

Newsletter • Bulletin

Summer

2000

L'Été

A WINTER OPERA BREAK IN NEW YORK

by *Shelagh Williams*

Having seen their ads and talked to Helen Glover, their new Ottawa representative, we were eager participants in the February "Musical Treasures of New York" arranged by Pro Musica Tours.

We left Ottawa early Saturday morning in our bright pink (and easily spotted!) 417 Line Bus and had a safe and swift trip to the Belvedere Hotel on 48th St. Greeted by Larry Edelson, owner/director and tour leader, we met our fellow opera-lovers (six from Ottawa, one from Toronto, five Americans and three ladies from Japan) at a welcoming wine and cheese party.

Saturday evening the opera was Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*. This was a lavish (though not new) production with sumptuous costumes, sets descending to reappear later, and magical special effects. The cast was in fine voice: Neil Shicoff returning to the Met as a hard-

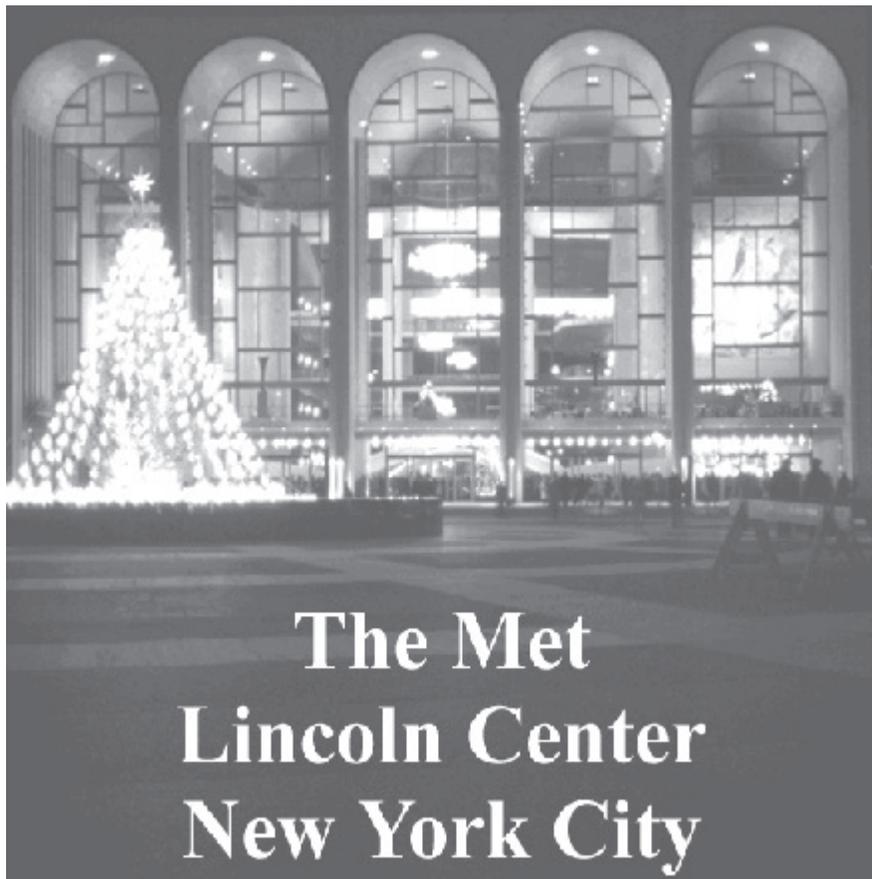
driving and audible Hoffmann; Victoria Livengood as the sultry Venetian courtesan, Giulietta; and Mary Dunleavy as Olympia, Antonia and Stella. However, as devotees of Saturday Afternoon at the Opera will know, Bryn Terfel could not sing the four villains roles, as his bout of sciatica had sent him off to Wales. The good news was that Bryn Terfel was replaced by the Canadian, John Fanning, who had sung the role for the N.Y. City Opera; it was most enjoyable to hear him again.

The Sunday afternoon programme at Alice Tully Hall was a remarkable collaboration of poetry and words and music combining the poetry of Emily Dickinson recited by Julie Harris and seventeen songs by ten different composers, sung by Renee Fleming. A lecture preceded the concert and it was followed by having most of the composers, including Andre Previn, join the performers on stage for the applause. An unusual and enjoyable afternoon.

Monday evening was the Met's block-buster premiere production of Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, with Frederica von Stade and Placido Domingo, under Sir Andrew Davis, in a new English translation. The operetta was, understandably, sold out, and so the only tickets available were seats in the Family Circle (at the very top). These were amazingly good – fine sightlines and sound as good as, or better than, in orchestra seats!! –

excellent value at \$25 US! The cast was phenomenal, both in singing (Domingo added an extra aria) and dancing.

The Tuesday opera was Boito's *Mefistofele* in the magnificent production from San Francisco seen by those of us who attended the January Opera alla Pasta presentation. As we settled in, an official came on stage to dead silence, followed by some anguished
(continued on page 7)



PRESIDENT'S REPORT: National Capital Opera Society Annual General Meeting, June 4, 2000

On this glorious spring day we gather together as members of an organization whose achievements over the past year have been considerable in demonstrating our devotion to opera in its many facets. When I think of the areas of the Society's focus, three major ones emerge. We have the Brian Law Scholarship Competition; our support for opera in its many forms, for example, Opera Lyra Ottawa, Opera Brevia, or the National Arts Centre; and third, our commitment to enhance the opera environment through activities for you, our members and your friends and colleagues. Closely tied to these areas and fundamental to our success is the generation of funds to finance our support, be they private dollars, corporate dollars or community dollars.

What are my hopes for our organization, and, at the same time, my concerns? As promised last year the Board undertook an in-depth review of the Brian Law Scholarship competition. We could call this our flagship project. One of our deep interests is the development and support of young operatic talent. An opera career demands devotion and commitment to the art; it is a harsh taskmaster and initially the costs wildly outstrip the returns. Back in 1992 you approved a scholarship to help young people in the name of a gentleman who devoted a great deal to opera and our Society during his years in Ottawa. You might be surprised to learn that some ask—Who is Brian Law? We have a biography ready for these people, as Brian Law is making a deep impression in New Zealand.

So we have to work on the publicity more diligently. Our revised plan focuses the competition in "prime time", presents a former winner in a short recital during the jury's deliberations, and follows the competition with an audience-wide reception (with your help) – all serving to clearly say that this is a special event deserving of the attention of the music community. A \$2000 scholarship is generous – though not as rich as we might like. Through a series of private donations over the years we have given each non-winner competitor a small honorarium of \$100 to help defray costs. Both the Board and previous jurors have strongly recommended that this be increased even to five times the amount; but, if that is to be done we need the funds to do it. The endowment fund generates some returns at today's limited interest rates – not to the extent to cover the honorariums. There is no reason why, for instance, a \$500 honorarium cannot be awarded to the first runner-up in someone's name.

Turning to institutional support, we must first applaud the many positive developments at the National Arts Centre. An aura of excitement pervades the place, and one gets the feeling that the various programs rank far above the concerns of buildings and the many elements that go into the Centre. I have become somewhat of an NAC groupie, and I try to attend the public meetings of the Board of Trustees under their dynamic Chair, Dr. David Leighton. You may ask "Why?" The glimpse of the dynamics that permeate these discussions say a great deal about the balance being sought in the revised goals of this magnificent institution. Perhaps the future will hold that the strains of Debussy or Puccini or Verdi, to mention only a few examples, will be internally produced by the Centre.

This leads to the excellent work being undertaken by Opera Lyra Ottawa. I'm sure we have all enjoyed some of their offerings over the past year and many of us are private supporters. But there is an ache in my heart because over the past few years we have forwarded no financial donation to OLO, except perhaps for advertising in their program. At a recent Board meeting we have sought to redress this imbalance. We honour our relationship with the Opera Lyra Guild. We also do something that is very special. We advertise events in our Newsletter, and I know that you all read that august publication. Similarly, if other events focusing on opera are brought to our attention, they find their way in to the newsletter.

In 1999 we staged the fourth Brian Law Opera Scholarship competition. But we did much more. "Opera alla pasta" became a term associated with a video showing of one of the world's opera classics at St. Anthony's Soccer Club, followed by a very good pasta dinner with all the trimmings, all fuelled by the club bar. It makes for a pleasant Sunday afternoon, so we are at present arranging the next season. There is more and more going on in the region to spice our opera lives, and these special afternoons add much in their own way.

As well as their appearances in the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival, Gerald Finley and his wife, Louise Winter, made time to join us in a fun evening in their honour, an event hosted by the Society and Don and Lois Harper. What a great pleasure it was for all to meet this talented couple of opera singers who make their home in England and thrill Europe, North America and “down under” with their marvelous singing. In November we presented “Let’s Celebrate a Millenium of Opera” and did just that. Four young opera singers of the future punctuated Rob Clipperton’s sparkling survey of opera from Monteverdi forward (written by Murray Kitts) with appropriate selections, and each guest table featured a special operatic centrepiece honouring a composer (all designed and made by Gerda Ruckerbauer). A silent auction bolstered by donations from many of you nicely augmented our coffers – and, let’s face it, everyone had a great time!!!

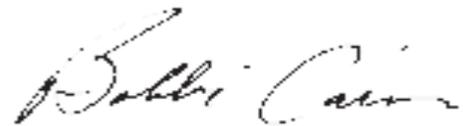
Which brings me to our ongoing need to raise money – money to support our activities such as the newsletter, money to support the work of other agencies such as Opera Lyra Ottawa, and money for the Brian Law Scholarship. As you will see, the endowment fund is around \$20,000 so that some of the interest returns can assist with the scholarship work. We have decided to again mount a corporate fundraising campaign, particularly for the endowment fund, and we need help from well-connected individuals to target our missives to the most generous firms and patrons. The theme of money tends to dominate what we do, and yet it is the grease that makes the machines work.

I speak of people I have come to know and respect – those on and around the Board of Directors: Pat Adamo, whose arrangements were key to the Opera alla pasta events, and who, along with Ute Davis, takes great photos; Renate Chartrand, whose specialty is publicity generation and distribution; Murray Kitts, who retired as a conscientious treasurer after nine years, and has taken over publicity and our newsletter; Peggy Pflug, who is expert on the food end of planning events, and who throws great barbeques; Gerda Ruckerbauer, who paints great pictures and makes innovative decorations; Jean Saldanha, who has worked so hard as board secretary, and is now membership secretary; Norma Torontow, who has been my right-hand vice-presi-

dent and who worked on events; Tom McCool, who is continuing to work with Murray to produce a fine newsletter; and Norma Mellon, who has retired after seven years of assistance and advice with the Brian Law events. To all others who helped, our thanks. This was a very busy year for everyone, and without such support it would have been much less successful than it has been. I thank all these people.

However, I must insert an advertisement: we urgently need a treasurer for the Society. As I said, Murray took charge of the newsletter and publicity at the end of 1999. I agreed to take on the treasurer’s job for a few months while we advertised, hoping that one of you or one of your friends would come forward. I had great faith that this would happen, and my faith has not been justified. As your president, I am too busy to do both jobs, as, believe it or not, each is a big job if done properly. Also, I feel strongly that it is a conflict of interest to be involved in both jobs. So – where are you, our new treasurer? – there are four board meetings a year, and, of course, other activities, and the job is sort of computerised. So – PLEASE!!

In this millenium year let us all look to the future – all sharing our love of opera with our enthusiasm for all the arts in their many forms.



N.C.O.S. Board of Directors *

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*The president was elected at our Annual General Meeting. The additional offices will be filled at our next Board meeting.

** New members

Goethe the Great

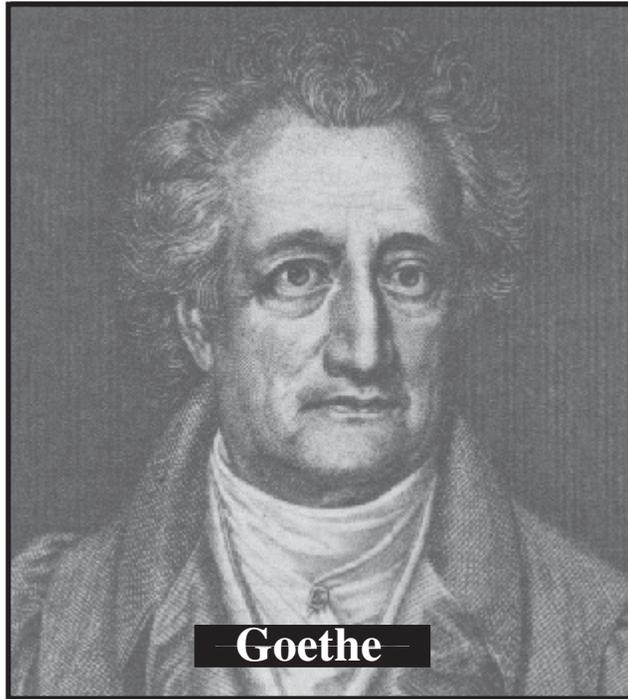
by Murray Kitts

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is celebrated today in English-speaking countries as a famous writer who is seldom read, but whose works are alive mainly because of their connections with music. Anyone who enjoys lieder knows many poems by Goethe are used as the text for the songs. Composers like Schumann (*Scenes from Goethe's Faust*) and Mahler (*Symphony No. 8*) set to music parts of Goethe's masterpiece. Liszt was fascinated by the characters in *Faust*, writing music not only for the piano but a for a huge symphony orchestra as well.

But it is as the source of opera librettos that Goethe is most famous with the general public. Surprisingly enough Goethe wrote a number of opera librettos himself, one of which, called *Erwin und Elmire*, based on Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, was set to music several times and enjoyed widespread popularity at one time. Goethe admired Mozart's *The Magic Flute* so much that he wrote a sequel to it, but he couldn't find any composer willing or able enough to try to continue Mozart's great work.

Today, most music lovers connect Goethe with the various versions of *Faust* operas that are currently being staged. Boito's *Mefistofile* is now playing at the Met and is to be seen in Montreal in the fall. Gounod's opera *Faust* is not as popular as it once was, but still is produced regularly. Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust* is not an opera as such, but is sometimes staged. None of these works can do justice to the original play by Goethe – length alone would make it impossible. But audiences are introduced to some of the main characters and to some of the main scenes.

The *Faust*-inspired operas are by no means the whole story. Jules Massenet had been working for some years on an opera based on Goethe's youthful novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. When the opera was offered to Paris for production, it was considered too gloomy to be presented. Luckily, following the success of *Manon* in Vienna, Massenet was asked to supply a new opera for that city. In 1892 the first performance of *Werther* was given in Vienna. The following year the Paris premiere was not a success. Outside of France the opera was so well received that it was revived in Paris in 1903.



Since then there have been 1,300 performances in that city alone. Today *Werther* has topped even *Manon* in popularity.

Goethe's novel is based on his own experience as a young man and on the case of a friend who committed suicide. The original novel seems like a most unlikely source for an opera libretto as it consists mainly of letters written by Werther to a friend, not even letters to Charlotte as in the opera. The three librettists who worked on the text managed to keep most of the story straight. However,

many details are changed or distorted. Much is made in the opera of Charlotte's promise to her dying mother to marry Albert; but this is not part of the original. The final death scene between the two lovers is purely operatic, since in the novel Werther dies alone. What makes both the novel and the opera so attractive (in spite of their differences) is the universality of the theme – a hopeless, yet overwhelming love, with death the only remedy.

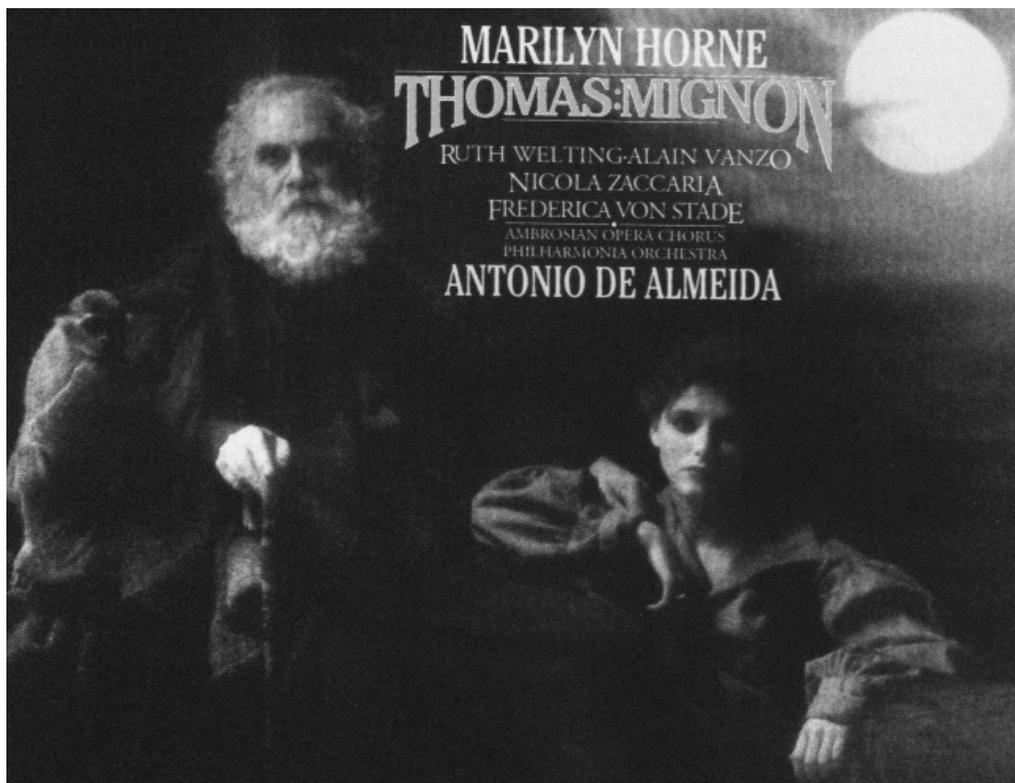
Massenet's score is one of great beauty, expressing the heartfelt feelings of the protagonists.



Rodney Milnes in *The Grove Dictionary of Opera* goes so far as to say that "...the third act (is) one of the most inspired and powerfully sustained in all French opera...". The classic recording on CD is with Georges Thill and Ninon Vallin (EMI References CHS 7 63195 2). But this recording – great in spite of the Mono sound and its 1931 vintage – is no longer listed. Fortunately there are others available and I can recommend a recent EMI set (5 56820 2) with Roberto Alagna as Werther, Angela Gheorghiu as Charlotte and Thomas Hampson as Albert with Antonio Pappano conducting the London Symphony.

While Werther's popularity grows over the years, the same cannot be said for another opera based on a work by Goethe, namely, *Mignon*. This is too bad because Mignon was one of the most popular works in the history of opera and certainly deserves to be in the repertoire today. The composer, Ambroise Thomas, turned to Jules Barbier and Michel Carre, the successful librettists of Gounod's *Faust*, to create a libretto out of the three volume novel, *The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister*, by Goethe – not a work of his youth like Werther. This is a highly original account of the wanderings of a young student and the remarkable people encountered on his trips. It seems to me to be inspired by Rousseau's *Emile*. Meister comes to the aid of Mignon, who is described as "neither boy, nor girl, nor woman" and who is being abused by the a gypsy who forces her to do her egg dance. But Meister is attracted by the actress Philene whose troupe is performing *Hamlet* – Goethe gives a long disquisition on how Shakespeare's play should be produced. In the end Meister turns his affection to Mignon who has served him faithfully only to have her die.

Barbier and Carre's libretto changes a good deal of the novel's plot. Thus *Hamlet* becomes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* so Philene gets to sing the famous "Je suis Titania". Mignon does not die but only swoons, overcome with the knowledge that she is the daughter of an Italian Marquis stolen as a baby from her parents. In the opera she recovers. In Goethe's novel she doesn't. I went so far as to read the sequel, called *The Journeys of Wilhelm Meister* (also three volumes), hoping to find a type of re-



vival not uncommon in operas. But Mignon stayed dead and buried.

From the first performance, the opera Mignon was a tremendous success, with one hundred performances in the first eight months and one thousand performances in just twenty-eight years. Thomas's lovely music captivated the audiences and attracted many of the most famous singers to the roles. Mignon has been sung by great sopranos like Emma Albani, Geraldine Ferrar and Lucrezia Bori, but more often by mezzos like Rise Stevens and Frederica von Stade. Lily Pons was a famous Philene. And both Schipa and Gigli enjoyed portraying Meister.

Fortunately for opera lovers an excellent recording of this opera has been reissued on CD with Marilyn Horne as the heroine, Frederica von Stade in the trousers role of Frederick, and Nicola Zaccaria as the old minstrel who turns out to be Mignon's noble father. Notable also is Ruth Welting as Philene and Alain Vanzo as Meister. The Philharmonia Orchestra and Ambrosian Chorus are under the direction of Antonio de Almeida. The Sony recording (SM3K 34590) was first released in 1978 and is still a gem. The opera is full of great individual numbers, Mignon's "Connais-tu le pays" for example, and is to my mind much more enjoyable than Thomas's *Hamlet*.

When you listen to great music – songs by Schubert, pieces by Liszt, operas by Gounod and Boito, Massenet and Thomas – remember the great literary genius who inspired them – Goethe.

On the Horizon...

Television Specials in June

June 21 Andrea Bocelli PBS, Channel 16 9:10 p.m.

June 24 Callas at Covent Garden Bravo, Channel 40 9:00 p.m.

June 28 Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* PBS, Channel 16 8:00 p.m.

LanaudiPre Festival Joliette, Quebec Information: 1-800-561-4343

July 8 *Le Rossignol* by Stravinsky *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* by Poulenc 8:00 p.m.

July 15 Galina Gorchakova sings Tchaikovsky, Puccini & Cilea 8.00 p.m.

Glimmerglass Opera Cooperstown, N.Y.

La Bohème by Puccini

July 7, 9, 15, 23 & 27 August 1, 5, 7, 11, 17, 19, 25 & 27

The Glass Blowers by Sousa

July 8, 10, 16 & 28 August 3, 5, 13, 19, 2 &, 28

Salome by Strauss

July 22, 24 & 30 August 4, 8, 12, 14, 20, 24 & 26

Acis and Galatea by Handel

July 29 & 31 August 6, 10, 12, 15, 18, 21, 26 & 29

(Many performances are sold out!)

Information: 1-607-547-2255

Opéra de Montréal

Place des Arts, Montréal

Così fan tutte by Mozart

September 16, 18, 21, 23, 27 & 30

Information: 1-514-985-2258

Chautauqua Opera Chautauqua N.Y.

La Rondine by Puccini

July 7 & 10

Ariadne auf Naxos by Strauss

July 21 & 24

The Barber of Seville by Rossini

August 4 & 7

Street Scene by Weill

August 18 & 21

Information: 1-800-836-ARTS

Canadian Opera Company

Hummingbird Centre, Toronto

Otello by Verdi

September 21, 24, 27 & 30 October 3 & 6

The Bartered Bride by Smetana

September 22, 26 & 28 October 1, 4 & 7

Information: 1-800-250-4653

OPERA

LYRA OTTAWA

La Fille du rJgiment

Gaetano Donizetti's French
comic masterpiece

Starring

Tracy Dahl

with

the N.A.C.Orchestra

National Arts Centre

September 9, 11, 13 & 16

Information: 233-9200

Lyra's Traviata

The last performance of *La Traviata* that I attended previous to Opera Lyra Ottawa's was in Montreal. In Ottawa the sets, scenery, costumes, lighting, and stage direction were all superior to the Montreal product. But even more importantly both the major tenor and baritone roles were sung more successfully. I even think that Lyne Fortin was better in Ottawa, perhaps because she didn't have to kick chairs around as she was obliged to during a key aria in Montreal. The ballet in the scene at Flora's was particularly enjoyable compared with the weak, almost amateurish effort in Montreal. Can it be that the busloads of opera lovers who used to come to Ottawa from Montreal for opera productions will start coming again?

M.K.

(New York...continued from page 1)

groans! He hastened to assure us that Mr. Ramey and Mr. Margison were healthy and looking forward to singing for us; however, the soprano had a cold, but would sing, begging our indulgence. In fine voice as he strides around in his devilish duds, Samuel Ramey IS Mefistofele. Richard Margison sang Faust beautifully as expected, but the wisdom, or need, of having a tenor of his bulk climbing up and down ladders, or rolling on the ground with the soprano, escapes me! Veronica Villarroel sang both Marguerita, and Elena (of Troy) and was especially good as the latter, cold or no.

Madama Butterfly was beautifully sung by Michele Crider, in a traditional production, on Wednesday, with Sergej Larin as a believable Pinkerton, and Wendy White as Suzuki and William Shimell as Sharpless giving strong performances. "Our" Japanese ladies enjoyed it, in spite of the very large Afro-American Cio-Cio-San!

Thursday evening we had a farewell dinner on the Grand Tier at the Met before this season's opening night of Rossini's *La Cenerentola*. This production has been seen on TV with Cecilia Bartoli, but on this occasion the lovely Jennifer Larmore, also a fine Rossini specialist, sang the lead. It was the Met debut of Canadian John Relyea, as Alidoro; he sang and acted his part well, including sprouting angels' wings.

Larry Edelson is originally from Ottawa, but now lives in New York City, furthering his singing career. The tour included several additional events facilitated by Larry's living in NY City. Monday there was a delightful private concert and meeting with a young Met singer – Andrea Trebnik, a soprano, who was a '97 Met winner as a mezzo! Tuesday in the a.m. we had a tour of the Pierpont Morgan Library including a special exhibition of Netherlandish and Flemish drawings and in the afternoon a tour of the Met. Wednesday was busy. In the morning we had a private tour of the Asia Society's "Sheer Realities" (Philippino clothing) exhibition, in NYU's Grey Gallery, down by Washington Square. In the afternoon, we attended the play *Amadeus* seeing David Suchet and a cast of over 20 in a superb production. Thursday afternoon we finished off with a tour of the Museum of Modern Art's special exhibition for 2000.

Friday we were finally able to relax again on the coach trip back to Ottawa. The tour was a great success and we can heartily recommend Pro Musica Tours.

Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

host: **HOWARD DYCK**

June 24 **LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO**

Falstaff (Verdi)

Conductor: Antonio Pappano

Cast: Bryn Terfel, David Cangelosi, Raymond Aceto, Patricia Risley, Kallen Esperian, Lucio Gallo

July 1 **ROY THOMSON HALL, TORONTO**

Millennium Opera Gala

Conductors: Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw

Featuring: Isabel Bayrakdarian, Russell Braun, Measha Bruggersgosman, Tracy Dahl, Frances Ginzer, Ben Heppner, Richard Margison, Adrienne Pieczonka, Robert Pomakov, Brett Polegato, Gino Quilico, Catherine Robbin, Michael Schade, Jean Stilwell, James Westman

July 8 **OPERA GARNIER, PARIS**

Dialogues des Carmélites (Poulenc)

Conductor: Seiji Ozawa

Cast: Richard Stilwell, Patricia Racette, William Burden, Felicity Palmer, Nancy Gustafson

July 15 **TEATRO LIRICO, CAGLIARI**

Cherevichki (The Slippers) (Tchaikovsky)

Conductor: Gennadi Rozhdestvensky

Cast: Ludmilla Semtchuck, Valery Popov, Vladimir Ognovenko, Ekaterina Morosova

July 15 **NATIONAL OPERA HOUSE, HELSINKI**

La Damnation de Faust (Berlioz)

Conductor: Okko Kamu

Cast: Justin Lavender, Monica Groop, John Cheek, Hannu Forsberg

July 15 **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON**

La Battaglia di Legnano (Verdi)

Conductor: Mark Elder

Cast: Placido Domingo, Veronica Villarroel, Vladimir Chernov, Orlin Anastassov

August 5 **THEATRE ROYAL, LIEGE**

Il Viaggio a Reims (Rossini)

Conductor: Alberto Zedda

Cast: Anne-Catherine Gillet, Jean-Luc Viala, Anna Maria Di Micco, Mario Zeffirini

August 12 **OPERA HOUSE, CRACOW**

Die schwarze Maske (Penderecki)

Conductor: Kai Bumann

Cast: Jozef Kolesinski, Ewa Izykowska, Joanna Kabaszewska, Pawel Wunder

August 19 **STAATSOPER, MUNICH**

I Puritani (Bellini)

Conductor: Marcello Viotti

Cast: Edita Gruberova, Paul Groves, Paolo Gavanelli, Alastair Miles

August 26 **LA MONNAIE, BRUSSELS**

Agrippina (Handel)

Conductor: Rene Jacobs

Cast: Anna Caterina Antonacci, Malena Ernman, Rosemary Joshua, Lorenzo Regazzo

September 2 **BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2000**

Parsifal (Wagner)

Conductor: Christoph Eschenbach

Cast: Poul Elming, Hartmut Welker, Hans Sotin, Andreas Schmidt, Matthias Holle, Violetta Urmana

September 9 **LA MONNAIE, BRUSSELS**

Wintermärchen (Boesmans)

Conductor: Antonio Pappano

Cast: Dale Duesing, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Franz Joseph Selig, Juha Kotilainen

September 16 **DEUTSCHE OPER, BERLIN**

The Cunning Little Vixen (Janacek)

Conductor: Christian Thielemann

Cast: Ulrike Hetzel, Fionnuala McCarthy, Lenus Carlson, Ute Walther, Uwe Pepper

September 23 **VIENNA STATE OPERA**

Die Frau Ohne Schatten (Strauss)

Conductor: Giuseppe Sinopoli

Cast: Johan Botha, Deborah Voigt, Marjana Lipovsek, Wolfgang Bankl

September 30 **VIENNA STATE OPERA**

Lulu (Berg)

Conductor: Michael Boder

Cast: Anat Efraty, Graciela Araya, Franz Grundheber, Jorma Silvasti

October 7 **RESIDENZHOF, SALZBURG**

Iphigénie en Tauride (Gluck)

Conductor: Ivor Bolton

Cast: Susan Graham, Thomas Hampson, Paul Groves, Philippe Rouillon, Olga Schalaeva

October 14 **GROSSES FESTSPIELHAUS,**

SALZBURG Don Giovanni (Mozart)

Conductor: Lorin Maazel

Cast: Ferruccio Furlanetto, René Pape, Renée Fleming, Marina Mescheriakova