



High C and High Tea: Opera Oddities and Surprises

Murray Kitts favoured us with another of his highly entertaining and educational presentations, based on his vast opera collection, on June 24th. This Sunday afternoon event of High C and High Tea was created by the former Ottawa Lyra Guild and is truly enjoyed by all who participate. The National Capital Opera Society continues these events on an annual basis. In 2016 Murray chose "A tribute to Gerald Finley" and Gerald surprised and delighted us all by stopping by for tea! This year Murray's *Opera Oddities and Surprises* took place in salons at City Hall, a usually ideal venue, but this time plagued with no electrical power, an unresponsive projector, and only weekend staff! Nevertheless, Mark Robinson soldiered on, even returning home for a second DVD player (not needed!) before an electrician arrived and stop gap measures (a cord to the next room, once unlocked, and a laptop!) were employed, for a 2:30 p.m. start - whew!

The wait was well worth it! Murray started with overtures, and immediately captivated us with the antics of maestro Gianluigi Galmetti, using his entire body to lead the Stuttgart Orchestra in the overture to Rossini's *La scala di seta (Silken Ladder)*. At one point he was holding on for dear life with one hand as he swayed about and gesticulated amusingly while conducting this overture, itself described as "like a happy puppy"! The second overture was to Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* at Covent Garden, conducted by Antonio Pappano. Director David McVicar immediately caught our attention during the overture with the high jinks of the downstairs staff members preparing for the upcoming wedding, all timed to the music!

We were then treated to a real rarity: Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia*. Murray himself only saw it once, when the Bolshoi brought over five operas for Expo67 in Montreal. We heard Fevronia's lovely aria from a 2012 Dutch production directed by Dmitri Tcherniakov. The next example illustrated the wonderful effects of the wind on costumes and draperies in an outdoor performance in Orange, France, of Bellini's *Norma*, with Montserrat Caballé singing *Casta Diva*, the weather in no

way diminishing her lovely bel canto delivery.

These were followed by two surprises. Mozart's *Idomeneo* is not often staged, because the tenor role is so difficult, but in 1982, to quote Murray, "the MET had a tenor who could sing everything", and did so, as we heard, magnificently - Pavarotti! Next was a first: Anna Netrebko singing Wagner on the stage, in a 2016 Dresden production of *Lohengrin*, where she demurely sang Elsa!

Jacques Offenbach's ever popular *Orpheus in the Underworld* brought a lighter touch to the proceedings, in a 1971 Hamburg production. Toni Blankenheim as Jupiter, dressed as a fly, finds his way through the keyhole into the room of Eurydice, the lovely Elisabeth Steiner, in order to sing a buzzingly funny duet! Not to neglect the opera chorus, we next enjoyed their great singing and dancing in Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* in a new 2016 production from Madrid.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end. The famous Austrian opera producer and director, Walter Felsenstein, also made operatic films, and the ending of his 1956 black and white film *Fidelio*, starting with the horse ride of the bearer of the all-important proclamation to the actual finale and happy ending was very exciting! Finally, we watched an encore from Rameau's opera ballet *Les Indes Galantes*, with conductor William Christie up on stage, joyfully joining in the singing and dancing of the finale! What a hoot!

We then repaired from the Colonel By Room to the Councillors' Lounge, where a magnificent spread for High Tea awaited us, courtesy of Beverley, Carole, Colleen, Diane, Judy, Lesley and Mary Frances. Tea was impeccably poured by Carole Stelmack, while Judy Burrows had earlier manned the reception desk. Lesley Robinson also looked after publicity. In spite of all the gremlins, Mark Robinson's tech skills ensured that Murray's informative and interesting video-illustrated talk went smoothly and delightfully - the show must go on! It was a lovely afternoon and thank you to everyone who contributed.

Prepared by Shelagh Williams and Mark Robinson



President's Annual Report, May 27 , 2018

You will be pleased to hear that this year's report will be shorter than usual. First of all, our newsletter, which is a great combination of many talents: editor, David Williams and assistant, Tom McCool, Jim Burgess, distributor by email, and all the ever-growing number of excellent contributions by our members. Thanks to all. One change in our policy of acceptance for items in the newsletter is that comments offered by an author of any article which are at odds with the purpose of our organization will be deleted by the editor and president.

The death of Elizabeth Meller brought an unexpected shock and sorrow to all in our society. She brought a great many new members into our group and impressed all with her knowledge of opera and excellent choices. It has become apparent that Pat Adamo, not recovered from the deaths of her only closest relatives and coping with the confusion of being relocated to a new home, is no longer able to serve as a Board Member. Thank you, Pat, for all your years of interest and service.

No matter how much we promote the burgeoning productions of opera in the National Capital area and enjoy the Opera alla pasta presentations we must remember that our main objective at this time is to stage and promote the Brian Law Opera Competition. Helping us to do this are the remarkable successes of our winners who are receiving amazing international acclaim. This very day Yannick-Muriel Noah is singing Liu in

Turandot in Bonn. Wallis Giunta in following months has multi-roles in Berg's *Lulu* in Leipzig and in August *Bernstein on Broadway* at the BBC Proms Festival. Joshua Hopkins will be the clever barber Figaro at the Glimmerglass Festival. These are just some of the people who make all our efforts worthwhile.

Our first big job in the future will be to completely revise the method used to apply to become an applicant for the competition. This will enable applicants to avoid heavy mailing costs and at the same time ensure equal opportunities for all. You will be pleased to hear from Mark Robinson, our treasurer, that our 2017 Competition was a financial success as well as what can be considered artistic and entertainment successes. Mark and his wife Lesley, our excellent secretary, set up a splendid liaison with the Southminster Concert series, besides getting student volunteers and reducing the reception food costs from what was \$1,000 in 2013 to zero in 2017 with donations of food and goodies from our members. All deserve our thanks. To conclude, one of our finest members asked me yesterday if there was going to be another High Tea & High C event. On June 24 at City Hall the talk will be: *Opera: Oddities and Surprises*. Do join us to be entertained and to enjoy the food.

Murray Kitts

It is with sadness that the NCOS wishes to inform you that Carole's husband Bob Stelmack passed away recently. We send our condolences to Carole and the family. Our thoughts and prayers are with them during this time.

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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

Ancient Greece plus Tudor England in Toronto! by Shelagh Williams

We took advantage of almost acceptable weather the last weekend of April in Toronto to journey even further through music. We were transported to Ancient Greece and the Trojan War via Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses* at Opera Atelier (OpA) and Offenbach's *La Belle Helene / The Beautiful Helen* at Toronto Operetta Theatre (TOT), and to Tudor England with Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* at the Canadian Opera Company (COC).

The Opera Atelier production of *Ulysses* was sublime in every way. As always, director Marshall Pynkoski, conductor David Fallis and choreographer Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg got it right, overseeing 20 named roles, plus the always excellent Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Atelier Ballet. The sailors' dancing with their oars was especially delightful and witty!

The story covers the second half of Homer's *Odyssey*, when, after Ulysses' 10 years of wandering after the Trojan War at Neptune's displeasure, Minerva supports Ulysses' return to Ithaca. Set designer Gerald Gauci's sets were mainly fairly simple but gorgeous painted backdrops, with occasionally arches in front of a beautiful ocean scene for outside, and an additional more solid drop to indicate inside. Similarly, waved blue fabric evoked the sea. However, Michelle Ramsay's fantastic lighting transformed everything as needed, with sound effects to augment lightning storms and gods' interventions! Michael Legouffe's beautiful and apt costumes completed the visual treats.

This very early Italian opera was written in 1640, just after Venice founded the first public opera house for everyone. One of the results of commercial concerns is smaller orchestras; therefore David Fallis chose to use only 16 musicians plus himself on organ. However, this did include no less than three lute/guitars and Ed Reifel was a one-man percussion section, continually in motion, especially for thunder, lightning and wind effects!

The excellent cast was also kept very busy, even doing some dancing at the end! We learned in the pre-show chat that we were indeed fortunate to have mezzo Mireille Lebel sing Queen Penelope for us. At the start of rehearsals, Mireille was very badly burned on the right arm in a kitchen fire, necessitating hospitalization involving three surgeries and grafts - but she made it back to the cast! She sported a long white tube bandage on her arm and everyone was very careful with her, but she sang beautifully - the show must go on! She had both a sad lament and a feisty aria shooting off her suitors, plus her final agonizing scene to finally recognize Ulysses after 20 years. This dramatic role of the beleaguered wife with unwavering devotion was a far cry from her Cherubino in *Figaro* last fall! Of course, OpA's favourite tenor, Kresimir Spicer, with his marvellous voice, ingrained stylish movement and extensive European baroque experience in this role, was a standout as King Ulysses. You may have noticed him

in the recent Opera alla Pasta DVD of *David and Jonathas* as the Philistine general Jaobel.

As the gods instigating much of the cruel and unjust action, we had the stately bass-baritone Stephen Hegedus as Neptune with his trident plus tenor Kevin Skelton appearing on high as Jupiter! Our 2013 BLOC winner, soprano Meghan Lindsay, in a gorgeous yellow gown as the goddess Minerva, thankfully helped put everything right! The portrayers of virtuous characters who also supported Ulysses' cause included mezzo Laura Pudwell, great as Penelope's nurse Ericlea, and tenor Christopher Enns, flying in with Minerva's magic, as Ulysses son! Soprano Carla Huhtanen, an uOttawa grad now living in the U.K., returned in the lively figure of Penelope's servant Melanto. Debuting Canadian tenor Isaiah Bell was her lover and fellow servant Eurimaco, in league with the suitors, rather than supporting Penelope. As one of the royal suitors pressing Penelope to remarry, bass-baritone Douglas Williams especially impressed as a macho, aggressive Antinoo, using a deep and loud voice. Quite a transformation from the charming Figaro of last fall! The rambunctious suitors were hilarious when they tried to string Ulysses' bow!

The scene of Ulysses, disguised as a beggar, successfully stringing his bow and dispatching the unsuccessful suitors was



handled with much sound and light effects. After Penelope finally recognized and acknowledged Ulysses, they sang a great love duet. Then everyone, including the Maestro, ended up dancing joyously! What an evening - we were enraptured!

What should a prudent opera company do when a world-class soprano lands at its doorstep? - tempt her to sing by staging appropriate operas to showcase her talents! Which is why the COC closed its season with a truly marvellous production of

Ancient Greece plus Tudor England in Toronto! (continued)

Donizetti's breakthrough opera, *Anna Bolena*, headlining Sondra Radvanovsky. Last done at the COC in 1984, with Joan Sutherland, this opera is rarely performed because of the difficulty of casting the title role, and the result here was the COC actually producing two Donizetti operas in a single season - another rarity!

This completes the COC's Donizetti *Tudor Trilogy* by British director Stephen Lawless, after *Maria Stuarda* in 2010 and *Roberto Devereux* in 2014, with Radvanovsky as Anna Bolena's daughter, Queen Elizabeth. All three used the three-story wooden semicircular set by Benoit Dugardyn, based on Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, originally built by Dallas Opera but now owned by COC. For this opera 8 or 9 hinged panels were added (possibly unnecessarily) to indicate different locations in Windsor Castle and the Tower of London in this earlier time period. Fortunately, gorgeous costumes, again by Ingeborg Bernerth, brightened things up, counterbalancing all the wood.

Lawless must be congratulated for a clear production, starting helpfully during the overture by giving a history lesson with people and surtitles to sort out the back-story of the characters. He also later introduced a young Elizabeth with Anna, since she is the common thread of all three operas. We were at opening night, with a few glitches, but the one real distraction was during Henry's hunt when two men with deer heads and antlers wrestled for Henry. Why? However, he really knows how to bring out the drama of the situation, especially in closing each act. Act I has the banner with Anna's and Henry's initials being unceremoniously ripped down just as Anna is arrested, while Act II ends with Anna standing beside the block as a swordsman enters!

Italian maestro Corrado Rovaris had already conducted *Roberto Devereux*, and knew how to deliver an exciting performance when provided with the excellent COC Orchestra and Chorus and a superb cast. Of course, Sondra Radvanovsky, who sang all three queens at the Met in a single season, was marvelous. She not only has the voice, but also the acting skills, so her coloratura matches her character's emotions as events go downhill. After her mad scene, in white, beside the block, she finally accepts the inevitable as the headsmen looms behind her - scary! Happily, the rest of the cast, mainly American, was also superb. Bass baritone Christian Van

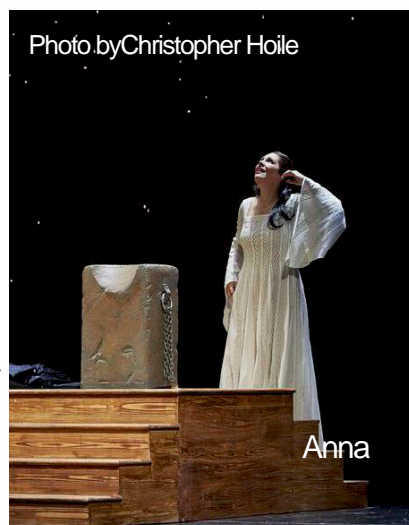


Photo by Christopher Hoile

baritone Christian Van

Horn stepped in for Eric Owens who was slated to sing Enrico, and he was perfect for the young King Henry. He was tall and good looking, dominating his scenes, although he often played Henry lounging casually, with a drink in his hand, as he easily commanded the action physically and vocally. And what a tenor! Bruce Sledge sang Lord Percy beautifully - he was a joy to listen to! Soprano Keri Alkema as Jane Seymour brought her real-life friendship with Sondra Radvanovsky to her sympathetic portrayal, so the scene of her admission to Anna that she was actually the rival to Anna became even more dramatic and poignant. Mention should also be made of debutee tenor Jonathan Johnson as Hervey, clad like the devil in red, and always slithering around and watching, spying for Henry - he was so good I almost booed him!

Two great Canadians rounded out the cast as Anna's co-condemned. Tiny mezzo Allyson McHardy was perfect in the



pants role of the young musician Smeton, secretly enamoured of Anna, while bass-baritone Thomas Goerz was a noble Lord Rochefort, Anna's brother. As with the other two Tudor operas, *Anna Bolena* ends with the demise

of the title character, but along the way what marvellous singing and music and drama and pageantry to round off the COC season in style!

And now for something completely different! Jacques Offenbach really created operetta as we know it, with his combination of comedy, satire, entertaining plots and beautiful music with memorable melodies. And the TOT was producing his *La Belle Helene* - need I say more? We had not seen it since the COC did it last in 1983, in rep with *Elektra*.

La Belle Helene is an opera bouffe parodying the story of the start of the Trojan War. Prince Paris of Troy has named Venus the winner of a heavenly beauty contest and been rewarded by Venus with the most beautiful woman in Greece, Helen. One slight hitch: she is already married to King Menelaus of

Ancient Greece plus Tudor England in Toronto! (continued)

Sparta! What with interventions by Venus, the manipulations of Jupiter's high priest Calchas, and the cunning of Paris disguised as the high priest of Venus, Paris finally abducts Helen, starting the Trojan War. The original libretto by Meilhac and Halevy was wittily adapted into English by Geoffrey Dunn for Sadlers Wells Opera Company, and TOT cleverly updated it!

As usual, multi-talented TOT founder and General Director Guillermo Silva-Marin was stage director plus lighting and stage designer, and set the mood with Greek columns and urns. Malabar's costumes were colourful and attractive and mostly apt! Conductor Peter Tiefenbach, formerly of CBC Radio, led the 9-member chamber orchestra and kept the gorgeous score and cast moving at a merry pace. Unfortunately, Toronto was so busy on Sunday, April 29th, what with parades and demos and sports events and vigils, that traffic was chaotic, and the curtain had to be held at least 15 minutes, and there was still one viola orchestra member missing for the first half. Thus the second half was much better than the first, with everyone, from orchestra to singers, performing with much more verve and musicianship.

The cast was ideal for the work, combining singing with broad acting and lively dancing where called for, although some singers' diction could have been improved upon for clarity. In the title role, Turkish-Canadian mezzo Beste Kalender was definitely "belle", with a lovely voice to match. I had only heard her in recital, and was most pleasantly surprised with her appropriately exuberant acting and comedic skills. Canadian tenor Adam Fisher, whom we know from OpA, was a handsome, wickedly charming Paris of Troy. His *Judgement of Paris* introduced him nicely, and certainly caught Helen's eye! The two made a charming couple with their *Dream of Love* duet.



Portraying in a lively manner the high Grecian royalty were baritone Stuart Graham as Agamemnon, King of Kings, and tenor Cian Horrobin as his son Orestes, while baritone Gregory Finney was Helen's befuddled husband, King Menelaus. Baritone Matthew Zadow portrayed a wily Calchas, high priest of Jupiter, clothed in what looked suspiciously like a superannuated Christian cope! In the over-the-top *Patriotic Trio* dance number, Agamemnon and Calchas tried to convince Menelaus that it was his patriotic duty to appease Venus by allowing himself to be cuckolded! The other kings and courtesans were well portrayed by soloists from the chorus.

We all left with big smiles in our faces after a delightful afternoon of fun and marvellous melodies that we don't hear often enough. What a great ending for a wonderful long weekend of opera!

Book Review: William Berger. "Puccini Without Excuses: a Refreshing Reassessment of the World's Most Popular Composer." N.Y., Vintage, c2005. by Shelagh Williams

After reading Murray Kitts' review of Berger's book on Wagner, I thought this book on Puccini would also bear scrutiny. Berger again starts with a biography of our composer, setting him helpfully in his milieu. He also points out Puccini's dogged insistence in getting the libretto for each opera just right. A scene-by-scene analysis of each opera follows. And what a variety of operas he wrote, ranging from almost operetta - *La rondine* - to perhaps "the last grand opera of the great tradition" - *Turandot*. Berger then also emphasises that in Puccini's works "verismo" is not "realism" but "truism." In this context *Tosca* is further explored for its mythic content/basis, much more obvious it seems to Mediterraneans than to Northern Europeans and English speakers! The concluding compendium of notable Puccini singers is delightful. Available for loan at the OPL.

James Bond and Opera by Mark Robinson

What do James Bond and opera have in common? Most readers would say, “They have nothing in common”. For me, James Bond and opera do have something in common; they are two of my favourite things. So, can you imagine my delight when I ran across a flyer for a new opera in English called *James Bond in A Convenient Lie* presented by the Savoy Society of Ottawa in collaboration with Malfi Productions.

My heart was all a-flutter. A marriage of James Bond and a new opera - and in English. I would be able to understand what was going on without reading sur or sub titles. I bought a ticket for the April 14th performance at Centerpointe Theatre.

Why would I do such a foolish thing? First, over the years I have attended many marvelous performances of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas presented by the Savoy Society of Ottawa. They have always done a fine job and gave me confidence that this might be fun too.

Secondly, I did a web search and I found that this new opera was written by Kyle McDonald – a Toronto based actor, writer, singer, producer. There is something special about attending an opera with the author in attendance and also alive. This was a rare opportunity. (Of note to fellow Ottawans, Kyle reports in his resume that he was

trained by the operatic legend Maria Pellegrini.)

Thirdly, Kyle has taken the great hits of opera and combined them with an original storyline based on the films of James Bond. The production was described as a blending of the beautiful and demanding classical style of singing with the fast paced and exciting story of a contemporary film.

I won't ruin the story or ending for you, by describing it here. However, if you wish to watch a trailer – just like the real movies, Google the following: “James Bond a convenient lie”.

In closing, you might ask “How was your evening?” I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. My jaw was aching from laughter as I drove home. My favourite part was the car chase through

Paris sung to a famous Rossini ensemble. I spotted one of the Brian Law finalists, Ryan Hofman, as a member of the tremendous MI6 Ensemble. I enjoyed the blending of beautiful opera with a humorous story. It was creatively presented and in English. Most importantly I hope this introduces new audiences to the beauty of opera. I congratulate the Savoy Opera Society of Ottawa and Malfi Productions for taking the risk to produce something different. Lastly, I wish to thank Kyle McDonald for not only creating this new English opera, but also for being a suave and deadly James Bond.



Photos courtesy of Malfi Productions.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed

by Shelagh Williams

UOttawa Music School Concerts

(i) **Great Composers of Note:** 2018 was a banner year for anniversaries of composers and uOttawa's Vocal Sector, including both the Calixa-Lavallee and Choral Ensembles, plus 7 pianists, set out to prove it! Christiane Riel's concept, with John Avey narrating, and all conducted by Laurence Ewashko, produced a first class gala concert covering 8 composers.

It opened with a lively presentation of *Tonight* from Bernstein's *West Side Story*. Quieter pieces from each of 17th century composers Couperin and Porpora led into a large set of Rossini works. *Priere* from *Moise et Pharaoh* and the *Villagers' Chorus* from *William Tell* framed a song and a duet from *Les Soirees musicales*, entertainingly presented by soprano Marlise Ritchie and mezzo Heather-Lynn Smith. Gounod's *Faust* was well represented by mezzo Tessa Fackelmann's *Faites-lui mes aveux* and Marguerite's showy *Jewel Song* by 2017 BLOC third place winner soprano Jeanine Williams.

After intermission, we heard the Act II *Waltz Scene* from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, with both choirs, plus soprano Lynlee Wolstencroft's heartfelt *Letter Scene*. Soprano Emili Losier also favoured us with one of his Russian songs. Debussy loved the voice and we heard two of his songs, from sopranos Danielle Girard and Gabrielle Coté-Picard. Whenever have you heard music by composer Lili Boulanger who died too young in 1918 of TB? We heard a beautiful rendition of her *Pié Jésus*, with piano, string quartet, and harp, sung by soprano Carmen Harris.

The concert ended with Bernstein. The *Opening Trio* from *Trouble in Tahiti* got an energetic song and dance routine from Carmen Harris, tenor Yanik Gosselin, and baritone Mitch McGivern! The grand finale was *Make Our Garden Grow* from *Candide*, with Gosselin as Candide and Losier as Cunegonde, plus all the soloists, both choirs, and Nadia Boucher at the piano!

(ii) **Art Song:** Prof. Laurence Ewashko's Art Song class of Master's students (many stars from *Figaro*) presented an excellent concert of *Songs from Different Traditions*. This permitted a marvellous pot pourri of art songs from different composers, countries and traditions in different languages, moods and styles - even a duet! Various pianists and guitarists teamed with the singers to provide entertaining collaborations, all carefully introduced to ensure our comprehension and enjoyment.

(iii) **Voice and Harp - uOttawa at the NAC 4th Stage:** Sopranos Jeanine Williams and Emili Losier performed with harpist Sarah Veber and pianist Maxime Dubé-Malenfant. Among Jeanine's art songs were a pair by Kelly-Marie Murphy, supportingly present, together with Dvorak's beautiful *Serenade to the Moon*

from *Rusalka*. Emili followed a Bellini aria from *I Capuleti et I Montecchi* with an interesting melange of art songs including some gorgeous Strauss. A harp-accompanied *Barcarolle* duet from *Hoffmann* sent us off blissfully into the night!

(iv) **Chamber Music:** For chamber music lovers, there were three superb two-hour sessions in April - one treat after the other!

In Paradisum: Joel Allison with the Rideau Chorale: Multitalented Roland Graham, Director of Music at Southminster, is also Conductor of the Rideau Chorale, which offered this concert of 20th century choral masterpieces. The highlight was the Duruffe *Requiem* written in 1947, after WW II, and set for the living and focussing on peace. This was a class presentation, with a 16 piece orchestra plus organ, and two soloists, mezzo Katarzyna Sadej and our 2017 BLOC 2nd prize winner, bass-baritone Joel Allison. His voice is becoming even richer and deeper, and when we congratulated him afterwards, he commented that, although the part was not overlong, the music was difficult and tricky!

Benvenuto Cellini at Galeries Aylmer Cinema: Wow! What do you get when you cross Monty Python with Grand Opera? Terry Gilliam's fantastic production of Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini!* Initially produced at English National Opera, and presented here from the Dutch National Opera, it was a bit garish and certainly over the top and down the other side! The huge cast included circus performers, and decidedly campy Swiss guards surrounding Pope Clement, who arrived majestically atop a huge structure! And the libretto had the tense metal casting scene interrupted by the workers going on strike! But musical values were not neglected, and tenor John Osborn as Cellini sang beautifully. What a great introduction to such a rarely performed opera!

An Afternoon at The Opera: Soprano Ania Hejnar, mezzo Arminé Kassabian, together with pianist and entrepreneur Judith Ginsburg, presented a marvellous programme of opera "Greatest Hits". It was a treat to hear these BLOC finalists - and Arminé was the 2011 winner - in such good voice, and with Judy both MCing and playing! Ania, with her easy coloratura, gave us the Queen of the Night's first aria, Gilda's *Caro nome*, and *Glitter and be gay*. Arminé alternated in a variety of arias: Rosina's *Una voce poco fa*, a pants role page from Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, Carmen's *Habanera*, and *Joso Maria de Buenos Aires* from Piazzola's opera. Two gorgeous duets, the *Barcarolle* from *Hoffmann* and the *Flower Duet* from *Lakme* were interspersed, and they finished with Rossini's humorous *Cat Duet!* A polished and professional programme that was a joy to attend - Judy's opera productions are to be noted!

Plácido Domingo in *Luisa Miller* at the Met—Then and Now by Lesley Robinson

The first night of the latest season's production of *Luisa Miller* at the Met on 29 March 2018 was a very special occasion for us. We were thrilled to attend the first night of Plácido Domingo's 149th operatic role - this time the baritone role of Miller, the father. Having never seen this opera, we prepared by watching the video of a performance recorded at the Met, on 20 January 1979, featuring a much younger Plácido Domingo, then in the tenor role of Rodolfo. He had debuted in this role eight years earlier (November 1971), also at the Met and sang it a total of 16 times over his career. This gave us an interesting perspective to compare and contrast the two productions and to note how performances have developed over the years, not only for Mr. Domingo, but for the House and for opera in general.

The Met's 1970s production used the original setting of the piece (based on a play by Schiller) - a seventeenth century Tyrolean village - whereas the new production has been moved in both time and place to a fairly austere setting in Victorian England. This moves it to the time of the opera's composition (1849). The atmosphere is almost Dickensian and one can imagine Walter's great fireplace and dark staircase as Bleak House itself. Although not the original setting, this one highlights the dark aspects of the story.

Today's live HD broadcasts with their revealing close ups have upped the ante when it comes to the requirements of the performers to act as well as to sing. No longer can they get away with just belting it out. Similarly, costumes and make up need to be just right. Gone are the days of bad wigs and painted frowns. We have entered a new age of "verismo". This is somewhere that Mr. Domingo has excelled. He has evolved his art into the twenty-first

century. Sherrill Milnes's Miller is dignified and steady. Domingo's is achingly vulnerable. It is in recent baritone roles that he has been able to bring tears to my eyes. Verdi is full of examples of father/child relationships, particularly father/daughter relationships, and Domingo captures the essence of the helplessness of a father who yearns to protect his child and of the all-encompassing love that nevertheless cannot conquer all.

Rodolfo is said to be one of Domingo's finest roles and the 1979 Domingo sang with verve and passion as we travelled with him through a range of emotions from the hopeful joy of new love through to the despair of betrayal and the agony of fateful irony. This year's Rodolfo was Piotr Beczala and I can say with absolute certainty that this was the finest performance I have seen from him at the Met. His singing was spot on and the emotions were all there in abundance. He gave Rodolfo the innocence of young love and a cruel coming of age.

A word about the 2018 Luisa: Sonya Yoncheva was featured last season in the title role of Tosca and as Mimì in *La Bohème* as well as in *Luisa Miller* and returns next season in *Otello* and *Iolanta*. She is rapidly making a well-deserved name for herself. Her Luisa was beautiful and nuanced. Luisa is a victim, yet Ms. Yoncheva gave her a resolute strength that the women of the "Me Too" generation can relate to.

I sometimes wonder what the composers of yesteryear would make of the performances of today. They would no doubt be thrilled to have an audience of millions and I would hope that they would welcome the evolution so readily embraced by artists such as Plácido Domingo.

Opera alla Pasta 2018-19

The following new releases are being considered for showing in the 2018-19 Opera alla Pasta season:

Massenet's *Werther* with Juan Diego Florez
 Donizetti's *La Favorite* with Kate Aldrich
 Handel's *Giulio Cesare* with Cecilia Bartoli
 Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* as excerpted at High C's.

We do need some further suggestions and would welcome your input. Your choices will be considered as long as they are not too long (2 1/2 hours is best but we can start earlier to accommodate a slightly longer one).

Would you please send your requests to Murray Kitts at kmitts1637@rogers.com.

What Are Our 2017 BLOC Winners Doing Now? by Shelagh Williams

Jennifer Olenic:

Since 1988, the Belvedere International Vocal Competition has searched for and provided professional exposure for operatic singers. Our 2017 BLOC winner was one of the 147 singers, out of 1127 entrants, who competed in Latvia in June this year!

In preparation, Jennifer gave a fund raising concert in Ottawa on May 23rd at which she sang the five arias she had prepared for the competition. Jennifer introduced each aria before singing it, accompanied by Luis Camacho, and Yoriko Tanno spoke between each aria.

Unfortunately, Jennifer did not make it to the semi-finals. However, Yoriko said that Jennifer was not upset and had found this a great experience.

The top three winners were all male and of the 16 finalists only four were female. In the last six years the top three positions have been awarded to 13 males and 6 females. Why males are favoured in this competition is puzzling. More information at <http://www.belvedere-competition.com>

Joel Allison:

As reported in the winter NCOS Newsletter, Joel won the \$3,000 second prize place in the COC Ensemble Studio Competition!

He then entered the MET Nationals Competition, progressing successfully through the first level, but not making it from the larger area stage to the N.Y.C. level of competition.

During the 2017-2018 season he sang both Leporello

and the Commentatore (on different days!) in *Don Giovanni* for UofT Opera in November, plus several performances of *Messiah* and of Mozart's *Requiem*. After Christmas he appeared as Simone in *Gianni Schicchi* for Essential Opera and was also in Handel's *Samson*. This summer he is singing Leporello in *Don Giovanni* at Westben and at Music Niagara, and has also sung in Ottawa. (see account, p. 7)

In early February it was announced that Joel had been invited to join the COC's 2018/2019 Ensemble Studio. In the fall he is scheduled to sing in the COC productions of *Eugene Onegin* (Zaretsky) and *Hadrian* (Senior Senator).

Jeanine Williams:

In April, it was announced that Jeanine, having been invited to prepare and present a vocal programme, had won the new uOttawa Nicole Senecal Emerging Artist Award. This includes a gig with Ottawa Chamberfest (to be arranged) plus a \$10,000 cash prize!

In May Jeanine adapted her role of the Countess from uOttawa Opera Co.'s *Figaro* (reported in the Spring 2018 NCOS Newsletter) for her professional debut with Calgary's Cowtown Opera. Now called Rosina, she got a good review from *Opera Canada*, in what was called *Figaro's Wedding*, the modern "transladaptation" by director Joel Ivany of Against The Grain Theatre.

In June she was then off for a year in Europe, where she planned to improve her German in Linz, Austria, and also do some training and auditioning.

New Operas Commemorating Canadian Shipwrecks by Shelagh Williams

Two new operas are in preparation to mark the centenaries of two Canadian shipwrecks of 1918, both largely forgotten today.

On June 27, 1918, the Canadian hospital ship HMHS *Llandoverly Castle* was torpedoed and sunk off Ireland by a German submarine. Of the 258 aboard, 14 Canadian nursing sisters drowned, and only a total of 24 survived. A new Canadian opera, *The Llandoverly Castle*, has reached the stage of semi-staged workshop, performed by the Bicycle Project in Toronto on June 26 and 27, to exactly mark the tragedy's centenary.

Stephanie Martin composed the opera for voices and a 9-piece chamber orchestra for playwright Paul Ciufo's 9-scene libretto. It was staged by director Tom Diamond as a radio play with costumes. The glowing *Opera Canada* review indicates that this is an opera well worth further development and full staging.

2018 is also the 100th anniversary of the worst maritime disaster of North West America - its Titanic. The October 24,

1918, shipwreck of the Canadian Pacific Railway's SS *Princess Sophia* resulted in the loss of all 353 passengers and crew - only one dog survived! The disaster, whereby the *Sophia* grounded on Vanderbilt Reef and the next day sank, in the Lynn Canal just outside of Skagway, Alaska, also affected Canada, as it took 126 of Dawson City, Yukon's, 800 citizens! Commemorative events are planned for Skagway this year.

Of interest to opera lovers is a new opera *The Sinking of the Sophia* planned for the fall centenary in the state capital, Juneau. In the Juneau City Museum we enjoyed an exhibit of Dan Fruits' paintings of his scenery designs for the opera! Artistic Director and conductor William Todd Hunter of Juneau's Orpheus Project commissioned composer Emerson Eades and writer Dave Hunsaker, whose home overlooks the Vanderbilt Reef! So far music from the opera has been performed in concert, and the premiere is set for October 25, 26 and 27.

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

This summer CBC2's Saturday Afternoon at the Opera will feature a series of international opera productions beginning with Mozart's *Don Giovanni* on June 30 followed by:

July 7 Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*

July 14 Giordano's *Andrea Chenier*

July 21 Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Delila*

July 28 Donizetti's *La favorite*

August 4 Verdi's *Otello*

August 11 Verdi's *Attila*

August 18 Verdi's *Macbeth*

August 25 Gounod's *Faust*

September 1 Rubinstein's *The Demon*

Check the CBC website for complete details of all the above productions.

A new season of the Saturday Afternoon at the Opera "BEST OPERAS EVER" begins on September 8, 2018.

What's it All About?

by Murray Kitts

I was pleased to order from Amazon.ca a copy of an opera *Margherita D'Anjou* by the important but neglected opera composer (the most popular of his day) Giacomo Meyerbeer. This was the last opera the composer wrote in the Italian semiseria style before embarking on mammoth grand operas like *Robert le diable*. The story concerned the former Queen of England's attempts to protect her young son from the clutches of an English baron who was trying to usurp the throne of late king Henry VI. The libretto by Felice Romani (author of nearly 100 opera librettos for such composers as Bellini, Donizetti and even Verdi) could be expected to be good and the musical direction under Fabio Luisi promised a certain level of excellence. The original complicated plot (the one about protecting the rights of the boy king) was given a full treatment in the accompanying booklet.

But then, what did I see? Could this be a fashion

show with models of both sexes changing into outlandish clothes? Why did one of the characters have an enormous kiss curl, coloured green (also his chest hair was discovered later to be green)? In addition the hero sported a huge red Mohawk hair-do. It might seem remarkable that the threatened boy was seen playing with Barbie dolls but not if he was to inherit the haute couture business.

There is some very pleasant music and singing in the opera and there is a happy ending. But this is a travesty on the original opera. Opera semiseria is old fashioned but it does not have to be represented with a half-witted plot. I would give this a prize for the worst recent opera production had I not read a review of *Norma* from the Royal Opera House with Norma portrayed as a female RC priest singing *Casta diva* while saying mass. Patrick Dillon describes this production in "Opera News" as an unholy mess.

Summer Opera

Glimmerglass Opera

Cooperstown N.Y.

The Barber of Seville

July 14, 20, 23, 28 & 31 August 3, 9, 11, 13, 19 & 25

The Cunning Little Vixen

July 8, 21 & 30 August 5, 7, 10, 16, 18 & 25

Silent Night

July 15 & 22 August 2, 4, 6, 12, 18, 21 & 23

West Side Story

July 7, 16, 19, 21, 24 & 29

August 4, 11, 14, 16, 17, 20 & 24

Website: glimmerglass.org

Opera North

Lebanon, New Hampshire

Tales of Hoffmann

August 3, 8, 10 & 12

The Barber of Seville

August 5, 9, 11 & 14

Website: www.operanorth.org

Summer Opera Lyric Theatre

Toronto

Manon (Massenet) July 27 & 29 August 1 & 4

Semele July 28 August 1, 3 & 4

Fior and Dora July 28 & 31 August 2 & 5

Website: solt.ca

Westben

Campbellford, Ontario

Don Giovanni in Concert. July 7

Website: www.westben.ca

Chautauqua Opera

Chautauqua, N.Y.

Don Giovanni July 7

Candide July 27 & 30

As One August 7

Website: chq.org

Festival d'Opera de Québec

The Magic Flute

July 31, Aug 2 & 4

La Belle Hélène

July 28, 30 & August 1

Pelléas et Mélisande in Concert

July 29

Website: festivaloperaquebec.com

Opera Saratoga

Saratoga Springs N.Y.

The Merry Widow

June 29, July 1, 8 & 13

The Consul

July 7, 9 & 15

Rocking Horse Winner & Vinkensport

June 30, July 6 & 14

Website: www.operasaratoga.org

Highlands Opera

Haliburton, Ontario

La Bohème August 24, 25, 26 & 27

The Glove & The Troublemaker Aug 16 & 17

Website: highlandsoperastudio.com

Check the websites listed above for additional details (times, casts etc.) of the productions as well as information about other musical and theatrical events that are staged at the various locations.

Live in HD from the Met 2018-19

Verdi's "Aida" (October 6, 2018): The HD performance will star Anna Netrebko, Anita Rachvelishvili, and Aleksandrs Antonenko under the musical direction of Nicola Luisotti.

Saint-Saëns' "Samson et Dalila" (October 20, 2018): The opening night production will get its live transmission on Oct. 20, 2018, with Roberto Alagna and Elina Garanca in the title roles.

Puccini's "La Fanciulla del West" (October 27, 2018): Jonas Kaufmann and Eva-Maria Westbroek star in the Puccini opera under maestro Marco Armiliato.

Muhly's "Marnie" (November 10, 2018): Isabel Leonard leads the new production. Christopher Maltman and Iestyn Davies also appear in the Muhly opera.

Verdi's "La Traviata" (December 15, 2018): Yannick Nézet-Séguin leads Diana Damrau, Juan Diego Flórez, and Quinn Kelsey in a new production by Michael Mayer.

Cilea's "Adriana Lecouvreur" (Jan 12, 2019): The New Years Eve new production will also get a run on the big screen with Anna Netrebko and Piotr Beczala in leading roles. The new production is by David McVicar and also stars Anita Rachvelishvili.

Bizet's "Carmen" (Feb. 2, 2019): Clémentine Margaine takes on her signature role opposite Roberto Alagna under Louis Langrée. Aleksandra Kurzak also stars.

Donizetti's "La Fille du Régiment" (March 2, 2019): The Donizetti work will showcase Pretty Yende and Javier Camarena in the leading roles alongside Stephanie Blythe as the Marquise of Berkenfield and Alessandro Corbelli as Suplice.

Wagner's "Die Walküre" (March 30, 2019): The second opera in Wagner's tetralogy gets an HD showcase with a cast that includes Christine Goerke, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Stuart Skelton, Jamie Barton, and Greer Grimsley under Phillippe Jordan.

Poulenc's "Dialogues des Carmélites" (May 11, 2019): Nézet-Séguin leads a cast that includes Isabel Leonard, Adrienne Pieczonka, Erin Morley, and Karita Matilla, among others, in Poulenc's masterwork.

--from OperaWire (operawire.com)

Tickets for the Live in HD 2018-19 season go on sale to the general public in the United States and Canada on July 18.