

Newsletter • Bulletin

Fall

2010

Automne

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

Our New Patron - Gerald Finley by Murray Kitts

The NCOS is pleased to announce that Gerald Finley has graciously agreed to be patron of the Brian Law Opera Competition. The board of directors unanimously agreed that Gerald Finley had to be the obvious successor to the late Maureen Forrester. Gerald as chorister and Brian as choirmaster and musical mentor formed a great friendship in Ottawa many years ago. Not long after the scholarship was first announced, Bobbi Cain, through her knowledge of Gerald, asked him to give a fund-raising recital. This was the first of a number of events through the years where Gerald freely donated his presence to help establish an ever-increasing amount of money which would go to aspiring singers.

Two trips to New York not only delighted our members but raised money by a raffle of tickets for the trip. The first of these for Gerald's debut at the Met as Papageno was crowned with an extraordinary brunch arranged by the Canadian consul in New York and attended by Gerald's parents and the whole group from Ottawa. The second, for Don Giovanni, was marked by a visit from Gerald just before he went for make-up and costuming for that evening's performance. No one there will forget the time he spent counseling and encouraging one of the Brian Law contestants who was on the trip. Gerald's visits to Ottawa were also occasions to meet with him and to promote our efforts at raising money. There was a fine reception sponsored by the Harpers (our trip arrangers and benefactors) when Gerald took part in one of the Chamber Music Festivals. For his appearance with the NAC Orchestra the NCOS arranged a grand reception after a performance. It was an especially happy moment for Peggy Pflug and myself (see photo) since



Photo: Siemsen

we were members of the Board when the competition was instituted.

By lending his name as patron to the Brian Law Opera Competition Gerald Finley brings with him a tremendous prestige in the world of opera, singing and music generally. One of our members once asked: "Has Gerald Finley ever had a bad review?" The evidence is in the many DVD performances which capture not only his fine voice but also his brilliant acting. See for yourself his great performances in Mozart's operas: Figaro at Glyndebourne; the Count at Covent Garden; and the soon-to-be released Don Giovanni which was the big event at

Glyndebourne this summer. Gerald has been nominated as "Artist of the Year", has had his CDs winning many awards and has even had operas composed with him in mind as the principal singer.

I'm sure Brian Law will be very pleased at the news that Gerald Finley is the distinguished patron of the Brian Law Competition.

Incidentally, the news from Christchurch is that, although his house was somewhat damaged by the earthquake, Brian was not in the house at the time and was not injured.

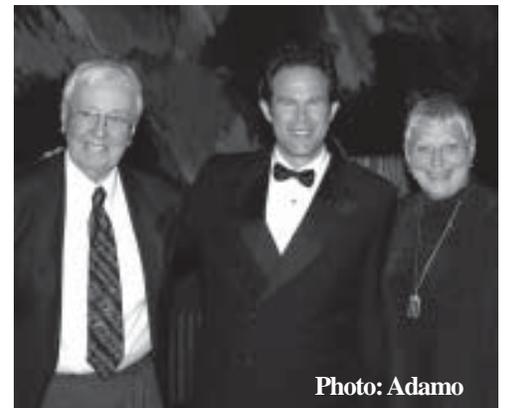


Photo: Adamo

President's Message

It must be the fresh air and the beauty of the countryside that makes what has become our annual summer meeting out at the Pflugs' country home so pleasant and productive. As you can see, the directors have all been willing to serve in the same positions again. Our finances are in good shape. We were again able to contribute \$1,000 each to Opera Lyra's Studio Artists Program and to Pellegrini Opera. Pat Adamo has generously agreed to donate again the 3rd prize of \$1,000 at the next Brian Law competition (November 2011). The number of members has increased. Opera alla Pasta arrangements have been made for the coming season. Plans for a new brochure and a logo for the NCOS are underway. There was unanimous support to ask Gerald Finley to be our new patron. His positive answer was most gratifying. We shared news of the Brian Law Competition family: Joshua Hopkins with a full-page photo and article in *Opera News*, excellent reviews for his roles in two operas in Santa Fe, and notice of his partici-

pation in Bernstein's *A Quiet Place* with the New York City Opera in October; a photo of "the highly promising Cherubino of Wallis Giunta" accompanied the opera review in *Canadian Opera*; Shannon Mercer received an excellent review in June's *Gramophone* for her recording of music by Francesca Caccini; Julie Nesrallah's cabaret performance of *Carmen*; Yannick-Muriel Noah's delightful recital in Luskville accompanied by Jean Desmarais, enjoyed again on a CBCTV program hosted by Julie; and Philippe Sly is to have a leading role in a McGill Student Opera Production of *La Bohème*. As usual the potluck food and drink were excellent but nothing could equal the fresh corn and tomatoes right out of the Pflugs' garden - another expression of their boundless hospitality.



Newsletter Editors

David Williams

Tom McCool

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

October 3 (Double Bill)

Fidelio

Beethoven



Walter Felsenstein's 1953 acclaimed film with Richard Holm, Magda Laszlo, the Vienna Symphony and State Opera Chorus under the direction of Fritz Lehmann is both moving and thrilling.

&

Henry VIII Act 3

Saint-Saëns



The annulment conflict between Henry and Catherine of Aragon sets the stage for a "grand opera". 1983 production by the Théâtre Français de la Musique.

Reserve by Sept 29 by calling 613-721-7121 (Elizabeth Meller)

November 7

I due Foscari

Verdi



Based on Byron's *The Two Foscari* this elaborate La Scala 1988 production with Renato Bruson and Linda-Roark-Strummer under the direction of Gianandrea Gavazzeni brings out the full beauty of Verdi's score.

Reserve by Nov 3 by calling 613-721-7121

In 2011 March 6: *The Bartered Bride* (Smetana) May 15: *Der Freischütz* (Weber)

Music Triumphs in Opera Lyra's *Turandot*

by Murray Kitts

The popularity of Puccini's last opera depends to some extent on lavish sets which accompany the exotic-sounding music. Opera Lyra has had to choose between a production approaching the Met's Zeffirelli extravaganza or a more modest one (this one from Opera Carolina) using the money saved to hire the best voices available. I think that the latter choice proved to be the best one. After all, Opera Lyra has the great NAC orchestra to start with and, augmented as it was by at least a dozen musicians, the orchestra played magnificently under the direction of Andreas Delfts. The Opera Lyra Chorus under Laurence Ewashko has once again proved that they can tackle any score brilliantly. Right from the start the audience knew that the cast had been very well chosen with the entrance of the powerful voice of the Mandarin, Gene Wu. Benoît Boutet was a memorable, magnificently garbed, Emperor. The three imperial councillors: Ping, Aaron St. Clair Nicholson, Pang, James McLean, and Pong, Michel Corbeil, were obviously chosen for their accomplished acting skills as well as for vocal abilities. Their comic "turns" in the first two acts captured the *commedia dell'arte* conventions of Gozzi's play. Peter Volpe portrayed the bravery and despair of the blind king Timur with his excellent bass voice. Richard Margison as Calâf is still able to produce those high notes and to thrill audiences with his solos. Puccini knew what he was doing when he introduced the character of Liù into the story. Shu-ying Li's performance in this role was genuinely moving and sung to perfection.

Turandot, the princess made of ice, is a much more difficult task for any singer. Lori Phillips, possessing a voice which is powerful yet beautiful, proved capable of surmounting all the vocal technical difficulties with apparent ease. At the same time she had to cope with an elaborate costume, albeit magnificent, while managing to climb up and down sets of stairs. There was much in the stage direction by Brian Deedrick to admire. His handling of the chorus and especially the children was admirable. However the presence of a number of mobile platforms, although moved about quite skilfully, led to some staging problems. The beautiful children's chorus at the entrance of *Turandot* was sung well to the back of the stage. The parade of the

Right from the start the audience knew that the cast had been very well chosen

executioner's men with the head of the Prince of Persia (designed to further dissuade Calâf) went unnoticed by many in the audience. This could have been corrected by better use of lighting effects. As a matter of fact, I found the lighting and projections in Act I to be rather weak. For example, if the libretto mentions the image of the moon as a severed head then surely the moon itself should be shown. The lighting effects improved greatly in the last two acts. To sum up, this masterly opera by a great opera composer was given an outstanding performance with the two sopranos especially notable.

NCOS Board of Directors 2010-2011

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Another Great Glimmerglass by Shelagh Williams

After forsaking Glimmerglass Opera (GGO) for Santa Fe Opera last summer, we returned to our old favourite this summer and immersed ourselves in four operas in three days: Puccini's *Tosca*, Handel's *Tolomeo*, Copland's *The Tender Land*, and Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, plus a delightful concert by the Young American Artists Program (YAAP) entitled *Killer B's: American Song from Amy Beach to the Beach Boys!*

GGO prides itself on new productions for its yearly offerings, but this year, in a thrifty response to the economic conditions, enlisted Donald Eastman as set designer for all four operas, commissioning him to "repurpose" his 2005 set for *Death in Venice*, yet not damage it so that it could not still be rented out intact to other opera companies to use for that opera! This resulted in the same floor and footprint in a unit set for all four operas, with the original black walls serving *Tosca* and *Tolomeo*, and new white walls plus backdrops for *Tender Land* and *Figaro* - quite a brilliant concept actually, with suitable set dressing to accommodate each opera. We watched the stage crew on Saturday do the changeover from *Tolomeo* to *Tender Land*, and the heads of the technical teams in their commentary mentioned that the expense of a special floor change team of 16 or so was also saved this year. I can remember in a changeover witnessed many years ago watching a very complicated raked stage being painstakingly and expensively put together for the evening show! However, the story of the problems and pitfalls of trying to supply tall wheat (6' was wanted!) for the background of the *Tender Land* kept us in stitches, and set one to wondering how much that particular conceit of the director or designer had cost the opera company! The commentators also mentioned that the "repurposing" was not entirely a matter of economics - the company on which GGO relied to build some of the sets had gone out of business, leaving GGO to build all four of their sets themselves in house. Behind the scenes can be as interesting as what happens on stage!

The production of *Tosca* was an extremely fine one, with all aspects contributing to its overall quality. The setting lacked the sumptuousness of other productions - no bishop or procession in the church, and only typewriters with no couch for seduction in Scarpia's

office! However, all of the black of costumes and walls was quite ominous. Jeff Harris's lighting played up this feeling, especially in the scary second act, yet managed to distinguish the initial church setting and the final outdoor dawn scene visually for us. Although updated to between the two World Wars, Puccini's era, it worked if you ignored the actual text! Matthew Pachtman gave *Tosca* some nice gowns - attractive yet sensible day dresses and a stunning pristine white evening gown in which to confront Scarpia and his black-clad menials in the second act. Wielding the baton was the GGO Music Director, Brit David Angus, who ran a tight ship musically, matched by director Ned Canty, who was sparing of big gestures, but told the story well, if sparsely, with no unnecessary or expensive directorial whims. Fortunately, the money was spent on the singers, three magnetic young Americans. Baritone Lester Lynch was a merciless, evil Scarpia, winning some boos at the curtain call, while good looking tenor Adam Diegel hit his high notes while singing strongly and beautifully. Soprano Lise Lindstrom, fresh from her *Turandot* at the Met, gave us her first essay of the title role. She was capable of not only singing the role but also looking and acting the part so that we could feel for her in her predicament. In spite of being the sparsest *Tosca* I've ever seen, Glimmerglass had a winner in this production!

The next afternoon was *Tolomeo*, in an entirely different opera form, a baroque *opera seria* about Royalty. The story is a typical convoluted Handel "romantic comedy". Deposed King Tolomeo of Egypt and his wife Seleuce have been exiled separately to Cyprus, where they live disguised as shepherds, while seeking each other. The local Royals, Princess Elisa and her brother, King Araspe, are, in turn, surprisingly, in love with the two supposed shepherds, who are of course not interested. Enter Tolomeo's brother Alessandro and a potion to further complicate matters but, by the end, the Egyptian Royal couple and Elisa and Alessandro are happily paired off and sadness turns to joy for everyone but Araspe. The black walls

Another Great Glimmerglass^(continued)

of the unit set, with various backdrops and a lot of imagination were used by director Chas Rader-Shieber, with lighting by Robert Wierzel, to portray the various scenes. To suggest the ocean we saw a goldfish in a bowl and a huge swordfish swimming across the back, for the shipwreck a toy boat broken in two, and for a windstorm five antique electric fans. The light-hearted range was from quaint to humorous to absurd. Rader-Shieber certainly kept one's attention without too much upstaging of singers and their arias, except for the addition of three supernumeraries, dressed as ancient bewigged footmen, who excruciatingly slowly moved furniture, pushed brooms and watched the singers, definitely distracting from the singing! The costumes, by Andrea Hood, were stylish but as bizarre and inconsistent as the set and props - and therefore in keeping with the overall concept! Do not, however, let all this detract from the fact that the opera was beautifully played and sung under the superb direction of Scottish conductor and baroque specialist Christian Curnyn, plus a nifty little continuo consisting of harpsichord, theorbo and baroque cello, in the right hand corner of the pit, raised to keep an eye on the singers! The smaller roles were taken by two excellent YAAPs, baritone Steven LaBrie, in red dandy outfit and top hat with feather plus devilish goatee, to play the villainous Araspe with great glee, and mezzo Kate Mushegain in the pants role of Alessandro. As the ever-faithful Seleuce, soprano Joelle Harvey sang her lovely laments heartrendingly, maintaining her regal poise despite whatever stage business was going on around her! Canadian mezzo Julie Boulianne had the juicy role of Elisa, which she sang and played to the hilt, bringing out all the comedy of a man-hungry vixen in bright red curly hair and matching red ankle boots! As Tolomeo, countertenor Anthony Roth Costanza, in jeans and a long frock coat, with a beautiful clear voice, made his invariably sad character still believable and likeable. And then at the end, the reunited Tolomeo and Seleuce threw off their outer garments in joy, followed by Elisa and her new boyfriend

Alessandro, and even Araspe, so that we finished with the ladies in white satin slips and the men in various humorous underwear to lark about happily and leave us with a smile on our faces as marital constancy and brotherly love prevailed. GGO, which has now staged 8 different Handel operas since 1995, has been important in the revival of Baroque opera in the US, and this production, the North American professionally-staged premier of *Tolomeo*, showed why - first-rate musical values coupled with interesting and inventive staging making for another great performance!

That evening was *The Tender Land*, originally commissioned for TV, but actually premiered at NYC Opera in 1954, and also a relatively rarely performed opera. One reason may be that it was written for young people, but is too difficult for college age singers, especially the lead role of Laurie, written for an 18 year old with Wagnerian capabilities! Fortunately, GGO's YAAP class of 2010 - 38 chosen from a field of 700-800 applicants - was of sufficient calibre to select the total cast from its members - another cost-saving measure! Tazewell Thompson, who directed the original *Death in Venice* whose set was reconfigured for this summer's operas, had Donald Eastman provide worn white clapboard walls for *The Tender Land*, plus the aforementioned wheat backdrop for authenticity. Thompson matched the setting with good straightforward, unpretentious direction of the rather uninspired libretto. Farm girl Laurie Moss, about to be the family's first high school graduate, wishes to escape the farm and overbearing Grandpa Moss. She suddenly falls in love with Martin, the younger of the two newly hired men, and hopes to leave with him. However Top, the older, makes Martin realize he really has nothing to offer Laurie, and early on the morning of graduation day the two men depart without her. Implausibly, Laurie still decides to leave on her own, that very day. Andrea Hood of the stylish *Tolomeo* here used borrowed 1930s clothing from Juilliard's costume archive for a shabby but All-American feel, with Robert Wiesel providing the prairie lighting. Emeritus Music Director and YAAP founder Stewart Robertson returned to conduct the lush score with the full GGO orchestra and his talented protégés. These included Canadian tenor Chris Lysack who sang

Another Great Glimmerglass^(continued)

the mailman Mr. Splinters, bass-baritone Joseph Marron as Grandpa Moss, and baritone Mark Diamond as Top. As the young couple, tenor Andrew Stenson and soprano Lindsay Russell both had the lovely voices and good acting skills to pull off their roles. This was a brave attempt, but the result did not feel totally professional, and there are clearly reasons why this opera is not often performed!

Fortunately, we finished off with a marvelous “traditional” performance of *Marriage of Figaro*. Canadian Leon Major directed the opera with care and thoughtfulness, and in this case Eastman’s unit set was the white wood one with added wainscoting, plus a back wall encompassing double doors and windows to accommodate the various scenes and comings and goings in the opera! The designer even suggested that the slightly worn aspect of the walls of this country estate mirrored the Count’s own lack of concern for his wife and property. The costume designer, Matthew Pachtman again, in this production set in 1905, has given us beige and cream Edwardian clothing, with the only colour on Susanna - whose story it really is in this production - in a lovely blue dress, with the Count looking ruffled, in his linen suit, and not at all in charge! Major ensured that any jokes came logically from the story and situations of the opera, rather than being added on indiscriminately. Some clever bits of stage business really enlivened the proceedings, especially in Act I: Figaro and Susanna’s little wrestling match, and Figaro’s not marching Cherubino off to war, but instead delightfully giving Cherubino his first shave, setting it up exactly as in the shaving scene of *Barber of Seville*! Throughout Don Basilio was quite active, and kept turning up, comically eavesdropping and keeping an eye on things! Ingeniously, in the complicated final act, a large wagon dominated the stage and provided umpteen hiding places on, under and beside it, as various lovers, disguised and otherwise, flirted and tried to evade detection while seeking to embarrass the philandering Count! Our conductor was again David Angus who con-

fessed in the pre-show chat that *Figaro* is his favourite opera, and it showed in his work with his first class singers and orchestra! Mezzo Aurlhelia Varak was charming in the pants role of young Cherubino, soprano Haeron Hong was adorable as his scatterbrained girlfriend Barbarina, baritone Robert Kerr was believable - and sober! - as her father the gardener Antonio, and tenor Alex Monsoori was lively as Basilio, but bass-baritone Mark Schnaible did not have the presence he should have had, as the Count - he certainly didn’t act like top dog! In 2008, soprano Caitlin Lynch sang the Countess successfully in Ottawa for Opera Lyra Ottawa, and so of course here sang with the facility of practice and with feeling. In the pivotal role of Susanna, Russian soprano Lyubov Petrova - the charismatic GGO Cleopatra of two years ago - showed again what a good actress and fine singer she is. But of course, this opera lives or dies on its Figaro, and in bass-baritone Patrick Carfizzi we had just the ticket: a first-rate voice, and an active and clever actor, with a good comedic turn - need I say more? It was a great way to end our long weekend of operas at GGO, with its always excellent music values.

This year we decided to try the Road Scholar programme run by “Explore New York”. It included such excellent presenters as singer and Yale University Music faculty member Daniel Egan, GGO Principal Coach and harpsichordist David Moody, and GGO Music Director and conductor David Angus. A highlight was a Sunday morning session with Lindsay Russell, the morning after she had sung Laurie in *Tender Land*, and Patrick Carfizzi, just before he was to sing Figaro in *Marriage of Figaro*! Their enthusiasm for opera was infectious and their insights into their profession, though at different stages, were most enlightening. Overall the programme was an excellent experience.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed by Shelagh Williams

Fringe Festival: Two shows which we saw merit mention and indicate that there is lots of music out there - you just have to find it! Vancouver opera singer turned cabaret chanteuse Lindsay Sutherland Boal presented *Purely Cabaret*, based mainly on the underground songs of the Weimar Republic, sung in German or English. She and pianist, Elisabeth Scholtz, provided a lively, lovely partnership for these sometimes witty, sometimes tender, often bittersweet melodies. Completely different was the dance rock opera *The Duck Wife*, based on an ancient Inuit myth. An epic journey was brought to life by Inertia Productions through song, dance, theatre and very loud live rock music played by the band Grub Animal. The music was not perhaps to our taste, but the whole was certainly interesting - and won Best of Fest for their venue!

Music and Beyond Festival: Julian Armour returned, bringing the usual heat wave and his own inimitable repertoire choices! Ottawa's own Donna Brown - she of the heavenly creamy soprano - gave a sublime *Shepherd on the Rock* accompanied by Menahem Pressler on piano and Ross Edwards on clarinet! The next day she returned with pianist Stephane Lemelin for a set of Mahler songs, set in context by music writer and incomparable raconteur Norman Lebrecht. For opera lovers, the Boston vocal ensemble Tapestry presented the fully costumed world premiere of *The Tale of the White Rooster*, a delightful chamber opera for voices, percussion and Tibetan bowls. The four rich female voices blended beautifully in this Tibetan Buddhist tale, commissioned by the Smithsonian and, as the composer told us, scheduled for its Washington, DC, premiere the following week! The magnificent British Hilliard Ensemble, in its first-ever Canadian appearance, presented a concert of superbly blended early music *From the time of Caravaggio* - quite breathtaking! It was hard to believe that only four voices, a capella, could so fill the church and surround us with music. Later in the week there were our own lovely Ottawa Bach Choir and then Daniel Taylor's peerless Choir of the Theatre of Early Music doing *Music from the Sistine Chapel*.

Yannick-Muriel Noah and Festival Pontiac Enchante: Jean Desmarais has established a music festival in the Pontiac, and on a Sunday afternoon in late July we enjoyed a superb concert by Yannick-Muriel Noah, accompanied by Jean. Muriel capped off a programme of beautifully sung art songs in French, English and German with four brilliant operatic arias plus two encores. CBC was there, recording, and they broadcast the programme on Ottawa TV on Sept. 4th.

Chamberfest: For Chopin's 200th birthday Chamberfest supplied us in one concert with two sets of his songs, sung beautifully in Polish by a soprano and a baritone respectively, plus a lovely sonata for cello and piano - who else had heard or even knew about these works? Having travelled to Toronto to hear Canadian Brett Polegato sing at the COC, it was a pleasure to have him debut here at Chamberfest in a programme of both well known and rare English language songs from the British Isles and the States, which suited his rich baritone beautifully.

Shaw Festival: The Shaw gave us the hilarious, tuneful hit musical *One Touch of Venus*, with marvellous music by Kurt Weill and clever lyrics by Ogden Nash, delivered by a cast that could sing, dance and deliver a one-liner with the best!

Stratford Festival: Monday evening's *Night Music* featured Barbara Fulton, in a concert of tunes from the 1920s to 1960s. The rock opera *Evita*, with Chilina Kennedy and Juan Chioran was given a superb production - though with more rock music in it than I recalled - or am I getting older?! Cole Porter's clever music and lyrics made *Kiss Me Kate* very funny, with good production values and lots of humorous stage business, all performed with super energy. *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, starring Brent Carver, was presented with a nice intimate, cabaret feel, but it was more nostalgic and less gritty than I remembered. *King of Thieves*, a newly commissioned musical by George F. Walker with a cynical edge, was inspired by *The Beggar's Opera*, composed and conducted by John Roby, and staged in the new Studio.

A New Vision for Glimmerglass

by David Williams

Francesca Zambello officially assumed the role of General & Artistic Director at Glimmerglass Opera on September 1, 2010 when she succeeded Michael MacLeod, who held the position for five years. An American, who grew up in Europe, she speaks French, Italian, German and Russian. She has a vast international experience in directing operas, musicals and theatre and has received significant awards from many countries. Zambello has a vision for Glimmerglass and brings with her many new ideas to revitalise the organisation. The first is to rename Glimmerglass Opera as **The Glimmerglass Festival** beginning with the 37th season which will run July 2 through August 23, 2011. The company will continue its tradition of four new fully staged productions, but instead of four operas the season will change to three operas and one piece of American musical theater, performed as intended with full orchestra, large cast and no sound amplification. These four productions will be supplemented by special performances, cabarets, concerts, lectures and symposiums throughout the season.

Zambello has said: *Our new name reflects our new breadth of activities and spirit of adventure. My goal is to have a variety of offerings, so you can come to a concert or reading in the afternoon, have a picnic, go to the opera, and then stay afterward for a cabaret.*

In 2011, The Glimmerglass Festival will present new productions of Bizet's *Carmen*, Berlin's American classic *Annie Get Your Gun* and Cherubini's rarely performed *Medea*. Additionally, a double bill of two new one act operas about American artists will feature the world-premiere production of *A Blizzard in Marblehead Neck*, a Glimmerglass-commissioned work by award-winning composer Jeanine Tesori and librettist Tony Kushner, and the professional premiere of John Musto's and Mark Campbell's *Later the Same*

Evening, an opera based on five Edward Hopper paintings.

New in 2011, the company will host a **Glimmerglass Festival Artist in Residence**. Each summer, an Artist in Residence will join the company for the season and be fully integrated into the Festival. The inaugural Artist in Residence will be Deborah Voigt who, in addition to starring in

Annie Get Your Gun, will perform special solo performances throughout the summer and work closely with members of the company's Young American Artists Program. Coincidentally Voigt will star in Puccini's *La Fanciulla Del West* in the coming season at the MET which will give us an interesting comparison.

Also new in 2011, The Glimmerglass Festival will present **Meet Me at the Pavilion**, a series of special performances and lectures that will take place in the company's Thaw Pavilion next to the Alice Busch Opera Theater. These performances will be presented all summer and will consist of

concerts, lectures, post-performance discussions with cast and crew, and performances by members of the Young American Artists Program. The Glimmerglass Festival will also introduce **ShowTalk**, a series that will take place over three weekends and two weeks in August when visiting scholars and artists will explore topics related to the Festival productions. Zambello says we should *anticipate an eclectic mix of cultural and critical perspectives on music, theater, art and ideas.*

Unfortunately, most of us in Ottawa only visit Glimmerglass for a few days to see the main stage performances and consequently, will miss many of these new ventures. Hopefully, those who live close enough will visit frequently so that The Glimmerglass Festival can succeed financially as well as artistically.



photo by Claire McAdams

Events You Could Enjoy by David Williams

Ars Nova: World-class soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian, accompanied by pianist Serouj Kradjian, will perform favourite works by Handel, Mozart and more in a recital entitled *Sing, Heavenly Muse*. Wednesday, November 24, 2010 - 7:30 pm at St. Andrew's Church (Kent at Wellington).

Daniel Taylor and the Theatre of Early Music present a special Christmas concert entitled *Star of Wonder* which will feature Bach's *Christmas Cantatas*. Wednesday, December 22, 2010 - 7:30 pm, Knox Presbyterian Church (Elgin at Lisgar).

Information: www.arsnova.ca or 819-328-9447

Cathedral Arts: Soprano Marie-Josée Lord will present a recital on Sunday, Oct. 24, 2010 at 7:30 pm. Award-winning Marie-Josée Lord, has been featured in many CBC broadcasts, and has performed in numerous operatic productions.

Yannick-Muriel Noah and the Christ Church Cathedral Boys' Choir will present a Christmas Concert on Saturday, Dec. 18, 2010, at 8:00 p.m. This concert is being presented in collaboration with the Ottawa Bytown Rotary Club in partial support of the outreach program of StreetSmarts to help homeless individuals of all backgrounds.

Both concerts at Christ Church Cathedral. Information: 613-567-1787 or www.cathedralarts.ca

OLO Opera Studio: On September 30, 2010 bring your lunch to the NAC Fourth Stage at noon and enjoy a free concert featuring artists of the OLO Opera Studio as they perform a 50-minute concert. Admission is free, general seating, cabaret style.

Orpheus: The Broadway musical *Annie* will be presented November 12-21, 2010. *Annie* is based upon the popular Harold Gray comic strip *Little Orphan Annie*, with music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Martin Charnin, and the book by Thomas Meehan. Information: www.centrepointheatre.com or call 613-580-2700

St. Luke's Anglican Church: Pauline van der Roest, Lara Ferreira (soprano), Ken Trudell (tenor), and Thomas Franzky (bass) will present a concert of opera arias, etc. on October 3, 2010 at 7:30pm. Location - 760 Somerset Street West. Information: (613) 235-3416 or www.stlukesottawa.ca

The Ewashko Singers: A concert in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the births of Chopin and Schumann will feature guest artist soprano Maria Knapik on October 23, 2010 at First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa, 30 Cleary Avenue, and will commence at 7:30 pm. For tickets or information, contact@ewashko.com or Doretha Murphy at 613-565-3993

Ottawa University: Music at Tabaret will feature a concert by Donna Brown on October 22nd at 8:00pm Location - Tabaret Hall. Information: "613-562-5800, ext. 3611

Ottawa Baroque Consort will present Matthew White in Concert, Saturday September 25, 2010 - 8:00pm at St. Giles Presbyterian Church - Bank and First Avenue. www.ottawabaroque.ca

National Arts Centre: A Kinderconcert, *Annabelle Canto* will be presented November 21, 2010, featuring Christina Tannous, soprano and Dominic Boulianne, piano. The amazing story of a young opera singer who happens to lose both her voice and her memory on the morning of an important concert... how unlucky can you get? All concerts are held in the Panorama Room at the National Arts Centre. English performances: 9:30 a.m. 11 a.m. 1:30 p.m. French performance: 3 p.m.

A Night at the Oratorio: Jean Desmarais with singers Lacroix, Woyiwada, O'Hearn, Jost, Parmer, O'Farrell, Brown and Lawlor will present a concert at Tabaret Hall, October 8 at 7.30 pm.

Savoy Society: A fundraising concert version of the *Merry Widow* will be presented December 6, at the Unitarian Church, Cleary Avenue.

A Whale of an Opera

by Ute Davis

On 30 April 2010 I was privileged to attend the opening night of *Moby-Dick*, the brilliant new opera with music by Jake Heggie (*Dead Man Walking*) and libretto by Gene Scheer. This took place at the Winspear Opera House in Dallas, Texas which only opened in October of 2009, blessed with excellent acoustics, courtesy of acoustician Robert Essert, responsible for the same at the COC Toronto Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

I think we all know the Herman Melville novel about the manically obsessed Captain Ahab's duel with the great white whale and here the major potential for a staged drama has been fully realized. However the long, tedious descriptions and symbolism had to be removed, preserving the underlying psychological drama of Ahab versus Whale and concurrently of Ahab versus his more objective first mate, Starbuck. The sailor's yarn is clearly and well told and the music of Heggie proves emotional and beautiful and helps move the plot forward in a way rarely found in modern opera. The lush tonal score and colourful instrumentation lead to comparison with Puccini as well as shades of Gershwin and even Wagner.

Even for Texas the staging seemed huge and was extremely ingenious. Credit is due to director Leonard Foglia, set designer Robert Brill, lighting director Donald Holder and especially to projection director Elaine McCarthy. This opera breaks ground with a single white planked rear wall, convex to the audience, fitted with metal rungs for the singing sailors to hold onto. This serves convincingly as a backdrop for projected images, allowing the cast to leave the Pequod and man the whaling boats.

The overture is played to a captivating series of night-sky projections, the multiplicity of stars yielding to a lesson in astro-navigation and finally merging to the outline of the huge bow of the whaling vessel Pequod headed straight at our front-orchestra seats!

The curtain rises to reveal the foreground complex of masts and rigging of the Pequod. As in a real square-rigged vessel, you must be swift and sure to work on this set.

For this huge production and intense drama, Ben Heppner became the obvious choice for Ahab. One is at times reminded of a comparison with Peter Grimes. To quote Dallas critic Wayne Gay, "Ben Heppner, the leading dramatic tenor of our times, was born to musically embody Ahab". And William Littler reports "Sheer and Heggie....have given Ben Heppner, Canada's foremost



Photo: Almond (Dallas Opera)

tenor – who rose triumphantly to the occasion – one of the most challenging and rewarding roles of his landmark career". This was Ben at his best, combining lyrical grace and heroic vocal powers. The opera proved to be a physical challenge for Ben as well. There are several stories about the peg leg in circulation, which caused some circulation problems of its own. Suffice it to say that the resultant relative lengthy immobility on stage further focuses attention on him.

The chorus, all male, performed in excellent fashion on stage and from the pit, under the leadership of Alexander Rom. The cast was uniformly of very high quality. I was particularly impressed by baritone Morgan Smith's subtle portrayal of the conscientious first mate Starbuck as a contrast to the obsessed Ahab. His diction is superb, not always the case with American singers. Jonathan Lemalu, who hails from the South Sea Islands, proved another excellent piece of casting as the harpooner, Queequeg. Talise Trevigne, the sole female on stage, sang the cabin boy Pip with great intensity adding to the impact of his drowning death. Tenor Stephen Costello as Ishmael, but known in the opera version as Greenhorn, turned in a performance worthy of a major premiere, as did baritone Robert Orth and tenor Matthew O'Neill in most noticeable secondary roles of Stubb and Flask.

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Conductor Patrick Summers, long associated with Jake Heggie creations, was thoroughly impressive, adding this experience to his extensive reputation in modern opera. He will be remounting *Dead Man Walking* in Houston early next year, with Frederica von Stade performing in it for the last time. They are scrambling to find the money for a DVD version.

The applause was the longest I have experienced in North America. The audience went truly wild and clapped and screamed with delight for a full 10 minutes. The cast danced off the stage in daisy-chain fashion with huge grins on their faces. Ben was truly

delighted to see some Canadians at the stage door.

The Moby-Dick saga will not end in Dallas. It was co-commissioned by four other companies. Ben has only been contracted to sing Ahab in San Francisco in the fall of 2012. Enterprising Calgary Opera had not realized that Mr. Heppner would be engaged at the Met in the winter of 2012, when they expected him to follow up his Ahab in Canada. They have asked John McMaster to sing instead. I am not aware as to whom San Diego, February 2012, or the State Opera of South Australia, September 2011 will engage for their respective productions. Let's hope this is not the end of the list and that Ahab and the *Moby-Dick* will live forever.

Pellegrini Opera presents *Don Giovanni*

by Ute Davis

This slightly edited version of the Mozart/da Ponte work with recitative in English, but the arias in the original Italian, allowed the large audience on 24 April of this year at Dominion Chalmers Church to keep up with the plot and to enjoy the touches of humour subtly intermixed with the drama. The artistic direction of Maria Pellegrini and stage direction of Vincent Thomas maintained a light touch to leaven the dramatic morality play, while the work of very talented pianist Michel Ross and conductor Christian Paquette did the music full justice.

The cast was of good calibre, substantially stronger than that of Pellegrini Opera's first *Don Giovanni* in 2004, indicating how far the company has progressed in the interim.

Luc Lalonde sang a strong Don and acted well, though fundamentally he might just be too nice a guy for this role. As Leporello, Christopher Mallory again showed his great skill and versatility and he quite cap-

tivated his audience. Stephanie Piercey sang beautifully as a powerful Donna Elvira and Chantal Parent overcame a nervous start to fulfill the role of Donna Anna well. Meanwhile Rory McGlynn's clear tenor tone made a convincing Don Ottavio, although he appeared to be tiring in the later stages.

As the "youngsters", Zerlina and Masetto, Nicole Bower and Mark Gough both sang very well and showed a delicate mix of coquettish behaviour and rustic simplicity to be totally convincing. Fred Bradley back-stopped the production as a stentorian and unrelenting Commendatore.

All in all this was a highly successful production, well received by the audience and a great credit to the Pellegrini-Thomas team. A final note is a nod to the unsung heroes, Jean E. Hudson and her assistant stage managers as well as technical manager Carlo Verdicchio, with keen son by his side, who, among his many functions covered the departure of Don Giovanni to the nether world with large and effective quantities of "smoke".



Photo: Davis

Viva Saratoga Springs! by Tom McCool

Saratoga Springs, a small city in upper New York state, is a pleasant five hour drive from Ottawa through the Adirondacks on the way to New York City. Saratoga Springs is a popular tourist mecca in the summertime with a multitude of attractions. The major tourist lure is the Saratoga Springs Race Course, one of the most important racetracks in the United States. The 40 day racing season begins in late July and runs until early September and during the racing season horses reign supreme in Saratoga. Evidence of this is scattered throughout the downtown area in the form of numerous life-size statues of horses. However, if you should be one of those unfortunates who doesn't own a stable of stallions there is still much to enjoy in Saratoga Springs. There are many spas in the area and a whole range of outdoor activities such as golfing, hiking, hot-air ballooning, boating and so on. There are also activities of a musical nature. Saratoga Springs is the summer home of both the Philadelphia Orchestra and the New York City Ballet; both are resident in Saratoga Springs in July. As is the Lake George Opera, which usually stages two operas every summer: one very well known and one quite obscure. Typical was this year's offerings of Bizet's *Carmen* and Donizetti's *Viva la Mama*. It is the latter that is the subject of this report

Viva La Mama, an opera about opera, began its existence in 1827 as a one-act piece performed under the name *Le Convenienze teatrali*. It proved to be very successful but four years after its premiere in Naples Donizetti lengthened the opera to a two-act format and retitled the work as *Le Convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali* (Theatrical Seemliness and Unseemliness). Again, it was initially quite popular but nevertheless faded into obscurity and was forgotten for well over a hundred years until its revival in 1963. Since 1963 the opera (in both its one-act and two-act versions) has been performed in Europe, includ-

ing La Scala, under a number of different titles, including *Viva la Mama*. It has also enjoyed increasing popularity in the U.S.A. First performed in San Francisco in 1977 it has since been presented by a number of other opera companies. The latest American staging was in July of this year when it was mounted by the Lake George Opera Company in Saratoga Springs.

This opera is unique in that Donizetti composed the music and wrote the libretto as well. How he found the time to do both is remarkable because in 1827 Donizetti composed the music for five other operas – almost a lifetime's work for many composers. The music is typical Donizetti so not surprisingly the music was a highlight of the evening. The libretto was also first rate. The plot revolves around the attempt of a regional opera company to stage an opera seria. All the trials and tribulations, conflicts and controversies that one might expect by bringing together a cast of opera singers as well as the director, conductor and composer are very much in evidence as the plot unfolds.

The "Mama" of the title (a bass dressed in women's attire) is the mother of the second soprano and manages to harass the first soprano until she quits the production. Then "Mama" takes over the role of the prima donna herself. You can imagine the results. *Viva*

La Mama is one of the few operas that can be considered a farce and as such requires superior acting, skilled interaction among the performers, and precise timing. Farce, if not done well, can be painful to experience but his production was anything but. The star of the show was, of course, the big burly bass (expertly played by Richard Holmes) who could not only sing and act but proved quite adept at running about the theatre in high heels. Though by no means one of Donizetti's best operas, *Viva La Mama* was a very entertaining comic romp. I do believe Donizetti would have been happy with this Lake George Opera production. I know the audience at Saratoga was.



Donizetti

Chautauqua's *NORMA* by Vera-Lee Nelson

A beautiful midsummer evening, champagne, the cream of operatic music, what more could one ask for? This year our annual week at the Chautauqua Institution included a performance of Vincenzo Bellini's wonderful bel canto opera *Norma*. As I have noted before, all the Chautauqua opera presentations must be sung in English if they are to be



presented at Norton Hall, in accordance with the terms of the bequest that funded the construction of the concert hall. Somehow, I cannot even imagine how Bellini would be squeezed into the English language and fortunately others must have wondered too. So the wise decision was made to present the opera for one night only, in the open air 5000 seat amphitheatre. The Chautauqua Amp is the venue of all the major lectures, the symphony and dance productions and the ecumenical church services. It is roofed and there are complex and sophisticated sound and lighting systems. The sides are open and the night breezes waft through as the performances unfold. In true Chautauqua fashion, the screens for the surtitles were exactly placed so that they could be seen by all.

In preparation for the opera, I signed up for a 5 hour mini course on *Norma*, the opera. The first session began with a short lesson on the proper way to make a Bellini cocktail. Such intoxicating beverages are not to be found in public so we had only the recipe and were left to try it at home. Fortunately, it was peach season. The lectures were enhanced by many DVD clips of past productions of the opera and the chance to hear the signature *Casta Diva* sung by Maria Callas and Joan Sutherland, among others. On the last afternoon we were invited to attend the dress rehearsal, an enchanting four hours. Returning for the performance on Saturday evening I was well prepared with almost 8 hours of *Norma* prep under my belt. Would it be a surfeit of *Norma*, I wondered? The night of the performance came, we met our friends and took the seats we had psyched out beforehand to give us the view and sound we wanted. (Seating in the Amp is always open, with just an occasional section reserved for special guests.) The Chautauqua Symphony began the overture and all the magic that attends an actual performance took over.

From the first bars it was obvious that the orchestra and conductor Joseph Colaneri understood the place of the

orchestra in this opera and he led them where they needed to go. Jay Lesenger, the stage manager took full advantage of the large open stage to emphasize the three dimensional aspect and extend the feeling of intimacy with the audience. Every member of the cast moved to support the action on the entire stage, and a big stage it is. The set was simple, featuring an almost stark, stylized silvery forest that was moved

smoothly around the stage by the cast as the opera proceeded. The costumes were richly coloured and ornate, perfect against the almost monochromatic set and on stage in such a large venue.

Barbara Quintiliani was singing *Norma* for the first time. And what a challenge; she is onstage virtually the entire time and is singing on a $\frac{3}{4}$ thrust stage in an amphitheatre open to any outside noises and passers by. She has sung at Chautauqua before, last year in *Il Trovatore*, but not in the Amp. I was totally impressed by her talent and beautiful rendering of the music, her agility and flexibility in singing was most impressive. However she seemed rather stiff. I got the impression she had to concentrate so thoroughly on the music that her dramatic interpretation suffered. One thing that worked especially well was the relationship between Norma and Adalgisa, the 2 females of the triangle. Elizabeth Bishop sang her part beautifully and her acting was well up to the plot. The voices of these 2 women complimented and supported each other extraordinarily well. You really felt it when they came together and decided how to proceed. Roy Cornelius Smith performed as Pollione, singing well and making his character deservedly unsympathetic. A true professional, acting and singing, was Philip Cokorinos singing the majestic character of Oroveso. Although the part is not large it is a key element in the unfolding of the plot and Cokorinos gave it everything it needed. The rest of the supporting cast and the chorus were as outstanding as we have come to expect every year. Artists from the Young Artists program and apprentice and studio artists are an integral part of the productions of Chautauqua Opera. They rise to the high standards set for them every year.

This *Norma* was a brilliant experience for this audience. I sincerely hope that future operas will be performed in the Amp; it really works to give the audience the gift to become immersed in the opera, as well as doing justice to the lyrics sung in the language in which they are written.

And now for something completely different:

Carmen on Tap by Ute Davis



Photo: Davis

Julie, a natural Carmen, showed her usual vibrant mezzo skills and dynamic acting, well balanced by the plaintive melodic tenor tones of Steeve Michaud as Don José. The other members of the cast were strong with Maghan McPhee/Stewart singing a particularly pleasing Micaëla. Sean Watson was a very capable and enjoyable Escamillo.

The piano accompaniment was limited by the quality of the instrument, but the production of-

An interesting item on the Ottawa entertainment bill of fare this summer was the production of *La Tragédie de Carmen* in the Red Velvet dining room above Fat Tuesday Pub in Byward Market. The three acts alternated with a three course dinner of quite typical “pub grub”, with an extensive choice of beers and wines. Julie Nesrallah initiated the production with an old colleague, artistic director Brent Krysa, in an effort to bring opera to a new, younger audience.

Despite some inevitable limitations of space, lighting and the acoustic quality of the building, the production was well presented by a very talented cast and was cheerfully received by the audience; at least the ones who were able to see from behind the forest of tables.

ferred some imaginative moves, as when Carmen serenades Don José using an ice cube filled metal cocktail shaker (replacing the conventional castanets) to reinforce the sexy rhythm as well as some distinctly pub-type moves to cool his ardour!

Julie and her colleagues deserve high marks for the choice of opera and quality of production. Originally booked for two performances, it was extended to four evenings and was a sell-out for all of these. However seating was limited to 100 per show in this venue, with several patrons being rather unhappy with a largely “obstructed” view.

We hear rumours of the group wanting to repeat their venture in another location, possibly Toronto and we look forward to perhaps another “on tap” opera in Ottawa.

The Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild

presents

Werther

Starring Marcell Alvarez and Elina Garanca

Join us for a full-screen showing of this 2005 production of Massenet's opera.

Wilkie Kushner will introduce this Vienna Opera production.

October 31, 2010 at 1.00 pm
The Auditorium, Library and Archives Canada

Minimum Contribution \$20; Guild members \$15

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

October 2, 2010

Kat'a Kabanova - Leoš Janáček

Lyric Opera of Chicago, Markus Stenz, conductor

October 9, 2010

The Merry Widow - Franz Lehár

Lyric Opera of Chicago, Emmanuel Villaume, cond.

October 16, 2010

Carlo, Re de Alemagne - Alessandro Scarlatti

Stavanger Sinfoniorkester (Norway),

Fabio Biondi, violin & conductor

October 23, 2010

Genoveva - Robert Schumann

MDR Radio Chorus and Orchestra, Jun Märki,
conductor

Canadian Opera Company Season

October 30, 2010

Idomeneo - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Harry Bicket, conductor

November 6, 2010

Maria Stuarda - Gaetano Donizetti

Anthony Walker, conductor

November 13, 2010

Der Fliegende Holländer - Richard Wagner

Johannes Debus, conductor

November 20, 2010 - encore

Carmen - Georges Bizet

Rory Macdonald, conductor

November 27, 2010 - encore

Otello - Giuseppe Verdi

Paolo Olmi, conductor

December 4 & December 11 TBA

December 18, 2010

The Toll Brothers "Live from the Met" broadcasts begin with Verdi's *Don Carlo* conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin

The Met: Live in HD Season

Wagner's ***Das Rheingold*** – New Production

October 9, 2010 at 1:00 pm; Encore November 20 at 1.00 pm and November 29 at 6.00 pm

Mussorgsky's ***Boris Godunov*** – New Production

October 23, 2010 at 12:00 pm; Encore November 27 at 12.00 pm

Donizetti's ***Don Pasquale***

November 13, 2010 at 1:00 pm; Encore December 4 at 1.00pm and January 17, 2011 at 6.30 pm

Verdi's ***Don Carlo*** – New Production

December 11, 2010 at 12:30 pm; Encore January 22, 2011 at 12.30 pm and February 14, 2011 at 6.00 pm

Puccini's ***La Fanciulla del West***

January 8, 2011 at 1:00 pm; Encore February 19, 2011 at 1.00 pm

Adams's ***Nixon in China*** – New Production

February 12, 2011 at 1:00 pm; Encore March 12, 2011 at 1.00 pm

Gluck's ***Iphigénie en Tauride***

February 26, 2011 at 1:00 pm; Encore March 26, 2011 at 1.00 pm

Donizetti's ***Lucia di Lammermoor***

March 19, 2011 at 1:00 pm; Encore April 2, 2011 at 1.00 pm

Rossini's ***Le Comte Ory*** - New Production

April 9, 2011 at 1:00 pm; Encore May 7, 2011 at 1.00 pm and June 13, 2011 at 6.30 pm

Strauss's ***Capriccio***

April 23, 2011 at 1:00 pm; Encore May 21, 2011 at 1.00 pm and June 27, 2011 at 6.30 pm

Verdi's ***Il Trovatore***

April 30, 2011 at 1:00 pm; Encore June 4, 2011 at 1.00 pm and July 18, 2011 at 6.30 pm

Wagner's ***Die Walküre*** – New Production

May 14, 2011 at 12:00 pm; Encore June 18, 2011 at 12.00 pm and July 11, 2011 at 6.00 pm

Opera Within Reach

Ottawa

Opera Lyra Ottawa

Hansel and Gretel by Humperdinck
October 23, 24, 30 & 31 in the NAC Fourth Stage

Lucia di Lammermoor by Donizetti
March 26, 28, 30 & April 2, 2011
in Southam Hall at the NAC

Information <http://www.operalyra.ca>

Orpheus Society

Annie by Strouse

November 12-21 with matinees on Nov 14 & 21
at Centrepointe Theatre
Information: <http://www.orpheus-theatre.ca>

Montréal

Opera de Montréal

Rigoletto by Verdi
September 25, 29, October 2, 4, 7, 9

Roberto Devereux by Donizetti
November 13, 17, 20, 22, & 25

Performances are in Salle Wilfrid Pelletier at Place des Arts
Information: <http://www.operademontreal.com>

Toronto

Canadian Opera Company

Aida by Verdi
Oct 2, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30 Nov 2 & 5

Death in Venice by Britten
Oct 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31 Nov 3 & 6

Performances are in the Four Seasons Centre
Information: <http://www.coc.com>

Opera Atelier

Acis and Galatea by Handel
October 30, November 2, 3, 5, 6 & 7

Performances are in Elgin Theatre

Information: <http://www.operaatelier.com>

Syracuse

Syracuse Opera

The Mikado by Gilbert & Sullivan

October 22 & 24

Performances are in the Syracuse Civic Center.

<http://www.syracuseopera.com>