

Newsletter • Bulletin

Winter

2009

Hiver

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Wonderful Wexford by Shelagh Williams

With Irish heritage, a given name with an “Irish” spelling, and a hankering for hearing unusual operas and seeing new opera houses, it was a given that the Friends of the NACO’s October tour to Ireland, including Wexford Festival Opera (WFO)’s new Opera House, would find me an eager participant! What a wonderful little opera house it is - Ireland’s first purpose built opera house! It took them three years and only \$50 million, but the WFO Board are very proud that they managed to squeeze a new larger, almost secret opera house into the same centre town site as before! The original unpretentious streetscape now opens into a lovely foyer with stairs to the many reception areas, rooftop terraces and 5 bars, where the well-dressed audience in black tie and evening gowns mingled and drank their glasses of champagne! (Hey - this was the opening weekend of both the house and the season!) The classic horseshoe-shaped auditorium is gorgeous, lined with black walnut wood from Canada for superb acoustics! They now have 770 comfortable seats, twice the old number, with no one too far from the stage to see or hear well - really very like the Canadian Opera Company’s new house, although smaller.



Opera House at Night

The newish Artistic Director, appointed in 2005, is Canadian David Agler, and he has carried on the WFO’s motto for choosing the year’s three opera rarities: “One for the head, one for the heart, and one for fun”. This year’s trio were R.R. Bennett’s twentieth century *Mines of Sulphur*, which we saw recently at Glimmerglass Opera (GGO), Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Snegurochka (The Snow Maiden)*, and Carlo Pedrotti’s *Tutti in Maschera (Everyone in Disguise)*. We saw the last two mentioned.

We started off with opening night of Pedrotti’s best known work, *Tutti in Maschera*, a delightful melodious

comedy with libretto based on Goldoni’s commedia dell’arte *L’Impresario delle Smirne*. Although Pedrotti was a contemporary of Verdi, his forte was comic opera in the tradition of Neapolitan opera buffa, and he was also an important conductor. The opera’s story centres on a small struggling opera company in eighteenth century Venice during Carnival, with its two prima donnas vying for the attentions of Abdala, a rich entrepreneur from Damascus, who has come to hire an opera company for the next season in the Middle East. Of course, the inevitable misunderstandings and suspicions, both professional and amatory, result in lively scenes, culminating in the hilarious final ball, with the two prima donnas in similar costumes and their menfolk dressed as Turks like Abdala. Naturally,

in the end, all is amiably resolved and true love triumphs. A co-production of WFO and three Italian theatres, where it was seen in October 2007, this opera about opera was updated to post-WWII Italy, permitting stylish costumes by Claudia Pernigotti. Attractive and innovative sets by Federico Bianchi, some of which only needed to be flipped for the next scene, all nicely lit by Paul Keogan, gave director Rosetta Cucchi, also

Assistant to the WFO Artistic Director, ample scope for her energetic, gag-filled treatment - for example, both prima donnas trying to hide under the same bead-covered table! It was an absolute hoot, completely delighting a young opera neophyte on our tour -she could hardly wait for her second opera the next night! Italian conductor Leonardo Vordoni matched this staging with relish, delivering an exciting and lively reading of the score, and fortunately had the necessary prima donna voices to carry through his intentions - interestingly, both young singers we had seen

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President's Message

2009 marks an important landmark in the history of the NCOS. Twenty-five years ago a group of opera lovers came together to try to revive the summer opera season at the NAC which had been so abruptly cancelled. What a loss it was. Among the most memorable productions was Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* with Jon Vickers and Maureen Forester. In spite of our representations the summer festival has not as yet been successfully revived. But, as you know, our society has made significant contributions to the development of opera in our region by donating funds to Opera Lyra and other performing groups. OPERA ALLA PASTA continues to attract lovers of opera and good food. A new Board member, Elizabeth Meller, is now helping to choose and introduce our opera presentations. Our proudest achievement has been the Brian Law Opera Scholarship competi-

tion and it is fitting that 2009 is a year in which the competition will be held in its biennial cycle, awarding for the first time a top prize of \$5,000 to an outstanding young artist. Mark November 21 on your calendar. Among those winners recently in the public eye are: Julie Nesrallah with her classical music programme, Yannick-Muriel Noah a soloist in this year's Messiah at the NAC, Joyce El-Khoury recent winner of a \$10,000 George London Scholarship, and word has it about the appearance of Shannon Mercer and Joshua Hopkins in a forthcoming Opera Lyra production. The NCOS Board with your assistance will enthusiastically continue our work of promoting opera singing and productions in the National Capital Region.



February 15, 2009	OPERA ALLA PASTA	May 3, 2009		
	<p>Donizetti's <i>Don Pasquale</i> La Scala Production Call 613-721-7121 by Feb 12 to reserve.</p>	<p>All video showings begin at 2 PM at St. Anthony's Soccer Club and are followed by a delicious meal. Cost: \$15</p>	<p>Rimsky-Korsakov's <i>The Tsar's Bride</i> Bolshoi Production</p>	

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Wonderful Wexford (continued from Page 1)

recently at Glimmerglass Opera. Blonde coloratura soprano Sarah Coburn as Vittoria looked gorgeous in the high-style costumes, sang her impossibly high trills effortlessly, and acted believably and comically as a prima donna. Equally surprising, matching her in every respect, was mezzo Laura Vlasak Nolen as her rival Dorotea. I didn't recognize her, even though I had seen her last summer at GGO as a believable "manly" Cesare in *Giulio Cesare* - what an actress! The men acted well and sang well enough, but were not memorable. However, as an ensemble, the troupe shone in this funny, rousing romp - this was opera-making on a very high plane.

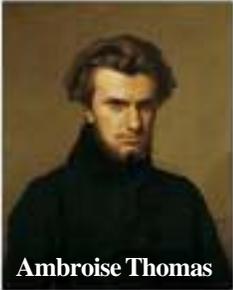
Snegurochka, Rimsky-Korsakov's third and favourite opera, is entirely different, based on a fairy-tale play by Ostrovsky about the coming of spring - Canadians, like Russians, can warm to that! In a prologue and four acts, the opera basically tells the story of the Snow Maiden, daughter of Spring Beauty and Father Frost, with a heart of ice who, when she finally falls in love on the Sun God Yarilo's Day, becomes vulnerable to Yarilo's rays and melts! - all in just under four hours! Director John Fulljames and designer Dick Bird enlivened the proceedings with humorous touches such as having Spring Beauty fly in during the Prologue aided by an airport ground crew, and accompanied by shivering air hostesses; having the Tsar's residence as a grounded yacht, with a slanted floor and including a sumptuous bathing room for the Tsar to hold court in; and having Spring Beauty arrive in a wheelchair for her final farewell to her daughter! Fulljames and choreographer Mandy Demetriou kept the large cast and chorus moving appropriately and the troupe of seven dancers gave us an entertainingly acrobatic "Dance of the Tumblers". However, it was all a bit slow-moving until Act I when Snow Maiden's lively friend Kupava, dressed in a bright red, very low cut and brief, dress arrived to stir things up, announcing her engagement, and then flirting with the Tsar! *Snegurochka* was enchantingly dressed all in white, and her parents also looked the part, but in general the costumes were quite odd, even for a fantasy, and the scenery was nothing to write home about! Young Russian maestro Dmiti Jurowski conducted

splendidly with firm authority, helped by the fine singers - many also Russian - and orchestra he had to work with. Among the men, baritone Igor Tarasov was stalwart as the much put-upon Mizgir, who finally wins Snow Maiden's love only to lose her, and American tenor Bryan Hymel with his beautiful voice brought out all the humour and humanity of the role of Tsar. Again, the women were much more compelling. Czech mezzo Katerina Jalovcova sang the important pants role of the amorous shepherd Lel, whose lovely singing charms all of the females in the vicinity, and awakens the Snow Maiden to life. As Spring Beauty, German mezzo Natela Nicoli brought to the beginning and final scenes a lovely warm voice and believability as a mother. Soprano Irina Samoylova has sung Snow Maiden with the Bolshoi, and with her fair haired beauty and brilliant clear coloratura perfectly portrayed the untouchable ice-maiden. However, I felt Georgian soprano Lina Tetrushvili, whom we saw in the spring with Sarasota Opera in the lead in *La Rondine*, really kept the piece moving as the saucy Kupava, who in the end catches Lel from under the noses of all the other females! Rimsky-Korsakov's lovely folk like tunes, beautifully orchestrated, illustrated this enchanting if overlong fairy tale - his usual subject matter - for an enjoyable outing of this rarely performed work.

Wexford Festival Opera is truly a festival. Over an 18-day period, besides the three evening operas, there are three short afternoon operas plus talks, lunchtime recitals, and concerts in churches and theatres - quite a programme. It is in its 57th year and like all arts organizations relies heavily on its 350 local volunteers, with families carrying on the tradition through generations. In the recent past it relied on Eastern European musicians for both orchestra and chorus and this year's chorus is the Prague Chamber Choir. It is encouraging to see that this year's orchestra is Irish. The surtitles, in English, appear in large easily read print on screens on the first balcony on either side of the stage, which makes them awkward to catch during the opera action, although of course still useful, especially when they sing the National Anthem in Irish! The WFO is certainly a great organization for rescuing long-neglected lesser-known operas, and its compact three-tiered new house, with its splendid acoustics, provides a magnificent showcase.

OLO's *Hamlet* by Tom McCool

There are innumerable operas based on the works of Shakespeare. *Macbeth*, *Otello* and *Falstaff* come quickly to mind and those are the operas of just one composer. Last summer Glimmerglass Opera ran a whole season based on



Ambroise Thomas

works derived from Shakespeare's works. However, despite the popularity of Shakespeare with composers there are very few operas based on what many consider to be the Bard's greatest play, *Hamlet*. The best known is the opera by Ambroise Thomas and even that piece is performed only rarely.

Consequently, Opera Lyra Ottawa deserves a lot of credit for presenting *Hamlet*, albeit in a concert version.

Concert versions have their place in opera. First and foremost, they are much less expensive to produce. Sets and costumes are not needed and frequently only piano accompaniment is used. Furthermore, some operas are just extremely difficult to stage. Catalani's *La Wally*, for example, calls for an avalanche and many of Schubert's operas, among numerous others, have similar almost impossible requirements. Consequently, these operas are seldom put on and opera goers are denied the opportunity to hear much beautiful music. Granted, you don't get the action with a concert version but you do get the music and the opportunity to experience obscure works.

Without doubt, a piece such as *Hamlet* would be better with full theatrical staging but it works well too as a concert.

Hamlet, as it was presented at Dominion Chalmers United Church on October 26, was very well received by a near capacity audience. The chorus plays a major role in this opera and the Opera Lyra Ottawa Chorus was in fine form. The principals were excellent as well, especially baritone Theodore Baerg in the title role. But for many in the audience the highlight was the singing of coloratura-soprano Nikki Enfeld who sang the very demanding part of Ophelia. A late replacement in the production she was especially brilliant in Ophelia's extended mad scene. No less an authority than Maria Callas, who knew a thing or two about mad scenes, considered Ophelia's mad scene to be the finest in opera and Ms. Enfeld's performance gave substance to that claim.

Opera Lyra Ottawa began presenting concert versions of operas last year with another infrequently performed Thomas opera, *Mignon*. The great success of both presentations bodes well for the continuation of these concert versions next season. One improvement for the future would be the implementation of supertitles. But, regardless of supertitles or not, Ottawa opera enthusiasts should be eagerly anticipating whatever opera in concert will be featured next year.

A "Master" piece! by Shelagh Williams

At the end of November there was a marvellous performance of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* by Ottawa U's Unicorn Theatre together with the Music Department's Opera Workshop. It was actually the "master" piece or thesis production of MFA candidate Elif Isikozlu, multitalented in film and dance as well as theatre. She directed the piece, and put together a class entertainment with full orchestra including harpsichord, choir, lovely costumes all in white, scenery and lighting, and a full production crew, including a movement coach! The great cast was comprised mainly of singers from the Opera Workshop, all in good voice, under the musical direction of Sandra Graham, and MMus candidate Elliott Braganza conducted. The overall concept was charming: movement coach Elise Gauthier, as Fate, daintily directed proceedings, even the entrance of the choir, and the conductor's downbeat - and of

course the bows at the end! She ensured the singers' stylish baroque movements and the sailors' delightful stylized hornpipe! Joanna Dempster was a humourously evil Sorceress, egged on by her two comical witches, Ghislaine Dionne and Candace Cheung. Mark Wilkinson was a tall good looking Aeneas, aided and abetted by his two nimble sailors, Gennaro Busa and Bret Newton. Soprano Shannon Cole as Dido's confidante Belinda and Alaina Viau, as her other Woman, served beautifully the Dido, mezzo April Babey, who was very moving in her final lament and will be Carmen in the Opera Workshop's upcoming production. This was a tremendous performance, serving Purcell's beautiful music with an equally beautiful production, both visually and vocally!

Good and Fair Fall Fare by Shelagh Williams

After spending October in Ireland we had to scoot down to Toronto sharpish to catch the penultimate performances of the Canadian Opera Company (COC)'s run of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, plus a rare performance by the University of Toronto of Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto*.

First off, I must admit that my opinion of the performance of Mozart's masterpiece may be slightly coloured by the unpleasant experience of having the absolutely worst seats in the house: at the side, over the orchestra, behind a grill and a solid bank of spotlights, with no view of most of the right side of the stage! Why they sell those seats, with no warning of an obstructed view, to season subscribers, I do not know. Secondly, I have fond memories of two years ago when we saw a marvellous special production in Prague at the Estates Theatre, where it premiered in 1787, and last year an absolutely stu-

pendous one at Covent Garden, with Anna Netrebko, Michael Schade and Erwin Schrott, the new baritone. Couple all this with dreadful direction by Robin Guarino and the fact that the COC chose to do the "Prague" or original version, eliminating two beautiful arias, the tenor's "Dalla sua pace" and Donna Elvira's great scene with "In qual eccessi...Mi tradi", and you get the picture. The one plus was that this resulted in a playing time of under three hours. This was a revival of the COC's 2000 production, with Chilean designer Jorge Jara's abstract sets - what we could see of them - working quite well, with all enhanced by Robert Wierzel's lighting. However, Jara's mishmash of costumes was often questionable: Leporello in dreadful khaki shorts and sloppy long coat, Donna Elvira in bright red and green like a Christmas tree, Don Ottavio in a terrible overlong knitted vest and business suit, with glasses making him look even more nerdy, and the peasants Zerlina and Masetto drastically overdressed. At least the Don, in black leather, looked sexy and appropriately clad. It was director Robin Guarino's COC debut, which may explain why she allowed scenery to be continuously moved about distractingly in mid-aria in preparation for the next scene, and then absolutely

ruined the usually riveting climactic final death scene, having the Don expire (or not?) on his dining table instead of going down to Hell with the Commendatore! - perhaps I should be happy I couldn't see it well! Fortunately, the COC can be relied upon to get the music right, and debuting English maestro William Lacey's lively conducting ensured that it was played and sung superbly by the mainly Canadian cast. Among the principal roles, soprano Virginia Hatfield looked and sounded sweet as Zerlina and Russian bass Stanislav Shvets made his debut as a steadfast Masetto, and they made a believable peasant pair. American soprano

Julie Makerov made a suitably memorable entrance as Donna Elvira, in the ugly green and red outfit, accompanied by an overburdened maid, carrying umpteen cases, plus a broom in her teeth.

Makerov sang her way masterfully through her role as the wronged woman who still loved the Don. Tenor Gordon Gietz, as Donna Anna's betrothed, sang the truncated Don Ottavio role well enough but couldn't overcome his unfortunate wimpish costume and staging, especially his inept pistol handling - no wonder Donna Anna seemed conflicted between him and the Don! As Donna Anna, soprano Jessica Muirhead was elegantly gowned and in good voice as she at first seemed to be welcoming Don Giovanni until he killed her father. Throughout the piece, the Don's servant Leporello had a persuasive advocate in bass Robert Pomakov, who brought out the broad comedy in the role while still delivering musically, especially in his celebrated Catalogue Aria. But the star of the show was undoubtedly handsome baritone Brett Polegato, cutting a devastating swath through the female population as Don Giovanni. He was believably charming, yet dangerous, all the while singing up a storm - with the possible exception of his serenade, "Deh, vieni alla finestra", to Donna Elvira's maid which was not quite up to par. So, this production of *Don Giovanni* was a mixture of hits and misses, and

Don Giovanni was a mixture of hits and misses, and even the hits had reservations - in contrast, War and Peace was marvellous.

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Good and Fair Fall Fare (continued)

even the hits had reservations, but Mozart's marvellous music well performed can still trump a flawed vision to ensure a tolerable overall result, worth attending.

In contrast, *War and Peace*, based on Tolstoy's novel, was marvellous as a superb four-hour show. This first fully-staged Canadian production was coproduced with ENO, who did it in 2001, and is the largest single production the COC has ever staged. It consists of 13 scenes or excerpts and an epigraph, divided into *Peace*, the love story of Countess Natasha Rostova and Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, and *War*, the War of 1812 with the Napoleonic invasion. The fact that Prokofiev was writing this opera while Russia was again being invaded, this time by Germany in W.W.II, not only added immediacy and poignancy but also an aspect of morale-building to the piece - all the while pacifying the Russian censors! Tim Albery, the original director, chose to place the epigraph at the beginning and gave us a chorus of strong voiced 1940s Russian workers who then stayed on to watch and help quickly change the scenery during *Peace*, then as the Russian people fight in *War*, and finally celebrate the victory as 1940s workers again, all very neat and well thought out and ominous. For the excellent overall look of the piece - magnificent in *Peace* and gritty in *War* - we have to thank the original set and costume designers from ENO, Hildegard Bechtler and Ana Jebens, making their COC debuts with this production, and lighting designer Thomas C. Hase. To clarify locations or plot development during the opera, and help with scenery, since one large basic battered set covered all bases, projections of key phrases or appropriate scenes were used judiciously. Even many of the parading Regiments were sensibly portrayed by film/video projections, getting the same effect much more economically than the massive Met/Mariinsky production of a few years back, which had a different concept and used a rotating dome of a set with vast armies of extras for the war scenes. This is not to suggest that the COC production stunted on cast or costumes (2,265 costumes and accessories in total), or that the chorus didn't have

many quick changes between scenes as they went up or down the social scale(!), but that Albery and the production team used good technique and careful planning to ensure its success. Actually, just casting and manipulating 61 named roles, not to mention 77 chorus and 14 dancers, is mind boggling, and the Canadian choreographer Lailo Diallo who worked with the chorus members and principals who danced, as well as the dancers, to produce the many different great ball dances during *Peace* is to be highly congratulated. Of course, all Albery's brilliance would be for naught if the musical side were neglected, and here the COC was indeed fortunate to have young German conductor Johannes Debus, both making his COC debut and conducting this opera for the first time. He masterfully marshalled his huge orchestra to deal with Prokofiev's score and support his excellent singers. If the enthusiastic reaction of cast, chorus and orchestra at the end was any indication they obviously loved him - we may hopefully see more of Debus at the COC in the future! It is impossible to detail all of the strong performances by the splendid principals, never mind the minor roles, but in the love triangle, Canadian baritone Russell Braun as a strong but human Prince Andrei, Russian tenor Mikhail Agafonov as a marvellous Count Pierre Bezukhov, and debuting Russian soprano Elena Semenova as the young Countess Natasha were superb. Incidentally, from the Mariinsky the COC recruited bass Mikhail Kit as Fieldmarshall Kutuzov of the Russian army, tenor Oleg Balashov as Natasha's would-be seducer Prince Anatole Kuragin, and baritone Vassily Gerello as Napoleon, and their experience showed. Mention must also be made of Russian mezzo Larisa Kostyuk, who debuted with COC as Carmen in 2005, as a believably dangerous-to-know Countess Helen Bezukhova, Pierre's wife and Anatole's sister; and Canadian mezzos Jean Stilwell as a deliciously gossipy Madame Peronskaya, and Norine Burgess returning to the COC as Princess Marie Bolkonskaya, Andrei's sister. Amazingly, one could not believe two hours had gone by in each act, the production was so gripping and well done, with all the parts coming together in an amazing whole - what grand opera should be!

And now for something completely different - Where and when would you expect to find orchestra

Good and Fair Fall Fare

(continued)

players in the pit in costumes and the conductor arriving in a flashing witch's conical hat? On Hallowe'en, of course, at the University of Toronto (UofT) Faculty of Music, where we enjoyed an excellent production by the Opera Division of Domenico Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, based on the play *The Clandestine Marriage*. Cimarosa was of the same period as Mozart, with music reminiscent of Mozart, and indeed Cimarosa was in Vienna when he wrote *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, his most celebrated work, which butted enjoyed by dience whole encored!

an excellent production by the University of Toronto Opera Division

when it de- was so en- its first au- that the opera was It is a humorous and lively work, involving a father with two daughters and a sister, all unwed, and of course at cross purposes with each other and the two suitors, especially as one of the daughters has secretly married someone already! This was a full-scale production, with an excellent full orchestra in the pit at MacMillan Theatre, and even surtitles! Director and choreographer Alison Grant, also a choreographer for the COC, produced an enjoyable work, setting it in 1920s Italy, with appropriate costumes and lots of engaging stage business, for example the exuberant entrance of the aristocratic suitor Count Robinson on a motorbike! - would she had directed Don Giovanni! The splendid set consisted of a two-story country house front with three doors on each floor, allowing people to easily enter and leave during the tumultuous goings-on, and with a movable stone garden wall for some exterior scenes! There were two casts of students, each singing alternate evenings of the four night run, and our energetic six singers were excellent both in voice, especially the tenor, and acting ability. Whether or not Russell Braun, their new Resident Operatic Specialist, had anything to do with this production, his presence can only help improve matters! If this production is any indication, the UofT Opera School produces superior work well worth seeking out to enjoy, and promising us well trained opera singers for the future!

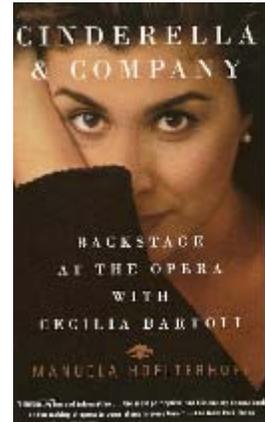
Cinderella and Company: Backstage at the Opera with Cecilia Bartoli

by Hoeltherhoff, Manuela.

New York: Vintage Books, 1999

BOOK REVIEW: by Shelagh Williams

This Fall I finally got around to reading this book which I bought last time I was in New York City. It is now a bit out of date but still entertaining and enlightening, and filled in a few gaps! It covers two years of the opera world, centring on Cecilia Bartoli, but with side trips touching on all sorts of backstage gossip, triumphs and tragedies. The huge cast includes singers' agents, opera company intendants, and opera directors, as well as singers, including the three large sopranos nicknamed "The Three Tonners"! The author makes it abundantly clear that if a singer does not wish to sing, he or she won't - some are just more imaginative than others with their cancellation excuses! All of this is conveyed with wit and insight - a few of the author's forecasts have since become fact - making for a page-turning read with lots of chuckles!



All Opera Lovers

It is time to RENEW your membership or join NCOS for 2009!

The membership year runs from January to December. Please fill in the enclosed form and join us for another year of musical activities!

Events You Could Have Enjoyed!

by David Williams

Ooh La La Opera opened its season with *The Scent of Scandal* at the NAC's Fourth Stage. This was a melange of music from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Die Fledermaus* and many other operas. The entertaining libretto, written by George Valettas, was summarised as "A night in the life of a high-ranking mandarin whose fate is sealed by his amorous and political indiscretions." Renée Lapointe, Shawn Elizabeth, George Valettas, Christopher Mallory, Francois Doucet and J.P. Fortier-Lazure all sang and acted well. Marina Denisova, a coloratura soprano, made a very successful debut and we hope that she will be seen in future operas. Renée Villemaire provided excellent piano accompaniment.

Cathedral Arts brought to Ottawa **Cantabile: The London Quartet** who presented a programme of both madrigals and more modern music. The arrangements ranged from serious to witty with a touch of British humour thrown in to provide an entertaining musical evening.

The **NACO Bostonian Bravo** series had advertised that Measha Bruggergosman would sing Berlioz' *Les Nuits d'Été*. To some peoples dismay and other persons pleasure, Measha changed her programme to a symphonic vocal work by Barber and a set of cabaret songs by Bolcom. As usual, the voice was thrilling and her new svelte figure most appealing. The only negative was that the orchestra seemed too strong for the atmospheric Barber piece. To the delight of opera lovers Measha returned at the end of the evening to sing Elektra's final aria from *Idomeneo*.

Ottawa Pocket Opera presented an ambitious two-act abridged version (90 min.) of Gioacchino Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Soprano Nadia Petrella, mezzo Ellison Owen Culp, baritone François Doucet and bass Christopher Mallory all sang well. Tenor David MacAdam was indisposed and, consequently, had difficulty with his voice. His performance was also not helped by his other responsibilities as director. Piano accompaniment was expertly provided by Valerie Dueck. The opera was well costumed and adequately staged but, unfortunately, on opening night had frequent stoppages due to electrical mal-

functions. Admirably the cast's singing was not significantly affected by these interruptions.

The recent **Strings of St. John's** concert starred lyric soprano Alexa Wing in a secular Bach cantata and Benjamin Britten's *Les Illuminations*, a cycle for soprano and string orchestra. Conductor Gordon Johnston always presents interesting and entertaining programmes.

Opera at the Movies

Large numbers of opera fans continue to attend the MET Opera live presentations at local cinemas. The cinemas are always packed and early attendance is required if you wish a good seat. Comments are almost always positive. Empire Theatres also present operas at a downtown cinema. Audience numbers are fewer but the operas shown are from first class European companies and well worth seeing. The main difference is that the MET broadcasts provide back stage views and interviews.

Opera Quiz

1. a) What instrument was the Mad Scene in *Lucia* written for? (not the usual flute!)
b) Who was one of the earliest composers to employ this instrument?
2. Wagner in his Ring Cycle was not the only opera composer to succumb to the charms of the sirens of the sea.
a) Offenbach wrote an opera about mermaids, with a German libretto, which premiered in Vienna in 1864. What was it called?
b) What Czech composer wrote *Rusalka*, based on Andersen's *Little Mermaid*?
c) In *Rusalka*, what characters are similar to Wagner's Rhine maidens?
3. Before they conducted (or directed) opera, what was the chosen "instrument" of the following?
a) Bernardi, Barenboim, Bonyngé, Masur, Rudel
b) Herbert, Toscanini, Harnoncourt
c) Lorin Maazel, d) Domingo, e) Laurent Pelly

Answers

1. a) Glass harmonica b) Mozart 2. a) *Das Rheingold* b) Dvorak c) 3 water sprites who open the opera 3. a) Piano b) Cello c) Violin d) Tenor voice e) Oboe

Events You Should Enjoy!

by David Williams

Ooh La La Opera has scheduled *The Wistful Dance of the Heart* for March 5 and 6, 2009 at the National Arts Centre, Fourth Stage at 8:00 pm. This will feature extensive excerpts from Massenet's *Werther* and Gounod's *Faust* as well as excerpts from Berlioz' *Les Troyens* and *La damnation de Faust*, Boito's *Mefistofele* and songs by Franz Schubert.

Cathedral Arts will be commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the Birth of Robert Burns on January 31, 2009 at 8:00 pm. Soprano Meredith Hall and Friends will pay homage to the Scottish poet with a selection of songs and instrumental pieces on the theme of love. This talented soprano will sing in the Scottish and English dialects of the period, interpreting the texts of Robert Burns with striking aptness and a rare intensity.

Classical Music Inspired by Legend and Literature is a course in Carleton University's Learning in Retirement (LinR) program. The course consists of a study of masterpieces in music which are derived from great classical works in literature. The course participants will first explore the literary works, such as the Greek legend of *Orpheus & Eurydice* and Scott's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, then the musical masterpieces inspired by them. Fridays, January 16th - February 20th; 1:30 - 3:30 pm. Additional Information: carleton.ca/cie, 613-520-6624

The NAC Orchestra will feature local favourite Donna Brown in *Music for a Sunday Afternoon* at the National Gallery on February 1st, 2009 at 2 pm. Donna will also appear with other well known singers in Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass* on January 28 & 29 th, 2009 at the NAC.

Ottawa University Opera Workshop under Sandra Graham will present two operas. Bizet's *Carmen* on January 23, 24, 25, 30, 31 & February 1, 2009 at Alumni Auditorium, University Centre. Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief* on February 28 & March 1, 2009 at Freiman Hall.

Seventeen Voices and the Ottawa Baroque Consort will present a concert on March 13, 2009 at St. Matthew's Anglican Church in celebration of Purcell's 350th anniversary.

The Kiwanis Music Festival takes place from April 14th to May 2nd. The senior and open voice sections are provisionally scheduled for the week of April 14-18, 2009.

St. Lukes Anglican Church in its Sunday evening recital series has scheduled soprano Bonnie Cooper on February 22nd and mezzo Carole Portelance on March 22nd, 2009 at 7:30 pm.

Julie Nesrallah and the Gryphon Trio will perform an all Beethoven benefit concert for the Ottawa Chamber Music Society on February 5th at 7:30 pm at Dominion Chalmers United Church.

Julie Nesrallah will also perform (i) with pianist Joan Milliken at Maison du Citoyen de Gatineau on January 18th, 2009 at 11 am and (ii) with harpist Caroline Leonardelli at St. Giles Presbyterian Church on March 6th, 2009 at 8 pm.

Yoriko Tanno's 14th Shooting Stars Operatic Showcase will present a staged and costumed operatic production entitled *A Cendrillon Entertainment* at Carleton University, Kailash Mital Theatre, on March 28th, 2009.

Opera Lyra Opera Studio Artists will (i) present **Operantics** featuring excerpts from *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization on March 14th, 2009 and (ii) workshop at the NAC Fourth Stage at noon on March 20th, 2009 a newly commissioned children's opera by Dean Burry which will be premiered as part of OLO's 25th anniversary season.

Opera Lyra Opera Studio Competition The Studio Artists will also compete in the annual OLO Competition on March 22, 2009 - attendance is open to all supporters of OLO.

Pure Gold in Montreal

by Murray Kitts

La fanciulla del West has never been one of Puccini's most popular operas but that can be partly explained by being in the shadow of *Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Butterfly*. The story, based on the David Belasco play, seems ill-suited for opera. However, with an excellent cast, ingenious settings and a first-class orchestra under a superior conductor, this is an opera which should be presented more often. Susan Patterson as Minnie gave a memorable portrayal of the gun-toting, tough saloon keeper whose compassion and love touches all the rude, hard drinking, gambling miners. Vocal honours were shared with the excellent Australian tenor Julian Gavin as the bandit Dick Johnson and the man with whom Minnie finds her first passionate love. Luis Ledema as the sheriff Jack Rance had the misfortune to look like the description of the bandit everyone was hunting; but with his powerful voice he carried out his role quite well. There were many minor characters in the opera giving a chance for fine young Canadian singers to shine in their parts, especially Antoine Bélanger as the bartender and Alexander Dobson and Alexandre Sylvestre as two of the miners. The chorus and orchestra (the Métropolitain) were both outstanding no doubt due to the leadership of the Canadian conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson who has already built an impressive international reputation. After all, it is Puccini's score that makes the plot believable and sweeps us along to the final moment when the heroine and her beloved go off into the sunset. This was a new production for l'Opéra de Montréal by Thaddeus Strassberger who also acted as stage director. The sets were ingeniously constructed, moved easily on stage and added to the enjoyment of the piece. Congratulations to all involved in this splendid presentation.

Thank You, Thank You

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the content, production and distribution of last year's Newsletters.

Black & White

Opera Soirée

Black & White and funny all over
Gilbert & Sullivan
 on Parliament Hill!

Hosted by national news anchors
 Peter Mansbridge
 Lloyd Robertson
 Bernard Derome

FEBRUARY 21
 NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE

A benefit evening for the National Arts Centre Orchestra and Opéra Lyra Ontario
 presented by **Bell**

GIVE THE GIFT OF LAUGHTER!
 Tickets available now \$80, \$65, \$50

OPERA Soirée D'OPERA
 OPÉRA LYRA D'ONTARIO
 WWW.NAC-CHA.CA

Don't Miss It!!
February 21, 2009
**National Arts
 Centre**

Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild

Viva Verdi

Rigoletto March 24, 2009. 7 pm
Pavarotti and Guberova filmed live in Vienna.

DVD big screen presentations of the operas.

"The Grandest of the Grand Operas" and High Tea

Hosted by Murray Kitts
Sunday April 19, 2009, at 1 pm.

All of the above events take place in the auditorium at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street.

Joy of Opera Luncheon

January 25, 2009. 12 Noon, RA Centre 2451
Riverside Drive. Information: 613-233-9200
x221 www.operalyra.ca. Advance reservations

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera "From the Met"

January 3 Puccini: *La Bohème*

January 10 Puccini: *La Rondine*

January 17 John Adams: *Doctor Atomic*

January 24 Gluck: *Orfeo ed Euridice*

January 31 Verdi: *Rigoletto*

February 7 Donizetti: *Lucia di Lammermoor*

February 14 Tchaikovsky: *Eugene Onegin*

February 21 Ciléa: *Adriana Lecouvreur*

February 28 Verdi: *Il Trovatore*

March 7 Puccini: *Madama Butterfly*

March 14 Dvorák: *Rusalka*

March 21 Bellini: *La Sonnambula*

March 28 Wagner: *Das Rheingold*

April 4, Donizetti: *L'Elisir d'amore*

April 11 Wagner: *Die Walküre*

April 18 Wagner: *Siegfried*

April 25 Wagner: *Götterdämmerung*

2009 Metropolitan Opera Live on the Big Screen

La Rondine - Puccini

Saturday, January 10, 2009 (1:00 pm) Encore February 21
2 hours 15 minutes/ one intermission. Conductor: Marco
Armiliato; Production: Nicolas Joël; Angela Gheorghiu,
Lisette Oropesa, Roberto Alagna, Marius Brenciu, Samuel
Ramey

Orfeo ed Euridice - Gluck

Saturday, January 24, 2009 (1:00 pm) Encore March 14
1 hour 31 minutes/ no intermission. Conductor: James Levine;
Production: Mark Morris; Stephanie Blythe, Danielle de Niese

Lucia di Lammermoor - Donizetti

Saturday, February 7, 2009 (1:00 pm) Encore April 4
3 hours 20 minutes / two intermissions. Conductor: Marco
Armiliato; Production: Mary Zimmerman; Anna Netrebko,
Rolando Villazón, Mariusz Kwiecien, Ildar Abdrazakov

Madama Butterfly - Puccini

Saturday, March 7, 2009 (1:00 pm) Encore April 18. 3 hours 21
minutes/two intermissions. Conductor: Patrick Summers; Produc-
tion: Anthony Minghella; Cristina Gallardo-Domâs, Marcello
Giordani

La Sonnambula - Bellini

Saturday, March 21, 2009 (1:00 pm) Encore April 25. 2 hours 40
minutes/one intermission. Conductor: Evelino Pidò; Production:
Mary Zimmerman; Natalie Dessay, Juan Diego Flórez, Michele
Pertusi

La Cenerentola - Rossini

Saturday, May 9, 2009 (12:30 pm) Encore May 23. 3 hours/one
intermission Conductor: Maurizio Benini; Production: Cesare Lievi;
Elina Garanca, Lawrence Brownlee, Simone Alberghini, Alessandro
Corbelli, John Relyea

Opera Within Reach

OTTAWA

Opera Lyra Ottawa

Black & White Opera Soirée February 21, 2009

Eugene Onegin by Tchaikovsky April 4, 6, 8, 11, 2009

All performances are at the NAC. Information:

613-233-9200 x221 www.operalyra.ca

Cathedral Arts

Meredith Hall, January 31, 2009

Performances are at Christ Church Cathedral
Information: 613-567-1787 www.cathedralarts.com

Orpheus Society

Nonsense by Goggin March 6-15, 2009

Savoy Society

The Gondoliers by Gilbert & Sullivan March 27-29,
April 1-4, 2009

Orpheus and Savoy performances are at Centrepointe
Theatre. Information: 613-580-2700
www.centrepointheatre.com

MONTREAL

L'Opéra de Montréal

Macbeth by Verdi Feb 4, 7, 9 & 12, 2009

Starmania by Plamondon/Berger Mar 14 to 28, 2009
Performances are in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts

Così Fan Tutte by Mozart Mar 28 to April 4, 2009
Performances at Monument-National. Information 1-
514-985-2258 www.operademontreal.com

TORONTO

Canadian Opera Company

Fidelio by Beethoven Jan. 24 to Feb 24, 2009

Rusalka by Dvorak Jan 31 to Feb 23, 2009

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

Opera Atelier

The Coronation of Poppea by Monteverdi
April 25 to May 2, 2009

All performances are at the Elgin Theatre.
Information: 1-416-872-5555 www.operaatelier.com

Opera in Concert

Il Mondo Della Luna by Haydn Feb 1, 2009

Kamouraska by Wilson March 28, 29, 2009

Performances 2:30 p.m. in the Jane Mallett Theatre
Information: 416-922-2147 www.operainconcert.com

SYRACUSE

Syracuse Opera

Romeo & Juliet by Gounod March 6, 8, 2009

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

Check for times and other details on the Websites.