

Société d' Opéra
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital
Opera Society

Fall 2015

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Automne 2015

SIX FINALISTS HAVE BEEN CHOSEN FOR THE 12th BRIAN LAW COMPETITION

The Brian Law Opera Competition is open to young singers who are native to, reside in or have studied voice in the National Capital Region. A panel of preliminary jurors assessed applications from eligible singers and six competitors were selected for the final competition. These six finalists are (in alphabetical order):

Tonatiuh Abrego, tenor

Joel Allison, bass-baritone

Ania Hejnar, soprano

Ryan Hofman, baritone

Eliza Johnson, soprano

Jennifer Mizzi, soprano

See the biographies of our finalists on pages 2 & 3 of this newsletter.

On the night of the competition each singer will perform three opera arias, one of which must be preceded by a recitative. Each competitor will be accompanied by a pianist. Our MC for the evening will be former CBC host Rob Clipperton. The final panel of judges is to be announced. Please watch our website www.ncos.ca.

The winner will receive a prize of \$5,000. The runner-up will receive \$3,000. The third prize of \$1,000 will be donated and presented by Cavaliere Pasqualina Adamo, a member of our Board of Directors. The audience will be invited to meet the competitors and judges at a reception following the event.

There is no reserved seating. Tickets will be available at the door, open at 6:00 p.m., at a cost of \$25 (\$10 for students) or in advance by telephone 613. 830.9827. Please consider a donation to our worthy cause. Every dollar donated supports a young singer. Please join us and bring a friend or two. There will be door prizes!

Saturday, 10th October, 7pm
Southminster United Church,
15 Aylmer Avenue (at Bank), Ottawa.



Tonatiuh Abrego

A native of Ottawa, award-winning tenor Tonatiuh Abrego is thrilled to be competing in the Brian Law Competition. Tonatiuh's previous credits include: Lionel in SOLT's production of *Martha*, the creation of the leading role Orisis in Voicebox: Opera in Concert's workshop of the brand new opera *Isis and Osiris*; Male Chorus and the Witch in Calgary Opera's productions of *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Hansel and Gretel* respectively; Nemorino in Opera NUOVA's *L'Elisir d'amore*; Don Ottavio and Mr. Craven in Banff Centre for the Arts' productions of *Don Giovanni* and *The Secret Garden*; Count Almaviva in Capital City Opera's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. His upcoming performance will be with Jeunesses Musicales du Canada where he will sing Romeo in *Romeo and Juliette* in their fall and spring tours. After having completed his Masters degree in Voice performance at McGill University under the tutelage of Maestro Stefano Algeri, Tonatiuh graduated from Calgary Opera's Emerging Artist program; he is also a laureate of the Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyriques du Canada. Tonatiuh was a semi-finalist in the prestigious Lotte Lenya Competition and the recipient of the Elizabeth Wirth Opera Scholarship at McGill. Tonatiuh is the winner of the St-Georges Provincial Music Festival in the Maestoso Category, a finalist in the Ottawa Orchestra Concerto competition and a winner of the Ontario Provincial Music Festival for Classical Voice. With an extensive list of concert experience, Tonatiuh has performed as a guest

Tenor soloist with the Calgary Festival Chorus directed by Mel Kirby, the Kanata Choral Society, directed by Gloria Jean-Nagy, and the Ottawa Welsh choir in various pieces including: Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Ariel Ramirez's *Misa Criolla*, Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, and Camille Saint-Saens's *Oratorio de Noel* (2008).

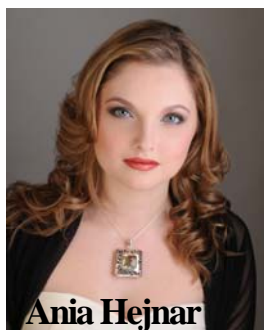


Joel Allison

Photo – Sean Done

Joel Allison's voice has been described as having "crisp tones blessed with a silken smoothness." He recently graduated from the University of Ottawa with a BMus in vocal performance. He is now pursuing a Diploma in Opera Performance at the University of Toronto, under the tutelage of Daniel Taylor and is a core member of the Tafelmusik Baroque Chamber Choir. Previous engagements include: the role of Adam in Haydn's *Creation* with the Peterborough Singers; the premiere of a new set of songs by Andrew Ager in recital at the University of Ottawa; the complete third book of Dowland lute songs; Mozart's *Requiem*; the complete *Songs of Travel* in a solo recital at the NAC Fourth Stage; the role of Aeneas in the University of Ottawa's production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and the title role in *Don Quixote* by George Telemann with Seventeen Voyces. He also performed multiple roles while at the University of Ottawa including Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, Don Alfonso and Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, and premiered the role of Beppe in Andrew Ager's opera *Casanova*. He has performed for the past two seasons with the Talisker Players. Upcoming performances include the role of Mr. Gobineau in *The Medium* and the role of John Shears in *Paul Bunyan* by Benjamin Britten. As a member of the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir upcoming performances include Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and Handel's *Messiah*. An ardent choral singer, Joel has sung in many choirs including Seventeen Voyces, St. Andrew's Church in Ottawa, The Theater of Early Music and Tafelmusik

Baroque Chamber Choir. He is the second bass soloist at St. Paul's Bloor St. in Toronto. Joel is also an alumnus of the Ontario Youth Choir and the Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute.



Ania Hejnar

With critics already hailing her "pristine coloratura" and "outstanding interpretations", soprano Ania Hejnar is enjoying what many consider the inevitable result of her extraordinary voice and talent. She won 1st prize in the Canada Music Competition and was asked to perform with the Orchestre Métropolitain under the baton of Alain Trudel. She also won the 2009 Barry Alexander International Vocal Competition, resulting in a performance debut at Carnegie Hall, as well as a study grant for The Alexander & Buono Festival of Music, and a performance at New York's Kosciuszko Foundation Auditorium. Ms. Hejnar won the 2011 Barry Alexander International Vocal Competition that resulted in an invitation to a Carnegie Hall performance in 2012. She also won the North York Concert Orchestra (NYCO) Mozart Vocal Competition and was invited to perform with NYCO Symphony Orchestra in Toronto in 2012. She returned to Carnegie Hall as a featured guest artist for the Fifth Annual ABC Gala. Ms. Hejnar began her undergraduate work as a Bachelor's of Music candidate at the University of Ottawa, studying under Professor Ingemar Korjus. This collaboration led to invitations to perform in roles such as Susanna

in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Frasquita in Bizet's *Carmen*. Ms. Hejnar has also performed for Prime Minister Stephen Harper and former Governor General Michaëlle Jean, while also participating in Opera Lyra Ottawa's production of Puccini's *Turandot*. Ms. Hejnar has recently been the lead soprano in Ottawa's Opera Lyra Studio, with performances of Mabel from *Pirates of Penzance* and both the Queen of the Night and First Lady in *Die Zauberflöte*. Her light lyric voice has made appearances as soprano soloist in Haydn's *Creation* with the NYCO Symphony Orchestra and Handel's *Messiah* with Maestro Michel Brousseau. She recently performed her premier role as soprano soloist in *Carmina Burana* in Montreal and Ottawa with Maestro Brousseau in May 2015. She is set to perform Queen of the Night from *Die Zauberflöte* in April 2016. Currently coaching with Christiane Riel and Judy Ginsburg, Ms. Hejnar is preparing roles and concert repertoire for upcoming performances that include engagements in Canada and beyond.

**Ryan Hofman**

A new resident of Vancouver, baritone Ryan Hofman is attending the University of British Columbia for a Master's of Music in Opera under the tutelage of J. Patrick Raftery. The 2014-15 season proved to be a busy one for Mr. Hofman: he appeared with the Opera Lyra chorus in their productions of Puccini's *Tosca* and Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Other credits with the company include an opera-concert production of Verdi's *La Traviata*, Puccini's *La Bohème* and *Turandot* and Massenet's *Manon* in 2010. This past season, he also appeared with University of Ottawa Opera Company as Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus* and made his company debut with Pellegrini Opera as Schaunard in *La Bohème*, where he was hailed as "performing with gusto... (Mr. Hofman) sang with a pleasing and strong voice in a limited role which promises well for the future" (National Capital Opera Society,

Summer 2015 Newsletter). In June 2014, Mr. Hofman had the pleasure of appearing in Opera NUOVA's Vocal Arts Festival as Maximilian in Bernstein's *Candide* and Dungbeetle in Isaiah Bell's *Lives of Lesser Things*. A recipient of the 2014 Rising Stars Award from the Ottawa International Chamberfest, his other stage credits include Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, le Dancaïre in *Carmen*, Antonio in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Speaker of the Temple in *Die Zauberflöte* with University of Ottawa Opera productions.

**Eliza Johnson**

Canadian/American Soprano Eliza Johnson has been praised for her fine acting prowess and even lyric tone. Under the mentorship of Maestro Stephen Lord she was Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL)'s first-ever Richard Gaddes Festival Artist (a new category for emerging young artists in Opera Theatre's prestigious Gerdine Young Artists' program) appearing as Berta in *The Barber of Seville* and covering Pulcheria in the American premiere of Handel's *Riccardo Primo*. With OTSL, Eliza appeared as Mrs. Fiorentino in *Street Scene* and Antonia in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* in the 40th Anniversary Center Stage concert. During the 2014 season, Eliza appeared as an Artist in Residence and as a Gerdine Young Artist, making her company debut as Soeur Valentine in *The Dialogues of the Carmelites* and covering Adina in *The Elixir of Love*. She sang the role of Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* under the baton of Maestro Daniel Lipton during the 2015 summer season of Highlands Opera Studio. With Opera Lyra Ottawa's Opera Studio, Eliza appeared as Pamina/Second Lady in *The Magic Flute* and competed as the only soprano finalist in the 2014 COC Centre Stage Competition. In concert, Eliza has been heard with the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra (Beethoven's *Mass in C*), Stratford Symphony Orchestra (Mozart's

Exsultate, Jubilate), Stratford Summer Music Concert Series and Salon 21 with Soundstreams International. Eliza was a member of the COC Chorus during the 2013-14 season. Eliza holds a Bachelor of Music and Masters of Music in Opera from the University of Toronto where she studied with Canadian soprano Mary Morrison and tenor Dr. Darryl Edwards. Roles with the U of T Opera Division include Lucy in *The Telephone*, Despina in *Così fan tutte*, Rob Ford's Mother in *Rob Ford: The Opera*, Adina in *L'elisir d'amore*, Governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, and she appeared in excerpts as Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Marzelline (*Fidelio*), Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*), and Violetta (*La Traviata*). Eliza is an alumna of training programs with Highlands Opera Studio, OTSL, Queen of Puddings Music Theatre, Tapestry New Opera, University of Manitoba Contemporary Opera Lab, St. Andrews by the Sea and the Oratorio Advanced Workshop with the Victoria Conservatory. In 2009, Eliza released her debut album, *Eliza Sings Rodgers and Hart*, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Mr. William Francis. Eliza is a member of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association and the American Guild of Musical Artists.

**Jennifer Mizzi**

Canadian soprano Jennifer Mizzi has been hailed as "beautiful to watch" and "sweet on stage". A complete musician, dedicated to performance, Jennifer has appeared in a wide range of venues from Vancouver's Chan Centre to Luxembourg's Château de Vianden and Toronto's Richard Bradshaw Amphitheater. With a focus on the roles of Mozart Operas, she has performed the roles of Fiordiligi in *Così fan Tutte*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Papagena in *The Magic Flute*, and Mademoiselle Silberklang in *Der Schauspieldirektor*. Other appearances include Elle in Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine*, Sandman in *Hansel and Gretel* by Humperdinck, Gasperina in Haydn's *La Canterina*, Mimi in *La Bohème* and Loretta in *Gianni Schicchi*.

Jennifer pursued musical studies at York University with soprano Stephanie Bogle, later transferring to the University of British Columbia to continue her undergraduate studies with Heather Thomson-Price. She is a graduate of the University of Toronto's Opera Diploma Program and is a grant recipient of the Ontario Arts Council. She is currently working with Canadian Tenor Ermanno Mauro and has participated in workshops including the Canadian Vocal Arts Institute, Vianden Music Festival, and the NAC Young Artist Program. She was awarded a National Residency in Chianti, Italy, where she engaged in artistic exchange and research exploring the art of Bel Canto with Maestro Daniel Ferro and Maestro Bruno Rigacci. In addition to her operatic work, Jennifer is an active chamber music performer with repertoire ranging from Pergolesi to Heitor Villa-Lobo to Willem de Haan.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE AUGUST 28, 2015

Such coincidences! If this newsletter had appeared before the September issue of Opera News I might have claimed that the section title "Tell Tale Heart" was copied from my Tell - tales. I would not want to be credited with the error in the Operapedia section where Matilda is referred to as Gessler's daughter. Even in Schiller's original play her relationship to the arch villain is as a ward. As for the reviews, I am strictly in the group who regard *William Tell* as part of the genre of "grand opera" and take exception to all attempts to present it differently. Opera News can be forgiven for any errors because it published a gorgeous photo of a 2009 Brian Law prize winner, the very lovely Wallis Giunta, plus interview, and named Gerald Finley as one of a select group of great singer-actors of the past few decades. Jon Vickers was also one mentioned. And in the Summer Edition of Opera Canada, pictured with Jon

Vickers, is Ottawa Joan Patenaude whose remarkable career as opera performer and vocal teacher can be easily googled. I met Joan for the first time when we were both teenagers many years ago. Besides the tribute to Jon Vickers you should enjoy an article by Richard Turp on the 2015 Montreal International Music Competition. We are so fortunate to have Richard as a regular juror at the Brian Law Competition. October 10th is the date you must set aside for this year's competition. Having attended the session of the preliminary jurors, I can assure you that all the finalists are exceptional. In the meantime, see you at Opera Lyra's *Barber* with Joshua Hopkins in the title role.

Murray Kitts

Tis the Season

by Vera-Lee Nelson

Off to the market and the array of fresh fruits and vegetables that meets our eyes and assaults our senses at this time of year. Front and centre are the baskets of firm golden peaches. A favourite dessert of my family is Peche Melba. It is easy and scrumptious, and we add some touches of our own.

And of course for opera lovers it pays homage to one of the grand divas of history. Nellie Melba was born Helen Porter Mitchell in Australia in 1838. She began to sing, later than most, after her brief unsuccessful marriage to Charles Armstrong. As a tribute to her native land she adopted the name of Melba after the city in which she grew up. She went on to have an

acclaimed career of 38 years; her farewell performance was at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in 1930. Her career was prolific, and included roles at the Met in New York, in London, Paris and throughout Europe.

Nellie Melba's life is worth reading more about as she was acclaimed for her singing and also won many awards. She was a valued mentor and contributed to the education of young singers. During the First World War she was in Australia and gave great energy to the war effort.

And she left a reward for us. The great chef Auguste Escoffier created the dish of Peche Melba in her honour, for us to enjoy now.

Peché Melba

Find 1 ripe peach in perfect condition. Immerse in boiling water, drain, peel and cut in half. Remove the pit.

In a bowl place a large scoop of high quality vanilla ice cream. Place the peach halves on either side of the ice cream.

Sprinkle plump fresh raspberries over all. Gently spoon a generous amount of Chambord* over all.

Serve.

*Chambord is a raspberry liqueur

Triumphant World Premiere in San Francisco by Lesley Robinson

It was a thrill and a privilege to attend the opening night of the world premiere production of *Two Women (La Ciociara)* by Italian composer Marco Tutino in San Francisco last night. Although this is not the first time an Italian opera has been commissioned and premiered in the US, you have to go back more than a century to find another example: Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* was commissioned by and first performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York where it premiered on 10 December 1910.

Tutino's new work was commissioned by the San Francisco Opera and is a co-production with Teatro Regio di Torino where it will be performed in an

as-yet-to-be-announced upcoming season. There was an atmosphere of electrifying anticipation for last night's opening. My wonderful husband remarked what a rare pleasure it was to see the composer in evidence in the foyer before a performance, since they're usually dead!

What seems most special about this work is that it is quintessentially

Italian. Not only is it set in a turbulent period of Italian history, but the drama and the music follow on in the great tradition of Puccini. This is not a 21st century departure from tradition, it is what naturally comes next. The source material was the 1958 novel by Alberto Moravia,

which was adapted into a groundbreaking film in 1960 starring Sophia Loren (for which she won an Academy Award as best actress). The story contains just about all the essential elements of Italian opera: the tragedy of war, love, the mother-daughter relationship, violence and death. All that was missing was a villain, so Tutino developed the character of Giovanni into a vicious, self-serving pragmatist, intent on bending circumstances to his own advantage. The vile Giovanni could very well be the direct descendant of Scarpia!

The leading role of Cesira was created specifically for Italian soprano Anna Caterina Antonacci and it fits her like a

glove. She exudes feminine sensuality both in her voice and her acting. She is the perfect loving and fiercely protective woman whose circumstances deny her the power to defend those whom she loves. Young American soprano Sarah Shafer sings the role of Cesira's teenage daughter, Rosetta, who loses her innocence in unimaginably painful and tragic circumstances. In the early scenes Rosetta sings in the lower part of her range, but as the drama unfolds her voice soars to a higher register than that of her mother.

The singing and acting came together perfectly to convey the atmosphere of this intense musical drama

The evil Giovanni is portrayed with devilish gusto by Baritone Mark Delevan who greatly relished the villain's boos he received at the curtain call. The tenor part of the intellectual and gentle Michele was sung by American Dimitri Pittas, seen last season at the COC in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* and performing in his San Francisco Opera debut role. The cast was well chosen and capably directed by Francesca Zambello. The singing and acting came together perfectly to convey the atmosphere of this intense musical drama,

alongside the crisp San Francisco Opera Orchestra under the masterful direction of Nicola Luisotti who was instrumental in the commission of this piece.

The set effectively evokes the setting of the war-torn Italy of 1943-44 with the use of projection for a backdrop. Before the opening

and during the intermission newsreel footage and stills of the period are projected, enhancing the reality of the setting and also evoking the atmosphere of the 1960 black and white film which is so well known to all Italians. In the opening scene an explosion sends shelves and their contents tumbling to the floor in exactly the way it happens in the opening scene of the film. In the scenes that follow, the beautiful countryside provides the projected backdrop, juxtaposed with the crumbling, war-torn reality that the action portrays.

The premiere of *Two Women* was a unique experience and ranks highly on my personal list of special operatic moments.



photo by Cory Weaver

Rosetta

Cesira

Four Marriages, No Funeral

by Lesley Robinson

The 2014-2015 opera season has been a busy one for the Robinsons, notably including four different productions of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Back in December 2014 we saw the Met's new production. In March, LA Opera's production opened on the same night as Opera Lyra's, which we saw in Ottawa the following week. San Francisco Opera's season runs into the summer, so their production was last on our calendar in June.

The Singers: We were fortunate to see the Met's *Nozze* with a different cast from that which performed for the HD broadcast. We saw a magnificent cast, headed by Erwin Schrott as an energetic Figaro, Danielle De Niese as an effervescent Susanna and Mariusz Kwiecen as a debonnaire, lecherous and very funny Count Almaviva. (The stage was set for an indecorous romp when a topless floozy ran across the stage, scampering away from the lascivious Count during the overture.) In LA the cast was appropriately youthful: Italian Roberto Tagliavini was Figaro, with the lovely South African soprano Pretty Yende as Susanna and native Californian Ryan McKinny as Count Almaviva. In Ottawa we were treated to another fine young cast led by John Brancy as Figaro with Sasha Djihanian as Susanna and featuring our own Wallis Giunta as Cherubino in a delightful homecoming. Talking of our "own", Philippe Sly was glorious, confident and commanding in his role debut as Figaro in San Francisco. The chemistry amongst the principals was splendid, with the charismatic Luca Pisaroni as the Count, the charming Nadine Sierra as the countess and the delightful Lisette Oropesa as Susanna. Kate Lindsey was an adorable Cherubino.

The Orchestras: The splendid Met orchestra never fails to thrill. On this occasion it was conducted with great aplomb by Edo de Waart. We usually choose to sit up in the gods only for performances in which we expect the acting to be rather wooden and we would rather not see the protagonists up close. In the case of the LA production, our late decision to attend meant that the seats we might have preferred were not available and we found ourselves seated in the highest level of the auditorium. This was a very different experience from sitting close to the brass or the percussion sections, or being close enough to hear the conductor breathing. The sound of the LA Opera orchestra, directed by James Conlon, was magnificent from our high vantage point, which compensated somewhat for the intense heat at that altitude. Despite its proximity to Hollywood, LA Opera is by no means a Mickey Mouse operation. With Placido Domingo as General Director (as well as singer and conductor) and James Conlon as Music Director, the company is establishing itself a fine reputation. Incidentally Mr. Conlon's pre-opera chats are sometimes illuminating, usually quite personal and always charming, rising to the considerable challenge of speaking to a broad level of

knowledge and familiarity with the works. In Ottawa, the NAC Orchestra was directed by Kevin Mallon, who made his mark during his stint as Interim Artistic Director. The San Francisco Opera Orchestra was under the able direction of Principal Guest Conductor, Patrick Summers.

The Settings and the Sets: Two distinct conflicts are explored in *Le Nozze di Figaro*: the clash of the classes (with the servants thoroughly outwitting their masters) and the battle of the sexes. The first was particularly topical when the play and indeed the opera were written, coming as they did in the years preceding the French Revolution. In fact the play was banned for several years in Louis XVI's France, the subject matter being far too sensitive for aristocratic audiences.

The Met, LA and Opera Lyra all used twentieth century settings for their *Marriages*. The shift in time takes the edge somewhat off the clash of the classes and shifts the focus more towards the perennial battle of the sexes. European aristocrats (in those places which had not succumbed to revolution) still had their servants in the first half of the twentieth century, so the setting continues to make sense, but this was a time of social change. Opera Lyra's setting had a feel of *Downton Abbey* about it, in which there was still a lingering, somewhat conservative loyalty of the servants to their masters, whilst at the same time the recognition that it was the end of an era - just as it was in pre-revolutionary France.

This opera, based on a French play, composed by an Austrian with an Italian libretto, is set in Spain. The Met's set was the only one of the three to acknowledge this with anything noticeably Spanish. The decor of the revolving set had a distinctly Moorish-influenced, Andalusian feel about it. During the overture the set turned to reveal a multitude of rooms with much activity going on and giving the feeling of a very large and busy household. LA's set was far less imaginative or memorable and San Francisco was the only one of the four to present *Nozze* in its traditional eighteenth century setting. Perhaps it was the age of the set and costumes (this production is a revival from several years ago), but there was a dusty feel in the colours and decor which evoked the sleepy heat of Spain, and Figaro's successive costume changes had an increasingly flamboyant air of the toreador, with his elaborately bobbed epaulets.

Seasoned opera goers might groan when they see the same old favourites on the programme yet again, whether at the major opera houses of the world or at smaller companies such as Opera Lyra Ottawa, but there's a reason that they have become old favourites, and when they are done well, they give us something new each time. I don't mind how many *Marriage* invitations I receive.

Open Curtain Intermission at San Francisco by Lesley Robinson

What might otherwise have been somewhat of a disappointment was saved in part by a delightful feature of the second intermission of a performance of San Francisco Opera's (SFO's) production of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (billed as *The Trojans*): the Open Curtain Intermission. The source of disappointment was the unexpected absence that night of Bryan Hymel who was supposed to be singing the part of Aeneas. Sometimes such happenstance may give rise to a big break for an up-and-coming star. Sadly this was not to be the case for stand-in Corey Bix, who seemed a little under-prepared for his big moment, and American Tenor René Barbera received a much warmer ovation for the much smaller role of Iopas.

SFO's Open Curtain Intermissions are an opportunity to see the inner workings of the scene changes. At a limited number of select performances, the curtain remains open during intermission and San Francisco Opera staff narrate the live changeover. Audience members are invited not only to remain in their seats during the intermission, but to do something which is usually totally prohibited in the opera house - turn on their cell phones, take photos and video and share what they're seeing live on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The presenters also welcome questions live on Twitter using the hashtag #OpenCurtain. So the scene change becomes not only a fascinating



photo by Lesley Robinson

experience for those present, but a live social media event.

This was the David McVicar production (available on DVD) presented in co-production with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Teatro alla Scala, Milan, and Wiener Staatsoper, Vienna. SFO's audiences were fortunate to partake of such a treat. The spectacular set, in every way larger than life, complete with its magnificent Trojan horse, its unusual architectural perspectives and dazzling pyrotechnics, was created and built in the UK for Covent Garden and was transported and painstakingly set up in San Francisco. The total weight of the set is a staggering 32 tons. The horse, or rather just the horse's head which gives the impression of a scale that just cannot fit on a stage, is 23 feet tall. The casting of the pieces for the horse took a whole year to accomplish. It is constructed out of steel and pressed fibreglass pieces representing the debris of battle and evoking the industrial revolution to match the Dickensian era costumes. The soldiers' costumes are all military uniforms of the various countries that

fought in the Crimean War and the Troy of the set is designed to give the impression of the Battle of Sebastopol in 1855. The horse is out of necessity flame resistant and members of the Fire Department are on hand at every performance, just in case.

I am glad to have remained in my seat during this fascinating event. Open Curtain Intermissions were also a feature of the other productions of SFO's summer programme, but the set of *The Trojans* is absolutely made for such a presentation.

A Delightful Purcell and Haydn Double Bill by Shelagh Williams

A revived Ottawa Pocket Opera (OPO) presented a very well done double bill of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Haydn's *La Canterina* (in English). Appropriate scenery and excellent costumes showcased good voices and staging, all under the direction of David MacAdam, with Joanne Moorcroft at the piano. In the large cast of 12, Julia Brown as Queen Dido, with a lovely *When I am laid in earth* lament, Mark Wilkinson as Aeneas, and Alison O'Brien as Handmaid Belinda, anchored the Purcell work ably, while the singers of the smaller roles also doubled smoothly as chorus. The Haydn opera is his

"earliest surviving stage work" (programme notes) and a lively, tuneful and comic confection, even more welcome for being rarely if ever encountered! The cast of four was exemplary: Maria Gubbels as Gasparina, the conniving diva of the title; Sonya Sweeney as her manipulative sister Apollonia; Caitlin Tabbenor in the trouser role of Don Ettore, a young suitor of the diva; and David MacAdam himself, suitably bewigged, as Don Pelagio, the diva's music teacher and sugar daddy. This comic opera was a good balance for the sadness of the Purcell, and sent us home happy!

Philippe Sly Leaves a Major Impact on San Francisco by Ute Davis

In his first cooperation with the defrocked priest Lorenzo da Ponte, Mozart found himself writing about the sexual escapades of the nobility. How did he “get away with it” with the censors and the public in 1786 and still with the public in 2015? I believe the answer is charm.

This traditional production by Robin Guarino for San Francisco Opera was superbly conducted by Patrick Summers and gave full expression to the enormous charm of Mozart’s music. Nothing saccharinic about this; indeed Nadine Sierra’s “Porgi amor” opening Act 2 was exquisite pathos. Her portrayal of the Countess was highly empathic despite her youth and relatively limited experience. And, as in the Opera Lyra Ottawa production of *Nozze* earlier this season, a young cast gave the work a very lively enthusiasm and verve which maintained the pace and lightness of the work. At 40, Luca Pisaroni (Count Almaviva) was the oldest of the major singers on stage!

Clearly the danger inherent in a young cast is whether they are adequately trained and experienced to sing these difficult Mozart roles. Although only 25, Philippe Sly (Figaro) again proved that he is fully capable of playing a major role in a major opera house. Vocally secure, he gave a thoroughly convincing performance with grace of movement to match the lovely colour and expression of his bass-baritone. He made full use of the opportunity to sing Figaro’s Act IV recitative and aria, unfortunately omitted in our local Opera Lyra production

advantage of having two leading men in your cast, each over 6 feet tall, slim and well coordinated. To match this athleticism, Kate Lindsey (Cherubino) turned a smooth somersault on stage, again proving that slim grace aids her excellent mezzo voice for trouser roles. We managed to catch her final performance during the San Francisco run which was a delight. Our second Cherubino was Angela Brower, who sang well but was not used to the fast pace of the rest of the cast.

The very demanding part of Susanna was sung by Lisette Oropesa, with great effervescence and charm,



Photo by Cory Weaver

almost as tall as her fiancé Figaro and with a waist which most ladies in the audience would die for. She was born on Cuba, lives in Florida and had sung the role in at least 25 different productions. She was a perfect Susanna!

The remainder of the cast was more than competent and, although older, fitted

well into a production which had admirable pace and enthusiasm. I was very pleased by the ecstatic applause awarded to Philippe Sly by the San Francisco audience at the curtain of each of the two performances I saw. After graduating from the advanced and prestigious San Francisco Adler program, which followed his participation in the Merola summer program and a year with the COC Ensemble in Toronto, Philippe is now a polished performer and a true singing actor. While charismatic on stage he remains modest and true to his Ottawa roots. To opera goers of San Francisco the mention of Ottawa, Canada now has the implicit indication of quality. I expect that this will be reinforced when our honorary patron, Gerald Finley, appears as Sweeney Todd this September.

Philippe’s next stop will be a smaller part, again in *Nozze*, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin and recorded by Deutsche Grammophon at the Festspielhaus in Baden-Baden this summer. This will be followed by Philippe’s first role of Golaud in a concert version of *Pelléas and Mélisande*, conducted by Kent Nagano with Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal on 8th and 9th September, 2015.



Photo by Cory Weaver

since running into overtime and additional pay to musicians can raise havoc with the budget of opera companies.

Luca Pisaroni has played “Figaro” in many productions and having “graduated” to Almaviva sang with great presence and poise, his aristocratic hauteur not preventing the occasional graceful leap over a bench! He also managed to inspire Philippe to try one of these leaps; the

Glimmerglass Gracefully Solves Problem Libretti by Shelagh Williams

For its 40th Anniversary, Glimmerglass Festival (GG) received funding to sport several welcome upgrades for visitors' comfort. These included a relocated Box Office, a dedicated Preview Tent, and in its previous location a Marketplace, with improved shop and food and beverage facilities, plus covered seating and eating areas. What a difference some extra money makes!

We got into the opera mood as soon as we arrived with a marvellous concert in the opera theatre, by bass-baritone Eric Owens, 2015 Artist in Residence, and tenor Lawrence Brownlee, in his GG debut! They capped off a pot pourri of great Italian, English and French solo repertoire with the lovely duet from the *Pearl Fishers* - heavenly!

Our first work (operetta?) was Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*, a coproduction with Opera National de Bordeaux and Theatre du Capital de Toulouse. The original book by Lillian Hellman, based on Voltaire's satire of ridiculous optimism and acceptance of evil in the face of calamities, was a flop in 1956 as well as the second go in 1997. In the programme the list of people tinkering with the lyrics, originally and later, gives an idea of the many versions and revisions now available - it probably didn't help that Bernstein was working on *West Side Story* at the same time! GG wisely chose a streamlined version by Hugh Wheeler for the Royal National Theatre, revised by John Caird, with the Scottish National Opera's version of the music, and it worked!

Director (and GG Artistic and General Director) Francesca Zambello thankfully did not try any political updating, but stuck to the script, which was convoluted enough to begin with! She moved her cast well, setting the tone by starting off with the characters appearing amazingly from a tiny trunk! The costumes by Jennifer Moeller were appropriately 18th century. Set designer James Noone provided a bare wood stage with a spiral staircase up to a catwalk across the back, plus various wooden platforms and colourful drops and props to allow swift changes from one venue to the next as the cast travelled the world, going from disaster to disaster. The preponderance of gold and jewels and the feathery costumes for El Dorado were especially memorable.

Conductor and GG Music Director Joseph Colaneri had the requisite high quality of orchestra and singers to keep the music moving at a good clip so nothing dragged. In the title role, former Young Artist Programme member (YAP) tenor Andrew Stenson has blossomed nicely and he caught *Candide's* naivete fittingly with his sweet voice and clueless manner, till the end when he showed leadership for setting down with his little band of travelers to *Make our garden grow*. Coloratura soprano Kathryn Lewek sang and portrayed Cunegonde very strongly, with an angry *Glitter and be gay* entirely in character and in synch with her circumstances as the most hard done by character of the group - it is not a



trifle, if you really listen to the words! (Usefully, song surtitles were provided.) The two had a great time together in their duet which outlined their entirely conflicting views of marriage! Holding the whole to-

gether as both the narrator Voltaire and the optimistic Dr. Pangloss was the actor David Garrison, on stage throughout, with beautiful diction and more than passable singing voice. Veteran mezzo Marietta Simpson brought style to her portrayal of the knowing *I am easily assimilated* Old Lady, also pivotal in the tale. The chorus, made up of YAPs, energetically played and sang the many characters in the various venues visited by *Candide*. The whole came together, with clever lyrics - *What a day, for an auto-da-fe!* - and sprightly tunes hanging on the framework of the libretto, all well delivered by a first rate ensemble to entertain us thoroughly!

We were fortunate to enjoy a Bernstein double bill, as his one act opera *Trouble in Tahiti* was presented in the Pavilion after *Candide*. The cast of five YAPs included a neat close harmony trio to keep the narration flowing, with baritone Sean Michael Plumb as the overbearing husband and mezzo Aleksandra Romano as the unhappy wife. This bonus opera was well produced and cleverly staged, but would have benefited from surtitles, even tho' sung in English!

Our second major work was the American premiere of Vivaldi's 1737 *Cato in Utica*, the title playing on the name of the nearby N.Y. town to intrigue potential opera goers! The problem to be solved with this opera was that the libretto by Metastasio has survived, with a choice of two endings (!), but without Vivaldi's Act I music - only Acts II and III survived! Act I has been reconstructed by Alessandro Ciccolini from other Vivaldi works, but since it is mainly exposition, GG opted for Alan Curtis's critical edition of Vivaldi's Act II and III, supplemented by a bit of Ciccolini's reconstructions where absolutely necessary. Essential facts from Act I were projected onto the scrim at the start, to bring us up

Glimmerglass Gracefully Solves Problem Libretti (continued)

to speed, and Metastasio's original tragic ending was restored, to give us a true *opera seria*.

This was a truly splendid production in every sense. Experienced director Tazewell Thompson set it appropriately in Roman times and managed with the help of choreographer Anthony Salatino to direct it in a straightforward manner so that the long *da capo* arias were not upstaged, yet held our interest - no mean feat! Associate Artistic Director Emeritus John Conklin has designed over 30 GG productions, and his set for *Cato* was glorious: all gold and reddish browns with a great arch at the centre and two walls slanting forward at the sides. The artistic cracks and rubble in the first half, as befits the end of the Roman Republic, gave the cast something to climb over, but was then cleared away for the shorter second half and ending. Lighting designer Robert Weirsel has been with GG even longer than Conklin, and the team made use of the huge arch for numerous painted vistas and clever lighting effects, to accompany the story. Cato symbolically stood out in a plain white toga. However, costume designer Sara Jean Tosetti gave us interesting classical costumes in glowing colours, often with innovative draping in gorgeous gowns for the female roles. It was a real feast for the eyes.

And then there was the music! Debuting conductor Ryan Brown, an early music specialist, had the modern instrument GG Orchestra playing the baroque music beautifully in the raised pit, while the continuo section (harpichord, cello and theorbo) were especially able for the recits, and he had a great cast to work with. Despite the title, the star was the conquering Caesar, sung by counter-

tenor John Holiday. He came on stage looking like a football lineman, then opened his mouth and this strong, beautiful sound poured forth, handling everything Vivaldi threw at him, while expressing both his rage at Cato's stubbornness and his love for Cato's daughter - what a performance! Mezzo Sarah Mesko made a strong showing as Emilia, Pompey's widow, thirsting for revenge against Caesar. Three YAPs sang the roles of star-crossed lovers: mezzo Megan Samarin in the conflicted role of



Photo by Karli Cadel

Cato's daughter Marzia, secretly in love with Caesar; countertenor Eric Jurenas as Arbace, Prince of Numidia, affianced to Marzia and allied to Cato; and mezzo Allegra de Vita in the pants role of Fulvio, Caesar's lieutenant, but in love with Emilia! The lowest voice on stage was

that of tenor Thomas Michael Allen, who conveyed with dignity the Roman Senator Cato's steadfast, indeed implacable, nature, holding out against Caesar for the continuation of the Roman Republic. At the end we saw him in an impressive tableau in the great arch, seated with his back to us, his arms outstretched, and with long red cloths attached to his wrists, to signify his last defiant act - his honourable Roman suicide, death before dishonour - while lovely music played and the other characters silently mourned his passing. It was like old times at GG, with two countertenors in a great baroque opera!

GG has become truly a festival with more than just opera available. In the *Meet me at the Pavilion* concert series, after *Cato*, we enjoyed *Ladies' Night Out*, which featured the major female singers, both professional and YAPs, in their delightful party pieces, in a comfy cabaret setting. We also experienced the art collaborations: the Fenimore Art Museum's exhibitions of Chagall's 1967 *Magic Flute* costumes from the MET, plus Maxfield Parrish, and the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute's *Monet to Matisse* exhibition in Utica.

Next year's lineup includes Puccini's *La Boheme*, Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, Rossini's *Thieving Magpie*, and Ward's *Crucible*.

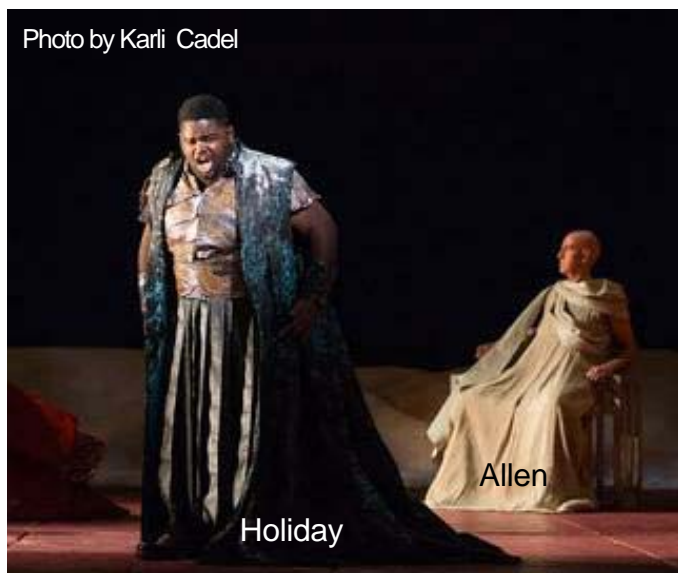


Photo by Karli Cadel

A Fine *Fidelio* to the Rescue in San Francisco

by Ute Davis

July 2015, the day after the Supreme Court decision on gay marriage in California, a lot of people had descended upon the city for the largest Gay Pride parade San Francisco had ever seen. Because of closure of roads and cancellations of public transport, we would have to leave early for the opera to make it on time. That day we had tickets for the matinee of *La Ciociara* (Two Women), a world premiere. However the parade would take all day and the civic plaza, next to the opera house would not be cleared until the evening. It took us a very long time to find a taxi, the only one we ever saw near our hotel, and we had to share the ride with other guests. Our driver tried multiple detours away from the madding crowd, but by the time he had executed “plan D” he had us close enough to walk. He fully deserved his tip.

La Ciociara proved disappointing and despite the rather desperate efforts of conductor Nicola Luisotti I felt it depressing, grating and the lack of arias unsatisfactory. So far this had not been a good day. But things improved when we met with a young singer and had a pleasant, early dinner. We could hear loud noises and music from the nearby parade.

At breakfast, I had spotted a tiny notice in the local paper for a performance of *Fidelio* that evening at the Symphony Hall which is across the street from the opera house. The last couple of tickets were available to us at a discount and we were seated at the end of the front

row. The Davies Symphony Hall was esthetically pleasing, also comfortable. *Fidelio* is not an often performed opera in North America. In my 50 or so years in Canada I have seen it less than five times and that includes two Met performances. On the other hand, you will probably find *Fidelio* performed at least a dozen times in Germany and Austria this season alone. The source play was loosely based on real events from the French Revolution but is a decidedly Germanic work, which Ludwig van Beethoven wanted to call *Leonore*. It had its premiere on 20 November 1805 at Vienna’s “Theater an der Wien”. The theatre’s owner insisted it be called *Fidelio* to avoid confusion with other *Leonore* operas. It was thought to be too long so Beethoven reluctantly agreed to trim it, producing a two-act version which made its debut in March of 1806. This shorter version is usually called *Leonore* today. *Fidelio* is the substantial revision first heard in May of 1814. Exhausted by the multiple revisions, Beethoven told his final librettist “This opera will win for me the martyr’s crown”. He never wrote another opera.

In short, it is the story of a political prisoner’s wife who goes undercover as the male title character, infiltrates the family of the prison guard and frees her husband from a secret dungeon just as the local petty tyrant is about to kill him.

The opera is also romantic and its deepest emo-



photo by Stefan Cohen

A Fine *Fidelio* to the Rescue in San Francisco (continued)

tional expression is one of hope, uniting both the conjugal and the political. Not only will love triumph but so will justice!

Though *Fidelio* opens in quiet domesticity, unfortunately the grim prison scenes tend to inspire artistic directors of today to associate the story with Nazi times, concentration camps and Gulags, Guantánamo Bay, the South American junta, Che Guevara and the PLO, to name just a few.

Michael Tilson-Thomas took the baton and gave a searingly beautiful reading of the Leonore II overture which had me holding my breath. I was completely captivated from this point on.

The level of precision and the laser intensity between Tilson-Thomas and his orchestra was complemented by the array of vocal talent.

With minimal staging and singers in uniform black, there was nothing to distract from the sound. All the voices were of sufficient power that placement of the singers behind the orchestra was not a problem. The Singspiel format with spoken dialogue was kept to a minimum although it demonstrated again that North American performers can sing much better than they can speak German. This does not apply to the Swedes!

Nina Stemme is a powerful soprano at the height of her career. A Swedish Royal Court singer and Kammer­sängerin of the Vienna State Opera among her many honours, she came through with sterling high notes and showed power and finesse throughout. Her Act I aria “Abscheulicher! Wo eilst Du hin?” was simply riveting.

American Heldentenor Brandon Jovanovich

opened Act II with a tremendously powerful “Gott, welch Dunkel hier o grauenvolle Stille”. He has commanding physical and vocal power but was still able to combine with Stemme in a love duet of extraordinary intensity and beauty.

In this production the characters were rather two-dimensional and Alan Held managed to be a totally evil Pizarro with no redeeming quality. Kevin Langan (Rocco the jailer) and Nicholas Phan (Jaquino) both sang very well as did Joëlle Harvey (Marzellina), but it was unfortunate that this lady used her score throughout, the only singer to do so. Luca Pisaroni (Don Fernando) arrives late in Act II, just in time to release the prisoners using his customary authority and baritone grace.

The SF Symphony chorus provides a very effectively anguished dramatic climax to Act I with the prisoner’s chorus.

Tilson-Thomas allowed the music to speak for itself, the “from darkness to light” theme of Beethoven steadily mounting as the opera unfolds. The dark desolation of despair gives way to a radiant hymn of rejoicing as news of the overthrow of the tyrannical government is brought to the prison. This grand chorus of freedom and joy seems to anticipate the composer’s hymn of joy closing his 9th Symphony. Far, far more joy here than I found in the recent NACO Symphony at the hands of Pinchas Zukerman and Dwayne Wolfe. I enjoyed this so much that I am now especially looking forward to the forthcoming Opera Lyra Ottawa fully-staged *Fidelio* under the baton of Timothy Vernon.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed

by Shelagh Williams

Opera Lyra Ottawa’s Glorious 20th Annual Garden Party!: Once again the OLO Garden Party had to be postponed one day due to rain, but then was celebrated in proper style on a beautiful summer’s evening in the Italian Ambassador’s gorgeous garden. While impossibly elegant models wandered by in gowns and hats by Earlene’s House of Fashion, and classical music charmed our ears, a parade of trays of scrumptious hors d’oeuvres tempted our palates, with an array of suitable beverages to accompany them. Of course a real highlight was the appearance of and message from the brand new Artistic Director, Timothy Vernon, just before the highly anticipated operatic concert. CBC’s Laurence Wall’s mellifluous tones and sense of humour guided us through the various delightful arias and duets, with Jean Desmarais’ unflinching collaboration at the piano. The pride of Mallorytown, baritone Benjamin Covey, started off with an aria from *Barber of Seville*, as a teaser for OLO’s fall opera, in which he will sing. Soprano Sasha

Djihanian, our Susanna in OLO’s recent *Marriage of Figaro*, gave us a meltingly sweet *O mio babbino caro* that no father could have resisted! Tenor Sean Clark had a bird singing along to his lovely *Una furtive lacrima!* The exciting toast *Libiamo* from *La traviata* was a fitting finale for this most enjoyable sold-out OLO fundraiser - a pleasant way to relieve us of our money!

Yannick-Muriel Noah, *Music and Beyond Festival:* The chance to hear BLOC winner, soprano Yannick-Muriel Noah, in concert at home in Ottawa at the *Music and Beyond Festival* was not to be missed! In a lovely turquoise gown, she treated us first to Berlioz’s *Nuits d’ete* and Strauss’s *Vier letzte Lieder*. Then she finished with a premier from John Greer’s *Grooks Songbook*, with Piet Hein’s pithy poems accompanied by the composer himself! Her encore, the aria from *La Wally* with which she won the BLOC, showed how her voice has grown in both beauty and power!

Jon Vickers - a personal tribute

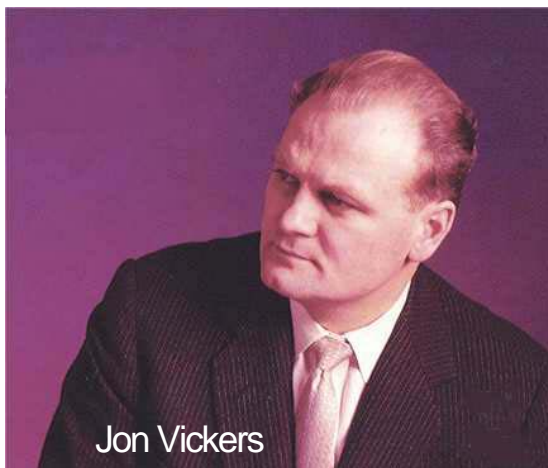
by Murray Kitts

The first opera I ever saw on stage was *Carmen* at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto. The Don Jose was Jon Vickers. It was one of the greatest opera performances that I have ever witnessed. The range of emotions, the intensity of feelings, the passion of love, the fierceness of anger - all overwhelmingly expressed by this master of the opera stage. Having Regina Resnick as Carmen was also a major factor in my enjoyment of the Bizet masterpiece.

Teaching in Northern Ontario did not lend itself to frequent visits to the opera but Minneapolis was only a few hours flight from Fort Frances for the Met touring performances. The cast of Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* was a great one, George London in the title role, Leonie Rysenek as Senta and Jon Vickers as Erik, singing and acting with such intensity that I feared he would injure his beloved in trying to persuade her to spurn the Dutchman's offer. Another Met production was Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, an opera which I believe was specially newly mounted because Jon Vickers was capable of singing the demanding part of the doomed hero. Here Jon Vickers proved that no one was his equal in this role outside of Russia. The acting and singing of fellow Canadian Teresa Stratas complemented that of the protagonist. Her leap over the balustrade into the icy river and oblivion was breathtaking. Of course many of you may have seen the marvellous production at the NAC of the same opera, this time with the incomparable Maureen Forrester as the Old Countess and Vickers as the obsessed gambler who caused her death. This was one of the greatest opera productions ever presented in Ottawa.

Another role that Jon Vickers made his own was the brutal fisherman with mind of a poet in Britten's *Peter Grimes*. I

was fortunate enough to see his great performance in Chicago. Ironically, the composer did not regard Vickers' interpretation of Grimes with favour. However, I feel that this portrayal of the doomed man will ensure that *Peter Grimes* will be considered as the composer's best opera.



Jon Vickers

Last of these live performances but not least, almost fifty years ago as part of the cultural offerings of Expo 67, the Montreal Opera presented Verdi's *Otello* with the finest of Canadian opera talent, Teresa Stratas as Desdemona, Louis Quilico as Iago and Jon Vickers in what I consider his greatest role, The Moor of Venice. It is possible to have some notion of Vicker's performance on a DVD featuring other singers. But to have been there and seen and heard the transformation of a mighty general, a tender and passionate lover into jealous, irrational, mad killer

was to me the greatest experience that I have ever had in the opera house.

Apart from these live presentation I must mention the DVD production of Bellini's *Norma* featuring Vickers singing so beautifully with Montserrat Caballe in the Roman Theatre in Orange. There are too many CD recordings to mention, including his Tristan and Florestan; one of the greatest was his portrayal of

Aeneas in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, another role that only Jon Vickers was capable of performing for the great Berlioz revival under Sir Colin Davis. See the extensive list of roles and recordings in Wikipedia.

As we mourn the loss of a great Canadian artist we can still be thrilled and profoundly moved by his

incomparable operatic portrayals and, in my case, some still vivid memories.



Grimes



Otello

Jonathan Stewart "Jon" Vickers, CC, was born 29 October 1926 in Prince Albert, SK and died 10 July 2015 in Ontario.

Uncle John a Successful Modern *Don Giovanni* by Shelagh Williams

Chamberfest brought Toronto's 5-year old *Against the Grain Theatre* and cast to Ottawa to restage its sold out *Uncle John*. Multi-talented Joel Ivany, the company's founder and artistic director, created a clever new, modern, English language libretto for *Don Giovanni* which was singable and made sense, and then directed the piece as well. Chamberfest thoughtfully provided two previews, one to meet Joel Ivany and one to meet the cast, to familiarize us with the concept.

An intimate venue (here the titivated Tabaret Hall), local and Canadian references, and an enthusiastic cast brought the story to life right around us, rather than up on a stage. We, the audience, entered Zerlina's wedding reception hall, all white chairs and round tables around the head table, while the Cecilia Quartet plus pianist and music director Milos Repicky played the Mozart beautifully in the corner, as arranged by Stephen Hargreaves.

Equally excellent were the voices and acting of the cast, the secret of the *Theatre's* success. Cameron McPhail really got into the role of slimy, evil Uncle John (Don Giovanni), while Neil Craighead was a bumptious Leporello, humourously using an i-pad for his *Catalogue Aria!*

Lone tenor Sean Clark, recently singing in OLO's Studio and Garden Party, was a fine police officer Ottavio,

helping his beloved Anna deal with her father's death at the beginning, but being dumped at the end! John Avey, the Commander, was the caterer at the hall, and no pushover for Uncle John, until the latter stole his heart pills to kill him, while Aaron Paul Durand made a nicely dressed and well mannered bridegroom Masetto, there to help Zerlina finalize arrangements.

The women were especially good. Miriam



Clark

Khalil Allison

Craighead

Durand

Joynt

Photo by Darryl Block



McPhail

Avey

Photo by Darryl Block

Khalil used her lovely rich soprano as Elvira, exhibiting a wide range of emotions dealing with the rest of the cast, while, as assistant caterer Anna, Betty Wayne Allison was equally striking. Lovely BLOC prize winner Sharleen Joynt was a classy and sweet yet saucy bride-to-be Zerlina. The cast by turns strolled, ran, and hid amongst the tables and chairs where we were sitting, for great interaction and immediacy, and the masqueraders sang from the organ loft, so that all of the hall was used! Although this was not a classic production, this was a most enjoyable and stimulating show where words and actions meshed with Mozart's music (just under 3 hours total) to get across in an accessible manner the universal story of *Don Giovanni*.

The Met: Live in HD 2015-16 Season

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Verdi's <i>Il Trovatore</i> October 3, 2015 | Encores: November 14, 16 & 18 |
| Verdi's <i>Otello</i> October 17, 2015 | Encores: December 5, 7 & 9 |
| Wagner's <i>Tannhäuser</i> October 31, 2015 | Encores: January 9, 11 & 13 |
| Berg's <i>Lulu</i> November 21, 2015 | Encores: February 6, 8 & 10 |
| Bizet's <i>Les Pêcheurs de Perles</i> January 16, 2016 | Encores: February 20, 22 & 24 |
| Puccini's <i>Turandot</i> January 30, 2016 | Encores: March 19, 21 & 22 |
| Puccini's <i>Manon Lescaut</i> March 5, 2016 | Encores: April 9, 11 & 13 |
| Puccini's <i>Madama Butterfly</i> April 2, 2016 | Encores: May 14, 16 & 18 |
| Donizetti's <i>Roberto Devereux</i> April 16, 2016 | Encores: May 28, 30 & June 1 |
| Strauss's <i>Elektra</i> April 30, 2016 | Encores: June 11, 13 & 15 |

Tell - Tales

by Murray Kitts

I was most fortunate to see a live performance of Rossini's masterpiece at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome many years ago. Of course it was the Italian version, *Gullielmo Tell*, but the grandeur of the production on the enormous stage is the only thing that I remember about it. Tom McCool even had to remind me that we saw it together.

My next encounter with the legendary Swiss hero was the reissue on CDs of the French original with a truly outstanding cast including Gabriel Bacquier, Monserrat Caballe, and Nicolai Gedda with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Ambrosian Orchestra Chorus under Lamberto Gardelli recorded back in 1973. This recording is hard to beat although the text in French is only included for the just under four hour performance.

To actually see a production one had to revert to the 1988 Italian version at La Scala with Giorgio Zancanaro, Cheryl Studer, and Chris Merritt under the direction of the great Riccardo Muti. This four hour portrayal is a traditional one with delightful and exciting ballets and is the only DVD to project on stage the magnificent scenery of Switzerland so strongly evoked in the music. Zancanaro as Tell gives a noble and touching performance, but the two other leading singers, while adequate, have never been my favourites.

The Rossini Festival in his home town of Pesaro has given rise to many revivals of the "Swan of Pesaro's" body of work. For *Tell* an excellent 2011 unstaged performance in French with Gerald Finley, Malin Bystrom, and John Osborne with Canadian Marie-Nicole Lemieux as Tell's wife was recorded with Antonio Pappano conducting the Orchestra and Chorus of the Academy of Saint Cecilia. Gerald Finley gives a magnificent performance in EMI CD. And there will be more to come with staging the opera.

The first new DVD to become available is from the Rossini in Wildbad Festival 2013. It claims that "the restored score has been used in its entirety for the first time ever." According to times given for other versions this claim is questionable. The cast consists of Andrew Foster-Williams, Judith Howarth and Michael Spyres with Antonio Fogliani directing the Camerata Bach Choir and the Vituosi Brunensis. The hall is limited in size so that attempts made to increase playing space are only limitedly successful. The chorus is good but small compared with those on other versions. The main singers are fine but not in the same class as the vocal stars in rival offerings. For these reasons, and for portraying Tell as a wild revolutionary, I would suggest this DVD only to those who must have every version of the opera.

Next from the 2013 Rossini Festival in Pesaro comes Nicola Alaimo, Amanda Forsythe and Juan Diego Florez with the Orchestra and Chorus of the Teatro Comunale of Bologna

with rising star Michele Mariotti conducting. Here is a much more suitable venue, with outstanding chorus, singers and musicians. But direction by Graham Vick should indicate to opera lovers that there might be a problem. Sure enough, the original scene in Act II takes place in a forest where the two lovers meet but here the stage is empty except for being dominated by a half dozen or so life size plastic horses. Later we find that one of the horses has been decapitated so that the singers communicate over the gap between the detached head and the bloody cadaver. Why, oh why? Nicola Alaimo is well-known in Europe for his Rossini and Donizetti roles, Marina Rebeka is another renowned European singer and then there is the incomparable Juan Diego Florez who seems completely at ease and assured in possibly the most difficult bel canto tenor role in opera. By the way, the hated conquerors were making a movie during the course of the action presumably to show the ridiculous customs of the Swiss, mocking their dances and customs although these may have originated in the mind of Graham Vick.

Finally, the 2015 Royal Opera House production was shown in Ottawa Landmark theatres to extremely sparse audiences. This was certainly the "dirtiest" opera I have ever seen. No, no, I'm not referring to the nudity and gang rape that was booed on opening night. By the time the opera reached Ottawa all that had been tidied up, the fair maiden managing to keep her grip on a tablecloth shielding her body from the lascivious soldiers. The dirt was everywhere on the stage, so no ballet. In Act I the ballet was replaced by children's game and a children's archery contest. In Act III you were given a rape scene to the lively, jolly music which Rossini wrote. But the dirt just didn't lie there, it was revelled in. Dirt was put in parcels, rubbed all over bare chests along with blood derived from cut thumbs. At least half the time in the opera someone was taking off his clothes. By the end of the opera all the men on stage were bare to the waist (except the tenor) and covered with dirt. The women only dirtied their faces and arms. These people LOVED the soil of their country, get it? Fortunately there was some great singing by the same trio as on the previous CD. Gerald Finley was portrayed as a reluctant hero spurred on by the martial urgings of his young son, Sofia Fomina, a trouser role. Malin Bystrom managed to keep most of her clothes on and sang beautifully to accompany the vocal acrobatics of her smudged lover, the excellent John Osborne. The director, Damiano Michelotto, also invented a character called "the Spirit of Switzerland" who flitted around trying to inspire patriotism in the Swiss but only visible to Tell's son. The director has much to answer for. Still and all, I will buy the DVD of this performance. The ROH opera chorus augmented by forty singers was superb, matching the achievements of the principle singers. Rossini's masterpiece will live on.

Opera alla Pasta

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

Opera alla Pasta is held at St. Anthony's Soccer Club at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday afternoon. The cost is a modest \$25. Call 613-721-7121 at least three days before the date of the DVD presentation in order to reserve a place.

Romeo et Juliette



October 25, 2015

"The sensational hit of Salzberg's 2008 festival stars tenor Rolando Villazón in a stunning performance. Soprano Nino Machaidze burst upon the Salzburg stage with an emotionally vulnerable and vocally spectacular performance. Machaidze wowed the press and audiences alike. This visually vibrant production is sure to become the benchmark for this opera for years to come."

The Tsarina's Slippers



November 29, 2015

"Based on Gogol's fantastical and comic story of the Devil's antics on Christmas Eve, this magical opera composed by Tchaikovsky is brought vividly to life in Francesca Zambello's dazzling production. The largely Russian cast is joined by Cossack dancers and members of the Royal Ballet to create a spectacle of festive magnificence."

The rest of the Opera alla Pasta season:

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|---|---|--|
| <p>January 24, 2016 <i>Countess Maritza</i></p> | <p>March 13, 2016 <i>Simon Boccanegra</i></p> | <p>May 22, 2016 <i>L'heure espagnole & Gianni Schicchi</i></p> |
|---|---|--|