko (Donna Anna) had missed the dress and two performances with a throat infection, and we hoped that by the fourth performance she would be better and singing well - and she was! This was a revival of director Francesca Zambello's spectacular 2002 production strikingly designed by the late Maria Bjornson. The set consisted of a huge curved wall of blue-black bricks dominated by a huge gold Virgin Mary on the left surveying the action, and with a tiny balcony at the top on the right to indicate Donna Anna's Spanish house and environs. The wall cleverly reversed to Don Giovanni's palace and other outdoor scenes, all well lit by Paul Pyant. Aptly, the Don was always dressed in libertine red (although the amount of coverage varied!). He and his servant Leperello looked very much alike, and the footmen even resembled the Don - perhaps as a result of his exercising his "droit de seigneur" at home? Maestro Ivor Bolton was in firm charge of the excellent Royal Opera House Orchestra and Chorus, and even a sharply dressed little band which marched smartly on stage when called for - no expense spared! And what a cast! - where to begin? Even the Commendatore of bass Reinhard Hagen was notable, a tall figure with a white mane, who stalked about and commanded one's attention. As the young wedding couple, Zerlina and Masetto, pert soprano Sarah Fox, in white as a bride, and large dependable bass Matthew Rose brought their characters to life. Donna Elvira, sung by Ana Maria Martinez, arrived surprisingly on stage in a cart drawn by four male servants, a rifle on her back and a telescope to her eye for the betraying Don, and continued to pursue him vigorously, her incisive soprano charting her every emotional turn. American bass-baritone Kyle Ketelson brought his own experience as the Don to his humorously clever portrayal of Leperello. And who but our own Canadian tenor Michael Schade should sing Don Ottavio, with

his lovely voice and solid acting - no wishy-washy person here! Soprano Anna Netrebko's Donna Anna was, as expected, beautifully sung, with heartfelt emotion and exciting presence - one did not even think to question her motives in prosecuting Don Giovanni or putting off her marriage to Don Ottavio! But the surprise of the show was the Uruguayan baritone Erwin Schrott, whom I'd not heard of, but who we were assured was the real star and the apple of the ladies' eyes, when I was inquiring after Anna Netrebko's health. He is a Don nonpareil, sexy, good looking and athletic, with the voice and insouciance to pull off the role superbly - he reminded me of a young Samuel Ramey! The opera opened arrestingly with the Don, masked and bare-chested except for a vest, struggling with Donna Anna on the balcony, and the Don actually kissing her before she repudiated him - only when her father was dead did she seem to take up arms against him! The ending was quite tremendous. The Don arrived for dinner topless and dripping with sweat - not incidentally nicely showing off his fine physique! Then all hell literally broke loose! The little band arrived to play, Donna Elvira rushed in, in white bridal veil, to try to save the Don, and finally the Commendatore strode in to drag him to hell, with columns of flame all around - enough fire for any pyromaniac! Then, during the finale, there was a vignette of Don Giovanni now "at it" in hell! - no rest for the wicked! With the superb cast, interesting direction and unusual decor, this was a witty, entertaining, altogether enthralling production of *Don Giovanni*, quite the best I've seen, or expect to see for some time!

Day tickets - tickets you queue for on the morning of the performance day - are a visiting opera lover's lifeline in London. The 67 tickets available at Covent Garden include good seats at the sides near the front - in fact they are the preferred seats of an opera photographer who was seated beside me, and she gets to see all the dress rehearsals! However, the ENO day seats are not as good, being in the top balcony, second and third rows, with a bar at eye level, which even their very low price does not balance out - unless, of course, the opera is completely sold out on the last night, as was *Death in Venice*!

A Hell of a Start at Glimmerglass!

by Shelagh Williams

Under its new General and Artistic Director, Michael MacLeod, Glimmerglass Opera (GGO) has entered a new era with themed seasons: this year's theme being the Orpheus legend to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, the first great opera. The basic story concerns the poet and musician Orpheus who, when his young wife Eurydice dies, convinces the ruler of the underworld to set her free, always with the proviso that Orpheus not look at her on the return journey.

Imagine the sheer luxury of having two superbly sung pre-Mozart operas in one day! We started with *Orphee et Eurydice*, Gluck's 1762 first "reform opera", which simplified the Baroque opera form, and was itself reorchestrated by Berlioz in 1859 to use modern instruments. This was a marvellous production, beautiful to look at with Associate Artistic Director John Conklin's classical ruin of a set, appropriately lit by Robert Wierzel, and matching off-white costumes by Constance Hoffman, and all tied together by director Lillian Groag. Couple this vision with the vocal beauty of male soprano Michael Maniaci as Orphee and the result was spectacular. Soprano Amanda Pabyan as Eurydice and the GGO chorus and orchestra under conductor Julian Wachter, principal conductor of Opera McGill, completed the picture musically. A pair of professional dancers, Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Trey Gillen, were effectively used in several scenes, assuring us of our opera ballet! This gorgeous production even had a happy ending, with L'Amour bringing Eurydice back to life a second time and reuniting Orphee and Eurydice at the end!

You know you're in for a musical treat when you see three theorbos emerging from the orchestra pit! These were part of the continuo ensemble of plucked instruments, including two harpsichords, a reed organ, and a harp, in support of Monteverdi's 1607 *L'Orfeo*. It was unfathomable why GGO would assemble such marvellous musical forces plus singers for this important opera revival and then leave the direction in the hands of Christopher Alden to produce one of his weird and annoying "Eurotrash" productions! Monteverdi must be turning over in his grave! This was a co-production with Opera North in England, where it had already played, and Norwegian National Opera, to which it will now go to open their new opera house, and so perhaps was more attuned to European sensibilities. Set designer Paul Steinberg gave us a huge yellow diagonally wood-panelled hall with five large archways at waist height along the right hand wall,

and furnished the set with a large number of moveable and oddly mismatched chairs and couches. Adam Silverman occasionally backlit these archways to indicate other rooms, for the singers to jump in and out of. There was a large cast, almost all in double (or triple) roles, and yet each singer had only one costume throughout the opera, which was confusing, to say the least! The Swiss costume designer, Doey Luthi, works mainly in Germany, which probably explains a lot - there was no consistent theme, or time period. Euridice was dressed like an ancient Greek maiden, Pluto and Proserpina were in opulent Renaissance costume, La Musica looked like a show girl, and Orfeo, the star, wore dirty jeans and T-shirt! The staging was also weird with most of the cast on-stage throughout, perpetually doing something or other, often distracting the audience and upstaging arias. One tenor, dressed in a business suit, mysteriously recorded the entire proceedings until his final entry as Apollo to end the opera by taking the grief-stricken Orfeo to heaven! Poor Euridice was up against the wall throughout the opera, either being groped by Orfeo in the first act, or duct-taped loudly to a wall in Hades by Charon in the second act. However, one action did make sense - Charon finished the taping by cordoning off Hades against Orfeo - let's hope they got a special deal on duct tape from Canadian Tire! Fortunately Australian maestro Antony Walker knew how to conduct his excellent orchestra and cast, in spite of the latter's surely tiring activities. Mezzo Katherine Rohrer as the Messenger delivered a lovely description of Euridice's death and followed that up with a strong Proserpina in Act 2 in Hades. Soprano Megan Monaghan was unfailingly lyrical as both Euridice and Speranza. Tenor Michael Slattery has sung Orfeo elsewhere and managed to overcome the staging and deliver a good performance. Although handicapped by the director-driven production, musically at least this *L'Orfeo* was a success - and memorable! Fortunately, Christopher Alden is not listed to direct next year!

To celebrate Philip Glass's 70th birthday, GGO produced its first opera by him: *Orphee*, based on Jean Cocteau's 1949 film. Director Sam Helfrich, along with set designer Andrew Lieberman and lighting designer Aaron Black, brought us a strikingly attractive contemporary Paris apartment which actually was three rooms, each the mirror image of the next. Persons entered "The Zone" (or underworld) through "mirrors" between rooms,

A Hell of a Start at Glimmerglass! (continued)

and doubles of the four principals reflected their actions as they died. This was an elegant if somewhat confusing take on the story, not as unambiguous as the clever Covent Garden production we saw two years ago, where a separate lower level for "The Zone" clarified proceedings immensely. Kaye Voyce provided contemporary costumes to match the setting and succeeded amazingly in producing "identical twins" for the mirror effects. The music seemed much less strident and repetitive and more interesting and tonal than I remember in London, which may be due to the careful conducting of Anne Manson - and to my increased familiarity with it! It also helped that she and the director had a super cast to work with. The very high tessitura of La Princesse (of Death) was handled beautifully by soprano Lise Saffer. Tenors Jeffrey Lentz, as her chauffeur Heurtebise, and Glen Alamilla, as the young poet Cegeste, and soprano Caroline Worra as Eurydice did their smaller roles proud. In the title role, baritone Philip Cutlip sang the self-centred poet strongly. This was a very attractive, totally enjoyable, satisfying production, surprisingly well staged, well played and sung, and with a happy ending to boot!

This reviewer was prepared to enjoy *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Offenbach's high spirited send-up of opera and religion (and goodness knows what else), with its merry hijinks and great music. Unfortunately the first act started off with another case of directorial overkill, but the second half was much better, leaving this reviewer much happier by the end! Resident Dramaturg and surtitle writer Kelly Rourke supplied new English lyrics and dialogue to order for this production, so no expense was spared! Visually the design team of Allen Moyer, sets, Gabriel Berry, costumes, and Shawn Kaufman, lighting, gave us four varied, memorable acts. For the opening scene on earth, think Oklahoma transferred from the Stratford Festival, with "corn as high as an elephant's eye"(!), then subsequent venues included a classic drawing room for heaven, a high class brothel for hell, and a wild disco club for the finale, with appropriate (and inappropriate) costumes - or lack thereof - and lighting. There were several clever transformation scenes and even Toulouse-Lautrec wandered by, well sung by tenor Glen Alamilla! In fact, Canadian conductor Jean-Marie Zeitouni ensured that all of his excellent singers and orchestra performed at a consistently high standard, while taking everything energetically and at a very fast clip. Canadian tenor Kurt Lehmann, Cassio in our OLO *Otello*, got the title role as Orpheus because he can play the violin, and acquitted himself very well, though he

seemed under-utilized. In fact, Eurydice is the major role - part of the humour - and soprano Jill Gardner filled the bill both vocally and visually, enthusiastically transforming from a hayseed to a siren for her "death" scene and descent to the underworld, then moving on romantically from Pluto to Jupiter when down there! The opera's action was precipitated and prodded along by Public Opinion, the humorously overbearing mezzo Joyce Castle, who harangued Orpheus for his glee at losing his disaffected wife, and harassed him until he went after her! In Olympus the complaints of tiny Cupid, drunken Venus and love-sick Diana, well played by sopranos Joelle Harvey, Donna Smith, and Canadian Ellen Weiser finally awakened Jupiter, veteran baritone Jake Gardner, who took the whole brood down to the underworld with Orpheus. While there Jupiter and Eurydice had their hilarious but tuneful dalliance, Jupiter transformed into a pudgy fly, complete with wings! - quite a highlight! To top it off, choreographer and assistant director E. Loren Meeker gave us some great dancing, especially the cancan of professional dancers Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Trey Gillen. Although over the top, this production was a visual feast and musically top drawer, and a great way to finish off our opera long weekend - it is easy to see why this work made Offenbach the father of the modern operetta!

GGO had two public exhibits: one at the rear of the theatre, on Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and a second, in the Thaw Pavilion, consisting of a fascinating potpourri of models, sketches, and rejected ideas, to illustrate the creative process behind this year's operas.

In addition to the Young Artists recitals, we were able to catch one of the concerts of the Cooperstown Chamber Music Festival. This was *Music for Soprano, Flute and Harp* with Amy Burton, recently the star in GGO's *La Voix Humaine*, and a leading soprano at NY City Opera. In a delightful programme she sang Cherubini, Ravel, Corigliano, and Granados, accompanied by, and interspersed with instrumental duets by, the Chesis/Cutter Duo.

Next year's GGO theme will be Shakespeare's plays. The operas will be Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*; Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*, based on *The Taming of the Shrew*; Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot* (Forbidden Love) based on *Measure for Measure*; and Bellini's *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*, based on *Romeo and Juliet*. Subscriptions are already on sale!

Events You Could Have Enjoyed!

On June 2nd the Friends of the NAC Orchestra led another successful trip to Montreal to hear Mozart's *Don Giovanni* by the Opera de Montreal. With Bernard Labadie conducting his own Violins du Roy and a mainly Canadian cast the excellence of the musical component was assured! Included were baritone Aaron St. Clair Nicholson (in white) who, in preparation for his fall portrayal at Opera Lyra (OLO), sang the Don; plus soprano Lyne Fortin as the scarlet woman Donna Elvira appropriately in scarlet, tenor John Tessier as a strong Don Ottavio, our Brian Law Scholarship and the Canada Council Sylva Gelber award winner, Joshua Hopkins handsome as Masetto, and, in bridal white, perky Ottawa U. Grad soprano Pascale Beaudin as Zerlina. The two British imports, soprano Susan Gritton in black and white as Donna Anna, and bass baritone Neal Davies in black as the much put upon servant Leporello, more than maintained the high standards. It will be interesting to compare the OLO production to this one and the superb one I saw in June at Covent Garden!

However one may regard Julian Armour's departure from the Ottawa Chamber Music Society, it still produced an enjoyable Chamberfest '07, with a remarkably large number of high quality singers and vocal groups in concert — a boon to opera lovers! These included old favourites such as Ottawans mezzo Julie Nesrallah and countertenor Daniel Taylor with his Theatre of Early Music, and great imports such as high tenor Charles Daniels and soprano Anne Grimm singing her native Dutch music to German texts. We were also treated to a number of excellent recitals by Canadians such as tenor Michiel Schrey, sopranos Melanie Conlin and Mariateresa Magisano, and Peter McGillivray the beautifully resonant baritone, while several young sopranos from McGill combined in other vocal programmes. In addition, for opera fans, there was a special presentation regarding the new Newfoundland chamber opera *Ann and Seamus*, with a showing of the documentary film, *To think like a composer*, followed by an informal discussion with the film maker; unfortunately the composer couldn't get off the island! The East Village Opera Company also performed an open air concert. There were also Pass-Plus concerts where one could hear soprano Nancy Argenta and countertenor James Bow-

man. Incidentally, First Baptist Church can now be added to the short list of air-conditioned venues!

The two Stratford Festival musicals this summer, *Oklahoma* (Rodgers) and *My One and Only* (Gershwin), were both excellent productions and will run almost daily till near the end of October.

The professional Thousand Islands Playhouse in Gananoque produced in its main Springer Theatre the new musical *Anne and Gilbert*, in its first outing off PEI! This was a lively and entertaining production with a huge cast, great scenery and costumes, a live "orchestra" of four, and energy to burn! I don't know how they do it for the ticket price!

L'Anima del Filosofo or its alternate title, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, was composed in London in 1791 when Joseph Haydn was visiting England. For a variety of reasons it had to wait 160 years to receive its first performance in Florence on May 9, 1951. Since that time, despite the support of opera luminaries such as Callas, Sutherland and, most recently, Cecilia Bartoli, the opera has been seldom performed. This summer Glimmerglass Opera presented an abridged concert version of *L'Anima del Filosofo* as part of its Orpheus-themed program which is described elsewhere in this newsletter. The Haydn concert, which played to an overflow audience at 11 a.m. on a Sunday morning, was outstanding. The Metropolitan Opera's Sarah Coburn, a Glimmerglass regular, sang the role of Euridice and was superb. The three other principals, including a narrator who advanced the action admirably, were excellent as well. Also worthy of mention was the superlative chorus, a continuing Glimmerglass strength. One of the criticisms of Haydn as an opera composer is that he, unlike his good friend, Mozart, was not a man of the theatre and his operas are not theatrical but more like oratorios. That criticism may be true for this opera but it is ideal for a concert performance. Haydn could definitely write for an orchestra and for the human voice if not for the stage. This is an opera that you may never get to see but it is absolutely one that you should make every attempt to hear. If you missed the Glimmerglass production a more accessible alternative is a recent CD (Decca 452 668-2) of the opera which features Cecilia Bartoli in the role of Euridice.

Events You Should Enjoy!

National Arts Centre

Joshua Hopkins will be appearing in Handel's *Messiah* on December 18th and 19th.

The Great Performers Series will star Frederica Von Stade and Samuel Ramey, January 8th.
Information: 613-947-7000

Opera Lyra and Guild

An Opera Insight (not Prelude) for *Don Giovanni* will be hosted by Tyrone and Joanne Paterson on October 30th.

Opera Lyra Studio Artists will be presenting a noon hour concert of *Don Giovanni* excerpts at the NAC on November 1st.

Definitely The Opera will be showing Puccini's *La Bohème* (December 3rd) and Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* (January 15th)
Information: 613-233-9200

University of Ottawa

The Fall Opera Workshop will stage Menotti's *The Medium* on October 27th and 28th.

Master Classes will be given by Russel Braun (December 10th) and Donna Brown (January 11th).
Information: 613-562-5733

Ooh La La Opera

George Valetta and Shawne Elizabeth will present *Love and Ashes* at the NAC 4th Stage on October 26th and 27th.

Information: 613-947-7000.

Cathedral Arts

Garth Hampson, together with the National Capital Concert Band, will perform in a Rememberance Day programme on November 10th.

Quartetto Gelato presents a Christmas programme on December 15th. Both concerts at Christ Church Cathedral.

Information: 613-567-1787

Ars Nova

Russian Soprano Marina Shaguch will be performing on December 15th at Dominion Chalmers United Church. Information: 819-682-2693

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

The CBC Radio 2 schedule is:

October 20 *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Wagner)

October 27 *Parsifal* (Wagner)

November 3 *La Fanciulla del West* (Puccini)\

November 10 *Katerina Ismaylova* (Shostakovich)

November 17 *Louise* (Charpentier)

November 24 *Hänsel und Gretel* (Humperdink)

December 1 *Transit of Venus* (Davies)

December 8 *Iphigénie en Tauride* (Gluck)

December 15 *Roméo et Juliette* (Gounod)

December 22 *War and Peace* (Prokofiev)

December 29 *Hänsel und Gretel* (Humperdink)

January 5 *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Verdi)

January 12 *Macbeth* (Verdi)

Hopefully, this schedule is more accurate than the one we gave in our last newsletter!!

Opera at the Movies

The Metropolitan Opera will be presenting the following operas at your local cinemas.

December 15th, 2007 *Roméo et Juliette* (Gounod)

January 1st, 2008 *Hänsel und Gretel* (Humperdink)

January 12th, 2008 *Macbeth* (Verdi)

Ottawa Baroque Consort

Shannon Mercer will perform in a concert at St. Giles Church on November 3rd.

Information: 613-730-2977

Opera Within Reach

Ottawa

Opera Lyra Ottawa

Don Giovanni by Mozart Nov. 10, 12, 14, 17, 2007

The Brothers Grimm by Burry Dec. 8, 9, 2007

Black & White Opera Soiree February 23, 2008

All performances are at the NAC. Information:
613-233-9200 x221 www.operalyra.ca

Orpheus Society

A Christmas Carol by Menken
Nov. 16 -24, 2007

Performances at Centrepointe Theatre.
Information: 613-580-2700
www.centrepointetheatre.com

Montréal

L'Opéra de Montréal

Roméo et Juliette by Gounod
Nov. 3, 7, 10, 12 and 15, 2007

Performances are in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts

Information 1-514-985-2258
www.operademontreal.com

Opera McGill

Albert Herring by Britten
November 21, 22, 23 and 24, 2007

Information: 514-398-4547

Toronto

Canadian Opera Company

The Marriage of Figaro by Mozart
Oct. 2, 5, 10, 13, 16, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, Nov. 2, 2007

Don Carlos by Verdi
Oct. 12, 17, 20, 23, 25, 28, 31, Nov. 3, 2007

All performances are at the Four Seasons Centre.
Information: 1-800-250-4653 www.coc.ca

Opera in Concert

Anna Bolena by Gaetano Donizetti
Sunday, October 28, 2007

Die Drei Pintos by von Weber & Mahler
Sunday, December 2, 2007

Performances 2:30 p.m. in the Jane Mallett Theatre
Information: 1-800-708-6754
www.operainconcert.com

Opera Atelier

The Return of Ulysses by C. Monteverdi
Oct. 27, 28, 30, Nov. 1, 2 and 3.
Elgin Theatre, 189 Yonge St.
Information: 1-416-872-5555
www.operatelier.com

Opera Ontario

The Magic Flute by Mozart
October 18, 20, 26 and 28.

Popera (Margison and company)
November 22, 23 and 24.
Information: 1-905-526-6556
www.operaontario.com