

Newsletter • Bulletin

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Josh Hopkins shines in Vancouver's Barber

by Marjorie Clegg & Tom McCool

As Rossini's comic masterpiece, *The Barber of Seville*, nears its 200th anniversary it is surprising to realize that the opera was composed in less than a month in 1816. Since that time, despite a rather shaky opening night, the *Barber's* inspired score, intriguing cast of characters and madcap plot has continually delighted audiences. One of the latest productions of the opera was staged this winter in Vancouver featuring the 2003 Brian Law Opera Competition winner Joshua Hopkins in the lead role. After praising the production, David Duke, the opera critic

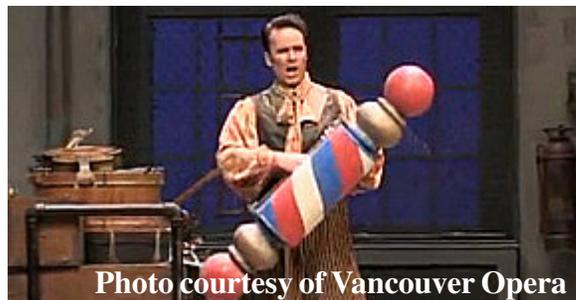


Photo courtesy of Vancouver Opera



Photo by Marty Umans

of the Vancouver Sun reserved his highest acclaim for Hopkins: "So it's kudos for this production's fresh concept and flashy execution. But one element of the endeavour transcends even this overall consistent standard—the quality and exuberance of baritone Joshua Hopkins' Figaro. Vancouver audiences have enjoyed Hopkins as a lieder singer who combines

an innately appealing instrument with musical sensitivity and precision. Here he delivers a stunning interpretation of Figaro, rooted in his physical sense of the character. He has the tone, the timing, and the confidence to make it appear effortless fun; from quicksilver recitatives to solo work and ensembles, Hopkins is the focus of the production. And he couldn't be better." (Vancouver Sun, March 18, 2012.) An-

"...the baritone Joshua Hopkins won your heart as the tormented, yet charming Junior... Bernstein's music ennobles and animates Junior, and with his mix of anguish and vitality, Mr. Hopkins triumphed over stereotype." Anthony Tommasini, *New York Times*, October 20, 2010

other Vancouver review was similar: "The title role is essayed with audacity and panache by Ontario baritone Joshua Hopkins, who looks and sounds perfect as the cocky Figaro with a genius for fixing things. He is larger than life in his virtuosic first act aria "Largo al factotum" and hams it up quite a bit, but that is who Figaro is in this opera." (John Jay, www.reviewvancouver.org) It is hard to imagine critical comment much more laudatory!

"Joshua Hopkins' Figaro was charming and charismatic. He performed Figaro's well-known aria "Largo al factotum" with ease and gusto. He customized the aria with subtle and fun vocal embellishments that tastefully supported his take on the character." Nihan Yesil, KCMetropolis.org, April 23, 2012

We were fortunate in being able to see this production for ourselves. Knowing how well Josh plays comic roles (especially Papageno in *The Magic Flute*), we were certain the role of Figaro would suit him well. What we weren't sure of was the production: set in the 1940s on a movie set with Figaro as a hairdresser. Though we would have preferred a more traditional staging, we loved every minute of Josh's performance—and would love to have seen him in the same role in Kansas City in a conventional staging, where he also wowed the audience and critics. According to Paul Horsley in the *Kansas City Independent*, "it was Hopkins in the title role who virtually

(continued on page 3)

President's Annual Report, May 20, 2012

The past year presented our society with a number of challenges as well as opportunities to contribute to the careers of young singers and to foster the love and development of opera in our region. The summer Board meeting was held as usual at the home of the Pflugs whose generosity and hospitality has never waned. It was decided to support again the Young Artist program of Opera Lyra Ottawa and the Pellegrini Opera Company with an increase in our grant to these two fine endeavours. The Young Artist program continues to supply us with applicants for the Brian Law Competition. The productions using the expertise and experience of Maria Pellegrini have been enjoyed by growing audiences over the years.

We had to say farewell to Jim Burgess who has moved permanently to Munich. The loss of such an excellent webmaster would be tragic indeed if it were not for the fact that Jim has continued from Germany to be our webmaster as well as working his digital magic for a number of Ottawa music organizations including our own. For example, if you receive your NCOS newsletter by email it is sent from Munich by Jim. In recognition for his services to NCOS the Board voted to make him an honorary life member, wishing him well and looking forward to his visits in the future. One of his ongoing projects is a paper entitled "How to Organize a Brian Law Opera Competition" based on input from all involved. This will be invaluable for future organizers.

Our biggest endeavour of the year was the Brian Law Opera Competition held on November 19th. It was decided to dedicate the tenth biennial competition to the memory of Bobbi Cain who did so much to establish a fund to help young singers in the National Capital region. Fortunately the Unitarian Congregation was adequate to accommodate the large, but not capacity crowd. From a record number of applicants our experienced preliminary jurors, Barbara Clark, Lawrence Ewashko, and Charlotte Stewart, chose six excellent singers who presented a most enjoyable series of operatic arias, producing stiff competition, but resulting in three excellent winners. Joyce El-Khoury was to be the guest recitalist but was in Beijing at that time appearing with Maestro Loren Maazel. The recital given by 2009 winner Phillipe Sly was testament to his success at the Metropolitan Opera Competition. A beautiful voice expressively singing beautiful music. Rob Clipperton again was an outstanding Master-of-Ceremonies, reading messages from Gerald Finley, our patron, and from Brian Law and helping to inform the audience of certain changes in the program. Illness prevented Donna Brown from appearing as a juror but Maria Pellegrini gladly agreed to fill her place on the jury with Sandra Graham and Richard Turp. Santa Claus and his Ottawa parade interfered with plans for the jurors to have dinner together. However, the show went on most smoothly and successfully. A new feature was the drawing and presentation of door prizes to the audience - prizes of CD's and a DVD featuring previous Competition winners - donated by former President Marjorie Clegg and Tom McCool.

As president I have learned over the years to be the main channel of communication with the applicants and especially with the finalists. Fortunately I have always found them to be most cooperative with me and respectful of each others talents. As always I could rely on the help and support of all the Brian Law committee members, including Ute Davis, who had an especially difficult task in finding final jurors available for this competition, Renate Chartrand who was able to combine her major publicity efforts with the production of a fine program, Peggy Pflug who always orders and serves delicious fare for the reception, and Jean Saldanha, our secretary who skilfully organizes ticket sales, program distribution and ushers. All Board Members are indirectly concerned with the competition but each has his own function in our organization. Our Membership Chairperson, Vera-Lee Nelson, efficiently records and sends out receipts to our members. Elizabeth Meller has dedicated herself to presenting attractive operas to our Opera alla Pasta programs and has increased the number of attendees quite remarkably. Pat Adamo, with her fund of experience in the musical life of our region has always been a source of good advice to members of the Board and to me particularly.

Twelve years is a long time for anyone to do volunteer work for an organization especially if that person is engaged in helping half a dozen other community services. We can only try to thank Gordon Metcalfe adequately for all the work that he has done to see that our donations are properly invested so that we can continue to help young singers. Gordon was always available with good advice when I or any other Board member needed it. Thank you Gordon for all your help.

It seems almost miraculous that the newsletter appears regularly with interesting and well-written articles with such great photos, thanks to our excellent contributors. The appearance and content of our newsletter is due to the fine editorship of David Williams with Tom McCool assisting. Only a bout of illness prevented Norma Torontow from mailing out one edition. Now Norma is back seeing that everyone who wants a mailed copy gets one.

As the Opera Lyra Ottawa debacle unfolds all we can do as an organization is to support efforts to get staged opera up and running again. We should be proud that two of our Brian Law winners, Joyce El-Khoury and Joshua Hopkins, are in the cast of *La Bohème*.

The formation of the so-called National Capital Opera presented a real challenge to us. I decided to meet the challenge head-on, advising a name change which would benefit both us and the new company. Fortunately my good advice was accepted and there will be no confusion with the Capital City Opera.

We anticipate the visit of Gerald Finley to Ottawa this summer and would hope to have a get-together with him at that time. In May of 2011 I appealed for new members to join the Board to help us continue our projects. We should be very pleased that two new members, keenly interested in opera, have agreed to join the Board. The National Capital Opera Society goes forward.

stole the show. His world-class baritone is simply a delight to listen to: mellow and crisp, naturally supported, and well-outfitted in its whole range. He was a confident presence onstage who avoided buffoonery and yet always made it clear that Figaro was, in fact, in control of everything.” (Kansas City Independent, April 24, 2012).

It has been such a pleasure watching Josh making his international career in opera. Since winning the Brian Law Opera Competition in 2003 he has gone on to carve

“Hopkins is the vocal standout, his baritone bold and bright...” Scott Cantrell, Dallas Morning News, February 12, 2011.

"Hopkins' voice was smooth, mellifluous and perfect." Lorin Wilkerson, *Oregon Music News*, March 14, 2011.

“He owns a gorgeous voice, a voice with gold in it. I am not talking about its bankability, but rather its tone...this young Hopkins is one of those golden singers, and he filled the Koch Theater with this gold, this glow.” Jay Nordlinger, *The New Criterion*, December 2010

out an impressive singing career that has taken him throughout North America and Europe. Along with appearances far and away Josh has returned to Ottawa on a number of occasions. Most NCOS members will remember his mini-recital at the 2007 Brian Law Competition. As well, he sang the role of Papageno in Opera Lyra's *The Magic Flute* in 2009, was a soloist in Handel's *Messiah* at the NAC and in Bach's *Passion of St. John* for the Ottawa Chamber Music Society at Dominion Chalmers United Church.

"It's been a month of exciting back-to-back debuts for Pembroke-bred baritone Joshua Hopkins: in the same week in late October, he gave his first performance for New York City Opera in a musically challenging opera by Leonard Bernstein and he saw the release of *Let Beauty Awake*, his first solo recital CD, a collection of 20th-century songs for Montreal's ATMA Classique label." Steven Mazey, *Ottawa Citizen*, November 24, 2010.

Photo by Sam Garcia



He has gone on to sing in a variety of opera centres including New York, Montreal, Dallas, Santa Fe, Houston, Seattle and cities in Spain and England with such companies as the New York City Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, Santa Fe Opera and the Glyndebourne Festival to mention only a few. The highlights of the last five years have probably been his debut with the Metropolitan Opera in the “Live from the Met in HD” production of *Turandot* in 2009 and his debut at Carnegie Hall in 2011. In addition to his operatic work he has performed as a soloist with Violons du Roy, the Cleveland Orchestra and, in June of this year, with the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City.

If the last few years have been busy the next few appear to be more of the same. In July he will be in Switzerland singing the part of the Count in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Following that, he will be in Vail, Colorado, for a repeat of the New York Philharmonic concerts which will include Nielson's *Symphony No. 3* and Mozart's *Mass in C Minor*. For the rest of the summer he will be at Glyndebourne. In September he will return to Ottawa to sing the role of Marcello in Opera Lyra's *La Bohème*. Then it is on to Houston for another Marcello. In December he will be in New York City to appear in the Metropolitan Opera's *Maria Stuarda* which will be broadcast to theatres around the world on Saturday, January 19, 2013 as part of the Met's “Live in HD” series. Next March he will be returning to Vancouver to sing Papageno in Vancouver Opera's acclaimed aboriginal *Magic Flute*. A more complete listing of his past and future performances and achievements is available on his website: <http://joshuahopkins.com> where you can also check out his recordings.

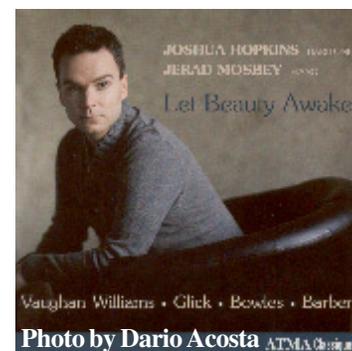


Photo by Dario Acosta ATMA

Kurt Weill and Maxwell Anderson's *Lost in the Stars*

by Lesley Robinson

Those who are fortunate enough to be attending *Lost in the Stars* this summer at the Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, New York (July 22-August 25) are in for a rare treat. This co-production with the Cape Town Opera opened in November 2011 in Cape Town, South Africa and I was lucky enough to attend on the opening night.

Lost in the Stars, based on the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, is a poignant story of hope, despair, loss, faith and redemption, set in 1940s South Africa. It is the story of two fathers and two sons whose paths intersect with tragic consequences. It portrays the struggle to get by and to do the right thing in a society where the injustice of apartheid directs the lives of all, but where forgiveness remains powerful. *Lost in the Stars* begins with the same words that begin the novel: *There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it.* The haunting melody, sung by the Leader and joined by the chorus as in a Greek tragedy, sets the tone of mournful beauty. We are aware of the juxtaposition of the hard lives of the protagonists with the loveliness of their homeland. This same passage begins the second part of the book, echoing the beauty of the backdrop and heightening the irony of the ugly despair that descends on Stephen Kumalo, the simple pastor who leaves his rural home to seek his son who is lost to him in the big city.

Kurt Weill's magnificent score contains elements of American blues and jazz and European orchestral music. The 15 piece orchestra, conducted in Cape Town by Cape Town Opera's Chorus Master, Albert Horne

and at Glimmerglass by American John DeMain, contains no violins, yet the orchestration tugs at the heart-strings and underlines the tragedy and the drama that unfolds onstage. The sets and costumes by Michael Mitchell and choreography by Sibonakaliso Ndaba add to some memorable moments of musical theatre. "Train to Johannesburg" evokes the rhythm of the train and the staging cleverly represents the comfort of the white, first class passengers and the cramped overcrowding of the black travellers. There were stand out performances from Tshepo Moagi (Tenor) as the Leader and

Patrick Tikolo (Baritone) as Stephen Kumalo, with a moving rendition of "O Tixo, Tixo, Help Me!" expressing a father's agony. Gloria Bosman, renowned for her work in gospel and jazz as well as opera, delivered a deliciously raunchy performance of "Who'll Buy?" At the time of the opening in Cape Town it was not yet certain which of the South African cast members would be travelling to Cooperstown, but 10 of them will be there. What is certain is that at Glimmerglass the role of Stephen Kumalo will be sung by

Eric Owens, the 2012 Glimmerglass Artist in Residence, the Leader by Sean Panikkar and James Jarvis by Wynn Harmon. Director Tazewell Thompson is a New Yorker who considered it an extraordinary opportunity to direct this piece with an all South African cast in the country that inspired it. He was touched by their sensitivity and their art and looks forward to sharing *Lost in the Stars'* message of compassion and understanding with a North American audience at Glimmerglass.

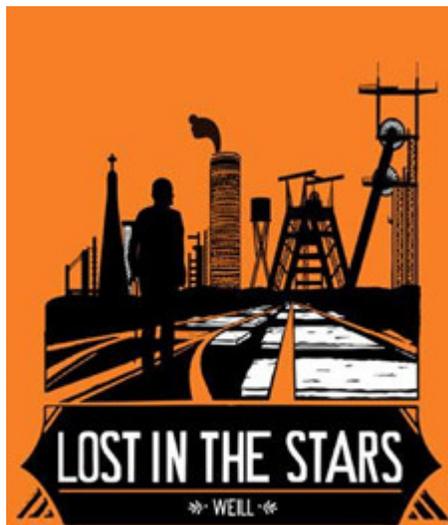


Photo courtesy of Cape Town Opera

Enjoying French Culture - in Toronto! by Shelagh Williams

In April, Toronto's Opera Atelier beckoned alluringly with its Baroque production of Lully's *Armide* at the Elgin Theatre. To get ourselves in the mood, we went first to CanStage's excellent production of *The game of love and chance*, a new translation of Mariveau's hilarious comedy of mistaken identity, *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hazard*.

Opera Atelier's *Armide* is a remounting and embellishment of their 2005 production, resulting in a magnificent undertaking, both visually and aurally. Jean-Baptiste Lully was a ballet composer for Louis XIV and, when granted the right to stage operas in 1671, he began to compose operas in French with his librettist Philippe Quinault, resulting in the "tragedie lyrique", in which dance was a vital component. *Armide* is based on Tasso's *Jerusalem delivered*, and tells of a doomed love affair during the Crusades between the Christian knight Renaud and the Muslim warrior princess Armide. Opera Atelier's co-directors Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, also the director and choreographer respectively of the piece, outdid themselves this time, producing, with set designer Gerard Gauci and costume designer Dora Rust D'Eye, an absolutely beautiful presentation. Even the house curtain was an elegant Persian calligraphy design announcing the opera! Gauci's impressive Persian-influenced painted backdrops, well lit by Bonnie Beecher, set off the gorgeous multi-hued baroque costumes - all quite dazzling! Since Pynkoski began his career as a dancer, he ensures that everything is done stylishly and clearly and that both singers and dancers move gracefully, with no one overweight, so that everyone is easy on the eyes! The extent of so-important choreography gave Zingg full range to express and dance her baroque inspiration, including swordplay and one especially delightful number by the

excellent Atelier Ballet using castanets and finger-cymbals. However, this is an opera and the all-important music was in the capable hands of conductor David Fallis and the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, a combination which breathes baroque! The ensemble included two theorbos and two harpsichords, one at each end of the tiny pit! The chorus was the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir, all in black and discreetly arrayed in the left side boxes, but nevertheless effective! The two main protagonists were marvellous, both having sung previously for Opera Atelier. Tenor Colin Ainsworth had both the looks and voice to make Armide's infatuation with Renaud believable - nay inevitable! In a blazing

red gown in the title role, soprano Peggy Kriha Dye sang with style and dramatic honesty, in a long and complicated role, torn continuously and longingly between love and hate. The smaller roles were excel-



Photo by Bruce Zinger

Armide

Renaud

lent, such as bass-baritone Olivier LaQuerre and tenor Aaron Ferguson portraying the two chevaliers who came to rescue Renaud from Armide - and reacted hilariously to the supposed hellish monsters in the orchestra pit! Baritone Curtis Sullivan looked and sounded great, in a strikingly devilish body suit, as the personification of Hatred, while Love was a dancer with huge wings! In *Armide*'s train were her stately uncle, bass Joao Fernandes and her two ladies-in-waiting, sopranos Carla Huhtanen and Meghan Lindsay, all in good voice. We were fortunate to attend the last night of this glorious production in Toronto, but don't despair: in May it goes on to the Royal Opera House at Versailles, where it debuted in 1686, and to Glimmerglass Festival in the summer! Catch it if you can!

Pellegrini Opera's *La Traviata*

A very smooth production with some powerful voices. 20/21 April 2012 at Dominion Chalmers Church
by Ute Davis

Pellegrini Opera is proceeding to establish itself with another polished production staged in 1920s costumes and, as last year, performed for two successive evenings at the D.C.Church.

A new feature this year was the introduction of a chamber ensemble to accompany the vocal score. This consisted of five strings and a flute conducted by D.Kai Ma, who appeared to be wearing at least “three hats” since he also functioned as the chorus master, pianist and répétiteur. We hope to see this experiment repeated in future productions, as the talented Mr. Ma greatly contributed to our enjoyment of the performances; a financial gamble though it must be.

Toronto soprano Deirdre Fulton sang a sophisticated and very confident Violetta Valéry, comfortably filling the large building with a pleasing voice reinforced by her commanding stage presence. Colin Loiselle as Giorgio Germont showed good vocal range and excellent baritone timbre. There appeared to this observer to be good chemistry between this inflexible father and the self-sacrificing partner (Violetta)

of his son. Singing Alfredo, Chris Oliveira was more tentative but he warmed to the task as each performance proceeded and his plaintive tenor voice certainly pleased the audience. All

three of the major singers showed good stamina and pacing in singing on two successive nights. Misty Banyard acquitted herself well as Flora Bervoix and Jeff Boyd was a strong Gastone. Christopher Mallory was also vocally strong as Doctor Grenvil while, as we noted in other productions, showing exceptional acting skill all the time he is on stage. Kim Bentham (Annina), Robert Gervais (Doupohl), Andrew Snow and Geoff McGuire completed a good quality cast. The chorus sang beautifully while moving well on stage and contributing to the smooth production.

Indeed the quality of vocal coaching from Artistic Director Maria Pellegrini and staging from Vincent Thomas were major features of this production, which was enjoyed by more patrons

than any previous work by Pellegrini Opera since 2004. The increasing stability and sophistication of the company is due credit to Chairman James Ogilvy and his Board of Directors. Further evidence of this is their full incorporation and obtaining status of a charitable organization.

This is a hint for anyone who is contemplating a financial donation to this hard working opera company.



Photos by Klaus S.

An Imperial Delight

by Shelagh Williams

For their final concert of the season, Thirteen Strings under conductor Kevin Mallon ambitiously undertook, for the first time, a semi-staged opera, Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. This was originally staged by Tom Diamond under Kevin Mallon at the Canadian Centre for Opera Studies in Italy in summer 2010, and we benefited from this collaboration with Thirteen Strings for (in their words) "a sumptuous feast for eyes and ears!" Of the eight young singers, the women (Cleopatra and Cornelia) each had three lovely gowns, while the many male roles (variously sung by men and mezzos) were

attired in tuxedos handily colour-coded, with white shirts for the Romans (good guys!) and all black for the



Egyptians (bad guys!), and Caesar differentiated by a laurel wreath. A booklet with an English translation of the words was helpfully supplied, and Diamond kept the action moving along and clear, with

a bit of comic relief. Of course, the Thirteen Strings (augmented) under Mallon were superb, and the Canadian singers were all good. In the smaller mezzo pants roles, Maude Brunet brought out the fury of Cornelia's son Sesto, bound on vengeance for his father's death, while Meagan Zantingh was a gentle Noreno, friend to Cleopatra. The two baritone roles (no tenors here!) were sung by Mallorytown native Benjamin Covey as Tolomeo's general and counsellor, Achilla, and Giovanni Spanu as Caesar's tribune. However, special mention must be made of strong counter tenor Daniel Cabena as an amusingly vile Tolomeo; creamy mezzo Maria

Soulis as Cornelia, the elegantly grieving widow of Pompey; soprano Claire de Sevigne, who will join the COC's Young Artists in

September 2012, as a beautiful Cleopatra; and Valley girl mezzo Jillian Yemen, a former BLOC finalist and OLO Studio Artist, outstanding here in the title pants role of Caesar. This was a total success for all involved.

A Fine Start for Capital City Opera

by David Williams

In the present economic climate Rory McGlynn has shown great courage in starting a new opera company in Ottawa. His use of social network voting and on-line auditions to cast his operas is an interesting new approach. Certainly, for their first production, Puccini's ever popular *La Bohème*, the audience had a greater percentage of young people than one normally sees at operas in our city. The seven young singers - Vania Margani (Mimi), Ryan Harper (Rodolfo), Joel Allison (Marcello), Misty Banyard (Musetta), Kyle Merrithew (Schaunard), Dion

Mazerolle (Colline) and Colin Loiselle (Benoit/Alcindoro) - in general sang and acted well in this slightly condensed concert version produced by Bart Tecter. Musical Director Jo Greenaway provided excellent piano accompaniment. The presence of the Mayfair cinema screen allowed scene descriptions and more extensive surtitles - a welcome addition for those newcomers not familiar with *La Bohème*.

The Capital City Opera season continues with *Così fan tutte* (September 26 & 27) and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (December 19 & 20). For further information check their website www.capitalcityopera.ca

Sometimes Best Heard, Not Seen! by Shelagh Williams

The spring Canadian Opera Company offerings included Jacques Offenbach's only opera, *Tales of Hoffmann*, the double-bill of Zemlinsky's *Florentine Tragedy* and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, and Handel's *Semele*.

We were fortunate to catch the closing night of the COC's marvellous *Tales of Hoffmann* which, amazingly, they had not performed since 1988! They made up for the omission with a glorious amalgam of great sets and costumes, superb singing, and excellent direction for 3½ hours of operatic bliss! This production of Hoffmann's three unhappy romances originated at Vlaamse Opera in Antwerp, with director and designers all making their COC debuts. Israeli set designer Roni Toren started the action in Hoffmann's small tilted box of a bedroom, then morphed it into a large tavern with the same back wall, then into an inventor's studio, and so on as the stories developed - all quite amazing. Brigitte Rieffenstuel's costumes were mainly period and attractive, although the Venice revels were more modern and ratty. British director Lee Blakeley held it all together in a lively manner, and introduced clever and humorous touches, such as characters popping up out of Hoffmann's bed in his tiny bedroom, lots of distorted oversized furniture, and using a sleigh bed for the Venetian gondola in which Giulietta runs off! COC Music Director Johannes Debus was blessed with fine singers, mostly Canadian, and his usual responsive COC Orchestra and Chorus, to give us an exciting performance of the music, including a lovely Barcarolle. BLOC winner bass-baritone Philippe Sly was an engaging and energetic Hermann in the tavern scene. American tenor Steven Cole brought us four funny servants, while baritone Gregory Dahl contributed strong portraits of

Antonia's father Crespel and Giulietta's lover Schlemil. Amongst Hoffmann's three lost loves, debuting Canadian soprano Andriana Chuchman, whom we had seen two years ago at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, was a lovely and hilarious automaton Olympia, with the accurate and precise coloratura necessary. Sopranos Erin Wall and debuting American Keri Alkema ably rounded out the trio, as the sickly Antonia and the sensuous Ve-



netian Giulietta. The large and important role of Hoffmann's Muse, appearing mainly in the pants role form of his companion Nicklausse, was in the capable hands of mezzo Lauren Segal, while soprano Ambur Braid had little to do as Hoffmann's current flame, the diva Stella, except to wander elegantly through each episode! We had two standout singers in the two major male roles. In the title role, American tenor Russell Thomas was making his COC and role debut, and his gorgeous voice, with no weakness in the upper ranges, was a delight to hear. Dramatically, he did little but sit on the floor at the side of the stage, writing and drinking, getting progressively drunker, but still managed with a short sword to win the sword fight in Venice at the end! But the real star was Canadian bass-baritone John Relyea, finally making his long overdue COC debut in his signature Devil role, here as the Four Villains, and applying his formidable acting and vocal skills to delightfully differentiate each character. With all aspects of this production coming together so splendidly, our spring COC week started off with a bang!

Our next treat was a new COC produc-



Sometimes Best Heard, Not Seen! (continued)

tion combining two one-act operas, both set in Renaissance Florence and both written in 1917, but there the similarities ceased! The first was the Canadian premiere of Alexander Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy*, based on the unfinished Oscar Wilde play and, since we knew absolutely nothing about it, we attended the COC's enlightening Opera Exchange seminar in Toronto the month before. Wilde wrote many commercial social comedies, but it seems this was one of his few serious "literary" plays, written in verse (iambic pentameter) as was *Salome*, which also became a German opera! Similarly, Zemlinsky, a bit of an outsider, unfortunately lived in the shadow of Mahler as a composer, but was an excellent pianist, a good teacher and conductor, and his operas have recently returned to popularity. An interview with the American soprano and now stage director, Catherine Malfitano, in charge of this production, concluded the session informatively. The story involves three people: a Florentine merchant, Simone, who returns home unexpectedly to find his wife Bianca "entertaining" someone else, who turns out to be a prince, Guido.



After much verbal fencing, an actual duel ensues, with Simone then strangling Guido, resulting in a surprise ending, with the couple marvelling, she at his strength, he at her beauty, and reconciling with a kiss over the dead body! Malfitano, in her COC debut, updated the play to the 1920s, and the ominous Strauss-like overture became the unwritten first act, setting the scene ambiguously with the lovers on stage so we are not sure exactly where the affair had got to: first assignation or ongoing? There was

also lovely lyrical music for the merchant describing his beautiful fabrics, when he was sizing up the situation. All in their COC debuts, German-Canadian tenor Michael König and German soprano Gun-Brit Barkmin stylishly sang and acted Guido and Bianca, respectively, but the major role was that of Simone, sung by American bass-baritone Alan Held, and he rightly dominated proceedings, both vocally and dramatically. It was certainly an intense experience from beginning to end!

The second opera was Puccini's delicious romp *Gianni Schicchi*, the final part of his *Il Trittico*. In it the clever parvenu Gianni Schicchi is invited to help a disinherited aristocratic family recover their deceased relative's wealth, and does so by impersonating the dead man and then dictating a new will which gives each principal the particular estate they coveted, but outrageously leaves the three best properties for himself, so that his hitherto dowerless daughter Lauretta and a young family nephew Rinuccio may now marry! - a happy ending! Malfitano set this opera in the present, and debuting set designer Wilson Chin cleverly reused most of the previ-



ous Florentine mansion, adjusting the back wall, and filling the space with a high and amazing pile of household furniture and bric-a-brac, in front of which was set the invalid's crummy sofa bed and small TV on a trolley. Malfitano made witty and well-timed use of this setting, allowing the inconvenient deceased to slip into the sofa bed and out of view, perching various cast members on the junk pile to comment during the will-writing, and having the rapacious family then try to dismantle its contents when they realized they have been tricked! Debuting costume designer Terese Wadden moved easily from the long languorous gowns of the *Tragedy* to today's fashions and had a great eye for appropriate apparel, wittily

Sometimes Best Heard, Not Seen! (continued)

dresser one stylish young female mourner in a skin-tight black sheath, with a lace back which when she turned revealed an inappropriately bright red bra underneath! Sir Andrew Davis managed the sea change in music and brought out both the comedy and soaring melodies in Puccini's score, overseeing a large ensemble cast, perfect in each role. Among the older generation, American mezzo Barbara Dever and Italian bass Donato Di Stefano were hilarious as Aunt Zita and ex-Mayor Simone, while Gun-Brit Barkmin returned as a young wife and mother. BLOC winner bass-baritone Philippe Sly provided a serious foil to the general highjinks as Ser Amantio, the notary, come to rewrite the will, even managing to keep a straight face! As young Rinuccio, debuting American tenor Rene Barbera's lovely voice suited the part of the keen young groom-to-be. For the show-stopper aria, *O mio babbino caro*, wherein Lauretta tries to convince her father to help her, Canadian soprano Simone Osborne brought a sweet and moving rendition - finishing with a cute thumbs-up to Rinuccio when she realizes she's persuaded Schicchi! But the star was again Alan Held in a complete change of character, language and music, as the trickster Gianni Schicchi, but again successful against the establishment. At the end, as Schicchi enjoyed watching Lauretta and Rinuccio happily realizing that they could now marry, the back wall and curtain rose to reveal an absolutely beautiful Florentine cityscape! - a blissful ending to a marvellous evening with an excellent new company-built production!

The final opera was the COC premiere of Handel's *Semele*, in an unusual production which was added to the schedule after General Director Alexander Neef saw Zhang Huan's oriental version at the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels in September, 2009. Zhang Huan is, according to the Art Gallery of Ontario, "an internationally acclaimed Chinese artist", and the gallery accompanied the opera's run with an interesting showing of two series of Zhang's works: "Ash Paintings" (literally using ash!) and "Memory Doors". Now, Handel's *Semele* consists of beautiful music sung in English to William Congreve's text, and was originally an oratorio, and so should be a straightforward and simple work to stage. In a story with little action, *Semele*, a mortal princess, is enamoured of the god Jupiter, and his jealous wife Juno connives to have *Semele*, who

hopes for immortality, demand, to that end, that the impassioned Jupiter appear to her as a god - and the flames of his power consume and kill her. Unfortunately this was Zhang's first opera and he applied Buddhist sensibilities to the myth of Greek gods. Since he originally staged it for La Monnaie, to be transferred to Beijing in 2010, as the first major production of a Baroque opera there, perhaps a few variations are understandable. However, he started off annoyingly by using Handel's lovely overture as background music for a grainy black and white film featuring a rotund chap in his grubby undershirt giving a subtitled history of the Ming temple which was being dismantled to become the stage set! We then went on to Act I, a lovely temple scene where the augustly orange-robed chorus of Greek priests oddly sat around on round exercise-type balls, accompanied by a pantomime horse! In the next act, in Jupiter's palace, the chorus, now in red, proceeded to remove their robes and engage in an orgy, accompanied by the pantomime horse with a quite vulgar foot-long erection(!), and then a pair of Sumo wrestlers had a match, rolling around on the floor, and walked off hand in hand, to amazed laughter! After that low point, many patrons left, but the second half was fairly tame, apart from a large pink inflated puppet inexplicably joining *Somnus*, God of Sleep, on the roof for the start of Act III. Musically, the director cut several well known Handel arias, then added a Tibetan singer wandering down the aisle and onto the stage at the end of Act I singing a folk song! But the most egregious desecration was the elimination of the last twist of the plot and Handel's final happy chorus, so that the ending changed to the Buddhist concept of life as tragic, with *Semele*'s sad death, accompanied by - I heard in disbelief - the chorus humming the Communist anthem, *The Internationale*!! As Anna Russell would say: "I'm not making this up, you know!" Luckily, to offset the director's many gaffes, a few things by the debuting artistic team worked. Mr. Zhang's salvaged Ming Dynasty temple, beautifully lit by Wolfgang Gobel, worked well as a set, and his huge Tibetan-style bell, rung

Sometimes Best Heard, Not Seen! (continued)

by a horizontal golden statue, was visually and aurally impressive. The costumes by Han Feng were a gorgeous and glorious amalgam of Oriental and Baroque era styles. For Semele's self-obsessed aria *Myself I shall adore* a giant mirror filled the entire proscenium arch to allow her to preen as she sang. Her potentially difficult to stage death was accomplished by a lovely large white Chinese dragon which wrapped itself around her as she disappeared, although without the expected attendant fiery light effects. Fortunately as well, the Handelian music left intact was in the good hands of debuting conductor Rinaldo Alessandrini, a Baroque opera specialist, who had harpsichord, organ and theorbo for continuo, plus a cast to die for, and made the most of them. The three male leads were all American, making their COC debuts. We have heard countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo at Glimmerglass Opera several times, and he did a great job of the music of Prince Athamas, Semele's intended, without losing any of the humour of his situation, not believing he could possibly be spurned! Bass Steven Humes portrayed both a regal Theban King Cadmus, Semele's father, and Somnus, God of Sleep, wittily asleep in a sleeping

bag on a huge carpet on the roof! The lovely tenor of William Burden was perfect for Jupiter, King of the Gods, especially in the beautiful aria *Where'er you walk*, which he sang while washing Semele's feet! The women, in contrast, were all Canadians. A bit of comic relief was provided by soprano Katherine Whyte, as Juno's put-upon messenger, Iris. Mezzo Allyson McHardy managed to be overtly jealous, as both Ino, Semele's sister, in bleach blond pageboy, and Juno, Jupiter's wife, in towering dark brown coiffure. Oddly, when Juno took Ino's place to persuade Semele to tackle Jupiter about her immortality, she only threw on a multicoloured wrap and did not change her hair - surely Semele did not become colour blind. In the title role, coloratura soprano Jane Archibald looked, acted and sang like a dream - even floating through the air for *Endless pleasure, endless love* - especially in the second half where she was allowed more to sing. What with the antitextualisms, the upstaging of musical numbers, the truncating of the opera, and the cutting of arias to add non-Handelian items, the presentation was saved only by the music, but would the composer recognize his own opera? It seems the COC just cannot put together two or three operas without at least one being ruined by directorial conceits!



Photo by Michael Cooper

Semele

Jupiter

Toe-Tapping Tango Treat!

by Shelagh Williams

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) wrote only one opera, his 1968 tango operita (chamber opera) called *Maria de Buenos Aires*. It is an unusual, almost mystical, opera, with not a lot of action, but lots of lovely tango music, with Maria in essence the personification of tango. Les Concerts Ponticello put together a quality concert version with full orchestra including two percussionists, the Norteno “tango nuevo” quintette, two singers, a narrator, and a speaking chorus! Musical director Pierre-Paul Provencher, a founder of Norteno and Piazzolla specialist, both conducted and played the bandoneon, an amazing performance, obviously a labour of love!

The exciting Gatineau-based quintette Norteno (“northerners” in Spanish) is composed of bandoneon, violin, piano, guitar and bass, the correct instrumentation for Piazzolla’s quintets. The narrator, also a gob-

lin, was beautifully and emotively handled by Laura Dutto, although it would have been more useful if we had understood Spanish! Young Ottawa tenor Tonatiuh

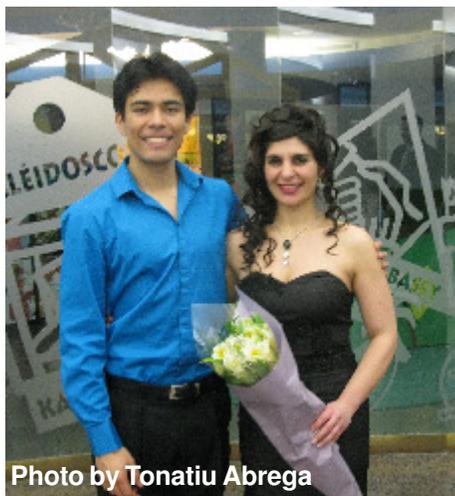


Photo by Tonatiuh Abrega

Abrega, a McGill voice grad, looked and sounded the part as he sang several male roles. These were mainly serious, but one number was the humorous *Aria of the Psychoanalysts!* He plus Norteno and the narrator were distinguished by their vividly coloured clothing. In the title role was BLOC winner Arminè Kassabian, in a striking black gown and marvellous coiffure, and obviously enjoying singing the music! She had several solos, including strong renditions of *Maria’s Theme* and *Yo soy Maria*

(*I am Maria*) in the first act, and her show stopping final aria, which she reprised as an encore at the end! This lively presentation played to a sold-out house and constituted a most entertaining evening!

NATIONAL CAPITAL OPERA SOCIETY

Board of Directors

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

The following members were elected to the board at the annual general meeting: Pat Adamo, Renate Chartrand, Jim Burgess, Ute Davis, Elizabeth Meller, Peggy Pflug, Mark Robinson, Lesley Robinson and Jean Saldanha. Specific positions will be decided at the first meeting of the new board.

Newsletter Editors: David T. Williams and Tom McCool

Webmaster: Jim Burgess

Membership Renewal

A gentle reminder. The annual membership dues for the NCOS are for the calendar year. If you have not yet renewed for 2012 please forward your payment for renewal and any changes of information to the Treasurer.

Events You Could Enjoy

by David Williams

Opera Lyra Ottawa Garden Party 2012: July 10 at 6:00 p.m., rain date July 11. Hosted by the Ambassador of Italy to Canada, the evening will feature an opera in concert performance, good food and wine, and fashion models. For tickets call 613-233-9200 ext 222.

Westben 2012: Westben Opera will present:
The world premiere of a Canadian folk opera *The Auction*, June 29 (preview), June 30 & July 1.
Shows of Schikaneder will be performed July 21.

Gerald Finley will give a recital July 22.
All shows at 2:00 p.m.
Information: www.westben.ca & 1-877-883-5777

Music and Beyond 2012: The Festival has a number of vocal concerts which could be of interest.

July 4, Opening Gala with Yannick-Muriel Noah
July 5, Wallis Giunta and John Brancy.
July 8, *Baroque Opera Soiree*. Karina Gauvin
July 9, *Song of Songs: Come into my Garden* - Tap-estry
July 15, *Music and Nature* - Donna Brown.
July 15, *An Evening with Ben Hepner*
Information: musicandbeyond.ca & 613-241-0777

Ottawa Chamberfest 2012: The Festival has a number of vocal concerts which could be of interest.

July 27, The Gryphon Trio with Julie Nesrallah
August 1, Van der Kamp, Monoyios and Weimann
August 3, Les Voix Baroques
August 3, Britten, Bernstein, Bowles and Bedbugs
August 5, Sweelinck and Gesualdo
August 6, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*
August 6, *The Book of Love*
August 7, *Did I Escape, I Wonder...* A Chamber Opera
August 8, Lawrence Wiliford: *Music for a While*
Info: ottawachamberfest.com & 613-234-8008

Shaw Festival 2012: The Festival will present:
Trouble in Tahiti - music by Leonard Bernstein
Ragtime - music by Stephen Flaherty.
Information: www.shawfest.com & 1-800-511-7429

Stratford Festival 2012: The Festival will present:
The Pirates of Penzance - Gilbert and Sullivan
42nd Street - Harry Warren
You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown - Clark Gesner
Info: www.stratfordfestival.ca & 1-800-567-1600

Summer Opera Lyric Theatre: This year's productions in Toronto will be:
The Barber of Seville, July 28, 31, August 2, 4
The Marriage of Figaro, July 27, 29, August 1, 4
La Mere Coupable, July 28, August 1, 3, 5
Information: www.solt.ca

Highlands Opera Studio: This year's productions in Haliburton will be:
Carmen, August 17, 19, 21
The Magic Flute, August 26, 28, 30
Information: www.highlandsoperastudio.com

Bard Summerscape 2012: As part of the summer program the following Chabrier opera will be presented at Annandale-on-Hudson, NY:
Le Roi Malgre Lui July 27, 29, August 1, 3, 5
Information: <http://fishercenter.bard.edu>

Green Mountain Opera Festival: This year's operas are:
Don Pasquale, July 21, 23
La Bohème, July 22, 24
Information: www.greenmountainoperafestival.com

Opera Company of Middlebury: This year the opera will be:
Thais, June 8, 10, 14, 15, 16
Information: www.ocmvermont.org

Events You Could Have Enjoyed

Shelagh Williams

Who Knew?: Rene Chiu, a Ph.D. candidate at McGill, gave a fascinating lecture at Ottawa U. in March on the role of music in the sixteenth century civic management of disease, mainly in the form of plague processions, the community singing a litany as it walked! According to one chronicler, “Just think, in walking around Milan one heard nothing but song, veneration of God, and supplication to the saints, such that one almost wished for these tribulations to last longer”!

Yoriko and Her Shooting Stars, 2012 - Journey: Yoriko Tanno and her 17th Annual Operatic Showcase reverted this year from producing original operas written for the cast by Maestro Jose Hernandez to its more traditional programme of singing music from known operas. This show is always a class production with the huge studio all fetchingly costumed and well drilled. Using the theme of *Journey*, studio alumna and musical theatre star Alison Smyth directed the presentation, with the first act showcasing individual singers in interesting solos and ensembles, mainly classical from early to present day, but with also a musical theatre cabaret. Act two presented nicely sung and staged highlights from *Tales of Hoffmann* and *La Bohème*, and finished off with the creative team showing off its own talent. Alison sang a solo from *Yentl*, while Maestro Hernandez played a Beethoven piano sonata and also sang a duet from *La Traviata* with Yoriko. The grand finale was Puccini's *Nessun Dorma* performed by five tenors and the entire ensemble! With Yoriko's proven track record of producing successful opera and musical theatre performers, we may well have enjoyed another star in the making!

Edith Wiens, Master Class: What a treat! Canadian soprano Edith Wiens listened attentively to eight excellent young Ottawa U. voice majors, analysed their performances, and gave them exercises and advice which resulted in them sounding even better! Dr. Wiens is Professor of Voice at the Nuremberg Hochschule and joined the faculty of the Juilliard School in N.Y.C. in fall 2010, and so we were indeed fortunate to have the benefit of her knowledge in Ottawa for a second time!

Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild: The 16th Annual Joy of Opera Luncheon and Concert was another very enjoyable event - good food, good company and good music! The four great young Ottawa U. voice majors had all been in the casts of their Opera Company's *Don Giovanni*, and, interestingly, three of the four had been in Edith Wiens' Master Class the day before! Soprano Natacha Fan and baritone Kyle Merrithew each sang two arias, while mezzo Lydia Piehl sang an aria plus a duet from *Così* with bass-baritone Joel Allison. Joel was this year's winner of the Donald Metcalfe Memorial Scholarship, and he also delighted us with Leporello's *Catalogue Aria* from *Don Giovanni*!

Jeunesses Musicales' Carmen: Jeunesses Musicales has the dual mission of promoting the performance of classical music and supporting the careers of young musicians. This year's *Carmen* was highlighting our third place BLOC winner soprano Jana Miller as Micaela in the spring tour. (Another cast does the fall tour.) This super production was very clever and a model of economy in every way. The two curved set pieces served as both Act II tavern and Act III mountain hideout with one side forward, and modified, while with curved sides out were a streetscape for Act I and the outside of a round bullring for Act IV! Similarly, the costumes for Carmen and friends started as white muslin dresses with coloured laced corsets for the factory, and each added a skirt and shawl for dancing in Act II, while gloves and scarves were needed for the cold Act III mountain top! But for the final act Carmen went very upmarket in a lovely black lace dress, and the toreador was similarly smart! The casting was equally efficient, with Antoine Joubert on piano and six excellent singers playing all necessary parts! Soprano Suzanne Rigden and mezzo Jessica Bowes portrayed factory girls and the smugglers (usually male!) as well as Frasquita and Mercedes, respectively, and baritone Justin Welsh alternated between all of the soldier roles and Escamillo! In single roles, besides Jana as Micaela, tenor Gaetan Sauvageau sang Don Jose and mezzo Kristin Hoff was a strong Carmen. This was a quality production, and even included bilingual surtitles - the place should have been packed!

Events You Could Have Enjoyed (continued)

Kiwanis Festival: This year's April festival again showcased our talented young local musicians. The senior voice adjudicator was Canadian tenor Torin Chiles, who has sung with OLO, and is now on the Faculty of Music at Western. He specializes in voice technique and always had a quotation for the occasion in his critiques. Especially apt, in the light of our latest BLOC was "Any competition is not a singing competition, but a repertoire choosing competition"! From hearing this year's crop of singers, I can assure you that our future opera productions will not lack accomplished singers!

The Savoy Society of Ottawa (SSO): The SSO returned with an enthusiastic production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*. Excellent sets, costumes, orchestra and singing actors with good diction all combined for an entertaining performance. A highlight was the Lord High Executioner's "little list", by a "satirist", of people who'd "none of 'em be missed", and really made him "p...eeved"!!

Opera Lyra Ottawa (OLO) Spring Opera Concert: As a thank you to supporters, OLO gave a marvellous *Spring Opera Concert* featuring Artists of the OLO Opera Studio. Pianist Judy Ginsburg accompanied mezzo Arminè Kassabian, tenor David Lafleur, baritone Emanuel Lebel and bass Brian Wehrle, the *Barber of Bytown* cast, in a lovely programme of arias, duets, and ensembles to satisfy every opera lover in the capacity audience! Artistic Director Tyrone Paterson M.C.'d and also reminded us of OLO's upcoming *La Bohème* and *La Traviata*, which OLO need to sell out!

Verdi Requiem and National Arts Centre Orchestra: In one of the last NACO concerts of the season Pinchas Zuckerman conducted Verdi's *Requiem*, featuring great soloists: Canadians soprano Adrienne Pieczonka (Measha Brueggergosman 2nd night) and mezzo Anita Krause, tenor James Valenti, and, fresh from the MET's *Ring*, bass baritone Eric Owens!

Opera Ballet Quiz

1. Ballet written into opera was primarily a French tradition:

- a) Where were the ballets placed in the opera?
- b) Why?
- c) Wagner was forced to include a ballet in *Tannhauser* for its Paris debut, yet still infuriated the French audience and caused a riot. Why?

2. Dance (in opera) evolved to complement rather than oppose the opera's action, echoing the locale or epoch of the work. Name well-known operas by these composers with these settings for dance:

- a) Smetana: Czech village
- b) Verdi: Egypt
- c) Borodin: Tartar encampment
- d) Strauss: Herod's Palace
- e) Mozart: a ball/dance in a Don's palace
- f) Saint-Saens: Philistine temple

3. For ball scenes in operas, certain dances are specified. In what act of *Eugene Onegin* is a) a waltz

b) a polonaise danced?

c) What different dance is named in Act I, Scene 2 of *War and Peace*?

d) In scene 22 of *Don Giovanni*, what do Don Ottavio and Donna Anna dance together?

4. In *Orpheus in the Underworld*, what is the famous (Act IV) cancan called?

Answers

- 1. a) At the start of the second act b) To allow patrons dining during the interval to arrive late (without losing the plot) c) He placed the new Venusberg ballet music at the beginning of Act I, not Act III!
- 2. a) *Bartered Bride* b) *Aida* c) *Prince Igor* d) *Salome* e) *Don Giovanni* f) *Sansone et Dalila*
- 3. a) Act II b) Act III c) mazurka d) a minuet
- 4. A gallop

The Sydney Opera House

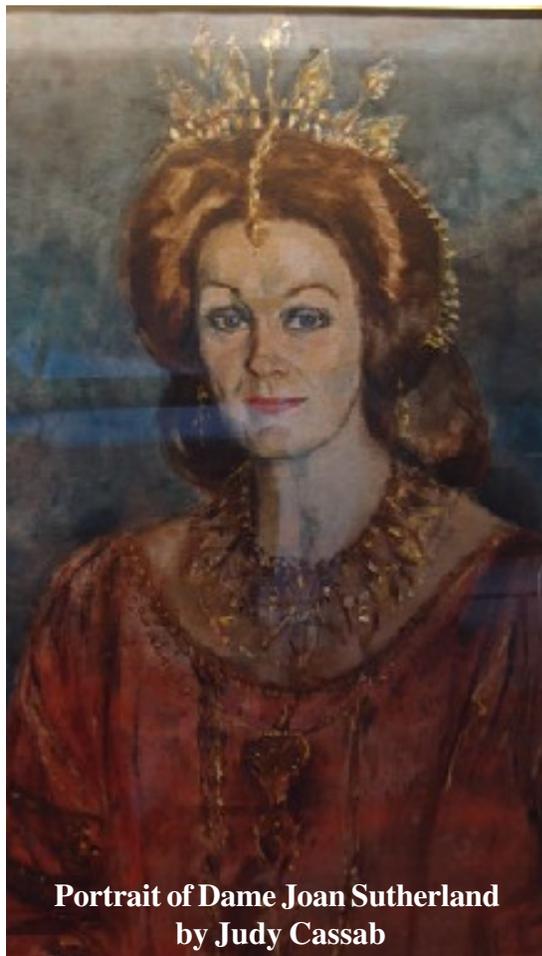
Dream of a lifetime for this opera lover. Sampling a very impressive Opera Australia! by Ute Davis

We were fortunate in spending a few days in Sydney, N.S.W., following a month of travel in Fiji and New Zealand which had been fun but caused acute “opera-starvation”.

Having flown into Australia on an afternoon, we managed our first opera house sighting between the airport and the hotel check-in. The moment I tried to focus in on the amazing sight with my camera, we were doused by a sudden rain shower, while looking longingly at the opera house across the bay from the Royal Botanic Gardens at “Mrs. Macquaries Chair”, a quaint installation to honour a lady who idled away her years, admiring the beautiful view. We were rushed back to our bus with very little photography to show for our trouble. This gave me an intense sense of frustration, having wanted to see the opera house up front with lots of close-up photographs to prove it. Our small group was then whisked off to Bondi Beach before being taken to our hotel for the night. The next morning we did not

get any closer to this amazing building, having been booked for a walking tour through the “Rocks”, an area on the other side of the bay. Again, close to “my” wonderful opera house, but all was still only “love from afar”. Finally I was taken out of my misery as we were led towards the harbour to start our second tour of the morning and I came “eye to eye” with this iconic opera house, which is a photographer’s delight, inside and out. Some of us sped to the box office to purchase performance tickets.

The Sydney Opera House complex is the busiest performing arts centre in the world and operates 24 hours a day, with the exception of Christmas Day and Good Friday. Visitors, about 200,000 of whom take part in the guided tours each year, are surprised to find it to be a complex of theatres and halls linked beneath its famous shells. It actually consists of four similar buildings, with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra occupying the largest space (2,679 seats). Next in size is the Opera Theatre (1,547 seats), recently renamed the “Dame Joan Opera Theatre” and shared by the Ballet company. Rounding out this amazing complex are a smaller Drama Theatre (544 seats) and a Playhouse (398 seats) for small cast plays, lectures and seminars, fully equipped to function as a cinema. The Studio (364 seats), intended for “contemporary” performing arts, was opened in 1999 and created by redesigning part of the interior space. A bird’s-eye view shows the building in the shape of a fish and a restaurant occupies the “tail”. The various foyers are often rented out and set up for lavish receptions. In the 90s one of these areas, the one with the best view and covered with a most glorious purple carpet, was set up for a gala reception in honour of Luciano Pavarotti. The very superstitious tenor walked in to the thunderous applause of his assembled admirers, took one look at the beautiful purple area and declared point blank “purple is the colour of death”; turned around and out he went. We stood on this amazing carpet while being told the Pavarotti story. Apparently, it took a large group of staff to very quickly move every little



**Portrait of Dame Joan Sutherland
by Judy Cassab**

The Sydney Opera House (continued)



All photos by Ute Davis.

item prepared for the reception to another level of the opera house which had an orangy-red carpet. Our sweet Luciano was delighted and re-joined his party. All foyer spaces have spectacular views overlooking Sydney Harbour to be enjoyed while sipping on bubbly or coffee during intermissions. This unique design is said to have occurred to Danish architect Jørn Utzon, born 1918, as he sectioned an orange for dessert. In 1957, after much trial and tribulation, he changed his design to the present more spherical geometry of the roof vaults, allowing pre-cast construction, greatly reducing both time and cost. The utterly unique and stunningly beautiful building was completed in 1973 and opened by Queen Elizabeth. The folk of Sydney were initially highly critical of both design and cost but now recognise the enormous value of the structure to the identity of their city and to the tourist trade. The original cost of about \$100 million was derived from

lottery profits. The NSW Government today contributes about 30% of the annual cost of maintaining and operating the complex. This compares to about 19% of financial support for arts installations in Canada. The stunning complex sits on a small peninsula extending into the harbour and based between the Domain city park and the city centre. The sight was selected by a Government commission and is known as Bennelong Point, named after the first Aborigine to speak English, who was born on this site. Harbour transportation ferries, buses and taxis arrive nearby and there is a plethora of waterside restaurants covering a wide price range. Our guide was a knowledgeable and pleasant young lady who showed the confident directness but absence of conceit that we found in young Australians. She and her husband plan to follow their careers in Toronto where she will study at Ryerson University. All the buildings are very well maintained. The opera house has excellent acoustics and satisfactory sight lines, although surtitles are not

The Sydney Opera House (continued)

visible from the rear two or three rows of the orchestra level.

Our *Turandot* was traditional in costume and set. We found the production of excellent quality, a very pleasant surprise as we had just seen the constraints in backstage space of the house. Director Graeme Murphy is a veteran with very extensive experience in directing European, Asian and Australian opera and ballet. The latter showed to great advantage in the smooth choreography and beautiful movement on stage. The musical quality was also very good under the baton of Arvo Volmer, an Estonian, now based in Adelaide. The major voices were uniformly of good quality, the Liu of Hueseoung Kwon being particularly pleasing. This is a young soprano from Korea, trained in Opera Australia's young artists' program. Further indication of local strength was evident in that most of the cast were born in Australia or N.Z. with the ex-European or Asian in a small minority. Anke Höppner, a German I had not previously heard, sang a very competent Princess Turandot.

The next night had us attend *Così fan Tutte*, which was sung in English and quite modern, something which did not please some of our group, actually blaming the conductor of being incapable of understanding Mozart. The sets were stark but the costume design by Gabriela Tylesova was highly imaginative and the lighting effects by Damien Cooper were very dramatic, both of these artists having extensive overseas as well as Opera Australia credentials. The cast was all Australian, sev-

eral from the local young artists' program. The conductor and director were also Australian. All in all an excellent demonstration of the depth of talent available to Opera Australia.

It occurred to me that it has been at least 25 years since I have seen a period version of *Così*, with the exception of Pellegrini Opera's production in 2004. *Così* appears to be an opera no one is willing to produce other than in very modern fashion, with the Opéra de Montréal's Atelier Lyrique version having been the most fun a few years ago. We passed on the Julie Taymor Met version of *Magic Flute* the next night, simply since we had seen it several times and because my little grand-daughter was not with me. Instead I watched the DVD again, once back in Ottawa.

We departed Sydney for Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef experience, delighted to have finally experienced their, or rather "my", opera house, thoroughly impressed with the quality of work produced by Opera Australia. Regretfully, we missed the next two offerings; the closing performance of *Macbeth*, a much criticized production, was in direct competition with a glamorous *La Traviata*, floating on Sydney Harbour, as shown below. We did get to admire the sets, floating on water, the audience seated on land and we look forward to a movie house showing or a DVD, which was hinted in the press. Look out for this, it is quite the spectacle. Opera is clearly alive and well in this city.



Saturday Afternoon at the Opera



June 16 – *MARY'S WEDDING*

From Pacific Opera Victoria
 By Andrew P. MacDonald and Stephen Massicotte
 Timothy Vernon – Conductor
 Betty Wayne Allison – Mary
 Thomas Macleay – Charlie
 Alain Coulombe – Sergeant Flowerdew

June 23 – *L'ORACOLO IN MESSENIA*

From Opera Rara, Krakow
 By Antonio Vivaldi
 Fabio Biondi – Conductor
 Magnus Staveland – Polifonte
 Ann Hallenberg – Merope
 Laura Polverelli – Epitide
 Romina Basso – Emira
 Julia Lezhneva – Trasimede

June 30 – *SHOW BOAT*

From Lyric Opera, Chicago
 By Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II
 John DeMain – Conductor
 Nathan Gunn – Ravenal
 Alyson Cambridge – Julie
 Morris Robinson – Joe
 Angela Renee Simpson – Queenie
 Ross Lehman – Capt. Andy

July 7 – *LA DONNA DEL LAGO*

From Teatro alla Scala, Milan
 By Gioachino Rossini
 Roberto Abbado – Conductor
 Joyce DiDonato – Elena, the Lady of the Lake
 Daniela Barcellona – Malcolm Groeme
 Juan Diego Florez – Uberto

For a complete listing of the opera broadcasts
 this summer check out the CBC website.

[http://music.cbc.ca/#!/
 Saturday-Afternoon-at-the-Opera](http://music.cbc.ca/#!/Saturday-Afternoon-at-the-Opera)

The Met: Live in HD 2012–13 Season

L'ELISIR D'AMORE (Donizetti)

LIVE - October 13, 2012
 ENCORES - November 17 & 19, 2012

OTELLO (Verdi)

LIVE - October 27, 2012
 ENCORES - Nov. 24 & December 3, 2012

THE TEMPEST (Ades)

LIVE - November 10, 2012
 ENCORE - January 12, 2013

LA CLEMENZA DI TITO (Mozart)

LIVE - December 1, 2012
 ENCORES - January 21 & 26, 2013

UN BALLO IN MASCHERA (Verdi)

LIVE - December 8, 2012
 ENCORES - February 9 & 11, 2013

AIDA (Verdi)

LIVE - December 15, 2012
 ENCORES - February 23 & 25, 2013

LES TROYENS (Berlioz)

LIVE - Saturday, January 5, 2013
 ENCORE - Saturday, March 9, 2013

MARIA STUARDA (Donizetti)

LIVE - January 19, 2013
 ENCORES - March 18 & 23, 2013

RIGOLETTO (Verdi)

LIVE - February 16, 2013
 ENCORES - April 6, 8 & 24 2013

PARSIFAL (Wagner)

LIVE - Saturday, March 2, 2013
 ENCORE - Saturday, April 20, 2013

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI (Zandonai)

LIVE - Saturday, March 16, 2013
 ENCORE - Saturday, May 4, 2013

GIULIO CESARE (Handel)

LIVE - Saturday, April 27, 2013
 ENCORES - June 1 & 3, 2013

Opera Within Reach

Opera Lyra Ottawa

La Bohème (Puccini) September 8, 10, 12, 15

Information: www.operalyra.ca

Opera de Montréal

La Traviata (Verdi) September 15, 18, 20, 22

Information: www.operademontreal.com

Canadian Opera Company

Il Trovatore (Verdi)

September 29, October 2, 5, 10, 13, 19, 21, 25, 28, 31

Die Fledermaus (J. Strauss)

October 4, 9, 12, 14, 17, 20, 24, 27, 30
November 1, 3

Information: www.coc.ca

Summer Opera Festivals

Glimmerglass Opera

Cooperstown N.Y.

Aida (Verdi) July 7, 13, 15, 23, 27

August 4, 9, 11, 14, 17, 25

Music Man (Willson) July 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30

August 2, 4, 6, 12, 19, 21, 24

Armide (Lully) July 21, 29, 31

August 5, 10, 13, 18, 23

Lost in the Stars (Weill) July 22, 28

August 3, 7, 11, 16, 18, 20, 25

Information: www.glimmerglass.org

Opera North

Lebanon, New Hampshire

Elixir of Love (Donizetti) Aug 7, 10, 15, 18

The King and I (Rodgers/Hammerstein)

August 3, 8, 11, 16, 17

Information: www.operanorth.org

Opera Quebec

The Tempest (Ades)

July 26, 28, 30, August 1

Nelligan (Gagnon)

July 29, 31, August 2, 4

Information: festivaloperaquebec.com

Chautauqua Opera

Lucia di Lammermoor (Donizetti) July 7

Manon Lescaut (Puccini) July 29 & August 1

Information: opera.ciweb.org

Opera Saratoga

Rigoletto (Verdi) July 6, 9, 13, 15

The Mighty Casey (W. Schuman) July 7, 10, 14

Information: operasaratogo.org