

Newsletter • Bulletin

Spring

2008

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A Grand Night for Singing by Shelagh Williams

The *Black and White Opera Soiree* goes from strength to strength. This year's edition not only raised \$415,000 for Opera Lyra Ottawa (OLO) and the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO), but entertained us royally, to boot! — and even had us singing along!

The beauty of it was that the singers were all Canadian, and extremely good! Of course, baritone Russell Braun and tenor Michael Schade need no introduction, and the latter co-hosted with Steven Page of the *Barenaked Ladies*. Who, you say? — well the group has been going for 20 years and, besides being lead singer, he has also composed music for the Stratford Festival. Last, but by no means least, was the lovely mezzo Lauren Segal, a graduate of the Canadian Opera Company (COC) Ensemble Studio, who sang Siebel in the COC's recent *Faust*.

The NACO, under debuting but experienced opera conductor Giovanni Reggioli, a protégé of Plácido Domingo, was its usual brilliant self and book ended the first half of the programme with Strauss's delightful *Die Fledermaus* overture and sprightly *Tritsch Tritsch Polka*. The OLO Chorus, though not busy, made the most of its chances, delivering excellent back-up, but without a serious challenge to sink their teeth into.

The programme was a nice blend to appeal to both avid and not-so-avid opera-goers — the comment "I haven't been here in ages!" was heard in passing! The co-hosts and singers kept the programme flowing with amusing antics and playful touches, including the introduction of a hockey stick and Senators jersey to placate those miss-

ing their *Hockey Night in Canada*! Operetta composers J. Strauss Jr. and Lehar and opera composers Mozart and Rossini supplied each soloist with two or three solos, plus ensembles and extended excerpts. Michael Schade shone in such favourites as *Dein ist mein ganzes Herz* from

Lehar's *Land of Smiles* and *Il mio tesoro intanto* from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Russell Braun showed off his lovely rich baritone and intensity in *Her die Hand* from Strauss's *Gipsy Baron* and *Finch'han dal vino* from *Don Giovanni*. It will certainly be a treat to hear him

next year make his Canadian debut in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* with OLO! Lauren Segal demonstrated her prowess in trouser roles in *Chacun a son gout* from *Die Fledermaus* plus Cherubino's aria *Voi, che sapete* from *Nozze di Figaro*. She and Russell Braun concluded the Mozart segment with a delightful rendition of the seduction aria *La ci darem la mano*, with Russell literally carrying her off! All of these were thoughtfully provided with surtitles, but unfortunately they were almost illegible to those of us in the rear seats!

Steven Page was not allowed to sing during the operatic concert, although he did show off his guitar-playing skills in accompaniments, where called for. However, come the encores, he and his guitar led the other singers plus the audience in his hit song *If I had \$1,000,000!* Then he launched easily and surprisingly into *Nessun dorma* from *Turandot*, with full chorus and orchestra, and a little moral and vocal support from his friend Michael Schade in the final glorious high ending! What a way to finish a concert!!



President's Message

It's getting to be better and better to be an opera lover in the National Capital area. The Met simulcasts are now in their second season and seem to be developing an approach which explores the new medium fully without distorting it. At the beginning there were some experiments with odd camera angles and movement which detracted from the productions. But now things have settled down. The intermission interviews are delightful. The two productions from Madrid have also been very well received, although not well attended. Opera alla pasta has shown two unusual Russian operas already this year with good attendance. This seems to indicate that our members would like to see operas not easily available either in performance or in the new media. Whether or not the Met showings will hurt attendance at some of the other local opera events is yet to be determined. Given the number of small opera productions and opera recitals, even with orchestral accompaniment one can't help feeling that opera enthusiasm is on the rise. I was particularly pleased to learn that there will be a repetition in concert of another great opera from the French repertoire, namely Thomas' *Hamlet*. And of course next season there will be Opera Lyra Ottawa's *Onegin* and *Barber*. See you at the opera!



2008 Annual General Meeting

The NCOS AGM will take place on April 20th, 2008 as part of the Opera alla Pasta afternoon. The AGM will be held between the DVD presentation and the pasta dinner. If you wish to meet fellow members, find out the latest news or have questions or comments, then attend this meeting. Your participation is essential if we are to maintain an active and vibrant society.

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Thank You, Thank You

Many thanks to the following who contributed to the content, production and distribution of the past year's Newsletters. Our apologies to anyone who has been overlooked.

Pat Adamo, Jim Burgess, Ute Davis, Laura Clegg, Marjorie Clegg, Renate Chartrand, Paula Copeland, Murray Kitts, Tom McCool, Asalyn Meakin, Gordon Metcalfe, Klaus Siemsen, Norma Torontow, Mary Vulsteke, David Williams, Shelagh Williams.

New Members

**Carl H. McMillan
Sabine Rohlfs
Tom & Lieselot Scales
Norman & Marion Takeuchi**

*Opera Alla Pasta -
Sunday Afternoon
at the Opera*

Mozart's *Bastien et Bastienne* and *The Impresario*

April 20, 2008

The DVD showings begin at 2:00 p.m. at St. Anthony's Soccer Club. Following each showing, at about 5 p.m., there will be a delicious Italian buffet with salads, pasta, main meat dish with vegetables, dessert and coffee, all for only \$15.00. Reservations are required at least three days before the presentation. Contact Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 or email kmitts1637@rogers.com.

Things you could have enjoyed

Nutcracker at the World Exchange Empire Theatre

On December 22, 2007 Ottawa ballet enthusiasts could have seen and heard San Francisco Ballet's *Nutcracker* in high definition and digital surround sound. This was a film of the performance that took place on December 19, 2007 at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco. Probably not as spectacular as the National Ballet of Canada's production, which was being transmitted live the same afternoon to three different Ottawa theatres, this *Nutcracker* is a critically acclaimed production that plays to sold out houses in San Francisco every December. The dancing was superb and the music was, as always, simply magnificent. Moreover, both the picture and sound quality in the theatre were excellent.

Tom McCool

Another Reason to Rejoice

After performing in Handel's *Messiah* on December 19, baritone Joshua Hopkins was honored at a special reception hosted by the Canada Council for



the Arts. The occasion was the formal presentation of the \$15,000 Sylva Gelber Foundation Award, established in 1981 by the late Sylva Gelber of Ottawa to help young musicians embarking on a professional career. The award is given to the most talented classical music candidate under 30 years of age.

The reception, held in the Le Café at the NAC, provided an opportunity for family and friends, including several members of the NCOS, to celebrate Joshua's success. Conductor Trevor Pinnock, as

well some of the other performers in *Messiah*, were there to congratulate him, too.

Joshua continues to show us why he won the Brian Law Opera Scholarship in 2003. His voice and stage presence are exceptional and we wish him all the best in his blossoming career. To learn more about Joshua, please go to the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition link on our website at: <http://ncos.ca/>

Marjie Clegg

Ooh La La Opera

Our spirits were raised in mid-February by an entertaining production of *Where Love Dies*, a pastiche of arias from *Carmen* and *Rigoletto* intertwined in a detective story narrated by Artistic Director Sylvain Landry. Stalwarts Shawne Elizabeth (soprano) and George Valettas (tenor) sang to their normal standards and were ably supported by Christopher Mallory (bass) and Francois Doucet (baritone). However, the star was undoubtedly Renée Lapointe (mezzo-soprano) who sang the roles of Carmen and Magdalena and who will sing the role of Flora in OLO's *La Traviata*. Renée Villemare accompanied adroitly and sympathetically. The audience enjoyed the mixture of humour and serious singing and we can look forward with anticipation to Ooh La La's next production.

David Williams

University of Ottawa's Opera Workshop

Sandra Graham gave us an excellent production of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* using two casts of current and former students who alternated in the four performances. For the performance we attended former students Denis Lawlor (Don Alfonso) and Isabelle Lacroix (Fiordiligi) anchored the production. Gavan Quinn (Ferrando) and Conlin Delbaere-Sawchuk (Guglielmo) not only sang well but captured much of the humour of their parts. Alaina Viau (Dorabella) and Marie-Claire Fafard-Blais (Despina) rounded out an excellent cast and Barbara Jeffrey (harpsichord) and Sara Brooks (piano) accompanied admirably. An NCOS member who also heard the other cast said that they were equally good, if not better. These are opera productions that are well worth attending.

David Williams

Gerald Finley's *Doctor Atomic* in Chicago

by Ute Davis

We travelled to Chicago to take in the Lyric Opera's production of *Doctor Atomic* for several reasons. It was a rare opportunity to see Gerald Finley perform an operatic role in North America; this modern work had only been seen in San Francisco and Amsterdam; critics have been surprisingly complimentary about such an unusual new work.

Previously produced modern works for this opera house had not been box office successes, considering that the Lyric, on average nights, sells out over 100%. When we attended Luciano Berio's *Un Re in Ascolto* in the 80's, we were able to move from balcony to empty seats at orchestra level during first intermission. *Amistad* by Anthony Davis, a few years later, was also not a great success. The Lyric of Chicago felt it had taken a major financial gamble, when it decided to stage this modern work. As it happened, the public, perhaps because the critics appeared to like the opera, flocked to see it, with only a few seats left for each performance of a relatively long run. One lady we spoke to at a performance of *La Traviata* the night before, had seen every performance and was coming back for the remaining ones.

Doctor Atomic describes the Manhattan Project of the latter part of WW II, leading to the Los Alamos tests and subsequent atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with all the terrifying physical and ethical problems of introducing this new era, and the effects on the scientists and military staff involved. We were pleasantly surprised to find that each performance was preceded by an informal 'chat' with director Peter Sellars, sporting a cheerful Hawaiian shirt. Sellars proved to be highly personable, very entertaining and not merely knowledgeable, having written the libretto for John Adams' *Nixon in China* music. Robert Spano conducted.

The cast, many of whom had sung in the original San Francisco production, included Richard Paul Fink, Eric Owens, James Maddalena and Roger Honeywell, past member of the COC Ensemble training program, all as

more or less conscience stricken scientists. Jessica Rivera sang Kitty Oppenheimer, the humanitarian wife. Her beautiful soprano role was new to this Chicago production. The role was originally to have been sung by the astounding mezzo soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, who, due to illness with cancer, was replaced by mezzo Kristine Jepson at San Francisco Opera. After Hunt Lieberson's untimely death, the role received a Fach-shift to lyric soprano, which Rivera sang with considerable technical control and beauty. Gerald Finley sang the extremely difficult central role of Robert Oppenheimer with consummate skill.

He is an extraordinarily effective dramatic actor with a fine voice which moves one to tears, particularly in unusual repertoire like *Owen Wingrave* and *Doctor Atomic*. Here his musical delivery of the most memorable "Batter my heart, three person'd God", which he performs in a silhouette setting with his terrifying scientific creation suspended above him, is positively shattering. In my humble opinion, Gerald is at the absolute pinnacle of his career.

The dramatic impact of music and plot is devastating - even when viewed in sixty years of his-

toric perspective. The music is not discordant while reiterating the horrifying dilemma in which the project workers find themselves. This is an opera which takes days, if not weeks, "to sink in", much like the recently seen *From the House of the Dead* by Janáček, or even Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*.

I note that the Metropolitan Opera will stage a co-production of *Doctor Atomic* with English National Opera in October of 2008 in New York. Produced by Penny Woolcock, this will also star Gerald Finley as Oppenheimer. Lois and Don Harper are organizing an 11-14 October, 2008 tour to the MET production.



Peter Sellars Photo by Ute Davis

Our Sensational Carmen Julie Nesrallah

by Ute Davis

Every production of *Carmen* stands or falls with the talent of the leading lady. The recent February 2008 Tri Cities' *Carmen*, with Ottawa mezzo-soprano Julie Nesrallah proves this point. Julie, one of our past Brian Law Opera Competition first prize winners, has made this her signature role. She very much benefits from her prior experience. I had not expected her to perform better than she did last year in Syracuse but



Photo by Ute Davis

she seems to improve with every performance I have witnessed, from Saskatoon to Kingston, Victoria to Syracuse. A treat to listen to and a sexy delight to watch. Allow me to quote from Stephen Landesman, music critic of the Binghamton Journal. "Estrogen and Testosterone levels surged to new levels last weekend. Canadian *CARMEN* mezzo-soprano Julie Nesrallah unreservedly inhabited the role of Bizet's gypsy temptress in a performance that was occasionally R-rated as well as gorgeously sung. Julie Nesrallah obviously knows the title role intimately. She has sung it to great acclaim in Canada and doubtless brought along some useful dramatic baggage. The second verse of her well-sung Seguidilla in Act 1 was sung on her back (with a fine B-flat), and here as elsewhere was extremely suggestive. Moreover, her contemptuous and erotic taunting of Zuniga (baritone Alexander Scopino sings quite well but needs to work on his French) was

capped by a remarkable, almost seamless drop ("Tra la la la") into a sonorous chest register. Nesrallah also brings with her the mastery of the original Halévy-Meilhac dialogue, which she occasionally provided as a very welcome relief from Guiraud's somewhat tiresome recitative. Her Act 1 "Habanera" was performed (with deliberate leisure) as she took a sponge bath outside the cigarette factory."

The superb costumes were designed and made for her by Elisa Richards this time, rather than rented from Malabar. The young children's chorus was a delight to see and hear, well above the usual standard; indeed their French diction was superior to that of some of the principals. The whole production brings great credit to the stage direction team of Peter Sicilian and Judy Berry, who bring the children back in the fourth act to mingle with the crowd, waiting to watch the bull fight, and a nice touch which delighted the audience. Todd Geer, singing Don José, has a lovely tenor voice which nicely complements Carmen. The role of Micaëla was sung very pleasingly by Tri Cities' young artist Julia Ebner. Maestro Duane Skrabalak conducted a more than competent orchestra.

Following the performance we were very pleased to learn that Julie has been added to the roster of the major New York agency of Wolf-Piper Artists International. Also, she has been awarded a mid-career grant by the Canada Council for the Arts, which she will use to travel to Vienna and Paris where she plans on learning new roles.

Opportunity Strikes for Yannik-Muriel Noah

by Ute Davis

We chanced to be attending the performance of the COC *Tosca* on 6 Feb 2008, and experienced the usual sinking feeling when they announced that Eszter Sümegi, the lead soprano, was too ill to perform. However, we then learned that she would be replaced by the cover-singer Yannik-Muriel Noah, whom you will remember was the first prize winner of the Nov 2007 Brian Law Competition. Her "Vissid'arte" brought the house down and her overall performance was first class!



Photo by Ute Davis

Book Review

The King and I (The Uncensored Tale of Luciano Pavarotti's Rise to Fame by His Manager, Friend and Sometime Adversary) by **Herbert Breslin & Anne Midgette**. New York: Doubleday, 2004

Reviewed by Tom McCool

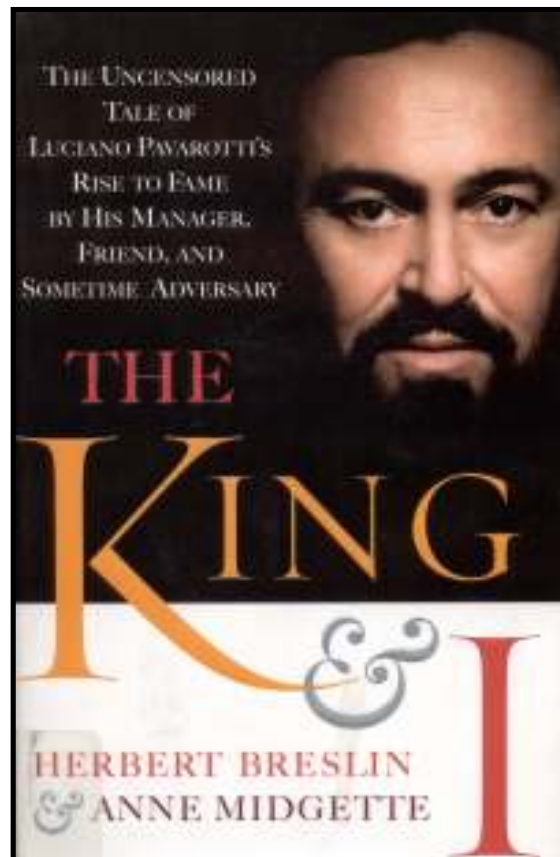
The “King” in the title refers, of course, to “The King of the High Cs”, Luciano Pavarotti. The “I” is Herbert Breslin, Pavarotti’s longtime publicist and manager, and one of the authors of this book. If Breslin were to be given a regal moniker it might well be “The King of the Disparaging Remark” as he seems to take great pleasure in putting down just about everybody in the world of opera. Breslin seems unaware of the old proverb, “Don’t speak ill of the dead.” In his defence it is only fair to mention that Pavarotti was alive when *The King and I* was published. It also must be mentioned that there are many flattering comments about Pavarotti in the book, such as his incredible talent, his endearing folksy charm, his frequent acts of kindness towards young colleagues and his overwhelming generosity. Furthermore, Pavarotti is given the last word in the book, as the “Epilogue” consists of an interview with him in which he presents his view of his years with Breslin. So, regardless of whether you are a Pavarotti lover or a Pavarotti hater, this book will be an intriguing read with lots of inside information, anecdotes and salacious gossip aplenty.

Breslin first met Pavarotti 1967 when the tenor was a relative unknown and helped him become the biggest opera star since Caruso. Breslin takes credit for guiding “the greatest career in classical music”. He probably overestimates his role in Pavarotti’s rise to fame but Breslin *was* instrumental in getting Pavarotti out of the opera house and into solo recitals, big arena shows (such as the Three Tenors concerts) and, most impor-

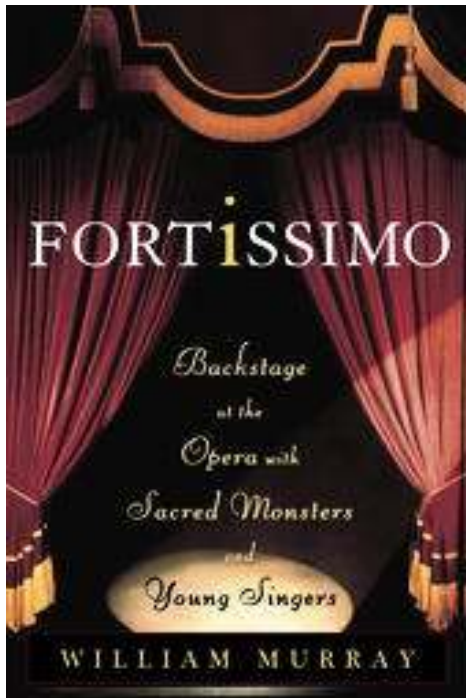
tantly, onto television screens. It was the latter that made Pavarotti a household name and also made him untold millions of dollars. One personal curiosity: how could someone who earned immense amounts of money during his career end up at his death with debts of over \$25 million? According to Breslin part of the answer to this question was Pavarotti’s extraordinary generosity. Another is Pavarotti’s extravagance. There are illustrations of both in *The King and I*. Pavarotti and Breslin maintained a business and personal relationship that lasted 36 years and it is this relationship that is the focus of this book. Near the end of Pavarotti’s career there was a “falling out” between the two and perhaps that might explain the mean-spirited sarcastic attitude of the author toward his subject and the emphasis on Pavarotti’s

negatives. And, there were definite negatives: the frequent cancellations, the outsized ego, the refusal to learn to read music, the messy marriage split, the tax problems with the Italian government, the string of “secretaries” and the huge entourage that always accompanied him and so on, all of which are detailed here. However, after all is said and done the one thing that remains in memory is the glorious voice that makes everything else irrelevant. Nobody or no book can ever take that away from him.

A number of copies of *The King and I* are at the Ottawa Public Library.



Book Review



Fortissimo: Backstage at the Opera with Sacred Monsters and Young Singers.
William Murray. New York, Crown, 2005.
 Reviewed by Shelagh Williams

This enthralling book is excellent background reading for anyone with an interest in opera and its workings. It starts off with a hilariously funny recounting of an almost disastrous performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* by young not completely professional opera singers. The author sang Edgardo, for the first and last time, before deciding that his future lay in his pen and not in his voice! However, his own experiences as an aspiring opera singer gave him a sympathy for and an understanding of the trials and tribulations of the 12 young singers in the very successful Lyric Opera (LO) Centre for American Artists (LOCAA) in Chicago, whose progress he follows throughout the 2003-4 season in this book. He explains that he would have benefited from such an excellent programme, which takes in four singers per year, all well-trained graduates, mostly with some pro-

fessional opera experience already, and keeps them usually for three years. They receive intensive coaching and master classes, plus rehearse the roles they are given to sing or cover in the 8 operas produced annually on the main LO stage. It was fascinating to follow the progress of singers who have recently sung in Ottawa - Canadian Erin Wall and Nicole Cabell, whom I interviewed - and in Toronto at the Canadian Opera Company (COC) - Guang Yang. One soon realizes how much hard work and stamina are necessary to achieve their level of excellence-plus good luck in auditions to win the roles! The book covers and gives background on most of the 12 LOCAA singers but, of special interest was Canadian tenor Roger Honeywell, the oldest of the group. He had been acting at Stratford and, after being cast as the lead in a musical, found he had an operatic voice! With a family to support, he was under tremendous pressure to master the technique to control his voice and make the switch to professional opera singer as quickly as possible. His breakthrough came at the 2003 Opera de Montreal Gala, where it suddenly all came together and he was "the big discovery" of the evening! I have since heard him at Glimmerglass Opera and the COC and his acting experience and ability are an added bonus to his good looks and voice, and set him apart from most singers. The yearlong backstage chronicle of the LO itself and its staff and of the opera season, with the changes in programme and casts, brought on by financial necessity and singer indisposition, kept one turning the pages compulsively. Interspersed among the tales of the LO and LOCAA were personal reminiscences of directors, especially Zeffirelli, and of "sacred monster" Pavarotti and his manager, Herbert Breslin. There were also interviews with various established opera singers and other notables in the business together with "inside" opera stories, both the illuminating and the amusing varieties. The author has a nice style and turn of phrase, while providing enough detail and some suspense over events to keep one's interest piqued. This book, dedicated to his Italian grandmother, was obviously a labour of love.

London Lights! by Shelagh Williams

A visit to England in November allowed us to spend a week in London and we were soon cheered by the Christmas lights and decorations and three excellent operas: Verdi's *Aida* and Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* at the English National Opera (ENO) and Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden.

The ENO had a highly anticipated blockbuster production of *Aida* on its boards and our first port of call on arrival in London was the ENO Box Office. A sign said "*Aida* is sold out, but ask about returns", which we did, and were rewarded with a pair of good tickets for 6.30 that evening in the second balcony, which is steeply raked to give excellent sight lines. It is over two decades since the ENO's last *Aida* and, for this new co-production with Houston Grand, Norwegian National and San Francisco Operas, they pulled out all the stops, especially visually. British fashion designer Zandra Rhodes travelled to Egypt for her research, and then called on her affinity for bold, theatrical colour to bring the funerary tomb paintings to life. The costumes, make-up and wigs might have been slightly over the top, but Egyptian priests in long gold pleats, Radames in long brown and navy pleats, and Princess Amneris in orange floating sleeves were arresting and delightful. My only quibbles were with the "Ethiopian" outfits of *Aida* who could have done with more visually identifying costumes (even if she was a slave!) — you should be able to easily pick out the title character on stage! — and with the abysmal costume of her father Amonasro — he looked like a clown, not a king! The clever sets consisted mainly of panels, brightly striped and with hieroglyphic "squiggles", which slid about easily, often leaving a suitably pyramid-shaped opening for scene changing. British director Jo Davies gave us a delightfully straightforward, conventional production, and her staging of the 4th Act Judgement of Radames scene behind an Egyptian eye-shaped grill, rather than off-stage, with Amneris watching and raging in front, was brilliant. In the Triumphal March, choreographer Jonathan Lunn treated us to dancers, acrobats, children, and Radames arriving on an enormous, ingenious, humanly manipulated turquoise elephant with huge tusks and ears! All of this was imaginatively lit by Bruno Poet, whose final scene with the light slowly diminishing in

area to become a suffocatingly small tomb was most effective. Musically the production was also a hit, with ENO's new Music Director, conductor Edward Gardner, keeping his orchestra tempi well up, and controlling his excellent chorus and cast beautifully. American mezzo Jane Dutton, as Princess Amneris, brought us a vivacious vixen while bass-baritone Iain Paterson overcame his costuming to deliver a splendid and lively Ethiopian King Amonasro. Tenor John Hudson sang a very strong Radames, well up to the difficult role and interacting well with *Aida*. Soprano Claire Rutter, although debuting in the title role, was marvellous, acting well and sounding especially lovely in her Act 3 aria about her native Ethiopia. The English translation of the late (1927-2007) Edmund Tracey, to whom this run was dedicated, was sung well and with good diction by all (although the surtitles were still useful!), but "Goddess *Aida*" for Radames' opening aria took a bit of getting used to! However, it was a treat to see and hear such an excellent all round production of this classic "Grand Opera"!

Equally exciting was a new production, a co-production with Opera National de Paris, of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, dedicated to the memory of Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007) since it was one of his favourite roles, and set to feature Rolando Villazon. Alas, the casting for this production was soon modified, but not to the detriment of our enjoyment! A prolific composer, Donizetti excelled himself with 5(!) operas between May 1831 and May 1832, but only his comic *L'elisir d'amore* has stayed in the repertoire continuously over the last 175 years. With such a lively and amusing production, directed (and costumed) with the French flair of Laurent Pelly, and his usual set designer Chantal Thomas and light man Joel Adam, its longevity is no mystery! — we were lucky to get day tickets to the penultimate evening! The production had been set in 1960's Italy and opened surprisingly to a mountain of hay bales, on which the land owner Adina was sunbathing provocatively and coquettishly in a scoop-necked sundress! This was just the beginning of a production which included

London Lights! (continued)

such vehicles as a hay-baler, a tractor, bikes, Italian scooters, and for Dr. Dulcamara a huge suitably decorated truck which opened into a full stage for his sales pitch! The latter's ads for his various elixirs for every embarrassing affliction imaginable, covering the front cloth for scene changes, and a speedy and well-trained Jack Russell terrier enlivened proceedings during any "quieter" moments, though sight gags such as a military troupe consisting of only two soldiers, one very short and one over 6 foot tall, and a "verismo" setting of several scenes outside the back of a roadside bar, piled high with crates beside the door to the gents', ensured they were few in number. Young Finnish conductor Mikko Frank dealt very well with the orchestra and his excellent though youthful cast — younger than expected as promised tenor Rolando Villazon withdrew due to indisposition. In his place Italian tenor Stefano Secco in his Royal Opera debut brought us a charming, sympathetic, beautifully sung young Nemorino. French baritone Ludovic Tezier as Belcore looked, acted and sang the part of the handsome, haughty, self-satisfied sergeant well, in spite of a disclaimer at the start about an incipient cold. Before the last act the intermission was unusually long, finally ending with an announcement of another cast change: Tezier had lost his voice, but would continue to act the part, and there were cheers when it was announced that Alessandro Corbelli, in London for his role of Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola*, would sing at the side! This was my first experience of this situation and it worked very well, not least because of the quality of the replacement singer. I had heard this Italian bass-baritone two years ago at Covent Garden as the husband in *Il Turco in Italia* and many of us saw him in the title role in *Gianni Schicchi* in the Met cinema broadcast last winter. Veteran baritone Paolo Gavanelli was a real treat as the "itinerant quack" Dr. Dulcamara, bringing a rich voice and good comic timing to his portrayal of the unprincipled but likeable rogue. But the star and revelation, a singer new to me, was young Polish soprano Aleksandra Kurzak, pert and saucy, with the good looks and cute figure to match her marvellous voice with its coquettish coloratura in be-

lievably portraying the flirtatious Adina to a "T" — Nemorino, Belcore and Dulcamara all succumbed! She has sung, and will be singing, several major roles both at Covent Garden and the Met, and certainly bears further hearings! This was a great evening — trust the Royal Opera House Covent Garden to have the depth to come up trumps in even the most trying circumstances!

For our final opera at ENO, Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, we had the time and opportunity to get excellent orchestra tickets (at full price!) for the second performance of an atmospheric new production, first seen in 2006 at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre. The ENO has an affinity for Britten, as evidenced by their beautiful *Death in Venice* earlier in the year, and brought us another wonderful, enigmatic production by Scottish director David McVicar. The Victorian ghost story was set by Tanya McCallin in a maze of translucent sliding panels and cunningly lit with shifting patterns by Adam Silverman, so that scenes melded into each other and ghosts suddenly appeared as if out of thin air. With only a small but excellent chamber orchestra of 13 and most of the cast in role debuts, conductor Garry Walker, himself debuting at the ENO, had his work cut out for him, and delivered an outstanding performance. As the possibly corrupted children, 13-year old treble Jacob Moriarty, as Miles, and soprano Nazan Fikret, a student at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, as Flora, were veterans in their roles and showed it. The ghosts, which may only exist in the children's new Governess' mind, were brought to life eerily — though perhaps too corporeally — by tenor Timothy Robinson as Peter Quint and Australian soprano Cheryl Baker as former governess Miss Jessel. Irish mezzo Ann Murray, as the older housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, sang and interacted well with Welsh soprano Rebecca Evans, in her difficult but well-acted role as the discerning — or over-imaginative? — new Governess. I found this production to be not as scary as one we saw at the ENO almost 20 years ago, where projected images for scenery made everything much more haunting. However, this was a superb production with the finale of the spot lit Governess kneeling to hold the dead Miles leaving an indelible image.

London in November is wonderfully vibrant, with a wide choice of opera, art, theatre, and concerts.

Events You Should Enjoy!

Edith Wiens is scheduled to present three Master Classes at Freiman Hall, Ottawa University on March 26, 27, 28, 2008. (Information 613-562-5733)

Yoriko Tanno's Shooting Stars Operatic Showcase will present *Encounters in the Woods* based on *Hansel and Gretel* at 7:30 pm on March 28 & 29, 2008 at Carleton University. (Tickets 613-697-5753)

The 3 Divos Debut Concert featuring Alexander Savtchenko, Franco Tenelli and Igor Emelianov takes place at 8:00 pm on March 29, 2008 at the Unitarian Church (Information 819-685-2412)

The Ottawa Bach Choir presents *The Splendour of Bach* on April 18, 2008 at 8:00 pm at St. Matthew's Church. Soloists will be Daniel Taylor, Benjamin Butterfield, Daniel Lichti and Agnes Zsigovics. (Information 613-270-1015)

Graduate and undergraduate vocal (and other) recitals will take place at Ottawa University during March, April and May. (Information www.music.uottawa.ca)

Pellegrini Opera will present Puccini's *La Bohème* on Saturday April 26, 2008 at 7:30 pm at Dominion Chalmers United Church. (Information 613-236-3736)

Ooh La La Opera will present a benefit production for Free the Children of *Little Red Riding Hood* on May 2, 2008 at 7:00 pm at Glebe St. James United Church. (Information www.oohlalaoopera.ca)

The NACO Ovation Series includes Mendelssohn's *Elijah* on May 7 & 8, 2008 at 8:00 pm. Soloists are Elizabeth Keusch, Roxana Constantinescu, James Taylor and Nathan Berg with conductor Helmuth Rilling.

For long term planning take note that Placido Domingo's Operalia Competition will take place in Quebec City September 18 to 24, 2008.

Carleton University's Learning in Retirement Program presents the course *Five Mozart and a Beethoven Opera* on six Thursday afternoons from April 3 to May 8; 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. (Information: 613-520-6624 and www.carleton.ca/cie)

Florence Foster Jenkins was notorious for her complete lack of pitch, rhythm and singing ability but she had a passionate devotion to her art and was prepared to hire halls and locations so that she could perform in public. Her last recital at Carnegie Hall was a complete sell-out and tickets were the hottest item in New York City. If you want to hear more of her story go and see/hear *Glorious* at the Thousand Islands Playhouse, Gananoque, from May 7 to 31, 2008. Also in this summer's season is *Les Misérables*, July 3 to August 30, 2008.

Information at 1-866-382-7020 and www.1000islandsplayhouse.com

Opera Quiz

The Bible has provided a fruitful source of opera plots and characters.

1. In which Verdi opera do Zaccaria and the High Priest of Baal appear?
2. In which Saint-Saens opera does the High Priest of Dagan instigate the action?
3. What was Massenet's opera called before being produced in London as *Salome*?
4. Benjamin Britten set what Chester Miracle Play to music?
5. What Rossini opera concerns the Book of Exodus?
6. Which operas were written about a famous visitor to King Solomon by (a) Gounod and (b) Karl Goldmark?
7. Which operas were written about an Old Testament King by (a) Marc-Antoine Charpentier, (b) Arthur Honegger and (c) Carl Nielsen?

Answers

1. Nabucco 2. Samson et Dalila 3. Herodiade 4. Noye's Flutte 5. Mose in Egitto 6. (a) *La Reine de Saba* in 1862 (b) *Die Königin von Saba* in 1875 7. (a) *David et Jonathan* in 1688 (b) *Le Roi David* in 1921 (c) *Saul og David* in 1902

Pleasure and Pain:

The Von Stade - Ramey Recital by Murray Kitts

These are undeniably two great artists both with a special connection to Ottawa and the NAC. Frederica von Stade, although suffering from the remnants of a bad cold, provided most of the pleasure in this concert. Her voice is not what it was twenty or thirty years ago but she is still capable of producing beautiful sounds with all the artistry that has made her famous. Samuel Ramey has developed a terrible beat in his voice which I find unpleasant. It was particularly ironic that just a short time later I was screening the great nightmare scene from Verdi's *Attila* (1991) which showed this artist at his best. To me the selections from opera by von Stade were the highlights of the evening. For some reason or other Ramey's portrayal of Gounod's devil was much better than those devils by Berlioz and Boito - probably because of the longer legato lines in the latter numbers. The Aaron Copeland arrangements of American folk music were most enjoyable, especially the von Stade solos and the final comic duet. Singing Broadway songs is a risky business for opera singers at best but these came off as well as could be expected. Special mention must be made of von Stade's lovely rendition of Sondheim's *Send in the clowns*. Only in the encore *Ole Man River* were there hints of the former greatness of Ramey's voice. Jack Heggie, a real live opera composer, had a difficult time on a couple of occasions when someone stumbled, but managed to keep the show going with his expert piano accompaniments.

OLO Opera Studio Vocal Competition by David Williams

Formerly known as the Vivian Asfar Award, this competition is restricted to members of the OLO Opera Studio. This year's event took place on March 2nd and seven of the eight studio members participated. Laura Whalen, Gregory Dahl and Gregory Atkinson, all appearing in OLO's *La Traviata*, were the judges. The \$1000 OLO Studio Award winner was baritone Marc-Antoine d'Aragon and the \$500 New Sun Award winner was soprano Danielle Dudycha. Marc-Antoine will sing Antonio in OLO's *Le Nozze di Figaro* and appear in Seattle Opera's *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2009. Danielle will sing Annina in OLO's *La Traviata*.

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera "From the Met"

The Toll Brothers Metropolitan Opera Saturday Afternoon Live Radio Broadcasts from Lincoln Center in New York.

Peter Grimes March 15, 2008

Tristan und Isolde March 22, 2008

Ernani March 29, 2008

La Bohème April 5, 2008

The Gambler April 12, 2008

Satyagraha April 19, 2008

La Fille du Régiment April 26, 2008

Die Entführung aus dem Serail May 3, 2008

Additional information: www.metopera.org

Movies From the Metropolitan Opera

Peter Grimes – Britten. Encore Broadcast Saturday March 29, 2008, (1:30 - 5:15 pm)

Tristan und Isolde – Wagner. Encore Broadcast Saturday April 12, 2008, (12:30 - 6:05 pm)

La Bohème – Puccini. Saturday, April 5, 2008 (1:30 - 4:50 pm) Encore Broadcast Saturday May 3, 2008.

La Fille du Régiment – Donizetti. Saturday, April 26, 2008 (1:30 - 4:40 pm) Encore Broadcast Saturday May 10, 2008.

Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild

Xerxes May 6, 2008 7:00 pm.

Lohengrin & Parsifal April 6 & 13, 2008 1:00 pm
Hosted by Wilkie Kushner

DVD presentations of the operas at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street.

Opera Within Reach

OTTAWA

Opera Lyra Ottawa

La traviata by Verdi March 15, 17, 19 & 22, 2008

All performances are at the NAC.

Information: 613-233-9200 x221 www.operalyra.ca

Orpheus Society

The Sound of Music by Rodgers & Hammerstein
June 6-14, 2008

Savoy Society

The Pirates of Penzance by Gilbert & Sullivan
April 4-6 & 9-12, 2008

Orpheus and Savoy performances are at Centrepointe Theatre. Information: 613-580-2700
www.centrepointetheatre.com

MONTREAL

L'Opéra de Montréal

Madama Butterfly by Puccini
May 24, 28 & 31 June 2, 5 & 7, 2008

Performances are in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts

Information 1-514-985-2258
www.operademontreal.com

TORONTO

Canadian Opera Company

Eugene Onegin by Tchaikovsky
April 2, 6, 10, 12, 15, 18, 24, 26 & 30, 2008

The Barber of Seville by Rossini
April 16, 19, 25, May 2, 4, 8, 10, 13, 16, 21, 23, 2008.

Pelléas et Mélisande by Debussy
May 6, 9, 11, 14, 17, 20, 22, 24, 2008.

All performances are at the Four Seasons Centre.
Information: 1-800-250-4653 www.coc.ca

Opera Atelier

Idomeneo by Mozart
April 26, 27, 29 May 1, 2 & 3, 2008

All performances are at the Elgin Theatre.
Information: 1-416-872-5555 www.operaatelier.com

Opera in Concert

The Snow Maiden by Rimsky-Korsakov April 6, 2008

Performance in the Jane Mallett Theatre.
Information: 416-922-2147 www.operainconcert.com

SYRACUSE

Syracuse Opera

The Medium by Menotti and *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo
April 27 and 29, 2008

Information: 1-315-476-7372 www.operasyracuse.com

Check for times and other details on the Websites.