

Newsletter • Bulletin

Winter

2011

Hiver

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A Tribute To Bobbi Cain by Murray Kitts

In 1983 after thirteen years of magnificent summer opera and concerts Festival Ottawa was cancelled because of major cuts to the budget of the National Arts Centre. Mario Bernardi conducted over thirty operas in those years including an outstanding *Queen of Spades* with Jon Vickers and Maureen Forrester and a splendid production of Handel's *Rinaldo* which was given to the Metropolitan Opera for its very first presentation of that opera in New York. Opera lovers came regularly from as far away as Montreal to enjoy these performances at the NAC.

Bobbi Cain, whose connection with choral singing and music in general is well documented in a tribute on the Choirs Ontario website, was one of Ottawa's citizens who was outraged by the cancellation. She helped to form the National Capital Opera Society and became its president in 1984 in order to find a way to return these magnificent summer opera experiences to the National Arts Centre. Thus began almost twenty-five years of Bobbi's constant dedication towards the restoration of opera in Ottawa. The files of the NCOS are filled with references to petitions (one with over 1,000 signatures); letters to the editor; meetings with officials who might have influence; even appearances at political meetings to challenge the views of politicians - these are only a few of the activities where Bobbi was in the forefront. Parallel to these activities was a constant attempt to remind Ottawans of what they were missing. The most suc-



Bobbi Cain 1936-2010



cessful of these was Fête Opera in 1985 with outstanding singers and a chorus and orchestra drawn from NAC productions under the direction of Brian Law. Any time there was an opera production staged at the NAC Bobbi arranged a reception for the principals and conductor, partly as a fund-raiser for the society and partly to celebrate this great art. Every year brought new attempts to keep the cause of opera in the minds of Ottawans. Every year there was a new "gala" like the one which paid tribute to great opera composers. This gave Bobbi an opportunity to introduce some young singers to the public, "showcase them" as it is termed. From there it was a logical step towards trying to help the newcomers directly in their quest for a career in opera. Then there were the regular excursions to the Montreal Opera, and sometimes to Toronto and New York. And there were the opera films, videos and DVD's (as technology improved) at the Bytown Theatre, at the Ottawa

Public Library, at Bobbi's condo building, and continuing even now at St. Anthony's Soccer Club which, with a meal, has become "Opera alla pasta".

One of Bobbi's proudest moments (which I witnessed) was when Nicholas Goldschmidt reviving the Summer Festival at the NAC in 1997 told her: "We owe this revival to you." Alas the festival was not to last very long, but these words meant a great deal to Bobbi for all her hard work. In the meantime Opera Lyra Ottawa was developing and performing at several venues until it could

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A Tribute To Bobbi Cain

(continued from page 1)

return opera to the NAC Southam Hall. Under Bobbi's leadership grants were given to Opera Lyra for performers such as Mark Dubois, who sang the role of Tamino in a production of *The Magic Flute* with Brian Law conducting. This relationship has continued and the NCOS has been contributing to OLO's young artists' programs since grants were first organized by Bobbi.

The departure of Brian Law for New Zealand provided Bobbi with a new challenge and opportunity to use her remarkable organizing powers. To recognize the contributions Brian Law had made to music in Ottawa the Brian Law Opera Scholarship was established in 1991 and first awarded in 1993. What an enormous task it was to establish all the rules and regulations surrounding the competition: eligibility of contestants, method of selecting finalists, and procedures on the actual occasion of the competition. Bobbi tackled all these problems and more so well that the procedures she instituted are still being followed virtually intact after nine competitions spanning sixteen years. Bobbi's prominence in the musical community in Ontario enabled her to enlist the voluntary services of outstanding jurors such as Stuart Hamilton, Diane Loeb and Nicholas Goldschmidt to name only a few. Fund-raising for the scholarship which started out as a modest \$1,000 prize now became an important feature of NCOS activities under Bobbi's leadership. The galas and showcases continued with the occasional recital such as the one arranged by Bobbi with Gerald Finley, a former Brian Law chorister, giving a magnificent performance. For the 2009 competition 1st prize was \$5,000 with second and third prizes at \$3,000 and \$1,000. The increase in prize money was greatly due to the success of the winners and competitors.

There were many difficulties along the way in establishing and fostering the competition. But the greatest challenges for Bobbi lay ahead. Used to seeing her at her office in the Economic Council of Canada, or in her home on Chesterfield Drive, now those in the NCOS who worked with Bobbi would have to contact her in various hospitals. First there was the fall which required a hip replacement operation. Then colon cancer was discovered and an operation had to follow. Subsequently another colon cancer operation was necessary.

And, cruellest of all, one of these had to be followed by a second operation to correct an error in the initial one. Bobbi's devotion to her causes was shown when, against medical advice, she proceeded to struggle through the 2001 Competition and complete her task, hiding her distress. The emergency operation followed. From hospital bed and from convalescent hospital bed Bobbi carried on directing the affairs of the NCOS and planning the next competition. The Board met in a room in the Elizabeth Bruyere Centre so that Bobbi could preside. In 2003 Bobbi was able to persuade her old friend, Hamilton Southam, to be honorary patron for that year's competition. By 2005, in spite of one of the stays in hospital detailed above, Bobbi was back to preside over the competition. Sadly it was to be her last. The cancer operations didn't stop her, the diabetes didn't stop her, it was one of the cruellest diseases, dementia, which robbed her of her ability to continue to dedicate herself to the cause of opera and of helping young singers. And what great young singers! To mention only a few, Shannon Mercer and Joshua Hopkins have well-established singing careers. Yannick-Muriel Noah is emerging as a major opera singer. See their websites to get a complete picture of their careers. Almost every weekday we can listen to Julie Nesrallah introduce classical music on CBC Radio 2.

All these singers have shown their appreciation to Bobbi and the NCOS by coming to give outstanding mini-recitals at competitions subsequent to their own. From now on when Brian Law Competition contestants are singing in recital halls or on the great opera stages of the world their achievements should proclaim that they have been helped in part, at the very least, by Bobbi's working to her last ounce of strength on their behalf. People who worked with Bobbi knew that however demanding she could be of them she was willing to work ten times harder than anyone else. One day the Ottawa Summer Opera Festival will take place again. In the meantime knowledge of Bobbi's championship of the Brian Law Competition provides a fitting memorial to this remarkable person.



Bobbi was at the centre of most NCOS activities: fund-raising events, receptions, dinners, recitals, concerts and, of course, the Brian Law Competition. These photos illustrate some of these activities and some of her earlier musical endeavours. Clockwise from top right: Gerald Finley, Bobbi's grandson Wesley and Maria Knapik, Ben Heppner, Bobbi as Peep-bo in *Mikado*, Rob Clipperton, Joyce El-Khoury, young Bobbi.



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Save the trees

You can help us save money (and also help save our forests) by opting to receive your copy of the newsletter electronically. If you are willing to do this send an e-mail to NCOS@NCOS.ca and say that you wish to receive the newsletter electronically. Please write newsletter in the subject line. Or, you can indicate that you wish to receive the newsletter "by e-mail" when you fill in the 2011 membership application form enclosed with this newsletter.

All Opera Lovers

It is time to RENEW your membership or join NCOS for 2011!

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 Enjoy

by David Williams

Opera Lyra Guild

The Joy of Opera Luncheon and Concert will be held February 13, 2011, at the Sala San Marco Banquet Hall.

www.operalyra.ca or 613-233-9200 x221

University of Ottawa

The U of O Opera Company will present Mozart's *The Magic Flute* on January 28-30 & Feb. 4-6, 2011, at 2pm or 7 pm in the Alumni Auditorium. Students frequently present recitals during the Academic year.

www.music.uottawa.ca for information.

Yoriko Tanno

Yoriko's Operatic Showcase will present "*The Lady of the Night*" a new opera by Jose Hernandez on March 25, 26, 27, 2011.

www.ykstudio.com

Pellegrini Opera

Bizet's *Carmen* will be performed in April, 2011. www.pellegriniopera.com for details.

Opera Lyra:

Opera Lyra will be a new beneficiary of proceeds from the 2011 **Viennese Opera Ball** to be held February 5th at the National Gallery. This will support their Opera Studio Programs.

www.vienneseoperaballottawa.com

New Members

Stewart Grenzowski
Suzanne & Keith McCully
Mayse Robillard
Leslie & Mark Robinson

Thank you

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the newsletter during the past year. Your grateful editors:

David Williams & Tom McCool

Opera alla Pasta

SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT THE OPERA

DVD Presentations of outstanding operas from the great opera houses of the world followed by a delicious meal.

The Place: St. Anthony's Soccer Club

The Time: 2:00 p.m.

The Cost: \$20

**March 6,
2011**



The Bartered Bride

by Bedrich Smetana

**May 15,
2011**



Der Freischütz

by Carl Maria
von Weber

Call 613-721-7121 at least 3 days before the date of the video presentation in order to reserve a place.

Death in Toronto

by Shelagh Williams

The Fall season of the Canadian Opera Company (COC) consisted of Verdi's *Aida* and Britten's *Death in Venice*.

I very much worry that the new German leadership of the COC is going to bring us German-style director-driven "Regie theatre" opera. What General Director Alexander Neef and stage director Tim Albery delivered was a moderately interesting and quite unnecessarily violent and ugly opera, but definitely not *Aida* as we know it, nor one which would attract new audience members. The pre-show chat indicated that Albery's concept was that the opera depicted Aida's nightmare of a life, and, if so, he was successful! - un-

definitely not *Aida* as we know it

fortunately, it was also a nightmare for the audience, many of whom left at the interval! In fact, Albery was booed opening night! The opera opened in a modern-day dictatorship with Aida, in ugly short blue dress, crummy shoes and ill-fitting white jacket, mopping the floor! - the lowest, if most attractive, of the slave menials - and went rapidly downhill from there! In fairness, it must be said that the interactions between the characters worked fairly well. However, no Egyptian motifs, but instead modern dress, no Triumphal March, plus much gratuitous brutality, were a real turn off. I'm sure no other opera companies will want to rent this production, but then in Germany, with state subsidies, there is probably not the same concern for fiscal awareness as here. Set designer Hildegard Bechtler, who had debuted with Albery on the marvelous 2008 *War and Peace* and did the excellent world premiere of *The Letter* in Santa Fe, provided a very efficient set in keeping with Albery's concept. She had witty touches such as Princess Amneris's pullout boudoir with a closet containing enough handbags and shoes to keep Emelda Marcos happy, and a cunning moveable upper level which was very effective in the final Act for hiding Radames' interrogation while Amneris

listened and reacted, and then for showing the final underground tomb for Radames and Aida, with Amneris still above, grieving. Debuting British costume designer Jon Morell also worked well within the constraints of the concept, but was only imaginative in the Egyptian ladies' dressy little outfits since the men were either in suits or military uniforms, and Amneris's size made her hard to make attractively regal, although he could have tried! Director Albery had the necessary superfluity of chairs to reinforce his modernity, plus all sorts of weird and downright unpleasant touches, such as when Aida was roughed up, and the mass shootings during the Triumphal March, and finally putting Aida and Radames at opposite sides of the stage for their final duet! Albery seems obsessed with offices and business suits to denote power, as in his COC *Gotterdammerung*, but why did the male chorus remove their suit jackets and put on black gloves before exiting to try Radames? The one saving grace was the musical performance itself and the quality of the performers, under the capable leadership of the COC's new Music Director Johannes Debus, in his first *Aida*. The excellent COC Orchestra was even supplied with 6 special new Egyptian trumpets for the offstage banda to ensure the right brilliant sound! The Chorus was in fine voice for the huge choruses and the principals had been chosen with care. Two Canadian basses underpinned the cast, with Alain Coulombe a regal dictator, the King of Egypt, and Philip Ens a deli-



Amneris and Her Egyptian Ladies

photo by Michael Cooper



Aida sketch by Morrell

Death in Toronto (continued)

ciously malevolent High Priest Ramfis. American baritone Scott Hendricks was an extremely young and virile Amonasro to be Aida's father. Debuting American mezzo-soprano Jill Grove sang up a storm as the Egyptian Princess Amneris, while fellow debutant Australian tenor Rosario La Spina had the vocal wherewithal, if not the stage presence, good looks, or slim physique, for the romantic lead as Radames. The production was staged for the COC and role debut of Sondra Radvanovsky, an American-born, Toronto-based Verdi soprano. However, we were there in the last half of the run and heard the debut of Canadian soprano Michele Capalbo, who had sung the role of Aida all over, and so provided an excellent performance, both looking and sounding a fitting object of adoration, in spite of her ugly costume and the staging to which she was subjected. It is a shame that after not staging *Aida* for 25 years, the COC had to come up with a production that its composer Verdi certainly would not have recognized!



Having murdered the opera *Aida*, it was fortunate that the COC, after not staging *Death in Venice* for 26 years, imported a great production of Britten's final opera. It was a co-production of the U.K. Aldeburgh Festival, the Bregenz Festival, State Opera Prague, and Opera National de Lyon, at all of which it received rave reviews. Japanese actor, director and writer Yoshi Oida, here with his whole team making COC debuts, lovingly shaped and staged the production so that all the aspects of the opera came together beautifully. Since we were off to Venice in a few days, we especially enjoyed

**stealing the show was
Scottish tenor Alan Oke**

Dutch set designer Tom Schenk's simple setting of boardwalks, and planks over the water, and projected images, that evoked Venice, all sympathetically lit by English lighting designer Jane Dutton. Edward Hudson's Edwardian costumes, mostly in white, were delightful, with the added clever innovation of a clothes rack either side of the stage to enable the two leads, the novelist Aschenbach and the Traveller, to change smoothly and easily from scene to scene for the former, and role

Hudson's Edwardian costumes were delightful

to role for the latter. We had seen a definitive production of *Death in Venice* at the English National Opera in June 2007, starring British tenor Ian Bostridge as Aschenbach, and this production was up to that standard. Although this production seemed to last longer than the ENO version, yet there was less movement about the stage of the many visitors in Venice, so that the identity of each of the characters was not always clear. However all of the requirements for the large resources demanded were met, including the huge singing cast, the large percussion section, and the well-choreographed dancers portraying the young Polish boy Tadzio and his friends. Another large part of this production's success was due to the presence of British conductor Steuart Bedford, chosen by Britten for the opera's premiere in 1972, and the definitive interpreter of Britten's works. He certainly got the best out of his excellent orchestra and cast. British baritone Peter Savidge also specializes in Britten's works, and his interpretation of the Traveller and the other six baritone roles was strong and varied, at times humorous, then conspiratorial, then evasive, then sinister, but always entertaining. But stealing the show as he made his COC debut as the novelist Aschenbach, was Scottish tenor Alan Oke, who has starred in this production, honing his skills, throughout its European tour, since 2007. He was on stage throughout the opera, an excellent actor and consummate singer, with clear diction delineating every emotion. This was a marvellous production, with both musical and directorial visions meshing to reinforce each other and transfix the beholder - would that all productions were so!

Italy's Holy Grail of Opera

by Shelagh Williams

The moment I saw the title of Congress Travel's October trip, "Cruise Tour to the Birthplace of Opera", including La Scala in Milan and La Fenice in Venice, I jumped at the chance! How often do you get the opportunity to visit these famous opera houses?!

Our first opera was an interesting production of Puccini's *Tosca* in Rome. It was preceded by a walking tour from Castel Sant' Angelo, along Via Giulia to the Farnese Palace and Square, and into Sant' Andrea delle Valle church - the three places that inspired Puccini in *Tosca* - and then to the 150 seat Teatro Flaiano. Here the Piccolo Lirica company presents 75 min. versions of operas, with all the important music and arias intact. The Liric Synth Orchestra provides live music using four synthesizers, under the direction of a conductor, on our evening Elisabetta del Buono. Their fascinating innovation is the use of virtual sets by Gianna Volpi - videos of the actual sites as scenery for the opera - so that we saw the action as if unfolding in the places we had just visited! Sumptuous costumes by Carla Fonzi Cruciani and good direction by Rossana Siclari ensured success with the cast, which was young, but excellent. Gwendolyn Alu was a lovely Tosca, Paulo Drigo a deliciously despicable Scarpia, and Fabio Zagarella a romantic Cavaradossi, with Mimmo Venturani and Lorenzo Merte Manicucci rounding out the cast as Spoletta and Sacristan respectively. This blending of new technology for scenery with a solid musical production (though the "orchestra" was a bit thin!) of all the best bits of *Tosca* ensured an entertaining evening.

Our second opera was at the highly esteemed and very

expensive La Scala in Milan, where we eagerly awaited our first experience in this opera holy of holies. The theatre itself is quite lovely, but the horseshoe shape meant sight lines in the side boxes were often poor! Unfortunately, it was not an Italian opera, but it was the new production of *Carmen* which had inaugurated their 2009/10 season on December 7th, St. Ambrose's Day, the patron saint of Milan. It was presented with French spoken dialogue and La Scala provided a choice of English, French and Italian subtitles. Before the performance started there was a moment of silence for Shirley Verrett, who had just passed away. The director and costume designer, the Sicilian Emma Dante, was making her operatic debut, and it showed. She seemed determined to distract us from the beautiful music, which is unfortunately becoming the European director-driven "Regie theatre" style! She had a feminist slant to proceedings, with much heavy Roman Catholic symbolism, and some really weird, inexplicable sequences. It all started out in an unpleasant manner with a heavily pregnant woman almost giving birth in the town square while the omnipresent crowd stood and stared - fortunately her women friends dragged her off stage in time! We were then presented with a Micaela dressed in a large



Photo by Marco Brescia

The Torreador's March

Italy's Holy Grail of Opera (continued)

black cape which suddenly flipped into a full white wedding dress and veil, and who was followed everywhere by a priest in a ridiculously large black hat and two altar boys carrying a large cross. Later, a huge marriage bed inexplicably surrounded her in the mountains - all clearly making fun of her and her traditional pursuits. The dancing by the hordes of extras at Lillas Pastia's tavern was some of the ugliest I have ever seen, while Lillas Pastia was a loose limbed caricature. The toreador Escamillo was strangely accompanied by 5 white whirling dervishes, and black-veiled women seemed to turn up at the drop of a hat! The magnificent toreadors' parade was a travesty: no Escamillo and shirtless toreadors mysteriously winding and unwinding red streamers around their bodies! To complete the theme of violence against women Don Jose raped Carmen on-stage before killing her! As I said, it was often quite unnecessarily and gratuitously offensive. In fairness, it must be mentioned that there were a few humorous touches, such as three chaps sitting fanning themselves languidly in the frantic opening scene in the square, and later having an elevator to enter Lillas Pastia's tavern! At least the veteran Richard Peduzzi provided colourful, clever and attractive sets which moved apart, and up and down to facilitate the action, and which were well lit by Dominique Bruguiere. Fortunately, the musical side of the production lived up to expectations, with maestro Gustavo Dudamel lashing the splendid Scala orchestra into a frenzy, and keeping his singers and chorus well in order. Our Escamillo was Hungarian bass Gabor Bretz, who had been singing Zuniga since the premier, but who was singing Escamillo for this and the next performance. We had felt that American tenor Andrew Richards as Don Jose took a while to warm up, but then was fine. According to his blog, he was called Wednesday evening to make his La Scala debut on Saturday, our performance! He flew to Italy, saw a performance on Thursday, had a musical rehearsal with the conductor Friday, then an afternoon of "Regie production" rehearsal, all the while refreshing French dialogue he hadn't done for over a year! Saturday before the curtain he still had a fight rehearsal, plus a review of some tricky stage business! Fortunately he had sung a couple of performances of *Carmen* with Anita Rachvelishvili at Verona in the

summer, and so they had a rapport and worked well together! Not surprisingly, in their production debuts, the two male leads were good but not overly strong, although this was perhaps just what this director intended! It was difficult to empathize with Alexia Voulgaridou's Michaela, given the staging she had to contend with. Our Carmen was 26-year old Georgian mezzo Anita Rachvelishvili, who debuted in the 2009 opening night, and is just a year out of La Scala's Accademia. She was chosen for the role by the original conductor Daniel Barenboim, after auditioning for a lesser role, and is growing into the part, having also sung Carmen in Toronto in February and in Verona in the summer, all with different casts and directors! She has a strong voice, but is rather plump, and not sexy enough for a memorable Carmen. Nevertheless, in this production, when she tossed her head of long curls, soldiers fainted right and left! It was interesting to contrast this production with the superb New Year's Eve premiere of *Carmen* which we saw last winter at the Met, with Canadian Yannick Nezet-Seguin making his conducting debut there. Both conductors gave us wonderful music, but Nezet-Seguin had the advantage of a good director, excellent singer-actors, and an exciting production. Directors like to make their mark, but the La Scala production was no-



Photo by Marco Brescia

Italy's Holy Grail of Opera (continued)

table for the wrong reasons! It is not surprising that the 2009 opening night La Scala audience cheered the singers and booed the director!



If La Scala was somewhat of a disappointment, La Fenice in Venice was an absolute delight. Well named (La Fenice means the Phoenix), the theatre opened in 1774 and the present house was rebuilt after the 1996 fire, with opera productions in this little gem restarting in 2004. We were treated to a lovely production of Donizetti's *L'Elisir*

d'Amore, which ran for 11 consecutive, almost daily, performances, with three casts, of which we luckily got the A list! The director Bepi Morassi, a native Venetian, knew how to handle his excellent players to bring out all the humour of the situations, and added such imaginative touches as an army which looked and marched like

toy soldiers, and the plain Gianetta made even plainer in spectacles! Morassi used a simple setting, with plain side panels and suitable backdrops, and wooden chairs, benches and platforms nimbly moved about by the chorus, to frame his charming production. This setting and the colourful costumes were by Gianmaurizio

Fercioni, a

Milanese who graduated from the Accademia di Brera, whose art gallery some of us had visited just the day before in Milan! The musical forces were under a hot shot young conductor, Matteo Beltrami, a graduate of the conservatories of Genoa and Milan, who drew marvellous performances from his excellent orchestra and cast. The aforementioned

Gianetta was sung prettily by the Albanian soprano Oriana Kurteshi. Suitably pompous and overweight as Sergeant Belcore was Italian baritone Roberto De Candia, a Rossini specialist. Baritone Bruno de Simone from Naples brought down the house with his final entrance down the central aisle as Doctor Dulcamara dispensing goodies among the audience! He specialises in opera buffa, especially Donizetti and Rossini! However, the two cast members providing the main love interest were something else! Spanish tenor Celso Albelo brought out all the fun and sadness of the peasant Nemorino, all the while bathing us in the sound of his beautiful voice. I thought I recognized the brilliant soprano Desiree Rancatore from Palermo, who was an animated and mellifluous Adina, and, sure enough, she was our Gilda in the excellent *Rigoletto* at the Vienna State Opera four years ago - "a sweetheart of a performer who was easy on both the eyes and the ears", to quote myself! But what made this so very special was not one, but two, encores! First Celso Albelo encored his lovely *Una furtiva lagrima*, and then Desiree Rancatore encored her sparkling *Prendi, per me sei libero*, and they ended up rolling happily on the floor together! For those who enjoyed it - and those who want to - one can find You Tube videos by "sarguar" of the two encores from opening night, October 29, 2010! (Also a video of the principals in a different 2009 Cagliari production) There was about this production the lovely cosy feeling of a beloved local opera company truly appreciated by its audience. This was a better overall production than we had at La Scala, here using mostly local Italian talent - truly the highlight of the trip!



Events you Could Have Enjoyed

by Shelagh Williams and Tom McCool

National Gallery: Recent Print Acquisitions: For a glimpse into Baroque opera, Matthaus Kusel's engraving of one stage set from Pietro Antonio Cesti's *Il pomo d'oro*, produced in Vienna in 1668, was an eye opener! If you think Wagner's operas are long, this extravaganza took two days to perform, its 467 scenes taking 10 hours, even receiving a new opera house for the performances! Also in this Exhibition, on at the National Gallery until January 2nd, 2011, was a lovely print of the Trevi Fountain, by Piranesi! **S.W.**

Opera Lyra Ottawa (OLO) Opera Studio: As part of Culture Days on September 25th, the OLO Opera Studio presented a workshop for opera singers called *Acting in Opera*. OLO acting coach Alix Sideris led soprano Marie-Claire Fafard-Blais, mezzo Sarah Christine Steinert and baritone Mark Gough in a warm up, and work on gesture and getting into character, and then Studio Manager Judith Ginsburg accompanied them as they applied these techniques while singing excerpts from their production of *Hansel and Gretel* for which they were preparing. We were able to enjoy the fruits of this workshop almost immediately, as on September 30th, in the NAC 4th Stage, the Opera Studio presented a first rate production of Mozart's *Così fan Tutti*. The Opera Studio - the above-mentioned three plus soprano Bethany Horst - were joined by former Studio member, tenor Graham Thomson, our third prize BLO Competition winner, whose voice incidentally is coming along very nicely, to round out the young members of the cast - two soldiers, two sisters, and their maid. This incarnation of the OLO Opera Studio is especially talented, which bodes well for their future. The old philosopher Antonio was deftly and wittily played by Francois Racine, a colleague of famous Canadian director Robert Lepage, and he both directed and narrated the cleverly adapted story. Studio Manager Judith Ginsburg provided her usual sprightly and supportive piano accompaniment. All of the humour of the piece, acted with sparkle, plus all of the best musical "bits" of the opera, and also a few details often missed, were beautifully presented, leaving the audience with a 55-minute absolute treat! The audience was much smaller than this production deserved, perhaps because the NAC unhelpfully programmed a Debut Concert with a baritone at the same time, splitting the potential audience! **S.W.**

St. John Passion: Voice lovers had a field day when Chamberfest brought us Les Voix Baroques and Arion Baroque Orchestra for a blockbuster performance of Bach's *St. John Passion*, the end of November. Advertised as "played on period instruments and sung, according to the composer's original intent, by a small ensemble", the latter group of 12 was led by acclaimed Ottawa countertenor Matthew White and contained two equally renowned BLOS winners, Shannon Mercer and Joshua Hopkins, both of whom had solos and were in fine voice! Tenor Jan Kobow was the excellent Evangelist, the orchestra and chorus, led from the organ by Alexander Weimann, was amazing, and the whole was both reverent and quite fantastic - an absolute delight! **S.W.**

Opéra de Montréal's Roberto Devereux:

Roberto Devereux is one of the operas in Donizetti's Tudor trilogy based on three famous queens in English history: Anne Boleyn, Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Tudor. As in Donizetti's other biographical operas he never allowed the historical facts to interfere with a good story. The end result is that *Roberto Devereux* is an intriguing historical melodrama. Many Donizetti aficionados claim it is the best of the trilogy. Without doubt, it is a classic of the Bel Canto style of which Donizetti was a master. In *Roberto Devereux*, as in all Donizetti's operas, regardless of the treachery and mayhem that is being depicted on the stage, the music is melodious and tuneful from beginning to end. More important in any Bel Canto opera is the singing; excellent singing voices in the lead roles, especially the women's roles, are requisites. In this Montreal production soprano Dimitra Theodossiou, as Elizabeth, and mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Batton were more than equal to the task. Both ladies were outstanding. There were no glaring weaknesses in *Roberto Devereux* - the music, singing, acting, costumes and sets were all fine - but the most memorable element in this production was the innovative staging which enhanced the flow of the action and the theatricality of the opera. This was the predominant reason for a satisfying performance that made the trip to Montreal a worthwhile journey. **T.M.**

Opera Within Reach

Ottawa

Opera Lyra Ottawa

Lucia di Lammermoor by Donizetti
March 26, 28 & 30 & April 2, 2011

All performances begin at 8 pm in Southam Hall at the National Arts Centre

Information: 613-233-9200 x221
www.operalyra.ca

Orpheus Society

Into the Woods by Sondheim March 4-13, 2011

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels by Yazbek June 3-12, 2011

at CentrepoinTE Theatre

Information: www.orpheus-theatre.ca

Montréal

Werther by Massenet Jan. 22, 26, 29, 31 & Feb 3, 2011

The Consul by Menotti March 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 2011

Salome by Strauss March 19, 23, 26, 28, 31, 2011

La Bohème by Puccini May 21, 25, 28 & 30 June 2 & 4

Information: www.operademontreal.com

Toronto

Canadian Opera Company

The Magic Flute by Mozart Jan. 29, Feb. 1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 18, 20, 23, 25, 2011

Nixon in China by Adams Feb. 5, 9, 11, 13, 19, 22, 24, 26, 2011

The Nightingale and Other Short Fables by Stravinsky May 1 to 6 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music Opera Festival

La Cenerentola by Rossini April 23 & 28, May 1, 7, 10, 13, 19 22 & 25

Ariadne auf Naxos by Strauss April 30, May 3, 12, 15, 18, 21, 27 & 29

Orfeo ed Euridice by Gluck May 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 24, 26 & 28

Information: www.coc.ca

Opera Atelier

La Clemenza di Tito by Mozart April 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, May 1, 2011

Information: www.operaatelier.com

Syracuse

Don Giovanni by Mozart February 11 & 13, 2011

The Pearl Fishers by Bizet April 8 & 10, 2011

Information: syracuseopera.com

The Metropolitan Opera Live in HD - 2011

Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*

January 8 at 1:00 pm;

Encore February 19 at 1.00 pm

Adams's *Nixon in China*

New Production

February 12 at 1:00 pm;

Encore March 12 at 1.00 pm

Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*

February 26 at 1:00 pm;

Encore March 26 at 1.00 pm

Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*

March 19 at 1:00 pm;

Encore April 2 at 1.00 pm

Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*

New Production

April 9 at 1:00 pm;

Encore May 7 at 1.00 pm and

June 13 at 6.30 pm

Strauss's *Capriccio*

April 23 at 1:00 pm;

Encore May 21 at 1.00 pm and

June 27 at 6.30 pm

Verdi's *Il Trovatore*

April 30 at 1:00 pm;

Encore June 4 at 1.00 pm and

July 18 at 6.30 pm

Wagner's *Die Walküre*

New Production

May 14 at 12:00 pm;

Encore June 18 at 12.00 pm and

July 11 at 6.00 pm

Met Radio Broadcasts 2011

January 1 *Pelléas et Melisande* - Debussy

January 8 *La Fanciulla del West* - Puccini

January 15 *La Traviata* - Verdi

January 22 *Rigoletto* - Verdi

January 29 *Tosca* - Puccini

February 5 *Simon Boccanegra* - Verdi

February 12 *Nixon in China* - Adams

February 19 *Don Pasquale* - Donizetti

February 26 *Iphigénie en Tauride* - Gluck

March 5 *Armida* - Rossini

March 12 - 12:00 *Boris Godunov* - Mussorgsky

March 19 *Lucia di Lammermoor* - Donizetti

March 26 *The Queen of Spades* - Tchaikovsky

April 2 *Das Rheingold* - Wagner

April 9 *Le Comte Ory* - Rossini

April 16 *Wozzek* - Berg

April 23 *Capriccio* - Richard Strauss

April 30 *Il Trovatore* - Verdi

Additional details for Live HD Transmissions and
Saturday Afternoon Broadcasts:
http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/broadcast/on_air.aspx