



Winter 2020

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Hiver 2020

Frankenstein - The Opera, 2019

by Shelagh Williams

How did you celebrate Hallowe'en? You should have been enjoying Andrew Ager's *Frankenstein: The Opera, 2019*!

Composer Ager himself adapted the novel *Frankenstein* for his original production, sung in English, and for this Ottawa premier adjusted some of the voice parts for this cast, just as Mozart would do! The result was a fully-staged production directed by Suzanne Bassett and featuring excellent Canadian and Ottawa singers. The composer himself was on one of the two pianos playing the score, with Ian Bevell on the thundering organ for the exciting events, and Zac Pulak on percussion.

Set designer Mark Shulist supplied the electrical machine to "awaken" the Creature, and it was quite impressive, with umpteen copper wires going every which way, and accompanying light special effects, thanks to Carlo Verdicchio.

Kathryn Racine's costumes and hairstyles were excellent, creating the right Victorian ambience to lull one before all hell broke loose!

Tenor Lenard Whiting reprised his major role of Victor Frankenstein from the world premier, setting the fraught context with his excitement over his successful scientific experiment, then his realization of what he has

actually done! In his work he is supported by his fiancée Elizabeth, sung by soprano Bronwyn Thies-Thompson, his friend Clerval, sung by baritone James Coole-Stevenson, and his brother William, sung by 12-year old Elliott Mennier, head chorister of Christ Church Cathedral.

The charming mountain interlude was animated by baritone Gary Dahl, who sang the sympathetic blind old DeLacey, and soprano Carmen Harris and tenor Jeffrey Boyd, who portrayed the young couple.

But the centre of the opera is the Creature created

by Victor Frankenstein: a very large figure with a complex nature. For this role, Ager had carefully selected huge bass Constantine Meglis, whom he had introduced at the Opera Launch this summer. Unfortunately, Meglis became ill the weekend before the run! With foresight, an understudy had also been provided, and so "noted N.Z.

baritone" Bradley Christensen stepped in at short notice, and was fantastic! He is tall anyway, and managed to stagger about most effectively on elevated boots, while still singing very well and acting to the hilt!

The final sound and light effects of the opera were quite amazing and wrapped up a most entertaining evening of opera, very well produced, and so apt for the season!



Frankenstein brings the Creature to life



the Creature

Photos courtesy of CBC

President's Message – December 2019

Dear Fellow Members: Our fall schedule was extremely busy and most enjoyable. The schedule began in September with High C and High Tea with a guided tour of Opera goes to the Movies by Murray Kitts, followed by a delicious High Tea.

In October, we held the fourteenth Brian Law Opera Competition. The six finalists presented a varied program with beautiful singing. We published a press release, updated our website, and published a special edition of our Newsletter describing the highlights. Rogers TV's *Celebrate Ottawa* featured the competition in their November broadcasts.

Lastly, in November, we had an Opera alla Pasta where we watched *Les Huguenots*

by Meyerbeer, a pretty piece and rarely performed. This was a nice treat for a very cold November afternoon.

Earlier this year, in January and February, the snow caused cancellations of several Opera alla Pastas. So we have scheduled the next Opera Alla Pasta on March 22nd, 2020. I hope to see you there.

To all our members, our BLOC finalists, our volunteers, our Board members, I wish the very best for the holiday season and the new decade. And I thank you all for your contributions to ensure we had such a great operatic fall in Ottawa.

Mark Robinson

Editor's Message

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed articles or reviews to the newsletter in 2019 and to everyone involved in the preparation and distribution of the digital and printed versions.

Remember, any member or guest is welcome to submit anything related to opera. Your opinion and experiences are of interest to our readers - you do not have to be an expert.

David Williams

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For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition contact Lesley Robinson at 613-769-5957 or consult www.ncos.ca

The BLOC and Grand Opera in Toronto! by Shelagh Williams

In an opera-filled week at the end of October, we managed to see a delightful *Romeo and Juliet* (Gounod, Pellegrini Opera), starring BLOC 3rd place finalist Susan Elizabeth Brown, on the Friday, then off to Toronto for two powerful afternoon productions, Dvorak's *Rusalka* and Puccini's *Turandot*, at the Canadian Opera Company (COC) and then back to Ottawa for Andrew Ager's Hallowe'en-inspired *Frankenstein* (see review, page1). Entertaining opera is available if you search it out!

Rusalka is called a lyric fairytale, and this production was truly fantastic! Dvorak's marvellous music, beautifully performed, was more than matched by director Sir David McVicar's delightful production - what a treat! This was McVicar's COC debut (originally done for Lyric Opera of Chicago) and he enlisted the team of fellow Brits John Macfarlane (sets) and Andrew George (choreography) plus German Moritz Junge (costumes) to work his magic. May they soon return! The opening nature scene was gorgeous, with shifting trees which revealed a beautiful moon for *Rusalka* to sing to! On land, a marvellous doorway opened to magically display the magnificent Gothic great hall of the Prince's palace, adorned with innumerable stags heads, much to *Rusalka*'s dismay! Outstanding among the excellent costumes, including opulence for the nobility and gauze for the nymphs, were the humorous huge frog feet and 3-fingered hands of *Rusalka*'s father, water goblin king *Vodnik*, and the feathered garb of the witch *Jezibaba*'s three attendant crows, whose antics contrasted sharply with the fine pointe work of the classical ballet dancers in the palace! The whole was directed and performed to bring out the feelings and motivations of the characters, but thankfully leavened with humorous touches here and there.

COC Music Director Johannes Debus led successfully the superb forces at his disposal, the COC Orchestra and Chorus and well chosen cast. The three wood nymphs, soprano Anne-Sophie Neher and mezzo Jamie Groote, both COC Ensemble Studio (ES), plus Lauren Segal led things off in a sprightly manner. Similarly, the second act began with the hilarious kitchen scene of the Gamekeeper, tenor Matthew Cairns (ES), and Turnspit, soprano Lauren Eberwein, with the latter energetically stuffing a huge goose almost as big as herself with all manner of things! From the Bolshoi, where she has sung the role, mezzo Elena Manistina favoured us with a witch, *Jezibaba*, that was neither really wicked nor really funny, but certainly malicious - and that was enough!

As to the principal roles, American soprano Keri Alkema brought us a steely Foreign Princess certainly not ready to put up with a fickle Prince with a wandering eye! For the two major male roles, the COC wisely went to Europe for new (to them) singers. Slovak bass Stefan Kocan has sung *Vodnik* in Prague and he brought this experience with him in his interpretation: funny, loving, serious - and he managed not to fall over his big feet!



Vodnik

Czech tenor Pavel Cernoch was easy on the eyes and ears as the Prince who captured *Rusalka*'s affections, and at the end returned faithfully, if too late, to *Rusalka*. This was the role debut of Sondra Radvanovsky as the water nymph *Rusalka*, but, since her father was Czech, it was a role she had really been wanting to sing - and it showed! Her *Song to the Moon* was just perfect! In spite



Rusalka

of being mute for much of the rest of the opera (the witch's price for *Rusalka* becoming human), hers was a beautifully sung, nuanced performance in which she made us feel her love for the Prince, then bewilderment and pain as her bad decision bore fruit, and she turned into a ghost of her former self. It was magnificently sad!

Everything came together to provide a marvellous whole, perhaps especially since it was

The BLOC and Grand Opera in Toronto! (continued)

the last performance of the run, and no one held back! Bravissimi!!

And now for something completely different: debuting American director Robert Wilson's take on Puccini's final opera *Turandot*! This was a new COC co-production with Teatro Real Madrid, Houston Grand Opera, and the Lithuanian National Opera.

First of all, the renditions of Puccini's glorious music were marvellous. Italian conductor Carlo Rizzi, soon to conduct the opera at the Met, took charge and ensured the COC Orchestra and Chorus, the Canadian Children's Opera Company, and the great cast all lived up to their billings. The first two solo voices to be heard were of BLOC finalists! The very first voice on stage was that of a Mandarin, Joel Allison, BLOC second prize finalist in 2017, his resonant bass-baritone setting the stage for the opera! The next solo voice was that of soprano Joyce El-Khoury, 2005 BLOC winner, sounding altogether splendid as the doomed slave girl Liu. Incidentally, after singing the second performance, Joyce actually took the 6 a.m. train up to Ottawa to catch the uOttawa Music School's 50th Anniversary Celebration and to receive the first Angela Hewitt Distinguished Alumni Award! Mind you, we had to carefully choose our opera dates to ensure hearing both of these great Ottawa singers together!

Comic relief was provided by the three government ministers Ping, Pang and Pong (here called Jim, Bob and Bill - I'm not making this up, you know! - as Anna Russell would say!), sung by baritone Adrian Timpau and tenors Julius Ahn (a Pang specialist) and Joseph Hu (a Pong specialist) respectively, who managed to both sing and leap about energetically and hilariously, if not quite like proper ministers! Liu's master, Timur, sung by bass David Leigh, and Emperor Altoum, sung by tenor Adrian Thompson, both sang well and sounded surprisingly healthy, despite portraying the fathers of the two principals! We heard a quite marvellous *Nessun dorma* sung by debuting Russian tenor Sergey Skorokhodov, who as Calaf was quite able

to keep up with his Turandot. Soprano Tamara Wilson was brought back after her strong Desdemona earlier this year for this role debut, and she aced it! Both vocally and by her presence she established Turandot as the focal point, a real person rather than just a figurehead. What a great total musical experience!

Among the many productions which I have seen of *Turandot* was an early one by Montreal Opera. Exuberant and extravagant, it had a tremendous opening scene, all smoke and flaming torches, with a superb bare-chested executioner with his assistants, all oiled and gleaming, and reminiscent of the J. Arthur Rank logo - unforgettable! In contrast, Wilson is the direct opposite, a minimalist, who does his own sets and lighting, thus controlling everything. He stages his productions having his players with whitened faces as in the "masked stock characters of *commedia dell'arte*" (Director's note), which he feels makes their faces more visible. He also uses slow choreographed gestures and unusual pared down set designs, which often did present striking tableaux. However, the Act III trees looked like they might have been left over from *Rusalka*! His Italian costume designer, Jacques Reynaud, had the cast mainly in dark Chinese style costumes, though Calaf's blue outfit was all awry while he was singing his big aria! Turandot was conspicuous in contrasting red, while the three ministers were, inexplicably, in contemporary suits! Unfortunately, with everyone facing out and not really connecting, and Calaf just blowing a kiss to Turandot at the end, it all became a bit ludicrous! It reminded me that several decades ago on a Morgan Tour we enjoyed a concert performance in Copenhagen of *Turandot*, with Hungarian soprano Eva Marton in the title role. Wilson's use here of a "formalized,

abstract style" (Programme) in which people do not interact, and certainly do not touch, but make stylized gestures, in a minimalist set, was just like an opera in concert, with costumes, but at much greater expense to us!

Fortunately, the music and the singers overcame the production's many physical shortcomings!



OperOttawa is on the move!!

by Norman E. Brown

OperOttawa is a relatively young opera company, now in its sixth season, producing opera and concerts amidst the larger well-established companies across Canada. As more of the large and medium-sized companies are folding due to budgetary stresses, there is a strong trend in many cities towards the smaller self-managed, self-producing companies. Under the leadership of former General Manager of Opera Lyra Ottawa, Norman E. Brown (singer and Impresario), OperOttawa produces at least one opera or oratorio performance per season in concert format or with moderate staging, utilizing the talents of young up-and-coming singers from Ottawa and semi-professional and professional singers from across Canada. OperOttawa also engages professional musicians (piano, trumpet, recorder, strings, percussion) to enhance our performances.


To date OperOttawa has produced Handel's *Acis and Galatea* in 2014, a sold out Opera Gala in 2015 and a highly successful *Giulio Cesare* in 2016, which also toured to Toronto. In 2017 the company produced Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* to excellent reviews, as well as hosting the concert "A Tribute to the Music of Mozart", and produced Handel's *Messiah* as a chamber concert in November. In 2018 OperOttawa produced the concert "A Tribute to the Music of Schubert", hosted Opera by Request's touring production of *Don Giovanni*, produced a staged production of Menotti's *The Medium* in October,

and in November, Saint Saens' *Christmas Oratorio* and Bach's *Cantata 142*.

OperOttawa's 2019 season kicked off with a highly successful Opera Gala featuring solo arias by some of Canada's finest singers (see page 6). In October the company was pleased to have performed Bizet's *The Pearlfishers* on a very successful tour that included Toronto, Oakville and Belleville. Always looking to specialize in earlier Baroque music, three works by George Frederic Handel were featured during the season. First, in November 2019, the opera *Rinaldo* was presented at the First Baptist Church on Laurier Avenue, the company's primary venue (see page 6).

In April 2020 OperOttawa will feature the ever popular *Messiah* but this time including most of the alternative arias and choruses, and ending the season with the opera *Giulio Cesare*, back by popular demand. Of particular note, in February 2020 OperOttawa will produce a staged abridged creative adaptation of the opera *Don Giovanni Trionfante* (*Don Giovanni Triumphant*). This will be a theatrical musical work using the key music from Mozart's opera interspersed with related readings by Kierkegaard. To the best of our knowledge this has never been performed in Canada. As a special incentive, \$10 will be deducted from the cost of a ticket for this production for NCOS members.

OperOttawa presents



DON GIOVANNI TRIONFANTE
 "Don Giovanni TRIUMPHANT!!!"

A staged abridged adaptation :

Sunday February 23, 2020 @ 7:30 p.m. First Baptist Church (Laurier @ Elgin)

OperOttawa's 6th Season! (2019-20) by Shelagh Williams

Gala Concert, Sept. 29: To kick off its ambitious 6th season with a bang, Norman E. Brown programmed a great concert. Imagine a marvellous chorus of beautifully trained voices processing in with Verdi's beloved *Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves* (*Va pensiero, Nabucco*)! - and that was just the beginning!

The ensemble consisted of 13 soloists, who each sang two arias, one before and one after the break, plus 6 chorus members. All were beautifully and formally accoutred and benefited from the superb piano playing of Frederic Lacroix, who unstintingly provided support for every number, whether familiar or more esoteric.

The first half of the programme was good, but after the break the singers seemed even better, as everyone seemed to settle in. Bass-baritone John Holland with his deep voice, as Vodnik, feelingly commiserated with his daughter Rusalka and her doom. In the second half, as Leporello, he entertained us, book in hand, with a funny *Catalogue Aria* (*Don Giovanni*)! A delightful *Connais tu le pays* (*Mignon*) from mezzo Jean-E Hudson was followed later by a well sung *O mio Fernando* (*La Favorita*). Tenor Iain Macpherson, with a nice voice and good breath control, treated us to a lovely *Il mio Tesoro* (*Don Giovanni*), in which his Don Ottavio was definitely not the usual wimp! Subsequently he really got into an interesting selection from the Zarzuela *La Tabernera Del Puerta*.

Soprano Sarah Ripley sang the tricky *Ebben? ... Ne andro lontano* (*la Wally*) with feeling. Baritone Norman E. Brown's *Hymn to the Evening Star* (*Tannhauser*) was beautiful! It was great to see Isabelle Lacroix, looking and sounding lovely as Mimi (*La Boheme*), and then proving she's still got the high notes for Helene in *I vespri Siciliani*. Tenor Corey Arnold was very accomplished as Andrea Chenier, then wowed us with his heartfelt *La fleur que tu m'avais jetee* from *Carmen*! The Countess's *Porgi amor* (*Figaro*) and *O mio babbino caro* (*Gianni Schichi*) were beautifully sung by soprano Selke Schwarz. As always, mezzo Carole Portelance was great, whether in a pants role as Farnace in *Mitridate* or as Tchaikovsky's Jeanne d'Arc. After the sweet high notes of Nadir in *Pearlfishers*, tenor Robert Martin became a very fierce Siegfried when reforging his father's sword! Finishing the first half in style, mezzo Sonya Sweeney gave us a very forceful Dorabella in *Smanie implacabile* (*Cosi*), then Dido's lovely *Lament* (*Dido and Aeneas*). Tenor Danny Leclerc had sung the very first aria, *Pourquoi me reveiller*, as Werther, with strength and feeling, and then later astounded us with a beautiful *Nessun dorma* (*Turandot*).

Finally, soprano Cristina Pisani crowned her earlier

well sung and acted *Sempre libera* (*Traviata*) with a gorgeously sung *Un bel di* (*Butterfly*). Then the lights dimmed and she lit the standing candle and the entire cast, each carrying a candle, paraded in for a great candlelit *Humming Chorus* - what a classy ending! Those of you not there missed a most enjoyable evening.

Rinaldo, Nov.17: When did you last hear this Handel masterpiece - 35 years ago at the NAC Summer Opera Festival? It was great to hear this marvellous music again! This opera in concert was an ambitious undertaking, with an excellent orchestra consisting of Frederic Lacroix playing marvellously on both piano and harpsichord, Gerard Nieuwenhuis on recorder(s), Peter Crouch on trumpet, and Jack Hui Litster on percussion. An unnamed but effective lighting specialist manned the lights.

A detailed libretto synopsis plus a listing of the musical highlights ensured that we could follow the crusading story and the well chosen cast's lyric outpourings. As the title character, Sonya Sweeney easily negotiated her tricky vocal runs, especially in a couple of Act I arias, with equally tricky piano runs! Rinaldo's beloved, Almirena, was sung by soprano Isabelle Lacroix, looking lovely in a shimmering gown, and treating us to, among others, a beautiful rendition of the aria *Lascia ch'io pianga*, with harpsichord accompaniment. The two also sang well together in their Act I duet. Tenor Colin Frotten was a strong Goffredo, Crusader leader and Almirena's father, opening the opera with a great aria rendition.

Armida, the sorceress Queen of Damascus, interpreted by Erinne-Colleen Laurin, had an impressive arrival with drums and trumpet, and followed it immediately with two arias in her high, mobile soprano, then later gave us a couple of real rage arias! Baritone Norman E. Brown sang Argante, King of Jerusalem and the Saracen leader, ranging from a heartfelt love aria in Act I to more militant fare. In another of her patented pants roles, Carole Portelance as Eustazio, Goffredo's brother, opened the second act with a lovely aria accompanied by recorder and harpsichord. The third act was strongly opened in turn by bass-baritone John Holland as Mago, a Christian magician, along with the seductive Siren, soprano Christina Pisani, and Donna, mezzo Jean-E Hudson. Tenor Ross Jewell, from the chorus, stepped in at short notice as the Herald, to round out the cast.

The performance finished very strongly with the principals in Act III each singing a showpiece aria or duet, imaginatively accompanied. The final chorus of 16 voices topped it all off gloriously!

Gozo's Fall Opera Season

by Marian Cumming

On a flying visit to Malta for a family wedding in October, I decided to pop over to Malta's sister island Gozo, for the Fall opera season. Gozo measures 67sq. km with a population of roughly 33,000. This small island boasts not one, but two, opera houses, both in the same town and on the same street, each putting on at least one fully-staged opera production every year. There is great competition between the two houses, each one trying to outdo the other.

The opera season in Gozo is considered the cultural



highlight of the year. As I walked to the theatre to pick up my ticket a couple of hours before the performance, the red carpet was being laid down, long tables with white table clothes adorned with beautiful floral arrangements were set up with champagne flutes, and a string quartet was settling in the foyer preparing to welcome guests. Guests, both local and foreign, finally arrived, some wearing long gowns and tuxedos, others less formal attire, but invariably all in their best bib and tucker, chatted happily and sipped (complimentary) champagne until curtain time.

The production I attended was Verdi's *Il Trovatore* at the Astra theatre, having missed *La Boheme* at the Aurora (the opera house across the street) which had

ended its run the previous week. My husband and I had seen an excellent production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* two years earlier and I was looking forward to an equally thrilling performance. I found this particular production to be a bit uneven - let's say I've heard better performances of *Il Trovatore*, but overall it was definitely worth the trip.



Chorus, stage crew, scenery, costumes, lighting, etc. are largely the work of volunteers. This year the Teatru Astra Opera Chorus was supplemented by the Coro Lirico Siciliano. I don't know how much time they had to rehearse but the result was excellent. Their voices blended beautifully and the off-stage singing of the nuns in the second act was particularly moving. The scenery was also imaginative with a number of high stand-alone movable turrets, which changed colour when spotlighted or opened up to show an interior, such as a chapel for Leonora and Manrico's thwarted nuptials.

The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, founded in 1968, is a professional orchestra made up of both local and foreign artists which performs regularly in Malta and abroad. The MPO regularly supports both opera houses and this evening's performance was ably conducted by Maestro John Galea.

Among the international cast, I was particularly impressed by Serbian mezzo soprano Sanja Anastasia in the role of Azucena. Her solo arias showcased a wide range and a rich, well modulated tone, which also proved to be the anchor in the ensemble parts. Another deep and powerful voice was that of seasoned Italian bass Carlo Colombara, who has sung the role of Ferrando, as well as many other roles, in major European opera houses as well as at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The role of Leonora was sung by American/Italian soprano Joanna Parisi. She has a dark, powerful voice but tended to become shrill on the high notes. Her acting during the first three acts was impressive but she seemed to lose focus in the last act, which did not make

Gozo's Fall Opera Season (continued) by Marian Cumming

for a very convincing dying scene.

Plamen Dimitrov, a native of Bulgaria, was the evening's Count di Luna. Although displaying a solid baritone and singing all the right notes I kept hoping he would come out of the shadows and develop the malevolent character of the Count. Unfortunately this did not happen. Tenor Valeriy Georgiev, also from Bulgaria, sang the role of Manrico. His off-stage aria in the first act sounded promising, but once he appeared on stage his voice took on an unpleasant metallic sound. This persisted throughout his performance with the exception of his second off-stage aria in the final act where he bids a passionate farewell to Leonora. However his technique was solid and he had no difficulty hitting the high notes, including the high C's in "Di quella pira".

Minor roles were sung by local singers; of particular note was Marvic Baldacchino as Leonora's confidante, Ines. At the age of 20 she has already sung in

Europe while continuing her studies with the support, among others, of the Joseph Calleja Foundation. And speaking of Joseph Calleja (the Maltese tenor), it was in this very theatre, the Astra in Gozo, that he made his operatic debut in the role of Macduff in Verdi's *Macbeth* in 1997 at the age of 19.

I may have sounded somewhat critical, but it is difficult not to draw comparisons between performances of such an oft produced masterpiece as Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, bizarre as the plot might seem. Kudos go to the management and staff of the Astra Theatre as well as to all the volunteers who every year, since 1978, have been putting their heart and soul into providing live opera for the enjoyment of a faithful audience. As I walked back to my hotel on a warm late-summer night, the group ahead of me was making an attempt at singing "Di quella Pira" and a couple behind me was humming "Ai nostri monti" - what's not to love!

NCOS presents High C and High Tea by Marian Cumming

A Sunday afternoon talk in the Colonel By Room at Ottawa City Hall entitled "Opera Goes to the Movies" was advertised as "Murray Kitts will once again delight us with his wit and wisdom", and that he did. For two hours Murray entertained us by introducing and commenting on various clips from a number of movies featuring opera, opera singers, skulduggery and laugh-out loud funny slapstick.

Among the clips was one from a 1920s silent movie, others, in black and white, featuring the Marx Brothers running amuck with their antics, likewise Laurel and Hardy, and Danny Kaye inserting himself into a duet on stage where he improvised with his usual gibberish (the only clip in colour).

Also shown was a "what else could go wrong" dress rehearsal of *Turandot* from the movie *Yes Giorgio* featuring Luciano Pavarotti, where, among other things, he gets swallowed up by a "dragon". As Murray pointed out, this was not exactly Pavarotti at his finest, as the

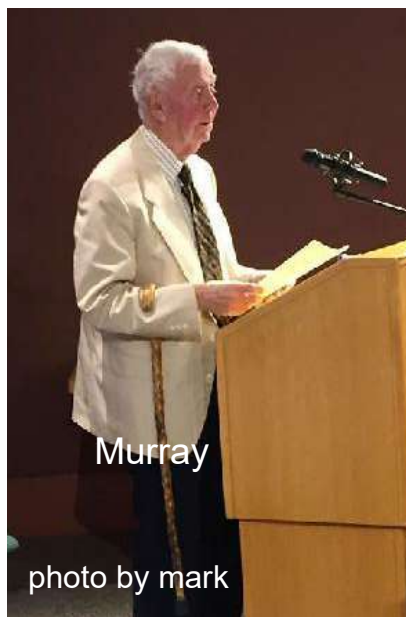
film was a boxoffice flop, losing millions of dollars. Also shown was an excellent rendition of *Largo al Factotum* from *The Barber of Seville* by Lawrence Tibbett.

At the end of the talk, Mark Robinson, who ably handled the role of projectionist, presented Murray with a "Ring" shopping bag which he and Leslie had recently picked up at the Met Shop.

As billed, this was followed by a High Tea. For this we moved to the airy Councilors' Lounge where round tables were set up along with a sumptuous, and plentiful, array of sandwiches, squares, fruit, copious amounts of tea - and did I mention scones with clotted cream and strawberry jam?

Thanks to all the volunteers, and of course to Murray Kitts, who made such a pleasant afternoon possible. City Hall was the ideal venue, with spacious rooms, comfortable seating, easy accessibility and the parking was free!

Murray obviously has a treasure trove of similar clips and we hope that there are enough of them left to once again delight us with an encore in the near future.



Murray

photo by mark

Autumn in Montreal

by Lesley Robinson

Opéra de Montréal's 2019/2020 season began in September with Tchaikovsky's 1879 lyrical adaptation of *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin's 1833 novel in verse, with the libretto closely following much of the original poetry. The production is jointly owned by Kansas City Lyric Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Michigan Opera Theatre, Atlanta Opera and Seattle Opera and is an example of the great value of smaller houses banding together to create co-productions that can reach a multitude of audiences.

It was a special treat to see Montreal native, baritone Etienne Dupuis, perform opposite Australian soprano Nicole Car here in Montreal. They are a real-life couple who met in 2015 during rehearsals for a production of *Eugene Onegin* in Berlin. They are currently living in Paris with their young child while their international careers are soaring. They have performed together at the Met in New York, in Sydney, Australia, and in Paris, and have a busy schedule of upcoming performances. The international cast of *Eugene Onegin* featured Canadians Carolyn Sproule (mezzo-soprano) as Olga and tenor Owen McCausland as Lensky along with Polish mezzo-soprano Stefania Toczyska as Filipyevna and Russian bass Denis Sedov as Prince Gremin. The



Car (Tatiana) and Dupuis (Onegin)'s curtain call.

creative team was equally international, including French conductor Guillaume Tourniaire, Israeli stage director Tomer Zvulun, American set designer Erhard Rom, and British costume designer Isabella Bywater.

Another special treat followed in October with a spectacular concert performance of Beethoven's only opera *Fidelio*. There was a celebratory atmosphere for the homecoming of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Orchestre Métropolitain, as well as Music Director of the Metropolitan Opera, the fabulous Yannick Nézet-Séguin. M. Nézet-Séguin took charge of the performance with his unmatched artistic passion and energy. He conducts with his whole body and soul. There were some splendid vocal performances from the international cast including Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen as Leonore, Canadian tenor Michael Schade as Florestan, Italian bass-baritone Luca Pisaroni as Don Pizarro, American bass-baritone Alan Held as Don Fernando, Canadian soprano Kimy McLaren as Marzelline and Canadian tenor Jean-Michel Richer in the role of Jaquino. *Fidelio* is a curious work, dealing with the weighty themes of political imprisonment, fidelity and heroism, yet the story includes a confusing and somewhat awkward love quadrilateral and culminates in a triumphant happy ending. This allowed the cast of this concert performance the freedom to ham it up somewhat and there were notable performances from a delightful Kimy McLaren and a blustering and malevolent Luca Pisaroni.

November heralded Opéra de Montréal's second fully staged production of the season, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In the pre-performance talk we were told that this was a "traditional" production. My guess was that this meant that the set and costumes were firmly rooted in the time and place originally conceived by the creators. The opera was written in 1835 and was based on Walter Scott's 1819 novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which was a historical novel, set in the 17th century and supposedly based on a factual incident. It is certainly challenging to create an authentic representation of 17th century Scotland and the costumes rendered a bewildering mixture of tartans, kilts and plaid trousers and a wild array of wigs. The appearance of a parade of ghosts in the final scene could easily have provoked some inappropriate giggles. It turned out that the "traditional" aspect of the production was more than just the

Autumn in Montreal (continued)

setting. The staging was somewhat static. The singers came to the front of the stage to address the audience. With everyone singing facing the audience, there was little interaction among the characters. Any acting that went on happened during musical interludes. The part of the opera where this approach seems appropriate is the mad scene when Lucia is ranting, centre-stage. Indeed the highlight of the production was the performance of Korean/American soprano Kathleen Kim as Lucia. Her voice was powerful, yet her Lucia was fragile and vulnerable. The other principals delivered robust vocal performances: tenor Frédéric Antoun as Lucia's beloved Edgardo, Gregory Dahl as her authoritarian brother Enrico and Mario Bahg as her ill-fated husband Arturo. There was another notable performance from Rocco Rupolo who has the beautiful tone that I love in a tenor voice.



Frederic Antoun as Edgardo, Kathleen Kim as Lucia, Gregory Dahl as Enrico and Mario Bahg as Arturo

Don Giovanni, Opera Buffa in Two Acts: Opera Atelier

By Lesley Robinson

The programme cover of Opera Atelier's recent production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* features Mozart's notes in his own hand, describing his work as "opera Buffa in 2 Atti". Da Ponte's libretto was billed as a "dramma giocoso", denoting a mixture of serious and comic action. The latter tends to be the way that the opera is presented, considering its ubiquitous operatic themes of love and death and the brutal comeuppance suffered by the Don in its fiery denouement, but how are we really supposed to view the paradoxical facets of this character?

Opera Atelier's answer is to focus on the lighter side and this is the approach that appeals to me, having first known the story through Molière's *Dom Juan* which is *definitely* a comedy. It always seemed to me that the Don was a lovable rogue who was somewhat hard done-by to be so harshly punished. After all, rape and murder is a harsh description for the seduction and self defence we witness in the first act. Considering modern sensibilities regarding consent, we cannot doubt Donna Anna's anguish. However, in Donna Anna's day, she would not have had the option of enjoying the tryst as an equal partner. Whether she had consented or not, she would have to say that she had not.

Atelier's comedic take plays up the delicious irony in the text and the hypocrisy is delightfully revealed.

Everybody loves the Don, but they all pretend that they don't. Don Giovanni and Leporello are a wonderful double act and Douglas Williams and Stephen Hegedus played it beautifully. So much of comedy is in the timing and the whole cast timed it to perfection. Meghan Lindsay, Carla Huhtanen and Mireille Asselin made a terrific trio of women scorned and Colin Ainsworth was a pitifully henpecked wimp.

Thank you, Opera Atelier, for giving us such a delightful evening. I think Mozart would have enjoyed it!



Curtain call tableau. The performers came on and struck various poses - l to r Donna Anna & Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni and Leporello, and Donna Elvira.

Events You Could Have Enjoyed

by Shelagh Williams

NACO's 50th Anniversary:

During the week of Sept. 20th to Oct. 3rd, the NAC and NACO staged an interesting, but poorly advertised, variety of free events to celebrate their joint 50th Anniversaries. These were mainly in celebration of the various educational programmes which the NACO has initiated throughout the country. The Monday noon concert on the stairs highlighted the Music Alive Programme (MAP) associated with the NACO's Canadian tours, wherein music teachers worked with local students at the NACO's destinations. The next three noon staircase concerts were given by musicians associated with the NACO's Summer Institute YAP programmes and the winter Orchestral Studies programmes.

The excellent concerts consisted of a wind quintet on Tuesday, a string quartet Wednesday, and, our favourite, on Thursday, a trio. This trio consisted of tenor Yanik

Gosselin, uOttawa music grad now at McGill, Lindsay Bryden, flute, just back from 10 years in the U.K.(!), and Nathalie Hoffmann, the new harp professor at uOttawa. Appropriately, they started with Louis Appelbaum's song *Anniversary!* Such gems as the Ravel trio *La flûte enchantée*, John Corrigiano's *Three Irish Songs* and Britten's *Fifth Canticle*, for harp and voice, were interspersed with a couple of instrumental numbers, notably Bach's *Flute Sonata*. Finally, of course, an aria from *The Magic Flute* finished off the concert in style!

After this concert, the final event was a marvellous interview cum reminiscence of Evelyn Greenberg, pianist and NACOA founder, and the two original NACO members still in the orchestra, violinists Elaine Klimasko and Karoly Sziladi. We managed to squeeze in, and it was fascinating to hear these memories pouring forth - we were actually at the first NACO concert!

uOttawa Music's 50th Anniversary!

With four choirs and 150 singers from both sides of the river, uOttawa's Music School really pulled out all the stops for a celebratory concert, in cold mid-November, with performances in both St. Joseph's, Ottawa, and St.-Francois-de-Sales, Gatineau! Vivaldi's brilliant *Beatus vir* for two choirs and 6 soloists was the highlight of a concert joining the forces of the classy Choeur Classique de l'Outaouais under Tiphaine Legrand with all of uOttawa's choirs: the Choral Ensemble and Calixa Lavallee Ensemble under Laurence Ewashko and the University of Ottawa Choir under Robert Filion!

We - and they - were warmed up in Part I with each choir, under its director, favouring us with some lovely selections. Then, in Part II, we were flooded with the marvellous sound of *Beatus vir* (Blessed is the man) under Laurence Ewashko, with the Choeur Classique and the uOttawa student Ensembles comprising the two choirs. Frederic Lacroix was our orchestra on piano! It was probably written for St. Mark's in Venice, with its opposing galleries, and featured the choral refrain *Beatus vir* gloriously interspersed between the verses of the psalm. These verses were sung beautifully in lovely solos, great duets and a marvellous trio by the soloists, all uOttawa Music grads: sopranos Ania Hejnar and Lynlee Wolstencroft, alto Tessa Fackelmann, tenor Grayson Nesbitt, and basses Hyung Song and Kevin Burke.

What an evening showcasing the glories of Vivaldi's music and the human voice in a beautiful Baroque blockbuster!

uOttawa Music School

The Voice Studio of Professor Christiane Riel participates in an end of term concert, and this year *She Says* featured music set to works of female writers. A screen exhibited a portrait, dates, and information about each writer, as her piece was sung. Fascinatingly, among these women was one who wrote the texts for Bach cantatas, and another the texts for some of Haydn's English songs! The studio is large, principally female, and this year includes many beginners. The highlight for me, an opera lover, was the final quartet from Mark Adamo's *Little Women* - by Louisa May Alcott - which we saw, in 2003, at Glimmerglass Opera, with Joshua Hopkins, who then went on to win the BLOC! As a finale, the entire corps joined together in a great rendition of *Both Sides Now*, by Joni Mitchell, a Canadian to boot!

For the last couple of years visiting composers have given talks to the uOttawa Composition class of Professor John Armstrong. This November a *Voice and Composition Workshop* gave rise to a very interesting discussion on *Opera Composition* by opera composers Maria Atallah and Laurence Jobidon and Atallah's librettist Alice Abracen. They discussed the collaborative process from the point of view of both composer and librettist. We were then treated to videos of Scene I of each of the two short operas these composers were workshopping that weekend!

DVD Corner

by Murray Kitts

Opera lovers know that Charles Gounod wrote two of the most popular operas in the 19th century, namely *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*. But what of the other 10 operas he wrote? Newly released is a production of a Gounod opera called *La Nonne Sanglante*, which is translated as *The Bloody Nun* or as in the DVD notes *The Bleeding Nun*.

This is a real attempt at bringing to the opera stage a horror story featuring the ghost of a murdered nun. The plot, derived from a book called *The Monk*, is quite unbelievable. The hero, Rodolphe, and the heroine, Agnes, who belong to warring clans, are planning to elope in order to preserve their love and avoid her forced marriage to Rodolphe's brother Theobald. Agnes plans to disguise herself as the ghost to help conceal the elopement. Alas, Rodolphe mistakes the real bloody ghost for his beloved, and under this misapprehension promises to always be faithful to the ghost, who is quite happy with this arrangement. The death of Theobald in battle removes one obstacle to a happy ending. But the ghost will not allow this to take place unless Rodolphe kills her murderer. And who is her murderer? Rodolphe's own father. The latter overhears a plot to ambush and kill his son so he takes his son's place when the final blow



comes. The newly-killed man is united in death with the Bleeding Nun and Rodolphe is free to marry Agnes. THE END.

No wonder Berlioz turned down this plot 10 years before Gounod decided to use it. Huge sums of money were spent on sets and costumes and on a month of rehearsals which took place for the premiere in 1854. Despite good reviews and popular acceptance, *La Nonne Sanglante* was removed from the repertoire after 11 performances, due mainly to change of management at the Opera. Only 16 years previously the first night of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* was first performed and went on to set a record of over 1,000 performances at the Paris Opera. This performance is from the Opera Comique in 2018. The producers feel that the quality and execution of the music make this production enjoyable. I would agree. There are many exciting choruses involving both battles and spectral appearances. Michael Spyres as the hero has an excellent tenor voice for his large number of solos and duets, and as Arthur, the page, Jodie Devos is an early model for Siebel in *Faust*. This opera would be perfect for a Halloween party. Suggested beverage – a “Bloody Mary” of course.

What's Opera, Doc?

uOttawa MUS3338 by Professor Dillon Parmer in Winter 2020 on Mondays (5:30-8:30 p.m.)

Recently, opera has come under harsh criticism for its racism, cultural appropriation, elitism, and misogyny. And yet the art form persists, captivating composers, performers, and listener-spectators. Much of this criticism stems from a one dimensional grasp of the genre, a grasp that defines opera by what happens in the words on the page, or by how the notes are laid out on the stave, or by how the action unfolds on the stage.

Through a study of selected excerpts from standard works representing different eras, national styles, performers and performing traditions, students will learn how the genre fuses its three systems—text, music, and stage action—into a composite genre irreducible to any one of three components.

Course work will consist of critical reflection from independent reading, listening, and viewing, as well as reflective practice, all of which will serve to inform in-class lecture, discussion, and viewing. Research projects will be individually tailored to accommodate student interests within the parameters defined by the course. It is recommended that students have some score-reading abilities, a general acquaintance with canonical works and composers, and (if possible) some performing/ playing experience. Students should have open minds, eyes, and ears, as well as an eagerness to engage challenging works and participate in active discussion.

Prerequisite: MUS2306/ 2706 or MUS1303/ 1703 or equivalent. Waiver of prerequisite is possible with permission of the professor (dparmer@rogers.com).

MET Opera HD LIVE 2019-20 Season

GIACOMO PUCCINI
TURANDOT

LIVE:
October 12, 2019
ENCORES:
November 2, 4, 6
and 10, 2019

JULES MASSENET
MANON

LIVE:
October 26, 2019
ENCORES:
December 14, 2019,
January 13, 15 and
19, 2020

GIACOMO PUCCINI
MADAMA BUTTERFLY

LIVE:
November 9, 2019
ENCORES:
January 25, 27, 29
and February 9,
2020

PHILIP GLASS
AKHNATEN

LIVE:
November 23, 2019
ENCORES:
February 15, 17, 19
and 23, 2020

ALBAN BERG
WOZZECK

LIVE:
January 11, 2020
ENCORES:
March 7, 9, 11
and 15, 2020

THE GERSHWINS
PORGY AND BESS

LIVE:
February 1, 2020
ENCORES:
March 28, 30,
April 1 and 5, 2020

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
AGRIPPINA

LIVE:
February 29, 2020
ENCORES:
April 18, 20, 22
and 26, 2020

RICHARD WAGNER
DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER

LIVE:
March 14, 2020
ENCORES:
May 30, June 1, 3
and 7, 2020

GIACOMO PUCCINI
TOSCA

LIVE:
April 11, 2020
ENCORES:
June 13, 15, 17
and 21, 2020

GAETANO DONIZETTI
MARIA STUARDA

LIVE:
May 9, 2020
ENCORES:
June 20, 22, 24
and 28, 2020

Presentations may not be available at all participating theatres for all advertised dates.

Cinema Aylmer 2020

Il Trovatore, Verdi (Arènes de Vérone): Friday January 24th, 2020 – 15h | Wednesday January 29th, 2020 – 19h. Anna Netrebko and Yusif Eyvazov will be the stars of the Franco Zeffirelli production.

Aïda, Verdi (LICEU): Friday February 21st, 2020 – 15h | Wednesday February 26th, 2020 – 19h

Fidelio, Beethoven (Royal Opera House): Friday April 17th, 2020 – 15h | Wednesday April 22nd, 2020 – 19h

As always check dates and times with the cinema at <http://www.cinemaaylmer.com>

Bytowne Cinema 2020

The Bytowne cinema showed the Royal Opera House ***Don Pasquale*** on December 7th. Opera showings for January and February should be available soon. Check the published Bytowne Guide or visit <https://www.bytowne.ca>

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

from the Metropolitan Opera on CBC Radio

2019-2020

December 7	<i>Akhnaten</i>	Glass
December 14	<i>The Queen of Spades</i>	Tchaikovsky
December 21	<i>Macbeth</i>	Verdi
December 28	<i>The Magic Flute</i>	Mozart
January 4	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	Strauss
January 11	<i>Wozzeck</i>	Berg
January 18	<i>La traviata</i>	Verdi
January 25	<i>La bohème</i>	Puccini
February 1	<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	Gershwin
February 8	<i>La Damnation de Faust</i>	Berlioz
February 15	<i>Manon</i>	Massenet
February 22	<i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i>	Mozart
February 29	<i>Agrippina</i>	Handel
March 7	<i>Così fan tutte</i>	Mozart
March 14	<i>Der Fliegende Holländer</i>	Wagner
March 21	<i>La Cenerentola</i>	Rossini
March 28	<i>Werther</i>	Massenet
April 4	<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	Gluck
April 11	<i>Tosca</i>	Puccini
April 18	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	Verdi
April 25	<i>Turandot</i>	Puccini
May 2	<i>Kát'a Kabanová</i>	Janáček
May 9	<i>Maria Stuarda</i>	Donizetti

All performances start at 1:00 PM except *Der Rosenkavalier* (12:00 PM),
La Cenerentola (12:30 PM) and *Simon Boccanegra* (12:30 PM)

For details concerning casts, conductors, synopses, photos and much more see the
 Met's website: metopera.org