

# Newsletter • Bulletin

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## Julie Nesrallah Wins Brian Law Scholarship

The week of February 3 - 9, 1997 was an exciting one for opera lovers in the Nation's Capital. Not since the termination of opera production by the National Arts Centre in 1983 has there been such a plethora of activity. And the National Capital Opera Society played a key role. Our week commenced with an inspirational recital and talk by baritone Gerald Finley and concluded with the staging of *LACENERENTOLA* at Carleton University. However, the highlight of the week was Julie Nesrallah's victory in the Brian Law Opera Scholarship competition recital. This event captured the hearts, and ears, of Ottawa opera enthusiasts.

Held on February 8<sup>th</sup> at the First Unitarian Congregation, the recital was magical. For the organizers and finalists the day began early. For the first time the recital was being filmed by Rogers 22 for a two hour production of the event. More about that later. By 10:00 A.M. an army of techies descended on the Congregation, bringing with them kilometres of wiring, truckloads of equipment and an abundance of expertise. Chaos abounded! By 2:00 P.M., when rehearsals began, the stage had been transformed into a quietly elegant production set, and miraculously all the wiring was invisible and the equipment unobtrusive. By 6:00 P.M. the room was filled with the excitement of competition.



Adamo

### Julie Nesrallah

President Bobbi Cain opened the competition by reading a letter from the Mayor of Ottawa, Her Worship, Jacquelin Holzman, proclaiming February 3 - 9 Opera Week in Ottawa. Ms. Cain then introduced the prestigious panel of judges — pianist Michael McMahon, soprano Roxolana Roslak and tenor Guillermo Silva-Marin — who were charged with the difficult task of evaluating the finalists and naming a winner. (Continued on Page 4)

## From the President...

What an exciting time the month of February proved to be! In response to a request from ourselves and Opera Lyra the Mayor of Ottawa declared the week of February 3-9 as "Opera Week" in the city. In that week there were five performances relating to opera — two nights of Opera Lyra's most enjoyable "R.S.V.P."; a very special recital sponsored by the N.C.O.S. by Ottawa's own Gerald Finley, (a marvelous young baritone who makes his Metropolitan Opera debut as Papageno in *THE MAGIC FLUTE* early next year); the final concert competition of "the Brian Law Scholarship" and the performance by the \$2000 scholarship winner, Julie Nesrallah, in Opera McGill's *LA CENERENTOLA* at Carleton University. Your executive worked very hard on your behalf and we were so fortunate to be involved in this week.

We have exciting plans—very different plans—for the future months and all the details will be available soon. We are working to revise our Laser Disk video showings, but these plans occasion some very serious thoughts. We have a small Board of Directors that needs help. With your help, we can do more for you and you can do more for the opera community. Won't you help us?

— Bobbi Cain

# Gerald Finley

Despite unfavorable weather conditions, a good turnout of opera supporters enjoyed an excellent recital and talk by Ottawa baritone, Gerald Finley, at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on February 13. The presentation was sponsored by the N.C.O.S.

Gerald Finley's musical talent was developed as a chorister in Ottawa at St. Mathew's Church, the Ottawa Choral Society, the Cantata Singers of Ottawa and as part of the N.A.C. Opera Chorus. He continued as a choral scholar at King's College, Cambridge, The Royal College of Music and the National Opera Studio, all in the United Kingdom.

An acclaimed performance as "Papageno" as part of Roger Norrington's "Mozart Experience" led to a close association with Glyndebourne which culminated in his performance as "Figaro" in the opening performances of the new opera house. He will return to Glyndebourne this year and in 1988. He has sung the roles of Figarao and Guglielmo in *COSI' FAN TUTTE* in London, Berlin, Toronto, Los Angeles and Vancouver. He makes his Met debut as "Papageno" in 1998. Other roles include "Demetrius" in *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* (Aix-en-Provence and Netherlands Opera); "Sid" in *ALBERT HERRING* (Canadian Opera Company); the "Count" in *CAPRICCIO* (Lyric Opera, Chicago); "Belcor" in *L'ELISIR D'AMORE*, (Los Angeles) and "Valentin" in *FAUST* and "Sharpless" in *MADAMA BUTTERFLY* (Bastille Opera, Paris).

Worldwide concert appearances cover a wide repertoire of works by Handel, Haydn, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Britten, Stravinsky and Webern. Recital appearances include Schubert's early songs with his wife, mezzo soprano Louise Winter, in the U.K. and in Canada.

In addition to operas and concert appearances he has made recordings with Roger Norrington, Sir Simon Rattle and John Eliot Gardiner

The Ottawa recital featured selections from Vaughan Williams, Mozart and Tchaikovsky among others. An informative question and answer period followed the performance. Brian Finley, an accomplished performer in his own right, accompanied his cousin on the piano.

## N.C.O.S. Board Members

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# ***DIE FLEDERMAUS*** Flits at N.A.C.

"The best sets I've seen at an Opera Lyra production", was the comment of one N.C.O.S. member. This was quite true, the Act II set from the Opera of Philadelphia even sporting a working fountain. I particularly enjoyed the lighting effects of Elizabeth Asseltine.

The costumes were a mixed bag, but certainly adequate for this performance. The orchestra under David Currie was fairly small, sounding thin during the famous overture, but providing a lively accompaniment for the singers when called upon to do so.

Top vocal honours go to Heidi Klassen as Rosalinde whose demanding role was well executed. Also Mark Dubois as Alfred was in fine voice, even though having him play a dual role in Act I made for problems with the plot. If the director's idea was to augment his part, why cut out most of the vocal part which is usually sung by a completely different singer, the Lawyer Blind?

Another role well acted and more than adequately sung was that of Adele with Mary Lou Fallis in this part. This matronly figured Adele is certainly not the pert, young maid, aspiring to be an actress and willing to accept the "protection" of an older gentleman which is the Adele we know and love.

I was disappointed with Benoit Boutet's performance as Eisenstein. He put a lot of work into his role but failed to convince: one pratfall, good; two, repetitious; three, boring. As the disguised clown lawyer in Act III he was much better.

Bruce Kelly as Dr. Falke was excellent both as an actor and especially in his "Bruderlein" aria. Brian MacIntosh as Frank, the prison warden, started out well; but by Act III had begun to overact and to develop a silly "Cherman" accent.

Edward Atenza in the speaking role of Frosch was good, but his monologue went on too long and only caught fire occasionally; perhaps it was because he was playing to a half-full house.

My biggest disappointment was with Prince Orlovsky played by Juan Chioran. He was all right in his

characterization and his voice was adequate for the part. But this is a famous trouser role and calls for a mezzo impersonating an eighteen year old boy. Changing the part to a mature man may not seriously affect the dramatic action of the play, but it certainly upsets the vocal balance considerably.

It may seem prudish to object to the three females and one male who appeared in their underclothes in Act II. If they had only appeared and then disappeared it would be a fairly amusing joke. But they were kept on the stage for a considerable length of time disporting themselves around the fountain and upstaging the rest of the actors.

As far as the use of English for dialogue and German for singing, as an Anglophone I have no objection. The alternatives of having long stretches of translated dialogue on the surtitles or having the whole in English are both unsatisfactory. The Met did a production entirely in English which came to Ottawa to the Capital Theatre. I can remember the Adele singing in the Laughing Song:

"What a bloomer - ha, ha, ha;

Full of humour - ha, ha, ha;

Very, very - ha, ha, ha;

Merry, merry - ha, ha, etc.

I'm sure you'll agree it sounds much better in German.

As far as the dancers are concerned the best I can say is — keep working on it; someday you too may learn to dance the polka. The chorus was good but overused in action. Their enthusiasm made up for any deficiencies.

I had an unreasonably difficult time getting my tickets for this production, although tickets were going begging and being sold for half-price later on. I paid full price for them (\$77 each). I got to the opera on one of the worst days of the winter and had to struggle to get home afterwards. Yet the irresistible Strauss music and the generally lively performance made this an enjoyable evening.

— M.K.

## Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition



Adamo

### *The Finalists: Nathalie Pilon, Kimberely Briggs, Hilary Knox & Julie Nesrallah*

Soprano Kimberly Briggs was the first to perform. Kimberly has won many prizes and awards on the Ottawa music scene, culminating with a \$3600 Open Fellowship from the University of Toronto where she is now working toward a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance. Kimberly chose arias from *DON GIOVANNI*, *IDEOMENEO* and *DIE FLEDERMAUS*.

Mezzo-soprano Hilary Knox followed with arias from *COSI' FAN TUTTE*, *VANESSA*, *DIE FLEDERMAUS* as well as a selection from *TROUBLE IN TAHITI*. A graduate in Honours Voice from the University of Toronto Faculty of Music with a Bachelor of Music Performance, Hilary is now a Master of Music candidate at The Mannes College of Music in New York City. Aiming for the international operatic stage, she has performed in both opera and oratorio in Canada and the United States

Mezzo-soprano Julie Ann Nesrallah opened with the popular "Habenera" from *Carmen*, followed by selections from *ARIADNE AUF NAXOS* and *LA CENERENTOLA*. Julie has been immersed in singing since she was a small child, having her Bachelor of Arts, Music, Vocal Performance from Carleton University and is now studying for her Artist's Diploma at the Faculty of Music at McGill. Winner of many distinguished prizes and awards, Julie performs not only in opera, but also in oratorio and musical theatre.

The recital ended with coloratura soprano Nathalie Pilon who sang arias from *ROMEO AND JULIETTE*, *IDEOMENEO* and *CANDIDE*. An accomplished pianist, Nathalie first studied voice in parallel, the singing and its joy dominated her career aspirations after she had completed her Bachelor degree at Conservatoire de Musique du Québec à Hull. An active and vibrant artist she has won several scholar-

## ***LA CENERENTOLA:*** **Another Triumph for Nesrallah!**

ships and worked with both Opera Lyra and Opera Brevia.

The focus of the evening then shifted to the jurors and their unenviable task. After deliberating for 30 minutes they returned to the waiting audience with their decision, naming Julie Ann Nesrallah as the recipient of this year's Brian Law scholarship. Julie was presented with a cheque in the amount of \$2000 by former N.C.O.S. president Marjorie Clegg. Then bursaries for the other three finalists, donated by the Society in memory of former Board member John Clegg, were presented by his brother, Barry.

Despite many conflicting events falling on February 8<sup>th</sup>, the competition recital was very well attended and very well received. Every performance was superb and showcased the abundance of talent in the National Capital. For those who were unable to attend, or wish to see it again, Rogers 22 will be broadcasting the two hour program at 8:00 P.M. on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, and at 10:00 A.M. on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Their program includes interviews with each of the finalists and the jurors as well as the recital in its entirety. Don't forget to watch and set your VCRs to what will undoubtedly be an artistic production!

— K.R.



*The Jurors: Roxolana Roslak, Michael McMahon & Guillermo Silva-Marin*

The weekend of February 8-9 proved to be a happy homecoming for Ottawa native and Carleton University graduate, Julie Nesrallah. Less than twenty-four hours after winning the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Nesrallah performed the challenging title role in Opera McGill's production of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* at Carleton's Alumni Theatre. At the conclusion of the opera she was rewarded with a standing ovation from the enthusiastic, near-capacity audience.

After its premiere, which was a failure like so many operas that have become all-time favorites to-day, *La Cenerentola* quickly became one of Rossini's most popular operas, second only in terms of number of performances to *The Barber of Seville*. Though composed in only a matter of a few weeks *La Cenerentola* is an exquisite opera with brilliant arias, rousing choruses and engaging characters in a familiar story with a multitude of comic situations. Never really out of the standard operatic repertoire this piece has enjoyed a revival of sorts lately, helped undoubtedly by the fact that Cecilia Bartoli has become identified with the title role. As recently as 1992 Ottawa Lyra staged an excellent production of this opera at the National Arts Centre.

Opera McGill's production was not particularly polished — the accompaniment consisted of piano and harpsichord, the sets were minimal and the singing of the principals was uneven — but it did make for a most enjoyable evening. The ensemble pieces in particular were well done. Most gratifying, of course, was the performance by Julie Nesrallah. She was superb from beginning to end and was completely deserving of the audience's applause. *La Cenerentola* provided the opportunity for a possible future diva to display her already considerable talent which was recognized only the night before by the jurors in the Brian Law Scholarship competition.

— T.M.

# Books & Recordings

*Mozart*, Marcia Davenport. New York: Scribners, 1932

*Mozart: A Life*, Maynard Solomon. New York: Harper Collins, 1995

Over 60 years ago, when Marcia Davenport was researching her book on Mozart she was forced to travel to Europe to hear Mozart's works performed in concert. At that time Mozart was not that popular on this side of the Atlantic. How things have changed! Now it's practically impossible to avoid hearing his music. Perhaps one of the reasons for this shift in popular sentiment is the biography of Mozart that was written by Davenport and published in 1932.

She loved Mozart and this is unmistakably conveyed in this memorable book. It reads more like a piece of fantasy fiction than an impartial, dispassionate biography. She idolized his music and marveled at all the twists and turns of his life. As she states in the *Forward* of this particular edition, "As Mozart's music had enchanted me always, so Mozart's life occupied me for years, during which I retraced every journey he made, saw every dwelling then extant in which he had ever lived, every theatre where his works were first performed, every library and museum where his manuscripts were then to be seen." The result is a superb biography that describes Mozart's life from his birth in Salzburg in 1756 to his death in Vienna 35 years later. This book is a true labour of love and completely worthy of its subject. Although Davenport does include some negatives, Mozart himself would have enjoyed this version of the story of his life.

Maynard Solomon's book, like Davenport's, is a chronicle of Mozart's life and music but it is much more. It contains a detailed analysis of his music as well as a psychoanalysis of the man. The trend in contemporary biography seems to be towards psycho-biography and this book is certainly in that category. For example, Solomon believes that the love-hate relationship between Mozart and his father, Leopold, is crucial to understanding the life and work of the son. This is certainly not a new idea but

what is impressive about Solomon's treatment of it is the thoroughness of the analysis. His analyses of Mozart's relationships with his sister and with his wife and her family are plausible in the same way. Other episodes in his life — his travels as a child and youth, his mother's death, his departure from Salzburg, his membership in the Masonic Order — are similarly detailed and credible. Opera fans will be intrigued by the accounts of the genesis of all of his mature operas and the particulars surrounding their premieres.

Solomon seems obsessed with details — lists of cities, names of musicians and singers, the value of florins and guilders — but the book is also full of interpretations. Solomon has a theory about everything: Mozart's finances, his religious feelings, the cause of his death — and he is entirely convincing! He has made use of 18th century sources as well as recent scholarship on Mozart to present a portrait of the man that is most believable. Perhaps the multitude of detail is tedious but he does succeed in humanizing his subject. A careful reading of this scholarly book, which should become the definitive biography of Mozart for some time to come, will lead to a much greater appreciation of the man and his music.

Unquestionably Mozart was much more than an opera composer — some 600 works more. In spite of all his other musical achievements he must be considered one of the greatest of all opera composers and many, primarily singers, rate him as the greatest. What emerges from these two very different biographies is that the true tragedy of Mozart was not so much that he died so young but that he was unable, because of circumstances beyond his control, to do more of what he always really wanted to do — compose for the operatic stage

Both of these books are available at the Ottawa Public Library and, in both paper and hardback, in most bookstores. Frequently Davenport's book can be found in second hand book shops. If you should find one there (or anywhere else), buy it! You will not regret it.

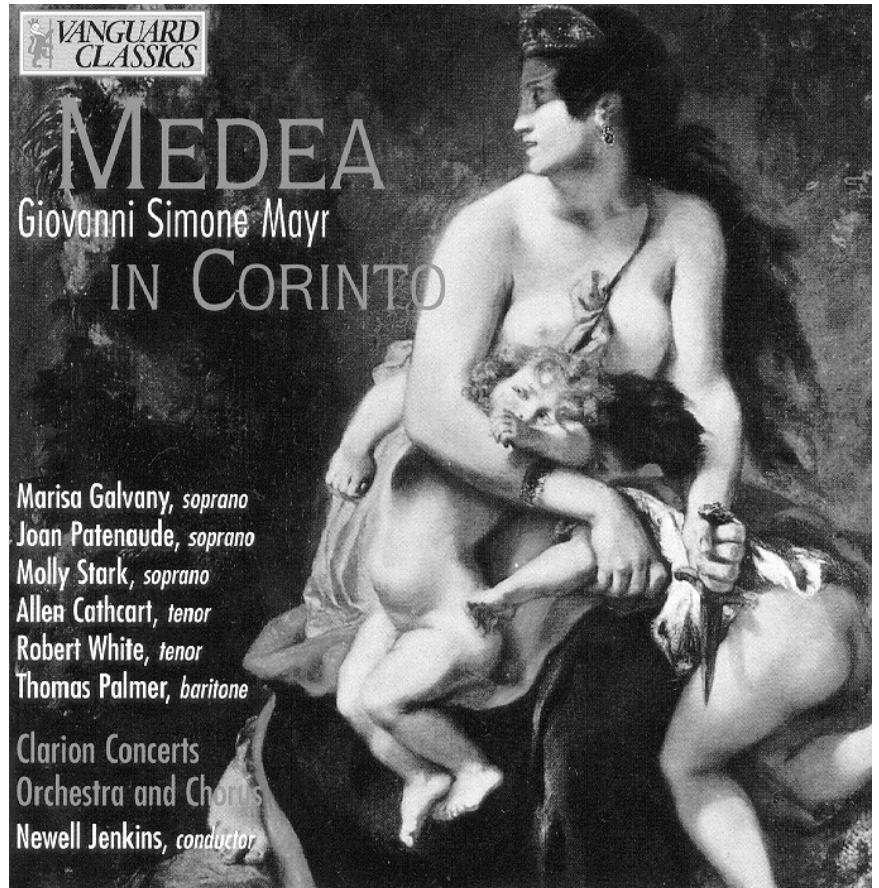
— T.M.

# Opera CD Stars Ottawa Soprano

While browsing through Harrod's CD collection last summer (how's that for name dropping) I came across an opera by Mayr. Now I should have known that Mayr was a prolific composer of operas and a key figure in the history of the art. In addition, the fact that he was Donizetti's teacher should have recommended his work to me. And the opera in question—*MEDEA IN CORINTO*—is considered to be Mayr's masterpiece.

But the only reason I bought the album was because of the name "Joan Patenaude" on the cover. Could that be the Joan Patenaude whom I had heard in Ottawa so many years ago and who established herself as a leading soloist with the San Francisco Opera. Indeed it was! And what a marvelous voice Joan had in 1969 when this recording was made. The role of Creusa, the bride-to-be of Jason, and the victim-to-be of the spurned Medea, whose witchcraft inflicts on her rival a particularly unpleasant death, allows Joan Patenaude ample opportunity to display the purity, flexibility and beauty of her voice.

So to hear Joan Patenaude again was reason enough to buy this set. But wait! The great tenor Robert White also appears in the cast in the minor role of "Aegeus". Mind you his voice is best heard in songs rather than in opera. Marisa Galvany as "Medea" does a commendable job in portraying the fire-breathing protagonist and other cast members are good to adequate. Orchestra and chorus under Newell Jenkins are fine. It is the music by Mayr which makes this recording



worthy of consideration by any opera fan. Mayr is credited with a number of innovations in opera, his orchestration being particularly noteworthy. This is a fast-moving, exciting, dramatic work with excellent choruses, arias and ensembles. The recording is by Vanguard Classics (08 5037 72) and was sold in Britain for 13 pounds for two CDs — a real bargain.

I own two other opera CD versions of the Medea story. Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *MEDEA* is given a stellar performance by William Christie and "Les Arts Florissants" on Harmonia Mundi (901 139-41), but this is a performance for the Baroque opera enthusiast. The best known opera version of the Greek classic is Cherubini's *MEDEA* (EMI CMS 7 63625 2) with Maria Callas, dramatically at fever pitch but vocally painful. I'm sure that I for one will be playing the Mayr version more often than the other two.

— M.K.

# Opera Within Reach

## OTTAWA

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA by Sopranos in Concert  
 Sunday, March 23 at 7:30 P.M.  
 First Unitarian Congregation, 30 Cleary Avenue  
 Tickets & Information: 523-5247

## MONTREAL

L'Opera de Montreal

*JENUFA* by Janacek. March 22, 24 & 27;  
 April 2 & 5

*CARMINA BURANA* by Orff and *HIVER DANS L'AME* by Prevost.  
 May 5, 9 & 10

*TURANDOT* by Pucini. May 31; June 2, 5, 7, 11 & 14

All performances are in the Salle Wilfred Pelletier  
 in the Place des Arts. Information:(514) 985-2258

## HAMILTON

Hamilton Opera

*CARMEN* by Bizet. April 12, 15, 17 & 19

Information: (905) 526-6556 or 1-800-575-1381

## TORONTO

Canadian Opera  
 Company

*MANON LESCAUT* by Puccini. Apr 8, 11, 16, 19, 24 & 27

*LUISA MILLER* by Verdi. Apr 12, 15, 17, 20, 23 & 25

All performances are at the Hummingbird Centre.  
 Information: 1-800-250-4653

Opera in Concert

*Rusalka* by Dvorak. April 6 at the Jane Mallett  
 Theatre. Box Office: (416) 366-7723

Opera Anonymous

*THE MEDIUM* by Menotti. May 21, 22, 23, 24 & 25.  
 Alumnae Theatre. Information:(416) 256-5664

Opera Atelier

*ACIS & GALATEA* by Handel. April 15, 17, 18 & 19 at  
 Jane Mallet Theatre Information: (416) 925-3767