

Newsletter • Bulletin

Fall 2009

Automne 2009

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

Six Outstanding Finalists to Compete for \$ 8,500 in Prizes!

by Renate Chartrand

Twenty aspiring young opera singers have applied for our 9th Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition, to be held Nov. 21. On October 8 our preliminary jurors met to review applications and listen to submitted recordings in order to select the finalists:

Jonathan Estabrooks, baritone
Wallis Giunta, mezzo-soprano
Sharleen Joynt, soprano
Liliana Piazza, mezzo-soprano
Philippe Sly, bass-baritone
Graham Thomson, tenor.

For the finalists' education and operatic experience please see the insert. At the competition they will each perform three operatic arias, at least one preceded by a recitative, with their own piano accompanist.

Our panel of jurors will include tenor Dr. Darryl Edwards, Head of Voice Studies, University of Toronto, and internationally celebrated Ottawa soprano Donna Brown, part-time professor, University of Ottawa. A special thank you to all of them for offering their services! A third juror is to be announced.

We are delighted that soprano **Yannick-Muriel Noah**, our scholarship winner in 2007, has agreed to be our special guest and entertain us with some of her favourite arias while the jury retires to choose the winners. Muriel (as her friends call her) is enjoying an amazing start of her career: having won several major international awards and prizes as well as second prize at the 2009 Concours Musical Inter-



Yannick-Muriel Noah

national de Montréal, she is currently starring as *Madama Butterfly* at the COC, to rave reviews. She also recently made a stellar Austrian début as *La Wally* in Klagenfurt, where she will return in 2010 to sing *Aida*!

Both audience and contestants will feel the suspense when the jury returns to announce its decision: The winner will be awarded the greatly increased 1st prize of \$5,000 and the runner-up will receive the new 2nd prize of \$3,000. In addition, our board member Cavaliere Pat Adamo is again offering a 3rd prize of \$500. The presentation of prizes will be followed by a reception, where the audience will have the pleasure of meeting the contestants and jurors.

The Master of Ceremonies for the evening will again be the much appreciated Rob Clipperton, former CBC host.

Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for students at the door, they may also be reserved by calling 613-830-9827. For further information visit our website at www.ncos.ca. Remember to mark your calendar for this exciting evening!

Saturday, November 21, 7:00 pm
First Unitarian Congregation,

30 Cleary Avenue (off Richmond Rd., east of Woodroffe)

President's Message

Enjoying an opera production has been described as an “ecstatic” experience. What might be done to heighten one’s ecstasy? Not too long ago I was seated at an opera performance where my neighbours were the parents of the soprano lead in the opera. In one way, only a relative or close friend could properly be swept away by shared ecstatic feelings with a singer’s triumph. But suppose for a moment that a person in the audience knew that they had helped a singer in one way or another to present themselves on the stage, to sing beautifully, to act the part perfectly, and to accept the plaudits of the audience. In no way could the contribution of the members of the NCOS be compared with the sacrifices of the parents of such a singer. But we have helped so many young successful singers that when the audience rises to its feet, when the Met telecast begins, when the announcer for the classical music program speaks, and when their latest CDs appear, then we, too, can share in this remarkable pattern of success. All I can say is - keep up the good work; the rewards are rich, indeed.

Murray Kitts

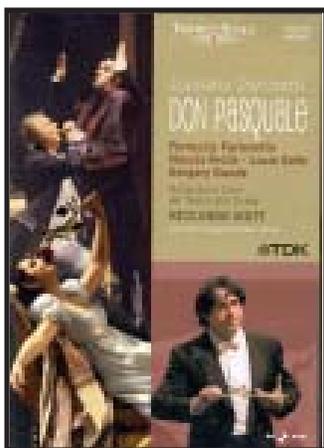
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Opera Alla Pasta — Sunday Afternoon at the Opera

All video showings begin at 2 P.M. at St. Anthony's Soccer Club and are followed by a delicious meal. Cost: \$20



Sunday, December 6, 2009 *Don Pasquale*

by Gaetano Donizetti

Recorded live at La Scala

Call 613-721-7121 by December 3 to reserve.

The rest of the Opera Alla Pasta season

La vie parisienne Offenbach
January 24, 2010

Luisa Miller Verdi
March 7, 2010

Manon Lescaut Puccini
May 9, 2010

OLO's *THE MAGIC FLUTE*

Great Voices, Great Acting, Great Opera

by Murray Kitts

Of course, we wanted our three scholarship winners to do well. Shannon Mercer as Pamina gave us an astonishingly varied portrait of the frightened captive princess, the expectant maiden hoping for deliverance, the affectionate daughter revolted by her mother's request, the despondent woman apparently spurned by the man she loves and finally a fitting companion for that same man, accompanying him through dangerous trials to the final triumph of enlightenment. At every moment her voice and interpretation seemed perfect for the part. Joshua Hopkins was a memorable Papageno portraying a bird-like creature with his hops and funny walk. But, in spite of the comic demands of the role, he managed to convince the audience that he was a very human being, letting a person like Prince Tamino attain higher truth but sticking himself to the quest for basic human needs. Papageno's vocal demands are not as great as for others in this opera but in passages such as the wonderful Act 1 duet with Pamina his beautiful, rich voice was apparent. Joyce El-Koury, as the Second Lady, sang mainly as part of the Ladies' ensemble but still managed to make a great impression because of her physical beauty, attractive voice and excellent acting. Bravi to all three.

But, of course, there was much more to admire. John Tessier, as Pamino, proved himself a world-class Mozart tenor right from his first aria. Valerian Ruminski is as great a Sarastro, with a wonderful bass voice, as any I have heard in the theatre or on recordings. Luz del Alba sang her two great arias as Queen of the Night with attack and accuracy. Pascale Beaudin made a delightful bird-like companion for Papageno.

Michel Corbeil was suitably comically loathsome as Monastatos. The other Ladies, Arianna Zukerman and Renee Lapointe, sang well. In small, but important parts, Thomas Goertz, Antonio Figueroa and Brian Wehrle were all excellent. The Three Boys were transformed into Three Genie in order to allow some girls to participate. As always they are show-stealers. The chorus under Laurence Ewashko was splendid. The orchestra under Pinchas Zukerman was superb as always.

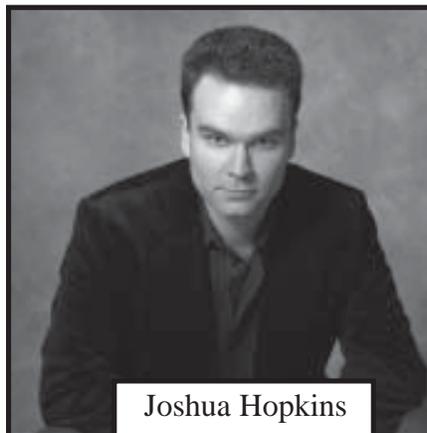
The scenery and costumes by David Hockney from San Francisco (and also used at the Met) were a little shop-worn but very effective especially for the numerous quick scene changes. Lighting and sound effects were excellent.

My only criticism of this production stems from the fact that the dialogue was in English while the sung text was in German. This in itself is not a bad thing as this type of singspiel has a lot of dialogue. It does create problems, however. Singers are often almost perfect when singing a text in a language not native to them. Speaking the language is another thing. An extra difficulty is created for the director who has to tighten up the speaking parts so that the dialogue does not drag. In this production, since the dialogue was in English, French surtitles were used. It was pointed out to me that if English surtitles were also used it would help the hearing impaired in the audience.

Any criticisms were forgotten with the enthusiastic bravos and standing ovations from the last night audience. I was delighted to go backstage and congratulate our three scholarship winners on their contributions to this, one of my favourite operas.



Shannon Mercer



Joshua Hopkins



Joyce El-Koury

The Divine Claudia by James Winters

It was in the early evening of a cold March 25th, 1965, in New York, that I, a forty year old operaphile since my teen years, was accosted by a gentleman in the crowded foyer of the venerable old Met, at Broadway and 39th street, desperately offering me \$500 for the \$50 ticket I had for that evening's performance. That, or a similar incident, was mentioned by Sir Rudolf Bing in one of the two published memoirs of his tenure as general manager of the Met. You may already know or may surmise that what transpired that evening turned out to be the legendary Maria Callas as Tosca in her very last performance in America of a fully staged opera. That I was blessed to be among the 'chosen few' was due to foresight on my part and good luck which resulted in my being seated in the Opera Guild Box no less! The eagerly awaited moment came when off-stage we heard our beloved prima donna assoluta singing, *Mario, Mario, Mario*, followed by her dramatic entrance on stage. She was greeted by a thunderous ovation punctuated by laudatory affectionate shouts of "Maria", "Divina". For present day opera aficionados, it may well be the case that, among that host of other great prima donnas who preceded her or who were her contemporaries, she is held to be the one whose superior gifts and artistry resulted in her being the only one among them to be accorded the exalted appellation, "Divina". However, to claim such is tantamount to being forgetful or unaware of there having been another soprano whose star in the lyric theatre galaxy between the two World Wars shone with a similar unique brilliance and glory. Her name is Claudia Muzio!! Evidence of this is found in the enthralling book, *The Last Prima Donnas*, in which the author, Lanfranco Rasponi, gives accounts of interviews he had with retired divas who, one discovers, not only shared stardom with her but also adored and idolized her and her art.

Iva Pacetti, for instance, stated, "I, who worshipped Muzio, absolutely trembled at the decrescendo, crescendo and then decrescendo again in *Pace, Pace (Forza del Destino)* at which she excelled". Gina Cigna, whose pioneer first complete recording of *Norma* is still available on CD, and who was a contemporary of both Muzio and Callas, stated, "For me, Callas could not touch Muzio. With Muzio you suffered agonies with her heroines, with Callas never. I am not taking away from the Greek that she had great presence, but goodness, she sang with three voices." From others came such references to her as, "my

idol"; "the divine Muzio"; "the only word to describe Muzio is sublime"; "I who venerated Muzio like a Madonna"; "haunted by Claudia Muzio in the role of Violetta" and "her Norma was an unforgettable creation". Perhaps the finest and most apt encomium came from Lucrezia Bori, the soprano so loved by the Met audience throughout her career there and until her death, who, when asked by Rasponi which were the most beautiful voices among the women she had heard, answered, "Ponselle and Rethberg, in their own different ways, had the most gorgeous instruments of all. Muzio was a case apart; you cannot classify her, for in the end you had been so emotionally destroyed by her performance, you did not even know anymore which kind of instrument she had".



Fortunately, for us and future generations of opera lovers, there exist her many superb recordings, particularly those made in the early 30's, just before her untimely death, which show her vocal powers somewhat diminished but which make the poignancy of her interpretations so vividly present as to reduce one to tears, however often one hears them. In this regard, for me personally, nothing illustrates this better than her famous and incomparable rendition of

The Divine Claudia (continued)

Violetta's aria, *Addio del passato* beginning with the spoken reading of the letter from the elder Germont. Thanks to modern technology, transcriptions of this 'gem' can be found on CD and on Net sites dedicated to Muzio.

In his book, *The Grand Tradition*, which critiques singing on records from 1900 to 1970, J.B.Steane wrote the following, "The essential Muzio, voice and spirit, one comes to know best through her most famous record, the *Addio del passato* from *La Traviata*. The music has been so absorbed as dramatic expression that every shade of changing emotion has intense meaning to the singer and in turn receives the stamp of her own humanity - and no one who knows the record well can hear Verdi's music in his head without hearing Muzio's voice also. The aria is preceded by the reading of the father Germont's letter *Teneste la promessa* dark and full voiced, deeply moved,

lifting the pitch for the word 'curatevi', allowing all to be overshadowed by the knowledge which comes tragically forward in the words 'e tardi'. The sense of actuality (the glance in the mirror, the hope, just permitted then suppressed, as the doctor's assurances are recalled) every moment is incomparably vivid. In the aria itself we feel the restrained fullness of emotion which will out when the music turns from minor to major ... as the heart swells with its sense of devotion and loss". In his book called *L'Equivoco*, the great tenor, Lauri-Volpi, writes of Muzio "singing with that unique voice of hers, made of tears and sighs and restrained interior fire". The mere tone of her voice, like that of Callas, conveys a depth of feeling and meaning that was in their time and, for me still is, beyond the expressive range of others. Brava Callas ! Bravissima Claudia Divina !

Events You Could Enjoy

A Little Gilbert. A Little Sullivan

The Ottawa Little Theatre and The Savoy Society of Ottawa have combined to present an evening of Gilbert and Sullivan apart. The evening's first offering will be *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, a one-act play by W.S. Gilbert, followed by *The Zoo*, a one-act comic opera by Arthur Sullivan and Bolton Rowe.

The Dates: November 12-14, 2009 at 8 p.m. November 15 at 2 p.m. The Cost: \$25. Tickets may be purchased at the Ottawa Little Theatre box-office: 613-233-8948 or through their website. Additional Information: <http://www.ottawalittletheatre.com>.

Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild

Two Films

Rusalka - Sunday, November 1, 2009 1:00 PM

Dvořák's *Rusalka* is the tale of a water nymph who gives up her previous life for the love of a prince. Renée Fleming stars in this Opéra National de Paris production.

Tristan und Isolde - Sunday, November 15, 2009 1:00 PM

This LaScala production of Wagner's masterpiece is universally acclaimed as the best ever.

Both of these outstanding films will be presented at the Auditorium of Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street. Cost: \$15 per showing or \$25 for both

For information and tickets call Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild: 613-233-9200 x221

A Santa Fe-cation! by Shelagh Williams

In light of our non-summer this year, we decided to trade Glimmerglass Opera and the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival for the sun and warmth of Santa Fe and its opera company (SFO). SFO's spectacular open-air opera house provides a roof, but the open sides allow beautiful views of the valley as the sun sets over the mountains, with occasional lightning effects, and then the lights of Los Alamos come up as a backdrop to the open backed opera stage. The company's summer season consisted of Verdi's *La Traviata*, Gluck's *Alceste*, Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*, Moravec's *The Letter*, and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, for 5 operas in 5 days! New General Director Charles McKay, former head of the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, ensured his first season would be memorable by engaging three top sopranos: Natalie Dessay, Christine Brewer, and Patricia Racette! Interestingly, SFO's "electronic libretto system", i.e. Surtitles, on chair backs is bilingual - English and Spanish!

The title role in *La Traviata* requires a soprano voice with coloratura agility, plus power for singing over a large orchestra, yet with long legato technique in pianissimo, all the while dramatically portraying the many different emotions. In her first-ever portrayal of Violetta, French soprano Natalie Dessay succeeded in spades! Rumour has it that Peter Gelb, having seen her performance, wants her to sing Violetta at the Met in 2011 - as she reprised her 2004 Santa Fe *La Sonnambula* at the Met this past year. Dessay and director and costume designer Laurent Pelly brought their own French team of conductor Frederic Chaslin, scenic designer Chantal Thomas and associate costume designer Jean-Jacques Delmotte. They chose to make the production darker than usual and closer to the original novel, Dumas's *La Dame aux Camelias*. The set was sombre, composed of grey boxes which during the overture became marble cemetery tombs for Violetta's funeral procession, viewed by Alfredo, mirroring the novel which opens with her death. These boxes also gave the crowd in the party scenes an interesting, if dangerous, terrain to mingle in, and, shrouded in white sheets, provided the covered furniture in Violetta's shuttered home for her deathbed scene. The opera itself opened suddenly and spectacularly with a scream from Dessay, in orange hair and a fluffy fuchsia strapless gown split to show off her legs and fuchsia high laced boots, as she sang and scarily leaped from block to block, defying death, or at least a broken leg! Hers was

a performance to savour, an embodiment rather than just a portrayal of Violetta. She has certainly come a long way since we saw her at the Met as Zerbinetta! Dessay's husband, baritone Laurent Naouri, also in a role debut, sang Alfredo's father, and his great natural height was enhanced in the opera by a very high top hat and placement atop one of the boxes, so that his diatribe against the tiny Dessay was even more overpowering than usual! - especially as she was inexplicably and unsuitably dressed in slacks and shirt! Albanian tenor Saimar Pirgu, debuting at SFO, was a suitably young, ardent and good looking Alfredo. Chaslin, also debuting, kept his excellent singers and orchestra on task, with exemplary results. The generous rehearsal time and space which SFO provides, and Dessay obviously loves, certainly bore fruit in this stunning production.

Our second opera was Gluck's *Alceste*, in the revised Paris version of 1776, with, therefore, ballet and also the character Hercules added. It is one of his reform operas, where he tried to make the music serve the text, as a reaction to the overly elaborate Baroque style. He also wanted singers who could act! Interestingly, the young Mozart saw the original Italian version of *Alceste* in Vienna with his father! The story, based on Euripides, concerns Greek Queen Alceste who "stands by her man", the dying King Admete, by offering to die in his place. Hercules rescues her from Hades, inspiring the god Apollo to allow both to live happily ever after - in about 3 hours! This production was staged because American soprano Christine Brewer, a SFO discovery and local favourite, wanted to do it! Unfortunately, her continuing problems with both knees - probably exacerbated by her size - which caused her withdrawal from the Met's *Ring* in the spring, also meant that she spent much of the evening on the nearest chair! Perhaps to compensate for this, director Francisco Negrin and debuting Spanish choreographer Ana Yepes moved the chorus - here a major character in itself - about, in an impressive and meaningful manner, and the seven dancers - integral to a French opera - in an erratic, distracting manner, often upstaging an important aria. Debuting French designer Louis Desire gave us dramatic long curved walls that cleverly closed to form the stairs and gates to Hades. The temple in the middle was a huge cracked white egg with a red centre! Desire's mainly black costumes were quite weird for the dancers. Duane Schuler lit every-

A Santa Fe-cation! (continued)

thing mostly in red, trying hard keep our attention from wandering. However, it is the music that is important here, since Gluck's music is lovely, though a bit monochromatic. Veteran Irish conductor Kenneth Montgomery led with a knowing hand, and the fine orchestra, cast, and chorus responded accordingly. In the title role, Christine Brewer, although a bit strident at first, soon settled into a beautiful, dignified delivery that made one forget any visual or mobility shortcomings. Tenor Paul Groves, debuting at SFO, is no stranger to the role of King Admete, and although mute in the first act, since he was on his deathbed, soon transformed into an amazingly handsome, healthy and adept dancer and singer! Fortunately the music itself and the stellar performances overcame any directorial and/or designer lapses - though a few judicious cuts might not have gone amiss!

Another sure-fire winner, *The Elixir of Love*, relied not on a star soprano, but on three former SFO apprentice artists, filling the principal roles of the love triangle, a triumph for the SFO training programme! English director Stephen Lawless, in his SFO debut, updated *Elixir* to post World War II Italy, very much like Laurent Pelly's production which we saw two years ago at Covent Garden. This SFO production featured Nemorino as an auto mechanic working on his smart little red Austin Healey sports car, Adina as the owner of a large olive tree farm, and Belcore as an American army officer. The designer, Ashley Martin-Davis, also English and debuting at SFO, provided an Italian village piazza replete with a huge billboard to advertise Adina's "extra virgin" olive oil and display other appropriate messages. A blackboard was used for many visual gags including a humorous Italian nuptial banquet menu (every course included chicken!). The female chorus was costumed in cute short post-war print dresses. Between the two Brits, there were lots of quick witty little touches: the villagers changed their Italian flags for Stars and Stripes when they realized the arriving troops were American, the priest arrived for the wedding incognito on a motorbike, and the chorus girls fought hilariously over Nemorino once they realized he'd become rich. In keeping with the fast pace of the action, Italian conductor Corrado Rovaris - like Donizetti born in Bergamo - kept orchestra and singers perking right

along. The tenor is the star of the show, and, as Nemorino, Dimitri Pittas successfully blended a bashful demeanour with his lovely voice, and produced a marvellous *Una furtiva lachrima*, although inexplicably in darkness - perhaps the spotlight malfunctioned? Jennifer Black was an attractive take-charge Adina with a matching strong soprano voice. Patrick Carfizzi's Belcore arrived in a nifty little jeep that needed Nemorino's know-how to fix, which gave Belcore time to spot Adina and start his flirtation, super confident of conquest with his virile baritone voice! The only principal not a SFO alumnus was Thomas Hammons, a marvellous last minute find for Mafia "Dr." Dulcamara, who came up trumps with a stupendous bass-baritone voice and a deft hand with comedy. When the ensemble works this well together, who needs a star to ensure a delightful, fun-filled, first class musical experience, that leaves you happily humming the tunes as you drive home!

It was with some trepidation that we approached the world premiere of Paul Moravec's first opera, *The Letter*, commissioned by SFO. However, we had spoken with the conductor, Patrick Summers, Music Director of Houston Grand Opera, when he conducted the NACO this spring, and he assured us that the music was tonal and quite accessible and he was very happy to be conducting this work! Also, we had seen Somerset Maugham's play at the Shaw Festival a year or so ago and knew the plot to be a memorable thriller - which became the basis for a well-known 1940 Bette Davis film. The story, based on an actual event, takes place in British Malaya, where Leslie Crosbie shoots her two-timing lover Geoff Hammond while her husband Robert is away, then tries to get away with it, but there are complications: an incriminating letter, blackmail,... It has become, in the hands of Moravec and librettist Terry Teachout, a taut *opera noir* of 8 scenes, with lovely orchestral interludes, compressed into only 95 minutes. Scenic designer Hildegard Bechtler, debuting at SFO, recently designed the marvellous sets and costumes for the COC's *War and Peace*, and for *The Letter* she provided a fantastic set allowing for the requisite fast changes. Her scenery consisted of two long walls, opening like the pages of a book, each arm ingeniously pivoting or sliding to provide instant pullouts to transform the original bungalow believably into a law office, jail cell, men's club, or courtroom. Fashion designer Tom Ford, also debuting, used his celebrated talent to clothe the cast, and

A Santa Fe-cation! (continued)

especially our murderess, in glamorous 1940's era costumes, so no effort was spared in presenting this work. British stage director Jonathan Kent understood the class and racial nuances and made the drama work right from the opening gunshots, while Duane Schuler's lighting, with its shadows and slits of light from the shutters was most atmospheric and ominous. The piece was written for local favourite, star soprano Patricia Racette, since she specializes in new works and premieres, and she worked with the composer - as one can with a live composer! - so that the music suited her voice. She also cannily asked for an aria near the end, to make her role more sympathetic, and to give other singers an aria to excerpt to get the opera known. Not surprisingly, she shone in this showcase for her vocal and dramatic talents, whether hard-headedly scheming or when slipping out of reality, in the librettist's operatic opening up of the story and expanding of roles. This allowed the tenor - the lover shot in the opening seconds! - a chance to sing as Leslie retold the story of the shooting and duetted with him, and also later when she hallucinated that he was the foreman of the jury, finding her guilty! Here Canadian Roger Honeywell excelled, his acting talents as well as his ardent tenor giving his duets with Leslie and his scary accusations believability. Another addition, for comic relief, was the Gilbert and Sullivan-type scene, at the Singapore Club, with the chorus cheerfully singing all sorts of non-politically correct lines about the shooting and the people involved: "a gallant woman she", "a damn good thing she shot him", "filled the bugger with lead", "better off, better off dead"! Finally, debuting mezzo Mika Shigematsu, as Hammond's "Chinese woman", silent in both play and film, here removed her dark trench coat to reveal a beautiful long cheongsam and sang the lovely aria *Morning will come, but not my love*. Thus we saw her as the sorrowful wronged party, wanting the money for the letter to bury Geoff and settle his affairs, rather than as a blackmailer. Holding everything together as the loyal family lawyer, Howard Joyce, was debuting baritone James Maddalena. His strong vocal and acting skills well portrayed his unease at being used to get Leslie off. English baritone Anthony Michaels-Moore made the uncomprehending husband Robert ring true. With such a strong cast and a good orchestra, Patrick Summers had no trouble giving us a fine performance of the music, ensuring we felt the suspense as the action unfolded. My only quibble was with the finale, which did not end dramatically, as in the play, with Leslie telling her husband *I still love the man I killed*, but with her killing

herself with a knife - it was simply not British! However, this was a great first effort of composer and librettist and one that I hope, with some judicious rewriting of the ending, goes on to many more performances - it deserves it!

SFO does a Mozart opera most years, and this year our final opera was a revival of their 2004 production of *Don Giovanni*, with almost everything in red! Unfortunately, the show was not as fiery as the paint job and the opening chords were not dark and dramatic enough to set the tone! David Zinn's scarlet settings and costumes seemed to be a hodgepodge of various periods, possibly set in an industrial area, although the latter did include cleverly opening doorways and windows at various heights to provide settings for the many scenes. Fortunately SFO brought back the original director Chas Rader-Schieber so that there was some continuity in concept with the design, although not all of his directorial choices were felicitous - for example, Zerlina pulling the Don off stage, not vice versa, when he tries to seduce her, and the Don finally exiting anticlimactically by jumping into a cupboard! Dutch conductor Lawrence Renes kept the music flowing at a fair clip, and had some lovely vocal ensembles, but the individual singers were uneven. Among the three women soprano Susanna Phillips as Don Elvira and debuting mezzo Kate Lindsay as Zerlina were especially good, and South African soprano Elsa van den Heever, also in SFO debut, was not too far behind as Donna Anna. On the male side, debuting tenor Charles Workman provided a strong Don Ottavio, both vocally and dramatically, not the wimp he often is played. However, baritone Lucas Meachem had neither the animal magnetism nor the strong voice to carry off the key role of Don Giovanni. Debuting English bass Matthew Rose had a lovely rich voice, a flair for comedy, and more than enough presence for Leporello - he might have made a better Don! Somehow the production didn't have the zing or style needed for a memorable *Don Giovanni*, and rather seemed to drag. However, Mozart's lovely music was well served by the orchestra and most of the cast, so that all was not lost!

Santa Fe Opera's first rate productions of standard and unfamiliar works, in a marvellous opera house, with both international and home-grown singers, are certainly worth a visit!

My Summer Vacation

by Vera-Lee Nelson

Remember that first week back at school? The composition we had to write on our summer vacation? I suppose we all wrote much the same things, with perhaps some exaggeration of our adventures. Summer vacations have never seemed quite so long as in my youth but they are still a special time in this land of short summer seasons. We have to cram in as much as we can. In the winter we have opportunities to attend indoor events, concerts, plays, live opera performances, and the wonderful Live in HD performances from the Met. When summer comes it seems we are doing different kinds of things, usually in the outdoors, swimming, hiking, going to cottages and traveling. It is a real bonus when we can pack in some opera as well. Early in our summer we returned to Chautauqua for a weeks stay. The program there offers so much, including an opera season of four presentations, with two performances of each opera. This year we were there for the second performance of *Il Trovatore*. As usual the talented young singers gave a beautifully sung and fervently acted performance, rising to the challenge of performing four operas in a few weeks. The Chautauqua Opera Young Artists perform subsidiary roles and provide a wonderful chorus when required. The sets were spare and effective, befitting a relatively small stage area. The orchestra was thankfully well attuned to the volume of the singers. Norton Hall, the opera house, was donated by the Norton family in 1929 with a stipulation - that the operas be performed in a manner understood by Chautauqua audiences, in English. In those times, most operas were performed in the local languages of the producing companies. As Norton Hall is relatively small this has not always posed a problem. There are however, some acoustical issues and this year for the first time the Chautauqua opera is experimenting with supertitles. They were actually well done and of assistance to those with hearing difficulties and also to those who find elaborately sung English not always comprehensible! Opera at Chautauqua is not to be missed -- always an important component of a full and varied week's program.

In midsummer we were invited to a friend's home in the Eastern Townships. The weekend was centred around a concert performance of Bellini's *La Sonnambula* at the newly developing Knowlton Festival. Maestro Kent Nagano of the Montreal Symphony

conducted the Knowlton Festival Orchestra, consisting of musicians selected for this occasion. The site is beautiful, a rolling meadow looking out to the mountains beyond. Last year the first performances were held in a tent but this year there was a rather more substantial structure, although still temporary. It is hoped that this will become a permanent part of the summer season in Quebec. This year it was timed to follow on from the successful festival at Lanaudiere. From the performances we have experienced in both of these locations I can only applaud this initiative. The first season featured *Norma* - it will be interesting to see if next summer's feature will again be *Bellini Bel Canto*. This certainly lends itself to this kind of performance. Sumi Jo returned to sing the title role again this year. Her strong expressive voice was outstanding in this part and she was beautifully supported by tenor Barry Banks as Elvino, Riccardo Zanellato as Rodolpho, Ekatherina Lekhina as Lisa, Susan Platts as Teresa and Juan Noval-Moro as the notary. An absolutely magical summer evening.

Just as August was ending we went, right here in Ottawa, to see an HD performance of *La Traviata*, recorded in London on June 30, 2009 at Covent Garden. Renee Fleming is a beautiful and enchanting Violetta. Unfortunately in this performance she needed all her acting skills to convey a passion she is supposed to feel for Alfredo, sung by Maltese tenor Joseph Calleja. This young tenor came on the scene a few years ago now and his singing voice, particularly his clear enunciation was splendid. I personally had been looking forward to seeing him in performance. Unfortunately his acting was quite wooden and whereas one does not like to stereotype a ``tubby tenor``, in this case it does come to mind. Especially when the role of Germont, his father, is sung by barihunk Thomas Hampson. No one as ethereal and beautiful as this Violetta could possibly look at this Alfredo when this Germont is on the scene! I feel quite finicky even expressing this opinion because the screening at the Empire Theatre was a delight. How lucky we are to have these performances available to us in such detail, with such magnificent sound.

And so another summer ends, with the excitement of the winter season ahead and the promises of opera delights in the summer to come.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed by Tom McCool and Shelagh Williams

Glimmerglass Opera

Glimmerglass Opera has been presenting operas at their opera house in Cooperstown, N.Y. since 1975 and has earned a well-deserved reputation for excellence and innovation. Two of the operas that were performed this summer were Verdi's *La traviata* and Rossini's *Cenerentola*. *La traviata*, with Mary Dunleavy in the central role, received a conventional professional staging that proved popular with the audience. *Cenerentola* was a more energetic and enjoyable show. The two main roles in this Rossini opera were sung by Canadians. John Tessier, well known to Ottawa opera enthusiasts, was the Prince and *Cenerentola* was sung by young Quebec soprano, Julie Boulianne. Both were first-rate. Also staged this summer were Menotti's *The Consul* and, in a concert version, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Next summer the four operas that are scheduled at Cooperstown are *Tosca*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, Handel's *Tolomeo* and the *The Tender Land* by Aaron Copeland. If past experience is any indication the Glimmerglass experience will be well worth the five hour trip from Ottawa to Cooperstown. **TM**

Opus Arte's *La traviata*

Another *La traviata* that you could have enjoyed was the Opus Arte presentation at the Empire Theatre in the World Exchange Centre. This Covent Garden production featured Renée Fleming, Joseph Calleja and Thomas Hampson. This presentation was not live as it was filmed earlier in the year but it was a superb production from beginning to end. Regrettably, Empire Theatres have announced that they will be discontinuing the Opus Arte's Program. This is indeed unfortunate because not only are operas included in this film series but also ballets and other musical events. They will be missed. **TM**

Opera Lyra Ottawa's Italian Garden Party

For the tenth consecutive year, there was no rain, and we enjoyed a beautiful June evening replete with, as advertised, "divine food and exceptional wine", hosted by the Italian ambassador at his Aylmer residence, and an exclusive fashion show presented by Earlene's House of Fashion. But of course the evening was topped off with a marvellous concert of opera arias, duets and trios by sopranos Joyce El-Khoury and Eve Rachel MacLeod, mezzo Elizabeth Turnbull and bass-baritone Thomas Goerz, accompanied by Judy Ginsberg. We

had not been for several years, and I had forgotten how magical a private outdoor concert of opera favourites can be, especially when the weather cooperates and one is pleasantly full of Italian treats - a painless fundraiser! **SW**

Celebrazione Tanno

In late August voice teacher Yoriko Tanno-Kimmons celebrated her mother's visit to Canada with an entertaining evening of operatic favourites and musical theatre hits. Miss Tanno's multitalented friend, Broadway singer Mark Cassius, and her ever-energetic former student Allison Smyth, now starring in *The Jersey Boys* in Toronto, MC'd the event. They and current university-level students of her studio presented a varied programme accompanied by pianist, tenor and vocal coach Jose Hernandez. The highlight for us was our BLOS winner Yannick-Muriel Noah, in a beautiful white wedding kimono from Miss Tanno, previewing her *Un bel di* from *Madama Butterfly*. The lovely rendition certainly bodes well for her debut in the role this fall at the COC in Toronto. **SW**

Shaw and Stratford Festivals

It was a Stephen Sondheim Summer. The Shaw Festival staged an excellent production of Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*, including a picture-perfect tableau of George Seurat's masterpiece, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, which inspired the musical. Stratford had two superb musicals: Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, directed by new Artistic Director Des McAnuff, not missing a trick, and starring the irrepressible Bruce Dow as Pseudolus, and Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*, with lyrics by Sondheim, and featuring Chilina Kennedy as a lovely Maria, both to listen to and to see! **SW**

Joyce El-Khoury: NAC Debut Concert

Following her excellent performance in the OLO *Magic Flute*, our BLOS winner, Joyce El-Khoury, sang a delightful and substantial Debut Series Concert of French and German art songs and opera arias on the theme of love. **SW**

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

Oct. 24, 2009, 1:00 pm

DIE ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO

Belmonte: Matthew Polezani, tenor

Konstanze: Erin Wall, soprano

Blöndchen: Aleksandra Kurzak, soprano

Pedrillo: Steve Davislim, tenor

Osmín: Andrea Silvestrelli, bass

Conductor: Sir Andrew Davis

Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestra and Chorus

Oct. 31, 2009, 1:00 pm

THE FLY

Music by Howard Shore

LOS ANGELES OPERA

Seth Brundle: Daniel Okulitch, baritone

Veronica Quaife: Roxandra Donose

Stathis Borans: Gary Lehman

Conductor: Plácido Domingo

Los Angeles Opera Orchestra

Nov. 7, 2009, 1:00 pm

BEATRICE ET BENEDICT

Music by Hector Berlioz

RADIO FRANCE

Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (concert version)

Béatrice: Joyce Di Donato, soprano

Bénédict: Charles Workman, tenor

Claudio: Jean-François Lapointe, baritone

Ursula: Elodie Méchain, soprano

Somarone: Jean-Philippe Laffont, baritone

Hero: Nathalie Manfrino, soprano

Conductor: Sir Colin Davis

Orchestre National de France

Radio France Chorus

Nov. 14, 2009, 1:00 pm

WERTHER

Music by Jules Massenet

OPERA BASTILLE

Werther: Rollando Villazon, tenor

Charlotte: Susan Graham, mezzo soprano

Albert: Ludovic Tézier

Sophie: Adriana Kucerová

Conductor: Kent Nagano

National Orchestra of France

Nov. 21, 2009, 1:00 pm

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Music by Benjamin Britten

LA SCALA OPERA, MILAN

Oberon: David Daniels, countertenor

Tytania: Rosemary Joshua, soprano

Puck: Emil Wolk

Theseus: Daniel Okulitch, baritone

Lysander: Gordon Gietz, tenor

Helena: Erin Wall, soprano

Conductor: Sir Andrew Davis

La Scala Orchestra

Staging: Robert Carsen

Sets and Costumes: Michael Levine

Nov. 28, 2009, 1:00 pm

IL VIAGGIO A REIMS

Music by Giacomo Rossini

LA SCALA OPERA, MILAN

Madama Cortese: Carmela Remigio, soprano

Corrina: Patrizia Ciofi, soprano

Contessa di Folleville: Annick Massis, soprano

Don Profundo: Nicola Uliveri, bass

Lord Sidney: Alastair Miles, bass

Modestina: Anna Maria Popescu, contralto

La Scala Orchestra & Chorus

Dec. 5, 2009, 1:00 pm

DER ROSENKAVALIER

Music by Richard Strauss

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

Octavian: Joyce Di Donato, soprano

Marschallin: Soile Isokoski, mezzo-soprano

Sophie: Miah Persson, soprano

Baron Ochs: Kristinn Sigmundsson, baritone

Conductor: Donald Runnicles

San Francisco Opera Orchestra & Chorus

THE RETURN OF THE MET OPERA

Dec. 12, 2009, 1:00 pm *IL TRITICO*

Dec. 19, 2009, 1:00 pm *LES CONTES D'HOFFMAN*

Dec. 26, 2009, 1:00 pm *ELEKTRA*

Additional details: <http://www.cbc.ca/radio2/programs/sato/schedule.html>

Opera Within Reach

Ottawa

Opera Lyra Ottawa

The Bremen Town Musicians by Dean Bury
"an opera for young audiences featuring artists of the OLO Opera Studio"

Dec 11 (7 pm) & Dec 12 (2 pm and 7 pm), 2009
at the Fourth Stage of the NAC

Macbeth by Verdi
March 27, 29, 31 & April 3, 2010

Manon by Massenet May 2, 2010 (an opera-in-concert)

Performances in Southam Hall at the NAC

Information: 613-233-9200 x221

www.operalyra.ca

Orpheus Society

Little Women by Howland
November 13 - 22, 2009

Performances at Centrepointe Theatre.

Information: 613-580-2700

www.centrepointetheatre.com

Montréal

L'Opéra de Montréal

The Magic Flute by Mozart
November 7, 11, 14, 16, 19 & 21, 2009

Performances are in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier
at Place des Arts.

Information: 1-514-985-2258

www.operademontreal.com

Toronto

Canadian Opera Company

Madama Butterfly by Puccini
Oct 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 & Nov 3, 2009

The Nightingale and other Short Fables by
Stravinsky
Oct. 24, 30 Nov 1, 4 & 5, 2009

Ben Heppner Concert November 7, 2009

Carmen by Bizet
Jan 27, 30 Feb 2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23 & 27, 2010

Otello by Verdi
Feb 3, 6, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25 & 28, 2010

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

Opera Atelier

Iphigénie en Tauride by Gluck

October 31- November 7, 2009

Elgin Theatre, 189 Yonge St.
Information: 1- 416-872-5555
www.operaatelier.com

Syracuse

Syracuse Opera

La Bohème by Puccini
October 23 & 25, 2009

Information: 1-315-476-7372
www.syracuseopera.com