

Newsletter • Bulletin

Summer 2008

Été 2008

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

La Dolce Vita in Ottawa by Tom McCool

During two weekends this June (June 5 to 8 and June 13 to 15) upwards of a quarter million people gathered in Ottawa's Little Italy to celebrate the glories of Italian culture. The occasion, *Settimana Italiana*, (or Italian Week) provided an opportunity to celebrate all that is unique to the Italian way of life and showcase the artistic, athletic and culinary expertise that has come to be associated with the Italian lifestyle.

Settimana Italiana originated as a religious procession from St. Anthony's Church 35 years ago and has grown to include a number of non-religious activities that are also synonymous with Italian culture: soccer tournaments, bike races, bocce ball, fast cars, fresh pasta and fine wine — a variety of sporting, artistic, religious and cultural activities that are unmistakably Italian! Most of the revelry took place on Corso Italia (Preston Street) where bands, singers, comedians, dancers and buskers provided entertainment. In addition there were parades, receptions, dinner dances, concerts, plays, exhibits, photo displays and, of course, food and wine. A highlight for car enthusiasts was the automobile parade featuring Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Maseratis, and other Italian luxury models. What was originally missing from the list of events was probably the most distinctively Italian art form of all: opera. This surprising omission was rectified 12 years ago when, because of the insistence of longtime festival organizer (and NCOS board member) Pat Adamo, opera was added to the program. Thus was born "Opera in Piazza", a free outdoor opera concert which attracts hundreds of opera aficionados on the second weekend of *Settimana Italiana* in Little Italy.

SETTIMANA ITALIANA
ITALIAN WEEK  **SEMAINE ITALIENNE**
 Ottawa Canada

June 5-15/Giugno/juin/2008

OPERA in PIAZZA

"Your Opera Favorites"

FREE

Friday June 13 2008
7:30 p.m.



MAIN STAGE

Preston/Corso Italia & Louisa St.



Gratis

PRODUCER:
Pasqualina Pat Adamo
Ottawa, Ontario
Ph: 729-9518

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT: National Capital Opera Society Annual General Meeting, April 20, 2008

The past year was dominated by preparing for, producing, and following up what is the most important activity of the National Capital Opera Society. On November 24th, 2007, we held the most recent, and, in some ways, the most successful of the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competitions. Its success was due to the record large number of applicants for the competition. From the seventeen who applied the preliminary jurors were able to select six outstanding finalists. While only three could claim top prizes we expect that all six should have successful careers ahead of them. And what a pleasure it was that evening to hear Joshua Hopkins, our 2003 winner, who has already gained a reputation as an accomplished singer. This was the first competition where we were only partially able to rely on the wisdom and experience of the person who has spearheaded this scholarship from the beginning. However, Bobbi Cain has left us a fine model of what this competition should be. Our success in the past and in the future is a tribute to her hard work and perseverance in raising money to help young talented singers. Well done, Bobbi. The other members of the committee, Renate Chartrand (house manager as well as publicity), Ute Davis (looking after the judges and filming a fine DVD of the event) and Peggy Pflug (in charge of refreshments) all contributed to the success of this last undertaking. I must particularly acknowledge the contributions made by Marjorie Clegg. Marjorie was one of the board members (along with Peggy Pflug and myself) who joined with Bobbi Cain in setting up the Brian Law Opera Scholarship, so it is particularly dear to her and once again she helped us greatly. I am pleased to announce that due to the continued support of our members and the skilled financial management by our treasurer, Gordon Metcalfe, we are able to increase the value of the scholarships for future competitions beginning in 2009. The extensive publicity campaign for the competition was the excellent work of Renate Chartrand. Besides reaching the general public, the notices attracted many more applicants than usual so we will endeavour to reach the same contacts in future. It may interest you to know that all the competition application forms and instructions are available on our website. One applicant, studying in Germany, sent by email not only the completed forms but also the required vocal recordings. Email communications with applicants and finalists have been simplified and made possible on a day-to-day basis through computer use.

This leads me to talk about our big project for this year. Actually last March I was in Cyprus enjoying the warm

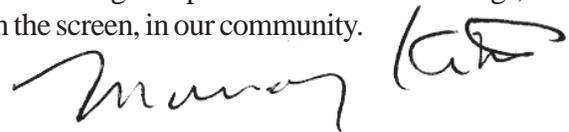
sunshine when I read the latest edition of our newsletter. How? On our website. With photos in colour, no less. Many of our members have access in their homes to internet service. We would like to deliver our newsletter to you through the internet. If we do not have to mail you a copy, then there will be considerable saving in postage as well as paper and printing. So we want to get from you your email address. But we are not trying to exclude those who are not computer people. Anyone who does not subscribe to the computer newsletter will receive their copy by mail as usual. Thanks to Norma Torontow the mailed version always goes out promptly. The details still have to be worked out with the capable editor of the newsletter, Dave Williams, his sidekick, Tom McCool, and our computer guru, Jim Burgess, who is always kept up-to-date by Renate Chartrand. In addition, many other organizations use the internet to tell their members about happenings of interest in the community. No doubt there will be a considerable amount of work in setting the communications system up but it will be most valuable to our organization.

Just a word on opera alla pasta. The opera selections seem to have been most appreciated since our attendance has increased. This is perhaps due to the fact that some are rarer operas, not often seen. We will certainly continue to present unusual and interesting selections on the vastly improved equipment at St. Anthony's Soccer Club with the promise of a delicious and inexpensive meal to follow.

Finally, thanks to Pat Adamo for all her good advice derived from her media savvy and experience in so many cultural organizations and to Jean Saldanha, our excellent secretary, who did double duty this year as membership chair.

Another project in the offing is the trip to New York in October to see our great friend Gerald Finley in a new production of Adams' *Doctor Atomic* at the Met. Those of us who went to previous productions with Gerald there can promise you an unforgettable experience.

Check your newsletter regularly so as not to miss some of the great opera and other vocal offerings, live and on the screen, in our community.



New Member
Elizabeth Meller

NATIONAL CAPITAL OPERA SOCIETY

Board of Directors

President: Murray Kitts; telephone 830-9827
email: kmitts1637@rogers.com

Past President: Bobbi Cain

Newsletter: David Williams

The following members were elected to the board at the annual general meeting: Pat Adamo, Renate Chartrand, Ute Davis, Gordon Metcalfe, Elizabeth Meller, Peggy Pflug and Jean Saldanha. Appointments to specific positions will be decided at the first meeting of the new board.

Web site: www.ncos.ca

Web Site News by Jim Burgess

Over the past six months, a significant change in the way the Newsletter is produced has opened new opportunities for the Society and its members, such as faster, cheaper and wider distribution of the Newsletter.

The Newsletter is now being assembled as a PDF (Portable Document Format) file. A PDF file is intended to be an *exact* reproduction of some document, such as the Newsletter. The PDF file can be sent to the printer for printing; it's the electronic format of choice for most commercial printers. The printed version will look the same as it does now. However, the PDF file can (and will) be posted immediately on our web site. Finally, an e-mail will be sent to every member (whose e-mail address is known to the Society) announcing that the new Newsletter is available. The Newsletter itself will be sent as an attachment to that e-mail, so that the recipient can just double-click on the attachment, rather than going to the web site.

PDF files are readable on any computer, since the required "reader" is free. For those who don't already have the necessary "reader," it is available at www.adobe.com. Look for the button labelled "Get ADOBE READER," click on it and follow the instructions.

The electronic (PDF) version of the Newsletter will be available a couple of weeks earlier than the printed version. In addition, all the pictures will be in colour, whereas the printed version of the Newsletter must be in black and white, for cost reasons.

The last two issues of the Newsletter (Winter and Spring 2008) are already available on the web site as PDFs. Click on "From the Newsletter archives" and then on "Spring" beside 2008; the Spring Newsletter will appear in a new window. The Winter Newsletter is there in both forms. Clicking on "Winter" beside 2008 brings up a new page where an index of the articles is there in the "old" format. However,

note the text "NEW! The complete Newsletter as PDF." Click on that and the Winter 2008 Newsletter will appear in a new window.

One of the pleasant changes of this process (at least for the webmaster!) is that it will now take approximately one minute to post the newest Newsletter, instead of the six hours or so that it used to take. Also, the PDF form of the Newsletter, being an *exact* copy of the original, will contain *all* the information in the original: not just the articles, but also the President's remarks, the little "opera trivia" contests that have appeared, etc. Over the next months, back issues of the Newsletter will be posted on the web site in PDF form.

However, does this mean that everyone now has to read the Newsletter online? No, not at all! In the near future, NCOS will be asking you if you would still like to receive a paper copy of the Newsletter. It's your choice! Nobody will be forced to read the Newsletter online. Every member will continue to receive a paper copy of the Newsletter unless he or she explicitly tells the Society that a paper copy is not necessary. However, members who elect not to receive a paper copy will be saving the Society both money (printing cost and postage) and labour (stuffing envelopes).

E-mail addresses: Because e-mail would allow the Society to keep its members better informed than it can via the Newsletter alone, the Society would like to compile a list of the e-mail addresses of its members. **If you have an e-mail address**, please send a message to Murray Kitts at kmitts1637@rogers.com. The Society will *not* make your address available to any other organizations. All messages will be sent by some member of the Executive, and will be about NCOS business or upcoming events that should be of interest to the membership (opera talks, films, presentations, etc.).

(continued from Page 1)

Originating in Italy at the end of the 16th century, opera quickly established itself as one of the most respected musical forms and has come to play an enormously important part in Italian culture. Originally an entertainment for the Italian aristocracy and the very wealthy, opera soon became something that all Italians, rich and poor, young and old, male and female, came to revere. After its establishment in Italy opera spread to other countries in Europe and, eventually, throughout the world. But it was in Italy that opera came to be an all-consuming passion. An Italian town would have to be very small indeed not to have an active opera house. It is difficult, if not impossible, to think of opera and not consider such names as Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini, La Scala, Caruso and Pavarotti to mention only a few. Even non-Italians such as Handel, Gluck, and Mozart wrote Italian operas. The heart and soul of opera was, and remains, Italian. Therefore, it is altogether appropriate that opera is now a vital component of *Settimana Italiana*.



Susan Blythe-Schofield

The heart and soul of opera was, and remains, Italian.



James O'Farrell



Frédérick Lacroix



Shawne Elizabeth

The venue for *Opera in Piazza* has been, and was again this year, in the centre of Little Italy at Corso Italia and Louisa Street. The program consisted of primarily Italian opera arias, duets and ensembles performed by local professional opera singers. This year the singers were soprano Shawne Elizabeth, mezzo-soprano Susan Blythe-Schofield and tenor James O'Farrell — all accompanied by pianist Frédéric Lacroix. Since rain has always been a constant threat in the past, precautions were taken this year to protect the entertainers and the spectators by erecting a huge tent over the site. Although the concert took place on Friday the 13th the weather was just about perfect and the 2008 *Opera in Piazza* event was, once again, a smashing success with a capacity audience and an excellent show.



The driving force behind *Opera In Piazza* has been Pat Adamo and the basic reason for the success of the event is due to her dedication, organizational skills and hard work. In acknowledgement of her commitment to the Italian community in Ottawa, Pat was awarded the prestigious CAVALIERE/CHEVALIER designation from the Government of Italy. *Opera in Piazza* is just one of the reasons for this very well-deserved honour. Previous recognition in appreciation of her contributions has included the Royal Jubilee Award and Canada's 125th Anniversary Medal. Just this year Pat received several more outstanding achievement awards including those of the Calabrese Savuto-Cleto Association, The Italian Womens' Filo Association and the Italian Week Committee.

The 2008 *Opera in Piazza* a smashing success.



Program

Italian Week Sottimana Italiana Somalno Itallenne

OPERA IN PIAZZA

Preston Street at the Queensway
MAIN STAGE, CORSO ITALIA,

Friday 13 June 2008 7:30 PM Il venerdì 13 giugno 2008 7:30 PM le vendredi 13 juin 2008 7:30 PM

featuring

Susan Blyth-Schofield & Shawne Elizabeth & James O'Farrell
accompanied by Frédéric Lacroix

Brindisi Duet	(Traviata)	James & Susan
Recondita harmonia	(Tosca)	James
Sull'aria	(Figaro)	Susan & Shawne
Mozart Trio	(Don Giovanni)	Tutti
Torna mi a dir	(Don Pasquale)	James & Shawne
Suicidio	(Gioconda)	Susan
Caro Nome	(Rigoletto)	Shawne
Mario, Mario	(Tosca)	James & Susan
Vesti la giubba	(Pagliacci)	James
Viss i d'Arte	(Tosca)	Susan
Un di felice	(Traviata)	James & Shawne
Quando m'en vo	(Puccini)	Shawne
Cedi, cedi	(Norma)	Susan & Shawne
Champagne Trio	(Fledermaus)	Tutti

Funiculi Funicula



More Sun Than Clouds!

by Shelagh Williams

It is very fashionable these days in opera to build a new house, or do over the one you already have, and Sarasota Opera (SO) is no exception! We had to go and see the results of the extensive \$20 million yearlong work on SO's Mediterranean Revival Opera House, which our guide assured us was a "rehabilitation", since many things were restored to the original state and many things were renovated, but all was done to produce a working modern opera house. And succeed they did! As you step into the foyer, the atrium is now a full three stories high, and sunlit by the restored skylight and the new glass entrance doors. The house itself, of just under 1,200 seats, the size of a European opera house, now has even better acoustics than before and, marvellously, comfortable new seats in a proper stagger for viewing, both downstairs and in the enlarged balcony. A larger deeper orchestra pit, with elevators, was dug and it can now accommodate larger orchestras for the major Verdi operas still in Artistic Director Victor DeRenzi's "to do" list to complete his cycle of all Verdi's operas. The whole has been beautifully decorated in period by local scenic artists, with columns reinstated into the ends of the proscenium arch, and even the rest rooms have been enlarged and redone! The only disappointment was that the collapse of a land swap deal meant that the enlargement of the small stage onto what is still a city lane could not be accomplished, but new rigging and lighting have improved the stage situation. All in all, it is now an even lovelier, still intimate venue for SO's excellent, traditional opera productions.

The SO managed to produce a full season of four operas this year for its grand reopening in its new house: in its Verdi Cycle *Rigoletto* and *I due Foscari*, the latter also part of its Masterworks Revival Series; Puccini's *La Rondine*; and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. However, rumour had it that the later than usual season might have affected some of the casting decisions negatively.

Rigoletto is one of Verdi's most tuneful operas and the start of a new phase in his development in 1851, coming just before *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*, although it maintains his usual divisions into four parts: here three acts, one with two scenes. In the new SO production we got traditional, though overcrowded, sets by David P. Gordon; lovely rich costumes by resident costume designer Howard Tsvi Kaplan; and fantastic lighting by resident lighting designer Ken Yunker, especially the lightning during the final storm, perfectly timed with the orchestra! Stephanie Sundine's direction was excellent, except for the quite dreadful dancing in the first act. In fact, the first act was quite disappointing all around, but fortunately things got better! Maestro DeRenzi's orchestra benefited from its new pit and the all-

male chorus was in fine voice. In general, the cast was strong, with the exception of *Rigoletto*'s daughter, Gilda, a tricky part. According to Karl Hesser, SO's Education Director, the singer needs to combine a coloratura soprano for Act I, a lyric for Act II, and a more powerful soprano for Act III! Unfortunately, Erica Strauss, a former SO Apprentice and Studio Artist, seemed miscast, with a harsh though powerful voice, and a sluggish manner, which did not well portray a young girl. Tenor Rafael Davila gave us a suitably suave and mellifluous Duke of Mantua, with a beautifully delivered "La donna e mobile". Outstanding was Canadian baritone Jonathan Carle as the voice of doom, the Count of Monterone. Would that *Rigoletto*'s voice had been as good! However, baritone Michael Corvino is a good actor, and showed quick-wittedness in the second act when the courtiers knocked his hat askew, and he threw it off, seemingly indicating that he was no longer a jester, but a serious, broken-hearted father. By the end Corvino had us on his side, sympathizing with his being unjustly robbed of his beloved daughter, Gilda. This production suffered in my eyes from comparison with the marvellous one seen in 2006 at the Vienna State Opera, but it was overall well done and skilfully produced and Verdi's marvellous music ensured that it was still an enjoyable evening at the opera!

Our second Verdi treat was a wonderful production of the rarely performed *I due Foscari*, an early (1844) work, with great music and a very dramatic story, based on Byron's play. The two Foscari are father Francesco Foscari, the octogenarian Doge of Venice, and son Jacopo, accused of murder and exiled. He has just returned to Venice, and his wife Lucrezia pleads to the Doge as a father to allow his son to stay. However, their sworn enemy, the evil Loredano of the Council of Ten, is adamant and Jacopo is again imprisoned to be exiled. Another man confesses to the murder but, by then, the innocent Jacopo has died on the departing ship. Broken hearted Francesco, stripped of his title of Doge, collapses and dies, completing Loredano's revenge. This story is definitely not a barrel of laughs and was turned down by Venice's Teatro La Fenice for fear of offending prominent Venetian descendants of the opera's characters! The Venice setting demanded and got from Jeffrey W. Dean grand yet flexible sets for the many scene changes, plus sumptuous costumes and impressive lighting by Kaplan and Yunker respectively. Former Ottawan Martha Collins kept the considerable on-stage forces well organised while Maestro DeRenzi ensured that the rousing music received an excellent reading by cast, chorus and

More Sun Than Clouds! (continued)

orchestra. The four main characters need strong voices and good stage presence for their roles, and this cast had them in spades! Bass Jeffrey Tucker, our Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*, returned as the despicable but deep-voiced Loredano, acting the part so well that I joined in the enthusiastic “boos”, which brought a huge smile to his face during his bows! As young Jacopo Foscari, tenor Benjamin Warshawski’s fine voice and acting brought the tragedy of his case to life. The role of Lucrezia, Jacopo’s wife, is extremely difficult, with lots of coloratura, plus acting ability, required, and soprano Reyna Carguill, who has gone rapidly from Apprentice Artist to Studio Artist to Principal in two years, more than filled the bill. In his SO debut as the Doge, Italian Marco Nistico was superb and his beautiful baritone and strong acting were riveting. Above all, the Act II quartet of the principals in the state prison was glorious, beginning with Jacopo haunted by a ghost of another condemned man, then joined by Lucrezia who lovingly comforted him in a duet, followed by a trio as the Doge greeted the pair, and ending in a quartet when Loredano arrived to gloat over his enemies - it doesn’t get much better! With such engaging music, this early opera was successful and with the right voices, as here, still provides a stirring evening’s entertainment - Donizetti said it showed “Verdi at his best in fits and starts”!

Since 2008 is Puccini Year (150 years since his birth in 1858), SO staged a new production of the delightful *La Rondine* (The Swallow), one of Puccini’s last operas. It is an unusual one for Puccini, not being based on a play he had seen, but instead commissioned by a Viennese theatre wanting a new operetta! It was therefore funny, with no tragic ending, and set to premiere in 1914. However, World War II intervened, and Puccini changed it to a full opera which premiered in Monte Carlo in 1917. The story is sort of a poor man’s *La Traviata*, with courtesan Magda honourably rejecting young Ruggero at the end because of her hitherto undisclosed past and returning to her rich banker. There is also an added comic pair, as in an operetta, consisting of Magda’s perky maid Lisette and the poet Prunier. To carry us to Paris and the Riviera, SO provided most charming settings and costumes, with a magnificent Art Nouveau nightclub, designed by Michael Schweikardt. Director Michael Unger took advantage of the attractive visuals to give us pleasing and funny crowd scenes in the Act I party at Magda’s and the Act II nightclub, while conductor David Neely kept the musical mood light and operetta-like, and both benefited from having

a good-looking, pleasant voiced young cast and chorus to work with. As the young lover Ruggero, tenor Ryan MacPherson looked like a blonde Leslie Howard, with spiffy spectator shoes, first coming out in the 1890’s, according to a costumer, and sang with youthful conviction and emotion. Much of the comedy was supplied by the attractively voiced pair of tenor Andrew Drost as a well drawn poet Prunier and soprano Christina Bouras as an over-the-top maid Lisette. In the title role of Magda, Georgian soprano Lina Tetrushvili was perfectly cast: gorgeous, with an alluring manner on stage, and a great voice, especially in her rendition of the well-known first act aria “Doretta’s Dream”. All four sang well, with Tetrushvili’s high notes beautifully anchoring the important Act II quartet in the nightclub. This was an enchanting opera, whose well-received premiere is easily accounted for, and which the Met is slated to do next season.

We finished off with the opening night of a thoroughly enjoyable *Così fan tutte* - first class in every respect. Director Pat Diamond brought out all the comedy in the piece and kept things moving because of the quick scene changes allowed by David P. Gordon’s unit set, which costumed “servants” adjusted. In his SO debut, conductor Pacien Mazzagatti shone, keeping all his musical forces in balance, and bringing out the best in them. Of the sisters, New Zealand soprano Marie-Adele McArthur had the large and regal voice and stature for Fiordiligi, while the rich mezzo of the attractive Vanessa Cariddi was effectively employed for the more frivolous Dorabella. Their duets together were marvellous. The two male lovers played their parts as disguised Albanians to the hilt, with good voices to match, baritone Sean Anderson as a large, handsome Guglielmo, and tenor Chad Johnson as a more diminutive Ferrando, whose scenes with Fiordiligi had the added humour of their greatly disparate sizes! In the two key comic roles, basso-buffo Stephen Eisenhard and soprano Alicia Berneche reprised their 2002 SO roles as Don Alfonso and the maid Despina, and both were marvellous, Berneche’s Despina being especially delightful - one of the best I’ve seen! It was a tremendous way to finish off our week of opera in sunny Sarasota!

We were fortunate enough to be in Sarasota at the right time to enjoy the fully costumed and enacted “Apprentice Scenes at Noon” of the Chorus members, and the “Covers at Three”, where the Studio Artists performed scenes from the current season operas which they were understudying. The talent out there is quite amazing!

The 2008-9 season is already set: Rossini’s *Barber of Seville* in November 2008, and in February/March 2009 Puccini’s *Tosca*, Donizetti’s *Elixir of Love*, Mascagni’s *L’amico Fritz*, and Verdi’s *Don Carlos* in French.

Delightful Diversity!

by Shelagh Williams

In one long April weekend in Toronto we experienced entirely different companies doing disparate opera styles from three separate eras: *Eugene Onegin* by the Canadian Opera Company, *Indian Queen* by the Toronto Masque Theatre, and *Idomeneo* by Opera Atelier!

Eugene Onegin may be Tchaikovsky's most popular opera, but it had not been performed at the Canadian Opera Company (COC) since 1995. They imported from the Opera national du Rhin in Strasbourg an interesting 2003 production created by Swiss director, set and lighting designer Marco Arturo Marelli. His conceit, re-created here by debuting Italian director Enrico De Feo and choreographer Allison Grant, is that Eugene Onegin is looking back wryly and regretfully at his life, seeing events in hindsight, in a slightly distorted way. This translates into a nightmarish "box" of a set with not a single flat playing surface, upright wall, or right angle, and fitted with oversized doors. In front is a white undulating strip on which only Onegin, on stage throughout the opera, often rested or stood while viewing events. However, when he strayed from this strip he often confused this reviewer as to whether he was watching or somehow taking part - a bit distracting, to say the least! The set was used cleverly, and lit adroitly to convey changes of time, place and mood but one never got the feeling that the young people started as teenagers and were only in their twenties at the end! German costume designer Bettina Walter ensured that everyone was appropriately and well dressed, and eliminating the Peasants' Chorus in the first scene certainly cut down on the number of costumes needed! The uneven floor made it difficult for anyone to move about easily, so that in the first ball scene only six trained dancers really danced, and at the final ball dancing was dispensed with completely, perhaps also for economy? Richard Bradshaw had remarked on the prohibitive cost of doing a traditional production. Fortunately, the musical side of the production generally passed muster, with the excellent cast and orchestra prepared by British conductor Sir Richard Armstrong but under Derek Bate, recently appointed COC resident conductor, on the night I attended. However, for much of the first half of the performance the orchestra seemed to be too loud, nearly drowning

out the singers, or else the singers, with the exception of Onegin, were too far back in the "box" to be properly heard. Canadian mezzo Allyson McHardy was delightful as the vivacious younger sister Olga, affianced to Lensky, yet not averse to flirting with his friend Onegin, precipitating the fatal duel. Lensky was nicely sung by Russian tenor Daniil Shtoda, but not until his heartbreaking solo just before he died did we really hear what a beautiful and strong voice he had. I am still unsure why his body was then placed on a bench at the rear of the stage for the rest of the opera, unless it was to indicate how it haunted Onegin. Northern Irish soprano Giselle Allen both in her portrayal of the young Tatiana during the pivotal "Letter aria", as she wrote the ill-considered love letter to Onegin, and as the mature Tatiana who successfully resisted him, sang and acted marvellously. As her older husband Prince Gremin, debuting Russian bass Alexander Kisselev looked the part, clad in military uniform with a black arm sling, a nice touch, and sang his aria at the end strongly and well. Older but definitely quality performers were baritone Cornelis Ophof, in his 50th season with the COC, as Lensky's second, Zaretsky, and debuting Welsh tenor Ryland Davies, bringing his 45 years of experience to the speciality role of Frenchman M. Triquet. However, the star of the show was Canadian baritone Brett Polegato, in his first portrayal of the title role. Although he was on stage throughout he is such a good actor that one never tired of his presence, and was fascinated by the distinction he showed between Onegin's young self disdaining Tatiana's love and his unhappy older self being rejected by her. Of course, the fact that Polegato is good looking and possessed of a marvellous voice also helped! In addition, the rest of the cast also acted well, and so Tchaikovsky's great music overcame any quibbles one had about the staging!

And now for something completely different: the Toronto Masque Theatre (TMT) presented *The Indian Queen* in the fourth season of its 5-year Purcell Cycle, working up to Purcell's 350th birthday next year! This was Henry Purcell's final work for the stage and, when he died before its completion, his brother Daniel finished the final masque. We were treated to a first class

Delightful Diversity! (continued)

production, true to the work but accessible to the 21st century, since the TMT slimmed down the 4 1/2 hour semi-opera - a combination of music and dance - by performing all the music and dance, but using two actors to synopsis much of the play. This was extremely useful, since the story was an uncommonly convoluted tale of the Queen of Mexico, the Inca of Peru and his general Montezuma, who turns out to be the long lost Mexican heir - you get the idea! All ended happily with a wedding masque for Montezuma and his beloved! One act was fully staged by the actors, dancers and singers, and the combination of music, dance and theatre was delightful. Artistic Director Larry Beckwith, who led the excellent period instrumentalists from the violin, drew on resources from both Toronto and Montreal to ensure the success of this undertaking, calling in Caroline Guilbault for scenery and dancer Marie-Nathalie Lacoursiere for costumes and the choreography of her troupe of six Montreal dancers. Director Derek Boyes and lighting designer Gabriel Croyley held up the Toronto end well. The nine talented singers, all Baroque specialists, and including two countertenors, delivered Purcell's divine music with care and style, and the words were helpfully provided. They were delightful together and three must be singled out for their outstanding solo performances: sopranos Teri Dunn, an Ottawa native and wife of the Artistic Director, and Meredith Hall, who also sings for Opera Atelier, and Canadian tenor Daniel Auchincloss, who works a lot in England and Europe. This excellent production of a late seventeenth century English work was obviously a labour of love for all participants, and was a revelation to this reviewer, plus a nice reference point for other later Baroque works.

Take off 140-150 pounds and you too can become a poster girl for Opera Atelier (OA)! If, of course, you also have Measha Brueggergosman's voice! Marshall Pynkoski, OA's Co-Artistic Director, did say that he only considered her for Elettra in OA's production of Mozart's *Idomeneo* after the weight loss, since movement and dance are very much a part of OA's style! OA is, of course, "Canada's Baroque Theatre Company", which does repertoire

from Monteverdi to Mozart. This production was, like Mozart's, in the French style, with dance integrated into and a most important component of the opera. The action is precipitated by King Idomeneo of Crete who, returning triumphantly from the Trojan War, was saved from a storm by Neptune, providing he sacrifice the first person he sees on landing - rather rough on the welcome party! Of course, this turns out to be his son Idamante, and the opera tells of the many twists and turns of fate to reach the happy ending of Idamante and his beloved, Trojan captive Princess Ilia, being placed on the throne, much to the chagrin of Greek Princess Elettra, who also fancies Idamante. To put us in the mood, resident set designer Gerard Gauci supplied us with a sumptuous setting - the opening scrim of a gigantic wave opened onto "forced perspective" scenes in radiant jewel tones - all beautifully lit by Bonnie Beecher and well matched by luxurious new costumes by Margaret Lamb. Director Marshall Pynkoski and choreographer Jeannette Zingg skilfully milked the libretto for every emotion so that there was never a dull moment, yet integrated the story and dance so smoothly that one was never completely sure where one ended and the other began. Indeed, the dancers were marvelous, with one actually in a shorter costume and pointe shoes for the final grand masque, pointe shoes having been introduced by 1681, the year of *Idomeneo*'s premiere! Jeannette Zingg herself danced in the 16-member corps de ballet, and one wondered if she were injured, since she lacked her usual spring! - perhaps the gruelling schedule of 6 performances in 8 days affected her! The music was under the superb and fiery direction of Baroque and Mozart specialist, Brit Andrew Parrott, with the always superior period-instrument Tafelmusik orchestra and a magnificent chorus and cast of singers. During the overture bass-baritone Curtis Sullivan, as Neptune, looked splendid behind the scrim as he waved his trident and derriere about, and also occasionally sang later! American soprano Peggy Kriha Dye, as Princess Ilia, both looked and sounded gorgeous. To soothe and free her, we had no insipid female singer but male soprano Michael Maniaci with his unfailingly beautiful voice and excellent dramatic skills.

Delightful Diversity! (continued)

Trying to break up this happy pair, Elettra in the person of the debuting Measha Brueggergosman, gave us a third different soprano voice! This was her first ever Mozart role - she hasn't done many opera roles - and although it is not the main female role, it was enough for her to sink her teeth into and excel in! Her voice was transcendent, her acting satisfactory, and her stage movement passable, except for one entrance where she obviously forgot and stomped on to mid-stage, rather than gracefully gliding into place! As King Idomeneo we were blessed with another first-class performer, debuting Croatian tenor Kresimir Spicer, announced by Pynkoski as "one of the finest singing actors of his generation". Spicer specializes in Baroque roles, and he certainly lived up to his advance billing: good looking, active, thrillingly dramatic, and with a great voice to boot! It all came together wonderfully well, tied together by Mozart's marvellous music, and all aspects of the production, both visual and musical, were first class, with no detail overlooked or expense spared, setting an even higher standard of performance for Opera Atelier!

We returned in May for the COC's final offering of the season, Debussy's only opera, *Pelleas and Melisande*. Surely a production headlining Canadian opera stars baritone Russell Braun and soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian in the title roles would be good - or at least a better revival than the 2000 COC original which was so dark you could hardly tell who was singing or what was happening! And of course it was, even though the story is unusually weird even for opera, and a real downer. Middle aged Prince Golaud brings into his dysfunctional royal family, where first spouses seem to die from unexplained circumstances, a beautiful young bride, Princess Melisande, of an age with his half brother, Prince Pelleas, and - Surprise! Surprise! - they fall in love! Golaud finally twigs something may be amiss and ends up killing Pelleas and injuring Melisande, so that she dies in childbirth, in keeping with the family tradition of early deaths! All of this enacted at a stupefyingly slow rate with unbelievably "dumb" dialogue accompanied by no perceptible tunes, had people bolting to the exits at the first blackout, between scenes! After the only intermission in the three hour long affair there was an amazing

number of empty seats - more than I've ever seen at the COC. One wag suggested it should be retitled as "Bally-Ass and Head-in-Sand"! Fortunately lighting designer Thomas C. Hase gave us enough light, well placed, that we could see the performers and the sets and costumes of Dany Lyne. To designate the Royal Family, Chinese dress was used, while the foreigner, Melisande, was in beautiful Indian sari silks. Golaud, as the heavy, was mostly in black and Pelleas in innocent white, while Melisande was in red, perhaps subconsciously a scarlet woman, though appearing sweetly passive. The stage was again divided oddly into two levels and action took place on the same awkward trestle as before, with pull down stairs and trap door to the undercroft. It did allow one half to be raised for Melisande's unbelievably high tower boudoir. However, Hase again rescued things, with innovative low placed lighting which in this case produced shadows to stretch Pelleas up, and enable him, in one's imagination, to touch Melisande and her hair! Nicholas Muni made a better job of directing this time, but of course he and English-born conductor Jan Latham-Koenig had a dream cast to work with! Pelleas is Russell Braun's most frequently sung role. This was his eighth time, though the first in Canada, and he was marvellous, bringing out Pelleas's youth and playfulness, and with his high baritone just right for the music. It was Isabel Bayrakdarian's first Melisande, but she sang and acted to her usual high standards, and was able to move about more easily than when she was very pregnant in *Marriage of Figaro*! It was nice to see bass-baritone Pavlo Hunka well and singing again, and bringing all of his acting and vocal talents to the complex role of Golaud. Grandfather King Arkel had a powerful exponent in debuting Welsh bass Richard Wiegold, and Canadian mezzo Erin Fisher sang well as Golaud's young son Yniold, but was really too tall! *Pelleas and Melisande* has pleasant enough music for a twentieth century opera, and this time the beautiful singing and playing of a first class cast and orchestra, plus good lighting, lifted it from the earlier 2000 stygian gloom to a more enjoyable performance - at least for some of the audience.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed!

Keeping up its string of solid successes, **Opera Lyra** (OLO) presented another excellent production, this time of Verdi's *La Traviata*. Under the sure baton of James Meena, who needed no score, the NAC Orchestra and OLO Chorus and the soloists shone. Beautiful sets from the New Orleans Opera and costumes from Malabar set the scene for Joseph Bascetta's delightfully straightforward and clear direction - none of the nightmarish antics of the demented director of the COC's last *La Traviata*! The quality cast sang and acted superbly under these two gentlemen, notably soprano Laura Whelan in the title role, tenor Kurt Lehmann as young Alfredo, and baritone Gregory Dahl as his father, plus mezzo Renee Lapointe debuting with OLO as Flora and baritone Benoit Boutet hamming it up expertly as Gastone. There was even an excellent troupe of gypsy dancers as specified for the "Spanish Soiree" in Act 3! The OLO now gives us world-class opera productions - no need to go elsewhere! **Shelagh Williams**

"Pirates at Centrepointe"

For the past 33 years the Savoy Society has been entertaining Ottawa audiences by staging Gilbert & Sullivan operettas. This year's presentation, *The Pirates of Penzance*, was superbly done and enjoyed by near capacity audiences for two weeks in April at Centrepointe Theatre. Not only was it fun for the audiences but the performers appeared to be enjoying the experience as well. At the risk of belaboring a cliché it is definitely true to say that a great time was had by all! Don't miss next year's production of *The Gondoliers*. **Tom McCool**

Glorious at the Thousand Islands Playhouse, was great fun and showed many of Florence Foster Jenkins' attributes, the chief of which was her joy in singing. Despite her lack of vocal talent she gave great pleasure to her audiences. Visit www.metoperafamily.org for more information on this wonderful lady. **David Williams**

Events You Should Enjoy

To close out its inaugural season, on Friday, June 20, and Saturday, June 21, 2008, at 8:00 p.m. at St. Matthias Anglican Church, 555 Parkdale Avenue, **Ottawa Pocket Opera** will present its spring production, a double-bill of one-act operas: Ralph Vaughan Williams dramatic masterpiece *Riders To The Sea*, and Douglas Moore's brilliant comedy *Gallantry*. Tickets will be available at the door, or may be purchased in advance at The Leading Note (370 Elgin St., 569-7888). www.ottawapocketopera.ca

Benita Valente will give a vocal **Masterclass** on June 27th at 19:30 in Freiman Hall, University of Ottawa.

At LeBreton Flats Park on July 17th at 19:30, **Opera under the Stars** presents Measha Brueggergosman and Richard Margison with the NAC Orchestra in a programme of opera's greatest hits. The following evening, July 18th, (same location and time), soprano Marianne Fiset will sing with the Orchestre de la Francophonie Canadienne.

Isabel Bayrakdarian will open the **Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival** on July 25th. Other vocal performers are scheduled throughout the festival. Check www.chamberfest.com for full details.

Live in HD from the MET presents the Opening Night Gala starring Renée Fleming in fully staged performances of scenes from three different operas: Verdi's *La Traviata* (Act II), Massenet's *Manon* (Act III), and the final scene from Richard Strauss's *Capriccio*. Tenor Ramón Vargas and baritones Thomas Hampson and Dwayne Croft co-star. Met Music Director James Levine and Marco Armiliato conduct. Monday September 22, 2008 at 6:30 p.m.

Opera and Ballet at the Empire Theatre

Last year the Empire Theatre at the World Exchange Centre presented high definition transmissions of operas and ballets from Covent Garden in London, Madrid and San Francisco. Unlike the transmissions from the Metropolitan Opera they were not "live" but they were of excellent quality. Plans for next year have not been finalized yet but the Empire Theatre definitely does plan a similar program for next year.

Saturday Afternoon At The Opera



- June 21 *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (R. Strauss)
Lyric Opera of Chicago
- June 28 *H.M.S. Pinafore* (Gilbert & Sullivan)
Edmonton Opera
- July 5 *Guillaume Tell* (Rossini)
Auditorium Parco Della Musica, Rome
- July 12 *Les Troyens* (Berlioz)
Geneva Opera, Grand Theatre
- July 19 *Le Roi d'Ys* (Lalo)
Theatre du Capitole, Toulouse
- July 26 *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* (Dukas)
Opera Bastille, Paris
- August 2 *Norma* (Bellini)
Vienna State Opera
- August 9 *La Forza del Destino* (Verdi)
Vienna State Opera
- August 16 *Cappriccio* (Richard Strauss)
Vienna State Opera
- August 23 *Die Walküre* (Wagner)
Vienna State Opera
- August 30 *Così fan tutte* (Mozart)
Vienna State Opera

Opera Within Reach

Glimmerglass Opera

- Kiss Me Kate* July 5 - August 23
Guilio Cesare in Egitto July 6 - August 23
Das Liebesverbot July 19 - August 22
Capuletti e i Montecchi July 26 - August 24
 Evening Performances (20:00). Matinee times vary.
 Tickets: 607-547-2255, www.glimmerglass.org

Lake George Opera Saratoga

- La Traviata* July 5, 11 (19:30) July 8, 13 (14:00)
Pirates of Penzance July 3, 12 (19:30) July 6, 9 (14:00)
Gianni Schicchi/Buoso's Ghost July 10 (19:30) July 12 (13:00).
 Performances at Spa Little Theatre, Saratoga Springs
 Tickets: 518-476-1000 www.lakegeorgeopera.org

Opera North

- Madame Butterfly* August 9, 13, 15, 19 (19:30).
 August 17 (14:00)
Magic Flute August 14, 16, 20, 23 (19:30).
 August 21, 23 (14:00).
 Information: www.operanorth.org

Opera Lyra Ottawa

- Le Nozze di Figaro* September 13, 15, 17, 20 (20:00)
 Southam Hall, National Arts Centre.
 Information: 233-9200 x221, www.operalyra.ca

Canadian Opera Company

- Don Giovanni* October 8 - 31
War and Peace October 10 - November 1
 All performances are at the Four Seasons Centre.
 Information: 1-800-250-4653, www.coc.ca

L'Opéra de Montréal

- La Fanciulla del West* Sep. 20, 24, 27, 29, Oct. 2 (20:00)
 All performances in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts.
 Information: 1-877-385-2222 www.operademontreal.com

Pellegrini Opera's *La Bohème* by Ute Davis

Pellegrini Opera's production on 26 April 2008 at Dominion Chalmers United Church proved to be an artistic and a box office success. Maria Pellegrini now has several good quality opera productions to her credit and, having performed either Mimì or Musetta 120 times (including ROH Covent Garden, La Scala, N.Y. City Opera and across Canada) is particularly suited to directing this work. Her coaching and stage direction proved this. I thought it a miracle that she managed to pull it all together in one week of rehearsals. *La Bohème* was well received and attended, though thousands of Ottawa opera lovers had just seen the MET HD productions of the same opera.

Christina Tannous looked the part of the ailing heroine, sang very well and was an impressive and empathic Mimì throughout. Christina has just been accepted into the Opera Lyra Ottawa "Studio Artists" program. Her Rodolfo, Jeremy Cornell, though less experienced in his career so far, demonstrated a promising lyrical tenor voice. In appearance, he was very well suited for this part. Baritone Jean-Sébastien Kennedy, a local favourite and graduate of the University of Ottawa as well as the OLO "Young Artists" program as it was known before being re-named "Studio Artists" Program, was a very effective Marcello and a mainstay of the cast. Satisfactory performance came from Nicole Bower as Musetta, who had been won-



derful in Dress Rehearsal but was rather hampered by illness at performance. Darcy Marin, Colline, was one of two singers who had actually sung his role before and produced a satisfactory performance. Thomas Franzky sang well and produced lively, enjoyable acting in the limited role of Schaunard. Christopher Mallory, in the dual role of Benoît/Alcindoro also sang well while again demonstrating the outstanding acting abilities we have previously seen from him on the Fourth Stage (Ooh La La Opera!) and Main Stage (Opera Lyra) at the NAC.

The talented piano accompaniment of Michel Ross and conducting of Yves Lacoursière combined with excellent costumes and a well drilled cast of extras in the Café Momus scene added up to a very enjoyable production. Too many to mention all, here are just two of the very "seasoned" supernumeraries, often seen with Opera Lyra as well. They are Stewart Grenzowski and Chip Hair.

Pellegrini Opera operated on a very tight and limited budget and few donors, but the good attendance generated just sufficient finances to cover the cost of this colourful staged production. Maria hopes to put together *Madama Butterfly* in April of 2009.



Photography: Ute Davis

CBC Announces New Hosts for Radio 2

It was with great excitement that we heard the news about the new line-up of programs on CBC Radio 2.

Mezzo-soprano Julie Nes-rallah, our 1997 Brian Law Scholarship winner, will host a new weekday classical show from 10am to 3pm. The program will originate in Ottawa and will feature both recorded classical music and recordings of live performances.

As noted by Chris Boyce, programming director for CBC Radio, in the CBC news release: “As soon as people listen to her, her appeal as a host, companion and broadcaster will be evident. Where she really shines is her intimate knowledge of classical music, her discipline as a performer and certainly in



the insight she will bring to music and musicians on the show.”

An extremely versatile singer and actress, Julie is at ease in all styles. She is regularly cast in principal roles by leading opera companies across North America and abroad, her most famous being Carmen. She also appears in performance with symphonies, ensembles, summer festivals, and as part of a duo with classical guitarist Daniel Bolshoy.

Julie will be bringing all of her musicality, knowledge, and personality to the listeners of CBC Radio 2 throughout Canada. It will be a treat for all of us.

Opera Atelier's *Idomeneo* (see Review on Pages 9 & 10)



Photo: Ute Davis