

NATIONAL CAPITAL OPERA SOCIETY  
 Newsletter

March 1995

SOCIÉTÉ D'OPÉRA DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE  
 Bulletin

mars 1995

P.O. Box 8347, Main Terminal, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H8  
 C.P. 8347, Succursale principale, Ottawa (Ontario) K1G 3H8

**Summary of forthcoming local events**

<b>Kiev Evening</b>	NCOS's spring gala: dinner, auction, music	26 Apr	1830	Ukrainian Orthodox Hall, 1000 Byron Ave	p 3
<b>An opera not yet written or composed</b>	New opera created and performed by Opera Lyra Ottawa Children's Workshop; reception	18 Mar	1400	Arts Court Theatre, 2 Daly Ave	p 11
<b>Opera workshop</b>	University of Ottawa's annual opera workshop	28 Mar	2000	Tabaret Hall, University of Ottawa	—
<b><i>The Mikado</i>, by Gilbert and Sullivan</b>	Performance by the Savoy Society	31 Mar to 2 Apr and 5 to 8 Apr	2000 (1400 on 2 Apr)	CentrepoinTE Theatre	—
<b><i>La traviata</i>, by Verdi</b>	Performance by Atelier Lyrique de Montréal	4 Apr	2000	National Library	p 4
<b><i>La bohème</i>, by Puccini</b>	Production by Opera Lyra Ottawa	13, 15, 17, and 19 Apr	2000	National Arts Centre, in the Opera	p 11
<b>The Mozart Fantasy Auction</b>	Opera Lyra Ottawa's fund- raising dinner and auction	13 May	1800 for 1930	Ballroom of the Westin Hotel	p 11
<b>Something's gonna happen</b>	Concert by Opera Lyra Ottawa's Boys' Choir	28 May	1330 and 1630	De la Salle High School, Old St Patrick	p 11

## The Brian Law Opera Scholarship competition

The second competition for the Brian Law Opera Scholarship took place on Saturday, 21 January 1995, in the First Unitarian Church at 30 Cleary Avenue in Ottawa. As most members will, or should, know, the finalists were:

Marianna Bell  
Kimberley Briggs  
Julie Ann Nesrallah  
Marlene Piitz  
Mary Ann Swerdfeger  
Maria Knapik-Sztramko

Marian Pickering, Brian Law's representative in Canada, read out a message from him—and you could hear his voice:

From the warm, balmy, South Pacific shores of sunny, warm New Zealand—Antipodean Greetings.

I'm sorry I can't be with you in Ottawa tonight (did I mention it is warm here?) but my thoughts are very much with you all, particularly the competitors.

My thanks and congratulations go to the NCOS for creating this splendid scholarship. I'm very aware of the honour you have bestowed on me by establishing it in my name.

Standing up in public and performing is what singing is all about. For all the contestants the opportunity of participating in this competition is a very valuable (albeit nerve-racking) experience. I'm sure you will all have benefited from your participation. To the winner my heartfelt congratulations. I will follow your musical development with interest from the other (warm) side of the world.

My best wishes to you all.

Brian Law  
The inverted loon  
[accompanied by sketch]

The jurors for the final competition were Diane Loeb, mezzo-soprano, from Toronto, and two conductors from Montreal, Louis Lavigueur and Iwan Edwards. The singers went up in the



The winner, Mary Ann Swerdfeger.  
(Photograph by Eugene Besruky.)

order shown and each sang three arias, to the great pleasure of the audience to judge by the applause and the smiles on people's faces. After a half-hour during which a cash bar was open and free vegetables and dips steadily diminished in quantity, the audience reconvened to hear the chairman of the jury, Iwan Edwards, state that the criteria they used in assessing promise of a successful career in opera—not only voice and musicianship but also stage presence and acting ability—were all given equal weighting. He

then announced the winner—Mary Ann Swerdfeger.

Diane Loeb generously offered a master class for each finalist on the morning following the recital. Four of them were able to take advantage of this. She wrote to our President afterwards and included the following words:

I would like to thank you and the NCOS Board for inviting me to participate in the competition. It was a wonderful experience for me putting all those years of my career to some use, hearing the talent that is present in the Ottawa area, and seeing some familiar faces again. You are all to be congratulated for providing a forum for these singers to be heard, and the resources for the best of them to continue their studies.

As it happened, the weekend was even more of a milestone for Mary Ann Swerdfeger, when it became known that she had been chosen as one of two singers at the funeral of Rose Kennedy, who had once been a piano student at the Boston Conservatory where Mary Ann is now studying.

It had been Mrs Kennedy's wish that students from her alma mater sing at her funeral.

Thanks to really splendid and thorough publicity work by Chris Sayre, the hall was full. While a considerable queue outside the door with five minutes to go created a little nervousness, it was just the kind of worry the Society would like to see more of. We can handle it.

After the announcement there was a celebration dinner in the next room for those who had the famous red tickets. It was catered by our friend and enthusiastic supporter Dave Smith and brought a successful evening to a pleasant end.

### **Our photographer**

We were successful in getting a photographer for the occasion, Eugene Besruky, and we are grateful to him for enabling us to put better pictures in the Newsletter than we are accustomed to. In selecting photographs for this issue we have had to omit many good ones, but in several cases the owners of the featured faces have received fine coloured prints as mementoes.

---

## **Kiev Evening—this spring's Society fund-raiser**

This year's fund-raising spring gala will be a Ukrainian evening, properly called in this case 'Kiev Evening,' after a popular song. It will be on Wednesday 26 April, and will be an evening of Ukrainian culture, the high point of which will be the singing of the well-known couple Alexander Savtchenko and Laura Dzubaniuk. They will sing a program of Ukrainian opera arias and duets, art songs, and folk songs, with piano accompaniment. Before we get to this point in the evening, we start off at 6:30 with a cocktail hour in which everyone can patrol the silent auction and make rational, composed bids on the goodies that will be there. This is followed by a dinner of Ukrainian flavour, catered as usual by Dave Smith, who then changes his hat for that of an auctioneer at the noisy auction, for want of a standard phrase, that follows the feast. There will be further shows and demonstrations of Ukrainian culture, but details are not firm enough to print yet.

The master of ceremonies will be our old friend from CBC, Rob Clipperton.

The price of a ticket to all this fun is \$55, and that figure is the price you actually pay. When buying your tickets, you will of course put out of your minds any risk of spending more at the auction—until you see the bargains and remember that the party is intended to raise funds for the Society.

Whether you get your tickets from Pflug Optical in Merivale Road or from the President, Bobbi Cain (225 0124) you should tell Bobbi how many will be in your group and what name to put on the table to define it. As we have done before, we will arrange grouping of singles and couples for those who would like this. Since numbers have to be known for certain a day or two in advance, the deadline for ordering tickets will be 23 April.

As everyone knows, it is a lot of work obtaining the donated articles for a charity auction. If

every member could help by contributing or obtaining just one article it would make a large difference to our success and relieve the few who put the major effort into finding things. One way that often proves successful is to ask for a contribution from a shop or business where you are a good and frequent customer, and everyone has at least a couple of such places. So please, everyone help a little.

In order to avoid the embarrassment of more than one member approaching the same establishment, would you please call Bobbi Cain with the name of anywhere you plan to canvas? In this way we can function not only successfully but professionally too.

### Summary

Date: Wednesday 26 April

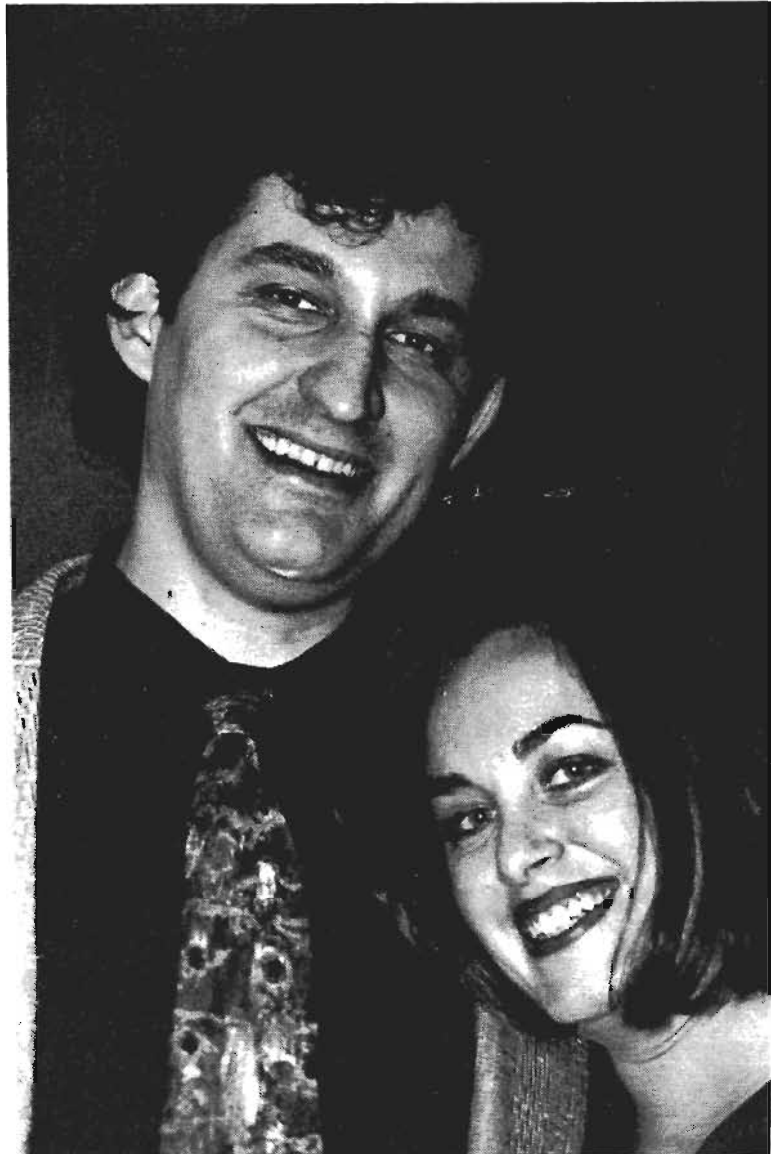
Time: 6:30 pm

Place: The Ukrainian Orthodox Hall,  
1000 Byron Avenue

Price: \$55 per person, inclusive of taxes

Tickets: From Bobbi Cain (225-0124) or from Pflug Optical, Merivale Road

Deadline: 23 April



Alexander Savtchenko and Laura Dzubaniuk, seen recently at the Brian Law Opera Scholarship finals . Ms Dzubaniuk was the winner of the first Brian Law Scholarship. (Photograph by Eugene Besruky.)

---

### *La traviata*

There will be a performance of *La traviata* by the Atelier Lyrique de Montréal in the National Library on Wellington St at 8 pm on Tuesday 4 April. Admission is free. This could be the good deal of the week.

### Thank you, Opera Lyra

In our last issue we asked for the donation of a fax machine, and it with great pleasure that we thank Opera Lyra Ottawa for giving us one. It's going to be at the President's home, and as soon as it is installed and we know its number, we will let you know.

***Membership reminder—this time we say nothing more!***

## Splendid introduction

*Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Opera*, by Fred Plotkin. New York: Hyperion. 494 pp. \$18.95.

A year or two ago a reader suggested that we write about opera books that would interest our members. While we did not forget the suggestion, few opportunities have forced themselves into the consciousness of our scant supply of contributors. Or so it was until just before Christmas, when I was looking for presents for other people and came across Plotkin's book and bought it for myself. This was a good move, and in this review I hope to tell you why.

To start with the title. A good title tells you what's in a book, it elevates interest into desire, and it does not disappoint you later. *Opera 101* sounds like a course, at a level where the only prerequisite is curiosity; and that is what it is. It promises to guide your learning; and it does. Though I suspect that its claim to lead the reader to love is a sound one, I cannot yet judge for I love opera already. However, I have never been very fond of Wagner but I intend to follow Plotkin's guidance and test his promise of eternal love.

Many, if not all, of life's greatest pleasures are heightened by preparation—thought and work. This book tells you, for opera, how you should think about it, what the work is, and how to do it.

It starts with a long chapter on the history of 400 years of opera, tracing its development from theatre which had music associated with it even in ancient Greece, through the music that sometimes went with medieval liturgical drama, and arriving at the works of Monteverdi, generally regarded as the first operas. The early operas used music to express the feelings of the characters on the stage, and then Mozart used the music and singing to advance the action. And so on, through two more centuries Plotkin outlines the various changes like the alternation between drama in the music and drama in the words, right up to the present. I found this history very illuminating.

The next chapter is 'Becoming an opera cognoscente.' Plotkin starts with what an opera is made of, not a play with music nor a piece of

music with words, but a combination of words and music that produces a 'singular creation.' He discusses the main languages used in operas and how they both permit and limit what music can do with them. He describes the responsibilities of the various principal people involved in putting an opera onto the stage—conductor, stage director, lighting director, and so on. He provides advice on how to learn and understand the story and spends a good time on the various voices, and the traditions and conventions attached to them, naming the great singers in the different categories that are accessible through recordings. While like any opera lover he has his favourites, he never puts down other people's favourites but quite fairly says what their strong points are and in what roles they appeared at their best. He also goes over the variety of functions of the chorus.

The reader arriving at the chapter 'Going to the opera' might think, if already an opera-goer, that there can't be much to learn here. Nevertheless, while it is ostensibly aimed at the beginner, there is much advice that is useful to established aficionados. For example, if you ever arrive late and are kept from your seat until a suitable moment, Plotkin advises you to console yourself by thinking of all the times you have been able to watch and listen without being molested by latecomers. And will in future.

He is always encouraging you to listen to the music, to let it speak to you separately or in parallel to the words and the action. The advice is often what to do with your mind, to the increase of your appreciation and enjoyment.

The meat of the book is the ten chapters given over to the ten operas of the course, 101. The operas are chosen to represent the main kinds of opera and to be among the very greatest. They are:

*Rigoletto*—for learning your first opera

*Tosca*—opera as drama

*Lucia di Lammermoor*—drama expressed through music

*Il barbiere di Siviglia*—opera and comedy

*Don Giovanni*—classical opera

*Les contes d'Hoffmann*—French opera  
*Eugene Onegin*—romantic opera  
*Don Carlo*—grand opera  
*Tannhäuser*—opera and ideas  
*Die Walküre*—epic opera  
*Elektra*—psychological opera

To follow the course properly you have to buy or borrow CD recordings of these operas, not just any recordings but the specified ones. This is so that in leading the reader through he can rely on sharing the same version (no scenes missing, added, or changed), he can refer to the way a particular singer does something, or he can tell you what page in the libretto to look at if the track numbers are not given there. There is also an alternate opera (not an alternate recording of the same opera) for each of the categories. The recommendations are intended to span a variety of conductors, singers, styles and tastes.

Let me relate what Plotkin does with one of these, *Don Giovanni*.. As usual, the chapter discusses of the attitudes and philosophy of the composer and the librettist; in this case they were both children of the Enlightenment. In this opera the two conflicts of aristocracy versus the rights of man, and of science versus religion, are presented, though Mozart and da Ponte don't pronounce on them but leave you thinking about them yourself. As for the music, Plotkin reminds us that Mozart's music is not as easy as it seems and contains much subtlety; the musical ideas of the 19th and 20th centuries mostly stem from Mozart's, and this is why Plotkin starts his series with later operas, only returning to Mozart's time when the student has become familiar with the more modern fruits of Mozart's genius.

Then the author comments on why he chose the particular recording, noting its particular strengths but not ignoring the odd weakness.

Like the good teacher he is, Plotkin asks you questions. As he talks of the catalogue aria, he says, 'Do you think Leporello is proud of his master's accomplishments, or is he highly cynical?' And after Donna Anna's '*Fuggi crudele*', 'Notice one important line uttered by Ottavio to Anna: "You have in me both betrothed and father." This may be noble, but is it what Anna wants?' These are two examples of the opportunities for the singers to go for one kind

of interpretation or another. As Plotkin says, 'I have seen more than fifty performances of *Don Giovanni*, and one of the enduring fascinations of this great work is to note the interpretive choices made by each performer and to observe how they merge in ways that I have not previously seen.'

To illustrate Plotkin's fine balance of telling the story, noting the principal musical points of interest, and attending to the reference detail to help the reader's study, let me quote a piece at length.

In track 10 (page 236) Elvira arrives to implore Giovanni one last time to change his ways. Giovanni ignores her, cynically raising a glass to toast wine and women. She leaves, and suddenly we hear her scream. Leporello goes to see what the problem is and he too screams. The stone guest has arrived for dinner. Notice, as Leporello recounts the tramping sound of the statue's feet ('ta, ta, ta, ta'), how this sound is not imitated but rather reconfigured in the music as the stone guest pounds on the door. An imitation would have been too obvious. By throwing us off guard musically, Mozart disarms us and we listen more carefully to what follows.

At track 11 (page 246), the statue of the Commendatore enters the room, accompanied by the chilling chords that opened the opera. Listen to him as he claims the dinner to which he was invited. For the first time, *Don Giovanni* is really caught off guard; he too cannot comprehend that a stone statue could step down from its pedestal and walk to his house. The Commendatore tells Giovanni that he wants to return the courtesy by inviting him to dinner. Although Leporello pleads with his master not to go, Giovanni says he has no fear. To seal the agreement, the statue asks Giovanni to shake his hand. You can hear in the music (track 11, 5:09) the very moment when the Commendatore's stone cold grip overtakes Giovanni. But even with the threat of hell and damnation, Giovanni refuses to repent. Soon flames and voices rise from below; Giovanni is dragged down to hell as the statue of the Commendatore leaves.

Notice the brilliant drama of Mozart's music in this part of the opera. The trio of low voices—*Don Giovanni*, Leporello, and the Commendatore—is thrilling and at the same time connotes the netherworld. The strings in the orchestra toss and swirl like waves in a raging sea. Suddenly there is the sound of inevitability with the roar of trombones. This is an unusual instrument for an opera orchestra, especially in Mozart's time. To me, as they growl louder each time they speak, there is the sense of a widening chasm as the mouth of hell opens up to swallow *Don Giovanni*. This is one of the greatest scenes in all of opera.

My only disagreement with Plotkin is over surtitles. He finds them distracting not only from the activity on stage but also in that they induce the audience to concentrate on the words at the expense of the music. I myself am distracted by not knowing what the words mean. Once I was watching a film of *Der Rosenkavalier* before I knew anything about it; there were no subtitles and from having no idea what was going on I became so distracted that I thought of more interesting things to do and left in the middle. He complains that sometimes surtitles are poorly done or mistimed and cause laughter at the wrong moment, spoiling the show and surprising the performers. This complaint is rather weak, as any component poorly done can spoil an opera—the point is to do everything well. I should like to see the legibility of some surtitles improved so that I can read them in an instant; some opera houses use a rather blurred font without serifs, and it would help if the brightness of the lettering varied with the general brightness of the stage.

In the COC's recent excellent production of *Don Pasquale*, surtitles were used to intentional comic effect. The setting was the Wild West, and as someone came into Don Pasquale's bar he was greeted in Italian that translated in the surtitles as 'Howdy, pardner,' raising a chuckle.

A most valuable part of the book is an appendix that lists all the major opera houses of the world, with their addresses and telephone and fax numbers. Where the season is short or is a festival, the time of year is given. Normally such information is very hard to come by, and the travelling opera lover, unless very well organized far in advance, has to go to the local opera house to see if there is anything on, and if

there are any tickets left if the answer is yes. I have already twice copied the relevant pages for friends travelling soon.

Other appendices contain a brief bibliography on opera and a recommended recording or video for each of about four hundred operas.

No reviewer worth his salt fails to find an error, however much he likes a book. Here Festival Opera is among the listings, a poignant mistake for members of NCOS, since its demise more than ten years ago was the trigger for the foundation of the Society. Another error is that some of the telephone numbers for Spain include a 9 (the trunk prefix in Spain, like the 1 here) that is not part of the telephone number and must not be dialled when calling internationally. So when you call or fax, leave out any 9 that comes right after the country code (34). To give Mr Plotkin credit, this error is extremely common, and as far as I can see he has made it only for Spain, and even then not every time!

Who would like the book? Intended primarily for the beginner with an interest, it's so full of wisdom and perception that any opera lover would derive enjoyment and profit. Above all, it's just the book to press on a friend who is aroused by your interest in opera but hasn't yet made a move. Lest you think that this is a book only for beginners, however, here is an extract from the foreword: 'I've spent practically my entire life with music and in the theater . . . , and I can say honestly that nothing in this book was redundant for me. . . .' The words are Plácido Domingo's.

JMC

---

## Operas you don't want to see

Our national newspaper's weekly Challenge recently featured well-known operas renamed and given more prosaic themes. Here are some of the winning entries, reprinted with permission from the *Globe and Mail*.

*Madame Butterfat*: The story of a woman's tragic obsession with her cholesterol level.

*Il Trouve a Tory*: Bilingual opera of the amazing discovery of a man in Quebec who voted for the Conservative Party in the last election.

*Eugene One Gin*: A Russian nobleman is rendered incapable after a single drink.

*Bluebeard's Cartel*: A problem shaver buys the company and corners the market.

*The Turn of the Screwdriver*: Effort to repair VCR causes tendonitis.

*The Rinse Cycle*: Mythological figures and ordinary Torontonians mingle in a laundromat.

*The Bartered Ride*: A suburban exchange of car-pooling for babysitting.

*The Threepenny Opener*: A man's search for a cheap corkscrew.

*Dialogues of the Camel Lighters*: Many smoky duets in a cigarette factory.

*Toss Car*: A tornado strikes the Interstate.

*Peter's Grime*: A bachelor struggles to keep his apartment clean.

*William May Tell*: A Swiss blackmailer comes to an unpleasant end.

*The Macadam*: A small town decides to repave its main street.

*La Bow Hem*: An innovative concept upsets the fashion world.

JMC

---

## A taste of Paris

Being a confirmed lover of all things Offenbachian, this opera lover went to a Saturday matinée performance of *La vie parisienne* given at the Théâtre Maisonneuve in the Place des Arts complex, just before Christmas.

This work is not another *Belle Hélène* or *Orpheus in the Underworld*, but it does have its charm and was well worth seeing, particularly since it was the first time that the Opéra de Montréal had undertaken its production.

Practically all the singers were or are now members of the Atelier lyrique. In some way this is quite appropriate as it gives younger singers a chance to display their talents. However, it goes against the more recent trend to present operettas, even Broadway musicals, with very high-powered casts.

Monique Pagé as Gabrielle, the clever glove-maker, and Grégoire Legendre as the stolid Swedish Baron de Grondemarck were outstanding as interpreters. There's a lot of Offenbach in Gilbert and Sullivan and the 'patter' songs in this opera were executed with great élan by Hugues St-Gelais (the only non-Atelier cast member) as the Brazilian millionaire in Act I and as Frick, the bootmaker, in Acts II and III.

Act I was not as lively as the rest, however much the introduction of a puffing steam engine at the Gare St-Lazare added to the action. Sets and costumes were up to the excellent standard that one can expect from Montreal productions. Keeping the New World cast on the right track

was the conductor from France, Emmanuel Villaume, who will be conducting Offenbach's masterpiece *The Tales of Hoffman* this spring in Sarasota.

The servants posing as eccentric guests and later in their own characters were quite amusing. The dancing was splendid; one could readily forgive the interpolation of the most famous can-can of all from *Orpheus* as a before-the-curtain number while sets were being changed between the scenes of Act III.

This was a most pleasant opera experience. Take the train to Montreal. Shop and eat underground. Travel by Metro. Then back to Ottawa by train. What does it matter if there's a snowstorm in progress? Let's hope the Opéra de Montréal has more of these matinées.

MK

---

## NAC operas in concert next season

According to a report in the *Citizen*, next season's NAC concert series will include a concert performance of *Carmen*, starring Bernadette Greavy, and an all-Purcell concert that includes *Dido and Aeneas*. It's not the NAC opera of yore, but it's much more than we have been getting in recent seasons. Help to fill the house and lend strength to our claim that there really is a public for opera here.

JMC



## A zoophobe *Aïda*

Not so long ago the only way one could get to see a live performance of *Aïda* was to go to a large arena where some visiting troupe would through amplification present the music and with the help of a menagerie present a picture of ancient Egypt.

If one can judge by the recent production in Montreal of the same opera, the zoophobes have won out. Not only were there no elephants, there were not even horses for Radames's chariot, nor a camel (as at the Caracalla in Rome), nor even a small python.

So what is left if the animals are left out? Why, only one of Verdi's greatest operas, that's all.

The new Montreal production (co-produced with Utah Opera and Pittsburgh Opera) presented sets that were admirable in their authenticity and adaptability. Only the Nile scene seemed a bit stagy. Costumes and stage directions were on the whole excellent, although the incense burning in Scene 2 of Act I became a little too mechanical.

The outstanding voice was that of Carolyn James in the title role. Her performance more than made up for any deficiencies in other performers. Inexplicably, the curtain was raised on Scene 2 of Act I to reveal the set and characters of that scene as the strains of '*Numi pieta*' were still being heard and *Aïda* was leaving the stage. Let us hope that this was by accident rather than design. The magic created by this great artist and Verdi's music was almost destroyed.

Some 'genius' decided that the charge that Verdi was influenced by Wagner's music had to be borne out by the length of time before the first intermission. Instead of having an intermission after Act I, Acts I and II ran together. Radames hadn't left for battle in Scene 2 of Act I but was back victorious already in the next scene. Of course the mob scenes in the washrooms were nothing compared with those when Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* was presented in Montreal without an intermission.

Louis Lebherz as Ramfis was quite impressive, as was Donnie Ray Albert as Amonasro. If Leslie Richards-Pellegrini sings Amneris at the

Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, then a bad night can be the only excuse for such sluggish singing, particularly in the first two acts. Poor Amneris had trouble even with a large 'stone' monument which moved when she leaned on it. Her voice and presentation seemed to improve during the latter part of the opera.

But her problems were not as great as those of Richard di Renzi, who sang Radames. In addition to the usual problems tenors have with '*Celeste Aïda*,' Mr di Renzi's voice broke and weakened almost to the point of inaudibility on the high notes. Matters were made worse when the Messenger, sung by Jonathan Boyd, filled the opera house with ringing tones in his minuscule role. Things did not improve much for Mr di Renzi, although his singing with Carolyn James did not detract from her outstanding performance.

The Orchestre symphonique de Montréal never sounded better, under the excellent leadership of Willie Anthony Waters (to whose splendid conducting of Puccini's *Turandot* in Miami a few years back this opera lover can attest).

As a former regular attender of summer performances of *Aïda* at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome, this reviewer can record what an opera lover misses by hearing *Aïda* in a conventional performance: the extraneous noises—airplanes overhead, all kinds of motorbikes, horse-drawn carriages out on the street; the flash bulbs—particularly during the tomb scene; and amplification of the voices. As the French general seeing the charge of the Light Brigade said, 'C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre.' What you get at the Caracalla or at an arena is a sort of spectacle related to opera. At the Caracalla one person in *Aïda* who always receives great applause is the little man, dressed appropriately in Egyptian garb, who comes running out to sweep up the droppings left on the stage by Radames's overexcited horses. He always takes a bow for his efforts. He does not take his bow with the principal singers, however.

In Montreal or in other opera houses when *Aïda* is presented, all you get is the great music of Verdi.

MK

## Genetics and operatics

Recently there was some interesting correspondence in the journal *Science* (267: 437) concerning recent discoveries of interest to opera lovers. While some of the technical content may baffle those who have dropped behind in genetics, careful attention should produce some sort of revelation. The correspondence is reprinted here, with the permission of *Science*.

The recent report of an 'Abnormal fear response and aggressive behavior in mutant mice deficient for  $\alpha$ -calcium calmodulin kinase II' by Chong Chen *et al.* (*Science* 266: 291) provides what may be an unusual insight into the presumably inherited deficiency manifested by a certain Siegfried Volsung. While his entire pedigree has long been open to speculation, it is asserted that he was the offspring of the consanguineous mating between brother (Sigmund Volsung) and sister (Sieglinde Neidung, née Volsung), who were separated at birth, only to reunite in early adulthood (R. Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Act I). Although Mendelian genetics was awaiting rediscovery at the time this kindred became the subject of a lengthy report (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*, 1876), such laws of inheritance would predict that Siegfried was significantly at risk for genetic disorders. Indeed, it is a wonder that the only phenotypic evidence of consanguineous parentage was a *complete lack of fear*. In a manner somewhat comparable to the  $\alpha$ CaMKII-deficient mice described by Chen *et al.*, Volsung was also disposed to remarkable acts of defensive aggression and risk-taking behavior [for example, Siegfried versus Fafner (*Siegfried*, Act II)].

While genetic counseling was not generally available to the community in which he lived, Siegfried is unlikely to have heeded prudent advice since, in typical fashion, he fearlessly won the affection of his aunt Brunnhilde (*Siegfried*, Act III). Because the murine machismo reported by Chen *et al.* clearly demonstrates a dominant inheritance pattern, one must scrutinize the behavioral phenotypes of Siegfried's parents for evidence of intermediate forms of fearlessness. And, in fact, usual precaution is not a feature of their daring escape

from Sieglinde's oppressive domestic trappings while at the same time singing constantly at great volume in the middle of the night (*Die Walküre*, Act I). The first and second filial offspring of the inevitable proband-aunt (Siegfried-Brunnhilde) mating may have provided valuable insight into the penetrance and mode of inheritance in this unusual disorder; however this will never be known because a complicated family dispute ended in not only Siegfried's death but the immolation of all known inhabitants of the region (*Götterdämmerung*, Act III, final scene).

Hannes Vogel  
Baylor College of Medicine, Houston

We appreciate that Vogel brings to our attention the fascinating story of Siegfried Volsung, as depicted in Wagner's opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Our previous work has shown that an autosomal dominant mutation in the  $\alpha$ -CaMKII gene is associated with a phenotype of increased defensive aggression and a lack of fear. In contrast, the neuropsychiatric condition exhibited by Siegfried, whose parents are brother and sister, seems to be derived from an autosomal recessive mutation. Thus it is not clear at all whether there is any genetic parallelism between the  $\alpha$ -CaMKII heterozygous knockout mouse and the man. There are, of course, other possible interpretations. For example, Siegfried may have carried a sporadic mutation in the  $\alpha$ -CaMKII gene; or one of his parents may have had heterozygous or homozygous mutation in the  $\alpha$ -CaMKII gene. Siegfried's father, Sigmund, appears to share similar traits. As Bernard Shaw has characterized [*The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Ring of the Nibelungs* (Constable, London, 1956)], 'The boy Siegfried inherits . . . all his father's hardihood. The fear against which Sigmund set his face like flint, and the woe which he wore down, are unknown to the son. . . .' If Siegfried's mother, Sieglinde, is normal, both the father and the son may have had the heterozygous mutation. In this case, the genetic parallelism may be justifiable.

Chong Chen  
Howard Hughes Med. Inst., Cambridge

## News from Opera Lyra Ottawa

As we mentioned in our December issue, Opera Lyra Ottawa puts on a workshop called 'Create and Produce' for children during the March break, in which the children, under guidance, create an opera (including the music), rehearse it, and perform it—all within the short period of a week. The performance is open to the public and there is no cost of admission, though donations are naturally very welcome. The performance will be on Saturday 18 March, at Arts Court, 2 Daly Ave, at 2 pm, followed by a reception. For more information about any Opera Lyra event, call 233 9200.

Auditions for this will be closing soon, so if any of our young members want to take part—that is, those aged between eight and twelve—or if other members have or know children who would want to, they should get in touch with Opera Lyra Ottawa. The enrollment fee is \$150. The second production of Opera Lyra's present season is *La bohème* at the NAC on 13, 15, 17, and 19 April. The principal roles will be sung by Gary Rideout as Rodolfo, Irene Welhasch-Baerg as Mimi, and Theodor Baerg as Marcello. In the other major roles we will hear Gabriella Prata as Musetta, John Avey as Schaunard, and Luc Saucier as Colline. You can order tickets by phone: 233 9200. And don't put it off too long—they had full houses for *Rigoletto*.

The Mozart Fantasy Auction, a fundraiser for the 1995–1996 season, is being held on Saturday 13 May in the Ballroom of the Westin Hotel. The theme is 18th-century Vienna, and Ken Grant will be repeating his successful role as the auctioneer. The schedule is a reception at 6:00, followed by dinner at 7:30 and the auction at 9:00.

A silent auction proceeds in parallel from the start until Mr Grant gets going. They are naturally looking for donations, but I don't feel I can

plead as strongly for help as I did for our own Kiev Evening! Tickets are \$75 and can be obtained by calling the OLO office.

The Opera Lyra Boys' Choir presents two performances of a show called 'Something's gonna happen' on 28 May. It will be in the De la Salle High School in Old St Patrick, at 1:30 and 4:30. The ticket price has not yet been announced.

Opera Lyra's annual February fund-raiser 'Guess who's coming to dinner' was most successful this year and raised about \$10 000 for *La bohème*.

---



While Brian Law could not come to the Scholarship finals, his Canadian representative Marian Pickering, seen here thinking hard, read out his greeting (see p. 2). (Photograph by Eugene Besruky.)

## Opera within reach

Here are remaining parts of the season's schedules for opera houses and other sites of interesting events close enough to Ottawa for the serious opera fan.

### Montreal

#### L'Opéra de Montréal

*La bohème*, by Puccini. 18, 20, 23, and 25 February, and 1 and 4 March.

*Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Rossini. 10, 13, 15, 19, and 22 April.

*The Consul*, by Menotti. 26 and 29 April, and 1, 4, and 6 May.

*Don Giovanni*, by Mozart. 27 and 29 May, and 1, 3<sup>mt</sup>, 7, and 10 June.

All performances are in the Place des Arts.

<sup>mt</sup> For the opera and date thus marked, there is a Morgan Tour taking a group to Montreal (820 0221).

### Toronto

#### Canadian Opera Company

*Lucia di Lammermoor*, by Donizetti. 8, 11, 20, 22, 26, 28, and 30<sup>sm</sup> April. O'Keefe Centre.

*Eugene Onegin*, by Tchaikovsky. 19, 21, 23<sup>sm</sup>, 25, 27, and 29 April. O'Keefe Centre.

<sup>sm</sup> Sunday matinée

There remain two more weekends in which you could see two operas, one on the Saturday night and one on the Sunday afternoon. These are:

22–23 April and 29–30 April, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Eugene Onegin*. See above for which is when.

### Opera in Concert

*Florence, the Lady with the Lamp*, by T. Sullivan. 4 and 5 March.

*Goyescas*, by Granados, and *La revoltosa*, by Chapi. 22 and 23 April.

### Toronto Operetta Theatre

Sundays of Comedy and Romance [last one]:

Let's Begin the Beguine. 19 March.

*Czarevitch*, by Lehar. 3, 5, and 6 May.

### Hamilton

#### Hamilton Opera

*La bohème*, by Puccini. 1, 6, and 8 April.

---

## NCOS Board Members and responsibilities

<b>President</b>	Bobbi Cain	<b>Publicity</b>	Chris Sayre
<b>Vice-President</b>	Peggy Pflug	<b>Events</b>	The Board
<b>Treasurer</b>	Murray Kitts	<b>General Liaison</b>	John Clegg
<b>Secretary</b>	Sandy Shea	<b>Membership</b>	Gerda Ruckerbauer, David Shore
<b>Scholarships</b>	Bobbi Cain	<b>Member</b>	Pat Adamo
<b>Newsletter</b>	John Clegg		

### Some telephone numbers

Bobbi Cain 225-0124 (h)

Pat Adamo 729 9518 (h)

Peggy Pflug 226-5482 (h)

John Clegg 765 4599 (w)