

NATIONAL CAPITAL OPERA SOCIETY • SOCIÉTÉ D'OPÉRA DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE

Newsletter • Bulletin

Spring

1998

Le Printemps

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Ottawa baritone, Gerald Finley, made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City on Saturday, January 24, 1998 singing the role of *Papageno* in Mozart's *DIE ZAUBERFLOTE*. A large contingent of supporters from Ottawa, many of whom are members of the National Capital Opera Society, made the trip to New York to witness the historic occasion. See inside for details of the weekend.

From the President...

January and the trip to New York was a most exciting month. We were very happy to be able to assist in making Gerald Finley's exciting Met debut memorable for him and his family. The Canadian Consulate in New York did a wonderful job hosting the Sunday morning brunch – the food was great and the orange juice with champagne was brilliant! Despite the lack of co-operation from the weather (so what is new?), the trip was comfortable and pleasant and Congress Travel did a super job of co-ordinating things.

1998 will be a very busy year for the NCOS. The fourth Brian Law Opera Scholarship will be held on January 23, 1999 in the Unitarian Congregation worship space, so there are many hours of preparation needed. Brian will be in town this month and some members of the Society will be meeting with him over drinks. We had hoped to involve the two recent scholarship winners in a brief recital setting for him, but guess what? They will both be working (singing) at that time. 1995 winner, Mary Anne Swerdfeger is a singing "bar girl" in 76 productions of a revival of Sigmund Romberg's *NEW MOON* playing in two theatres in Milton and Media just outside of Philadelphia, hosted by Rockwell Productions in Pennsylvania. 1997 winner Julie Nesrallah will be singing *Cherubino* in Connecticut Grand Opera's productions of Mozart's *MARRIAGE OF FIGARO* in Stamford and Bridgeport. In early May Julie will be singing in Mahler's Second Symphony with the Ottawa Symphony and many of you heard her recent recital in Gloucester. So you see, our winners, as well as many other competitors, are in the business, and that is great!

Opera Lyra Ottawa's presentation of Rossini's *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE* was most engaging and the company is to be congratulated! Director Tom Diamond introduced some

amusing aspects to the production. Theodore Baerg sang up a storm as *Figaro*; it was nice to hear Donna Brown's sparkling interpretation of the vivacious *Rosina*; and what a joy to witness and hear Alan Monk's return to Ottawa stages as the suspicious and amorous *Dr. Bartolo*. We also saw our friend Alexander Savtchenko as the wily Don Basilio. Speaking of Rossini, I saw a very good production of his *CENERENTOLA* by Opera d'Montreal recently. It featured several very capable artists — mezzo Theodora Hanslowe, tenor John Osborn and bass Kevin Glavin from the United States, and baritone Brent Polegato who is generating waves in his hometown of Toronto. The opera was staged with some interesting touches, and the singing was almost uniformly of high caliber. Most enjoyable!

Best wishes to you all, and enjoy this "New York Issue".



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Gerald Finley, with his wife, Louise Winter, and family, at the reception hosted by the Canadian Consulate in New York City on January 25, 1998, the day after his successful debut at the Metropolitan Opera.





Gerald Finley and Barbara Bonney in "Die Zauberflöte." Mr. Finley and Edo de Waart, the conductor, were both making their Met debuts.

OPERA REVIEW

Two Debuts at Met: Conductor and Baritone

By ANTHONY TOMMASINI

The Metropolitan Opera has taken some criticism for the difficulty it has had in attracting internationally renowned conductors to its guest roster. The company has been working to correct this, however, and on Saturday night, Edo de Waart, the distinguished Dutch conductor, made an overdue Met debut in Mozart's "Zauberflöte," in the first of nine scheduled performances this season.

Though Mr. de Waart's base is the Netherlands, his work as an opera conductor in the United States has been extensive, including long associations with the Santa Fe and the San Francisco companies. This may explain why it has taken the Met so long to obtain the 56-year-old conductor.

His performance of "Die Zauberflöte" took a while to settle in. The slow introduction to the overture was noticeably shaky; entrances were not consistently together. Once the main Allegro section started, the tempo seemed driven. Similarly, in the first scene, when the three ladies ogle and bicker over the sleeping Prince Tamino, the brisk tempo had the fine trio (Christine Goerke, Jane Bunnell and Judith

New York operagoers get a chance to hear a noted Dutch conductor.

Christin) struggling a bit to keep up. Soon, however, Mr. de Waart's performance gained in grace, poise and flexibility, with no loss of vitality and more structural clarity. There were character and nuance in the orchestra playing, with the strings sounding particularly warm and focused.

A promising debut took place onstage as well: Gerald Finley as Papageno. The Canadian baritone has a robust voice and clear German diction. He is an accomplished singing actor and an agile physical comedian, who brought a humane dimension to the bird catcher's hormonal yearning for a mate, without slipping into slapstick, the problem with so many Papagenos. He must have worked well with John Cox, the director responsible for this imaginative production.

The tenor Frank Lopardo, who has a virile,

dark-toned voice, seemed set on making Prince Tamino a manly quester after spiritual enlightenment and a promised bride, Pamina. There is definitely a heroic dimension to this role, especially in the scene when, torn by confusion and anguish, Tamino grills the speaker at the temple. But sometimes Mr. Lopardo's singing was too beefy and hard pressed.

The soprano Barbara Bonney was a radiant-toned Pamina, whose subtle phrasing in the aria "Ach, ich fühls" was heart rending. The coloratura soprano Mary Dunleavy was a terrifying Queen of the Night. Runs and turns in her passagework were not always clear, but when leaping about in her upper range, including those notorious high F's, she was fearless and faultless. The resonant bass Franz Hawlata brought great dignity to the role of the wise Sarastro; the bass John Cheek was a stentorian Speaker, and the spirited Korliss Uecker was Papageno's long-awaited Papagena.

David Hockney's sets and costumes, first seen at the Met in 1991, remain a joy and a splendor. The technique involved is a throwback to the old days of simple, painted flats and scrims. But Mr. Hockney's eye for vibrant color and whimsical, striking imagery proves that you can do more with less.

Letters

3 February 1998

Ottawa

Dear Bobbi;

We are very grateful to you and the National Capital Opera Society for your support and promotion of Gerald's debut at the Met.

The publicity you organized with the media raised the level of awareness of Opera for people in Ottawa, besides promoting and encouraging Gerald's career.

The tour that you organized with Congress Travel, as well as the Raffle, enabled family, friends and fans to attend in a most easy and enjoyable way. The brunch at the Canadian Consulate was a wonderful opportunity for Gerald to meet his enthusiastic supporters.

We are sure his good debut performance was enhanced by the knowledge that he had lots of friends and family in the audience.

If the mission of the National Capital Opera Society is to encourage young opera singers it was certainly fulfilled when you supported Gerald so well. It has done much to further his confidence and his career.

Many, many thanks for all your efforts.

Sincerely, Rae and Gault (Skip) Finley

9 February 1998 New York

Dear Bobbi;

It has taken me a few weeks to get my bearings after the excitement of the Met debut, and dashing back to England to move house, all in the same week. So please forgive the delay in these heartfelt sentiments.

Although two weeks have passed, the event seems like yesterday, and I still am wondering whether or not I dreamt it all. Tonight is performance number five, so I guess I was part of those extraordinary moments, for performance number one!

I cannot express adequately all the thrilling moments I had with you all. Not only the build-up, with the announcement last year of the trip, the raffle with the trip as prize, and the arrangements made for the reception, but the thrill of the first performance itself, stepping on stage with my cargo of stuffed birds, aware of the vast open space around me, but knowing that out there, in the dark, were a team of loyal loving supporters. I felt no fear, only excitement to deliver the goods.

The response that followed was, and remains, completely overwhelming. The actual applause on the night was very thrilling and gratifying; to meet individuals at the Canadian Consulate was wonderful — what a perfect way to make contact, still within the spirit of the reception the audience gave me the previous evening, but a marvelous way to make the experience personal for me. Thank you so much for that.

I just wanted you and all my traveling supporters, as well as those who wished to go but were unable to come that this whole experience has been enriched by your enthusiasm for what I do for a living — and it has made me value again the very real and necessary support that all artists need.

All the very best to you and your hard-working committee of the NCOS, and I wish you many wonderful experiences of music! See you very soon, I hope!

Yours sincerely, Gerald Finley

ELSEWHERELESS

A new Opera by Atom Egoyan
and Rodney Sharman

One of the special features of the 1998 Festival Canada offerings is this new opera to be premiered by Tapestry Music Theatre, Toronto and co-producer Vancouver New Music, and associate producer The National Arts Centre in Toronto from April 23rd to May 16. Noted filmmaker Atom Egoyan (librettist/director) of COC *SALOME* fame combines his considerable talents with internationally renowned Vancouver composer, Rodney Sharman to evoke this stunningly visual tale of intrigue and deep emotion. These Festival Canada showcase performances are presented in the NAC Theatre on July 16, 17 and 18 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$30, available with Festival Canada subscriptions or at the box office.

The opera features a cast of five outstanding Canadian singers: tenor Benoit Boutet (of recent *MERRY WIDOW* fame in Ottawa); baritone Willy Grenzberg; mezzo soprano Fides Krucker; bass baritone Marcus Nance in the leading role of the servant, Malcolm; and baritone Curtis Sullivan. Several of these singers, Krucker and Grenzberg especially, bring to this work a solid background as contemporary music specialists. A ten-piece virtuosi chamber orchestra (two flutes, two bass clarinets, a mandolin, guitar, harp, violin and double bass, along with a gong/percussion ensemble) accompanies the

flute-driven score, all conducted by Tapestry Artistic Director and conductor Wayne Strongman. The talents of set designer Phillip Barker and lighting designer Paul Mathiesen complete the production team.

Set in an un-named Canadian diplomatic outpost in Africa troubled by severe political unrest, *ELSEWHERELESS* gyrates both backward and forward in time with escalating suspense, melding music, drama and film projections. It gradually reveals the story of Malcolm, the consulate servant, and the reason he stubbornly remains behind, paralyzed, while genocide and assimilation erase all traces of his people. A drama reminiscent of our present times, the opera's enigmatic theme resonates with the relationships of Malcolm and two couples of varying backgrounds, a powerful triangle of love, politics and ultimate betrayal.

Vancouver audiences will see *ELSEWHERELESS* in spring 1999, and to date the production has been invited to festivals in Rome, Paris and Amsterdam.

Festival Canada 1998 is to be commended for introducing this exceptional operatic work to its audiences, and it is hoped that opera and theatre lovers will respond to this enticing challenge.

— Gleaned from NAC and Tapestry Theatre materials by Bobbi Cain

1998 Saturday Afternoon Opera Schedule

May 9 *IDOMENEO*
Lyric Opera of Chicago

May 16 *LES PECHEURS DE PERLES*
Lyric Opera of Chicago

May 23 *PARSIFAL*
Royal Opera, London

May 30 *DER ROSENKAVALIER*
Bastille Opera, Paris

June 6 *THE LOVE FOR THREE ORANGES*
Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow

June 13 *MEFISTOFELE*
Royal Opera, London

June 20 *DIE AGYPTISCHE HELENA*
Royal Opera, London

June 27 *MACBETH*
L'a Scala, Milan

Next Season

Opera Lyra

October—*THE MAGIC FLUTE*

February—Fundraising Concert

March—*TOSCA*

Canadian Opera Company

September—*NORMA*

September—*TOSCA*

January—*THE BARBER OF SEVILLE*

January—*XERXES* (HANDEL)

April—*IL TROVATORE*

April—*THE GOLDEN ASS* (WORLD PREMIERE OF AN OPERA BY ROBERTSON
DAVIES AND RANDOLPH PETERS)

Opera de Montreal

September—*LA TRAVIATA*

November—*DON CARLO*

February—*CARMEN*

March—*MANON*

April—*SUSANNAH*

May—*THE CONSUL*

May—*LA GIOCONDA*

Metropolitan Opera New Productions

LE NOZZE DI FIGARO

LA TRAVIATA

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR

Floyd's *SUSANNAH*

Schoenberg's *MOSES UND ARON*

Opera Within Reach



Italian Week Festival

Opera in Piazza

Main Stage
Preston Street / Corso Italiano at the Queensway

Free

Operatic Favourites with
Shawne Elizabeth, Karen Kinder
& Lyndon Slewidge

Friday, June 19 8:00 P.M.

For more information contact Pat Adamo 729-9518

Mothers' Day Concert

Shawne Elizabeth, Fraser Rubens,
Garth Hampson & Christina Finley
Accompanist: Luba Slusar Pope

National Gallery of Art
Sunday, May 10 2:30 P.M.

ELSEWHERELESS see Page 6
for details

L'Opera de Montreal

MANON LESCAUR by Puccini

May 30, June 1, 4, 6, 10 & 13 at the Place des Arts