

Société d' Opéra
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital
Opera Society

Winter 2021

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Hiver 2021

Songs for Murdered Sisters by Marjie Clegg

As we know, live performances of opera have stopped in most parts of the world due to the Covid pandemic. Opera careers have been put on hold and may take years to recover. It is, therefore, heartening to know that Joshua Hopkins, one of our Opera Scholarship winners, has found other ways to shine.

On Saturday, October 17th, Joshua was featured on CBC's "Saturday Afternoon at the Opera." In an interview with host Ben Heppner, Joshua talked about his recently-released Chandos recording of Massenet's *Thaïs* — which was broadcast in its entirety in the program. With Joshua in his debut as Athanaël and the late Erin Wall as *Thaïs*, this recording was stunningly beautiful.

Another major accomplishment for Joshua has been the creation of **Songs for Murdered Sisters**.

Most of us in Ottawa remember the tragic events in September 2015 when three women were murdered on the same morning, just west of the city. The three women were Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk, and Joshua Hopkins's sister Nathalie Warmerdam. In his grief, Joshua asked Margaret Atwood and composer Jake Heggie to create a song cycle to honour these women and bring awareness to

domestic violence and violence against women. Co-commissioned by the National Arts Centre Orchestra and Houston Grand Opera (Joshua's home base), the piano/vocal premiere is due to be released as a film on February 19, 2021 as part of the HGO Digital season. The film will be available for viewing for free for one month on HGO's website and through Marquee TV, a global streaming platform in partnership with HGO.

The poetry written by Margaret Atwood is included in her new book of poetry, **Dearly**. The official launch of that book was on November 10th — and a segment of the online event included a sneak preview of Joshua (with Jake Heggie on piano) performing "Dream," one of the songs. Atwood told of having Joshua sing in her backyard to a very small audience including her 4-year-old grandchild, who was enthralled — especially by an encore of *Figaro* ("how could he sing it so fast?!").

We look forward to seeing the full performance in the film to be released in February. The official audio recording, released digitally on the Pentatone label, will be available for purchase beginning March 5, 2021, just shy of International Women's Day.

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Sound and Fury—Shakespeare at the Opera by Lesley Robinson



Here are the notes from the recent NCOS Zoom presentation on Shakespeare and the opera:

The phrase “Sound and Fury” comes from a quote from the play that actors fear to name, the Scottish play... *Macbeth* and these words symbolize so much of why Shakespeare’s plays make such great plots for operas. Shakespeare’s tragedies are precisely the stuff of opera—love and death, or otherwise sex and violence. (We’ll talk about the comedies later.)

Wagner always sought to create the ultimate work of art, insisting on shaping the drama and writing the words all by himself. I have always thought that it was rather a pity that Wagner couldn’t write like Shakespeare or that Shakespeare hadn’t been a fabulous musician, because those circumstances to me would have seemed to have engendered the ultimate work of art. In fact, even if Shakespeare had indeed been a musician, his productive time coincides with the very earliest of what was emerging as what we know of as opera in Italy, so we have to be content with adaptations of the drama by later composers and librettists. Curiously, there *is* an example of a Wagner opera based on a Shakespeare play. Wagner’s early work *Das Liebesverbot* (1836) was based on *Measure for Measure*. The premiere, conducted by the composer, was poorly attended and was a resounding flop and was never again performed in Wagner’s lifetime.

There are at least 200 operas based on or inspired by Shakespeare’s plays and Shakespeare purists have often been disappointed by the results. When the famous actor and theatre manager, David Garrick, presented an operatic version of *The Tempest* in 1756, he was berated for having “castrated” the play. In an 1818 letter written by Lord Byron, Rossini’s librettist was accused of “crucifying” *Othello*. So it seems you can’t have it all and Shakespeare’s poetry had to be sacrificed somewhat to the music and the need to translate it.

Verdi loved Shakespeare and the plays provided inspiration for three of his operas, *Macbeth*, *Otello* and

Falstaff. Sadly he never wrote the opera of his favourite play, *King Lear*. Although Verdi was unable to read Shakespeare’s English, he nevertheless was determined that his operas would do justice to the bard. For *Macbeth*, which premiered in 1847, he was very involved in creating the libretto. He presented his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave with a prose version of what he wanted Piave to create in verse. He was very unsatisfied with the result and made many corrections and enlisted the help of his friend Andrea Maffei who was a scholar and expert translator to whip the libretto into shape. Although the play needed to be cut down in order to work as an opera, the result was true to Shakespeare’s play. The extract I chose to share is Lady Macbeth’s famous sleepwalking scene—Act V, Scene 1 in the play, Act IV, Scene 4 in the opera; either way it’s the final act. It is notable how closely the language echoes Shakespeare’s:

Play: **LADY MACBETH**

Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.

Opera: **LADY MACBETH**

*There's still a spot here.
Away, I tell you, curse you!
One, two, it is time!
Are you shaking? Don't you dare go in?
A soldier and so cowardly?
Shame! Come on, hurry!
Who would have thought that there would be so much blood in that old man?*

The scene ends with the following lines, in both the play and the opera:

LADY MACBETH

*To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate:
come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone.--To bed, to bed, to bed!*

This is the last we see of Lady Macbeth. It is as if she fades away, tormented by guilt and the horror of what she has encouraged her husband to do. We later learn simply that she has died. It is when Macbeth learns of her death

Sound and Fury—Shakespeare at the Opera (continued)

that he utters the speech including the words “sound and fury”. He’s reflecting on life and he says:

It is a tale

*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

The Italian is a little less poetic: “Vento e suono che nulla dinota!” which translates as “Wind and sound, signifying nothing.” At this point Macbeth is numb to all emotion.

The chosen extract is from the French film directed by Claude d’Anna which was screened out of competition at the 1987 Cannes film Festival, starring Leo Nucci as Macbeth and Shirley Verrett as Lady Macbeth, whose performance is outstanding, both vocally and dramatically. The orchestra and choir of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna are conducted by Riccardo Chailly.

Incidentally, there is a wonderful series of podcasts put together by WNYC and the Metropolitan Opera called “Aria Code”. There is one on this aria featuring Dame Judi Dench and Anna Netrebko, talking about the character and the music. You can find it on WNYC’s website. Go to: www.wnycstudios.org and search for Aria code podcasts.

As we have seen, Verdi wanted to be as true as possible to Shakespeare and later, librettist Arrigo Boito, translated both *Othello* and *Falstaff* into Italian. It was these translations that formed the basis of Boito’s collaboration with Verdi on the latter’s last two operas. I always think that the most interesting character in *Othello* is actually Iago. He is a complex villain, not just a cardboard cutout like Scarpia (in *Tosca*) and we get to understand some of his motivation. Othello’s tragic character flaw is his jealousy which Iago uses to bring him down. Iago is himself jealous, but his jealousy is not an amorous one. As Othello’s trusted advisor, he is jealous and furious that he has been passed over for promotion in favour of Cassio. Iago wants revenge and plots it unscrupulously. If you want to understand Iago, I thoroughly recommend the 1995 Kenneth Branagh film. (I find Branagh to be the best interpreter of Shakespeare that I have ever seen and would recommend any of his Shakespeare films.) At this point I would like to mention that *Otello* was in fact the favourite Verdi opera of the late great opera fan and would be diva, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The extract shared is an example of the operatic version of Iago, sung by our own Gerald Finley at the COC. You can find Iago’s credo on YouTube.

It would be remiss not to mention the totally different Rossini version of *Otello*. This version involves a

whole array of tenors, at least four and Rodrigo, Iago and Othello are all in love with Desdemona. So the plot hinges on unrequited love, jealousy, revenge and a letter from Desdemona to Othello with a lock of her hair (instead of the handkerchief), which falls into the hands of Iago. Iago manages to persuade Othello that it is meant for Rodrigo. So this version is less close to Shakespeare’s, but considering the fact that it’s a bel canto tenor fest, the music is fabulous and I think it’s worth a listen. The extract I chose is a duet between Iago, Edgardo Rocha and Rodrigo, Javier Camarena. Iago has shown Rodrigo the letter and pretends to befriend him, so that they can get their revenge together. (Edgardo Rocha is a now 37 year-old Uruguayan tenor. I didn’t know him before seeing this, but he’s pretty good. He has won a number of prestigious competitions and has been very busy in the last few years, mainly in Europe.) The excerpt is from the DVD of the 2012 Zurich production. The aria is “No, non temer”.

Let’s move on to another classic tragedy—*Romeo and Juliet*. There are at least seven operas based on this beloved play, with varying degrees of fidelity to Shakespeare’s version. To give you an idea of how little Frederick Delius’s *A Village Romeo and Juliet* (1907) has with Shakespeare’s play, roles listed include Gingerbread woman, Cheap jewellery woman and Poor horn player. The young lovers aren’t even called Romeo and Juliet. In fact the only thing they have in common with Shakespeare’s protagonists is that they die together at the end. Versions by Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli (1796) and Nicola Vaccai (1827) were actually based on the 1530 novella by Luigi da Porto which is not listed as a particular source for Shakespeare’s play, so obviously they have their differences. The best known versions are Bellini’s *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (1830, also not actually based on Shakespeare) and Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* (1867). I particularly love the latter because Romeo is a tenor part, so of course the extract I chose features Juan Diego Florez singing “Ah lève toi, soleil”. This is from the famous balcony scene (although that’s not evident here from the set). Romeo is comparing Juliet to the sun that eclipses the light of the moon. Shakespeare’s word are:

*But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she.*

Sound and Fury—Shakespeare at the Opera (continued)

This is from the 2017 production at the Wiener Staatsoper with Aida Garifulina as Juliette and conducted by Plácido Domingo. It is available on You Tube.

Adaptations have continued to appear even into this century and although not specifically operatic, Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* deserves a mention and there is a fantastic French musical (if you like that sort of thing) with words and music by Gérard Presgurvic which premiered to great acclaim in Paris in 2001. I think the music is fabulous, but I didn't include it here in case you think I've gone completely crazy, but you may want to seek it out on You Tube.

Another great tragedy, *Hamlet*, with its final scene littered with bodies, hasn't fared all that well in operatic adaptations. According to an article in *The Guardian*, there have been 40 operas based on *Hamlet* written since 1812, most of them totally unknown. Franco Faccio's version, with a libretto by Arrigo Boito, appeared in 1865. It was well received, but lay dormant for years until a revival was set for performance at La Scala in 1871. The illness of Mario Tiberini in the title role led to postponements of dress rehearsals, and when it was finally premiered, Tiberini was just not up to snuff. The whole thing was a disaster and Faccio refused to have it performed again. It was another 143 years before Opera Southwest revived the opera for the Shakespeare 450 celebrations, in a production in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which received a nomination in the Rediscovered Work category from the International Opera Awards. I did find an extract from the first ever recording of the opera from the 2016 production at the Bregenz festival in Austria which received great acclaim, so we may well be seeing more of this work in the future. Czech tenor Pavel Černoch (cast in the role of the Prince in *Rusalka* at the COC in October 2019) is in the title role. There is a DVD of this production. A trailer is available on You Tube.

The 1868 version of *Hamlet* by French composer Ambroise Thomas was met with derision from English critics for its bastardization of the story and of course, according to the Brits, no one messes with Shakespeare, least of all the French.

More recently, a new version by Australian composer Brett Dean was commissioned by and premiered at Glyndebourne in 2017 to reasonable reviews, with British tenor Allan Clayton as Hamlet and Canadian soprano Barbara Hannigan as Ophelia. The scene I chose was "Get thee to a nunnery". Shakespeare's text includes the following words from Ophelia:

*Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.*

Although Verdi never managed to get *King Lear* onto the operatic stage, others have, more recently, done so. German composer Aribert Reimann's *Lear* premiered in 1978. The excerpt shared was from the final scene of the 1978 Bavarian State Opera production with baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as Lear. It can be found on You Tube.

In 2000, The Finnish National Opera commissioned *Kuningas Lear* by Aulis Sallinen. It was first performed in Helsinki with a Finnish cast including bass Matti Salminen as Lear and mezzo-soprano Lilli Paasikivi as Cordelia. A DVD was issued in 2002, but You Tube has no excerpts.

And now for something completely different. Let's get a little bit lighter by moving on to the comedies. Falstaff, based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was Verdi's final opera. I think it's a curious choice for a couple of reasons. For one thing *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was by no means one of Shakespeare's greatest comedies and Falstaff himself is a somewhat dubious character. He appeared earlier in both *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*. Although the plays are Histories, he is a totally fictional character; there may have been a real person with a similar name. In the histories he is a jovial rogue who leads the young Prince Hal (later Henry V) astray. However he has a sinister side – he proves to be shallow, boastful and cowardly.

I was surprised to find that there is an opera by Gustav Holst entitled *At the Boar's Head* which is the inn featured in the *Henry IV* plays, where Falstaff leads Prince Hal in carousing and shirking his responsibilities. Back to Verdi's Falstaff: many people consider it his masterpiece. What do you think?

The extract shared was from the 1999 Royal Opera House Covent Garden production, starring Bryn Terfel in the title role. The production is wacky and colourful and Terfel's Falstaff is gloriously loathsome! The excerpt is from the first scene of Act I: Falstaff, always short of money to feed his ever expanding belly, is hatching his new plan to persuade a couple of rich ladies to fall in love with him.

In 1862 Hector Berlioz wrote *Béatrice et Bénédict*, based on *Much Ado About Nothing*. Many of

Sound and Fury—Shakespeare at the Opera (continued)

Shakespeare's comedies are the precursors of the modern day rom com, in which the would be lovers start out hating each other, but after a series of mishaps and much confusion, end up falling for each other after all. *Much Ado About Nothing* is a prime example. Beatrice and Benedick get tricked into declaring their love and Hero and Claudio's relationship almost comes to a sticky end, but all comes right by the final curtain and the ending is decidedly happy. Berlioz's version leaves out all the intrigue which almost puts an end to Claudio and Hero's wedding and focuses, as the title suggests, on the relationship between the two initially reluctant lovers. There is a lovely 2016 Laurent Pelly production from Glyndebourne with a great cast including our own BLOC winner Philippe Sly as Claudio, so I selected an extract in which he features. In this scene, Claudio and Don Pedro (Frédéric Caton) are trying to persuade their friend Benedict (Paul Appleby) to consider the benefits of marriage.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were multiple adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*, another classic rom com plot. The best known is not an opera—it's Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate*. Glimmerglass did a great production of it in its 2008, which was their Shakespeare themed season. I love "Brush Up Your Shakespeare" for its witty lyrics, my favourite lines being:

*If she says your behavior is heinous
Kick her right in the Coriolanus*

But I digress. One of my favourite Shakespeare comedies is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and one of the earliest Shakespeare adaptations is Henry Purcell's *The Fairy-Queen* which dates from 1692. (This is one of the first pieces we took our children to see.) It's not a standard opera, in that Purcell did not set Shakespeare's words to music, but composed music around the story, so it consists of scenes from the play, interspersed with musical interludes. I decided to end on a delightful bit of slap and tickle from the third Act of the enchanting and sometimes naughty 2009 Glyndebourne production conducted by William Christie. It is the "Dialogue Between Coridon and Mopsa" with Andrew Foster-Williams as Coridon and the lovely Robert Burt as Mopsa.

As Shakespeare said:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances...*

So this will be my exit. Thank you all for listening.

President's Message November 2020

It seems like yesterday when I wrote my September message. We are now rapidly approaching the holiday season and it seems like it will be unlike any other. The good news is that the vaccination is on the way and hopefully this time next year, we may be looking forward to a more normal holiday season.

I encourage everyone to reach out to each other through the telephone, FaceTime, Zoom or snail mail. We all need to connect. If anyone needs any help with virtual connections I would be glad to help.

The next Brian Law Opera Competition would normally be held in October 2021. We would have started the planning by now. Given the uncertainty I have proposed to the Board to delay the next competition until October 2022. I would appreciate your feedback.

In the short-term we continue to publish our quarterly newsletter and I extend a big thank you to all the

contributors and to our editor, David Williams. Our website continues to be up and running thanks to our webmaster, Jim Burgess. And lastly, we continue to hold our monthly Zoom presentations. I hope you enjoyed the last two on comical moments from Opera. Thank you, Murray.

In November, I enjoyed a live stream from Los Angeles opera, "The Anonymous Lover" which is an opera written at the time of Mozart by the son of a slave from the Caribbean island Guadeloupe.

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, was educated in Paris where it is believed he did meet Mozart and Haydn. More information on this fascinating story can be found on the LA Opera website, www.laopera.org.

Stay safe, and I hope to see you on a Zoom soon.

Mark Robinson

An Interview with Mark Wilkinson, 2019 BLOC Prizewinner

2019 BLOC prizewinner, baritone Mark Wilkinson recently completed his doctorate and returned home to Ottawa. We are fortunate to have this talented, multi-faceted and big-hearted young man among us. Welcome home, Mark. He took the time to answer some interview questions for our newsletter.

NCOS: Congratulations on completing your doctorate. Please tell us a little about your studies.

MW: Thank you! How time flies.

My doctorate was a collaborative endeavour at The Ohio State University between the School of Music, the Department of Speech and Hearing Science, and the Department of Otolaryngology in the College of Medicine. I specialize in the care and maintenance of the human voice, a field called vocology. It bridges singing and speech science as a form of habilitation for the human voice, so that vocologists may preempt the need for rehabilitation later on. We look at the voice from sung, spoken, and medical perspectives so as to strengthen the understanding that professional voice users have of how better to use their voices. This all means that I spent hundreds of hours in voice studios, clinics, and operating rooms at Ohio State, receiving guidance from singing teachers, speech pathologists, voice scientists, and ear-nose-throat surgeons.

NCOS: When did you start singing and who have been your greatest mentors and inspiration?

MW: I've been singing for as long as I can remember, and I believe I joined my first choir when I was six or seven years old. My first instrument was the piano and singing followed soon after.

My greatest mentors and inspirations are my colleagues. Nothing encourages me more than watching and listening to my colleagues make music. I don't have a jealous bone in my body. I learn so much from my fellow



artists in a way that I find both beautifully intimidating and wonderfully motivating. I remember seeing my fellow baritone and friend, Max van Wyck, sing a concert and I could only think, "Wow, I'd like to do that when I grow up!" I may be a uniquely qualified voice scientist and teacher with a voice of my own, but there is nothing better than hearing your talented colleagues put on a masterclass of their own in how to sing. I owe them so much because I "steal" from them constantly.

NCOS: How and when did you first become interested in opera?

MW: I sang in the children's chorus of a production of Bizet's *Carmen* as a youngster, but I was too interested in sports for most of my childhood to "get it" when it came to opera. Late in high school, when I realized I had a voice, my parents bought me a two-disc recording of opera's greatest hits and it piqued my interest. Before I knew it, I was in music school at university and had this operatic voice. This may sound disingenuous, but there is no one more surprised at my ending up in opera than me. It was unexpected and, in spite of my elephant-like memory, I still don't fully know how I came to be an opera singer. I was an actor and a dancer who learned that he could sing. I always thought theatre/film would be my path.

Truthfully, this does bring up a larger point about which I feel strongly. The word 'opera' can be quite a loaded one. There is this idea that opera is its own style of singing, worlds away from song, oratorio, chamber music, etc. From a vocal health standpoint, this causes many young singers to create an artificial "opera voice" that involves a lot of pressure on the larynx and an unmanageably wide vibrato from too young of an age. While opera may be its own genre, the composers we associate with it were the same ones writing concert and recital music. There does not need to be this massive gap between Bizet's *Carmen* and his art songs, for example.

An Interview with Mark Wilkinson, 2019 BLOC Prizewinner (continued)

Healthy, free, beautiful singing is always the right choice. Sure, Handel's operas and Wagner's operas ask a different application of the voice, but that is not true of Handel's operas and Handel's concert repertoire. I encourage young singers to think more about the style of the composer within the canon than about their preconceived, blanket-voiced notion of opera.

On that note, the recording that truly got me into classical music was not of an opera. Back when the CBC Radio Orchestra was still a thing, they made a beautiful recording of Imant Raminsh's choral music, both a cappella and with orchestra. This included his *Magnificat* for choir, orchestra, and mezzo-soprano solo. Hearing that piece of music changed everything for me. The synthesis of the ensembles with the solo voice was magnificent, pardon the pun. Sure, Sandra Graham's voice was "operatic" as far as I could tell, but I later learned that she was simply singing as beautifully as it comes and that she has sung all kinds of repertoire outside of opera. I was starting to fall in love with the human voice, in any form (Diana Krall and Joni Mitchell are at the top of the list, for example). The bonus: I ended up, only a few years later, studying with Ms. Graham herself. It was all very fitting.

NCOS: We are happy to have you back in Ottawa. What are your short-term and long-term plans? How have they been affected by COVID?

MW: Thank you for the welcome home. It's wonderful to be back.

COVID-19 has thrown a wrench in the plans for so many of us. I was going to replace my mentor, Dr. Scott McCoy, at Ohio State right after finishing my doctorate, but the university's pandemic budget did not allow for his position to be filled after his retirement. It was truly my dream job: I would have taught undergraduate- and graduate-level singing, run a voice laboratory, and coordinated the same interdisciplinary program with Speech and Medicine in which I participated.

And so, the plan is to continue cultivating that kind of work in Ottawa and abroad. I have begun giving singing masterclasses at universities and providing voice health clinics with choirs, all remotely, thanks to

everyone's willingness to make life work online. I will continue singing virtually as those opportunities present themselves and I have begun to apply for tenure-track positions at universities for the 2021/22 academic year. The long-term plan is, therefore, to devote myself to teaching and mentoring young singers and actors at the university level. In the short term, however, I will require an "everyday job" for a few months to supplement the virtual teaching and masterclasses, which are not as abundant as they once were. I hope to contribute positively to ensuring that Ottawa's approach to singing is healthy and up-to-date in its thinking. I have a boatload of tools to share with anyone who uses their voice regularly in Ottawa, so I look forward to bringing my pedagogical and scientific knowledge to anyone for whom it will be of benefit.

No matter what the next few months bring, I have the support of an incredibly generous family and group of friends. We all need to take even greater care of each other than we ever have, and my loved ones are proof of how to do it. I have my health, my voice, and my community. I am a lucky guy.

NCOS: We'd love to hear about your interests and activities beyond opera.

MW: There is so much to explore in life. I am always curious about life and constantly seeking a new adventure or new thing to learn. You will often find me outside, getting lost on a hike, discovering a new trail, or checking out a new neighbourhood. If you give me a canoe, a campfire, and a cabin in the woods under the stars and trees, you will never find me happier. I grew up playing many sports, so I stay very active, particularly with tennis and fitness. I work out regularly and enjoy running and walking. I am also a certified yoga teacher and had the pleasure of teaching yoga full time in Ottawa for about two years before my doctorate. Bringing the peaceful strength of yoga and meditation to people's lives has been such a joy. I constantly incorporate yoga philosophies into my singing and believe in the power of a yoga teacher's voice to ring through a room and connect with every yogi in it.

An Interview with Mark Wilkinson, 2019 BLOC Prizewinner (continued)

Additionally, I love volunteering whenever I can. I give my time to Choral Canada and the National Youth Choir of Canada as a member of the organizing committee and web designer, English-French translator, fundraiser, alumni wrangler, and other ventures. I have enjoyed supporting CHEO and the Kate Wagner Teen Suicide Intervention Fund in Ottawa and Kingston, respectively, and I was a suicide prevention trainer throughout Ohio State's campus. Mental health is a passion of mine and much of my career as an educator is reminding young people that they are not simply "singers" and "actors" - they are human beings, first and foremost. The performing arts are a beautiful thing, but if we don't take care of the people doing the performing, we will lose ourselves along the way.

Finally, speaking of mental health, the last thing I will share is my anti-bullying work. I survived over a decade of torturous bullying in school and have made a

mission to turn that survival into a positive experience, not only for children, but for adults, too. Bullying does not end when high school does. We bring so many patterns we learned as youngsters with us into adulthood. It's been my pleasure to work with corporate groups in the promotion of mental health and self-realization, as much as it has to go into schools and talk to children/teenagers about bullying. This is also work I will continue to do from afar during COVID-19 and in person whenever we discover our new normal after it.

Dear readers: please stay safe, healthy, and mindful of those around you. Allow the bad days to happen and celebrate the good ones that follow. We will get through this. Be well.

NCOS: Thank you, Mark. We wish you all the best in all of your endeavours.

A Message from Yannick-Muriel Noah



Photo by Thilo Beu

Dear Mr. Robinson,
I hope you and everyone at the National Capital Opera Society are doing well, despite the strange times we are living through.

On my side, all is well. I have been resident soprano in Bonn, Germany since 2013, and have been raising my family here ever since. My children are now 16, 12

and 8 years old and fluent in English, French and German. The re-location led to even more opportunities. It's been such a blessing to be considered a city employee in the German system, and to have the accompanying support network these last few months.

On November 17th, I had the pleasure of performing a concert for Deutschland Radio, replacing another soprano at the last minute. The whole recital will be available online for the next few weeks. I thought your colleagues and yourself might enjoy a bit of music and distraction.

My sincere thanks again to all of you at the Brian Law Competition for your help and encouragement at the beginning of my career.

Be well! Stay safe!

Muriel
www.yannickmurielnoah.com

(Editor's note: Here's the link - <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de> and search for Yannick-Muriel Noah.)

Update on Opera Plans, Virtual and Tentative by Lesley Robinson

Opera companies all over the world leapt into action to provide everything they could for their loyal patrons, during COVID shutdowns—free live streams, at home galas and Zoom events. As the 2019/20 season and summer festivals have come and gone with the lights out in opera houses, it is now time to make plans for future seasons and to rethink what is possible right now.

Close to home, Opera Atelier in Toronto has reimagined its 2020/21 season. As usual, two productions are planned for the season—*Something Rich and Strange* (featuring music by Handel, Lully, Locke, Purcell and a new piece by Edwin Huizinga) on 12 December 2020 and Handel's *The Resurrection* on 1 April 2021. Both productions have been designed specifically to be live-streamed and livestream tickets include an invitation to Zoom chats with OA's creative team in advance of the performance dates. Every aspect of the productions takes into account the space used, the requirements of social distancing and video streaming.

Against the Grain Theatre, also in Toronto, has been innovative since its inception, so a little pandemic is no obstacle for AtG. The company is quite used to staging events in unusual locations, no matter that they now have to be virtual. This holiday season, beginning on December 13th, AtG is presenting *Messiah/Complex*, a bold, ambitious, Canada-wide version of Handel's *Messiah* in six languages with twelve soloists, four choirs and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. This socially-distanced production has been made possible using an array of high- and low-tech approaches and comes together through the accomplished skill of audio and video editors. Appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols have been assiduously applied at every stage of performance and production. In addition, AtG presents its latest creative and zany operatic production, *A Little Too Cozy*, which is a highly current adaptation of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. It is presented as a reality TV dating show, in which couples get together and get married without ever having met, all for a big cash prize and a dream honeymoon. Of course this is all available to watch online.

The Canadian Opera Company (Toronto) is not offering its usual subscription packages for its 2020/21 season. Instead subscribers are invited to enjoy reimagined programming for the season. You can visit the company's Opera Everywhere page <https://www.coc.ca/Hub> where you can sign up for the COC's eOpera newsletter which will let you know about the current Free Concert Series and will give you information on new COVID-compliant programmes and events as they become available.

So far this season, the Opéra de Montréal has streamed a Gala Talent 2020 concert as a benefit event for both the Opéra de Montréal and the Atelier lyrique young artists' programme. The company has announced its plan to be back on stage in the 2020/21 season. The large scale productions of *La Traviata* and *Jenůfa* have been postponed until a later date, but the world premiere of the *La beauté du monde* by Julien Bilodeau and Michel Marc Bouchard, *The Marriage of Figaro*, featuring an all-Canadian cast and *Riders to the Sea*, with the premiere of a new work by Hubert Tanguay-Labrosse and Olivier Kemeid in collaboration with Ballet Opéra Pantomime (BOP) and I Musici de Montréal are all planned for live performances in the spring of 2021.

If you visit the Glimmerglass Festival's home page (www.glimmerglass.org), you will see their latest online series, "Keeping Time with Colaneri" consisting of six episodes which provide an introduction to opera for newcomers to the art form or a review for more seasoned operagoers, presented by the Festival's Music Director, Joseph Colaneri. No plans have yet been announced for future festivals.

The Metropolitan Opera has continued with its nightly free opera streams of its vast array of HD broadcasts. (You don't have to watch at a particular time.) The 2020/21 season has been cancelled, but Met stars from around the world have been giving concerts from some very special locations. The next will be taking place live at 1pm ET on December 12th. Bryn Terfel will be joined at Brecon Cathedral in Wales by some special musical guests for a memorable holiday programme. The fee is \$20 US to link to the online broadcast. On the calendar for December 31st at 4pm is a Met Stars New Year's Eve Gala Concert (also \$20) featuring sopranos Angel Blue and Pretty Yende and tenors Javier Camarena and Matthew Polenzani singing live from the Parktheater im Kurhaus Göggingen, in Augsburg, Germany. More details and how to sign up are to be found on the Met's website (www.metopera.org). Despite the current season's cancellation, the Met has announced its plans for the 2021/22 season which includes new productions of Verdi's *Don Carlos*, *Eurydice* by Matthew Aucoin, Terry Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, Brett Dean's *Hamlet*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Verdi's *Rigoletto*, along with a host of returning favourites.

In Europe, opera houses are complying with ever-changing COVID regulations. Free streaming continues and live streams of new productions are planned while it is still not possible to seat audiences. Depending on local regulations, some have planned to re-open soon, live in the houses.

From Cradle to Grave by Marian Cumming

One of our most memorable opera trips was a one-week tour with Act 1 Tours in October 2013, celebrating the bicentennial of the birth of Giuseppe Verdi. It was aptly billed an "Italian Verdi Fest". And that it was!

First up was the rarely performed *I Masnadieri* at the historic Teatro Regio in Parma. Whereas Parma is famous for its cheese and ham, the Regio is best known not only for its superb chorus but for its discriminating audience which is very liberal in showing its approval (or not) with applause and boos.

A short drive from Parma is Le Roncole (now known as Roncole Verdi). There we visited Verdi's birthplace (pictured), the church in which he was baptized, along with a number of museums and monuments dedicated to his life and career. Also on the programme was a concert featuring many of his arias and duets in Casa Berezza in the nearby town of Busseto, the house in which he gave his first public performance.

In Milan we stayed at the Grand Hotel et de Milan where Verdi spent the last 30 years of his life. His suite is preserved with its original furnishings and is open to the public. We visited the Casa di Riposo per Musicisti, a home for retired opera singers and musicians which he had built and which has since been maintained thanks to royalties from his operas. On the grounds is a mausoleum containing his tomb (pictured). What would a visit to Milan be without attending an opera or two at La Scala, a short stroll from the hotel. And as if on cue Zeffirelli's sumptuous production of *Aida* was on the schedule as well as the Maestro's masterpiece, *Don Carlo*.

Giuseppe Verdi composed 27 operas and a Requiem. He was born on October 9 (or 10), 1813 and died on January 27, 1901.



A comprehensive review of this tour was published in the Winter 2014 Newsletter.

Update on Opera Plans, Virtual and Tentative (continued)

Visit individual opera company sites to see what is available:

Zurich - <https://www.opernhaus.ch/en/>

Vienna - <https://www.wiener-staatsoper.at/en/>

Royal Opera House Covent Garden -

<https://www.roh.org.uk/>

Paris Opera - <https://www.operadeparis.fr/en>

Teatro alla Scala, Milan -

<https://www.teatroallascala.org/en/index.html>

Liceu Opera Barcelona -

<https://www.liceubarcelona.cat/en>

Closer to home, don't forget to look out for NCOS Zoom events. We have been presenting video-illustrated talks on a variety of topics along with opportunities to chat with NCOS members. If you have ideas for presentations, or would like to offer one yourself, please contact President, Mark Robinson at smark.robinson@yahoo.ca.