

NATIONAL CAPITAL OPERA SOCIETY
Newsletter

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SOCIÉTÉ D'OPÉRA DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE
Bulletin

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Laura Dziubaniuk, first winner of the Brian Law Opera Scholarship. Story on page 2.

Summary of forthcoming local events

<i>La traviata</i> , by Verdi	Production by Opera Lyra Ottawa	10, 12, and 13 March	8:00 pm	The Opera, National Arts Centre
To Russia with Music	NCOS Gala: dinner, auction, and concert	15 May	7:00 pm	Shelley's, 11 Holland Ave (at Scott)

Laura Dziubaniuk wins the first Brian Law Scholarship

On the evening of 21 January a very exciting event took place—an event of which all the members of the NCOS and the wider opera community can be proud: the first competition for the Brian Law Opera Scholarship took place in St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, involving four distinguished jurors and four chosen finalists.

The jurors, Stuart Hamilton and Rosemarie Landry of Toronto, Iwan Edwards of Montreal, and Brian Law from his new home in New Zealand, had agreed to be with us, and a difficult job they had. Because of illness, soprano Maria Knapik-Stramko had to withdraw from the competition at the last moment. However, soprano Laura Dziubaniuk, baritone Marcos Pujol, and counter-tenor Daniel Taylor presented a varied program of operatic selections drawn from four centuries of opera repertoire. They then nervously waited with the assembled audience while the jurors made their decision.

The jury chairman, Stuart Hamilton, announced the winner and the runners-up. We were then privileged to have Brian Law present the first scholarship award to Laura Dziubaniuk (pictured on our front page),

while scholarships of \$100 were awarded to both Marcos Pujol and Daniel Taylor.

Ms Dziubaniuk had sung Monica's waltz from *The Medium*, by Menotti, Pamina's aria from *The Magic Flute* of Mozart, and Rusalka's aria from *Rusalka*, by Dvorak. She has studied music and voice at the University of Ottawa (Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance) and at the Kiev Conservatory, and has appeared in Opera Lyra productions in 1991 and 1992, as well as with the Cantata Singers and in Opera Studio Guild concerts; and we remember her performances for our own NCOS spring galas.

This first competition featured a talented assembly of young singers and a very capable jury. It is our goal to continue to build the endowment fund from its present level of some \$6 000 to \$15 000 to support this worthwhile endeavour. We seek your assistance in these efforts as we reach for all those who support opera, both in the private and corporate communities. This way, we will be able to draw on these resources down the road to stage further competitions.

BC

NCOS Spring Gala

Your tickets are here for *To Russia with Music*

Please mark your calendars for Saturday 15 May 1993, the date of our annual fund-raising dinner. This will be a very important event for us; it should be the main source of funds for the work of the Society, including the Brian Law Opera Scholarship. We need your help in making this a success.

Since the theme for the evening is Russian, we have planned some special music for you. The first winner of our Brian Law Opera Scholarship, Laura Dziubaniuk, will delight us with Russian folk songs, romantic songs, and songs from opera. We also hope to have some musical surprises for you.

Those who came last year enjoyed the dinner, silent auction, live auction, and music. This

year, all will have a deliciously Russian flavour.

The setting is *Shelley's* at 11 Holland Avenue (Holland Cross). Ample parking is available free underneath the building; the car park is very well lighted, and it is easy to park near the equally well lighted entrance to the building proper. *Shelley's* is owned by Dave Smith, our caterer and auctioneer, and is ideal for special events such as ours. The price is right, allowing us to keep our ticket price to \$50 (including GST) per person.

Please plan to come and bring some friends. Tables can be booked for groups of 8. We will be happy to arrange tables for singles. We are counting on you; please complete the

form below and join us on the 15th May.
See you there!

If you have items to donate to the auction,
please contact Marjorie Clegg at 594-2988
(evenings). Smaller items are welcome for
the silent auction, which—for those of you
who have never heard of one (and I was

among you!)—works this way: items are on
display with a sign-up sheet for bidding; you
may return and raise your bid at any time; the
winner is the person who has bid the highest
when closing time arrives.

MC

Praise for our *Newsletter*

We are very pleased to have won an award of
recognition for our *Newsletter*. Here is what
Opera Guilds International says in its own
newsletter of January 1993: "I want to take
this opportunity to congratulate the National
Capital Opera Society and the Opera Guild of
Montreal who have won recognition from
OGI for their outstanding newsletters. Each

guild [*sic*] will receive a Certificate of
Recognition for this. Enclosed is a copy of
the National Capital Opera Society's
newsletter. In my next mailing I will include
a copy of the Montreal guild's newsletter."

And here is a copy of the certificate, sadly
reduced in size and grandeur.



La traviata: Opera Lyra Ottawa's exciting production

There are many reasons to welcome the staging of *La traviata* on 10, 12, and 13 March. This is Opera Lyra Ottawa's first production to be presented on the stage of the Opera itself. No matter how successful previous operas staged in the Theatre have been, the Opera offers many advantages—from a larger orchestra pit and better backstage facilities, to the more obvious one that an opera should be seen and heard in an opera house, especially if such an excellent one is available.

NCOS members will welcome the news that this is a traditional interpretation of the famous love story based on the novel by Alexandre Dumas, *filis*, who drew his main character from a real Paris courtesan. Sets are from the Austin Lyric Opera, and costumes from Malabar, in Toronto. The entire production is under the direction of Jeannette Aster, whose productions of *La Cenerentola* and *The Magic Flute* are only two of her most recent local successes. But, naturally, the main interest lies in the casting of the singers. Opera Lyra Ottawa is dedicated to producing opera with Canadian singers. Fortunately, Maria Pellegrini (renowned for her interpretation of the main role) is to return to her home town, after some years of absence, to sing Violetta. Joining her, in the role of Alfredo, will be Guy Bélanger, artistic director of the Opéra de Québec, and recently the star of *Les contes d'Hoffman* in Paris. The third main character, Alfredo's father, will be sung by Peter Barcza, who sang this role with the New York City Opera last season and who was heard in the Opera RSVP concert a year ago.

Among the other singers, NCOS members will remember Marcia Swanton from her role as Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*; in this opera she sings the part of Flora. Without mentioning all the minor characters, it should be pointed out that two members of Opera Lyra Ottawa's Associate Artist Program known to NCOS members will appear on stage: these include Alex Fleuriiau-Chateau, who sang at our Gala

two years ago, and Maria Knapik-Sztramko, who was prevented by illness from singing in the recent finals for the Brian Law Scholarship.

The Opera Lyra Orchestra and Chorus (Laurence Ewashko, Chorusmaster) will be under the direction of Maestro Yves Abel, Music Director of L'Opéra Français de New York. It almost goes without saying that this is one of Verdi's greatest works and one of the most popular operas of all time. In the words of Charles Osborne, the great biographer of Verdi, it is "one of the world's great music dramas." The drama is achieved by using the music to underline the passion, the folly, the fragility, and, above all, the towering strength of Violetta.

It would be a pity to miss this opportunity to see and hear a live performance. As in the past, some of the members of the NCOS Board of Directors are meeting in the Café after the 12 March (Friday) performance for dessert and a drink. Any member, even if in the company of a non-member, is welcome to join this group.

Tickets for the production are \$23, \$32, \$42, \$52, and \$60, plus GST, and can be purchased at three places:

Opera Lyra Ottawa, 2 Daly Ave, Ottawa
(613) 233-9200

Ticketmaster (613) 755-1111

NAC Box Office, in person

If you think that these prices for a live opera performance are high, then you haven't been speaking lately to anyone who buys tickets for hockey games or rock music concerts.

See you at the Opera.

MK

Opera quiz

In Festival Ottawa's sensational production of *La traviata* in 1978, who sang the roles of (a) Violetta, (b) Alfredo Germont, (c) Giorgio Germont, and (d) Gastone? See page 9 for the answers.

MK

“The great creator and master of Russian opera”

Detlef Gojwy, *Russian Opera*

To participate in the World Festival which was a part of Expo 67 in Montreal, the Soviet government sent over its greatest artists to perform its greatest operas at the newly opened Salle Wilfred Pelletier.

Can you guess which operas were staged—or were you there, as I was? *Boris Godunov*, of course. *Prince Igor* would make a likely second guess. *Eugene Onegin* would be wrong, as *The Queen of Spades* represented Tchaikovsky. For 20th century opera, Prokofiev’s masterpiece *War and Peace* was presented. And, for the fifth opera, *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia* by the composer referred to in the title of this article, Nicolai Sergejevich Rimsky-Korsakov.

By this time, I’m sure that some of my readers are thinking that I’ve had to delve very deep to come up with something as obscure as this. Having heard this opera, I became an instant enthusiast for Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas and would like to share some of my enthusiasm with you. Most of the time when Rimsky-Korsakov is mentioned in connection with opera composing, it is as a sort of meddler in the works of others. Without going into a long argument about Rimsky-Korsakov’s work on such operas as those by Mussorgsky and Borodin, for example, let me just say in his defense that his friends and fellow composer had an alarming habit of dying prematurely and leaving operas that were either unfinished or not acceptable for performance at the time. Everyone blames Rimsky-Korsakov for the changes that he made to Mussorgsky’s works, but Rimsky-Korsakov, as he says in his autobiography, did not encourage Mussorgsky to “se cognaquer,” which he did to such an degree that he was unable to complete his own works.

Let’s consider rather the fifteen—yes, fifteen—operas by Rimsky-Korsakov, barely known outside Russia and Eastern Europe, but now becoming available.

What is it that attracted me so much to *The Invisible City of Kitezh*? The first scene in the forest is one of the most beautiful and powerful evocations of nature in all music. Yes, Rimsky-Korsakov had seen and heard a performance of *The Ring*: this is plain in a number of his works. But to this musical picture he adds a melody for Fevronia that is one of his most enchanting, sounding like a wonderful folk melody transformed into a rhapsody (a word used by the French philosopher and critic Vladimir Jankelevich to characterize the music of Rimsky-Korsakov).

For a number of years I’ve had to content myself with a recording of the suite from this opera plus my vivid memories of that wonderful performance in Montreal. When I discovered a recording of the complete opera at the HMV store in Oxford Street in London, I handed over the forty pounds for the three discs and thought myself lucky. But this recording on Le Chant du Monde LDC 278 857–9 is woefully inadequate. It is by the Bolshoi company, but it is a performance where the audience applauds the sets and where the marvellous chorus is poorly recorded in that great choral music, which is sometimes very liturgical and sometimes savage and passionate. Apart from a synopsis of the plot in English, the text is given in French only—that is, there is no romanized Russian text which one could follow. Still, I love this opera, continue to listen to this recording, and hope that a new one is issued soon.

This is not a vain hope. Last year Le Chant du Monde released “Christmas Eve” (LDC 288001–2) in an excellent new recording, part of the “Russian Season” series. Now, if you listen to this opera expecting to hear some sort of Christmas music and follow some sort of Christmas story, you will be very disappointed. The basic story by Gogol is the tale of Vakula the Smith (perhaps familiar to those who know the opera by Tchaikovsky—I don’t) and concerns such un-Christmas characters as the Devil, Vakula’s mother (who is a witch), and the

Tsarina, whose slippers provide an irresistible gift for the object of Vakula's affection. There is some Christmas eve singing from door to door, and I am happy to tell you that the rather alarming custom of giving out presents of "lard" described in the libretto turns out to be the more acceptable gift of sausage (according to the works of Gogol that I consulted). The music is Rimsky-Korsakov at his best—half the melodies are authentic folk-tunes and the other half sound like folk-tunes as well. This is another of Rimsky-Korsakov's later operas (like *Kitezh*); he waited until after Tchaikovsky's death to write it. With an excellent cast and recording, complete with libretto and notes in both English and French, this opera might be where you could start your acquaintance with Rimsky-Korsakov's operas.

Another legendary or fairy tale opera is *The Tale of the Tsar Saltan* performed by the Bolshoi in 1955, as recorded quite satisfactorily by Le Chant du Monde on LDC 278 1037–8. You may know that the famous bumble-bee music comes from this opera, but you may not know that the bumble bee is a prince in disguise who uses this form to punish his wicked aunts and a witch who earlier had convinced his father, Saltan, that his mother had given birth to a pig in the Tsar's absence. Naturally, as these things develop in the story, our bumble bee is in love with a swan who in reality is a princess. The libretto is based on a story by another Russian literary giant, Pushkin, familiar as the source for Tchaikovsky's two most famous operas mentioned above. Again, wonderful music for a story full of wonders. Libretto in French only but with an introduction and plot synopsis in English.

A much earlier fantasy, *The Snow Maiden*, is on the Fidelio label (Fidelio 8806–8) in a performance recorded in 1984 in Sofia, Bulgaria. This is based on a folk tale and contains much charming music. The libretto is dual Russian (romanized) and English, but no French. I would like to hear another recording of this opera before passing final judgement. The main character, Snegurochka, is beautifully sung by the Russian soprano Elena Zemenkova. It seems to me that there is an animated Russian version of

this story which I saw on TV one Christmas, indicating that the story is still popular in Russia.

In 1985 Fidelio recorded Rimsky-Korsakov's last opera *The Golden Cockerel*, in Sofia once more (Fidelio 8809–10). Again, I would like to hear a Russian performance of this work. This time the libretto is in English and German; few notes are given and only in these two languages. Although based on Pushkin, the opera had much political significance in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Nothing of this is pointed out in the notes. There are, however, some "Composer's remarks" three of which I think are worth quoting here:

Operatic singers are in the habit of introducing ejaculations, spoken words, etc., into the music, hoping thereby to produce dramatic, comic or realistic effect. Far from adding significance to the music, these additions merely disfigure it. The composer desires that the singers in all his works keep strictly to the music written for them.

In lyrical passages, those actors who are on the stage, but not singing at the moment, must refrain from drawing the attention of the spectators to themselves by unnecessary by-play. An opera is *first and foremost a musical work*.

The dances performed by the King and Queen in the second act must be carried out so as not to interfere with the singers' breathing by too sudden or too violent movement.

These few remarks give us some insight not only into Rimsky-Korsakov's understanding of stagecraft but also into the performance of opera in Russia in the first decade of this century.

Rimsky-Korsakov's most political work was *The Golden Cockerel*, but *Kastchey the Immortal* is not far behind. Fortunately, another excellent recording in the "Russian Season" series for Le Chant du Monde (LDC 288 046) allow us to have a good listen to this opera, which lasts a little over one hour. Notes and text are provided in English and French. *Kastchey's* revival in 1905 to raise money for the victims of the infamous Bloody Sunday massacre caused the police to descend on the audience and to place restrictions on the composer himself. Apart from all this, the work is an extraordinary one.

Setting aside the obvious influence of Wagner, one is struck by the modernity of the music, looking forward to a number of 20th century masters.

Turning once more to the the Fidelio label and to a text by Pushkin, we have *Mozart and Salieri* (Fidelio 1827). The main objection to this disc is that no text is supplied at all. If you can get hold of the Pushkin poem, you are all set. Let's hope that a better performance becomes available. Suffice it to say that in this Pushkin–Rimsky-Korsakov version of the story Salieri does the poisoning on stage. The opera lasts less than one hour.

Another Bulgarian performance is available for *Boyarina Vera Sheloga* (Fidelio 1877). There are a number of problems with this recording. First of all, it is a sort of short prologue to Rimsky-Korsakov's first (but re-worked) opera *The Maid of Pskov*, of which I have no knowledge of the story or the music or even of the existence of any recording. Although notes for *Boyarina Vera Sheloga* are given in English and French and the text of the libretto is supplied, but in English only, there is reason to suspect that something is missing. According to the libretto, the character Prince Tokmakov has no lines, even though a singer is listed as doing this part and there is a photograph of him included in the folder: no wonder I am suspicious. I can enjoy the beautiful lullaby in this opera, but I'm waiting for a definitive version before I would recommend any recording.

Of his second opera, *May Night*, I know only the overture, which promises many lovely numbers. *Mlada* is known mainly as a suite derived from this "Grand Opera-Ballet" for which Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov were originally to have written one act apiece, while Minkus was to write the ballet music for choreography by Petipa. In the end, Rimsky-Korsakov was the only one to compose to this text. What music is available suggests that the entire work would be worth hearing.

Sadko is known to me only for the "Song of India" If the rest of the opera is anything like that particular aria, then all of it should be heard. *Servilla* and *Pan Voyevoda* are spoken of rather disparagingly by Gerald

Abraham, Rimsky-Korsakov's biographer, and that's all I really know about them.

If I have counted correctly I've at least mentioned all the operas by Rimsky-Korsakov but one; and I've saved one the best to the end. *The Tsar's Bride* was performed by the Bolshoi in 1973 with an unbelievable cast, including Vishnevskaya, Arkhipova, Atlantov, and Nesterenko, all in top form. This is in a more conventional grand opera style than most of Rimsky-Korsakov's works and may appeal to a wider audience than many of the others. A new recording might improve on the French-only libretto (with English notes), but it would be difficult to find singers to equal these (Le Chant du Monde LDC 278 1035–6). Recently the Kirov Opera performed it in Washington and more performances of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas as well as recordings can be expected to follow. For a small sampling of some of the delights of these operas in purely orchestral terms, I can recommend the recording of Suites drawn from the operas played by the Scottish National Orchestra under Neeme Jarvi on Chandos CHAN 8327–9. I haven't even mentioned the brilliance of the orchestration be be found on nearly every page of every opera; these suites bear out the claim that only one or two other composers can rival Rimsky-Korsakov in orchestration.

You may finish this article thinking I am simply fixated on a certain composer whose operas are deservedly unknown and neglected. But it is my contention that largely because of ideological division, people in Western Europe and North America have lost contact with these masterpieces of Russian opera. Not only were they appreciated by his contemporaries, but they have remained popular in Russia since their composer's death in 1908. The operas based on works of Pushkin and Gogol could well be considered essential for anyone claiming a knowledge of Slavic culture. One of the commentators goes as far as to compare Rimsky-Korsakov's cycle of legends and folk tales to Wagner's cycle.

1994 will mark the 150th anniversary of Rimsky-Korsakov's birth. Surely it's high time to make his work more accessible to all.

If you truly love opera you will make the effort to become acquainted with some of these works. There are real difficulties: Slavic singing is not the same as *bel canto*. Many of the recordings I have mentioned in this article were purchased in Britain, although most of them have shown up in

Ottawa at one time or another. Notes, texts, and other materials are either non-existent, scarce, or imperfect. But it has been worth it all to me, and it might be the same for you.

MK

Opera within reach, 1992-1993

Here is our usual reminder of the remaining operas this season that it is reasonably easy to get to:

Ottawa

The production of Opera Lyra Ottawa:

La traviata, by Verdi. 10, 12, and 13 March.

Toronto

The Canadian Opera Company is performing:

Tosca, by Puccini. 2, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17, 20, 22, and 25 April.

The Bartered Bride, by Janacek. 8, 10, 13, 16, 18, 21, and 24 April.

Montreal

A Morgan Tour for NCOS members pays a visit to L'Opéra de Montréal on those dates marked by asterisks. The telephone number for Morgan Tours is 722-7572.

Lucia di Lammermoor, by Donizetti. 27

February and 1, 4, 6, 10, and 13* March.

Madama Butterfly, by Puccini. 17, 19, 22, 24, and 28 April and 1* May.

Die Fledermaus, by J. Strauss. 29 and 31 May and 1, 3, 5, and 7 June.

Hamilton

At the furthest distance we consider within reach for the purposes of this summary, there is Opera Hamilton with the remaining production:

Madama Butterfly, by Puccini. 1, 6, and 8 May.

Membership renewal

The 1992 membership year ended on 31 December, so now we have to mention the need to send in your money for 1993. In case you have not yet renewed, another renewal form is in this *Newsletter*, giving the prices of the various forms of membership. Please renew, and try to persuade new members to join: the more members we have, the more we can do and the more effectively we can do it.

Letters to the editor

We have received no letters, so we will print an extract of a letter sent to the President after last year's gala, Music and Spain.

Perhaps it will help you to decide about this year's, To Russia with Music.

I would like to extend congratulations to the National Capital Opera Society on the superb Gala you recently held. "Music and Spain" was, most assuredly, a very heart-warming theme on an unusual snowy April evening. Most enjoyable was the programme of music provided—flamenco guitars at their best and the rich young soprano voices of Laura [Dziubaniuk] and Mary Ann [Swerdfeger].

Already I'm looking forward to next year's!

Answers to the Opera Quiz

If you answered (a) Josephine Barstow, (b) Frank Little, and (c) Louis Quilico, you are very good. If you also answered Paul Frey for (d), go to the head of the class.

We need you!

Sometime this spring, the National Capital Opera Society will be holding its annual general meeting. Of course, one of the items on the agenda is the election of Board members. Many of us have been devoted, dedicated workers for years, and still fight (and play) on. For a variety of reasons, however, several of our Board members will not be able to continue next year; we will miss them, but look forward to welcoming newcomers. Will you consider being one of them? Please don't be shy. The only qualifications are enthusiasm, a willingness

to work (and have fun) in the name of opera, and membership in the NCOS.

We are an informal group, generally meeting once a month, usually at someone's house. Perks include watching opera videos, having good conversations about opera and music, and enjoying occasional fireside chats about nearly anything.

If you, or someone you know, might be interested, please call me (Marjorie Clegg) or one of the other Board members listed below.

MC

Discount for members

Last time we recommended Counterpoint Classics for Christmas presents. It's also a good place for birthday presents. Remember that we get a good discount if we present our membership cards when making purchases.

Counterpoint Classics, Murray St.
20% off each regularly priced CD.

NCOS Board Members

President	Marjorie Clegg	Newsletter	John Clegg
Vice-President	Anne Marie Smith	Publicity	Mary Anne Griffith, Brenda Lane-Eraut
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Scholarships	Bobbi Cain, Anne Marie Smith,	NAC Liaison	Bobbi Cain, Mary Anne Griffith
Membership	Gerda Ruckerbauer		

Some telephone numbers

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