

Société d' Opéra  
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital  
Opera Society

Spring 2019

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Printemps 2019

## **Announcing Increased Prize Money for the 2019 Brian Law Opera Competition**

We are delighted to announce a 40% increase in prize money. This year a total of \$14,750 is available to be awarded to the finalists as follows:

**1<sup>st</sup> prize: \$7500**

**2<sup>nd</sup> prize: \$3500**

**3<sup>rd</sup> prize: \$1500**

**other finalists will receive \$750**

Another exciting change is to an afternoon competition. We hope that the change to the afternoon will be attractive to our audience and boost attendance.

The 14th Brian Law Opera Competition (BLOC) will be held at  
**2:00 pm on Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019**  
at the Southminster United Church, 15 Aylmer Avenue, Ottawa.

At the last Competition, Southminster partnered with us by making the Competition part of their Saturday concert series. Although the church has not as yet made plans for a concert series next season, we would welcome their partnership.

The BLOC is our major activity, so the prizes are  
the best possible use of our funds.

Mark your calendars and we'll look forward to seeing you on October 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Mark Robinson**

## President's Message March 2019 by Murray Kitts

It's a lovely Spring day in Victoria, with sunshine and blossoms everywhere just like it was in January before winter reappeared. I've enjoyed a number of fine concerts here principally because they have been presented on Sunday afternoons usually at the excellent auditorium at the university. These concerts are attended by many elderly and handicapped people leading some visitors from Ottawa thinking that this type of arrangement would be good to have in Ottawa as well. The performance of *La traviata* that I attended and reviewed was an afternoon one. A couple of exceptional exceptions are coming up this month: Orff's *Carmina Burana* will be performed by the Victoria Choral Society with Ballet Victoria and musicians of the Victoria Symphony, and later at Christ Church Cathedral the 22 voice choir of Clare College (UK) will perform Tomas Luis de Victoria's

*1605 Requiem* as well as Passiontide motets by Renaissance masters.

As for the simulcasts from the Met, I missed so many last season due to poor health but was glad to see a repeat of *La fille du regiment*, more delightful every time I see it. For next season the big news for me is a production of Berg's *Wozzek* to be seen next season. This is probably the greatest opera of the 20th century. I have never seen a production of it on stage although I have seen the play when I was at U of T. The text was written by a genius named Georg Buchner whose works have been compared favourably to Shakespeare and who died of typhus at the age of 23. It is a shocking condemnation of war and contains perhaps the most devastating tragic ending of any opera.

*Murray Kitts*

**Remember the AGM is on May 26th after the Opera alla pasta**

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For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition, scheduled for October 19, 2019, contact Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 or consult [www.ncos.ca](http://www.ncos.ca)

## A Very Stylish *Don Giovanni*

by Shelagh Williams

Prof. Sandra Graham of the uOttawa Opera Company (UOOC) excelled herself this year with a season of two excellent productions. The second and major one in February was a very stylish *Don Giovanni* by Mozart. (see p. 4 for a review of the first one!)

Stage and Music Director Graham set the opera in Milan in 1991 at Giovanni's House of Design during Fashion Week - the perfect excuse for great costumes, especially the elegant gowns on the fashion models, almost all from Graham's own collection! For ease in identification, the Don (called Gianni/Johnny) stood out in a bright red shirt, with Elvira colour-coded also in red and Anna in blue, and security (Leporello) and police (Ottavio) in tan trench coats. It was all well lit and clear against the black backdrops.

The excellent student chamber orchestra was under the detailed direction of Donnie Deacon, erstwhile NACO principal second violin. He also participated in the opera, providing the "Giovanni Scores" book for Leporello's *Catalogue Aria* and neatly tossing the necessary cash to Giovanni at the start of Act II to sweeten the unhappy Leporello! Deacon and the orchestra members were nattily attired in black with red accents, in keeping with the fashion concept.

Graham wisely chose English for both dialogue and important recits to aid the audience's comprehension, while keeping the great arias in Italian. She also used her signature chaise longue and the multi-level stage plus the balcony and various aisles to good effect, keeping the action lively and well directed. In spite of weather disruptions, including a Snow Day(!) on the Wednesday (13<sup>th</sup>), she beautifully prepared two excellent casts, for three performances, presenting one cast on Thursday (14<sup>th</sup>) and Saturday (16<sup>th</sup>) and a mainly different cast on Friday (15<sup>th</sup>). We managed to enjoy both casts, at the Friday and Saturday performances.

Interestingly, both Giovannis are studying in uOttawa's unique Music and Science double major programme. On the Friday we heard Galen Boulanger, tall and energetic, and really into the part! His Leporello was the truly amazing Hyung Song, recovering from a broken knee, and deftly and cleverly incorporating his crutch into his interpretation. But Hyung also used his lovely deep bass voice for the Commendatore (called Don Pedro) on the Saturday - Oh to be young and to so easily recuperate again! We had two superb sopranos for the female leads,



Rehearsal Photo - credit Julia Martin

Juliana Krajcovic as Anna and Lynlee Wolstencroft as Elvira. It was a rare treat to have Ottavio, Anna's betrothed, not a wimp but here as the Chief of Police, strongly sung and portrayed in both casts by guest tenor Philip Klaassen. Zerlina and Masetto were sung by Lindsay Gillis and Mathieu Roy, the latter very stage savvy, carrying off his Elvis masquerade outfit with aplomb. Our Don Pedro, with a voice of doom, was Mitchell McGivern. In both casts, tenor Ryan Tonelli, the lead Aeneas in UOOC's earlier *Dido and Aeneas* production (see p. 4), here portrayed Leporello's assistant in security and flirted with soprano Julia Jordan, playing both Elvira's assistant and a mannequin! The principals and the rest of the large cast all worked together very well.

The Saturday cast we heard were performing together for the second time, and some of course had slightly different interpretations. Baritone James Coole-Stevenson, as Giovanni, gave us beautiful renditions of *La ci darem la mano* and the *Serenade* that would have melted the hardest hearts! As Leporello, Giovanni's inept head of security, bass-baritone Kevin Burke brought all his vocal and comedic skills to bear, especially in his performance of the *Catalogue Aria*, and in his facial reactions to just about everything! Again, Anna and Elvira were excellently exemplified, here by sopranos Emili Losier and Carmen Harris, the latter looking the part of Vogue editor in a swish designer suit. Tessa Fackelmann and Madox Terrell as Zerlina and Masetto adeptly rounded out the principals, and with the remainder of the cast contributed to the lively presentation.

## A Very Stylish *Don Giovanni* (continued)

The final scene, with black-clad and white-gloved furies pulling Giovanni down to Hell, was most effective!

With such an excellent production by singers, orchestra and other support, it was not surprising that, on the final day, the audience was told to fill up all the seats

to the ends, as the hall was essentially sold out! As always, the energy and talent of young musical performers are so infectious and leave one so full of admiration! Let's hope some of the soloists enter our 2019 BLOC!



Opening night curtain call - from left to right - Jordan, McGivern, Fackelmann, Losier, Harris, Coole-Stevenson, Burke, Klaassen, Terrell, Tonelli. Photo credit Julia Martin

## UOttawa Opera: Double The Pleasure! by Shelagh Williams

For the first in this year's grand two-production season, Prof. Sandra Graham presented a double bill that consisted of Menotti's *Old Maid and the Thief* plus Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in January. Artistic Director Graham had Graduate Student Reba Sigler as Stage Director for both operas, plus Reba sang an important part in *The Old Maid and the Thief*, with Dorothee Jourdain as collaborative pianist. This was a great production, from the evocative stage setting to the spot-on costuming, with every one playing their part to the hilt! Heather Lynn Smith embodied the rather prissy Old Maid, Miss Todd, while Reba Sigler was her bright and scheming young maid Laetitia. Adam Laurenti sang the part of the handsome hobo Bob, who is the cause of all the ructions, and the comic relief was provided by Christine Hecker as town gossip Miss Pinkerton - I fondly recall Susanna Doherty in this role a few years ago! This was a very lively and entertaining production of what began as an early NBC radio opera (1939) which Menotti adapted for the stage (1940), and which

is still going strong!

*Dido and Aeneas* had a much larger cast for Reba Sigler to direct, with collaborative pianist Anneli Loepp Thiessen. The attractive shiny gossamer costumes have been used before and really suited the classical ambience of the opera. Purcell's lovely music is more stately, and the cast sang and acted accordingly. Dido, Queen of Carthage, was sung strongly by Danielle Girard, and she was beautifully presented in a rich red gown and gold crown. She was attended by Jessica Eblie as Belinda and Jessica Simpson as Second Woman, and Cassandra Schantz sang the Sorceress. Ryan Tonelli as the Trojan hero Aeneas was suitably athletic. Interestingly, the director contrived a plot twist - a happy ending for Dido - by having her plot with the Sorceress, now her long lost sister, to feign her own death, and then the two sisters escape to the woods for an idyllic life away from court! This production was also well done and a nice contrast to the earlier modern piece.

## Pacific Opera's *La traviata* by Murray Kitts

*La traviata* x 5 - a splendid production of Verdi's great opera in Victoria.

Although I knew that the version of this opera was eventually to appear in five Canadian cities I was startled by the size of the two very large transport trucks parked right beside the theatre. What could they contain?

When the curtain opened with the start of the prelude the enormous pieces of stage set from the transports were revealed. These included an upper balcony able to hold the entire cast and a large curved staircase down which, to the music of the Prelude, descended a woman (Violetta) scantily clad in a startling costume very much like those worn by Josephine Baker when she was the toast of Paris.

This opera contains four acts each in different locales: Violetta's party, the country house, Flora's party, and the death room. Key lighting effects by the master of Lighting, Designer Kevin Lamotte, and the rearrangement of furniture, made for appropriate contrasting sets and allowed the production to have only one intermission.

Of course for an opera like this one it is reasonable to expect reasonably good singing. The role of Violetta demands a soprano with exceptional vocal powers. Lucia Cesaroni was more than capable of the technical difficulties and also was able to convey contrasting emotions such as frivolity, passionate love and sacrifice in her portrayal of the doomed heroine. With her was the tall, handsome tenor, Colin Ainsworth, who gave a very good performance as Alfredo, the man Violetta hoped would save her from an empty, artificial life. Veteran singer, James Westman, as Alfredo's father, gave a well-contrasted interpretation of a man try-



ing to cope with a difficult paternal dilemma. Filling out the large, capable and well-experienced cast of Canadian singers were Megan Lantham as Flora, Violetta's friend; James McLennan as Gastone, Alfredo's friend; Alexandre Sylvestre as Baron Douphol, Alfredo's rival; and with Giles Tompkins as Dr. Grenvil and Caitlin Wood as the maid.

The Pacific Opera Chorus was outstanding musically, conveying the joie de vivre of Paris in the 20's with great enthusiasm and doubling as performers in the ballet in Act III. Christina Poddubiuk's costumes for the female cast members were most appropriate in creating the frenzied party atmosphere. Men wore formal clothes suitable for rich men on the town.

The Victoria Symphony and Chorus were under the masterful direction of Timothy Vernon, famous for his reading of Verdi's magnificent score and founding Artistic Director of Pacific Opera.

The capacity audiences at the five performances in Victoria responded with great enthusiasm for the production. Good news for the people of Vancouver and Montreal because they will be able to enjoy this splendid production, although with different casts of excellent Canadian singers.



Photos by David Cooper

The sad news is that Pacific Opera is being required to move from its present home in the Royal Theatre to other venues much less suitable for opera productions or not as centrally located for the opera-going public. A full account of this situation is given in the current edition of Canadian Opera.

It seems even sadder that a few years ago Opera Lyra Ottawa could have joined this consortium of Canadian opera houses in what one hopes will be a continuing effort to bring great opera to those who love it.

## Heidi Melton In Centretown

by Paul Schaub

Saturday, March 2, Carleton University's Music Department offered an opera treat in their new Carleton Dominion Chalmers Centre on O'Connor St. Unfortunately it was not well advertised, and if one hadn't listened to a CBC afternoon program one wouldn't have known about it. Artist in Residence, soprano Heidi Melton, together with soprano Morgan Strickland and tenor David MacAdam, gave performances of lieder, arias, and duets.

Heidi Melton is blessed with a big, beautiful voice. One falls in love with her right away. Melton began the recital with two songs by Jean Sibelius, Opus 37, #4 *Var Dez en dröm? (Was It a Dream?)* and #5 *Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings möte (The Girl Returned from Meeting Her Lover)*, a most curious tale: the first time she came back with red fingers from holding hands, the second time she had red lips from kissing him, and the last time she came back with red eyes as she saw another woman in his arms. James Wright on piano was accompanist.

*Sull'aria* from *Le Nozze di Figaro* was sung by Morgan Strickland and Ms. Melton; their voices blended very well. Francesco Paolo Tosti's *Van gli effluvi de le rose, Tristezza*, and *L'alba sepàra dalla Luce l'ombra* were all sung by David MacAdam, accompanied by James McGowan.



Heidi Melton

photo by Simon-Pauly

*Fra gli amplessi*, the duet between *Così Fan Tutte's* Fiordiligi and Ferrando, was sung by Strickland and MacAdam.

*The Girl in 14 G* by Jeanine Tesori and Dick Scanlan, sung by Strickland, revealed the plight of a young woman who thought she had found a quiet apartment until the coloratura soprano in 13G started to sing the *Queen of the Night* aria and a young woman in 15G started to sing, drum and stomp on the floor.

After intermission, MacAdam performed *Why God, Why?* from *Miss Saigon*. The *Flower Duet* from *Lakmé* blended beautifully the voices of Melton and Strickland.

Then what everyone was waiting for, Melton singing Wagner, as she is a Wagner careerist. *Isolde's* curse-narrative reveals that she is angry with Tristan who has killed her fiancé. Melton possesses a huge dramatic voice. For a deep moment that voice blew one to the far end of the hall. Oh, to hear her sing the entire *Tristan und Isolde!*

Strickland and MacAdam performed the finale, *Libiamo ne'lieti calici* from *La Traviata*. Melton closed the recital with a

Kurt Weill song.

A most enjoyable evening, but unfortunately without a big audience. One also hopes that Heidi Melton, with her voice of great beauty, will give more recitals.

### Opera Quiz

1. Can you name an opera where the title character never appears?
2. Perhaps we should not refer to Donizetti's *Tudor Trilogy*, but to his *Tudor Tetralogy*. Can you name his fourth Tudor opera?
3. What soprano and tenor were born the same year in Modena, Italy?
4. What church title does Pooh-Bah hold in addition to all his other titles?
5. Name a singer who made headlines when she appeared in the buff in *Salome* at the MET.
6. Can you name the Massenet work in which Salome keeps her clothes on?
7. Can you name a Mascagni opera about Lady Godiva?

### Answers

1. Menotti's *The Consul*.
2. *Il Castello di Kenilworth* (1828)
3. Mirella Freni and Luciano Pavarotti, in 1935.
4. Archbishop of Tipu.
5. Maria Ewing
6. *Herodiade* (1881)
7. *Isabeau* (1911)

Shelagh Williams

## Adriana Lecouvreur Live at the Met

by Lesley Robinson

We had to change the date of our trip to New York to see Francesco Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, which meant that the title role was sung by American soprano Jennifer Rowley instead of Anna Netrebko, who performed in the HD broadcast. We had already seen this production several years ago at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden with Angela Gheorghiu and Jonas Kaufman (there is a DVD of that version) and we were happy to see it in another guise.

As well as the Royal Opera House, this David McVicar production is also a co-production with the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, the Wiener Staatsoper, the San Francisco Opera and l'Opéra National de Paris, and it is fortuitous that this lavish and innovative production has had an extended life. I hope fervently that it will remain in the repertoire over the coming years. The set is a fabulous, rotating stage within a stage. At the outset we are backstage, watching actors scurrying around, dressing and putting on make up. It is as if we are getting a privileged, backstage view of the world of 18<sup>th</sup> century theatre. (The action is set in 1730 in Paris.) As the dressing room conversation proceeds, we can actually see the actors on the stage, playing to the imaginary auditorium. As the set turns for the next act, the front of the stage ingeniously turns into a Parisian villa. We finally see the front of the stage in act three when there is a ballet for the entertainment of partygoers and Adriana performs a monologue from *Phèdre*, a prized role for any French actress. The elaborate Rococo set and costumes evoke the opulence of the period.

Of Cilea's five operas, *Adriana Lecouvreur* is undoubtedly the best known. He was roughly a contemporary of Puccini and although he lived much longer, they were

active around the same time and the music has a similar feel to it. The music is a wonderful showcase for the singers. The first act aria *La dolcissima effigie sorridente* begins with the tenor, and becomes a love duet. The theme recurs later in the opera, but right from the first act, we knew we were in for an amazing treat. Italian conductor Gianandrea Noseda was clearly enjoying himself as he sometimes rather noisily hummed along.

The story is yet another love triangle and the three stars all put in magnificent performances. Piotr Bezcala was a dashing and ardent hero and the stupendous Anita Rachvelishvili

(who has been described as currently the world's best mezzo-soprano) was fiery and passionate as the scheming princess who'll stop at nothing to have him for herself. Jennifer Rowley put her heart and soul into her role and showed us a vulnerable, yet intense Adriana. Her portrayal was penetratingly thoughtful. Here's what she said about it on her Facebook page: "When I took on the role of Adriana Lecouvreur, and after researching who this amazing and revolutionary woman was, my goal was to do justice to her as a person. To allow her to "live" on stage. To tell her story, and to allow every one to fall in love with her, as I completely have." At the end of the

performance it was evident that she had lived every emotion with Adriana. Apart from the three principal singers, I'd like to add a word about Ambrogio Maestri in the role of Michonnet. Mr. Maestri is a delightful larger than life presence, also seen at the Met in the title role of *Falstaff* and as Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*, but this role was different. Michonnet is a fatherly figure who loves Adriana. Although love has passed him by, he is a faithful and loving friend to Adriana and Mr. Maestri brought an affectionate poignancy to the role.



Jennifer Rowley was overwhelmed with emotion as she took her bow.



Anita Rachvelishvili, Jennifer Rowley, Gianandrea Noseda, Piotr Bezcala, Ambrogio Maestri & Carlo Bosi

## ***Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Met**

by Lesley Robinson

We returned to the Met in January for *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Claude Debussy, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin who was greeted once again by a rousing chorus of cheers from a highly appreciative audience. This was a revival of a Jonathan Miller production, originally from 1995, returning to the stage of the Met after a long interval.

Based on what is described as a symbolist play by the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, this was Debussy's only completed opera. The music is highly atmospheric, with no conventional arias. In an interview posted on the Met website, Mr. Nézet-Séguin explains his goal as to make it as engaging and alive as possible. He describes it as delicate music with a million colours, speaking directly to the emotions, and explains how the combination of listening to what the orchestra is telling with the delivery of the incredible cast can really reach the heart and imagination of the audience. Debussy's music creates a



Yannick Nézet-Séguin between Paul Appleby and Isabel Leonard

who is convincing as the vengeful and tormented husband. This production marked the Met debut of Canadian contralto Marie-Nicole Lemieux as Geneviève. She returns later this season as Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff*.

mysterious and ritualistic atmosphere which complements the esoteric mood of the story.

The story is set in a mythical time and place, but the setting for this production looks like a stark turn of the century mansion. Jonathan Miller preferred to avoid what he called the original's "proxy medievalism" and set it in the period of its composition. The result is a bleak and harsh backdrop to this mysterious love triangle.

The title roles of Pelléas and Mélisande were role debuts for both tenor Paul Appleby and mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard. Mr. Nézet-Séguin believes that they will become signature roles for both of them. The role of the third member of the love triangle, Golaud, who finds and marries the mysterious Mélisande, is sung by bass-baritone Kyle Ketelson

who is convincing as the vengeful and tormented husband. This production marked the Met debut of Canadian contralto Marie-Nicole Lemieux as Geneviève. She returns later this season as Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff*.

## ***Eugene Onegin: 24<sup>th</sup> Shooting Stars Showcase* by Shelagh Williams**

Every year Yoriko Tanno produces an opera with the singers in her Studio, and this year it was Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. She wisely chose to sing it in English, in a good translation.

With strong singers for the principal roles, she was able to double cast the three leading female characters. We attended the first of two nights, with 2017 BLOC first place winner soprano Jennifer Olenic beautifully singing Tatyana. Mabel Wonnacott was her lively sister Olga and Ally Downes their contented mother Madame Larina, to be replaced the second evening by Rebecca Shew and Hiroko Yokota-Adachi, respectively. Soprano Juliana Krajkovic, the recent Donna Anna with uOttawa Opera Company (see p. 3), was to sing Tatyana the second evening, but also lent her strong vocal and acting talents to the chorus on the first evening!

The chorus made an impressive entrance in the first act as Madame Larina's peasants, both singing and dancing a harvest song. They cleaned up nicely as they climbed the social scale in the ballroom party and finally in the palace!

Baritone Cameron Martin had the looks, diction and voice for Eugene Onegin. He and Jennifer worked well together in their major scenes.

As Lenski, Preston Smith sang well and delivered a very sad aria just before the fatal duel. Jeffrey Wu gave a great comic turn as Triquet in his party piece, a bit over the top, but hilarious!

The third act was especially good. At the ball, James Sullivan treated us to Prince Gremin's memorable aria. The final scene between Onegin and the now impressive Tatyana, the Princess Gremin, was very well done, to finish it all off in style.

The opera was very well presented with good settings for all the tableaux and everyone suitably costumed. The Shooting Stars productions are always great vehicles for the singers, and have been graced in previous years by such successful Ottawa opera singers as BLOC winners/finalists Yannick-Muriel Noah, Sharleen Joynt and Megan Lindsay, plus Mireille Asselin. They also give us a welcome chance to enjoy live opera in town every March!



## A Triumphant *Traviata* at the Met by Lesley Robinson

At the second performance of the new production of *La Traviata* at the Met the celebratory atmosphere of the opening continued. There were a number of special firsts being celebrated. Firstly, the opening night marked the official debut performance of the tenure of the Met's new Music Director, Yannick Nézet-Séguin. On the second night the energetic and charismatic Mr. Nézet-Séguin received a rapturous welcome when he took to the podium. He is already a great favourite with Met audiences. Although they have sung together many times, the partnership of Diana Damrau and Juan Diego Flórez in this opera was another first, since this was a role debut for the tenor, who was returning to the Met stage for the first time since 2015.

One wonders how different a new production may be of one of the most frequently performed and well-loved operas. Michael Mayer's new staging was a thoughtful, colourful and poignant presentation of the story. The set is a single room, with Violetta's bed constantly before us. The plaintive music of the overture, echoed later, enhances the perspective of this production. The dying Violetta is reliving the last year of her life in her final, heart-rending moments. The sumptuous set evokes the mid-nineteenth century period when the opera was written and changes with the seasons as the drama progresses.

The room is ornate with filigree-framed windows and at moments the filigree appears like a golden cage, entrapping Violetta, the fallen woman.

The colours of both set and costumes change with the seasons. In the first act it is spring and the colours are vibrant. In the sec-

ond act the action has moved to the lovers' country hideaway and the set is filled with light, denoting the full flowering of their love. The colours already begin to fade at the arrival of Germont, as Violetta's dream of love too begins to fade. This is the beginning of the end for her. In the next scene, it is autumn at Flora's party and the colours are autumnal and sombre. The dancers perform an eerie Halloween dance of death, which forebodes what is to come. In the final act it is winter and darkness surrounds Violetta's deathbed.

Musically too the performance was sumptuous. Maestro Nézet-Séguin lives every nuance of the score and every emotion expressed, with his whole body. He has fabulous chemistry with the orchestra and with the singers and has the capacity to make the well-known score come alive in a new way, as if you were hearing it for the first time. Diana Damrau's portrayal of Violetta was refined and heartfelt. Although not his first Verdi role (he is a fabulous Duke of Mantua), Juan Diego Flórez was singing the role of Alfredo for the first time. As his voice develops with age, he has been eager to take on new challenges. His Alfredo was passionate and petulant and the duets were gorgeous. Quinn Kelsey has already performed the role of Germont at the COC, the Royal Opera House in London and in Zürich. His portrayal of the gruff and unyielding patriarch is

mellow and thoughtful. (Ironically he is a few years younger than Mr. Flórez!).

The production returns to the Met stage in April with a different cast including Plácido Domingo as Germont. It will no doubt continue as a veritable feast for the senses.



Kirstin Chávez as Flora, Quinn Kelsey, Diana Damrau and Juan Diego Flórez

## *Champion* at the Opéra de Montréal

by Lesley Robinson

Kudos to the Opéra de Montréal for bringing us this unusual fusion of opera and jazz. *Champion*, by renowned jazz trumpeter Terence Blanchard, with a libretto by Michael Cristofer, was co-commissioned by the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Jazz St. Louis and tells the true story of welterweight boxing champion Emile Griffiths who soared to the heights of fame and came crashing down to a lonely and harsh reality when he accidentally killed an opponent in the boxing ring. Griffith's is a story of the American dream, which turns to a horrific nightmare. The undercurrent that runs throughout is the backstory of Griffith's homosexuality and his struggle to cope with who he is and how he is treated by society.

*Champion* premiered in 2013 in Saint Louis and there was a second production with revised orchestration in San Francisco in 2016 by Opera Parallèle (founded by Canadian conductor Nicole Paiement from Montreal) in collaboration with SFJAZZ. Blanchard described his work as "opera in jazz" rather than a "jazz opera" and in 2017 the piece went to the Washington National Opera in Washington DC. It is the Washington sets that came to Montreal along with the costumes from Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

Three members of the original cast also came to Montreal: bass Arthur Woodley as the aging Emile Griffith, bass-baritone Aubrey Allicock as the young Griffith and tenor Victor Ryan Robertson as Benny "The Kid" Paret, the boxer who Griffith hit mercilessly in the ring after he had used the pejorative term "maricón", Spanish for "faggot", at

the weigh in. Paret never regained consciousness and died 10 days later in hospital. Other parts were sung by Canadian singers: mezzo-soprano Catherine Anne Daniel was popular in the role of Emelda Griffith, Emile's mother who had abandoned him as a child in Saint Thomas, US Virgin Islands to go to New York to find work. Baritone Brett Polegato sang the role of Howie Albert, Emile's trainer, and soprano Chantale Nurse was Sadie/Blanche. Sri Lankan tenor Asitha Tennekoon took on the role of Luis Griffith, Emile's adopted son, who became his caregiver in his later years. Local youngster Nathan Dibula sang the part of Emile as a boy. American conductor George Manahan, who had conducted the premiere of *Champion*, took charge of the orchestra in Montreal. The music was rich in its orchestration, with a number of instruments that would not usually be found in an operatic pit, and much of the music was carried by a jazz quartet of drums, bass, guitar and piano.

The opera centres around the elderly Griffith, suffering from dementia, recalling his life story. He is haunted by his past and struggles with even the simplest of tasks, dressing himself. He is preparing to meet the son of Benny Paret, Benny Jr. (also played by Victor Ryan Robertson). Emile seeks forgiveness from Benny Jr., but in truth what he really needs is to be able to forgive himself.

At the end of the opera we are left with a powerful quote, which epitomizes Griffith's struggle: "I killed a man and the world forgives me; I love a man and the world wants to kill me."



The three ages of Emile Griffith: Arthur Woodley, Nathan Dibula and Aubrey Allicock

## Events You Could Have Enjoyed by Shelagh Williams

### Jeanine Williams

Jeanine, our 2017 third place BLOC winner, has returned from Europe, and gave a lovely and varied recital in December. She wore a very becoming black gown, with her long red hair over her shoulder, and presented her material, with Maxime Dube-Malenfant on the piano, very well. She began spiritedly in English with the aria *I want magic!* from Previn's *Streetcar Named Desire*, and Ottawa composer Kelly-Marie Murphy's *Winter Songs*, which really suited her voice. Canadian composer Jean Coulthard's *Chansons du coeur* were followed by Strauss's *Madchenblumen*, which she interpreted beautifully thanks to her Austrian immersion. She said she enjoyed the poetry of the 3 *Browning Songs*, by Amy Beach, her 3<sup>rd</sup> female composer, and it showed in her presentation, ending with the joyful line, *All's right with the world!* This was a great lead into the seasonal *Come unto Him* from Handel's *Messiah*, sung with nice embellishments to finish off triumphantly. This concert was part of the Nicole Senecal Emerging Artist Award, given for talent, artistry, work ethic, and drive, which Jeanine won in the spring, as I reported in the Summer NCOS Newsletter. It was programmed by Chamberfest as a prelude to the *Silver and Gold* concert reported below.

### Christmas Concerts:

#### I Strings of St. John's: *Messiah*

Christmas seems to bring out the best in musicians and so their efforts should not be overlooked, in spite of the time restraints of publishing.

This year the Strings of St. John's partnered with the choirs of St. John's Anglican, Woodroffe UC and Kanata UC for their Christmas concert. To warm us up, each choir presented two special numbers and in between we all sang two carols with the orchestra. However, the meat of the concert was the Christmas Part (I) of Handel's *Messiah*, under the capable baton of their founder, Gordon Johnston. With added winds, trumpets and tympani, the three choirs, and excellent soloists - Grayson Nesbitt, tenor, Jean-Sebastien Kennedy, bass, Cara Gilbertson, mezzo, and Carolyn Streich, soprano - they certainly made a great and joyful noise unto the Lord, finishing with the glorious *Hallelujah Chorus!* It is always great to hear local singers and instrumentalist in such marvellous music!

#### II *Silver and Gold: Christmas with the King's Singers, the Ottawa Choral Society and Chamberfest*

The newly-named Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre was the venue for the Chamberfest-produced Christmas celebrations of the King's Singers in their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year and the Ottawa Choral Society (OCS) in its 25<sup>th</sup>! We were treated to the 120-member OCS, with Matthew Larkin collaborating on the piano, in robust renditions of Christmas selections, while the King's Singers sextet gave us their exquisite renderings of baroque to modern gems. At the end the two groups collaborated on several selections, and we all joined them in one of the Christmas carols. Another great concert, with Jeanine Williams as a prelude!

#### III *Christmas with Music and Beyond with Myriam Leblanc*

In what was now titled the Carleton University Dominion-Chalmers Campus, we enjoyed Music and Beyond's always enjoyable Christmas presentation. Julian Armour always assembles an excellent instrumental ensemble and this year his core group consisted of himself on cello, all-stars Yolanda Bruno and Marc Djokic on violin, Carolyn Fernand on viola and John Geggie on bass, and Fred Lacroix on harpsichord, piano and organ! Lara Deutsch and Dakota Martin on flute and Caroline Leonardelli on harp rounded out the group for the many and varied seasonal selections. Eleven year old Natalie Paravalos, looking lovely in a sparkly dress and shoes, soloed amazingly on violin in the Bach/Gounod *Ave Maria* with the group, with young Francis Armour on piano. Special guests included the Ottawa Children's Choir and, under Caroline Leonardelli, E.S. De La Salle's Senior Harp Ensemble of 5 harps! Of especial interest to us opera lovers this year was soprano Myriam Leblanc, becomingly gowned, who was in beautiful voice. Her first gorgeous set included *I know that my Redeemer liveth* from Handel's *Messiah*, two Bach selections and Schubert's *Ave Maria*. At the end she gave us more Bach, *Silent Night*, and two newer Christmas songs, and then sent us home all happily singing *We wish you a merry Christmas!* Great stuff!

#### *Pinnock's St. Matthew Passion*

Baroque music specialist Trevor Pinnock, our former NACO conductor, returned in January for a stellar rendition of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with great soloists and choirs. Pinnock conducted from the harpsichord and both

## Events You Could Have Enjoyed (continued)

the NACO and the chorus were divided into two sections. These choirs were an intermingling of the Cantata Singers of Ottawa and the Capital Chamber Choir, plus the Ottawa Regional Youth Choir came on as the Daughters of Zion.

Of especial interest to opera lovers was the outstanding array of soloists. The higher voices were taken by soprano Lydia Teuscher and mezzo Allyson McHardy, who sings at both the COC and Opera Atelier. Tenor Mauro Peters as the Evangelist was on his feet almost continuously, while COC Studio alumnus tenor Andrew Haji's lovely voice handled the arias. Bass-baritone Douglas Williams, who has been singing lately with Opera Atelier, sang Christ. And of course, BLOC winner baritone Philippe Sly lent his graceful and deep baritone to the proceedings. We were at the NACO Friends' Open Rehearsal, and Pinnock was so happy with Philippe's singing that, unhappily for us, half the time he did not require Philippe to sing his whole selection! Other small roles were sung by outstanding choristers. Unfortunately, the surtitles at the rehearsal were indecipherable, but the music was great!

### **Kimberley Barber: *Music of the Holocaust***

Jan. 25<sup>th</sup>, almost the exact day of International Holocaust Remembrance Day (Jan. 27<sup>th</sup>), the 74<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, uOttawa School of Music presented an excellent concert of *Music of the Holocaust*.

Canadian operatic and concert mezzo Kimberley Barber combined with Ulrike Anton on flute and Anna Ronai on piano for a well-presented recital, with both surtitles and visuals, good notes, and a helpful and heartfelt commentary by the singer. Beautiful but heartbreaking were the songs of Ilse Weber, interned in Theresienstadt, especially *Wiegala*, which she sang to the children, including her own, as she voluntarily died with them in Auschwitz. Canadian composer Srul Irving Glick's song cycle *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* set the poetry of the child prisoners of Theresienstadt. The music of survivors Marius Flothuis (a flute and piano sonata) and

Vally Weigl (lighter songs) provided some contrast in a moving and thought provoking concert.

Following this, Kimberley Barber, who teaches at Wilfrid Laurier U. and coordinates their Opera Programme, held an interesting Master Class for six different advanced uOttawa singers, managing to enhance the performance of each one!

### ***Con Alma* with Christiane Riel and Louis Trepanier, *Music at Tabaret***

It is always enjoyable to hear the uOttawa School of Music professors displaying their specialities on Sunday afternoons at Tabaret Hall, to the delight of both their students and general music lovers. On the last Sunday of January, soprano Christiane Riel and guitarist Louis Trepanier made us forget the cold outside with a delightful recital of duos and guitar solos, which suited her voice beautifully and showcased his dexterity and warm timbre.

We began in Spain, with Louis mentioning that the guitar is the spirit of Spain! The themes of the second movement of Rodrigo's *Concerto d'Aranjuez* were used by the composer to set poetry by his wife, and this lovely piece opened the concert, to be followed by three songs from Granados's *La maja dolorosa (Sorrowful Woman)* and a guitar solo, Albeniz's *Granados* - a serenade. We then ventured further south, to Brazil, for Villa-Lobos's famous *Cantilena* from *Bachianas Brasileiras*, the cello accompaniment which the composer himself arranged for guitar, and others of his songs, some originally from a film score, arranged by Louis. The first half ended with two "Torch Songs" by Piazzolla, with *J'oublie* especially well done.

Canadian composers were not forgotten, with Louis' teacher Patrick Roux in attendance to hear Louis' rendition of Roux's *Valse Vertigo*. Of note was the debut of an interesting song cycle by Louis' sister-in-law, Christine Donkin, written especially for the duo. Half of the unusual poems were in Spanish, and the other half were enigmatic poems in English, by Frederick Candelaria, with *At Delphi* being especially intriguing!

The concert finished back in Spain with a fillip, with de Falla's well known *Siete canciones populares espanolas (Seven Spanish Folksongs)* which he harmonized, the lovely and lively rhythms warming us up for the trek home!

Congratulations to Joshua Hopkins on his 2019-20 Metropolitan Opera season. He will appear in his first leading role there as Papageno (December 15-January 3) and debuting a new role as Albert in *Werther* (March 31 and April 4). In the meantime, you can see Josh in Ottawa this summer! He will be appearing in the title role in Mozart's *Figaro* in Concert at the NAC June 12-14, 2019.

## The Met Live in HD 2018 - 2019

Bizet's *Carmen* (Feb. 2, 2019): Encores: March 9, March 11, March 13, March 31.

Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment* (March 2, 2019): Encores: April 6, April 8, April 10, April 16.

Wagner's *Die Walküre* (March 30, 2019): Encores: April 27, April 29, May 1, May 5.

Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* (May 11): Encores: June 8, June 10, June 12, June 23.

**Cinemas may not show all encores. Check with your local cinema for exact dates.**

## The Met Live in HD 2019 - 2020

The Metropolitan Opera has revealed its 2019-20 season for its Live in HD slate.

<i>Turandot</i> (Oct. 12, 2019)	<i>Manon</i> (Oct. 26, 2019)	<i>Madama Butterfly</i> (Nov. 9, 2019)
<i>Akhmaten</i> (Nov. 23, 2019)	<i>Wozzeck</i> (Jan. 11, 2020)	<i>Porgy and Bess</i> (Feb. 1, 2020)
<i>Agrippina</i> (Feb. 29, 2020)	<i>Der Fliegende Holländer</i> (March 14, 2020)	
<i>Tosca</i> (April 11, 2020)	<i>Maria Stuarda</i> (May 9, 2020)	

## CBC Saturday Afternoon at the Opera, 2019

Mar 23	<i>Samson et Dalila</i> , Saint-Saëns
Mar 30	<i>Die Walküre</i> , Wagner
Apr 6	<i>Tosca</i> , Puccini
Apr 13	<i>Siegfried</i> , Wagner
Apr 20	<i>La Clemenza di Tito</i> , Mozart
Apr 27	<i>Götterdämmerung</i> , Wagner
May 4	<i>Les Pêcheurs de Perles</i> , Bizet
May 11	<i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i> , Poulenc

## ByTowne Cinema

The 1994 Academy award nominee for Best Foreign Language Film *Farinelli Il Castrato* will be shown April 9<sup>th</sup> at 9:10 p.m. and April 10<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 p.m.

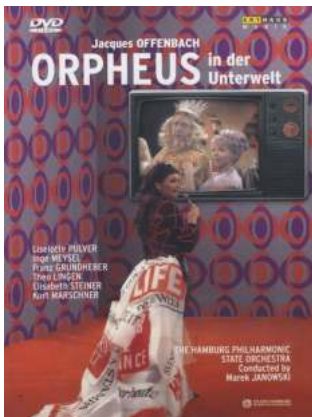
# Opera alla Pasta

## Sunday Afternoon at the Opera



### April 28<sup>th</sup> *Der fliegende Holländer* by Wagner

This DVD contains one of the true classics among modern Wagner productions: Harry Kupfer's production of *The Flying Dutchman* from the Bayreuth Festival 1978-85. Indeed it is one of the most imaginative, fascinating and well-conceived stagings of any opera available. First of all Harry Kupfer's core concept is simple as well as original, and is furthermore well in agreement with Richard Wagner's text without having to rely excessively on the imaginative powers of the audience: The entire drama of the Flying Dutchman simply takes place in Senta's imagination. The scene is set in a claustrophobic and traditional Norwegian fishing community of the 19th century. The dreamerish Senta clearly does not belong here among these down-to-earth people.



### May 26<sup>th</sup> *Orpheus in the Underworld* by Offenbach

By late 1858 Offenbach presented a full-length operetta to take advantage of the relaxing of restrictions on theatrical performances in Paris. He composed a delightful score full of memorable melodies to a libretto which exposed in a comical way the sexual antics of the Greek gods and others. The famed musician, Orpheus, is not a faithful husband trying to recover his wife, Euridice, who really doesn't like him, from the Underworld, ruled by the lascivious Pluto. The main sinner exposed is Jupiter, the king of the gods, who courts his prey in unusual disguises. This brilliant performance from 1971 is by an astonishing number of soloists, chorus, and ballet dancers from the Hamburg State Opera, accompanied by the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra conducted by Marek Janowski, and was produced for TV by Joachim Hess.



### *La Favorite* by Donizetti (date to be determined)

*La favorita* in its original French form; a tale of love and war that represents a glorious mix of Italian bel canto and 19th c. grand opera. Vincent Boussard's arresting Toulouse production does full justice to this newly renewed masterpiece. Chinese tenor Yijie Shi is a 'revelation' as Fernand. The rich-toned, authoritative French baritone Ludovic Tezier as King Alphonse XI and lauded American mezzo Kate Aldrich plumbed the emotional depths of the music. Conductor and bel canto specialist Antonello Allemandi adds to the passionate proceedings onstage.

Opera alla Pasta is held at St. Anthony's Soccer Club at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday. The cost is \$25. Call Lesley at 613-769-5957 or Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 at least three days before the date of the DVD presentation in order to reserve a place.