

Newsletter • Bulletin

Summer

2005

Été

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Opera Pilgrimage to New York

by Maghan Stewart

*Thanks to the generosity of Bobbi Cain and with the participation of Congress Travel, Maghan Stewart, a young, talented Ottawa soprano with aspirations for a career in opera and second prize winner in the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition, was able to join other opera lovers from Ottawa on a recent trip to New York to hear Gerald Finley sing the title role in **Don Giovanni** at the Metropolitan Opera.. What follows is her account of that journey.*

I often get calls by telemarketers telling me that I have been specially selected to go on an all-inclusive trip. I have never bothered to find out if these calls are legit, as I seem to be too cynical to think that something that great would just randomly happen to me. As my mom would say, "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is". But a few months ago, on Easter weekend, I received a very similar call. I didn't hang up this time, because it was Mrs. Bobbi Cain, who was the organizer of the Brian Law competition I sang in a few months ago. Mrs. Cain tells me that because of my success in the competition, she would like to invite me to go on an all-inclusive trip to New York City. I could not believe my luck. I had recently been to New York a few times to study with my teacher there. Lorraine Nubar from the Julliard School is an amazing teacher and has really been helping me shape my technique. Unfortunately, I don't have an income large enough to see her any time I please. I was trying to figure out how I would be able to get there this time and then the phone rang.

I didn't have a lot of details about the trip, except that a group of people would be going the weekend of April 16th by bus. I would be staying on the upper west side at Amsterdam and 79th and would be seeing a few operas at the Met and also I would be able to meet Ottawa opera star Gerald Finley. Wouldn't you know, my teacher's apartment and studio was literally two blocks from the hotel.

So, I showed up at the Delta hotel at 6:00 a.m. and boarded the bus. From the get-go I knew I was going to have a great time. Everyone on the bus was so friendly. We began our journey with a champagne lunch! Opera-goers really do like to travel in style.



Maghan
Stewart

Gerald Finley

Our busy weekend started the minute we got to the Lucerne Hotel. We had a reception at the elegant French hotel restaurant called Nice Matin. Two glasses of Shiraz and a salade nicoise later, I was sitting at the New York City Opera watching Bizet's *Les Pecheurs de Perles*. It was absolutely fantastic. I had never seen such a wonderful production. I'm generally interested in how good the singers are in a production and the rest usually falls by the way side. However, this production was so eye catching and wonderful to watch. You will not find better dancers than The New York City Ballet performers. Zandra Rhodes did an amazing job with the sets and costumes. They were so vibrant and full of colour. Mary Dunleavy as Leila, sounded beautiful and looked amazing in her cropped top. It's the first time I've seen a live soprano with six pack abs.

After this wonderful performance, I was finally allowed to sleep after such a long and stimulating day. The next day planned for the group sounded like a lot of fun. People were being dropped off at Macy's, 5th Avenue and the like to do some shopping. I, on the other hand, had two lessons booked. My day was a tiring one, but then we were off to see *Tosca* at the "Met"! I had never been to a "Met" production before. The closest I had ever been was in my living room listening to the live productions on Saturday afternoons. I knew I was in for a great treat.

(continued on page 6)

New Members

Lucy Budgell-Gray
The Honorable Sheila Finestone
Peggy Lee

Website News

New Address

Our new Web site address is <http://ncos.ca>. Please try the new address and explore all the material on our Web site. One of the new features that you can examine is the Newsletter Archives.

Newsletter Archives

The text of most of the articles and reviews from the Newsletter's last 10 years can be accessed by checking on the heading "From the Newsletter Archives". Eventually we hope to have the text of the articles from all the newsletters back to 1991. For the earlier newsletters it is necessary to retype the text into a word processing program. If you would be willing to volunteer to do some typing we would be interested in hearing from you. Call Tom McCool at 828-2770.

Opera Insights

Opera Insights introduces the music, history, and themes of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* and provides an opportunity for special guests, the creative team and cast members to share their experiences and views. These always well-attended sessions are usually held about 2 weeks prior to the opening of the opera. Ingemar Korjus of the University of Ottawa will be the special guest speaker at the next presentation in this series. Come and prepare yourself for *Roméo et Juliette*.

Roméo et Juliette

Meet the director and the principals for a presentation and discussion of this great opera at the National Library.

\$15

August 29 7:00 P.M.

N.C.O.S. Board of Directors

Co-President (Brian Law Scholarship)	Bobbi Cain
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For information telephone 830-9827;
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Editors's Notes

Particular thanks should go out to Nora and Costas Patsouris and to Gerda Ruckerbauer for helping Board members on the night of the Brian Law Competition. Marjorie Clegg should also be commended for her hard work getting the programme ready for the night.

The trip to New York to hear and see Gerald Finley perform the role of Don Giovanni for the first time at the Metropolitan Opera was first proposed by Bobbi Cain on behalf of the members of NCOS. We were joined by opera lovers from Opera Lyra Guild and NCOA. In my view it would be difficult to conceive of another production of this great opera where singers of such individual excellence worked so well together. Bravo, bravo, archibravo! as the Don says. Those who went on the trip were recently the guests of Lois and Don Harper at a reception and dinner to honour Bobbi Cain for all her remarkable work in promoting music.

I'm sure everyone will enjoy Maghan Stewart's account of her trip to New York. What pleasure it must bring to Bobbi Cain to know how much her generosity was appreciated.

The Board has decided to divide the duties of President in such a way that Bobbi Cain retains her position in charge of the Brian Law Competition. General administration of the Society will be managed from now on by co-president Murray Kitts who will rely heavily on Bobbi and other Board members for help.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: National Capital Opera Society Annual General Meeting, April 24, 2005

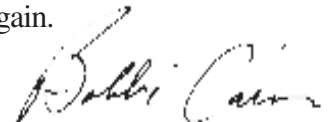
Opera is such a special form of glorious enjoyment. We listen to not only music by some of the world's most talented composers, but also the marriage of their musical skills combined with the verbal skills of their collaborators who have merged their wit with their deep love of great authors like Shakespeare. Mozart will always remain a favorite of opera-lovers around the world. Many of us were fortunate enough to enjoy the great singing of Gerald Finley in the rôle of the profligate Don Giovanni, as we visited New York... There we enjoyed Mozart and Puccini, visited museums and high class retailers. At the same time we earned money for the Society. All had a great time, traveling with others from Opera Lyra Ottawa.

In January the skills and hard work of many on the Board of Directors came to fruition with the several contestants involved in the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition. The winner of the \$2000 prize proved to be Joyce El-Khoury, whose glorious soprano voice was enjoyed by all.

As President I must thank those on the Board of Directors who were so helpful to me during the many

months I spent in hospital as my health problems improved and I began to feel like a human being again. Especially I thank my Vice-President, Murray Kitts. Others on the Board contributing have been Pat Adamo, helping with "Opera Alla Pasta"; Renate Chartrand, working on publicity generation and distribution; Ute Davis, who is an excellent photographer; Dan Leeman, now leaving the Board and an excellent helper at all our functions; Gordon Metcalfe, who has tailored his treasurer's role to ably fit his schedule; Peggy Pflug, expert on the food end of things and who throws a great barbeque; Jean Saldanha, Board Secretary, as well as looking after membership; Norma Torontow, who distributes the newsletter; and Tom McCool who works with Murray on publishing our newsletter. To all these folks I want to say a sincere "THANK YOU". We have a good organization, and I want you all to know that I am very proud of all our members as we continue to promote our programs

We all love opera, and we can all work together to enjoy these great works gathered from around the world. I am grateful to you all and hope we can continue to travel musically around the globe again.



Coming Soon Opera Lyra Ottawa

Roméo et Juliette Sept. 11, 13, 15 & 18

Canadian Opera Company

Macbeth Sept. 22, 24, 27, 30 Oct. 2 & 5

Carmen Sept. 28 Oct 1, 4, 7, 13, 19 & 23

Opéra de Montréal

Norma Sept. 17, 21, 24, 26 & 29

Hoffmann Versus The Creepy Crawlies

by Murray Kitts

There was much to enjoy in Opera Lyra Ottawa's production of Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. The sets from the Montreal production were fine. The use of "natural lighting" was good except in Act 3 when some judicious lighting could have been used on the two singers doing the famous "Barcarolle". If you don't bring them on in a gondola the least you can do is point out to the audience who is singing. The National Arts Centre Orchestra under Tyrone Paterson played brilliantly as usual. The chorus was good, but why did they appear in the Prologue wearing masks when the opera calls for an off-stage chorus? The singing of the principals ranged from good to excellent. All the female roles were particularly well sung, especially Mariateresa Magisano, a fine actress, who did triple duty as the Muse, Nicklaus and the voice of Antonia's mother. This is an opera which requires a good deal of acting ability on the part of the cast. Mélanie Boisvert was terrific as the doll, Olympia. Special mention should go to Pascal Mondieig for his quadruple characterizations: Andrès, Spalanzani, Pitichinaccio, and Franz and to Benoit Boutet for his Cochenille. Mark Thompson did a creditable job as Hoffmann as did Kristopher Irmiter as the Four Villains.

So with all this great music, excellent singing, and fine acting why did stage director Henry Akina decide to add a group of half-clad dancers? mimes? what-have-you's? to the action?

At first it seem all right. In the Prologue we could

accept that these were some sort of "familiar" that show up around evil people and they kept their place around the sinister councillor. In Act 1 they seemed superfluous to the action. But in Act 2 they were not only distracting but they interfered with the main action. All this business with other musical instruments like the French horn detracts from the main action of the Satan figure playing the violin. In Act 3 they really came into their own, writhing and groping, in the scene in Venice. In the Epilogue they deserted the evil character and fastened themselves around Hoffmann. Was this supposed to mean something?

Fortunately I had attended the dress rehearsal and could ignore their movements when I saw the opera's final performance. Surely the audience had enough to cope with trying to come to grips with people who get their shadows or reflections stolen. Too many people complained about being distracted by these "creepy crawlies".

I had to explain to my friends who had never seen the opera before that these characters have no place in the opera *Les contes d'Hoffmann* and merely express a superfluous excess by the stage director which added nothing to the production but rather detracted from it.

However, in the contest Hoffmann versus the Creepy Crawlies, Offenbach and Hoffmann were definitely the winners in spite of the best efforts of the stage director.

Filumena

by Murray Kitts

"Broadway Musical" I kept thinking during the first act. No wonder! The production was so theatrical, the set changes so slick, everyone on stage in the right places at the right times, it was a delight to behold. There were some fine moments in the first act but it wasn't until we arrived at the prison scenes in Act Two that I was really moved. This was really opera.

Everyone seems to have been surprised and captivated by the music and rightly so. It violated the principle that modern opera music should be cerebral, unpleasant and unmemorable. The NAC Orchestra under Bramwell Tovey performed John Estacio's score brilliantly.

The singing and acting were of a very high quality. I specially liked Elizabeth Turnbull as the wife of the crime boss Picariello. I have seen and heard Gaétan Laperrière in

a number of operas and have always admired the excellence of his singing but as Picariello he proved that he could turn in quite a convincing dramatic performance. This bodes well for his appearance as Falstaff in next season's OLO production.

It's difficult to form an opinion after only one hearing but I was not entirely happy with the text of some of the numbers. To me, the lyrics often failed to match the quality of the music in the love scenes. It was the reverse of the usual opera problem – an absurd plot compensated for with beautiful lyrical poetry.

It was no wonder that the audience responded so enthusiastically to such an excellent performance. What a wonderful gift to the nation from Alberta to mark its 100 years as a province in our great country!

**OPERA LYRA OTTAWA GUILD
LA GUILDE DE OPÉRA
LYRA OTTAWA**

**2005-2006 Program
Preview**

Pre-Opera Chats / Causeries pré-opéra

- **Roméo et Juliette:** English – September 10 and 14, 2005 with Diana Dzimbowski;
Le français – Les 12 et 17 septembre 2006 avec Fabien Tousignant
- **Falstaff:** English – April 8 and 12, 2006 with Bill Riley;
Le français – Les 10 et 15 avril 2006 avec Jacques Pichette

Definitely the Opera / C'est l'opéra

- **Ernani** (Verdi) – Monday, November 7, 2005
Le lundi 7 novembre 2005
- **Rusalka** (Dvorak) – Tuesday, January 10, 2006
Le mardi 10 janvier 2006
- **Falstaff** (Verdi) – Tuesday, February 7, 2006
Le mardi 7 février 2006
- **Roberto Devereux** (Donizetti) – Tuesday, May 2, 2006
Le mardi 2 mai 2006
- Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 19 h 00
- Minimum donation \$12; \$40 series /
Contribution minimale 12 \$; 40 \$ la série

**Shakespeare at the Opera! /
Shakespeare à l'Opéra!**

- Hosted by / Animé par Murray Kitts –
Tuesday, November 1 and 29, 2005
Les mardi 1 et 29 novembre 2005
- Library and Archives Canada
Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 19 h 00
- Tickets \$15; \$25 series
15 \$ le billet; 25 \$ la série

Joy of Opera / Joie de l'opéra

- Luncheon and Concert / Déjeuner et Concert
Sunday, February 12, 2006, 12:30 pm /
Le dimanche 12 février 2006, 12 h 30
- RA Centre, 2451, promenade Riverside Drive
- Guild members \$40; Non-members \$45 /
Membres de la Guilde 40 \$;
Non-membres 45 \$

DVD Reviews

by Murray Kitts

**Great Moments in Opera From
The Ed Sullivan Show**

There was a time when popular TV made an attempt to bring culture to the masses by presenting classical artists as part of a variety programme. Such a programme was “The Ed Sullivan Show” and the Ottawa Public Library has a marvellous DVD (DVD792.545 G786a) which I enjoyed greatly. Mind you I didn't look at the whole 2 hours of selections at one sitting. But I was delighted with the wonderful roster of “Met” stars who appear in this compilation. I used to attend “Met” touring performances in Minneapolis and heard many of the singers in person: Roberta Peters, Robert Merrill, Anna Moffo, Richard Tucker, Dorothy Kirsten – it seemed that these singers were there every year. And one memorable year I heard the great Tebaldi in *Tosca*. All these are here plus a number of others. Most selections are in colour. Most are not staged but a few are, notably when Dorothy Kirsten does her famous portrayal of Madame Butterfly. Other singers I have heard include Beverly Sills and Birgit Nilsson. But there are also to be seen and heard Leontyne Price, Jan Peerce, Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland, Marilyn Horne, Lily Pons, Franco Corelli and Eileen Farrell. There are a few repeats: Price, Callas and Nilsson all sing “Vissi d'arte” from *Tosca*. There are some rarities: Lily Pons sings “Je suis Titania” from *Mignon* and Roberta Peters sings the Bell Song from *Lakmé*. To one of my generation these were the great opera singers that I knew and loved. I hope others will get to enjoy this as much as I did.

La Forza del Destino

The Ottawa Public Library has a copy of Leontyne Price in one of her most famous roles as Leonora in Verdi's *La forza del destino* (DVD792.542 F745). This is a “Met” production from 1984 with James Levine conducting the magnificent score. The entire cast is excellent with Leo Nucci as Don Carlo and the beautiful Isola Jones as Preziosilla especially noteworthy. Enrico Fissore gives an eye-popping performance of the comic rôle of Fra Melitone. Don't miss borrowing this one!

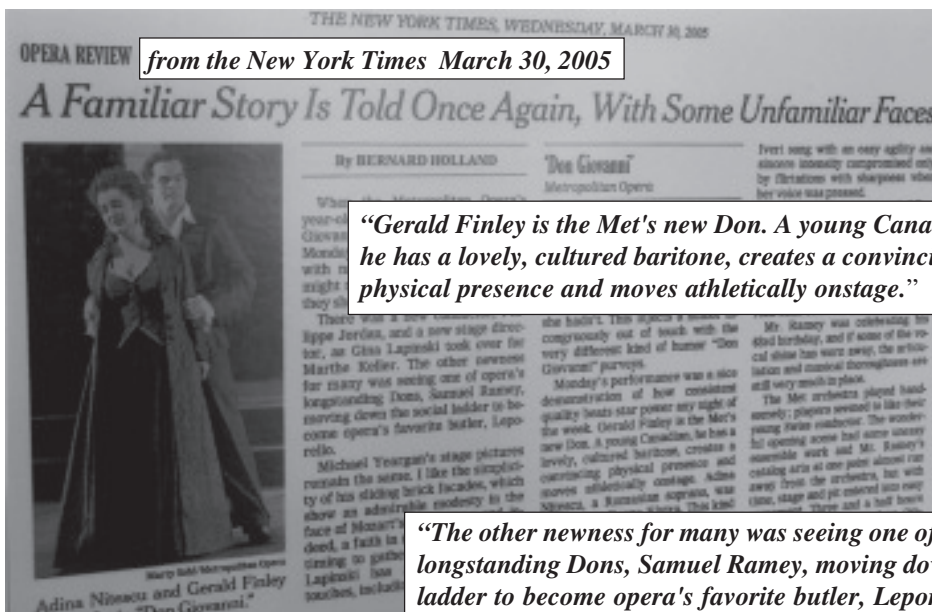
(continued from page 1)

Seeing an opera at the Metropolitan Opera is an amazing experience in itself. There is excitement and anticipation in the air. Everyone is dressed so well and just the theatre lobby is something to see. My expectations for my time at the "Met" were huge. After such an incredible experience the previous night and the hype that surrounds the "Met", it was no wonder that my high expectations were not quite met. Unfortunately, I was comparing it to my night at the *Pearl Fishers*, which I now realize was an event in itself and not comparable. As the curtain rose, the crowd applauded with glee, as the set of *Tosca* (by Franco Zeffirelli) was superb and so life-like. In my opinion and that of a few others in the group, the soprano (Maria Guleghina) did not have a lot of control of her instrument and the tenor (Salvatore Licitra) seemed very tense in the first act, although he did seem to loosen up by the middle of the production. But this was the "Met"! Imagine the pressure of performing in North America's best opera house. I was thrilled to be witness to see such a classic at the "Met".

The next day I booked lessons once again while the group got to visit the Metropolitan Museum, the Guggenheim and others. This time, supper was going to be provided at the Metropolitan Opera itself! We were going to have a wonderful meal and we were going to meet Gerald Finley. We all dressed up to the nines and arrived ready to enter the beautiful gala. Champagne, wine and Pamela Wallin, the Canadian Consul General, was there to greet us the minute we walked in. It was so neat to meet her in person. She was lovely and seemed very happy to meet all of us. Then, of course, Mr. Finley walked in. I had no idea just how handsome he was. He was so friendly and talked to members of the group for a while. I was so shocked that he would want to do so much talking when he had such a big performance ahead. Of course, like a lot of people, I shy away from celebrities. On the bus ride over to Lincoln Center I was doing a lot of positive self-talk, the way I would if

I were about to sing. I was trying to get geared up to speak to Gerald Finley. I really don't feel comfortable approaching people like Mr. Finley, because I think, "why would he want to talk to me?" All of that self coaching didn't seem to work, because the minute he arrived I decided that I was not going to talk to him. It would just be too embarrassing anyway. Luckily, Ute Davis pushed me in his direction when I was least expecting it, and introduced me as the young singer on the trip. Well, of course my face turned beet-red. To my surprise and delight, he was so nice and seemed eager to talk to me which made me feel at ease. Ute also mentioned that I was here to take lessons, and this sparked quite a conversation. He wanted to know who my teacher was. The minute I mentioned Lorraine Nubar, he got very excited. He has sung *Traviata* in Europe with one of her singers, and said her singing was seamless and that I should definitely hang on to such a great teacher. These five minutes truly were the highlight of my New York trip

Seeing *Don Giovanni* at the "Met" is really something I will never forget. Seeing Gerald Finley as Don Giovanni is also something I will never forget. Not only does he have such a wonderful instrument, but his presence and acting goes unsurpassed. If I had thought about it at the time, I would have asked him what it was like to sing with Samuel Ramey as Leporello. I wonder if it was intimidating to be singing with Samuel Ramey who was *the* Don Giovanni for so long. I wondered if the cast became close, or does everyone treat it like a job that they just return to every few days of the run? I wonder if he gets nerves and if so, what does he do to focus his attention? I guess I will have to wait to find out, but for now I will have the memory of that night in my heart.





Just a few hours before the thunderous standing ovation received by the Don Giovanni cast from the capacity audience Gerald Finley met with his Ottawa supporters in a private reception in the Grand Tier of the "Met".



Photography by Ute Davis

Who Needs Scenery Anyway?

by Shelagh Williams

For its April offerings, the Canadian Opera Company of Toronto presented us with two well-produced Italian tragedies: Verdi's *Il trovatore* and Rossini's *Tancredi*.

In contrast to the sombre, slow-moving 1999 COC effort, this year's *Il trovatore* was well-paced, well-acted and well-sung, a credit to all concerned. The production originated with Los Angeles Opera in 1998, and the original director, James Lawless, brought his total concept successfully with him to the COC stage. The set, by debuting Belgian designer Benoit Dugardyn, was pretty abstract, consisting mainly of tall dark panels which slid and lifted as needed. The good news was that it accommodated both large and small scenes and the action flowed without pause from scene to scene, building the tension unbrokenly. The bad news was that it portrayed nothing well, with the exception of being perfect for the two dark, dank, dungeon cells! The setting also had the stage inexplicably littered with umpteen swords sticking out of the ground, making movement difficult and limited until Count di Luna's soldiers finally pulled the swords out of the ground for slow motion sword drill before battle! Fortunately, the lighting designer, Joan Sullivan Genthe, the costume designer, Martin Pakledinaz, and the Munich armourer, Peter Braunreuther, combined splendidly to bring the piece to life visually. But, of course, it is the music that is most important, and under maestro Richard Bradshaw the orchestra and singers shone. Caruso famously said that *Il trovatore* only needed the four greatest singers in the world, and this cast certainly came close! As the troubadour Manrico, tenor Mikhail Agafonov was impressive vocally, and also looked the part, unimpeded by the bright pink outfit he had to contend with in *Masked Ball* in 2003! Similarly, Hungarian soprano Eszter Sumegi as Leonora and Russian mezzo Irina Mishura returning as the gypsy Azucena were superb. When we saw that the original singer was ill and the Count di Luna was being sung by a last-minute replacement, baritone Daniel Sutin, we were apprehensive, but we needn't have worried — he was a most effective villain! Canadians bass Robert Pomakov as the unpleasant Captain Ferrando and soprano Joni Henson as Inez, Leonora's friend, rounded out the excellent cast. Equally impressive was the COC chorus, which sang robustly and gave us some interesting sword play while singing the Anvil Chorus! We went home most satisfied with this exciting, vocally

superb *Il trovatore*!

Rossini's rarely performed opera *Tancredi* received its COC and Canadian premiere after nearly two centuries, but almost didn't make it! The much-vaunted sets and props of the production from Naples' Teatro San Carlo set sail but were delayed and did not arrive in time, while the colourful and exotic costumes by Nana Cecchi had to be flown in! Fortunately Canadian designers Bonnie Beecher (lighting) and Yannik Larivee (set) brilliantly combined their talents to create a suitable minimalist setting, using panels and scrims, and improvising a sail to symbolize Tancredi's ship. What could have been a disaster became an asset, with our attention not distracted by scenery or action, but focused on the superb singers and Rossini's marvellous music.

Tancredi was Rossini's first hit serious work, an "opera seria", written at age 21, and Rossini conveniently provided two endings. The COC opted for the usual modern choice of the more dramatic tragic ending rather than the happy ending. The story is as convoluted and farfetched as any opera: Amenaide and the exiled royal, Tancredi, are in love, but Amenaide is promised to Orbazanno by her father Argirio, in order to end Syracuse's civil war between their two noble families. When Amenaide spurns Orbazanno, the latter spitefully accuses Amenaide of betraying them to the Saracens using an intercepted letter she wrote to Tancredi, urging his return to Syracuse. Tancredi does return, incognito, and defends Amenaide's honour in single combat against Orbazanno, before going off to defeat the Saracen army.

He returns mortally wounded and dies in Amenaide's arms as her father unites them in marriage — a two-hanky ending! *Tancredi* was based on Voltaire's 1760 play, *Tanocrède*, which,

being in the French style, had the action happen mostly offstage, and this translated into a rather static opera. Fortunately, choreographer Serge Bennathan, in his debut as a COC opera director, moved his cast well and allowed the music under conductor Will Crutchfield, a revival specialist, to tell the story. In her signature role as Tancredi, Polish contralto Ewa Podles was magnificent and without her the exercise would have been pointless.

With Canadian Opera Company productions like these, bring on the new opera house!

She compelled one's attention so that one suspended disbelief — if a short, rotund tenor can portray a hero, why not a short, stocky contralto? Romanian soprano Nicoleta Ardelean was another last-minute cast change, but again a fortuitous find in her COC and North American debut as Amenaide. The remaining three principals were all sung equally expertly by three Canadians: tenor Michael Colvin in the difficult role of

Argirio, trying to force his daughter into a loveless marriage and later signing her death warrant, all the while professing to care for her(!); bass Robert Pomakov again being really nasty in the role of the evil Orbazzano; and mezzo Marie-Nicole Lemieux beautifully portraying Isaura, Amenaide's friend.

With COC opera productions like these, bring on the new opera house!

Peripatetic Placido in Pair of Premieres

by Shelagh Williams

This year's eight-day, seven night "May Masterpieces" opera trip with Pro Musica Tours covered both New York City and Washington, D.C. and included several rarely performed works sandwiched between more regular fare.

Tuesday evening in New York City the opera was Gounod's *Faust*, an excellent new Met production which debuted in late April. Music Director James Levine, finally adding this title to his list of major operas, ensured that the orchestra and singers were first-rate. In the title role, leading French tenor Robert Alagna looked and sounded the part of the handsome young Faust, but German bass Rene Pape as Mephistopheles stole the show. Tall, good-looking, and with presence, he looked deliciously dangerous whether in top hat and tails or costumed as the Devil, in body suit with a tail! Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski was a charming Marguerite, Korean baritone Hung Yun a concerned brother Valentin, and American mezzo Kristine Jepson effective in the pants role as the young man Siebel. The team of Romanian director Andrei Serban and American set and costume designer Santo Loquasto gave us a lush and entertaining production, with a crammed study for old Dr. Faust, a pretty cottage for Marguerite, and even angels with wings at the end for Marguerite's miraculous redemption — all in all a most satisfying production.

The next evening's opera was a revival of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's famous production of Mozart's last "opera seria", *La Clemenza di Tito*, again under the indefatigable Levine. The setting, consisting of Roman architecture, was remarkably flexible, being quickly and easily converted from bedroom to forum to garden to palace to arena. Staff Stage Director Peter McClintock directed the traffic well, in the tangled story of secret, rival, and vengeful lovers, with two of the male lovers sung as pants roles — a bit of colour-coding of costumes and consistently keeping wigs on or off

would have helped! Fortunately, all six principals were well cast: American tenor Frank Lopardo as Emperor Tito and Italian baritone Luca Pisaroni debuting as his advisor Publio held up the male side admirably. Of the two sopranos whom Tito sought to wed, German Melanie Diener played the vituperative Vitellia marvellously, while American Heidi Grant Murphy was the sweet Servilia. The roles of Tito's rivals were extremely well sung and acted by mezzo pants-role specialists Anne Sofie von Otter as Sesto and British Sarah Connolly debuting here as Annio. The opera is very static, mainly stand and deliver, and who gets whom is not spelled out, but when the lovely late music of Mozart is so well-rendered it makes it all worthwhile.

Friday evening was the highly anticipated North American premiere production of Franco Alfano's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. It is a co-production with London's Covent Garden, especially mounted for Placido Domingo as his 121st new role and also because he wanted Alfano to be remembered for more than just finishing *Turandot*! The opera is based on Edmond Rostand's play about big-nosed Cyrano who hopelessly loves his cousin Roxane from afar, but helps the witless but handsome Christian win her by forging marvellous letters for him — and it was useful for understanding the opera to know the play! Set designer Peter J. Davison and American costume designer Anita Yavich brought Paris to life, and American director Francesca Zambello kept the action flowing, which was especially important in the opening scene, set in a Paris theatre, which otherwise would have been too dull for words. Musically, Italian conductor Marco Armiliato, with the help of good singers, delivered the goods. Placido Domingo sang passionately, and obviously enjoyed the role, but at 64 he just could not convey the swashbuckling young poet Cyrano, tho' he was poignant in his final death scene, as Roxane realized it was he whom she really had loved. Similarly, American tenor Raymond Very sang

(continued on page 10)

well enough, but was a bit too solid to be leaping about trying to emulate the young, supposedly handsome, guardsman Christian. The really enjoyable singer was American soprano Sandra Radvanovsky playing Roxane. The production was very entertaining, with all three performances sold out, and it was interesting to see such an infrequently performed opera, but the rarity of its appearance may have a reason!

The very next evening at the Kennedy Centre Opera House in Washington, as the conductor took his place, my companion nudged me, and I realized it was the tireless, noseless, Placido Domingo, unannounced, conducting the opening night of Saint-Saens' *Samson and Dalila!* As the opera company's General Director, he was already scheduled to conduct a later performance in the run, rejoining his old colleague in the work, Olga Borodina. However, a flu-racked conductor forced Domingo to cover the premiere at the last moment, which he did marvellously — what a man! Director Peter McClintock was in charge and did his best with a work which is essentially a dramatic oratorio, with the third act bacchanal added to satisfy the Paris audience's taste for ballet — here performed by solo dancer Fidel Garcia and a small troupe of dancers. In the major roles we had two exceptional singers, American tenor Carl Tanner and Russian mezzo Borodina, in her debut. The other male roles were well performed by bass-baritone Kyle Ketelson as Abimelech, baritone Alan Held

as the High Priest of Dagon, and debuting bass Gregory Reinhart as the Old Hebrew. It was a pleasure to see the newly renovated opera house and to experience this opera there, even tho' all of the Philistines unconvincingly managed to move fast enough to get out of the way when Samson brought down the pillars of the temple!

Our final opera was Puccini's *Tosca*, a superb traditional production, a revival of their 2000 show, with set design by Alexander Beliaev, costumes by Lena Rivkina, and direction by Frank Corsaro. Leonard Slatkin, music director of the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted the phenomenal cast, including Venezuelan soprano Ines Salazar as a Tosca who dispensed with the candlesticks and cross for Scarpia, and the new young "in" tenor Italian Salvatore Licitra as Cavaradossi. Veteran baritone Juan Pons was a really evil Scarpia, who did not die immediately, but scarily went after Tosca again when everyone thought that he was already dead! With a good chorus added to the mix, the result was a most gratifying performance to end the trip.

Those who know Larry Edelson, Director of Pro Musica Tours, may be interested to know that having restaged Adamo's opera *Little Women* for N.Y. City Opera he was asked to direct their production in Tokyo and at the World Expo in Nagano, Japan, in May 2005

Summer Opera

Lake George Opera

Saratoga Springs N.Y.

The Mikado (Gilbert & Sullivan) July 2, 5, 7 & 9
The Italian Girl in Algiers (Rossini) July 3, 6, 8 & 10

Information: 1-518-587-3330
www.LakeGeorgeOpera.org

Chautauqua Opera

Chautauqua N.Y.

Madam Butterfly (Puccini) July 8 & 11
The Crucible (Ward) July 22 & 25
Lucia of Lammermoor (Wilson) August 19, 21 & 22

Information: 1-800-836-ARTS www.ciweb.org

Glimmerglass Opera

Cooperstown, N.Y.

Lucie de Lammermoor (Donizetti)
 July 1, 3, 9, 17, 21, 29 August 1, 6, 11, 13, 15 & 23

Così fan tutte (Mozart) June 30 July 2, 10, 22, 26, 30
 August 5, 8, 14, 16, 20 & 22

Death in Venice (Britten) July 17, 19, 23, 31
 August 3, 6, 9, 15, 19 & 21

Le Portrait de Manon (Massenet) and
La Voix Humaine (Poulenc) July 16, 18, 24, 28, 30
 August 2, 7, 12, 18 & 20

(Many performances are already sold out)
 Information: 607-547-2255 www.glimmerglass.org

Book Review:

The Inner Voice: The Making of a Singer.

Renée Fleming

Viking (Penguin Group), New York, 2004.

For loyal readers of this newsletter, references to Renée Fleming and Ann Patchett will not be new. In his review (Summer 2002) of Patchett's book *Bel Canto*, Tom McCool says that "Ms. Fleming was so taken with the book that she bought the movie and television rights." She was also so entranced by the book that she and Patchett met and became close friends.

Fleming's own book, released in 2004, owes a great deal to this friendship. Her first acknowledgement in the book is to "Ann Patchett, whose silent work on paper is the equal of the most colorful songbird. I would never have had the courage to undertake this project without her friendship and help."

Some have questioned whether Fleming did, in fact, write the book herself. I will leave that discussion in the hands of the two friends, quoted in a review published in *The Washington Post* (Sunday, January 9, 2005; p.1) by Philip Kennicott: "Patchett downplays her influence on Fleming's book: 'Renée was fine without me, she is so smart.' Fleming emphasizes it: 'I wouldn't have been able to get started. You can recognize her voice in some of the transitional material, and she organized the whole thing. Then I went through and rewrote it twice and put it specifically in my voice. It was a collaboration.'"

In any case, as Kennicott says: "Taken together, the two books offer the myth and reality of the soprano. Patchett's soprano lives in a world of sexual allure and evanescent, musical communication; Fleming's soprano lives in a world of press agents and record contracts and brutal competition."

It is this focus on the technical and business side of singing that distinguishes Fleming's book from others by opera divas. Though there are tantalizing references to her childhood and personal life as an adult, the essence of the book is given in the title: the inner voice. This is a book about how to develop and manage an exquisite voice, with detailed sections dealing with the physical placement of tone, vocal flaws and their fixes, vocal production, preserving the voice over the long term, choosing repertory, publicity and promotion, and scheduling.

There are also intriguing descriptions of how she gets herself into character for a role. "While born with a vivid imagination that enables me to put myself in a par-

Reviewed by
Marjorie Clegg

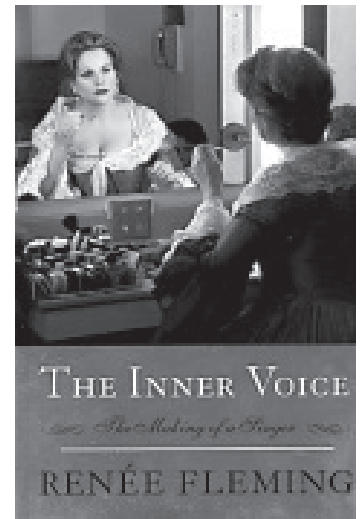
ticular character's situation, I had to work to learn how to realize that identification physically. ... It wasn't enough to me to feel a character's emotions; I had to be able to express them in such a way that the audience could feel them, too, especially in a big house, where no one can see my face past the tenth row with a pair of binoculars. Emotion has to be conveyed through every facet of body language, gestures, and movement."

Some of her most poignant stories are of her "dark night of the soul." During that time, the stress from her failing marriage, a miserable experience at La Scala, 'success conflict', and general stage fright led to severe psychological and physiological symptoms, nearly forcing her to give up singing completely. Fortunately for her and for us, she met those challenges and continued her career.

Along the way, Fleming does something quite rare in autobiography of any kind: she gives praise and gratitude to those who have helped her along the way, but refrains from comments about those who have done otherwise. One of her long-term mentors was Beverley Johnson, who provided not only technical advice (starting at Julliard), but also personal support: "One of the many gifts I got from Beverley, along with an enormous amount of comfort and love, was my top, my high notes. She taught me how to open the back of my mouth."

Other singers also provided mentorship—contrary to the prima donna stereotypes we are used to hearing about. Among those mentioned in the book are Renata Scottò, Joan Sutherland, Marilyn Horne, and Leontyne Price. About Price, Fleming says, "When I think of the remarkable singers I've met in my life, the one who took my breath away was Leontyne Price. ... Whenever people ask me about my favorite voices, hers is always the first one that springs to mind."

I imagine that singers will find this book invaluable and inspiring; those of us who can only listen with awe should come away with an even greater respect and admiration for those who provide that joy to us.



Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

June 18 *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Verdi)

Conductor: Antonio Pappano

Cast: Marcelo Alvarez, *Riccardo*; Karita Mattila, *Amelia*; Thomas Hampson, *Renato*

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

June 25 1984 (Maazel) *world premiere*

Conductor: Lorin Maazel

Cast: Richard Margison, *O'Brien*; Simon Keenlyside, *Winston*; Nancy Gustafson, *Julia*

Cast: Maria Rodríguez, *Dolores*; Cecilia Díaz *Gaspara*; Gustavo Parta, *Lázaro*

OPERA DE MONTREAL (SRC)

July 2 *Carmen* (Bizet)

Conductor: Bernard Labadie

Cast: Rinat Shaham, *Carmen*; Gordon Gietz, *Don José*; Richard Bernstein, *Escamillo*

LA SCALA, MILAN (RAI)

July 9 *L'Europa riconosciuta* (Salieri)

Conductor: Riccardo Muti

Cast: Diana Damrau, *Europa*; Désirée Rancatore, *Semele*; Genia Kühmeier, *Asterio*

MONTPELIER FESTIVAL (FRSRF)

July 16 *Salomé* (Mariotte)

Conductor: Friedemann Layer

Cast: Nora Gubisch, *Salomé*; Vincent Le Texier,

Jochanaan; Julia Juaon, *Herodias*

PHILHARMONIE HALL, COLOGNE

Bluebeard's Castle (Bartok)

Conductor: Lothar Zagrosek

Cast: Ildiko Komlosi, *Judith*;

Rudolf Rosen, *Bluebeard*

THEATRE DU CHATELET, PARIS (FRSRF)

July 23 *Les Paladins* (Rameau)

Conductor: William Christie

Cast: Topi Lehtipuu, *Atis*; Stéphanie d'Oustrac,

Argie; René Schirrer, *Anselme*

GRAND THEATRE, GENEVA (CHSSR)

July 30 *Die Vogel* (Braunfels)

Conductor: Ulf Schirmer

Cast: Roman Trekel, *Prometheus*; Brett Polegato,

Wiederhopf; Marlis Petersen, *Nachtigall*

TEATRO DEL MAGGIO MUSICALE, FLORENCE (RAI)

August 6 *Khovanshchina* (Mussorgsky)

Conductor: James Conlon

Cast: Vladimir Ognovenko, *Prince Ivan*; Clifton Forbis, *Prince Andrey*; Roberto Scandiuzzi, *Dosifey*; Elena Zarembo, *Marfa*

TEATRO REAL, MADRID (ESRNE)

August 13 *La Dolores* (Bretón)

Conductor: Antoni Ros Marbá

Cast: Maria Rodríguez, *Dolores*; Cecilia Díaz *Gaspara*; Gustavo Parta, *Lázaro*

THEATRE DES CHAMPS-ELYSEES, PARIS (FRSRF)

August 20 *Orlando Furioso* (Vivaldi)

Conductor: Jean-Christophe Spinosi

Cast: Marie-Nicole Lemieux, *Orlando*; Jennifer Larmore, *Alcina*; Philippe Jaroussky, *Ruggiero*

GRAND THEATRE, GENEVA (CHSSR)

August 27 *From the House of the Dead* (Janacek)

Conductor: Jirí Belohlávek

Cast: Peter Mikulas, *Goriantchikov*; Stefan Margita, *Filka Morozov*; Gordon Gietz, *Skuratov*

LA FENICE, VENICE (RAI)

September 3 *Le Roi de Lahore* (Massenet)

Conductor: Marcello Viotti

Cast: Ana María Sánchez, *Sitâ*; Vladimir Stoyanov, *Scindia*; María José Montiel, *Kaled*

CONCERTGEBOUW, AMSTERDAM (NLNPB)

September 10 *Jérusalem* (Verdi)

Conductor: Paolo Olmi

Cast: Nelly Miricioiu, *Hélène*;

Francisco Casanova, *Gaston*; Carlo Colombara, *Roger*

LA MONNAIE, BRUSSELS (BERTBF)

September 17 *La Sonnambula* (Bellini)

Conductor: René Jacobs

Cast: Sumi Jo, *Amina*; Antonino Siragusa, *Elvino*

OPERA LYON (FRSRF)

September 24 *Le Roi Malgré Lui* (Chabrier)

Conductor: Evelino Pidò

Cast: Laurent Naouri, *Fritelli*; Yann Beuron, *Nagis*;

Nicolas Rivenq, *Henri de Valois*

BAYREUTH FESTIVAL (BR)

October 1 *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner)

Conductor: Eiji Oue

Cast: Robert Dean Smith, Nina Stemme