

Newsletter • Bulletin

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Brian Law Winner Philippe Sly Takes a Bite of the Big Apple

by Ute Davis

The National Council Auditions of the Metropolitan Opera of New York are in their 58th year. They now fulfil their founders' intent and are a major path to an operatic singing career, as proven by the list of 93 artists who will perform at "The Met" this season having started their careers by participating in these auditions. Panels of expert judges assessed the almost 1500 entrants this year at the district level. Those who qualified were then heard at one of the 14 regional competitions from which the 22 most talented were invited to sing in New York at the semi finals, 6 March 2011. Only 8 of these youngsters were invited back to the finals the following Sunday, 13 March 2011, where 5 were named as winners.

Thus music-lovers of Ottawa may take great pride in the success of Philippe Sly who, last Sunday, was one of the 5 winners out of 1500 starters! This enormous test of vocal talent, training, acting ability and on-stage poise has few equals. And Philippe scored his victory at the age of 22, a clear two years younger than anyone else in this year's finals. Also we believe that he is the youngest male Canadian to win in the 58 year history of the competition. I note that there was no tenor or mezzo-soprano among the finalists. Opera enthusiasts may be interested to learn that Philippe "drew the short straw" and was the first to sing in the finals on the Met stage with full orchestra under the baton of Maestro Patrick Summers.... some pressure! He sang a

flawless "Sibilar gli angui d' Aletto" from *Rinaldo* (Händel) but really nailed down his win in the second half of the program with "O! Du mein holder Abendstern" from *Tannhäuser* (Wagner) which drew tumultuous applause from the audience of 3800 in the sold-out house. Joyce DiDonato charmingly hosted the proceedings throughout and Lawrence Brownlee sang some tenor arias to help relieve the nerve-racking ordeal of waiting for the judges' verdict, prior to announcement of the winners. At a reception following this, Philippe was awarded his \$ 15,000 prize.

I have followed Philippe's career from his very early days in the Opera Lyra Ottawa children's choir, his schooling under the tute-

lage of Laurence Ewashko, to singing Masetto for Sandra Graham while still in high school, singing in the Opera Lyra chorus in a notable *Barber* in Southam Hall, his win of the National Capital Opera Society Brian Law Scholarship Competition in 2009 to recent McGill productions of *The Rake's Progress* (Nick Shadow) and *La Bohème* (Marcello). The past two weeks of hectic activity and intense pressure in New York

brought out the very best in this young man. His modesty and personal charm match his talent and have greatly impressed not only the judges but also his colleagues on stage and his many new acquaintances. Based on this I predict not only a major international singing career but also the arrival of another out-



Philippe & his parents

photos by Ute Davis



The 5 winners

Green Sly Johnson Barron Lim

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President's Message

Joshua Hopkins is in good company these days. Having finished a successful run in Dallas as Mercutio (where his “expressive theatrics” were praised by one critic) with the much-praised Juliette of Lyubov Petrova, Opera Lyra’s *Lucia*, Joshua is on to San Diego where he will play Valentin confronting the Mephistopheles of Greer Grimsely (Opera Lyra’s Dutchman) in a production of Gounod’s *Faust* in April. Other Brian Law Competition alumni are to appear in Opera Lyra’s new season including Yannick-Muriel Noah in the starring role of Nedda in *I pagliacci* with Jonathan Estabrooks as her lover, Silvio, and Wallis Guinta as the bewitching Lola in *Cavalleria rusticana*. Wallis appeared with the Canadian Opera Company’s recent presentation of a group of Stravinsky operas in New York in a much admired production by Robert Lepage. Yannick-Muriel is appearing in the title role in *Tosca* in Edmonton Opera’s production in April. It was particularly pleasant to get word of Phillippe Sly’s success as his youth was again not an obstacle in recognizing his great potential as a singer. Thanks to Ute Davis for covering the competition so well and to Shelagh Williams who is truly our New York Met correspondent in this issue. If you have not received your membership cards and receipts so far this year please be patient. Our usually efficient Membership Chairman has had to recover from a prolonged illness. She is getting better and will see that you receive all these documents.



A reminder to renew your membership if you have not done so.

Newsletter Editors

David T. Williams
Tom McCool

Opera Alla Pasta

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

May 15, 2011

Der Freischütz

by Carl Maria
von Weber



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Brian Law Winner Philippe Sly Takes a Bite of the Big Apple

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standing ambassador for Canada of the calibre of Gerald Finley and Russell Braun. Let me summarize with my personal conclusions on Philippe's latest accomplishment. To see his performance in context one has to recognize the extremely high standard shown by everyone at this level of competition, despite the enormous pressure of being in New York City and singing on the Met stage. Nevertheless Philippe was outstanding in being one of the youngest competitors and showing a superb timbre in the bass baritone Fach while demonstrating the results of his excellent training and his pure technique. His diction was flawless in Italian, English and German and this was one of the qualities which separated him from most of his fellow competitors. He demonstrated first class vocal expression and has a natural physical grace in performance which gives him a striking stage presence. I believe that he showed the greatest potential of all the competitors and that this was a major factor in the eyes of the judges, just as it appeared to our adjudicators in the Brian Law Competition almost two years ago.

Philippe is in the final term of his Bachelor Degree at McGill Schulich School of Music. Following this he will spend the summer in the Merola Opera Program at San Francisco where he will be singing the role of Dr. Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. In September he starts with the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto as a member of their Ensemble Studio.

Future Engagements in 2011 include:

Soloist, *DOVER BEACH*, Samuel Barber
at Dominion Chalmers Church, Sunday, 1 May, 7:30 pm

Soloist, J.S. Bach *Cantata BWV 20*, Saturday, 28 May,
8:00pm at Eglise Saint-Viateur d'Outremont

Dr. Bartolo, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, August,
Merola Opera Program

Pilatus, *St. John Passion*, 9, 10 and 11 November,
Montréal Symphony Orchestra, Kent Nagano conducting

Web Site Update

by David Williams

Jim Burgess (Webmaster) and Renate Chartrand (Publicity) have been working hard to give our website (ncos.ca) a facelift which has resulted in a new and hopefully more appealing appearance. The Home Page now features news as it happens, especially major steps in the careers of our competition winners. For instance: Philippe Sly - a winning finalist in this year's National Council Auditions of the Metropolitan Opera of New York. Last year's NCOS news were Bobbi Cain's passing and Gerald Finley becoming the Brian Law Competition Patron. Upcoming Events now also feature links to other operatic events in the area. If you have any interesting news let Jim and Renate know so that they can add it to our website. Keep up to date by visiting the new website often!

Another change to the Webpage can be found in the Newsletter Archives. I have scanned old issues of the Newsletter and converted them to pdf files so that the full text and photos are now available if you wish to check back issues. However, we are missing some early issues and if you have any of these in your possession please consider lending them to us so we can add copies to our archive pdf files.

**check out our
new website**

**Brian Law 2011
Opera Competition
November 19**

Put this date in your diary

Something Old, Something New

by Shelagh Williams

The winter season at Toronto's Canadian Opera Company (COC) was comprised of Mozart's lovely *Magic Flute* and John Adams's contemporary *Nixon in China*, both of which received very good productions.

The presentation of *Magic Flute* was an absolutely charming new production for the opera house. The COC last produced Mozart's masterpiece singspiel in 1993, as Richard Bradshaw rightly felt that the cavernous O'Keefe/Hummingbird Centre was not for Mozart. Debuting Americans, director Dianne Paulus, who did the recent lively *Kiss Me Kate* at Glimmerglass Opera, and set and costume designer Myung Hee Cho applied a light hand to the proceedings. The overall concept was the entertainment for Pamina's name day, with a lovely little garden theatre on-stage being prepared during the overture to present a play within a play, and the second act continuing in the evening in the large moving garden labyrinth - most ingenious! Besides the beautiful costumes and scenery, the designer's black and white animals, both the original three-headed fierce serpent and the later more friendly species, were delightful

rather than the interminable tedious German text between musical numbers? Among the three ladies, Brian Law Opera Competition runner-up Wallis Giunta was a fetching second lady, and is, incidentally, to join the Met Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program for 2011/12. Deep voiced Russian bass debutant Mikhail Petrenko, just before his *Boris Godunov* Pimen at the Met, and Canadian bass-baritone Robert Gleadow were suitably serious and sonorous as Sarastro and Speaker respectively. Canadian soprano Lisa DiMaria was spunky as Papagena and debuting American tenor John Easterlin, appropriately dressed as a rat, was humorously sly and cunning as Monostatos, but a better actor than singer. Absolutely brilliant as Queen of the Night was Canadian coloratura Aline Kutan, debuting at the COC in a role she has sung on both sides of the Atlantic. We caught the end of the run, missing established Canadian stars Michael Schade and Isabel Bayrakdarian as Tamino and Pamina. However, since this is a story of youth, we were enchanted to hear two fresh-voiced young Canadians in their third performance as the young couple: debuting



Tamino

photo by Michael Cooper



Papageno

photo by Michael Cooper

and imaginative, and the tricycle horses for the three spirits were inspired! Appropriate thunder and lightning, plus stars where needed, especially in the trial by fire and water, by American lighting designer Scott Zielinski, enhanced the moods of various scenes - a complete package. Add to this the first class musical values, with COC Music Director Johannes Debus bringing his great experience with the work to conducting the top drawer COC Orchestra and Chorus and the large first class cast. However, couldn't they have followed the Ottawa U Opera Company's good example and used English

tenor Frederic Antoun as Tamino and COC Ensemble Studio member soprano Simone Osborne as Pamina. But the star of the show, as is often the case, was Papageno, sung by Russian baritone Rodion Pogossoy, COC's 2008 Figaro in *Barber of Seville*. Pogossoy was obviously a veteran of the role, singing it beautifully, managing all sorts of clever stage business, and still expertly playing his pan pipes! The opera ended with everyone dancing around happily, at the end of the party, echoing our pleasure at this whimsical yet completely satisfying and successful production of *Magic Flute*!

Something Old, Something New (continued)

Entirely different, in theme, time period, musical style, language, and presentation, but still well produced and enjoyable, was the 1987 John Adams opera, *Nixon in China*, with libretto in near-rhyming quatrains by poet Alice Goodman. This excellent production, by Americans director James Robinson, with set designer Allen Moyer and costume designer James Schuette, was

Good stage direction kept the proceedings lively and engaging

staged in 2004 for Opera Theatre of St. Louis and a consortium of American opera companies. It cleverly takes advantage of the fact that the 1972 happening portrayed was a TV event which had blanketed the airwaves and so uses multiple TV consoles throughout the piece, both as furniture and also often showing videos of the actual event! The stage set itself is a huge red box, which with the talents of debuting American lighting designer Paul Palazzo morphed smoothly into each locale as needed. The opera opened arrestingly, before any music was played, with a phalanx of miniature terracotta warriors in the middle and an elderly Chinese woman doing Tai Chi, gradually joined by the uniformed COC Chorus and dancers who one by one moved a warrior to a line at the back of the stage and then carried on the Tai Chi until the whole stage was full of the display! Then the TV sets flew in, with images of Air Force One, as Nixon landed, to start the opera proper! Good stage direction kept the proceedings lively and engaging, as during the formal banquet where the many toasts ended with the main characters in a conga line! This staging melded with young debuting Spanish conductor Pablo Heras-Casado's fine harnessing of the COC Orchestra and Chorus plus cast to produce a felicitous whole, although at times the surtitles were absolutely necessary to check out what the English lyrics actually were. It was also useful that the pre-show chat had indicated that in some of the rather puzzling scenes the lyrics and actions were stream of consciousness, or dreams, as in the odd final act where the char-

acters change into nightwear and lie on the TVs while reflecting on past memories. Similarly, perhaps subconscious musings on events explains why, in the beautifully danced grand propaganda ballet *Red Detachment of Women*, Mrs. Nixon suddenly intervened to protect the heroine! We had looked forward to hearing Tracy Dahl as Mme. Mao, a role she has played since 2004, but she cancelled due to illness. However, in her COC and role debut American soprano Marisol Montalvo was strong and came across as feisty in her important aria, "I am the wife of Mao Tse-Tung". English tenor Adrian Thompson made his COC debut as the ageing President Mao Tse-Tung, in very heavy facial makeup and being helped to get about. Most of the other singers were also COC debutants but were well-versed and so excellent in their roles: American bass-baritone Thomas Hammons as Henry Kissinger, American soprano Maria Kanyova as Mrs. Nixon, and baritone Chen-Ye



Yuan as a sympathetic Prime Minister Chou En-Lai, ending the opera with his aria: "How much of what we did was good?" American baritone Robert Orth is no stranger to the COC and has sung the role of President Nixon since 2004. He not only looked like him, but exhibited Nixon's self-conscious smooth aspect, as when he so described the plane landing at the start of the opera! This was a well-presented, well-thought out production of a modern opera and it was interesting to compare it favourably with the MET's Live in HD production! It was a real treat to have two winners at a COC visit to Toronto!

Well MET!

by Shelagh Williams

When Pro Musica Tours announced its week long New York trip of 5 operas in 6 days I was immediately interested. But when it transpired that it was to use the recently renovated and reopened Empire Hotel directly across from Lincoln Centre and the MET Opera I was sold. I was definitely not disappointed, by seating, performances or weather.

Our first opera on Friday evening was a great production of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which had opened the 2007-8 season with Natalie Dessay in the title role - and which we were to hear with both her and the marvellous Maltese tenor Joseph Calleja as her lover, Edgardo: top casting, to be sure! Director Mary Zimmerman updated the story to the composer's time, in the mid 1800s, and with designers Daniel Ostling on set, Mara Blumenfeld on costumes and T. J. Gerckens on lights (and lightning!) gave us a superb and evocative presentation, although the only Scottish plaid on view was over the shoulder of Normanno, captain of the guard - sung nicely by tenor Philip Webb. The tableaux developed smoothly and wonderfully, with the Act I countryside for the first scene opening beautifully to the larger fountain scene, the worn and shabby castle hall for Act II being tarted up nicely by servants for the wedding, and the ruins for the Act III Wolf's Crag Castle scene evolving cleverly into the castle ballroom for the Mad Scene, then quickly removed for the simple final graveyard scene - a lesson in effective and efficient direction and design! My only quibble with the director is her addition of extra characters to the work. Her two Irish Wolfhounds in the opening country scene are gratuitous and expensive potential hazards, though charming; the photographer in the pivotal marriage contract scene is a needless distraction, though he does keep the cast busy and not at each others throats; but the introduction of two real ghosts, in similar white gowns, one of the girl by the fountain, and one of Lucia herself, helping Edgardo to kill himself at the end, are really unnecessary intrusions into a viewer's own (perfectly adequate) imagination! Maestro Patrick Summers, from the Houston Grand Opera, had no trouble getting the best out of the MET Orchestra and his choice cast. Among the men at Lucia's castle, Korean bass Kwangchul Youn as the chaplain Raimondo, and French baritone Ludovic Tezier as Lucia's tall treacherous brother Lord Enrico seemed more compassionate than usual. Since Joseph Calleja had cancelled in *Tales of Hoffmann* when we were in NYC last year, we were overjoyed that the Maltese tenor, in great voice, sang a stupendous Edgardo, from the love duet



through the marriage contract scene to finally his outstanding death aria in the graveyard scene. It is hard to imagine that last scene ever being dispensed with, especially with a good tenor! But of course the star of the show was French soprano Natalie Dessay, thankfully back to the MET after last year's cancelled Ophelia in *Hamlet*. She looked suitably delicate and had the requisite voice, which combined with her acting skills embodied Lucia. Her Mad Scene was something to behold, and hear! - her runs and repetitions seemed to come naturally out of her madness, and her high notes as she was first jabbed by the doctor, and then carried off by the men of the chorus were a splendid idea, splendidly pulled off! This was a most enjoyable production, with two thankfully healthy leads, a great start to the week!

Saturday afternoon was the final performance of Rossini's *Armida*, which made its MET premiere last year as a vehicle for soprano Renee Fleming, and in which she starred for us. Since the piece requires an outstanding soprano, 6 tenors and 2 basses, it is not surprising that it is not often staged. In fact, the programme notes mentioned that only in Naples, when Rossini was musical director for their theatres, did he have the stability and quality performers to write this and similar serious works, in

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this case to showcase both his future wife, soprano Isabella Colbran, and the new stage machinery of Teatro San Carlo in its reopening after a fire. In her second production, director Mary Zimmerman had her own fantastic effects, as befits a work about a sorceress, including Armida herself and the Crusader Rinaldo descending from the sky in Act II, and large creatures and flowers adorning the set. The basic unit set by inventive set and costume designer Richard Hudson consisted of white walls with useful hidden doors, often topped by either a red-clad Love (female) or Revenge (male), as appropriate, all interestingly lit by Brian MacDevitt to contrast the two worlds of the Christian Crusaders and the Arab sorceress Armida, out to destroy them. A highlight was the Act II ballet in Armida's palace, aimed at enchanting Rinaldo, which was choreographed by Graciela Daniele, assisted by Daniel Pelzig. One could watch and understand this ballet in its entirety, since the whole stage was visible, as opposed to a single cameraman's view in the Live in HD transmission last year, which was less great to see! Although some of the singer belly dancers of the chorus were a bit older and plumper than desirable, the dancing demons in tutus, ala Ballet Trocadero, were a hoot! Musically, Italian conductor Riccardo Frizza dealt well with his large and talented musical forces, ensuring the love duets between Armida and Rinaldo, and the tenor duets and trio came off properly. The two basses, Peter Volpe, as stately Idraote, Armida's uncle, and David Crawford, as Astarotte, singing and dancing leader of her spirits, held their own among the sur-



feit of high voices. These included the tenors Italian Antonino Siragusa as the wicked Paladin Gerlando, American John Osborn as the Crusader Commander Goffredo, and diminutive but dramatic Brit Barry Banks and German Kobie van Rensburg as the Paladins Carlo and Ubaldo respectively. The main tenor role, of course, was Armida's love, the Paladin Rinaldo, beautifully sung by young American tenor Lawrence Brownlee, whom we are to hear in *La Cenerentola* at the COC in April. The final act trio of the last three named tenor Paladins was amazing to hear! Magnificently gowned, as befits a sorceress, and radiant, Renee Fleming breezed through the vocal display of her role as Armida, obviously relishing the finale after the tenor trio, when Rinaldo escaped her clutches, and she flew off in a rage! Beautiful to both see and hear, with a strong final act, this was a lively and entertaining performance.

After a delicious dinner at Josephina's across the Plaza, we were back to the MET for the evening performance of Gluck's *Iphigenie en Tauride*. The MET had not done this opera for 90 years until the present production, premiered in 2007, which featured mezzo Susan Graham in the title role, tenor Placido Domingo as her brother Oreste, and American tenor Paul Groves as his friend Pylade, the top notch singers we also enjoyed in their final performance of the run. In the opera, Greek princess Iphigenie of the unhappy House of Atreus is a captive priestess of Diane in Tauride (Crimea), forced by King Thoas to sacrifice any and all foreigners. Unfortunately, the Greeks Oreste and Pylade arrive, setting off an unhappy train of events. Stephen Wadsworth, the director, with sets by Thomas Lynch and lighting by Neil Peter Jampolis, gave us a very dark atmospheric three part unit set consisting of, on the right, a large temple to Diane, complete with altar and a huge statue of the goddess, then a small multi-use chamber on the left, and to the left of that a small area, signifying the outside, unfortunately angled backwards so that it was difficult to see events there. The accompanying costumes by Martin Paklerdinaz were acceptably pagan rather than classical Greek, but the excellent production was marred by Daniel Pelzig's weird, inapt and almost funny choreography, and what Iphigenie was doing at the end, wandering around with a green scarf, except perhaps using up bars of music, completely escaped me! Wadsworth had the same tendency as Zimmerman to needlessly add characters to spell everything out - in this case, during Iphigenie's initial nightmare, illustrated by the appearance of her mother killing her father, and then both

Well MET!

by Shelagh Williams

inexplicably remaining on the stage afterwards! Nevertheless, Patrick Summers returned to meld the MET orchestra and his phenomenal cast into a gripping whole. Canadian mezzo Julie Boulianne was debuting at the MET as Diane, and flew down magnificently at the end to sort out all the problems, pardoning Oreste, freeing all the Greek women, and sending Iphigenie and Oreste safely home to Mycene! - literally "Deus ex machina"! Baritone Gordon Hawkins' deep voice suited the malevolent and actively threatening King Thoas, and tenor Paul Groves' voice was high and crisp enough to contrast with Domingo's when the two sang duets. Domingo himself is a marvel - 70, yet still going strong! Oreste was originally written for a baritone, but in the Vienna version here used it is a tenor role, so that Domingo's rich and now more baritonal tenor was perfect for the role. However, since most of the time he was in chains, his actions and brave acting were somewhat curtailed, and it was a stretch to consider him a young Greek prince, the contemporary of Iphigenie and Pylade! Susan Graham was ever-present and lived the role, suffering intensely yet regally, until she suddenly lurched furiously at Oreste, knife in hand - I really was quite worried several times as she waved that long knife around the high priced help! Fortunately, of course, she couldn't kill Oreste, and they soon realized they were sister and brother. The arrival of Pylade with Greek soldiers to rescue Oreste, and then the appearance of Diane herself, ensured a happy ending to this tense, moving and totally satisfying production.

Just to underline his stamina, on Monday evening we had Maestro Domingo in the pit conducting Gounod's *Romeo and Juliette*! However, not so strong was our scheduled Juliette, Angela Gheorghiu, who cancelled from the run the day before the opening of this revival of the 2005 production! However, we were treated to a lovely



photo by Ken Howard

Iphigenie
Oreste Pylade

performance by Korean soprano Hei-Kyung Hong from the MET's deep roster of singers. Physically, Guy Joosten's production was impressive, with Johannes Leiacker's sets for the tale of "star-cross'd lovers" emphasizing astronomical effects with side panels in severe perspective inlaid wood / marquetry, and backdrops which seemed to open and close depending on the happiness or sadness of a scene. The wedding bed was breathtakingly suspended in mid-air, as if to signify the lovers were in 7th heaven, and it descended to end the idyll, landing on the same piece of stepped stage furniture which had been the couple's wedding altar: both the start and end of the marriage. The delightful picture was completed with suitable lighting by David Cunningham, and charming costumes by Jorge Jara: pink for Juliette and blue for Romeo, and helpful colour coding to distinguish Capulets and Montagues. Musically it all combined



Romeo & Juliette

photo by Sara Krulwich

under Domingo's knowing hand into a mellifluous whole - not surprising when you have for smaller roles such MET veterans as mezzo Wendy White as Gertrude and baritones Dwayne Croft and James Morris as Capulet and Friar Lawrence respectively. We again heard Canadian mezzo Julie Boulianne, here delightful in the pants role of the page Stephano. Tenor Sean Panikkar was a suitably obnoxious Tybalt, and baritone Lucas Meachem, a ho-hum Don Giovanni at Santa Fe Opera, was much more animated here as Mercutio. But the highlights were the singing and acting of our Romeo and Juliette, Czech tenor Piotr Beczala and soprano Hei-Kyung Hong. The four love duets were so beautifully sung that it was hard to believe that Hong had come in at

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the last moment. Hong, small and delicate, was a treat - she both looked and sounded the part of a young girl. Young Beczala was a revelation - good looking, able to act, and blessed with a marvellous voice, with lovely high notes - he is one to watch! What an evening - a grand night for singing!

Our final opera, on the Wednesday evening, was the opening night of the revival run of the MET's new production of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, which had premiered in October, 2010. Unfortunately, not everyone has Domingo's stamina and, reportedly due to exhaustion, Russian conductor Valery Gergiev did not come back from St. Petersburg for this run, and instead we enjoyed another Russian conductor, Pavel Smelkov, who had debuted at the MET last year. This was not the first defection - the anticipated German director, Peter Stein, withdrew, reportedly over visa complications, at the last moment, and Stephen Wadsworth was suddenly recruited, with only 5 weeks to go, to save the show. It was to be the MET debut of Stein and his German-Austrian designer team of Ferdinand Wogerbauer on sets and Moidele Bickel on costumes, and so Wadsworth's hands were already tied in that respect, but he managed to pull things together in time. He was limited by Wogenbauer with a single bare grey basic set with a few moveable pieces and some partial backdrops to fly in, all focused around a huge open book symbolizing Russia's history, around which the actions (of a cast of 200) had to be fitted! Fortunately Bickel's costumes were more colourful, her Polish court with the ladies all in white long dresses and hats both striking and unforgettable, and Duane Schuler's lighting also helped. Maestro Gergiev had brought with him a superb cast of East European singers for all but the title role, and so conductor Smelkov had no trouble with them in giving us a musically satisfying reading of the score, in this case with Mussorgsky's original orchestration and including all the scenes he wrote, in both original and final versions. Rich lower voices predominate in this opera, with Russians bass Mikhail Petrenko as the monk Pimen reading extensively from his Russian History book, only a week after his COC Sarastro, baritone Alexey Markov as the boyar Shchelkalov, and bass Vladimir Ognovenko as the thankfully amusing drunk monk Varlaam, the role a speciality of his. Especially memorable was Russian bass-baritone Evgeny Nikitin as the cunning Jesuit priest

Rangoni, the sexiest priest I've ever seen, slinking around in black satin robe and long coat with large red leather gloves, as he persuaded the Polish Princess Marina to influence Grigory, hopefully to convert Russia to Catholicism! Among the tenors, Russian Oleg Balashov as the treacherous, oily Prince Shuisky, and Latvian Aleksandrs Antonenko in the major role of Grigory, the monk turned regal pretender Dmitry, were especially believable, and provided a nice vocal contrast. As Polish Princess Marina, mezzo Ekaterina Semenchuk from Belarus, clad totally in black to contrast with her ladies all in white, cut a fine figure. With her rich voice she brought her calculating character to life in her Polish Act scenes with Rangoni and Grigory - an act added to introduce a leading female role, necessary to get the opera accepted for production! The star singer was German bass Rene Pape, in his role debut as Boris: suitably authoritative, yet tender with his children, and with a great rich voice to express the many facets of his character. Another major player in this opera is the Russian people, embodied by the huge MET Opera Chorus, all in fine



voice. Unfortunately, their long last act as directed was unnecessarily violent and distasteful, with far too many boyars and priests brutally tortured and murdered - it could be shown artistically and not be so graphic and off-putting. This production, with its minimal sets, was certainly nothing as grand as the great Canadian Opera Company production of a few years back - one felt something was missing. However, in spite of the short preparation time, Wadsworth did pull it off, and with all the magnificent basses, yes, this Boris was good enough!

Events You Could Have Enjoyed!

Ottawa Pocket Opera: OPO opened its third season on Mar. 11 with Three One-Act Operas, all staged and, as usual, sung in English. In the first, *The Canary Cantata* by Telemann, OPO director, tenor David MacAdam, gave an amusing account of the stages of grief after having lost his artistically trained canary. Salieri's delightful tiny gem *Little Harlequinade* demonstrated how to shed unwanted suitors, well performed by soprano Nadia Petrella (currently in the Master's program, Manhattan School of Music), baritone Mark Gough (OLO Opera Studio) and MacAdam. Most entertaining was Menotti's *The Telephone*. Composed in 1947, it is even more relevant today - Nadia and Mark relished their parts. They also offered a duet and arias in between operas. For the earlier works, the addition of a small string/virginal ensemble to the piano provided wonderful sound. A very interesting evening, deserving a larger audience!

Renate Chartrand

Yannick-Muriel Noah: Cathedral Arts presented *Christmas at the Cathedral* headlining our BLO Competition winner, Yannick-Muriel Noah, and she did not disappoint. Stunningly gowned, she offered us a full programme including an oratorio excerpt, *Hear ye, Israel*, from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, in the first half, and three arias, one by Strauss, and two by Verdi, plus a spiritual, after the intermission. With the Christ Church Cathedral Choir of Men and Boys she also presented a substantial Christmas excerpt from Handel's *Messiah* and two lovely Christmas carols plus a part of Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, all before the interval. The excellent choir itself sang several seasonal selections, with the highlight being three arias sung by a superb quartet of well-trained young treble choir boys. All was adeptly conducted or accompanied by the Cathedral Music Director Matthew Larkin on piano or organ. As an unannounced surprise, Yannick-Muriel finished off the programme with her spectacular *Ebben* from *La Wally*, to send us all home happy!

Shelagh Williams

16th Annual Shooting Stars Operatic Showcase: Yoriko Tanno again gave us the World Premiere of a

commissioned new opera, *The Lady of the Night*, written by composer Jose Hernandez with the students' vocal development in mind. The cast of 50 singers and some dozen or so others ranged in age from 9 to 60 years old with a wide range of training and experience. Hernandez said his aim was to *give each singer an individually crafted role, challenging and yet within their limits*. The opera was in four acts and the music ranged from rock 'n roll to operatic singing and included solos and ensembles. Hernandez also directed and conducted the 16 piece orchestra. The opera focuses on the life of Monica (Monica Botelho), and her daughter Monique (Monique Nadeau) with scenes in the present and in flashbacks to Monica's youth. Monica is the host of a radio talk show called *The Lady of the Night* and this allows interviews, commercial jingles and assorted other activities. Angels, guardian angels, devils, reporters, discos and fires provided opportunities for all of the singers. Bill Parker was Master of Ceremonies and provided a synopsis of the plot of each act for those without programs. The singers' enjoyment in performing this work was very evident both on stage and as they surrounded us in the aisles! **David Williams**

OLO Opera Studio Competition: This year's OLO competition among its four young Opera Studio members was held conveniently at the NAC Fourth Stage, in a cabaret style setting, with Claude Laverdure and Tyrone Paterson as hosts. The judges' criteria were clearly set out. The judges, from OLO's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, were Gregory Dahl (Enrico) and Wendy Hatale-Foley (Alisa). Each competitor sang two arias, accompanied by Principal Repetiteur and Studio Manager Judith Ginsburg. Bethany Horst, soprano, won the Joy MacLaren New Sun Award (\$3,000). She sang "Da tempeste" from Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and "Adieu, notre petite table" from Massenet's *Manon*. Marie-Claire Fafard-Blais, coloratura soprano, won the OLO Opera Studio Award (\$2,000, donated by Judith Burrows). She sang "O luce di quest' anima" from Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix* and

Events You Could Have Enjoyed! (continued)

"Je marche sur tous les chemins/Gavotte" from Massenet's *Manon*. The Spotlight Award (\$1,500, donated by Tyrone and Joanne Paterson) was won by Mark Ellis Gough, baritone, who sang "Tu sei il cor" from Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and "Questo amor, vergogna mio" from Puccini's *Edgar*. Mezzo Sarah Christina Steinert gained the Emerging Artist Award (\$500, donated by Pasqualina Pat Adamo). She sang "Que fais-tu blanche tourterelle" from Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* and "Dopo notte" from Handel's *Ariodante*. The Audience Choice Award (\$200) was won by Marie-Claire Fafard-Blais. A good time was had by all - and Bloody Madness cocktails by many!

David Williams

Ottawa University School of Music: Continuing its tradition of excellent opera productions, Ottawa University Opera Company's offering this year of *Magic Flute* was absolutely splendid in every respect. Music and stage director Professor Sandra Graham augmented her excellent musical efforts with marvellous costumes and headpieces designed and built by students from the Department of Visual Arts class of Professor Jennifer Macklem. This resulted in a monster and illuminated costumes and headpieces to rival those of any professional production! Professor Graham's directorial choice to use English spoken text between arias ensured the production flowed easily and clearly. Conductor Christian Paquette, in his 4th year, directed the first-rate full orchestra with panache and even took a small part in the opera action! Throughout the six performance run the various parts were double cast to give everyone stage experience, and the opening night, January 28th, singers were all good. Natasha Fam as Pamina, Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure as Tamino and Philippe Courchesne Leboeuf as Papageno were very fine, and Ania Hejnar as Queen of the Night was outstanding. All in all, a superb production, well worth seeing!

The Chamber Music Ensembles concerts at term end at the Ottawa University School of Music are always enjoyable, but those in December last year were especially delightful. To our pleasant surprise we were treated to a beautiful rendition of Schubert's

Shepherd on the Rock by soprano Isabelle Lacroix, whose voice continues to develop into a lovely instrument. This was followed by mezzo April Babey, accompanied by string quartet and piano, in a soulful interpretation of Chausson's *Chanson perpetuelle*.

Of course, fourth year and master's graduation recitals of individual singers occur throughout the year. Before Christmas soprano Monica Botelho gave her brilliant Master's Recital, consisting of opera arias by Massenet and Donizetti; songs by Verdi, Poulenc and Turina; and Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras*. Her collaborative pianist was Jose Hernandez, from Toronto, especially noteworthy in the piano solo in the Turina medley. Now that the end of the school year is approaching, the recitals are occurring at a fast and furious pace - always free and entertaining!

Shelagh Williams

Savoy Society: As a fund-raising venture in early December, the Savoy Society mounted a concert version of Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, hoping to raise enough funds to produce a fully staged version of the work in April, 2011, as a change from their regular Gilbert and Sullivan fare. Since the Unitarian Church was packed, with people turned away at the door, we can hope that they were successful financially - they certainly were artistically! Sung in an English translation set in high society Chicago, with a narrator to link the familiar musical numbers, the production was conducted by Allison Woyiwada and accompanied on the piano by Nicholas Roy. An effective chorus and good character singers able to pull off patter songs kept up the pace. Dr. Fraser Rubens as Monty Nelson of Chicago and Martin Dessureault as Prince Nikalas had pleasant if not great tenor voices, but the star was lovely blonde soprano Natalya Matyusheva, a fourth year Ottawa University voice major, outstanding as the merry widow herself, Adele Talbot. Let us hope the Savoy Society does mount a complete version, and continue to produce operettas for us to see.

Shelagh Williams

Events you Could Enjoy

by David Williams

Opera Lyra Guild: *High C and High Tea* on April 17, 2010, at 1 pm will feature Murray Kitts who will present DVD excerpts with commentary on Rossini operas. Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street. www.operalyra.ca or 613-233-9200 x221

University of Ottawa: Students present recitals during April and May. www.music.uottawa.ca

Ottawa Pocket Opera: OPO will present two one act operas. Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci*: an incomparable tale of love, jealousy, and betrayal set within a group of travelling performers. This will be paired with Mozart's *Bastien and Bastienne*: a charming pastoral story of two young innocents guided through their first encounter with Cupid by a wise and kindly wizard. These operas will feature the return to OPO of bass-baritone Gregory Sheppard as Tonio in *I pagliacci* and the wizard Colas in *Bastien and Bastienne*. St. Matthias Anglican Church, Parkdale Ave., Ottawa on June 10 & 11, 2011, 8:00 pm.

Pellegrini Opera: Bizet's *Carmen* will be performed on May 27 & 28, 2011. Information: 613-798-1479 www.pellegriniopera.org

The Kiwanis Music Festival takes place from April 4th to 30th. The senior and open voice sections are provisionally scheduled for April 26-30, 2011.

Ottawa Classical Choir and a number of guest choirs together with the New World Philharmonic Orchestra will present *Messa da Requiem* by Verdi on May 21, 2011 at the National Arts Centre, 8:00 pm. Soloists will be Maria Knapik, Renee Lapointe, Enrique Pina and Jeffrey Carl.

Donna Bown will perform a recital with harpist Jennifer Swartz. The program will include works by three contemporary Canadian composers, Caroline Lizotte's *La Madonne*, Srul Irving Glick's *King David Sonata* and Roddy Ellias's song cycle. There will also be Ravel's *Kaddish*, Amit Gilutz's *Storm's Morrow* for harp and haikus and a jazzy little number. Temple Israel, 1301 Prince of Wales Drive, April 9 at 8:00 pm. Tickets: 613-224-1802

Did We see the Same Opera ??

by David Williams

In the winter 2011 newsletter our reviewer, Shelagh Williams, made the following comments about the Puccini's *Tosca* that a number of us saw in Rome: *Our first opera was an interesting production ...; sumptuous costumes by Carla Fonzi Cruciani and good direction by Rossana Siclari ensured success with the cast, which was young, but excellent....; this blending of new technology for scenery with a solid musical production (though the "orchestra" was a bit thin!) of all the best bits of Tosca ensured an entertaining evening.*

Another member of the group, Shelagh's sister Moira Hudgin, had an entirely different opinion: *I personally was offended and disgusted by the spectacle - to me, it was a farce, and a waste of time and money. The singers were second string, the setting distracting and the orchestra cacophonous.*

Your editor's opinion, to paraphrase an old chestnut, was: *the opera was like the Curate's egg - good in parts - however, overall, it was somewhat disappointing.*

Why not become a contributor or reviewer for our newsletter??
Each person's opinion is equally valid and appreciated

So here you have three different opinions of the same performance. Who is right? None of us!! Whatever the opera or wherever it is performed, every member of the audience will have a different viewpoint on the merits of the production. There is no right or wrong opinion - each person's opinion is equally valid and appreciated.

So please consider becoming a contributor or reviewer for our newsletter! The more contributors we have to our newsletter, the more interesting it will be for our readers.

Lucia in Love, in Despair, in Madness, Captivates All by Murray Kitts

In spite of some inappropriate or puzzling stage directions OLO managed to present an enjoyable production of Donizetti's great opera. Lyubov Petrova's performance as the title character places her in the category of one of the finest interpreters of the role. She used her beautiful voice, her tremendous technical ability, her grasp of the ecstasy and agony of the young girl, to create in the minds and hearts of the audience an unforgettable experience. Fortunately in Marc Hervieux as her lover, Edgardo, the heroine was matched in dramatic intensity and power. After his beautiful duet with Lucia in Act I and his dramatic curse in Act II, he held the audience enthralled throughout the tragic climax of Act III. As Lucia's brother Enrico Gregory Dahl used his powerful vocal and dramatic forces to present a convincing portrait of a man consumed with hatred, capable of misusing his sister heartlessly for his own interests. Both the tenor and the baritone are robbed of some great music in the omitted Wolf's Crag scene which, although only lasting about 10 minutes, provides the reason for Edgardo being at the graves of his ancestors to fight a final duel with Enrico. In all fairness this scene, requiring set changes, is often omitted. As the chaplain, Raimondo, bass Robert Pomakov does not have an ideal voice for bel canto singing but was certainly adequate for the part. Wendy Hatala



Lucia

photo by Hadas Parush

Foley was excellent in her characterization of Alisa, Lucia's attendant, although her contribution to the famous Sextet was diminished by her separation above the others on the stairs and by the absence of any special lighting on her. Nils Brown, as Arturo, managed a convincing portrait of the doomed bridegroom, Arturo. Among

the minor characters, pride of place has to go to Graham Thomson, third prize winner in our 2009 Brian Law Competition. As Normanno, Enrico's captain of the guard, his clear tenor was used to advance the plot to force Lucia into a tragic marriage. Well done, Graham. The chorus under Laurence Ewashko again proved a great asset for opera performances as did the National Arts Orchestra with the harp and flute soloists especially notable. Costumes from

Malabar's were adequate but Lucia's wedding dress, stained with Arturo's blood, looked like it had been sent to the cleaners (with only some success) before she appeared for her mad scene. The sets courtesy of the Utah Symphony/Utah Opera were quite good although I'm sure that the limitations of set and staging did not allow everyone in the hall to see some of the important action – clearly the director's fault. I have to confess that I am not a fan of Henry Akina's previous efforts for Opera Lyra and his work in this opera confirms my opinion of his ability. This director seems to belong to the group who believe that it is boring to see someone standing on the stage and singing beautifully. At any cost to the atmosphere someone has to be moving to avoid any suggestion that the director is not doing his or her job. For

example, it seemed that every time Enrico had a major solo someone was doing something or going somewhere. Enrico's own activities, pushing and trying to cower his retainers, were more suitable for comic opera than for a grand tragedy. The Wedding Celebration Scene with its Blind-Man's-Buff activities posed a poor substitute for dancing when the music clearly called for dancing. The final scene was very puzzling. Why were these people standing around, leaning on tombs in the middle of the night? If they entered arriving from the Castle it might make sense. Then there was the coffin. Lucia just died and she was confined already. And the coffin was so small. And it was carried in the wrong way round (coffins are carried feet first). I have been given to understand that some of these details were reported to the director who chose to ignore them. I attended this opera with six others, none of whom were familiar with any previous performance or recording of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. They all raved about the wonderful music, singing and the overall production. In spite of some of my comments, I have to agree.



Enrico & Lucia

photo by Hadas Parush



Edgardo & Lucia

photo by Hadas Parush

Compare Your Carmens

Pellegrini Opera will perform Bizet's *Carmen* May 27 & 28, 2011 in a staged and costumed production with piano accompaniment.

Green Mountain Opera will perform Bizet's *Carmen* June 17 & 19, 2011 in a mainstage production with orchestra and chorus.



Pellegrini Opera



Green Mountain Opera

Conductor: Colin Morris

Artistic Director: Maria Pellegrini

Stage Director: Vincent Thomas

Carmen: Beste Kalender

Don José: Keith Klassen

Micaela: Nadia Petrella

Escamillo: Mark Gough

Dominion Chalmers Church at 7:30 pm.

Information: 613-798-1479

www.pellegriniopera.org

Conductor: Daniel Beckwith

Director: Helena Binde

Carmen: Julie Nesrallah

Don José: Dinyar Vania

Micaela: Mariateresa Magisano

Escamillo: Troy Cook

Barre Opera House, Barre, Vermont.

Information: 802-476-8188

www.greenmountainoperafestival.com

The Metropolitan Opera Live in HD

Le Comte Ory Rossini

Live: April 9, 2011

Encore: May 7 & June 13, 2011

Featuring: DiDonato & Florez

Capriccio R. Strauss

Live: April 23, 2011

Encore: May 21 & June 27, 2011

Featuring: Fleming & Braun

Il Trovatore Verdi

Live: April 30, 2011

Encore: June 4 & July 18, 2011

Featuring: Racette & Radvanovsky

Die Walkure Wagner

Live: May 14, 2011

Encore: June 18 & July 11, 2011

Featuring: Voigt, Terfel & Kaufmann

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

The Toll Brothers Metropolitan Opera Saturday
Afternoon Live Radio Broadcasts from Lincoln Center

April 9, 2011 *Le Comte Ory* Rossini

April 16, 2011 *Wozzek* Berg

April 23, 2011 *Capriccio* R. Strauss

April 30, 2011 *Il Trovatore* Verdi

May 7, 2011 *Ariadne auf Naxos* R. Strauss

May 14, 2011 *Die Walkure* Wagner

Canadian Opera Companies

May 21, 2011 *Lillian Alling* Estacio & Nurell

May 28, 2011 *Die Zauberflote* Mozart

June 25, 2011 *Lucia di Lammermoor* Donizetti

Opera Lyra Ottawa's production

The CBC Radio 2 schedule for June and July
is still to be announced

Summer Opera Festivals

Green Mountain Opera

Central Vermont

Carmen (Bizet) June 17 & 19, 2011

Così Fan Tutte (Mozart) June 16 & 18, 2011

www.greenmountainoperafestival.com

Saratoga Opera

Saratoga Springs NY

Die Fledermaus (J. Strauss) June 29, July 2, 5, 10.

Così Fan Tutte (Mozart) June 30, July 3, 6, 9.

www.spac.org

Opera North

Lebanon, New Hampshire

Cinderella (Rossini) August 7, 12, 15, 18, 20

Marriage of Figaro (Mozart) Aug 13, 17, 19, 21

www.operanorth.org

Westben

Campbellford, Ontario

Albert Herring (Britten) July 1, 2, 3

Bayrakdarian in Concert July 24

www.westben.ca

Summer Opera Lyric Theatre Toronto

Idomeneo (Mozart) July 29, 30, Aug 3, 6

La Traviata (Verdi) July 31, Aug 3, 5, 6

The Tender Land (Copland) July 30, Aug 2, 4, 7

www.solt.ca 416-922-2912

Opera Within Reach

OTTAWA

Orpheus Society

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels by Yazbek
June 3-12, 2011 (at Centrepointhe Theatre)
Information: www.orpheus-theatre.ca

MONTREAL

L'Opéra de Montréal

La Bohème by Puccini
May 21, 25, 28 & 30 & June 2 & 4

Performances are in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier
at Place des Arts
Information 1-514-985-2258
www.operademontreal.com

New York Glimmerglass Opera

Cooperstown N.Y.

Carmen (Bizet) July 2 - August 23, 2011

Medea (Cherubini) July 6 - August 16, 2011

Annie Get Your Gun (Berlin) July 16 -
August 21, 2011

A Blizzard in Marblehead Neck (Tesori)
& *Later the Same Evening* (Musto)
July 21 - August 22, 2011

Information: www.glimmerglass.org

TORONTO

Canadian Opera Company

La Cenerentola by Rossini
April 23 & 28 May 1, 7, 10, 13, 19, 22 & 25

Ariadne auf Naxos by Strauss
April 30 May 3, 12, 15, 18, 21, 27 & 29

Orfeo ed Euridice by Gluck
May 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 24, 26 & 28

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

Opera Atelier

La Clemenza Di Tito by Mozart
April 22-May 1, 2011

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

SYRACUSE

The Pearl Fishers by Bizet
April 8 & 10, 2011

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

Check for times and other details on the Websites.