

# Newsletter • Bulletin

Fall

2005

Automne

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

## Rich Feast for “*OPERA ALLA PASTA*”

Following tradition we asked our “regulars” at Opera alla Pasta to vote for the operas for the coming season. Here are the results:

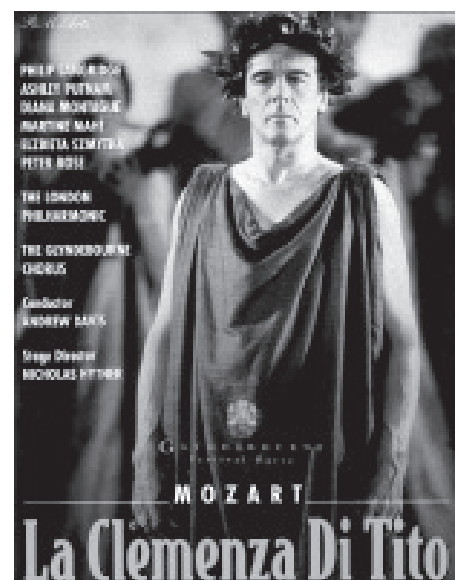
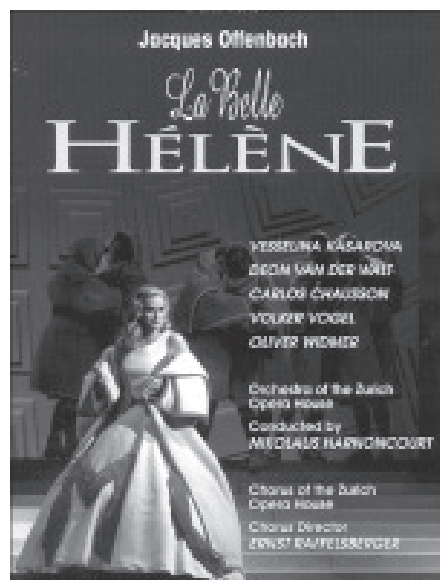
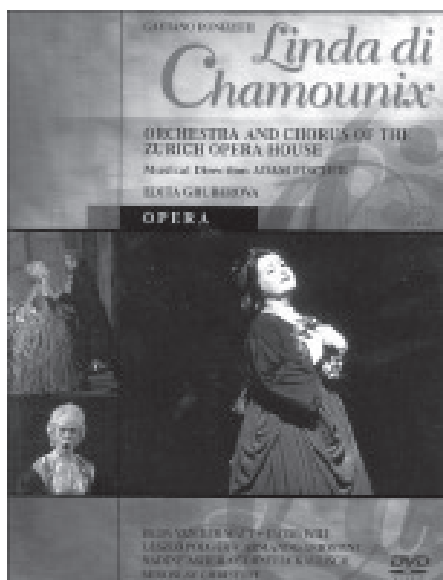
October 23, 2005 *Linda di Chamounix* by Donizetti. This is an opportunity to see a rarely performed work by one of the bel canto masters. The production features the Orchestra and Chorus of the Zurich Opera House under the direction of Adam Fischer. An outstanding cast is headed by the famous Edita Guberova as Linda, Deon van der Walt as her lover Carlo and Cornelia Kallisch as her faithful friend Pierotto. The production is a traditional one with the scene changing from the Alpine village dominated by a huge glacier to the salons of Paris and back again. Donizetti, as usual, writes beautiful melodies and even includes a Mad Scene but one which doesn't end in tragedy as in *Lucia*.

November 27, 2005 *La Belle Hélène* by Offenbach. The opera is a farcical account of the story of Helen of Troy and how she was taken away from Greece by Paris. In the lead roles are the glamorous Vesselina Karasova and our tenor from *Linda di Chamounix*, Deon van der Walt, as Paris. The conductor is Nikolaus Harnoncourt, best known

for his conducting of Monteverdi and other great classical composers, who enters wholeheartedly into this hilarious production which features unusual costumes and sets.

March 19, 2006 *La Clemenza di Tito* by Mozart. What better way to mark Mozart's anniversary year than to present his last opera seria, a work sadly neglected for many years. This production, staged at Glyndebourne, features the London Philharmonic and the Glyndebourne Chorus under the direction of Andrew Davis. Philip Langridge as the Emperor Titus leads an outstanding cast of singers. Although the costumes are period, the sets are futuristic. If you are not familiar with this particular opera here is a chance to see and hear a great work by a master opera composer.

As usual all of our opera showings are followed by a special meal prepared by the chefs at St. Anthony's Soccer Club. Antipasto, salad, a special pasta dish, meat or poultry, complementary vegetables, dessert, and tea or coffee is our usual fare. Wine or other drinks can be purchased at the bar. All you have to do is to make a reservation at least by the Wednesday preceding the performance. Call 830-9827 and join us for three banquets of music and food.



## Editor's Notes

There are so many people that contribute to the NCOS that I tried to reward them by inviting them to our annual corn feed at the Pflugs'. But Tom McCool who does so much to make this newsletter a success was attending the opera at Glimmerglass. Shelagh and David Williams were also not able to attend. Even farther away in Munich, Germany, but still able to put our material on the website, was key contributor Jim Burgess. If they had been able to come they would have enjoyed Peggy and Bob Pflugs' hospitality. Even Peggy's fresh strawberry pie couldn't overshadow the delicious corn picked in Bob's garden and cooked and eaten right away. All this was only part of the spread which included patés, a curried chicken dish and various salads. Most of the Board of Directors were able to attend and to discuss plans for the future as well as to enjoy the food.

We really miss Dan Leeman on the Board, collecting the money for Opera alla Pasta and being so helpful to Bobbi Cain at the Brian Law Competition and at other functions. We also need someone to relieve Jean Saldanha, our hard-working secretary, of her additional membership duties.

Are there a couple of members who would like to help us out? We do keep our meetings down to a minimum number a year. All you need to do is get in touch with me at 830-9827 or with any member of the Board. Besides helping to promote opera in our region you, too, could be with us at the Pflugs' next year.

*Murray Kitts*

## Web site News

All of the articles and reviews from past newsletters beginning with the Winter '96 issue up to and including the present issue are now on our Web site. They are arranged in reverse chronological order and can be accessed by clicking on the heading "From the Newsletter Archives" on NCOS Home Page. The Web address is <http://ncos.ca>

Many thanks to Doreen Wilson for typing in many of the articles and reviews on our Web site. Doreen not only did us a major favour but made herself into a computer expert in the process.

## Heppner and Bayrakdarian Recitals

This year's Cathedral Arts program at Christ Church Cathedral has two items of special interest. Ben Heppner and Isabel Bayrakdarian are giving individual recitals on October 8th and December 17th respectively. For ticket information call 613-567-1787.

## N.C.O.S. Board of Directors

Co-President (Brian Law Scholarship)	Bobbi Cain
Co-President (General Administration)	Murray Kitts
Secretary	Jean Saldanha
Membership	Jean Saldanha
Treasurer	Gordon Metcalfe
Publicity	Renate Chartrand
	Ute Davis
Events	Pat Adamo

For information: telephone 830-9827;  
email [kmitts1637@rogers.com](mailto:kmitts1637@rogers.com)

## Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild *Shakespeare at the Opera*

hosted by Murray Kitts

Part 1 November 1 & Part 2 November 29

### *Definitely the Opera*

*Ernani* (Verdi) November 7

*Rusalka* (Dvořák) January 10, 2006

*Falstaff* (Verdi) February 7

*Roberta Devereux* (Donizetti) May 2

### *Opera Insights*

*Falstaff* with Joanne & Tyrone Patterson  
March 28, 2006

### *The Ring Cycle*

hosted by Wilkie Kushner

*Das Rheingold* February 27, 2006

*Die Walküre* February 28

*Siegfried* March 4 (3:00 p.m.)

*Die Gotterdammerung* March 5 (3:00 p.m.)

**All of the above take place at the National Library at 7:00 p.m. (except the last two operas of the Ring Cycle).**

# Opera Lyra Surpasses All Previous Performances

by Murray Kitts

What a wonderful experience it is to attend a truly excellent performance of an opera!

Of course the opera itself must be a good one and *Roméo et Juliette* is surely one of the best.

Shakespeare's original play has been used by two dozen other composers but none so successfully as in this version. Gounod's librettists, Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, had already worked with Gounod on *Faust*. They follow Shakespeare's plot fairly closely but more importantly incorporated many key phrases and metaphors from the original in their text.

Gounod provided a score that might be expected from such a major melodist; but he did much more. He surpassed what he had done in the past in orchestration in the Queen Mab aria and in writing for the dramatic scene where the tragic fights occur. But it is in the four duets for the two main characters, unparalleled in number in previous operas, that Gounod exhibits his mastery of characterization as reflected in his unforgettable music.

So much then depends on the principals – can they sing (they each have a very demanding aria and sing almost throughout the length of the opera)? – can they act? – do they look the part? Fortunately in Laura Whalen and William Joyner Opera Lyra found an ideal Juliette and Roméo.

But what of all the other main characters (especially ones with solos) and there are quite a number. Fortunately Gaetan Laperriere as Capulet, Kurt Lehmann as Tybalt, Elizabeth Turnbull as Gertrude were all in good voice. I especially liked Michelle Sutton as Stephano and Aaron St. Clair Nicholson was a mercurial Mercutio. Valerian Ruminski as Friar Laurent was most impressive with his powerful bass voice. All other smaller roles were filled most adequately.

How was all this put together? Fortunately the very experienced Stage Director John Hoomes knows how to present such a complicated production on stage and the cast responded well to his direction. He was ably assisted by Jean-Pierre Fournier as Fight Director. This was not only the first time that Opera Lyra has had a fight director for an opera but we were told at the Opera Insights session that this was the first time that fights with both rapiers and daggers have been pre-

sented on the opera stage in Canada. What a thrilling spectacle was presented! The lighting by Stephen Ross was also outstanding – time and again the drama was enhanced by his use of lighting effects.

The sets from L'Opéra de Montréal were excellent. The garden setting for the famous Balcony Scene was simply breathtaking. And, when it was revealed to some of the loveliest romantic music ever written, it was a magical moment. The sets for all the other scenes were basically the same arches but presented in different ways, very practical and very effective. Costumes from Malabar's, especially for the principals, were very good. However, the representation on the scrim curtain of Michelangelo's Creation of Man seems to me to be unconnected to this opera.

The orchestra and chorus under Tyrone Paterson seemed to rise to a new level of perfection to match the other participants.

What a splendid entertainment it was and what a loss to those opera lovers who missed it. Part of the reason for so many empty seats has to be the result of the CBC strike and the resulting lack of the usual publicity. All of the Ottawa arts community will suffer unless this situation is resolved. Another reason may be the prejudice against French opera in this community, which is quite regrettable. Fortunately there seems to be a revival of French opera at the Met with last year's very successful *Faust* and this year's new production of *Roméo et Juliette*. Opera Lyra should be commended for bringing us masterworks from the French repertoire.

For those of you with an internet hookup there is a most interesting website mounted and operated by the great-grandson of Charles Gounod giving quite comprehensive information about the composer and his works. Try it at <http://www.charles-gounod.com/vi/> or go to Google, search for Charles Gounod and look at the first entry called Charles Gounod Website.

For anyone interested in a recorded performance of this opera I can recommend EMI CD 1732058 with Alfredo Kraus and Catherine Malfitano as the lovers, José Van Dam as the Friar and Gino Quilico as Mercutio. There is a fine DVD from Covent Garden with Roberto Alagna, Leontina Vaduva and Robert Lloyd; excerpts from this will be featured along with other opera selections at the Shakespeare at the Opera presentations Nov. 1 and 29 at the National Library at 7 P.M. See you there.

# French Polish at Glimmerglass by Shelagh Williams

Our annual August pilgrimage to Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown was rewarded with a bill of mainly French operas on The Art of Love — and the French should know! — what more could one ask?

We started out with “Love Betrayed”, a new critical Ricordi edition of the rarely heard 1839 French revision, *Lucie de Lammermoor*, of Donizetti’s popular bel canto masterpiece. The second time around it is nastier, more focussed, and much more dramatic! For a start, Alisa, Lucie’s companion, is cut, leaving Lucie alone against the male movers and shakers. Then Normanno, her brother’s captain, morphs into the more important, double-dealing, bloodthirsty Gilbert. Arthur, the doomed bridegroom, shows up earlier, in the first act, to seem more real and more of a threat. Finally, Raimondo or Raymond, the priest, has a much smaller role, only showing up at the wedding just in time to sing in the famous sextet! Physically, the production was generally well done, but gave no indication of the Scottish setting. The serviceable unit set by Associate Artistic Director John Conklin was abstract, with underfoot sliding slabs for varying elevations and black movable panels with white floating clouds on them, plus a few smaller white panels to designate a chamber — castle or burial — or to show a striking splash of blood. Catherine Zuber had the men in black U.K. Civil War garb, and the chorus women in garish blood-red gowns, but her costume for Lucie in her Mad Scene was brilliant: a spotless white night-gown, with the necessary red supplied by an armful of red rose petals to be strewn during the scene! Director Lillian Groag gave us some exciting scenes: the opening with the men brandishing crossbows while leaping about and the wedding scene where the priest grabbed a sword to hold combatants dramatically at bay. Unfortunately she started off distractingly with the gratuitous pursuit and death of a female deer during the overture, and later gave the female chorus antlers during the wedding dancing — supposedly to symbolize their vulnerability to men! Fortunately, musically all was well. Debuting conductor Beatrice Jona Affron is more used to conducting dance at the Pennsylvania Ballet, but given the chorus and soloists supplied, could hardly go wrong. In the minor male roles, tenors Bryon Grohman and Chad Johnson and bass-baritone Craig Phillips as Gilbert, Arthur and Raymond respectively, all brought both vocal and acting skill convincingly to bear. Baritone Earle Patriarco was full-voiced as Lucie’s desperate brother Henri, less evil than driven in this version. Tenor Raul Hernandez, who has sung with Opera Lyra, gave us a vocally and dramatically assured performance as Lucie’s lover Edgard, with lovely high notes, and beautiful sad final arias. But it was soprano Sarah Coburn, last year’s Patience, who stole the show as Lucie, with her blond beauty and her high range and spot-on vocal gymnastics. Musically there are a couple of changes in Lucie’s part, because the first soprano to sing Lucie substituted an aria she knew already in the first act and was responsible for the Mad Scene flute cadenza we love. Sarah Coburn gave us a full length

Mad Scene, gliding in quietly on a ramp to launch into the stunning pyrotechnics through C up to F, all done effortlessly and in character — what a performance! The lukewarm COC production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* earlier this year suffered greatly by comparison with this one!

Our next event was a double bill of French one-act operas, of vastly different periods with different casts, settings, conductors and directors — in a word, a perfect contrast! “Love Triumphant” was Massenet’s *Le Portrait de Manon*, the 1894 sequel he wrote to cash in on his popular *Manon*, recycling much of the original score! In the story, the middle-aged Chevalier des Grieux, still in love with the tragically dead Manon, refuses his nephew Jean, Vicomte de Morcerf, permission to marry Aurore, an “unsuitable” country girl — as Manon had been. However, the discovery of a forgotten portrait of Manon, and the subsequent conspiracy of the young lovers and Tiberge, Aurore’s guardian and Des Grieux’s old friend, result in Aurore being dressed to resemble the portrait. This causes Des Grieux to remember his first sighting of Manon and, when Tiberge explains Aurore is actually Manon’s niece, Des Grieux relents and allows the match. David Newell’s set of a room surrounded by broken images of Manon, Miranda Hoffman’s costumes, and Robert Wierzel’s lighting combined to effectively evoke the period. Excellent portrayals by Canadians baritone Theodore Baerg and tenor Colin Ainsworth as Des Grieux and Jean respectively, and soprano Kristine Winkler and tenor Bruce Reed as Aurore and Tiberge, under director David Lefkovich (also fight director for Lucie) and conductor Andrew Bisantz made for a pleasant, heart-warming production. The more unusual opera of the afternoon, “Love Denied”, was Poulenc’s 1959 opera, *La Voix Humaine*, based on the one-woman play of Jean Cocteau (he seems to have sprung up everywhere this past year!). Elle (“She”) is having a tortured telephone conversation with her ex-lover, punctuated by interruptions, crossed lines and wrong numbers. The same designers as above transported us to Paris of the 1950s, with Elle’s smart apartment and fashionable crinolined dresses. The work is a tour de force for a good singer-actress, and soprano Amy Burton was more than up to the challenge, presenting a striking and well-sung portrayal of the unstable, jealous, overwrought heroine. Music Director Stewart Robertson kept the orchestra and singer together throughout the difficult piece. Director Sam Helderich did not have Elle actually hold the telephone to talk, leaving her free to move about her apartment, from bedroom to kitchen to bathroom, and then to pack and change for going outside and finally hang up the phone sitting on the coffee table. Whether she intended to kill herself or start a new life was

left unclear. Unfortunately, in neither of the two opera performances did one feel really drawn to any of the characters or at all concerned with how things ultimately turned out!

For “Love Tested” we had an excellent production of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, a co-production with England’s Opera North, for which Director Tim Albery’s unusual concept and designer Tobias Hoheisel’s clever set and costumes were originally created. The unit set consisted of a magnificent mahogany antique camera almost completely filling the stage, and before the overture, Don Alfonso, clad in a black lab coat and carrying a ladder, entered and climbed up to polish the lens. The first scene, with the three men setting up the wager to test the faithfulness of the two sisters, was sung at the extreme front of the stage. Only then did the front of the camera slide open to reveal its contents: a small, black drawing room furnished only with white chairs and a table. The camera gradually widened to reveal a pair of double doors on the back wall, for exits and entrances. The idea seemed to be to illustrate the opera as an eighteenth century scientific experiment on human emotions, with Don Alfonso the investigator, setting up and controlling the conditions of the events as they unfolded. The period costumes were appropriate and the ladies’ were cleverly adaptable, consisting of grey basic gowns to which were added black fichus when they were mourning the loss of their original lovers, but which became more décolleté and even sleeveless as they flirted with their “new” suitors. Finally their skirts hooked up to reveal colourful underskirts, with matching stoles, for the more serious courting. Conductor Stewart Robertson did a magnificent job of briskly controlling his excellent orchestra, the unseen chorus, and the solo singers, individually superb, yet forming tight-knit ensembles when called for. In one of his signature Mozart roles, baritone Sanford Sylvan played and sang the crafty Don Alfonso skilfully, always lurking about, keeping an eye on his experiment and stirring the pot as necessary. Of the two sisters being tested, French soprano Anne-Sophie Duprels debuted as the more serious Fiordiligi, easily accomplishing the difficult octave leaps in her arias, and mezzo-soprano Sandra Piques Eddy portrayed the more impulsive Dorabella. Canadian tenor John Tessier (who played Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* recently with Opera Lyra) was a good-looking, thoughtful Ferrando, contrasting with Danish baritone Palle Knudsen as the dashing but dim Guglielmo. However, the experiment would not have come off without the clever young servant, Despina, aiding Don Alfonso, and soprano Camille Zamora was brilliant, pulling off both the doctor and notary disguises! In this production the two couples at first had seemed mismatched, and at the end, when they returned to their original partners after their fling, at least Dorabella and Guglielmo seemed unsure that they wanted to! Don Alfonso was right to be cynical! In sum, the concept worked,

giving us a focussed view of two couples as they became older and wiser in the ways of love.

Finally, there was “Love Obsessed”: Britten’s last 1973 opera, *Death in Venice*, with libretto by Myfanwy Piper based on Thomas Mann’s novella. Britten was very ill when he wrote the opera, putting off a heart operation until after it was finished, and then suffering a slight stroke during the operation, which permanently affected his right hand and thus his conducting ability; he died 3 years later, in 1976. He was, therefore, in the mood to write this haunting, basically sad tale of obsession and death: successful but blocked author Gustav von Aschenbach travels to Venice, where he sees a young Polish teenager, Tadzio, whose beauty fascinates him from afar. Upset by his loss of self-discipline and warned of a cholera epidemic he tries to leave, but a luggage mix-up makes him stay and in the end he falls dead alone on the beach while a no longer athletically superior Tadzio walks into the water to his own death — quite a sobering end. Glimmerglass provided a stunning production of this rarely-done piece. Donald Eastman’s lovely unit set of a large marble room with rear shutters opening to the lagoon, a huge chandelier, and a long mirror was well lit, with beautiful water effects by Robert Wierzel, and Carrie Robbins had the considerable cast suitably clad for the time and place. The orchestra consisted of a large percussion section (our vocal score listed 5 players!), with few strings and just double winds, to produce, under conductor Stewart Robertson, a colourful and interesting atmospheric soundscape. The opera consists mainly of Aschenbach’s musings, and in this pivotal role tenor William Burden was superb in voice, diction and characterization (though possibly a bit young-looking). The other major singing role is that of the seven “Messengers of Death” — from Traveller through Old Fop to Hotel Manager — which were all sung marvellously by bass-baritone David Pittsinger, who changed chameleon-like for each character. John Gaston, our one countertenor of the season, in shining white suit as Apollo had a voice clear as a bell. Most of the other roles were well-sung by members of the Young Artists Programme. Tazewell Thompson’s direction kept the crowds moving well, if incessantly, but seemed a bit weak when dealing with the youngsters. The key mute role of Tadzio is usually played by a good looking young dancer, but Scott Chiba mainly strode elegantly about, leaving the other, mostly younger, boys to lark about rather ineffectively, not really following the libretto. Nevertheless, this was a very well done production of this masterpiece, with a beautifully hushed musical ending, but not what one would call enjoyable!

Next year, July 7th-August 29th, 2006, Glimmerglass Opera’s programme includes Cavalli’s *Giasone*, with countertenor Michael Maniaci; the world premiere (finally!) of the newly-commissioned *Boule de Suif* or *The Good Whore*, by Stephen Hartke, after a de Maupassant short story; Janacek’s *Jenufa*; and an almost-all-Canadian *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, with Aaron St. Clair Nicholson (singing presently in OLO’s *Roméo et Juliette*), John Tessier, and Theodore Baerg!

# Everything Old is New Again: Opera Rarities in London

by Shelagh Williams

In early June we journeyed to London to enjoy the newly renovated opera houses of the Royal Opera Covent Garden and the English National Opera (ENO). The institution of the car congestion fee and completion of the road works around Trafalgar Square, making it almost a pedestrian zone, have combined to make the Theatre/Opera District a much more pleasant walking area.

The London Coliseum, home of the ENO, has undergone its first ever refurbishment, reopening in its centenary year with cleaned up auditorium decoration and increased audience facilities. Our first evening in London we saw Handel's *Jephtha*, a co-production of the ENO and the Welsh National Opera, where it debuted May 17, 2002. In a libretto reminiscent of Mozart's *Idomeneo*, Israelite leader Jephtha vows, if he is victorious in battle, to sacrifice the first living thing he sees on his return — tho' why anyone should sacrifice someone else for his own good fortune has always been beyond me. Of course Murphy's Law applies and the victim must be Jephtha's only child, his daughter Iphis. After much weeping and wailing, an angel intervenes in the nick of time to avert the sacrifice and sentence Iphis to a life of chastity dedicated to God — so Jephtha will still have no heirs! This 1752 patriotic oratorio of self sacrifice was effectively updated by Director Katie Mitchell from Old Testament Israel to World War II to give it more immediacy. The relationships between the various characters were underlined and made more poignant by the surprising and effective staging. Designer Vicki Mortimer gave us 1940s costumes and a marvellous set, a war-damaged hotel with a magnificent curving staircase which was readily adaptable and interestingly used, and well lit by Chris Davey and Paule Constable. Baroque specialist Nicholas Kraemer, conducting from the harpsichord, drew excellent musical performances from the energetic orchestra, sprightly chorus, and the principals. In the title role, tenor Mark Padmore well portrayed the distressed conqueror and mezzo-soprano Susan Bickley, as his wife Storge, was the embodiment of motherly love. She made it perfectly clear at the end, as she left with packed bags, that Jephtha's vow would not soon be forgiven! Handsome countertenor Robin Blaze played Iphis's betrothed, Hamor, and blended beautifully with her voice in their duets, both in happy times and especially the last sad leave-taking. A nice touch was having the Angel, soprano Sarah-Jane Davies, on stage throughout the action, first ensuring the "correct" wording of Jephtha's vow, then monitor-

ing proceedings and amazingly stopping the execution and explaining the real meaning of Jephtha's vow. As daughter Iphis, soprano Sarah Tynan was a joy to watch and listen to, during both the first happier half of the opera and the emotional ending. Unfortunately, in her ENO debut, director Katie Mitchell introduced a lot of unnecessary and distracting stage business when performers and audience should have been concentrating on the singing. Nevertheless, this was a beautifully sung, moving, enjoyable production, and to ensure understanding, since the ENO does not supply surtitles for its always-English productions, the complete libretto was thoughtfully included in the programme!

The Royal Opera House Covent Garden has also been rebuilt and one of the happy results is the small, adaptable Linbury Studio Theatre. This was used for an extraordinary production by the Vilar Young Artists Programme, for which it was configured with the audience seated on both sides of the set. The work was the UK premiere of Philip Glass's 1993 opera *Orpheus*, based on Jean Cocteau's 1950s film adaptation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, with the famous poet Orpheus hated by his young rivals, a situation with which both Cocteau and Glass could sympathize. Director Francisco Negrin, who directed the European premiere in Copenhagen, updated the production to the present day, without losing any of the story's mystique. The setting, devised by Es Devlin and lit by Bruno Poet, was quite spectacular: a narrow central mirrored walkway which raised and lowered to reveal the underworld, reached from doors at each end, with the chamber orchestra hidden to one side. Glass's music was bearable, tho' slow-moving, and well-produced with an excellent cast of singers under young conductor Rory Macdonald. Outstanding was Korean soprano Ha Young Lee, in both voice and presence, as the mysterious Princess, Death personified. New Zealand baritone Jared Holt deftly portrayed Orpheus, with whom the Princess is in love, with American soprano Katie Van Kooten as Eurydice, and tenor Andrew Kennedy as Heurtebise, the Princess' servant in love with Eurydice, completing the love quadrangle. Although obsessed with death, the opera actually has a happy ending, with the Princess and Heurtebise sacrificing themselves in the underworld so that Orpheus

and Eurydice can awaken, as from a long sleep, unaware of what has happened!

For something completely different: a rollicking farce magnificently produced on Covent Garden's renovated main stage: Rossini's comic opera *Il Turco in Italia*, his 13th opera, written at age 22! Although it had premiered in 1814, (2 years before *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), this was Covent Garden's first production of the opera — and they pulled out all the stops! To my delight, it headlined two favourites, the marvellous Cecilia Bartoli, in only her second opera at Covent Garden, as Fiorilla, and the ever enjoyable Thomas Allen (remember him in Eugene Onegin at the NAC?) as the poet Prosdocimo. The plot is, of course, quite complicated: Fiorilla, married to the older Don Geronio, is tired of both him and her lover, Don Narciso, and is much taken with the newly-landed Turkish prince Selim, and he with her. However, Selim's lost true love, the gypsy Zaida, also appears! Prosdocimo, looking for a plot for his next play, monitors the goings-on gleefully and even, à la Don Alfonso of *Così fan tutte*, manipulates the proceedings. After a confusing masked ball where the two ladies are dressed alike and the three men are all arrayed as Turks, everything is sorted out for a happy ending, with Fiorilla and Geronio reunited and Selim sailing home with Zaida. Directors Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier set the opera in 1960s Italy, with Christian Fenouillat's clever multi-coloured sliding-panelled set sporting Italian cars, a Vespa scooter, and even a bed-

room with a bed which slickly slid out at the appropriate minute! Thanks to this French triumvirate, it was altogether a hoot, with continuous sight gags, and the action never flagging. Cecilia Bartoli was, as expected, marvellous as flirtatious Fiorilla, with costume designer Agostino Cavalca dressing her quite stunningly. The three baritones were also excellent: Italian Ildebrando D'Arcangelo as handsome, suave Selim; fellow Italian Alessandro Corbelli hilarious in the buffo role as Geronio; and Thomas Allen incomparable as the interfering Prosdocimo. Rounding out the cast were tenor Barry Banks as an Elvis-style Narciso and Heather Shipp as Zaida, all under the watchful eye of Hungarian conductor Adam Fischer, who kept proceedings flowing zestfully. It was our last opera performance of the trip, but definitely not the least!

With the astronomical price of opera tickets in London, it can be daunting to arrive at the ticket wicket to find that the only seats available are at the maximum price. Fortunately, Covent Garden keeps back 67 tickets (3 % of house) in two not-maximum-priced areas, and these go on sale at 10 a.m. on the day, one ticket per person. The trick is to get up and join the queue early enough that there are fewer than 66 people ahead of one! (And don't worry if you get on the sides: in the new Covent Garden there are titles on the chair backs if the regular surtitles are blocked!) English National Opera also sometimes sells senior standby tickets at reduced prices if one checks at the box office the day of the opera!

## Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

Because of labour difficulties at the CBC the Saturday Afternoon at the Opera listings are not available. However, we do have the schedule for the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts for next December and January.

***Rigoletto*** by Verdi December 17, 2005 / 1:30 p.m.

***An American Tragedy*** by Picker December 24, 2005 / 1:30 p.m.

***Wozzeck*** by Berg December 31, 2005 / 1:00 p.m.

***L'Elisir d'amore*** by Donizetti January 7, 2006 / 1:30 p.m.

***A Mozart Celebration (Archive)*** January 14, 2006 / 1:30 p.m.

***Die Zauberflöte*** by Mozart January 21, 2006 / 1:30 p.m.

***Così fan tutte*** by Mozart January 28, 2006 / 1:30 p.m.

# Opera Within Reach

## Ottawa

### Opera Lyra Ottawa

#### A Resounding Chorus!

November 19 (8 PM) & 20 (3 PM)  
at Dominion Chalmers United Church  
with the Opera Lyra Ottawa Chorus

#### Black and White Opera Soirée

February 18, 2006

#### *Falstaff* by Verdi

April 8, 10, 12 & 15

All performances (except A Resounding Chorus!) are in Southam Hall at the National Arts Centre  
Information: 233-9200 x221 [www.operalyra.ca](http://www.operalyra.ca)

## Orpheus Society

#### *Meet Me in St. Louis*

November 18-26

All performances are in CentrepoinTE Theatre  
Information: 580-2700 <http://www.orpheus-theatre.on.ca/>

## Montréal

### L'Opéra de Montréal

#### *Norma* by Bellini

September 17, 21, 24, 26 & 29 October 1

#### *L'Etoile* by Chabrier

November 5, 9, 12, 14 & 17

#### Le Gala December 4

All performances are in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts  
Information: 1-877-385-2222 [www.operademontreal.com](http://www.operademontreal.com)

## Toronto

### Canadian Opera Company

#### *Macbeth* by Verdi

November 30 Dec 2, 3 & 5

#### *Carmen* by Bizet

January 23, 28 & 30 Feb 3, 6 & 8 2006

#### *Rodelinda* by Handel

January 27 & 30 Feb 2, 5, 8 & 11 2006

All performances are at the Hummingbird Centre

Information: 1-800-250-4653 [www.coc.ca](http://www.coc.ca)

## Royal Opera

#### *Tosca* by Puccini October

#### *Rigoletto* by Verdi February & March 2006

#### *Turandot* by Puccini April & May

Royal Opera performances are held in Hammerson Hall at the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga.

For exact time & date please check their Web site

Information: 1-866-322-0456

<http://www.royaloperacanada.com>

## Opera in Concert

#### *I Masnadieri* by Verdi October 23

#### *Samson et Dalila* by Saint-Saëns December 4

#### *La Griselda* by Vivaldi January 29, 2006

#### *Mazeppa* by Tchaikovsky March 26

All performances are at the Jane Mallett Theatre

Information: 1-800-708-6754

[www.operainconcert.com](http://www.operainconcert.com)