

Newsletter • Bulletin

Summer

2001

Été

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

CALIXA COMES HOME!! by Tom McCool

Calixa Lavalée is best known as the composer of “O Canada” but this is not his only claim to fame. Lavalée had a long and varied musical career as composer, performer and teacher in Canada, South America, Europe and the United States. One of his lesser-known accomplishments is the comic opera, *La Veuve*, which was performed last month by **Le Théâtre lyrique de Hull**.

La Veuve received its premiere in New Orleans in 1881 and subsequently was successfully staged in Chicago and a number of other American cities. The opera then was billed as *The Widow*. This was entirely appropriate as the libretto was in English. Lavalée, born in Verchères, Canada East (Quebec) in 1842, was living in the United States at the time and, in fact, died in Boston in 1891. After initial success the opera disappeared and was not rediscovered until some 20 years ago. Despite its English language origins the piece has a definite French feel, partly due to the fact that the setting is the south of France and the fact that there is a ballet in the second act. Also, of course, the language is French! However, until this recent production in June, the opera was never performed in French. Lavalée himself never heard the piece in his first language! I think he would have been pleased by the production staged by **Le Théâtre lyrique de Hull**. I know that the capacity audience enjoyed it immensely.

La Veuve has been described as Offenbach-like and for

many that is high praise indeed. (Lavalée was a contemporary of Offenbach and lived in Paris for a time.) Like Offenbach this opera has bouncy melodies, rousing choruses, the occasional soaring aria and some truly funny moments. This production was enhanced by the excellent playing of the orchestra and by a cast who could not only sing but had the ability to engage the audience. Both the music and the libretto were well served by the performers. On top of that the costumes were superb! On the down-side, while *La Veuve* is Offenbach-like it, alas, is not Offenbach. It does have the positive attributes mentioned above, but it does not have the same sparkle that characterizes most of the operas by the Parisian master. One major problem

with *La Veuve* is that it has a plot so preposterous and so convoluted that even Gilbert & Sullivan might have rejected it. But then, who goes to an opera because of the plot!

This is the fourth time in the last few years that I have attended a production staged by **Le Théâtre lyrique de Hull** and each time it has been at a different location. Because of the high quality of their productions, including *La Veuve*, this company deserves a permanent home. Hopefully, the Maison de Culture in Gatineau will serve this purpose. They also deserve credit for offering a repertoire that is not otherwise accessible to opera aficionados in the National Capital region. Next year they plan to stage Chabrier's *L'Étoile*. I intend to be there.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT: National Capital Opera Society Annual General Meeting, June 10, 2001

The millenium year was one of hard work and retrenchment. With an eventually enlarged Board of Directors it was an encouraging year that made us all feel that we could accomplish more. We continue to demonstrate our devotion to opera in its many facets by concentrating on the three major areas of the Society's focus: the Brian Law Opera Scholarship Competition; our support for opera in its many forms, whether they be, for example, Opera Lyra Ottawa, Opera Breva, 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. Unfortunately, our success in the generation of funds to finance our support, be they private dollars, corporate dollars or community dollars is a major part of this.

The realization that a corporate fundraising campaign to augment the Endowment Fund for the Brian Law Opera Scholarship has weighed heavily on the Board throughout the year, and it is only into the year 2001 that we are starting to make slow progress on this undertaking. Our revised plan from 1999 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. The \$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 a small honorarium of \$100 to help reduce costs. The endowment fund generates some interest returns, but at today's interest rates you can imagine the magnitude of the interest paid.

We applaud the many positive developments at the National Arts Centre with its dynamic Conductor and Music Director. Excitement continues to pervade 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 try to attend the public meetings of the Board of Trustees under their dynamic Chair, Dr. David Leighton.. Unfortunately that type of meeting has ceased and meetings have turned into presentations by the Director-General and various other Department heads. This approach presents useful information but lacks the input gained from planned discussions of facets of the Centre's plans and ongoing business. More about the NAC later.

The work being undertaken by Opera Lyra Ottawa has grown in excellence. I'm sure we all enjoyed their offerings over the past year and many of us are private supporters. We advertise events in our Newsletter, and I know that you all read that great publication. Similarly, if other events are brought to our attention where opera is the focus, they find their way to the Newsletter. I applaud the work being done in making the Newsletter a most enticing publication.

"Opera alla pasta" became a term associated with a video showing of one of the world's opera classics at St. Anthony's followed by a very good pasta dinner with all the trimmings and fuelled by the club bar. It makes for a pleasant Sunday afternoon and presently we are 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.

The year was one of preparation for the 2001 Brian Law Opera Scholarship with quite a few prospective entrants into the competition. It takes several months of work to contact singers, organize a preliminary competition and work on the plans for the final concert competition. Some of us were dogged by illness and were grateful to other Board members who extended a hand and sympathy. The best thing about this particular year was that Gordon Metcalfe joined us as the Society's treasurer. A long search came to an end.

This year of 2001 is getting to be an exciting one. The Christmas programming at the NAC features Brian Law as conductor of Handel's *Messiah* and among the soloists will be baritone Gerald Finley and counter-tenor Daniel Taylor. We have made inquiries and are in the process of setting up a special "Meet Our Friends, The Stars" reception after one of the performances. Brian has a lot of friends still in town and we would like to honour him and the other two singers with a fund raising event where they could see everyone and enjoy some goodies. We are planning a tribute to Canadian singers with a dinner, music and silent auction as another fund raiser in the new year..

It was my pleasure to be invited by the NAC to their launch of the summer “Great Composers’ Festival”. After the many announcements about the Centre’s exciting program for young instrumental artists and aspiring conductors, Maestro Zuckerman took the stage. After speaking about the summer schedule he started to muse about the future and said that he is working on seeing OPERA at the summer festival down the road. My clapped response, along with that of Hamilton Southam, was instant and prolonged. In an ensuing conversation Maestro Zuckerman suggested that they must be given time, that it was very expensive (as if we didn’t know), etc. I told him that we primarily needed the music and the singers, that any elaborate staging was secondary, and that well-cho-reographed concert encounters can be just as stirring. He was quite interested. So, you never know what the future may hold with a magician at the helm.

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 pictures;

— Renate Chartrand, whose specialty is publicity generation and distribution;

— Kurt Fuerst, who was an interested supporter;

— Murray Kitts, who did some publicity and the Newsletter;

— Dan Leeman, who was a terrific helper at the video showings and with the Brian Law planning;

— Donald Metcalfe, who has earned a reputation as a roving scribe for the Newsletter;

— Gordon Metcalfe, who has taken over the Treasurer’s job;

— Peggy Pflug, who is expert on the food end of planning events and 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;

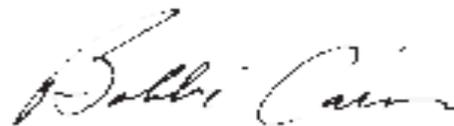
Norma Torontow, who has been my right-hand vice-president and worked on events;

— and Tom McCool, who is working with Murray producing a newsletter full of great information.

To all others who helped, our thanks. This has been a busy year for everyone, and without such support it would have been much less successful that it has been. I thank all these people.

In this millenium plus one 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.

Thank you.



N.C.O.S. Board of Directors

President

Bobbi Cain

Board Members

Pat Adamo

Renate Chartrand

Murray Kitts

Dan Levin

Donald Metcalfe

Peggy Pflug

Gerda Ruckerbauer

Jean Saldanha

Norma Torontow

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

**Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild and CBC Radio
present**

A Day with Stuart Hamilton

**Saturday, November 10, 2001
Auditorium, National Library
395 Wellington Street**

Program

9:30 a.m. Coffee and registration

10:00 a.m. Master class

Noon Light Lunch

1:00 p.m. Opera Quiz

2:30 p.m. Stuart Hamilton lecture

\$40 (\$35 for Guild members)

**Information: Adele Kline (260-2804)
Pre-registration essential**

AN OPERA GOER'S DIARY by Donald Metcalfe

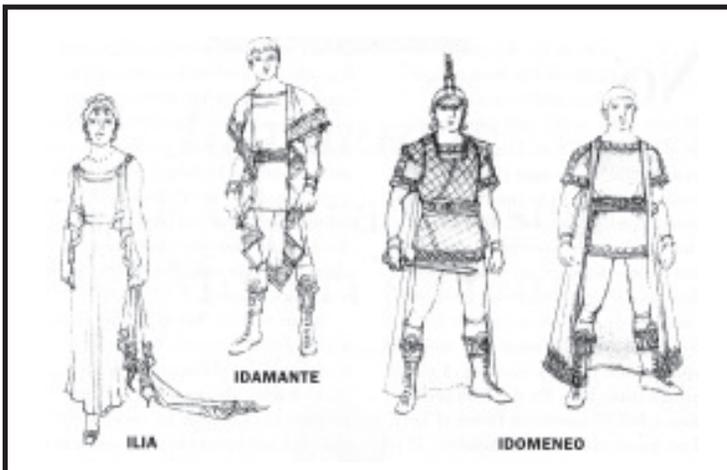
The 2000—2001 opera season has ended with an embarrassment of riches in this part of the country particularly for opera fans who enjoy works that are rarely heard.

Of course, Opera Lyra Ottawa has given us *IL TROVATORE* in a fine production, but other operas I have attended have included much less conventional fare.

First in Toronto there was the Canadian Opera production of Benjamin Britten's *BILLY BUDD*, based on the Herman Melville story.

The staging did not quite match the spectacular Metropolitan Opera effort that I've seen twice a few years ago, but the singing was exemplary, featuring Russell Braun in the title rôle, with Nigel Robson as Captain Vere, and Jeffrey Wells as John Claggart.

The problem with this opera is that it is written exclusively for male voices, and consequently there is no love interest. There are few arias and ensemble numbers, the opera consisting entirely of recitatives with the principal musical interest concentrated in the orchestra. Britten's emphasis is on the drama and he recruits every musical means at his command to point up the personal tragedy of the protagonist. Richard Bradshaw recognized this and offered us, as conductor, an appropriately sympathetic approach to the score. The scenery and costumes were from the Welsh National Opera and Opera Australia.



The following evening, April 18, I attended a new production by the COC of Mozart's rarely heard *IDOMENEO*. I've been lucky with this opera, not only with

the number of production (nine) but also with the casting. The first was at Covent Garden in 1978 with Stuart Burrows in the title rôle, Janet Baker as Idamante, and Colin Davis conducting.

Then in 1981 in Ottawa under Mario Bernardi we had George Shirley, Benita Valente, Mark Du Bois, and Pauline Tinsley in the cast as well as a young singer who appeared as a spear carrier, Ben Heppner. The following year at the Met I saw James Levine conduct a star-studded performance with Pavarotti, Ileana Cotrubas, Frederica von Stade and Hildegard Behrens.

In the present COC production we were fortunate in having our Canadian Michael Schade in the title rôle. He was perfect in that part, as was Polish soprano, Elzbieta Szmytka (last season's Melisande) in the rôle of Ilia and French soprano Isabelle Vernet as Elettra.

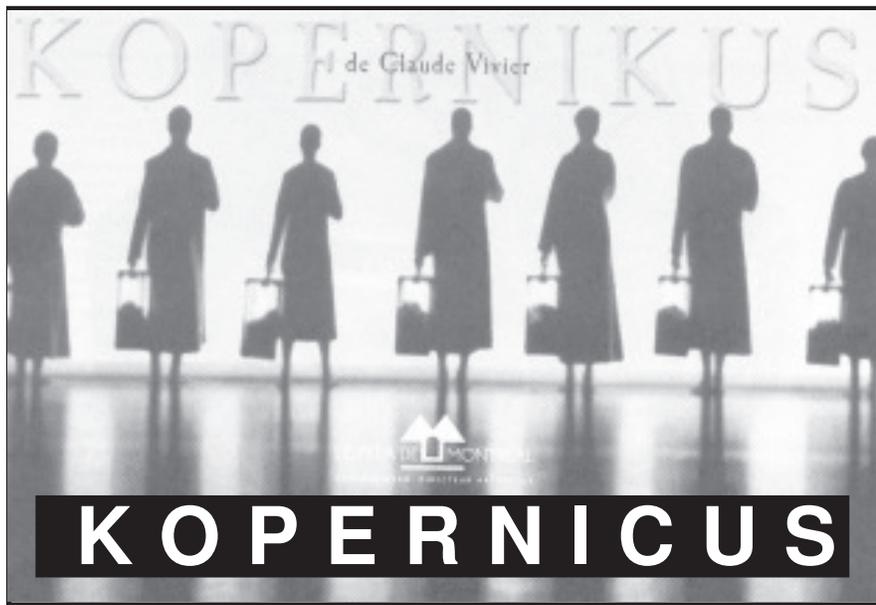
Once again Richard Bradshaw has managed well with a good choice of singers and a very acceptable production.

On April 28 in Montreal I attended Canadian composer Claude Vivier's opera *KOPERNIKUS*. This is not an opera I would recommend to the casual opera fan. Since we have so little opportunity to see Canadian content I felt obliged to take it in.

The ninety minute piece, with an eight musician orchestra conducted by Olivier Dejours in the appropriately smaller Salle Maisonneuve of the Place des Arts, offered no actual story, and has little to do with the title character.

Rather there is Agni and around her gravitate real and mythical beings taken from history: Lewis Carroll, Merlin, a witch, the Queen of the Night, a blind prophet, an aged monk, Tristan and Isolda, Mozart, and others, making the opera a bit confusing to say the least.

The friends with me thought that it was probably a workshop production and didn't justify a trip from Ottawa. I thought differently, and as I'm not that familiar with Vivier's music I would like to have an opportunity to hear the work again in the future and pass judgment then.



Debussy's *PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE* which I attended on May 12, once again in the Salle Maisonneuve, was another matter altogether. Although apprehensive about the size of the orchestra pit in this small hall for an opera that requires a large band of musicians, everything worked out admirably under the direction of Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Orchestre Métropolitain.

The principal rôles: Pelléas – Marc Boucher, Mélisande – Nathalie Paulin, Golaud – Dion Mazerolle were sung well and took advantage of the intimacy of a smaller venue.

A friend once referred to this opera as probably the most boring opera he had ever heard, music to put you to sleep before the end of Act I. At the first performance that I attended back in 1972 at the Met I would have agreed had it not been for the Met debut that night of Louis Quilico as Golaud with Colin Davis conducting. Since then I have grown to love this opera and as the Montreal production was my seventeenth it has remained one of my favourites. One of the most memorable performances was in Vienna in 1990 with the Staatsoper under Claudio Abbado and Frederica von Stade and Christa Ludwig in the cast.

On May 28 I attended the restaging of the Opéra de Montréal's 1994 production of Verdi's *AIDA* no doubt in honour of the centenary of the composer's death. Victor de Renzi conducted the Orchestre Métropolitain with an entirely new cast of singers. Marquita Lister was fine in the title rôle displaying a lustrous soprano voice and accomplished acting abili-

ties. Equally effective was Amonasro sung by Mark Delavan whose baritone voice and physical presence were quite splendid.

Louis Langelier's Radames was less attractive, although he did manage the famous aria *Celeste Aida* quite acceptably. Mezzo soprano Barbara Dever as Amneris had a huge voice but the sound was not always that pleasant.

This was the twentieth *AIDA* I have attended beginning in 1965, also in Montreal, with Zubin Mehta conducting and Jon Vickers as Radames.

The Montreal Symphony ended its present season on May 30 with a stunning concert version of Strauss' *ELECTRA* featuring South African-born Elizabeth Connell in the title rôle and Charles Dutoit conducting the one hundred and fifteen musicians in the orchestra and a singing cast of fifteen on stage. I had heard Elizabeth Connell before in this opera in New York under Lorin Maazel, but she sang the part of the sister, Chrysothemis, and Eva Marton was Electra; so it was a pleasant surprise to hear this soaring voice in the main rôle, offering us all that we should expect in this demanding portrayal of an obsessed person.

ELECTRA was the first collaboration between Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. In this opera, the most complex score he ever wrote, the composer came closest to atonalism; but it was made very clear in the final bar what direction he would take in the future: a resounding C major chord pointed surely towards his next opera, *DER ROSENKAVALIER*.

The other soloists did very well indeed, particularly Judith Forst as the mother, Klytemnestra; Françoise Pollet as Chrysothemis; Alan Held as Orestes; and Siegfried Jerusalem suitably assuming the neurotic part of Aegisthus.

The greatest praise, however, must be reserved for the Montreal Symphony and Maestro Dutoit for this marvellous evening, my only regret being that I didn't attend both performances.

It was my eighteenth *ELECTRA* including three featuring Birgit Nilsson in the title rôle (Vienna, New York, Stockholm) but the Place des Arts concert will have to rate high on my list of the best.

OPERA LYRA'S TRIBUTE TO VERDI

by Murray Kitts

Not only was the production of *IL TROVATORE* a fitting tribute to the great opera composer on his anniversary year but it was, in my opinion, the best performance of an opera ever delivered by Opera Lyra.

The singers were all first-rate and this applies to those in minor parts as well. The advance publicity for Barbara Livingston prepared the audience for an outstanding interpretation of Leonora. John MacMaster was excellent as Manrico. Yalun Zhang as the Count di Luna has a powerful if somewhat rough voice, but quite adequate for the part.

It's a little unfair to judge the acting abilities of these three up against those of Sharon Graham as Azucena. Verdi expert Julian Budden says "...a singer who cannot capture and hold her audience with this most rewarding of mezzo-soprano roles has no business on the operatic stage". This is in no way to diminish the vocal and dramatic achievement of Sharon Graham but perhaps puts the acting skills of the other principals in perspective. They just don't have the same opportunity in their roles.

Taras Kulish as Ferrando and Gary Remigio Pereira as Ruiz were both impressive. A special "brava" to Isabelle Lacroix as Ines. Isabelle was one of the outstanding contestants in the most recent Brian Law Opera Scholarship competition.

Tyrone Paterson proved once again that he is a skilled opera conductor and the orchestra responded well. The chorus was especially improved over past productions.

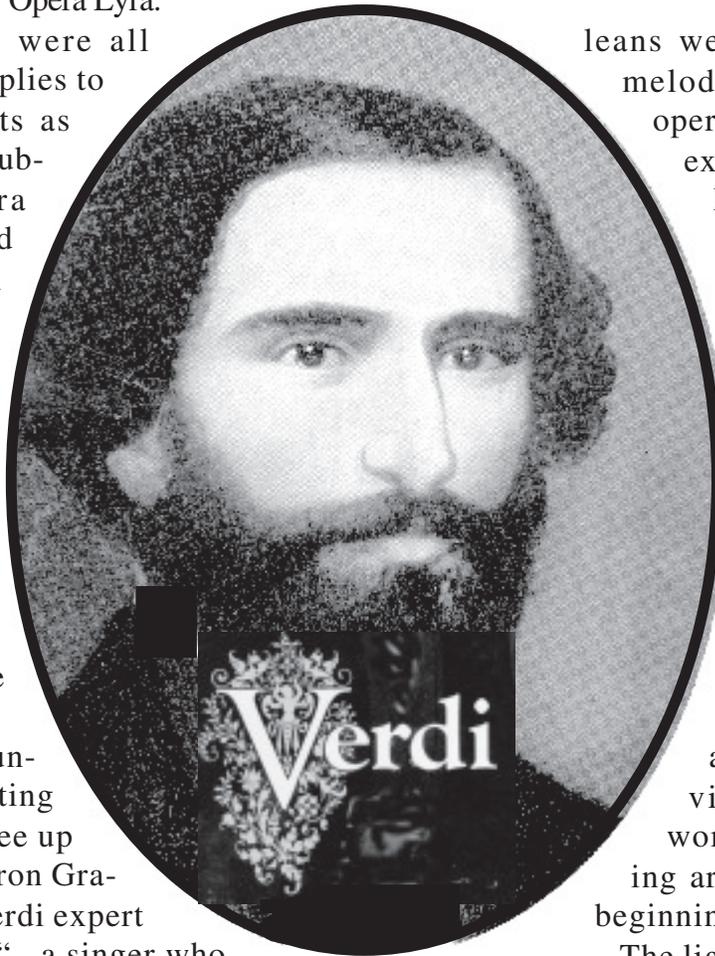
The sets from New Orleans were appropriate to the melodramatic nature of the opera. Costumes were fine except for the nuns in Act II who looked more like Bedouins (their costumes were probably quite authentic, but looked strange). I half expected them to throw off their robes and reveal themselves as Manrico's men in disguise.

Stage Director Ludek Golat kept the action moving although I was not convinced that the Gypsy women should be soliciting around the guards at the beginning of Act I.

The lighting was on the whole quite good except in the scene where Leonora mistakes the Count for Manrico; that received a laugh from the audience reading the surtitles because the stage was fully lit.

It was fashionable for some years for critics to denigrate *Il trovatore* but now it is recognized as one of Verdi's greatest achievements. Bravo Opera Lyra! Viva Verdi!

I hope all our members noted that the financial support of the National Capital Opera Society was acknowledged in the program.



On the Horizon...

OPERA LYRA OTTAWA

Salome October 20, 22, 24 & 27
Black & White Opera Soiree Feb 16, 2002
La Bohème April 13, 15, 17 & 20

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA

Metropolitan Opera Premieres

Sly
War and Peace

New Productions

Die Frau ohne Schatten
Luisa Miller
Norma

Restaged and Restored Production

Falstaff

Season Repertory

Arabella
Il Barbiere di Siviglia
La Bohème
Don Carlo
Eugene Onegin
The Great Gatsby
Hänsel und Gretel
Idomeneo
Lulu
Madama Butterfly
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg
A Midsummer Night's Dream
Le Nozze di Figaro
 Parade:
 Parade
 Les Mamelles de Tirésias
 L'Enfant et les Sortilèges
Rigoletto
Tosca
La Traviata
Wozzeck

L'OPERA DE MONTREAL

Peter Grimes
 Sept 15, 17, 20, 22 & 26

Nabucco
 Nov 3, 5, 8, 10, 14 & 17

Gala December 2

La Traviata
 Feb 9, 11, 14, 16, 20 & 23

Tosca March 9, 11, 14, 16, 20 & 23

Thérèse Raquin
 April 24, 27, 29 & May 2

L'Elisir d'amore
 June 1, 3, 6, 8, & 12

canadian | opera | company

Il tabarro & Cavalleria rusticana

Sept 20, 23, 26, 29 Oct 2 & 5

Bluebeard's Castle & Erwartung

Sept 21, 25, 27, 30 Oct 3 & 6

Giulio Cesare in Egitto

Dec 3, 5, 7 & 9

Salome

Jan 18, 23, 27, 31 Feb 2 & 5

Il viaggio a Reims

Jan 22, 24, 26, 30 Feb 1 & 3

Boris Godunov

April 5, 9, 11, 14, 17 & 20

Julius Caesar in Egypt

April 6, 10, 12, 16, 18 & 21

SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE OPERA

ESTONIAN NATIONAL OPERA, TALLINN

July 14, 2001 **Rusalka** (Dargomizhsky)
 Conductor: Paul Mägi
 Cast: Nadia Kurem, Leonid Stavitski
 Mati Körst, Riina Airene

PALAIS GARNIER, PARIS

July 21, 2001 **Ariodante** (Handel)
 Conductor: Marc Minkowski
 Cast: Anne Sofie von Otter, Laura Claycomb,
 Maria José Trullu, Richard Croft

TEATRO COMUNALE, BOLOGNA

July 28, 2001 **May Night** (Rimsky-Korsakov)
 Conductor: Vladimir Jurowski
 Cast: Agata Bienkowska, Vladimir Matorin,
 Maxim Mikhailov, Dariusz Stachura, Svetlana Vassileva

CONCERTGEBOUW, AMSTERDAM

August 4, 2001 **Saint-François d'Assise**
 (Messiaen)
 Conductor: Reinbert de Leeuw
 Cast: Heidi Grant Murphy, David Wilson-Johnson,
 Stuart Kale, Quentin Hayes, Gordon Gietz

THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS

August 11, 2001 **Pénélope** (Fauré)
 Conductor: Pinchas Steinberg
 Cast: Isabelle Vernet, Luco Lombardo, Guy Fletcher,
 Gilles Cachemaille, Sylvie Sullé

SEMPEROPER, DRESDEN

August 18, 2001 **Cora und Alonzo** (Naumann)
 Conductor: René Jacobs Cast: Inga Kalna, Bernarda Fink,
 Sandra Moon, Johannes Chum

VIENNA STATE OPERA

August 25, 2001 **Die Jakobsleiter** (Schönberg)
 Conductor: Michael Boder
 Cast: Franz Hawlata, Hubert Delamboye, John Dickie,
 Wolfgang Bankl, Kirsten Dene
Gianni Schicchi (Puccini)
 Conductor: Michael Boder
 Cast: Leo Nucci, Juan Diego Flórez, Angelika Kirchsclager

VIENNA STATE OPERA

September 1, 2001 **Roberto Devereux** (Donizetti)
 Conductor: Marcello Viotti
 Cast: Edita Gruberova, Carlos Alvarez,
 Enkelejda Shkosa, Ramon Vargas

LA MONNAIE, BRUSSELS

September 8, 2001 **Macbeth** (Verdi)
 Conductor: Antonio Pappano
 Cast: Jean-Philippe Lafont, Sylvie Valayre,
 Erwin Schrott, Marco Berti, James Cornelison

MUNICIPAL THEATRE, LAUSANNE

September 15, 2001 **Luisa Miller** (Verdi)
 Conductor: Corrado Rovaris
 Cast: Giorgio Surjan, Cesar Catani,
 Stefano Antonucci, Annalisa Raspagliosi

LA SCALA, MILAN

September 22, 2001 **Il Trovatore** (Verdi)
 Conductor: Riccardo Muti
 Cast: Salvatore Licitra, Barbara Frittoli,
 Leo Nucci, Violetta Urmana

NATIONALTHEATER, MUNICH

September 29, 2001 **Falstaff** (Verdi)
 Conductor: Zubin Mehta
 Cast: Bryn Terfel, Lucio Gallo, Rainer Trost,
 Elizabeth Futral, Marjana Lipovsek

BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2001

October 6, 2001 **Lohengrin** (Wagner)
 Conductor: Antonio Pappano
 Cast: Jean-Philippe Lafont, Melanie Diener,
 Stephen West, Peter Seiffert, Robert Dean Smith

BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 2001

October 13, 2001 **Die Meistersinger
 von Nurnberg** (Wagner)
 Conductor: Christian Thielemann
 Cast: Clemens Bieber, Emily Magee,
 Michelle Breedt, Robert Dean Smith, Endrik Wottrich
 Cast: Grace Chan, Stuart Howe, Zheng Zhou, Zhu Ge Zeng