

Newsletter • Bulletin

Summer 2014

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Opera Lyra's *Madama Butterfly*

by Murray Kitts

I first fell in love with *Madama Butterfly* when I was about 15 years old. My father bought an album of 78's of the opera hoping to hear his favorite "Humming Chorus" (not included). But I lost my heart to the wonderful performance by Licia Albanese (still alive at 100 years) as the 15 year old bride of that philanderer, Pinkerton. Since then I have remained faithful to my beloved, reinforced by many live and TV performances especially ones by Dorothy Kirsten in the Met's touring productions, which introduced a lovely set designed specially by a Japanese artist. I have attended a performance from the vast stage of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome where the ancient surroundings dwarfed the Japanese house. The local vendors of "caramelle, coca-cola, confetti" learned the Japanese words for their wares directed at a large number of Japanese tourists in the audience.

Most critics agree that Puccini's score for this opera is his finest. Fortunately we in the National Capital have one of the best orchestras in North America to perform the music, in company with the Opera Lyra Chorus whose excellence grows with each production under the direction of Laurence Ewashko. So much of the success of this opera depends on the performance of the title role; Shuying-Li did

not disappoint a most appreciative audience. Her solo numbers and her scenes with Arminè Kassabian, very effective vocally and dramatically as the maid Suzuki, were among the highlights of the performance. Antoine Bélanger as Pinkerton has a pleasant voice but without sufficient power for the role of Pinkerton. He was not helped by the loudness of the orchestra led by Tyrone Patterson or by the stage direction of Francois Racine. Pinkerton has two brief arias. The first he delivered sitting down in a chair, not the best position for voice projection, and well up-stage, again not a helpful spot. The second was performed down-stage but started from an awkward kneeling position. The love

OLO Photos by Sam Garcia



duet was fine but mainly due to the soprano's soaring voice. As the American consul veteran singer James Westman's scenes with Pinkerton tended to be rather dull. Among the minor characters Joseph Hu as the marriage broker Goro, Valerian Ruminski as the Bonze and Gene Wu as Prince Yamadori all made excellent contributions. The very plain, basic set from Boston Lyric Opera was fortunately enlivened by the beautiful costumes from Malabar and by lighting effects. Special mention must be made of the affectionate and moving performance by Anton Hofstaetter as the child, so superior to the Met's production use of a dummy. It is one thing to see from a seat in a hall a dummy moved

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President's Annual Report, May 25, 2014

I want to start out my report by referring to two familiar adages. The first is “The show must go on” and it did go on. More about this later. The second is Murphy’s Law – “Anything that can go wrong will go wrong”. This law worked overtime for NCOS this past year. I’ll start with my own experiences. Every year we have to consider the venue and date of the competition. Based on the difficulties we had in 2011 when we ran into a reduced audience because of Christmas-related events I decided to push back the date by one week to November 16th at our usual venue, the Unitarian Congregation. Unfortunately that date had already been taken and so I felt obliged to book November 9th even though there was more than a year to go before the actual performance. No one made me aware of the possibility of a clash with the Choral Society’s annual fund-raiser in November. And no one could predict that the Met Simulcast of its most popular production *Tosca* would be scheduled for that same date as it was announced in the spring of 2013. If you attended the competition on November 9th you will have noted that our audience attendance was the poorest in recent memory, which brings us to a current financial problem which will be outlined by our Treasurer. The deliberations of the preliminary jury left us with five sopranos and one tenor. This could have resulted in a series of repetitious selections but this proved not to be the case. One finalist was obliged to withdraw immediately from the competition but a substitute was found right away. For the first time I was obliged to deal with an unfamiliar problem with regard to certain selections. Since we require one recitative, “When is a recitative a recitative, or when is the recitative part of the aria?” was a question I had to submit to experts who were not always in agreement. For some reason I made several mistakes on the program which were not caught by me or anyone else even though we were sent at least a dozen versions to check. Arrangements for rehearsals had to be altered as one contestant had to reschedule a day before the competition. And on the fateful day one contestant decided to participate in spite of a heavy cold. Lest you feel that I am trying to find sympathy for my part in the process let me give an account of the really serious problems we faced. Peggy Pflug and her husband, Bob, ordered the food for the reception but both were unable to attend the competition because of serious mobility problems which in Peggy’s case have yet to be resolved. Renate Chartrand underwent surgery, endured a difficult recovery, and was unable to work on the program as in 2011. Jean Saldanha is still awaiting surgery but was able to come and

help that evening. We owe much gratitude to Ute Davis for volunteering to do the program and publicity and who had to overcome many difficulties in securing a full complement of jurors and a guest recitalist. Essential to the operation of the contest was the enormous amount of help given by Mark Robinson and his wife, Lesley, who had the brilliant idea of getting students from Ashbury College to come in to assist us. Vera-Lee Nelson was present at the membership table with her husband, John, helping as always. But the show did go on and was a success. The jury was treated to a meal and assembled on time by the Davises. The program was much admired due to the fine work and monetary support of Ute Davis with the technical help of Jim Burgess. Ute surprised us all by instituting and financing an Audience Favorite Prize of \$500 which went to the lone tenor, Nathan Haller. As usual Pat Adamo participated by donating \$1,000 to the third place winner, Alexandra LeBlanc. An important tribute to NCOS and the Brian Law Competition followed later in an article by Richard Turp, one of our outstanding jurors, in the Winter 2014 edition of *Opera Canada* in which he praised our work in helping to forward the careers of a considerable number of young Canadians. He paid special tribute to the vocal excellence of Meghan Lindsay, our top winner, who will be following such great singers as Joan Sutherland and Renée Fleming in the title role of Handel’s *Alcina* in Opera Atelier’s production next season. We just managed to survive the challenges of the 2013 Competition. Since then Pat Adamo has fallen and injured her back, Ute Davis also had a nasty fall, and I am now walking with a cane as a result of that cursed ice last winter. Elizabeth Meller has almost recovered from a long session of illness and will be most welcome to the Opera alla pasta group. I am sad to report that Jean Saldanha has decided to leave the Board after sixteen years as Secretary. Thank you Jean most sincerely for all your help and devotion to our projects. Thanks also to Dave Williams and Tom McCool for their fine editing of our newsletter, to our excellent contributors and to Norma Torontow and Jim Burgess who help in the distribution. We shall carry on helping young singers but we do need new Board Members who are relatively young, in good health, and who are inclined to remain upright. We also need your financial support so that we can continue our good work.

Opera Lyra's *Madama Butterfly* (continued)

by manipulators covered in black and quite another to be always consciously aware that this is a wooden figure and there are people dressed in black producing the effects. Personally I would never want to have a DVD to

recall the Met's performance. Finally, I would like to commend Opera Lyra for the attractive picture used with their publicity and on the cover of their program; this is a big improvement over some recent efforts.



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, Vera-Lee Nelson, Peggy Pflug, Mark Robinson, and Lesley Robinson. 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 2014 please forward your payment for renewal and any changes of information to the Treasurer.

Claret Conquers All

by Ute Davis



“...coming away feeling upbeat and positive.”

We attended both performances of Pellegrini Opera’s *L’Elisir d’Amore* (11 and 12 April 2014), coming away feeling upbeat and positive. Most readers know the story of the country boy, Nemorino, desperately in love with pretty, local girl Adina, who is a landowner and cool to his ardour. A small contingent of army recruiters, led by the dashing Sgt. Belcore, comes to the village where he starts a lightning but successful courtship of Adina. Dulcamara, a snake oil salesman, arrives in time to sell a bottle of “love

elixir” to Nemorino. It is simple claret, but its “Dutch courage” helps Nemorino to act coldly to Adina whereon she promises to marry Belcore. Now distraught and broke, Nemorino signs up for the army and spends the sign-up money on another bottle of elixir. However when Dulcamara tells Adina, she realizes the depth of Nemorino’s love and buys his release from the army. He then proposes marriage and, to the audiences’ delight, we have a happy ending. Belcore shrugs off the setback, goes on to recruit in the next village where he will find a new young lady. Dulcamara passes on the news that Nemorino has just inherited great wealth and claims this as an additional benefit of his elixir.

Over the years, Music Director D. Kai Ma, has steadily expanded the Pellegrini Opera chamber orchestra, now 13 strong and able to do full justice to the glorious score of Gaetano Donizetti.



Nemorino



Dulcamara

This Vincent Thomas production draws mixed reaction. The simple background of high drapes in the Italian national colours worked well with the simplest of props. Also the stage movement was satisfactory despite the 14 singers of the chorus and several supernumeraries in a limited space. However the predominance of beige and brown clothing of the chorus looked simply sad. Also, some over-the-top direction had Nemorino crawling on all fours across the stage to reinforce a desperate ardour already clearly and effectively expressed in voice and music. Overall the positives definitely outweigh the negatives.

Most important, tenor Chris Oliveira sang an excellent Nemorino. His limpid upper register and subtle piano were beautifully audible throughout. His “Una furtiva lagrima” sent shivers down my spine. This role so well suits his voice and the part of frustrated lover is well within his acting ability.



Emily Klassen sang and acted beautifully as Adina, showing pretty coloratura and excellent vocal range.



Martin Georgievski looked very effective as Stg. Belcore but fell short vocally. Peter Bass had eight years of conventional stage experience under his belt when he broke into opera and it shows to great effect. The finale of this opera buffa rests on the shoulders of Dulcamara and Bass pulled this off with nonchalant charm. He is truly a singing actor. Mention should be made of the fine comedic interplay between Dulcamara and his browbeaten assistant Cochise, well played by Brennan Martin. I did not know that a professional figure skating career made such good preparation for stage comedy! Felicia Mittica and Ksenia Kotchieva alternated in the role of Gianetta. Both these young singers were absolutely charming, singing and acting with great enthusiasm and showing the benefit of Maria Pellegrini's personal coaching. Indeed they epitomize the whole raison d'être of Pellegrini Opera, giving young singers the opportunity of showing their talent in a live opera production to entertain Ottawa audiences.



Going for Baroque in Toronto

by Shelagh Williams

It is not often that one gets the chance to see one Baroque opera, let alone two, but Toronto in late April afforded us Opera Atelier's *Persée* back to back with the Canadian Opera Company's *Hercules*! We felt that we were in excellent company at the opera, since we were assured at the concurrent Royal Ontario Museum Exhibition *The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors* that the Imperial family's favourite entertainment over the centuries was opera!

Opera Atelier (OA), backed by the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, presents marvellous authentic productions of 17th and 18th century operas, folding ballet in effortlessly among the music and drama, in this case that of Jean-Baptiste Lully's masterpiece *Persée*. This was OA's second remounting, after productions in 2000 and 2004, with a final refining of the gorgeous visuals, Gerard Gauci's sets and Dora Rust D'Eye's costumes. This was to ready it for its May 2014 run at the Royal Opera House of Versailles, where *Persée* has not been seen since it opened that house for the wedding of Marie Antoinette! As usual, OA's Marshall Pynkoski, as director, and Jeanette Lajeunesse Zingg, as choreographer and dancer, ensured that the piece came together as a whole, the graceful carriage and often spectacular gestures of the singers melding into the wonderful Baroque dancing and exciting fencing scenes of the resident Atelier Ballet. The complicated story has as its hero Persée, a son of Zeus, who loves and is loved by Andromède, King Céphée's daughter, although Mérope, Queen Cassiope's sister, secretly loves Persée, and Andromède is betrothed to her uncle Phinée! To win Andromède, Persée must perform three of his famous deeds - first kill Méduse, who is threat-

ening the Kingdom of Ethiopia, then rescue Andromède from a sea monster, and finally, at the wedding, overcome the enraged Phinée by using Méduse's head to petrify him - all gloriously enacted in the opera! The central scene of the encounter of Persée with the ugly bearded snake-haired Méduse was a hoot, with Méduse, originally written for a tenor, here played hilariously by tall bass-baritone Olivier LaQuerre in drag, with a nice flick of the hips! (He also doubled as a stately King Céphée!) Of course, conductor



Photo by Bruce Zinger

Mercure

Méduse

David Fallis coaxed beautiful sounds from the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, with two continuos; the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir, in black in the side boxes; and the excellent cast of singers. As the young lovers, Christopher Enns as Persée was making his OA debut and his debut as an haute-contre tenor (the French didn't like castrati!), and soprano Mireille Asselin was lovely as Andromède. However, the larger and more dramatic roles were more memorably performed. Soprano Peggy Kriha Dye was riveting as Mérope, and her Act 2 duet with her niece Andromède as they mutually prayed for Persée's safe return was sublime. Baritone Vasil Garvenliev as Phinée was almost over the top in his suffering and evil anger. Among the other roles, soprano Carla Huhtanen was splendid as Queen Cassiope, who set the story in motion, having by her vanity so enraged Juno that she sent Méduse as a punishment. Tenor Lawrence Wiliford bravely sang Mercure as a deus ex machina in a flying machine! Bass-baritone Curtis Sullivan utilized his fine physique and dancing ability in several smaller roles. And our latest BLOC winner, soprano Meghan Lindsay, was a scantily-clad Venus descending as second deus ex machina in her own cloud! This was a complete, attention-holding, refined presentation, combining humour and pathos with beautiful dancing



Photo by Bruce Zinger

Persee

Andromède

Going for Baroque in Toronto (continued)

and music making, in a splendid visual production to satisfy the most particular admirer of OA!

The Canadian Opera Company (COC)'s presentation of Handel's *Hercules* was its first staging of the work, an "oratorio-opera hybrid" based on ancient mythology and adapted from *Women of Trachis*, a tragedy by Sophocles, also a war general. It was a co-production with Lyric Opera of Chicago, where it was staged in 2011, and the five principals and creative team came together again for this production. Since this included conductor British Baroque specialist Harry Bicket, the music was in safe hands and the reduced in size COC Orchestra and Chorus, along with the excellent cast, gave us a lovely performance. Portraying the two central figures, the two best singers were the female leads. Debuting soprano Lucy Crowe was marvellous as the captive princess Iole, heart-breaking at the start and heart-warming at the end. Mezzo Alice Coote portrayed the roller coaster emotions of Hercules' wife Dejanira wonderfully, from fear for her husband through joy at his return, jealousy of Iole, desire for vengeance, and finally remorse. The three males were all American. Debuting bass-baritone Eric Owens in the title role had much less to sing than the women, but brought his rich deep voice to the task. David Daniels' sweet countertenor was also amazingly powerful in the role of Lichas, the herald and family friend. Having heard both of these singers years ago at the small theatre of Glimmerglass Opera, it was great to see them live again, in major roles in a larger and more important house. Finally, tenor Richard Croft gave us Hercules' son Hyllus in both heroic and then romantic mood, the latter with Iole. Unfortunately, the staging of this sublime music was very disappointing for me, especially coming the day after OA's superb presentation. American director Peter Sellars, seeking to make *Hercules* "relevant", imposed his own take on the piece, updating the mythological return of Hercules from war to the present day and compressing the libretto. His American production team was headed by George Tsybin, designer of the Sochi Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony, who gave us a unit set consisting of a circle of broken-off Greek columns surrounding a pile of broken-up rocks - neither modern nor inspiring! James F. Ingalls' lighting was atmospheric, but often overly bright, shining in one's eyes,

while Dunya Ramicova designed the costumes, of which more later. Sellars' concept was to portray Hercules not as a Greek hero, later worshipped as a god, but as an American general returning from a foreign war and suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)! Eric Owens does not normally cut an heroic figure, and even less so in army combat fatigues and vest. Other costuming included the bi-



zarre spectacle of Iole singing her first aria in an orange jump-suit with a black sack over her head! The chorus was in a mishmash of US uniforms, Midwestern US plaid shirts, and Middle Eastern gowns. As to Sellars' direction, we got for Hercules' triumphal return a barbecue and the chorus chugging beer and dancing, and later the chorus doing semaphore actions as they sang! The principals also had many inexplicable and contradictory actions, unrelated to their arias, while Hyllus staggered about on crutches throughout - why? For the final scene, Hercules' casket was rolled on covered with an American flag. The concept was inconsistently applied and did not work for me at all and distracted greatly from my enjoyment of the piece. The sharp contrast with OA's period sensitive production only served to make OA's production seem even more superb!

Three Hits in Toronto!

by Shelagh Williams

What a pleasure on our second Spring opera trip to enjoy two great and rare opera in excellent productions at the Canadian Opera Company (COC): *Don Quichotte* and *Roberto Devereux*! Since we combined these with the intriguing play *The Last Confession*, starring David Suchet, we had three hits to savour! As a supplement to Opera Lyra's *Madama Butterfly*, we also enjoyed an exquisite exhibit at the Textile Museum of *The Kimonos of Ichimaru*, one of the most famous geishas of the 20th century who went on to be a recording artist, performing always in full geisha regalia!

Based on Cervantes' novel, *Don Quixote*, Massenet's view of the knight-errant *Don Quichotte* is altogether different from *Man of La Mancha*. It is very Spanish, gentle and loving, which makes for a very lyrical work. It was written expressly for Feodor Chaliapin, the great Russian bass, whose talents were extolled in a noon hour COC lecture by Stephen R. Clarke. From recordings, it was clear that Chaliapin's breath control was fantastic, and it seems that his acting and make-up skills were legendary. Happily the COC hired the superb Italian bass Ferruccio Furlanetto to sing what is one of his signature roles - the stars were aligned! To showcase their ideal cast, the COC used a stunning production from Seattle Opera by the debuting Americans: director Linda Brovsky, set designer Donald Easton and lighting designer Connie Yun. The clever staging used moveable giant-sized books and ink wells, and quill pens which morphed into windmills, thus emphasizing the literary basis of the work. The libretto somehow compressed a 1,000 page novel into two hours! Projected quotes introduced scenes and entertained us during pauses, while for the final death scene the starry sky was perfect. A horse for Don Quichotte and a donkey for Sancho Panza lent a charming reality to several scenes. The troupe of five great Spanish dancers also added atmosphere, with the lone woman, Anjelica Scannura, being omnipresent and especially good. The tasteful period Spanish costumes were by Canadian designer Christine Poddubiuk. The musical

side of the production was of equally high quality, prepared by COC Music Director Johannes Debus, but conducted on our evening by resident conductor Derek Bate. As would be expected, the COC Orchestra and Chorus were in fine form, providing a great setting for the excellent principals. Canadian tenor Michel Corbeil made a striking COC debut as the Bandit Chief - a non-singing role for which he fortunately had an ideal speaking voice and good clear French pronunciation! The three major singing roles

are, unusually, all in the lower ranges, adding to the warmth of the overall atmosphere, and we had the three good singers required. We heard Georgian mezzo Anita Rachvelishvili make her debut as Carmen at La Scala and you may have seen her as Konchakovna in the recent Live in HD production of *Prince Igor*. Fortunately, when the original Dulcinee cancelled, the COC was able to obtain Rachvelishvili to portray the appealing flirt with the soft if unfaithful heart. Returning from his recent *Rigoletto* at the

COC, Hawaiian baritone Quinn Kelsey brought to the squire Sancho Panza a touching devotion to his beloved knight. But of course the star was bass Ferruccio Furlanetto, recently King Philip in the MET *Don Carlos*. His great voice, excellent acting ability, experience in the role and in life, and affection for the role all combined in a touching, yet most enjoyable performance. This was a great production, lovingly done, of Massenet's beautiful music - a delightful evening of opera done in a manner that the original composer and librettist would recognize!

If *Don Quichotte* was good, Gaetano Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* was fabulous! - one vocal treat after another in a frenzy of fantastic singing! This tragedy is part of Donizetti's Tudor Trilogy relating to Queen Elizabeth, here concerning her declining years and her relationship with the much younger Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, interestingly step-

Photo by Michael Cooper



Don Quichotte

Dulcinee

Three Hits in Toronto! (continued)

son to an earlier favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester! The strong libretto is not historically factual - the four-sided love plot is fictional, and it was not the reason for which Devereux was condemned, but treason. It hangs together well enough to provide the four principal characters with sufficient anguish and difficulties for a complex and exciting story. The COC wisely reimported from Dallas Opera the sets and team which had worked so well for Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*: British director Stephen Lawless, Belgian set designer Benoit Dugardyn, German costume designer Ingeborg Bernerth and American lighting designer Mark McCullough. The visually impressive set was again based on Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, allowing the chorus ample room on the balconies with the Queen on the lower central platform and several stairs for smaller ensembles. Lawless added suitable emblems and maps during the opera and the scene changes were very smoothly handled. However some additions were unnecessary, such as the potted history of Elizabeth's life distracting one during the overture, and three glass cases wheeled out containing first a young Elizabeth and her parents, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, and later, even more obtrusively, the three victims of Donizetti's Trilogy: Anne Boleyn, Mary Stuart and Devereux. The costumes were historical and mostly excellent, with the Queen resplendent in a red gown, although the odd costuming of Devereux in a red quilted top under a short biker-style jacket seemed inapt and out of period. To go with the great settings and highly emotional story, excellent musical forces were assembled under COC debutant conductor, Italian Corrado Rovaris, who is a regular guest in many major Italian houses. One of the 12 "must-see choices" of Opera News for this season was Sondra Radvanovsky in her role debut as Elizabetha in the COC's *Roberto Devereux* - and they were right! Following surgery in 2002,

Radvanovsky had to learn to sing again, and with her coach developed a new *bel canto* flexibility - to quote Richard Ouzounian, she can now sing *bel canto* to go with her "can belt-o", as evidenced earlier in her COC *Aida*. She was amazing as the Queen, singing her heart out in the demanding dramatic coloratura, while transforming herself from a magnificent upright reigning Queen into a shrunken, devastated old woman at the end of the opera after she condemned her favourite and banished her friends. She is scheduled to sing all three Tudor queens at the MET in 2015/16 - the feat Beverly Sills admitted shortened her career in the '70s! The COC had some problems getting suitable tenors for the title role of the Queen's favourite: the original

Italian tenor was called home on a family emergency, a second tenor took over the first half of the run, and we heard a third, Spanish tenor Jose Bros. Although this was his COC debut, he has recorded the opera, and we enjoyed a tall good looking tenor singing and acting marvellously, to provide a suitable romantic lead opposite Elizabetha and his real love, Sara. Canadian mezzo Allyson

McHardy acted and sang impeccably in portraying Elizabetha's friend Sara, Duchess of Nottingham, married unwillingly to the Duke while still in love with Devereux. In the pivotal role of the Duke of Nottingham, Canadian baritone Russell Braun exhibited his acting and vocal skills, making believable his transformation, as the fourth member of the love quadrangle, from Devereux's best friend and advocate to the jealous avenger who ensured his death, thus incurring the Queen's wrath and banishment for himself and his unfortunate wife. This emotion was all conveyed excitingly and melodiously in the glorious singing of the arias, duets and ensembles. It was closing night and it seemed as if each singer was vying with the next in a contest to outdo each other in the beauty, range and flexibility of their singing - they earned their standing ovation! What a marvellous ending to the COC season!

Photo by Michael Cooper



Sara

Elizabeth

First Night Triumph for Radvanovsky by Lesley Robinson

At the first night of the COC's presentation of *Roberto Devereux* by Gaetano Donizetti, the principal singers all delivered excellent performances, but the night belonged to a dazzling Sondra Radvanovsky whose sublime portrayal of the aging Queen Elizabeth I, tugged at the heart strings and brought the entire audience to its feet. There were moments of intense pathos and raw emotion as Ms. Radvanovsky's voice soared with gymnastic prowess.

This production did much to present Donizetti's "three queens", Anne Boleyn, Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I as a cohesive trilogy with Elizabeth at the centre. Even though she does not appear in the first opera, *Anna Bolena*, its subject matter deals with the downfall of Elizabeth's mother. The tragedy of Elizabeth's early life no doubt greatly affected her. Figures from both of the other operas appear eerily during this production of *Roberto Devereux*, making their presence felt as part of this story.

During the overture a tableau is presented, depicting the life of Elizabeth. The events portrayed in *Roberto Devereux* come towards the end of Elizabeth's long reign. We see her torn between her parents; their marriage and the manner of its ending contributed to Elizabeth never feeling totally secure on her throne and was presumably a factor in her decision never to marry. Elizabeth reigned over a golden age for England, both politically and culturally. During the overture we see Shakespeare directing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the aging Elizabeth in the role of Titania, a queen who is being taught a lesson, in a foreshadowing of what is to come. Finally we see a triumphant Elizabeth, single handedly defeating the Spanish Armada in a flourish of pyrotechnics.

The set evokes Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, emphasising the drama of the piece and reminding us that according to Shakespeare, "All the world's a stage." The chorus watches the action from the gallery, commenting from

time to time as an omniscient critic. The presentation of a historical piece as drama allows for some forgiveness of historical inaccuracies. It is, after all, to Shakespeare that we owe much popular knowledge of Plantagenet and Tudor history, but let's not forget that even Shakespeare himself was, to a degree, a purveyor of historical fiction. The real Robert Devereux was a favourite of Elizabeth I, although more than 30 years her junior. He was the stepson of Elizabeth's earlier great love, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Like his stepfather before him, Devereux was married and also had a mistress, but Sara, Duchess of Nottingham, with whom he is in love in Donizetti's version, is a complete invention. Devereux's betrayal of Elizabeth was actually merely of a political, rather than a romantic nature, although the young man's preference for a younger woman intensifies the pathos of his faithlessness towards the spurned and aging queen.

Just as Elizabeth I's subjects paid homage to her majesty, so the cast of *Roberto Devereux* complemented Ms. Radvanovsky's performance with their effervescent and accomplished delivery. Russell Braun (baritone) portrays a strong and loyal Nottingham, betrayed by his wife and his friend, yet remaining dignified throughout. The parts of the much younger lovers are sung by Leonardo Capalbo (tenor) and Allison McHardy (mezzo-soprano) with a reckless abandon and vulnerability respectively, each providing a foil to those who wield power, yet fall victim to their own emotions. The orchestra too performed with vivacity and brilliance under the masterful baton of Italian Conductor, Corrado Rovaris.

First night reviewers of *Roberto Devereux* spoke of style, emotion, flamboyance and power. It was indeed a triumph.

OLO Guild: *High C and High Tea* by Shelagh Williams

Always a treat, Murray Kitts' presentation in the salons of City Hall covered current Canadian opera stars. For each singer he encapsulated their careers and set the scene for the DVD clip, in a variety of productions which were of interest for either historic reasons, their rarity or their sheer weirdness! We enjoyed Gino Quilico and Donna Brown (*Don Giovanni*), Ben Heppner (*Die Meistersinger*), Judith

Forst (*Anna Bolena*), Russell Braun (*Romeo and Juliet*), Richard Margison (*La Gioconda*), Isabel Bayrakdarian (*Xerxes*), Lance Ryan (*Siegfried*), John Relyea (*Robert le Diable*), Michael Schade (*Das Labyrinth*) and Gerald Finley (*Dr. Atomic* and *Don Giovanni*). After the feast for our eyes and ears, we had a convivial High Tea to consume!

Peter Sellars and the Meaning of Art - *Hercules* at the COC

by Lesley Robinson

Whilst preparing for Peter Sellars' production of *Hercules* at the COC in Toronto, it was enlightening to come across a video of Sellars' inspiring pre-performance talk to an invited audience of students, serving military personnel and veterans before a dress rehearsal. Sellars speaks eloquently about his vision and setting of Handel's eighteenth century reworking of a Greek tragedy by Sophocles.

Mr. Sellars evokes the need to speak from our deepest emotions in order to contribute from our deepest selves to the public space. He speaks of the role of theatre in the ancient Greece of Sophocles, where he says that democracy was maintained through poetry, drama and music, with the theatre giving a voice to those who would not otherwise have one.

This production focuses on the aftermath of war and the inability both of those who experienced it and of those who were left behind to communicate their pain to one other. Sellars points out that Handel has given *Hercules* only three arias and his wife 13. His silence is typical of the struggle of the returning soldier, who cannot voice what he has experienced, yet there is an undercurrent of violence and pain in his silence. The form of the da capo aria used in this piece emphasizes the depth of emotion. The structure of a da capo aria is in three parts. The first is complete in itself. The second contrasts with the first in mood and tempo. The third section reprises the first ("da capo" meaning literally "from the head", so back to the beginning). Sellars points out how this structure mirrors our inner thoughts. An aria begins with a single sentence that repeats over and over, the way that a nagging thought plagues us by being played over and over in our minds. The change in the second section of the aria suggests that the character has managed to move beyond what torments him, yet it inevitably returns. Sellars likens this to the effects of post traumatic stress. He notes the explosiveness expressed in the music. 45 notes are used for the single word "battle", as if *Hercules* is unable to get the word out. The music is wild and crazy, moving at an incredible pace, yet at the same time the opera is moving slowly, with thoughts wandering in a deep space. Sellars says that poetry and metaphor are as if in a dream, where the deepest things in our lives can be accessed. This addresses

what is moving invisibly below the surface and it is why poetry and music exist: to get to a place where politicians don't go, but where the human heart goes every day. Sellars says that this piece is made with high idealism, the opposite of the gratuitous violence of films and television. He evokes the period of the Enlightenment when Handel was composing. Sellars believes that in dark times, the light comes from every human being.

This twenty-first century setting evokes the homecoming of US soldiers from Iraq or Afghanistan. *Hercules* is a returning hero, following a long period of warfare. Sellars suggests the disoriented alienation of post traumatic stress. *Hercules* returns to his wife who cannot possibly comprehend the horrors he has been through. We first see Iole, a prisoner of war in an orange jumpsuit and black hood, reminiscent of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and the infamous Abu Ghraib. We see the dehumanization and humiliation of this victim who has suffered the loss of her father and the further indignity of being torn from everything she holds dear. *Hercules* is in modern military fatigues and Lichas, the herald, reports the news in Wolf Blitzer-esque fashion.

For all its depth and earnestness, this setting doesn't work for me. Sellars stresses the modern notion of post traumatic stress and although this has existed for centuries, either unrecognised or called by another name, the horrors that *Hercules* has witnessed are of his own perpetrating. He is, by modern standards, a war criminal. There is something a little disconcerting about the twenty-first century wholesale export of democracy to places with a different tradition and history. Can we draw satisfying parallels between this well-meaning, although perhaps self-righteous misapprehension and the rape and pillage of *Hercules'* campaigns?

For me, *Hercules* is about something else. Yes, it is about raw human emotion, but it deals with the most basic aspects of human relationships. Sellars highlights the irony that *Hercules* was undone not on the battlefield, but in his own living room.

"Jealousy! Infernal pest,
Tyrant of the human breast!"

These were the words that were echoing in my head, as I left the COC at the end of *Hercules*. For me this story is about the destructive nature of obsessive jealousy, the irony of miscommunication and redemption through compassion.

An Encore at the Met - From Now On, Everything Else Will Just Be Opera

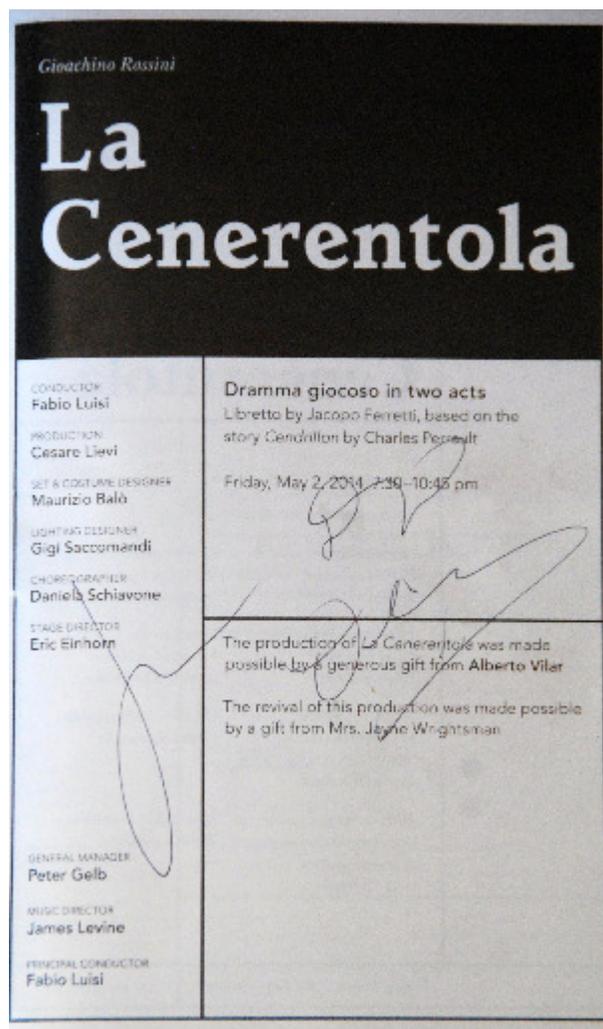
by Lesley Robinson

I'm not usually one to be star struck, but when it comes to Juan Diego Flórez I'm afraid I have to make an exception. It is not only the magnificence with which he plies his craft, but the sheer beauty of his unique instrument that has made him my unparalleled, favourite tenor for a number of years. His bel canto repertoire includes some of the most fiendishly challenging coloratura arias known to man and from which lesser talents might reasonably shy away. Yet Flórez rises to the challenge with flawless panache and with achingly passionate expressiveness. Those magnificently held high notes, which characterize his performance, leave me breathless with admiration.

Juan Diego Flórez has been the reason behind a couple of very special trips to New York, but it wasn't until this May that I heard what I had longed for, an encore at the Met. At a performance of *L'Elisir d'Amore* in March 2012 I had leapt to my feet, applauding wildly after *Una furtiva lagrima*, sadly to be disappointed. It wasn't until a performance several weeks later that this encore became a reality. An encore at the Met is indeed a rare thing, which for most of the twentieth century was specifically prohibited. It was Luciano Pavarotti who first broke the 70 year ban on encores at the Met in 1994 and it was not until very recently that anyone other than he and the illustrious Juan Diego had achieved this distinction, the latter on multiple occasions in *La Fille du Regiment* in 2008 and again in *L'Elisir d'Amore* in 2012 (as mentioned above). The recent run of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* at the Met broke new records. Mexican tenor Javier Camarena stepped in for the first three performances of the run when Mr. Flórez withdrew because of illness. Mr. Camarena responded to a prolonged ovation in the second act with a sensational encore. I listened to a YouTube video of his performance in a dress rehearsal and although the accolades are well deserved, I still find Juan Diego's impassioned and expressive voice quality totally matchless.

The performance of Friday, May 2nd was Mr. Flórez's first performance of the run. This was my birthday treat and I was thrilled to find that the rest of the audience seemed as eager as I was to hear an encore. The rapturous applause went on and on; there was only one way to satisfy the plaudits and I got my wish. To cap

the best birthday treat ever, I had the opportunity to thank Mr. Flórez personally in the restaurant across the road after the performance. He was most charming and gracious, wishing me a happy birthday and introducing me to one of his co-stars, Luca Pisaroni, who performed beautifully as Alidoro, but whom I hadn't even noticed sitting right next to my hero. Who would have thought that meeting an opera star of this calibre would have seemed no big deal!



I should add a word about the stellar cast of *La Cenerentola*. Joyce DiDonato was magnificent in the title role. She has announced that the final performance of this run was to be her last as Angelina (Cenerentola), which has been a signature role for her. As mentioned above, Luca Pisaroni made a delightful "fairy godmother", although in this version

An Encore at the Met (continued)

of the story, the magic is performed by Alidoro, an angel in disguise (complete with golden wings). Cenerentola's self-interested and ungenerous step-sisters, Clorinda and Tisbe, and her buffoonish step-father Don Magnifico were portrayed by Rachele Durkin, Patricia Risley and the splendid Alessandro Cobelli respectively and the cast was rounded out by a spirited performance from Pietro Spagnoli as Dandini. There was an abundance of well-timed comedy, enhanced by the sparkling Met orchestra under the direction of Maestro Fabio Luisi. The entire evening was a sumptuous delight.

The next day we were back at the Met for the matinee, Bellini's *I Puritani* and were treated to yet another virtuosic performance from the renowned American tenor, Lawrence Brownlee. They don't call it bel canto for nothing. The music and vocal performances from Mr. Brownlee and from Olga Peretyatko in her Met debut role as Elvira were stunning, although overall the production seemed a little tired to me, particularly in the staging. I'm afraid I was still too intoxicated from the ecstasy of the night before to be able to appreciate fully anything that was bound to pale in comparison. I'm sorry, Mr. Brownlee; I'm sorry Mr. Camarena; but after May 2nd 2014, everything else will just be *opera*.

DVD Corner by Murray Kitts

OPL's copy of the 2011 Vienna Staatsoper's production of Handel's *Alcina* should be on your list for viewing if you are going to see Opera Atelier's production next season. The casting of Meghan Lindsay as Alcina (a role made famous by singers like Joan Sutherland and René Fleming) and as Amor in the Gluck/Berlioz *Orphée et Euridice* is a strong attraction. Check out the video in Opera Atelier's promotion of its 2014-2015 season. You will see Meghan not as she appeared at the last Brian Law Competition. The Vienna DVD is a fine production with great singing and just might prepare you for the extremely complicated plot, one that would be well-known by opera goers in Handel's time. The music is glorious with Marc Minkowski vigorously directing the outstanding Musiciens du Louvre.

There has been a recent bonanza of bel canto operas, all featuring outstanding singing, and most of which are rarely performed. The first three are by Rossini. Juan Diego Florez plays a misanthropic, misogynistic villain who is transformed by the heroine of *Matilde di Shabran*. Suffice it to note that Matilde's final aria contains the line "Women are born to conquer and rule." If you would like to hear the Mexican tenor Javier Camarena who was recently allowed an encore at the Met go to a new DVD of *Le Comte Ory* with Cecilia Bartoli as the

target of the Count's sexual advances. Camarena is also in the cast of *Otello* along with four other tenors and Cecilia Bartoli again, singing the wonderful Willow song in the last act. The plot is a complete parody of Shakespeare and the production hits a new low with Desdemona pouring a bottle of beer over her head to show her defiance to her father. But the singing is magnificent. Two operas by Donizetti complete the list. *Gemma di Vergy* is a familiar opera story as the lead soprano has been put aside for inability to produce an heir for her warrior husband. In this case the husband is killed by Gemma's Arab admirer who then cuts his own throat. Gemma, still alive, is not happy with the result. Well produced and well sung from the Bergamo Donizetti Festival this opera suffers from the fact that Gemma is an "unappealing character" to quote Charles Osborne. *Gianni di Parigi* is a light-hearted comedy about the posing of the Dauphin of France as a bourgeois Parisian when he meets the Princess of Navarra, his betrothed, at a country inn. There are many good numbers in the opera, but I really did not enjoy the shrill voice of Ekaterina Lekhina as the Princess. Just remember that these operas are not in the same class as the masterpieces by Rossini and Donizetti with the exception of *Le Comte Ory*. Any opera company intent on reviving one of the other operas have forty by Rossini and over sixty by Donizetti to choose from.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed by Shelagh Williams

Hedwig and The Angry Inch: The Gladstone Theatre, which Steve Martin bought from the GCTC and then renovated beautifully, now houses several theatre companies which together produce an interesting theatrical season. The award-winning off-Broadway hit rock musical *Hedwig and The Angry Inch*, presented by Vanity Project Productions, warmed our cold April with the humorous and outrageous story of the “internationally ignored” rock-goddess Hedwig Schmidt. In the title role, as well as being production manager, Tim Oberholzer, in a huge blond wig, was absolutely marvellous, with enormous energy as he sang and danced the entire 90 minutes. The plain male sidekick, Yitzhak, was equally amazing, at the end revealing a sexy Rebecca Noelle as the singer actor! Four energetic rock musicians made up the back up band, The Angry Inch. It was something completely different, and on opening night played to an eager, enthusiastic full house! (It is coming back by popular demand in October - see it if you can!)

Ottawa University School of Music Recitals: End of year concerts by students of the Ottawa University School of Music again provided memorable musical fare. For those who enjoyed the UOttawa Opera Company’s recent production and the Joy of Opera Lunch, Joel Allison in his third year recital and Lydia Piehl in her graduation recital were excellent.

Organ Recitals: Once warmer weather beckons, organists seem to come out of hibernation and offer noon hour organ recitals in various churches. In Centretown, these are at St. Andrew’s, 1st Baptist and 1st Church of Christ, Scientist. The first of the Christian Scientist series was given by their organist Mervyn Games and soprano soloist Joanne Thomas: an all-Handel programme including *Royal Fireworks Music*, *Largo* from *Xerxes*, and *The Queen of Sheba* from *Solomon*, plus a sung prayer and a *Messiah* aria!

Strings of St. John’s: Gordon Johnston always crafts interesting programmes, and the latest, *8 Cellos and a Soprano*, was no exception. Associate conductor, Donnie Deacon, principal NACO second violin, conducted a Handel *Concerto Grosso* from the violin, and also a lovely Glazunov selection - rare in Ottawa! How-

ever, the major work was Britten’s *Les Illuminations*, pairing, in Johnston’s words, “crazy lyrics with Britten’s angular music”, with Canadian soprano Alexa Wing as soloist. As the concert title would suggest, she also partnered 8 cellos in a lovely rendition of Villa-Lobos’s *Aria from Bachianas Brasileiras #5*, and then the whole ensemble, cellos and Strings, joined her for a lush performance of Mimi’s *Donde lieta usci* from Puccini’s *La Boheme* to round out the afternoon!

Capital City Opera (CCO): For their spring offering at Algonquin Commons Theatre, CCO gave us their second *Opera in Hollywood* programme, a very professionally produced, witty, and informative musical entertainment. Six female and two male singers, along with MC Rory McGlynn, CCO founder and Artistic Director, treated us to beautifully sung arias, duets and ensembles to accompany clearly and concisely the fascinating film stills and excerpts. Most of the singers were from the area - Kimberley Bentham and Sarah Christina Steinert, both of whom sang in the OLO’s Opera Studio; Gabrielle Lazarovitz of Pellegrini Opera’s *Carmen*; Samantha Pierre and Benito Benone of Yoriko Tanno’s Studio; and Skye McDiarmid; and possibly Wayne Line, with a lovely mature baritone. As a late replacement, coloratura soprano Raphaëlle Paquette came from Montreal for a starring role - she will obviously shine when she headlines CCO’s *Magic Flute* on Sept. 13th. The carefully and thoughtfully prepared programme was deftly accompanied by Nick Rodgeron, and finished magnificently with Rory and Raphaëlle, along with the rest, singing the brindisi *Libiamo* from *La Traviata* to the orchestral sound track of the opening credits of the movie *Quartet* - what a clincher!

My First NAC: Making their NAC debuts were six excellent previous NACO training programme participants who were the 2014 Corus \$1000 Prize winners. The only singer was tenor Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure, who spent two years at UOttawa, then finished his degree and a Master’s at UMontreal. JP sang pieces from Schubert and Poulenc, exhibiting the talent which won him a place in the COC Ensemble Studio for September, 2014!

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera



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| June 21 <i>William Tell</i> - Gioachino Rossini - Teatro Regio | July 26 <i>Armida</i> - Gioachino Rossini - Sony CD |
| June 28 <i>Oklahoma</i> - Rodgers and Hammerstein – Lyric Opera of Chicago | Aug. 2 <i>Le Comte Ory</i> - Gioachino Rossini – Lyon Opera |
| July 5 <i>Armide</i> - Ch. W. Gluck – De Nederlandse Opera | Aug. 9 <i>Simon Boccanegra</i> - Giuseppe Verdi – Lyric Opera of Chicago |
| July 12 <i>Tancredi</i> - Gioachino Rossini - Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris | Aug. 16 <i>Don Pasquale</i> - Donizetti – Lyric Opera of Chicago |
| July 19 <i>Le Mage</i> - Jules Massenet – Saint-Etienne Opera (Loire) | Aug. 23 <i>La Forza del Destino</i> - Giuseppe Verdi – Bavarian State Opera |
| | Aug. 30 <i>The Robber Bride</i> - Ferdinand Ries - CPO - CD |

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

<http://music.cbc.ca/#/Saturday-Afternoon-at-the-Opera>

The Met: Live in HD 2014 –15 Season

- | | |
|---|--|
| Verdi's <i>Macbeth</i>
October 11, 2014, 12:55 pm | Lehar's <i>The Merry Widow</i> - New Production
January 17, 2015, 12:55 pm |
| Mozart's <i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i> – New Production
October 18, 2014, 12:55 pm | Offenbach's <i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i>
January 31, 2015, 12:55 pm |
| Bizet's <i>Carmen</i>
November 1, 2014, 12:55 pm | Tchaikovsky's <i>Iolanta</i> / Bartok's <i>Duke Bluebeard's Castle</i> - New Production
February 14, 2015, 12:30 pm |
| Adams's <i>The Death of Klinghoffer</i> - Met Premiere
Nov.15, 2014, 12:55 pm | Rossini's <i>La Donna del Lago</i> - Met Premiere
March 14, 2015, 12:55 pm |
| Wagner's <i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>
Dec. 13, 2014, 12 pm | Mascagni's <i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i> / Leoncavallo's <i>Pagliacci</i> - New Production
April 25, 2015, 12:30 pm |

Opera Within Reach

Opera Lyra Ottawa

Tosca (Puccini)
September 6, 8, 10 & 13

Information: www.operalyra.ca

Opera de Montréal

Nabucco (Verdi) September 20, 23, 25 & 27

The Barber of Seville (Rossini) Nov 8, 11, 13 & 15

Information: www.operademontreal.com

Canadian Opera Company

Falstaff (Verdi)
October 3, 9, 12, 14, 25, 29 & November 1

Madama Butterfly (Puccini)
October 10, 11, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30 & 31

Information: www.coc.ca

Summer Opera Festivals

Glimmerglass Opera

Cooperstown N.Y.

Madame Butterfly (Puccini)
July 11, 13, 17, 21, 24, 26 & 29
August 3, 9, 12, 18 & 23

Carousel (Rodgers and Hammerstein)
July 12, 18, 26 & 27
August 1, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19 & 22

Ariadne in Naxos (Strauss)
July 19, 22 & 28
August 2, 8, 17, 21 & 23

An American Tragedy (Picker)
July 20, 25 & 31
August 5, 7, 9, 11, 16 & 24

Information: www.glimmerglass.org

For additional details check the opera company websites.

Chautauqua Opera

Madam Butterfly (Puccini) July 5

The Ballad of Baby Doe (Moore) July 29 & 28
Information: opera.ciweb.org

Opera North

La traviata (Verdi) August 5, 9, 15 & 20

Street Scene (Weill) August 12, 14 & 17

My Fair Lady August 2, 8, 13, 16 & 19

Information: www.operanorth.org

Opera Saratoga

The Magic Flute (Mozart) June 14, 17, 22, 26 & 28

The Elixir of Love (Donizetti) June 21, 24, 27 & 29

Information: operasaratogo.org