



Kudos to El-Khoury!

by Shelagh Williams

The 2005 winner of our Brian Law Opera Competition, Joyce El-Khoury, was in Ottawa in late January and early February to perform at and for her alma mater, Ottawa University.

On February 5th she headlined a uOttawa Orchestra concert honouring her recently retired teacher and mentor, Voice Professor and bass-baritone Inge-mar Korjus. Stunning in a one-shouldered form-fitting royal blue gown, her long hair drawn to one side, she first charmingly paid tribute to Prof. Korjus and thanked him for giving her "the skills and courage to do what I do". She then launched into a mesmerizing performance of Strauss's *Four Last Songs* which, interestingly, she had also sung for Prof. Korjus for her uOttawa 2005 graduation recital! Since previous encounters with these works had not impressed me greatly, I had, as a veteran opera-goer, spent the afternoon in study of the text in German and English translation while listening to Elizabeth Schwarzkopf's recording. Joyce so conveyed the ecstasy of the soaring music that I was transfixed and completely won over!

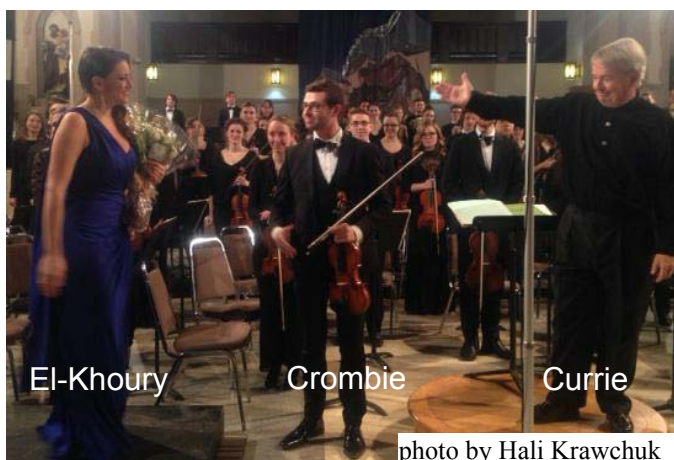
One can see why Joyce is invited to sing opera all over the world - at the MET and across the States, in Europe, and fortunately for us at the Canadian Opera and Opera Lyra Ottawa.

This Strauss piece was the icing on the cake of an already excellent concert of German composers' music by the uOttawa Orchestra led by David Currie, former NACO principal double bass and now former Music Director of the Ottawa Symphony. If possible, the uOttawa Orchestra just

seems to keep getting better, as new professors attract even more students! The concert started, using all the power of the 84 players, with a great reading of Brahms's 4th Symphony, the equal, I am sure, of many professional orchestra's efforts. Then the lovely *Adagietto* from Mahler's 5th Symphony, all delicate strings, plus harp solo by Sarah Veber, soothed us and put us in the right mood for the Strauss *Songs*. The orchestral playing itself in the Strauss was marvellous, with each section of the orchestra doing its part and Jonathan Crombie, the Concertmaster, playing his solos superbly, so that Joyce was beautifully partnered throughout, and could sing her heart out!

The previous week Joyce had given a vocal master class in Freiman Hall, which happily garnered a full house of voice professors, students and public. The six student singers (only 1 male!) presented mostly arias, and Joyce was very helpful to each, with a lovely friendly manner. Her proximity in age to these students seemed to make them pay close attention, and she finished up with a pep talk on the importance of working hard, as sheer talent will not be enough for a successful career. Everyone was very impressed with both her approach and the results she achieved with the singers.

The two evenings were a welcome confirmation of the value of the NCOS's efforts to maintain, and even expand, our well established Brian Law Opera Competition which encourages and financially assists our local singers to scale new heights!



El-Khoury

Crombie

Currie

photo by Hali Krawchuk

President's Message March 2016

by Murray Kitts

Some good news for opera lovers for a change. Thanks to emergency funding from the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, 13 Strings is able to present a semi-staged performance of Haydn's opera *L'isola disabitata* (The Uninhabited Island) on May 27th. Details concerning tickets can be found later in this newsletter. This is one of eight Haydn operas recorded in the late 1970s and released by Phillips on CD with Antol Dorati with the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra; I have all of them in my collection. The charming, although improbable, story is set to lovely music by a great composer. Dorati was able to engage many great singers for this set of operas including Jesse Norman, Frederica von Stade, Samuel Ramey and Renato Bruson, the latter in the cast of the recording of the opera in question.

It is ironical that *The Barber of Seville* which closed down Opera Lyra Ottawa proved to be such a success in Victoria. This was the only opera presented

so far this year but there were many fine symphony concerts. It seems to me that Ottawa's *Barber* had had much too much "business" added on stage to let the original comic masterpiece come through.

As for the HD presentations from the Met, *Manon Lescaut* was almost completely spoiled by taking the action out of context and presenting most of the story as a caricature of the original. The fourth act where the singing and acting of the two principals was allowed to shine forth was outstanding without any reference to the German occupation of France in World War II. I am particularly disappointed that the production of Rossini's masterpiece *William Tell* with Gerald Finley in the title role will not be part of the Met's simulcasts in 2016-2017. Gerald is singing "Hans Sachs" in *Die Meistersinger* beginning March 9 for five performances at the Opera Bastille in Paris. I expect nothing less than ovations for his interpretation of the role.

Remember the AGM is on May 22 after the Opera alla pasta

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Editor's Corner by David Williams

Do local opera groups talk to each other? What do they do to avoid scheduling conflicts?

If you consult the list of events on page 16, you will see three opera related events listed for April 16th.

This is also the day that the MET Live in HD presents *Roberto Devereux*. Surely, a must for opera lovers.

How many potential audience members are able or will even want to see two opera events in one day? Very few, probably, of an already small group.

However, many of us would be happy to attend most or all of these, with better scheduling.

Considering how much time and energy goes into producing these events, could organizers please spend more time on avoiding conflicts.

For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition contact Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 or consult www.ncos.ca

All the World's a Stage... Shakespeare, Opera and Me

by Lesley Robinson

2016 promises to be an abundantly enjoyable year for Shakespeare enthusiasts all over the world. The 400th anniversary of the Bard's death is the occasion for the universal celebration of the works of the playwright whose words have done more to shape the development of the English language than any other. It is Shakespeare's influence on world culture in general and on opera in particular that has been an inspiration for my own love of opera. I'll readily admit to being all but musically illiterate, so it is the combination of words with music and the dramatic expression inherent in operatic composition that inspires me – it is what I particularly love about opera.

The 400-year period since Shakespeare's time happens to coincide roughly with the entire history of opera, so it is unsurprising that these great works should have inspired such a vast operatic repertoire over the years and examples date from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century. An evening's research quickly yielded more than 50 examples of operas inspired by Shakespeare's works and there are plenty more. According to the *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* there are nearly 300 in existence, although some were failures and many are never performed. I found works by English, American, French, German, Italian, Russian, Czech, Spanish and even Finnish composers, with libretti in all the corresponding languages.

There are a few examples where adaptations of Shakespeare's original words do feature in libretti: Purcell's *The Fairy-Queen* (1692) uses an adaptation of Shakespeare's text and the spoken words in the piece are all Shakespeare's. For the 1966 opera, *Antony and Cleopatra* by Samuel Barber, the libretto, prepared by Franco Zeffirelli, was comprised exclusively of original Shakespearean text. The libretto of Michael Nyman's 1991 opera, *Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs* was abridged by the composer from *The Tempest* and this season the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, presented *Macbeth*, a new one-act chamber opera by Australian-born Luke Styles, a former Young Composer in Residence at Glyndebourne, based on Shakespeare's words.

As a native speaker of English, it is the language of Shakespeare that I find most exciting and have always wondered at the popularity of the works in translation. This popularity says much for the dramatic aspect and the universal human relevance of the themes. Out of necessity in an operatic version, the text will be curtailed,

but the drama will still be there, eloquently conveyed in the music.

Composers of opera have always had an important advantage over Shakespeare when it comes to the portrayal of female characters. Shakespeare was somewhat constrained by the fact that women were not allowed to perform on the Elizabethan stage. Since the feminine roles had to be played by relatively inexperienced, young, male actors, there was a certain economy applied to those roles. Shakespeare's women characters were nevertheless remarkably well developed, but out of necessity had relatively few lines. There are no such constraints in opera and what worthy diva would be content with less stage time than her hero? Verdi's *Macbeth* is a wonderful example of this phenomenon. Lady Macbeth is a driving force in the drama, yet in Shakespeare's play she has only 265 lines (to Macbeth's 719). Verdi was able to give her a much larger part in the opera, even though he kept very close to the original structure of the play.

Shakespearean tragedy provides the perfect elements for operatic adaptation. Love and death are the shared themes of so much of Shakespeare and the repertoire of grand opera. When you add such tragic flaws as ambition, jealousy, pride and self-doubt, you come up with the perfect universal themes for operatic treatment. Yet Shakespeare's comedies provided the plots for at least as many operas as his tragedies. These too play on universal themes and derive their brilliance from situations of mistaken identity, the comedy of intrigue and, of course, the perennial battle of the sexes. Shakespeare was masterful in his fusion of the tragic with the comic. Life is neither all doom and gloom nor one continuous, joyful romp. Even the darkest tragedies have their moments of comic relief and the lightest comedies still make us think about important ethical questions. The difference is in the resolution of an essentially human conflict. In a tragedy, the only resolution is death (very operatic), whereas in comedy, things tend to resolve themselves in a sort of *all's-well-that-ends-well* manner.

King Lear, one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, was to become the finest opera Verdi never wrote. Although he had commissioned the libretto and had a complete version of it as early as 1853, he struggled over it for the rest of his life and never composed the music. It is curious that Verdi chose instead to base his final masterpiece on one of Shakespeare's comedies (and

All the World's a Stage... Shakespeare, Opera and Me (cont.)

indeed one that, in the scheme of things, is not one of his best.) In fact there have been at least four operas based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, so Verdi was not alone in choosing it. Although Falstaff is a completely fictional character, he also appears in two of Shakespeare's history plays: *Henry IV Parts One and Two* in which his jovial persona carries some slightly sinister undertones – he is the cowardly, boastful and less than honest carouser who influences the wayward young Prince Hal. The young man's disillusionment with Falstaff is complete when he comes of age as Henry V. It is just as well that Falstaff gets his comeuppance in a comedy.

April 23rd is the actual 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. On that day the Metropolitan Opera in New York will be broadcasting Verdi's *Otello*, live on radio. This is the new production that had its first run in the autumn season of 2015, broadcast live in HD in cinemas on October 17th. The marvellous Željko

Lučić returns for the spring run as Iago, but sadly without Yannick Nézet-Séguin on the podium. *Otello* is also on the calendar in Montréal for January and February of 2016. The Lyric Opera of Chicago will present Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, while San Francisco's production of Bellini's *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*, featuring Joyce DiDonato and Nicole Cabell, will tour to the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts in Arizona. It will also be possible to see *Romeo and Juliet* at the Sydney Opera House, but this production will be pure theatre, simply unadulterated Shakespeare. Over in Europe, the Paris Opera will be mounting a production of *Lear* by Aribert Reimann, a contemporary German composer. It will be sung at the Palais Garnier in German. In addition, the Wiener Staatsoper will be premiering a new production of Verdi's *Macbeth*.

2016 does indeed promise to be a year of abundant delights, but can one desire too much of a good thing? I would say certainly not!

Here is a list of just some of the compositions inspired by the works of Shakespeare:

Date	Title	Composer	Inspired by
1674	<i>The Enchanted Island</i>	Matthew Locke, Giovanni Battista Draghi and Pelham	<i>The Tempest</i>
1692	<i>The Fairy-Queen</i>	Henry Purcell	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
1745	<i>Pyramus and Thisbe</i>	John Frederick Lampe	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
1756	<i>The Tempest or The Enchanted Isle</i>	John Christopher Smith	<i>The Tempest</i>
1776	<i>Romeo und Julie</i>	Georg Benda	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1788	<i>La morte di Cesare</i>	Francesco Bianchi	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
1799	<i>Falstaff, ossia Le tre burle</i>	Antonio Salieri	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
1816	<i>Otello</i>	Gioachino Rossini	<i>Othello</i>
1825	<i>Giulietta e Romeo</i>	Nicola Vaccai	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1830	<i>I Capuleti e I Montecchi</i>	Vincenzo Bellini	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1836	<i>Dar Liebesverbot</i>	Richard Wagner	<i>Measure for Measure</i>
1847	<i>Macbeth</i>	Giuseppe Verdi	<i>Macbeth</i>
1849	<i>Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor</i>	Otto Nicolai	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
1862	<i>Béatrice et Bénédict</i>	Hector Berlioz	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
1865	<i>Amleto</i>	Franco Faccio	<i>Hamlet</i>
1867	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i>	Charles Gounod	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1868	<i>Hamlet</i>	Ambroise Thomas	<i>Hamlet</i>
1874	<i>Der Widerspänstigen Zähmung</i>	Hermann Goetz	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>

1884	<i>Viola</i> (unfinished)	Bedřich Smetana	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
1887	<i>Otello</i>	Giuseppe Verdi	<i>Othello</i>
1893	<i>Falstaff</i>	Giuseppe Verdi	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
1896	<i>Las bravías</i>	Ruperto Chapí	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
1901	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	Charles Villiers Stanford	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
1907	<i>A Village Romeo and Juliet</i>	Frederick Delius	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1910	<i>Macbeth</i>	Ernest Bloch	<i>Macbeth</i>
1922	<i>The Tempest</i>	Felice Lattuada	<i>The Tempest</i>
1925	<i>At the Boar's Head</i>	Gustav Holst	<i>Henri IV, Parts 1 and 2</i>
1927	<i>Sly, ovvero La leggenda del dormiente risvegliato</i> *	Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
1929	<i>Sir John in Love</i>	Ralph Vaughn Williams	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
1940	<i>Romeo und Julia</i>	Heinrich Sutermeister	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1949	<i>Puck</i>	Marcel Delannoy	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
1953	<i>Kiss Me Kate</i>	Cole Porter	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
1953	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	Vittorio Giannini	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
1955	<i>Der Sturm</i>	Frank Martin	<i>The Tempest</i>
1957	<i>Укрощение строптивой</i> (<i>Ukroshchenye stroptivoy - The Taming of the Shrew</i>)	Vissarion Shebalin	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
1957	<i>West Side Story</i>	Leonard Bernstein	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
1959	<i>Die Ermordung Cäsars</i>	Giselher Klebe	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
1960	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Benjamin Britten	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
1963	<i>Christopher Sly</i>	Dominick Argento	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
1966	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	Samuel Barber	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
1970	<i>The Knot Garden</i>	Michael Tippett	<i>The Tempest</i>
1973	<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>	Nicolas Nabokov	<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>
1978	<i>Lear</i>	Aribert Reimann	<i>King Lear</i>
1984	<i>Un re in ascolto</i>	Luciano Berio	<i>The Tempest</i>
1985	<i>The Tempest</i>	John C Eaton	<i>The Tempest</i>
1991	<i>Noises, Sounds and Sweet Airs</i>	Michael Nyman	<i>The Tempest</i>
1991	<i>Timon of Athens</i>	Stephen Oliver	<i>Timon of Athens</i>
1997	<i>Venus und Adonis</i>	Hans Werrer Henze	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>
1999	<i>Bandanna</i>	Daron Hagen	<i>Othello</i>
2000	<i>Kuningas Lear</i>	Aulis Sallinen	<i>King Lear</i>
2004	<i>The Tempest</i>	Thomas Adès	<i>The Tempest</i>
2011	<i>The Enchanted Island</i>	A pastiche of works by composers including Handel, Vivaldi and Rameau	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> and <i>The Tempest</i>
2015	<i>Macbeth</i>	Luke Styles	<i>Macbeth</i>

* *Sly, ovvero La leggenda del dormiente risvegliato* by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari is one of the most intriguing examples. Based on *The Taming of the Shrew*, this opera, unlike most of Wolf-Ferrari's work, is a **tragedy!**

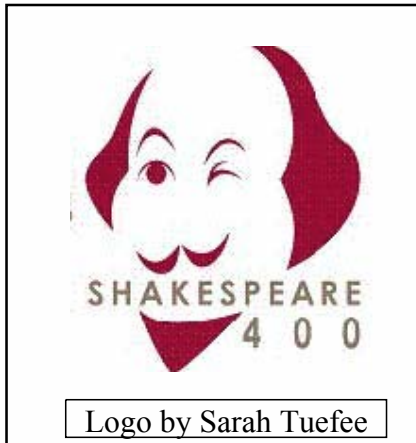
Shakespeare 400 Festival

by Shelagh Williams

Brush Up Your Shakespeare!

This was a gala to launch uOttawa's *Shakespeare 400 Festival*, celebrating 400 years since Shakespeare's death. It includes a film festival at the Bytowne Cinema and lectures at uOttawa, finishing with a symposium April 21 - 23. The sold-out gala, combining the forces of the Departments of English and Theatre, and the School of Music, especially its faculty and alumni, was M.C.'d by CBC's Alan Neal.

It was kicked off with an hilarious rendition of *Brush up your Shakespeare*, from *Kiss Me, Kate*, with baritones John Avey and Pierre-Etienne Bergeron. We were then treated to two readings by the well known Canadian actors and married couple Paul Gross and Martha Burns, doing courtship scenes from *Taming of the Shrew* and *Henry V*. These were interspersed with interviews by Alan Neal, with Paul Gross especially telling some interesting and funny "tales out of school"!



Logo by Sarah Tuefee

Appropriate operatic and musical theatre arias and Shakespeare songs by the aforementioned pair of singers plus sopranos Christiane Riel and Miriam Khalil, a BLOC finalist, illustrated and enhanced the readings. The quartet finished off beautifully by singing the *Non nobis, Domine* from Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*. All of the songs were expertly and sympathetically accompanied by Frederic Lacroix.

An added bonus of this delightful evening was the donation of the proceeds - \$3,000 - to PAL Ottawa, which supports local artists in need.

Concord of Sweet Sounds

Conceived by uOttawa Voice Professor Christiane Riel, *Concord of Sweet Sounds* was a fantastic concert by Music School students in the *Shakespeare 400 Festival*. It featured most of the stars of the previous week's *Magic Flute* (see p. 13) plus Prof. Laurence Ewashko's elite Calixa Lavallee Ensemble in a lovely smorgasbord of Shakespeare-related music. Everything was beautifully choreographed, everyone was well turned out, and John Avey provided the informative and entertaining linking narration.

It opened with pianist Aude Urbancic treating us to a rousing *Knight's Dance* from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* ballet, and near the end she was joined by Daniel Soucy to play an enchanting four-handed *Finale*, including the *Wedding March*, from Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In between, Urbancic, Valerie Dueck and Ylan Chu did yeoman service accompanying the many ensembles, arias and duets that made up the programme.

The Calixa Lavallee Ensemble, amongst other offerings, sang Shakespeare's *Sonnets* set by composer James Bassi to a harp accompaniment played by Keilah Morrison-Partridge. A soprano trio of Maria Bamford, Alyssa Curto and Terri-Lynn Mitchell woke us up with a rousing *Sing for Your Supper* by Richard Rodgers from the musical *Boys from Syracuse* (based on *Comedy of Errors*) - with a mid-song costume change and expert tap-dancing! Another show-stopper was *A Boy Like That* from Bernstein's *West Side Story*, put across strikingly by soprano Alexandra Givens and mezzo Carolynne Ball.

Two of Shakespeare's songs were fascinatingly presented by different singers with varying settings and languages. It all ended with a very moving *Non nobis, Domine* from Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* film, sung by a quintet and the Calixa Lavallee Ensemble.

What an evening! - *All's Well that Ends Well!*

The next musical *Shakespeare 400 Festival* event will be *New Composers Inspired by Shakespeare*, in Tabaret Hall, at 8 p.m. on March 30th. Further information on *Shakespeare 400* can be found at <http://artsites.uottawa.ca/shakespeare-celebrations>.

Bravo Barber

by Murray Kitts

I could hardly believe my eyes. When Timothy Vernon entered the pit to conduct the fourth of five performances at Victoria's Royal Theatre of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, he and his fine orchestra played in front of a great red and gold curtain. Just imagine - just like the good old days. To top it all the audience was quite attentive and enjoyed listening to the wonderful music without have all sorts of shenanigans taking place on stage before the real opera began.

And then the curtain opened to reveal a set so appropriate to the opera, so simple in design that the complicated action involving inside as well as outside the house could be accommodated. It was a daring concept as the almost uniform colour was white with suggestions of art nouveau design. No wonder the audience applauded the appearance of the set, paying tribute to opera and theatre factotum designer Ken MacDonald.

From the first appearance of the group of musicians onstage it was apparent that Stage Director Morris Panych had the staging of the opera well thought out and the lively pace under control.

The singer who portrays Count Almaviva not only has to be able to sing the very difficult serenade to Rosina but also has to be able to portray a drunken soldier and a substitute music teacher. Antonio Figueroa had no difficulty with the bel canto demands of his aria. But, in the second act as Don Alonso, I feel that the text favours a clerical type with his *pace e gioia* rather than the foppish, effeminate caricature of a musician he was called on to play by the director. Mind you it was quite funny but the traditional way makes more sense to me.

As Figaro the young baritone Clarence Fraser was not helped by his black moustache which made him look like a comic bandit, not the savvy servant who always has a solution to his master's amorous problems. He

delivered a rousing *Largo al factotum* with his fine baritone voice. In time he will develop a more distinctive stage presence.

Mezzo-soprano Sylvia Szadovszki was an attractive young Rosina fully able to meet the demands of the score. Her success with her big aria *Una voce poco fa* was continued with all the duos and ensemble numbers throughout the opera.

As befits an opera buffa the two major comic roles are men with voices in the lower register. We in Ottawa have had the great pleasure to witness Peter McGillvray as Doctor Bartolo in the *Barber* and in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. The Victoria production gave this artist full scope to show his comic genius without being tied down to an improbable, over fussy interpretation as seen in Ottawa.

Bass-baritone Giles Tomkins as Don Basilio also benefited from allowing him to take absolute stage prominence with his *La calunnia* aria and to reach great comic heights in the *buona sera* ensemble. These two kept the audience in stitches all the way through.

Geneviève Levesque gave an unusual characterful interpretation of the maid Berta.

All in all, a truly outstanding cast with the Pacific Opera Chorus a rousing bunch of soldiers, all accompanied by a first class opera orchestra.

Special note should be made of the contributions of Kimberly Purtell, well-known for her work as a lighting designer in the theatre in Canada. The lighting for the famous "freeze frame" ensemble at the end of Act 1 was excellent while the storm in Act 2 was tremendous and in time with the excellent music provided by that storm specialist, Rossini, in contrast to the puny lightning in the Ottawa production.

A delightful performance of a great comic masterpiece by Pacific Opera!



Almaviva

Figaro

David Cooper Photos



Rosina

Wedding Season

by Ute Davis

Still fresh from the San Francisco *Marriage of Figaro* starring Philippe Sly and Luca Pisaroni in June 2015, I was fortunately able to see three more productions of this opera in 2015-16. My exciting week in Baden Baden, by invitation, where Yannick Nézet-Séguin recorded a fabulous *Nozze* for Deutsche Grammophon to CD, will be written up separately to do justice to this amazing project.

Next, the COC staged the Claus Guth version which was recorded at Salzburg to DVD in 2006. Claus Guth and his team were in Toronto to direct. On adjacent evenings I saw the Ensemble Studio cast (young artists), then the senior cast, to beautifully round it all off.

A factor common to the two was the on-stage presence of a “Cherubim” for much of the opera. A novel introduction by Guth, the cupid-cherub flits on and off stage and through the intricacies of moving cast members and multiple flights of stars with consummate skill, often unnoticed until he magically controlled an actor’s pose or voice or remotely controlled a door or window. Described by Guth as an “Eros Angel”, he was intended to show a God-like supernatural control of the love relations between the characters. I found this a fascinating way of advancing the plot and clarifying some of da Ponte’s inconsistencies and all without distracting from the music! When growing up, I watched all of Ingmar Bergman’s movies, and saw Ibsen and Strindberg on stage. I wondered if Guth had a similar experience. During the final act I was convinced that Guth had met M.C. Escher!

Because Alexander Neef, COC’s General Manager, rewards the young singers with a small celebratory post-opera party, we had the wonderful opportunity to chat with all the singers, as well as the astounding actor-dancer Uli Kirsch who was the superb Cherubim in both productions. Uli, who hails from Berlin, is light as a feather, all lean muscle and looks like a Vienna choirboy with the addition of wings. I congratulated Uli in his native tongue on his superlative skill of technique, strength and balance whether riding a unicycle or the shoulder of a singer.

According to Russell Braun, whom we saw as Count Almaviva the following night, Uli is about 30 years old. Uli Kirsch explained modestly that he had the

experience of playing the part many times since 2005, including making the DVD, and has ridden the broad shoulders of Bo Skovhus, Thomas Hampson, Simon Keenleyside, “our” Gerald Finley and now Russell Braun, in Salzburg, Vienna, Amsterdam and Toronto. Russell told me “the guy is so light, wiry-strong and well balanced that it was no problem to sing and move comfortably with Uli up there, once I got used to him!”

This modern dress production proves totally satisfactory; the absence of wigs was pleasing and the broad stairway set provided doorway and casement window for smooth entry/exit at multiple levels. Thus the production is highly original, clean cut and simple with no undue distraction. However, I did wonder whether the cupid figure was a reminder that the director himself was in God-like control!

The quality of the senior cast was excellent, as we have come to expect of the COC over the past ten years. Russell Braun was able to bring great tenderness and sincerity to his portrayal of the count in the final act while the earlier scenes suggested he could easily fall prey to the temptation of Susanna. Erin Wall has the stage presence and warm mature soprano to engage full audience sympathy for the countess from her opening “Porgi amor” to her forgiveness in the finale. Due to the illness of Austrian baritone Josef Wagner, we saw Ian MacNeil as Figaro on both evenings. He acquitted himself very capably in a role of this magnitude and his voice held up well in the latter stages of the second back-to-back performance.

Jane Archibald was very pleasing vocally as Susanna, a little reserved and not as sprightly as some in this role. American mezzo Emily Fons was very impressive as Cherubino, hyperkinetic on an overdose of hormones and ready to commit to any female he met. A trouser-role specialist, she excels as Cherubino. Robert Pomakov (Bartolo) and Helene Schneiderman (Marcellina) rounded out the high-quality senior cast and Ottawa opera goers recognized Sasha Djihanian’s youthful and very impressive Barbarina (she was cast both nights) as well as Jean-Philippe Fortier-Lazure’s limpid tenor as Don Curzio and Don Basilio.

Not far behind this cast in quality, the Ensemble



Image Michael Cooper

Magicaarena

by Tom McCool

Magicaarena is a film about the opera festival that is held every summer in the Roman arena in Verona, Italy. The time of the making of the film is significant as it was the 200th anniversary of Verdi's birth and the 100th anniversary of the festival itself. As a film it is an intriguing behind-the-scenes documentary, but it will be of special interest to opera aficionados, especially those who have attended operas in Verona or those who are planning to go.

The ancient Roman arena at Verona was built in the first century and apart from the summer opera festival is worth a visit. Two earthquakes in the 12th century caused the destruction of much of the outer wall of the arena but despite this, the Verona arena is one of the best preserved of the ancient Roman structures. And it is the ideal site for an opera, providing seating for 15,000 and space for a massive stage and backstage.

The opera productions in the Verona arena are all about spectacular staging. This film, with its unlimited access to all the backstage and offstage drama, is able to

capture the stress, exhilaration, humour and conflicts of the performers and workers. It provides a front-row seat to the meticulous preparations, incredible complexity and astonishing magnitude of the Verona productions.

Though spectacle is predominant at Verona, the quality of the music is at a very high level. Some of opera's biggest names (Pavarotti, Callas, Corelli et al) have sung at the Verona Arena and the orchestra, chorus, dancers and other individuals involved in the pro-

ductions are uniformly excellent.

Although operas by Puccini, Bizet and others are staged in the arena, the most performed composer is Verdi. It is one of Verdi's operas, *Aida* (the grandest of the grand operas) that is always presented at Verona and is the focus of this film. It is the perfect opera for Verona. And for this documentary.

If Verona is not

in your travel plans this summer, then this film would be a good substitute.

A preview of *Magicaarena* is available on Youtube.
 Directors: Andrea Prandstaller & Niccolò Bruna.
 (2014, 95 minutes, in Italian with English subtitles.)



Wedding Season (continued)

Studio provided the increasingly mature and commanding Gordon Bintner as the Count and Aviva Fortunata as a vocally secure Countess. Karine Boucher was a very pleasing Susanna and Jacqueline Woodley a popular Cherubino. By the way, Gordon Bintner is now engaged to be married to Simone Osborn, an earlier graduate of the Ensemble Studio who sang a fine Nanet-

ta to Gerald Finley's Falstaff two years ago. One of the rising stars of Canada's conducting world and a graduate of the McGill Music Department, Jordan de Souza, conducted with skill and aplomb to match that of Johannes Debus. A piano forte or grand piano was used for the recitatives instead of the usual harpsichord and the tempi, if deliberate, were never ponderous.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed

by Shelagh Williams

Anne & Gilbert: The Musical

The Christmas musical at the NAC Theatre was *Anne & Gilbert*, the continuation of the beloved *Anne of Green Gables* musical, both based on L.M. Montgomery's classics. For this marvelous presentation the NAC Theatre pulled out all the stops, engaging first rate people for all aspects of the production. The huge cast (25 bios in the programme) of talented singers and dancers ranged from those who had previously performed their roles in PEI, including Ellen Denny and Alex Furber in the title roles, to Ottawa based David Whiteley, who also played the violin as Moody MacPherson! Through all manner of predicaments, the witty and clever lyrics, sung with impeccable diction, and the inspired dancing and overall choreography and direction, kept our interest until at the end everything turned out right, for, as everyone but the principals knew, *Gilbert loves Anne of Green Gables*, and Anne loves Gilbert too!

UOttawa School of Music End of Term Recitals

The Art Song Interpretation Class under Professor Lawrence Ewashko presented *English and French Art Song*. Guitar accompaniment was a new aspect, with each singer singing two songs in each language, three accompanied by piano and one by guitar. This resulted in an interesting programme by 9 singers, well sung and with background information provided by both singer and accompanist. On Sunday, April 10, 2016, at 3, in Freiman Hall, *Italian, Spanish and Slavic Art Song* will be on the programme.

The Acting for Singers Class presented *An Afternoon of Operatic Arias* with 12 singers each singing two arias to piano accompaniment. The assortment of pieces was interesting, and some of the singers put their arias across especially well, particularly soprano Maria Bamford, who has been in uOttawa Opera and Rapport Opera productions. I look forward to future offerings!

Handel's Messiah, NAC Orchestra (NACO)

With the return of former NACO Maestro Trevor Pinnock for this concert, we were treated to a lovely Baroque *Messiah*, with Pinnock conducting a small select ensemble from the harpsichord. Although we were greeted with the news that the two male soloists were ill, excellent Canadian replacements were recruited. Tenor Andrew Haji, whom we have heard at UofT and more recently with the COC Ensemble Studio, and the always dramatic baritone Alexander Dobson more than fit the bill, both with excellent opera and oratorio credentials. Creamy voiced Canadian soprano Karina Gauvin is a well known Baroque specialist, while American mezzo Sasha Cooke was outstanding in both voice and presentation. With the combined Cantata and Ewashko Singers as chorus, and Karen Donnelly on the trumpet, this was a great *Messiah*!

Christmas With Music and Beyond

Julian Armour presented a delightful concert featuring his Chamber Players and yet another lovely Canadian soprano, Helene Brunet. She has a beautifully flexible coloratura that was exquisitely exhibited in *Rejoice Greatly* from Handel's *Messiah* and two arias by J.S. Bach, both composers in whose works she excels. Of interest also was the charming performance of *D'ou viens-tu, bergere?*, set by composer Kelly-Marie Murphy, and featuring Caroline Leonardelli on the harp with young soprano Cassidy Van Bavel, the composer's daughter! In other fare the superb Ottawa Regional Youth Choir under Jamie Loback had a professional precision in its presentations, whether singing *a cappella* or with the Chamber Players or backing Helene Brunet in Christmas Carols. All of this was interspersed with appropriate Christmas and seasonal music by the Chamber Players, getting young and old into the holiday spirit.

Parting of the ways at the Rapport

by David Williams

Claire Hafner, Executive Director of Heavyweight Productions, has combined the Rapport™ with this company. Heavyweight Productions aims to be a unifying force in the Ottawa opera community serving as a politically neutral entity open to developing and supporting other individuals and companies in the capital area.

The other founders of the Rapport - Nadia Boucher, Cara Gilbertson-Boese and Hayley Swanton - intend to continue producing operas. Their next production will be Bizet's *Le Docteur Miracle*, on October 29th and October 30th. They welcome suggestions for a name for their new company.

What Makes a Masterpiece?

by Lesley Robinson

Verdi's *Otello* at Opéra de Montréal

I always find the pre-opera talks by Opéra de Montréal's Director of Communications, Outreach and Education, musicologist Pierre Vachon, to be enlightening. At the company's recent production of Verdi's *Otello*, M. Vachon spoke of Verdi's approach to his final Shakespearean masterpieces, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, which constituted a departure of sorts from his earlier compositions. In these last two operas, Verdi sought to highlight the drama by keeping the music virtually continuous and leaving very little opportunity for the audience to applaud between arias. This contrasts greatly with the solo, duet and quartet arias and even the rousing choruses of earlier masterpieces such as *Aida*, *La Traviata* or *Rigoletto*.

One certainly does not leave the auditorium after a performance of *Otello* humming its infectious ditties. What Verdi achieves with this approach is reminiscent of a movie score, with the music serving as a continuous backdrop to the action. In the tradition of early opera, the action is moved forward by recitative, while the emotional content is carried in the arias. By Verdi's time the plot too had migrated to the arias. When the composer hits the "pause" button after an aria, the singer holds the moment, pausing from the action as the applause erupts. This allows the audience to live a little longer in the bliss, the anguish or other catharsis of the moment. So it would be fair to say that the music of Verdi's earlier masterpieces is driven by character and emotion, whereas in *Otello* it is driven by the action, from the opening atmospheric storm to the tragic denouement. Which of these approaches yields a masterpiece? Perhaps the answer depends on whom you ask. My own preference is to leave the auditorium humming.

In this production the singers were clearly in constant connection with conductor, Keri-Lynn Wilson, who directed as a commanding presence, mouthing all the words along with the singers. The stand out performance for me was from Greek baritone Aris Argiris whose malevolent portrayal of Iago dominated the action. Japanese soprano Hiromi Omura gave Desdemona an extraordinary vulnerability, highlighting her persona of unsuspecting victim, while tenor Antoine Bélanger gave a skilful performance as a manly Cassio. This was a co-production with Pacific Opera Victoria with sets and costumes by Peter Hartwel, whose work has been seen at the Stratford and Shaw festivals, on Broadway and in London at the Royal Shakespeare Company, the

National Theatre and the English National Opera. The set had the feel of an all-purpose backdrop, with most of the action taking place on a central platform which doubled as Desdemona's bed for the final scene. The costumes seemed to increase in sumptuousness towards the end of the piece. This was a satisfying portrayal of a masterful work.

A Special First Night at the Met *Die Fledermaus*

December 4, 2015 was the opening night of this season's run of Johann Strauss, Jr.'s delightful operetta, *Die Fledermaus* at the Met in New York. Fortuitously we were present to see the unexpected Met role debut of Ottawa native soprano, Mireille Asselin, as the maid Adele, stepping in at the last minute for the ailing Lucy Crowe. Ms. Asselin's performance was fresh, charming and cheeky, beautifully sung and saucily acted.

This opening night was also a first for James Levine who was conducting the piece for the very first time in his celebrated 45-year Met career. Our front row seats were an auspicious vantage point to watch the Maestro's preparation for the energetic overture. Curiously, he took a significant amount of time, trying and retrying his three pairs of spectacles, before selecting the right pair for the occasion. We were also intrigued to observe his discussions with a percussionist before the performance, in which we guessed he was discussing some specifics of what was to come. It was marvellous to watch Maestro Levine's masterful direction of the orchestra and at times to be mesmerised by his remarkably expressive left hand.

Mireille Asselin's debut was exciting and there were other notable performances. American tenor Dimitri Pittas was delightful as the hapless yet hopeful singer and former lover of Rosalinde, the wronged wife sung by Susanna Phillips. Susan Graham was an outlandishly glamorous and deliciously camp Prince Orlofsky.

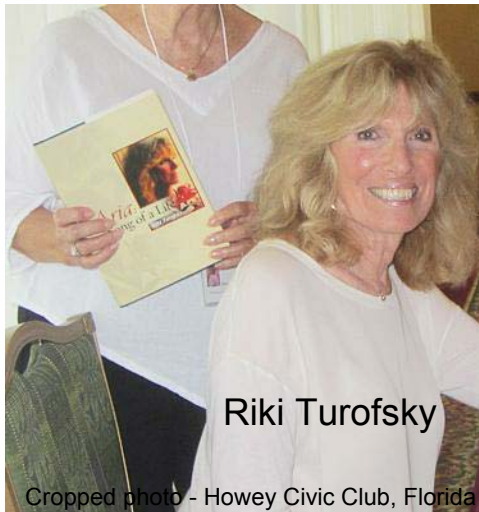
The production is the epitome of resplendent flamboyance. Although the composition dates from 1874, the Met's current version is set on New Year's Eve 1899, with all the gaudy Viennese ostentation that such a setting can suggest. Everything is larger than life and twice as glitzy. The ballroom is particularly opulent with its over-the-top chandelier and the scantily clad dancing girls ostentatiously evoke the naughty nineties. One is left thinking *Only at the Met...*

Riki Turofsky. *Aria - Song of a Life.* by Shelagh Williams

Hailed by *Maclean's* on its cover (Oct. 1974) as *Canada's sexy soprano*, Riki Turofsky combined beauty of face and form with that of voice to present a complete package. Her tell-all autobiography (published 2014), excerpted in a recent *Opera Canada*, presents an interesting chronology of both her and opera's development in Canada.

Orphaned at 17, she was married very young to a medical doctor from a wealthy Toronto family. Unfortunately, he decided to practice in Whitehorse, effectively squelching any hopes of her further musical education in string bass (her instrument) and voice. However, he had a wandering eye, and so she divorced him. Fortunately she had the gumption to take her infant daughter, with child support payments, to Vancouver, where she auditioned for and won a place in Vancouver Opera's new Opera Ensemble. They recognised her potential and she was awarded full tuition despite her lack of professional voice training!

Mezzo Judith Forst was also in the Ensemble, and won the Met Opera National Council Auditions in Seattle while Riki won the award for most promising artist, after only one year's training! The next step in her career was to audition for and win a place at the UofT Opera School, again on full scholarship. The rest, as they say, is history!



Riki Turofsky

Cropped photo - Howey Civic Club, Florida

She combined hard work, and some luck, to forge a career in opera, although, like Maureen Forrester, she found that singing in concerts left her much better off financially than performing in operas. This was in spite of the expense of always wearing elegant gowns rather than simple black sheaths for these concerts. She also did some cross-over work with non-classical singers, performed in musicals, and, as her celebrity increased, worked with CBC TV, plus made five recordings.

Her second husband, also with a wandering eye, was a music critic - a mixed blessing! Family misfortune still dogged her, with her beloved only daughter Carrie dying in 1985 at age 19. Riki returned to Vancouver, this time for a new start with CBC TV. Luckily she was fortunate enough to finally meet the love of her life, with a built-in family, and she married him. Living in Toronto, she continued to sing occasionally, although she writes that after 1985 "the voice quietens in sadness."

The book contains some great photos throughout, including her Titania in *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the NAC in 1978, and a nice *Appendix of Career Highlights* at the end. The book is available for loan at the Ottawa Public Library.

What Makes a Masterpiece? (continued)

Ring of Fire – *Siegfried* at the COC

Thank you to the COC for helping in our preparation for our first complete *Ring* at the Washington National Opera this coming May. Wagnerian opera is notoriously challenging to stage and this production rose to the challenge with an imaginative representation of the action.

Siegfried is about innocence and experience. We watch our young hero as he reacts with the naïve fearlessness of youth and eventually comes of age to claim his destiny. Much of the action is represented in a visually stylised way through the action of supernumeraries – dancers and white pyjama-clad extras who form the backdrop of human scenery, choreographed by Donna Feore. Wagner's operas are complete works of art; the fusion of words and music tell the story and transport us

to another world, represented fancifully in this production by the choreography. The dragon Fafner is represented by a human pyramid which collapses in slow motion as the dragon is slain. The fire of the blacksmith's forge is depicted by swirling hands ascending from a hole in the floor and the ring of fire which *Siegfried* must traverse to awaken *Brünnhilde*, his sleeping beauty, is embodied by a circle of swaying bodies.

Distinguished performances were given by Stefan Vinke as *Siegfried* and the magnificent Christine Goerke as *Brünnhilde*, but the night belonged to the outstanding COC orchestra, under the commanding direction of the virtuosic Johannes Debus. I look forward to more Wagner in the future.

A Magical *Flute!*

by Shelagh Williams

Once again uOttawa Professor Sandra Graham and the uOttawa Opera Company have outdone themselves in this year's four presentations of Mozart's *Magic Flute*.

Quality abounded. Starting with the Tabaret Hall venue, Music and Stage Director Prof. Graham re-figured it to accommodate the 33 piece orchestra; a full stage with multiple entrances and exits plus centre aisle access for processions and chases; and, with the organ loft above, for such as the Queen of the Night, the Three Spirits, plus the black-clad chorus. The Orchestra, under Alain Trudel, NACO Youth and Family Conductor and Music Director of L'Orchestre Symphonique de Laval, was truly excellent, and even included a Celeste! The chorus was equally well prepared by Professor Laurence Ewashko, who does the same for the NACO and did so for the Opera Lyra Ottawa Chorus from 1988.

The costumes were appropriate and imaginative, with marvelous illuminated head pieces on the Queen of the Night and her Three Ladies, and beautiful feathery attachments on Papageno and Papagena, his especially as a peacock's tail. Several lovely outfits were sensibly repurposed from earlier opera productions, as well as the scary monster! Makeup under Thierry Papineau was outstanding. It was all adroitly and energetically staged by Prof. Graham, with nice touches such as a Fire Dancer, Taylor Houghton, and blue waving strands for water, preventing the Fire and Water Tests from dragging. Against a black backdrop, the colourful costumes, with a three-step pedestal and Graham's signature chaise longue, provided sufficient visuals to keep it all interesting.

To ensure everyone had a role, the opera was almost completely double cast. We went to the final performances of each cast, and although I will designate them as cast A and cast B, it would be hard to say which cast was better. As Tamino, tenor Anthony Boxell sang all four performances, and was singing beautifully and easily, the notes just flowing out. He

has taken off considerable weight and told us he has been working out, and he looked very good, to match his singing and acting! He will be singing Rodolfo in *Boheme* for Opera Nuova this summer. Bass-baritone Kevin Burke amazingly sang both a perky and engaging Papageno (cast A) and a sonorous, serious Sarastro (cast B). Also singing in all four performances was tenor Grayson Nesbitt, almost unrecognizable in the elaborate grey face and hair makeup, and doing a great job as a slimy but funny Monostatos. Soprano Alex-



dria Givens was magnificent as the imperious Queen of the Night (cast A), hitting every high note dead on, and Terry-Lynn Mitchell (cast B) was also good - imagine having two such high flyers to choose from! Again, in the soprano role of Pamina, both Alyssa Curto (cast A) and Jordanne Ericksen (cast B) were excellent, with the latter having an especially sweet voice. Among the many other superior performers, too numerous to mention, note must be made of baritone Adam

Kuiack (cast B) and bass-baritone Hyung Song (cast A). Kuiack was a real natural on stage as Papageno and Song not only used his rich deep voice to sing a great and imposing Sarastro, but was also Production Manager and in charge of the lighting! Similarly, the two Mummies and the dancing Slaves also doubled as stage hands, so that scenes were changed rapidly.

We are so fortunate to have the uOttawa Opera Company with Sandra Graham producing such energetic and entertaining productions, which just keep getting better year after year! The uOttawa Music School has students with such great voices that both opera casts were fully satisfying. On closing night, bouquets of flowers were presented to both Sandra Graham and Alain Trudel, who charmingly took a bloom and presented it to Echo Lau, orchestra Celeste player and tireless repetiteur, who jumped up on stage to join the others for a bow!



Photo credits uOttawa

Nikolaus Harnoncourt, the respectful and respected Mozart Scholar

by Ute Davis

I first met “Graf (Count) Nikki”, as the genuine Austrian blueblood was lovingly called throughout Austria, in Salzburg in 2003. Make no mistake this was the perfect European taskmaster and perfectionist of everything Mozart.

A small group of friends from Canada, Germany and England pleaded with Michael Schade to allow us into his dress rehearsal for *Clemenza di Tito*. “All six of you?” He exclaimed and rolled his eyes. Michael then led us through a maze of corridors, all along making clear that we were not allowed to make any noise during this last rehearsal before the final “dress” at the Felsenreitschule. Michael took us to seats quite up front. “No talking, and don’t even cough or sneeze or you will be evicted!”

It was a rehearsal I shall always treasure. Every note had to be perfect and everything associated with the opera thoroughly researched. The cast included Dorothea Röschmann, Vassalina Kasarova, Elina Garanća, Luca Pisaroni and Canadian Michael Schade. Such was the admiration and respect, indeed affection, which Schade held for Harnoncourt that he invited him to be a godfather to his son and named the boy Nikolaus.

There would be daily references in the Salzburger newspapers as to what the conductor had recently managed to find which Mozart had intended, rather than what was the norm for any given work of his great master, Wolfgang Amadeus. Nikolaus Harnoncourt would rarely undertake more than one opera per Festival. Whatever he agreed to conduct would be delivered perfectly. During recent years though he would show more and more disenchantment with what artistic direction had in mind and the newspaper articles

on his thoughts were the talk of the Salzburg Festival patrons.

The last time I saw him was in 2012. He conducted *Zauberflöte* but did not approve of the production. At a press conference he said: “I know Mozart is rolling in his grave”! The opera was attended by ~45% children who clearly adored every minute of the slightly strange but amusing production. The presence of all these children made up for any misgivings I might have had. The production is available on DVD.

Nikolaus Harnoncourt was by no means a Mozart scholar only. Born in 1929 he was one of the pioneers of the post-war performance movement. His musical career started as a cellist with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra (1952-69), performing under Wilhelm



photo: Marco Borggreve

Furtwängler and Herbert von Karajan. Almost simultaneously, in 1953, he formed his own ensemble, Concertus Musicus Wien, to explore the music of the Baroque and Classical eras. He recorded a large body of repertoire ranging from Bach Cantatas to Schubert Masses. As a scholar he wrote a number of books including the *Musical Dialogue: Thoughts on Monteverdi, Bach and Mozart*. He received Gramophone’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009 and was voted into Gramophone’s Hall of Fame in 2012. He announced his retirement

shortly before Christmas of that year, citing ill health. He died on the day when I had just watched yet another *Magic Flute*. I stood in Tabaret Hall of uOttawa and explained to a young man who had given a very admirable performance as Monostatos. I told him that I found out during my last encounter with Maestro Harnoncourt, that according to the original Mozart score the name was really spelled Manostatos and that it was only a speaking role.

Nikolaus Harnoncourt (Johann Nikolaus Graf de la Fontaine und d’Harnoncourt-Unverzagt) was born 6 December 1929 in Berlin and died 5 March 2016 in St Georgen im Attergau, Austria.

Ottawa's Hidden Prodigy

by Shelagh Williams

The article on opera composer Jake Heggie in the July 2015 *Opera News* mentioned the name of his teacher and subsequent wife, “the distinguished pianist and composer Johana Harris.” This name rang a bell and so I looked up the *Citizen* article of May 18, 1997, by Richard Perry, with the interesting title, *Ottawa's Hidden Prodigy*.

According to the *Citizen* article, she was born Beulah Duffy in Ottawa in 1912. By age six she was performing in public, at age 14 she was admitted to the Julliard graduate programme, and at age 17 she graduated and became the youngest instructor in the school's history. She was soon an established concert pianist and in 1936 she married the much older American composer Roy Harris. She was renamed by her husband after composer J. S. Bach, and so Beulah Duffy became Johana Harris!

After her marriage, according to her *N.Y. Times* obituary, she began recording and eventually produced more than 100 records, including the premiere of the Ginastera *Piano Sonata*, composed for her in 1952. The *International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians* (11th ed., c1985) in its article on Roy Harris, calls her “an



photo by Carol Williams

outstanding pianist and the leading interpreter of those works by Harris which include the piano.”

Johana Harris continued as a pianist and teacher at various institutions, including UCLA, where her husband taught before his death in 1979. At UCLA Jake Heggie became her piano student, and, interestingly, she, at 69, married the 21-year-old Heggie! “He makes me glow”, according to the *Citizen* article. Apparently her five grown children were not so enamoured!

Heggie and Harris often performed together. *Opera News* confirms that he acknowledges “she was a magnificent teacher” and “her spirit it is in every note I write”.

Harris continued to be active musically, teaching at UCLA until 1993 and performing until 1994. The *Citizen* reports that in 1987, at 74, she both received the UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award, and recorded her entire solo piano repertoire, of which MCA issued, in 1988, two discs, one of Debussy and one of J. S. Bach, but only in the States. She died in 1995, at 82, forgotten in Canada it would seem, after her marriage to Roy Harris and subsequent complete name change from Beulah Duffy!

La Bohème at the Metropolitan Opera

by Maureen Smith

For the past twenty years I have enjoyed regular trips to New York City for theatre. My apologies to opera lovers, but an opera at the Met wasn't a priority for me until I had the opportunity to accompany an opera enthusiast from Calgary. Call me nostalgic but my motivation was the fond memory of being part of a 1980's group of teachers who made the trip from Lethbridge to Calgary as season ticket holders and the thrill of everything about the Metropolitan Opera. Suffice it to say that my experience with opera was limited and I had not kept it up once I moved to Ottawa in the late 1980's.

I attended Franco Zeffirelli's lavish production of *La Bohème* in January 2016 at the Met. It was a good choice for an amateur like me: simple storyline, Franco

Zeffirelli (need I say more), and an abundance of drama. The experience begins well before the curtain rises as you take in opulence of the Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center. Then the magic begins and it just doesn't end until Mimi takes her last breath. Mary Dunleavy as Musetta, Jean-François Borras as Rodolfo, and Quinn Kelsey as Marcelo provided us with strong performances but it was Maria Agresta's fabulous Mimi who stole the show. It was an incredible experience. I am now looking forward to another opera in the very near future. Opera lovers can either see the wasted non-opera years as a tragedy worthy of great operas or share in the joy of yet another aficionado joining their ranks!

Events you should enjoy

by David Williams

The **Strings of St John's** presents Bob Chilcott's *Requiem*. Sunday, March 20, 2:00 p.m. St John the Evangelist Anglican Church, 154 Somerset Street West.

Christ Church Cathedral: The Cathedral Choir of Men and Boys, the Cathedral Girls' Choir, the Cathedral Women's Schola, and the Ottawa Music Company Orchestra present *The St Luke Passion* by Scottish composer James MacMillan. This work had its world premiere in 2014 and this is the first time this work will be presented in Canada. Good Friday, March 25, 3:00 p.m., Christ Church Cathedral, 439 Queen Street.

Thirteen Strings presents *A Baroque Easter*: A Good Friday concert of sacred baroque works for Easter. Soprano Jennifer Taverner, countertenor Daniel Cabena, tenor Charles Sy and Seventeen Voyces join the orchestra for this program. Friday, March 25, 8:00 p.m. Dominion-Chalmers United Church

St. Luke's presents *Music of the Baroque*: A tribute to Baroque music for voice, trumpet and piano. Starring Norman E. Brown (baritone) and Peter Crouch (trumpet) with Frédéric Lacroix (piano). Sunday, April 3, 7:30 p.m. St. Luke's Church, 760 Somerset Street West.

UOttawa School of Music: The Art Song Interpretation Class under Professor Lawrence Ewashko will present on Sunday, April 10, 3:00 p.m., in Freiman Hall, a programme of *Italian, Spanish and Slavic Art Songs*.

Pellegrini Opera will present Verdi's *Rigoletto* starring internationally acclaimed baritone Jeffrey Carl as Rigoletto. The Pellegrini Opera Chorus and Orchestra will be conducted by Vito Lo Re. Saturday 16th April, 7:30 p.m., Dominion-Chalmers United Church. Information: 613-236-3736 www.pellegriniopera.net

The Ottawa Chamber Orchestra will presents Mozart's music - including Arias with Maghan McPhee. 8:00 p.m. Saturday April 16, St. Joseph's Parish, 174 Wilbrod St.

Music Rendez-Vous presents *Operamania: A Grand Feast of Opera Ensembles* by Gounod, Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Strauss, Verdi and Wagner. Saturday 16th April, 4:00 p.m. St. Thomas the Apostle Church, 2345 Alta Vista.

The **Ottawa Bach Choir** features two masses for choir with Ottawa's Matthew Larkin on the Organ. Charpentier's *Mass for Four Choirs* is stylistic of the Italian polychoral form, typical of Gabrieli, which Charpentier was most likely exposed to during a brief period of study in Rome. The second half of the concert is a modern juxtaposition of Langlais' *Solemn Mass* (written in 1949), also composed for four-part choir. Saturday, May 7, 8:00 p.m., Christ Church Cathedral, 439 Queen Street.

The **Savoy Society of Ottawa** will perform the comic Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *Iolanthe*. The show will be stage directed by Meredith Matthews, and music directed by Gloria Jean Nagy. Performances May 13, 14 and 15, at Woodroffe United Church.

The **Cantata Singers** will present *A musical bouquet for Tulip-tide*. A fascinating collection of works takes us on a floral journey from the Elizabethan madrigal to contemporary Canada. Sunday, May 15, 3:00 p.m. St. Joseph's Church, 174 Wilbrod St. Come at 2:30 p.m. for a pre-concert talk by conductor Andrew McAnerney.

The **Ottawa Classical Choir** presents a John Rutter program featuring two of his works, *Magnificat* and *Gloria*. 200 voices will be accompanied by l'Orchestre Philharmonique du Nouveau Monde under the direction of Maestro Michel Brousseau. Saturday May 21, 7:30 p.m. Dominion-Chalmers United Church, 355 Cooper St.

Thirteen Strings presents a semi-staged production of Joseph Haydn's charming opera *L'isola disabitata*. Friday, May 27, 8:00 p.m., Dominion-Chalmers United Church, 355 Cooper St. For ticket information: <http://thirteenstrings.ca> or Tel. 613-738-7888

Seventeen Voyces presents *Tales of Shakespeare*. Directed by Kevin Reeves, Seventeen Voyces presents Shakespeare's words set to beautiful music by some of the world's greatest composers. Starring actor Peter James Haworth. Friday, June 3, 7:30 p.m. Southminster United Church, 15 Aylmer Avenue.

Orpheus Musical Theatre will present *The Who's Tommy*. Music and Lyrics by Pete Townshend, Book by Pete Townshend and Des McAnuff, additional Music and Lyrics by John Entwistle and Keith Moon. June 3-12, at Centrepointe Theatre.

The **Ottawa Choral Society** will present Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah* on Friday, June 17, 7:30 p.m., St. Joseph's Parish Church. Duain Wolfe conducts the National Arts Centre Orchestra with soloists Isaiah Bell, Russell Braun, Susan Platts and Monica Whicher.

UOttawa School of Music Recitals: During April and early May, Third Year, Graduation, and Master's recitals, plus Ensemble concerts, will be presented. These are all free and most welcoming to audiences. Specific dates of voice recitals can be found at - <http://arts.uottawa.ca/music/concerts>

Boucher, Gilbertson-Boese and Swanton will produce Bizet's *Le Docteur Miracle*, on October 29th and October 30th at St. John the Evangelist Church.

The Met Live in HD 2015 - 2016

Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* March 5, 2016
Encores: April 9, 11 & 13

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* April 2, 2016
Encores: May 14, 16 & 18

Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* April 16,
2016 Encores: May 28, 30 & June 1

Strauss's *Elektra* April 30, 2016
Encores: June 11, 13 & 15

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera, 2016

March 26	<i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i>
April 2	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
April 9	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>
April 16	<i>Roberto Devereux</i>
April 23	<i>Otello</i>
April 30	<i>Elektra</i>
May 7	<i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i>

Complete details on these broadcasts are on the Met's website: metopera.org

Operas from the Royal Opera House

Boris Godunov, March 26 & 28, 2016

Lucia Di Lammermoor, May 7 & 9

Werther, June 29

These operas will be shown at the Landmark Cinemas in Orleans. Confirm dates and times by contacting the cinema. Phone: (613) 830-4400

The Met Live in HD 2016 - 2017

Tristan und Isolde - October 8, 12:00 p.m.

Don Giovanni - October 22, 12:55 p.m.

L'Amour de Loïn - December 10, 12:55 p.m.

Nabucco - January 7, 12:55 p.m.

Roméo et Juliette - January 21, 12:55 p.m.

Rusalka – February 25, 12:55 p.m.

La Traviata - March 11, 12:55 p.m.

Idomeneo - March 25, 12:55 p.m.

Eugene Onegin - April 22, 12:55 p.m.

Der Rosenkavalier - May 13, 12:30 p.m.

Opera alla Pasta

Sunday Afternoon at the Opera

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

Two delightful comedies that are guaranteed to make your day!

Two for the price of one!

May 22, 2016 at 2:00 p.m.

Ravel's
***L'heure
Espagnole***

Puccini's
***Gianni
Schicchi***

L'heure espagnole is a one act "operabouffe" first performed in 1904 at the Opera-Comique in Paris. This production, from the 2012 Glyndebourne Festival, features a stellar cast and the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Kazushi Ono. It is full of charming music that accompanies the madcap activities on stage. This highly acclaimed production was the winner of the Gramophone DVD of the year.

Gianni Schicchi is a one act comic opera that had its premier, along with two other short Puccini operas, at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1918. The storyline concerns the attempt by a money-grubbing family to forge a will and steal the assets of a dead relative. It is farce at its best. *Gianni Schicchi* is well-known for one of operas all-time favourite arias: "O mio babbino caro".

Opera alla Pasta is held at St. Anthony's Soccer Club at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday. The cost is \$25. Call 613-830-9827 or email kmitts1637@rogers.com at least three days before the date of the DVD presentation in order to reserve a place.