

Newsletter • Bulletin

Spring

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A New Star on the Horizon by Tom McCool

The number of Canadians who have become leading singers at the most prestigious opera houses in the world is truly remarkable. From the middle of the 19th century Canada has contributed operatic talent far beyond our comparatively small population. This continues to the present as Canadian singers grace the stages of the world's foremost opera houses. In

fact, more than one commentator, in reference to the current crop of Canadian opera singers, has used the term, "Golden Age". And, there is a new star on the horizon. Her name is Alexandra Deshorties and, although her link to Canada is somewhat tenuous, Ms. Deshorties is frequently referred to as the "Canadian soprano". Alexandra Deshorties was educated in France having moved there as a child. Her musical education was at the Marseilles Conservatory and at the Manhattan School of Music. What unquestionably qualifies her as a Canadian is the fact that she was born in Montreal. We will take her!

Alexandra Deshorties first achieved a degree of celebrity because of a bizarre incident that occurred during her opening night as *Konstanze* in the Metropolitan Opera's revival of Mozart's *DIE ENTFUHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL* on January 20, 2003. Perhaps notoriety rather than celebrity would be a more appropriate word as what happened was a male audience member seated in the middle of the orchestra section repeatedly and loudly booed Ms Deshorties' first two arias. The conductor, James Levine, who is an admirer and considered to be the "protector" of the soprano, was visibly upset at the booing. Nobody is certain of the official reason but at the intermission Metropolitan Opera security guards removed the disenchanted audience member from the premises. As well as gaining publicity for Ms. Deshorties, the incident raised a significant issue: does anyone have the right to express their displeasure with something they paid a lot of money to see and hear? On the basis of this incident that right does not exist at the Met. (Apparently it still



does at La Scala where not too long ago Renée Fleming was vigorously booed with nobody being ejected.) Whether Ms. Deshorties deserved the booing is another matter. She apparently was not in her best voice that night but what exactly was the cause of the booing from the malcontent is not known. One

thing is for sure and that is the reaction of audiences and critics to this Canadian soprano wherever she sings in Europe and America has been overwhelmingly positive. The incident described above is definitely an anomaly, albeit an intriguing one.

Alexandra Deshorties won the 1997 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and has been singing at the Met since 1999. She began with minor roles such as the Priestess in *AIDA*, the First Lady in *DIE ZAUBERFLOTE* and many others. She has since progressed to the lead soprano roles such as the Countess in *LE NOZZE DI FIGARO*, *Donna*

Anna in *DON GIOVANNI* as well as the aforementioned *Konstanze*. She has a deep, rich voice but has the range that enables her to sing all the roles in Mozart and the Bel Canto repertoire that call for a coloratura. The tall and beautiful soprano has an athletic bearing that enables her to move on the stage with an energetic ease. Of late, in addition to roles at opera houses in Europe and America, she has moved on to non-operatic roles and has performed with various symphony orchestras in works such as the *REQUIEMS* of Mozart and Verdi, *CARMINA BURANA*, Beethoven's *9th* and the choral music of Brahms. This month she is singing the role of *Donna Anna* in *DON GIOVANNI* at the Metropolitan Opera and in the 2005-6 season she will be the Met's *Lucia*. After that, the future looks bright indeed for this "Canadian soprano".

From the President

Happy Spring! Here's hoping that we don't get anymore snow.

Did you all go to **RIGOLETTO** and enjoy Verdi's masterpiece? My sixteen year-old grandson, who is my opera companion, enjoyed the music very much but found the story somewhat depressing.

As you have all seen from a special mailing that went out, we have our Annual Meeting, bookended by a DVD showing of Verdi's **LA TRAVIATA** and a delicious dinner, coming up on April 25th at St. Anthony's. If you are coming please call me at 225-0124 to reserve a place. If you are considering serving on the Board of Directors, let Peggy Pflug know at 1-613-679-1347. She'll be happy to hear from you. It should be a good afternoon, so come and join us!

Cheers to all!!



Donna Leon Bibliography

(in response to a reader's query concerning the titles of the Donna Leon murder mysteries)

Death at La Fenice (1992)

Death in a Strange Country (1993)

The Anonymous Venetian (1994)

also known as *Dressed for Death*

A Venetian Reckoning (1995)

aka *Death and Judgment*

Acqua Alta (1996)

aka *Death in High Water*

Death of Faith (1997)

aka *Quietly in Their Sleep*

A Noble Radiance (1998)

Fatal Remedies (1999)

Friends in High Places (2000)

A Sea of Troubles (2001)

Willful Behaviour (2002)

Uniform Justice (2003)

Doctored Evidence (2004)

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Opera alla Pasta

Too few of our members have taken advantage of the delicious meals served us by the staff of St. Anthony's Soccer Club.

At our most recent showing we started off as usual with a wide selection of antipasti - salami, prosciutto, other cold meats, olives, etc.

The salad course featured delicious fresh greens accompanied by argula and excellent home-made dressings.

Pasta, of course. We often have penne rigati in a delicious meat sauce. As a special treat we once had gnocchi.

There is always meat or chicken. Whether chicken, veal, pork or beef, this course is always enjoyable. In addition there are vegetables such as green beans and often potatoes roasted with rosemary, one of my favourites.

Dessert is not missing either, usually a succulent pastry. Coffee and tea complement the meal.

All this and the opera too cost you only \$15.00

For those of you who wish to wash down such an excellent meal with wine, there is wine available at the bar next door for a very moderate price.

Now that you know what you've been missing we expect to see you there.

For reservations call 225-0124.

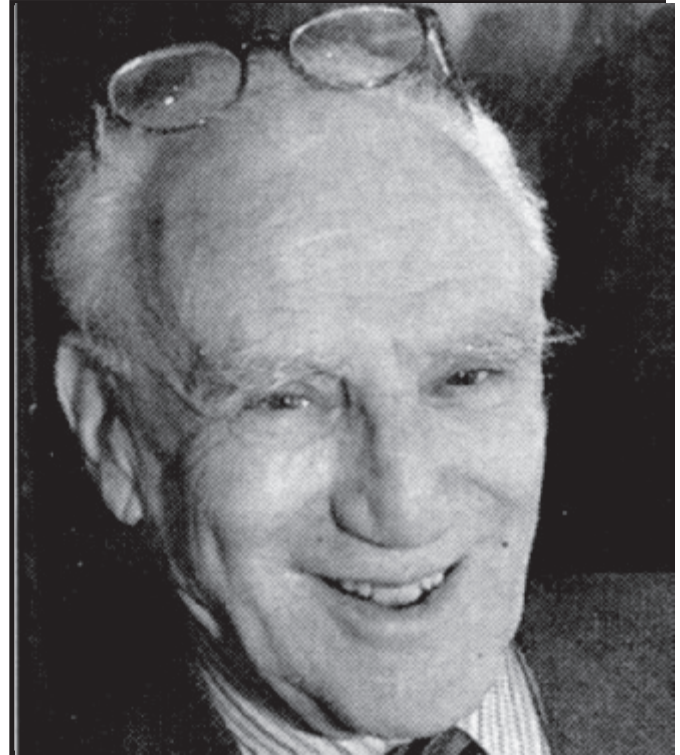
NICHOLAS GOLDSCHMIDT: MUSIC ORGANIZER, FOUNDER OF FESTIVALS

by Bobbi Cain

It has been my privilege to have known this dynamic gentleman since our Centennial year when I joined the 300-voice Centennial Choir that he had organized for that special event. “Niki” as we all knew him, was head of the performing arts division of the Centennial Commission from 1964 to 1968, a period which saw non-stop activity programming performances across Canada and liaising with performing groups of almost every nature in our vast country. For the special activities taking place in the capital region, he formed Ottawa’s Canadian Centennial Choir which drew choristers from many choirs to celebrate the Centennial. In 1968 he was approached by a group of us who wanted to continue working with the Maestro, and he did so with an 80 member choir until 1972, a choir which is still active.

Past centennial year Niki and his lovely wife Shelagh eventually returned to their home in Toronto, and I was “promoted” by him from choir president to Manager. He continued to commute to choir activities and organizational matters until turning over the baton to his successor in 1972. One cannot believe what managing a choir for Niki entailed – I was chauffeur, board manager, event liaison and a multitude of other Niki-related duties. Bless his fertile mind! It has recently been referred to as a “Perpetual Party”

One thing that he did involve me in to my eternal gratitude was to become one of the three organizers (along with two from the Guelph Spring Festival - one of Niki’s babies) of the first Ontario-wide choral event of the newly-formed Ontario Choral Federation in June 1971. Niki told me there would probably be fifty or sixty participants, and there turned out to be over 150 singers from far and wide to be fed and hosted by the National Arts Centre, as well at the then Chateau Laurier. From that event spawned my interest and organizational participation in the OCF (now Choirs Ontario) to this time. Niki organized festivals in Guelph, Toronto (many times), Algoma, and in Vancouver, festivals of international scope and national prominence, commissioning myriad compositions from a wealth of Ca-



nadian talent, and focusing on and promoting singers of great excellence such as Roxolana Roslak and Gary Relyea. Niki was a talented baritone, with special emphasis on lieder and he knew what made a good singer. He *breathed* his love of choral music and opera, being one of the founders of the Canadian Opera Company in the late forties. His last festival was one celebrating the music of Benjamin Britten across Ontario, in the autumn of 2003, just a few months before he died at this Toronto home February 8th at the age of 95 years. Born in what is now Czechoslovakia, and a product of musical schools and activity there and in Vienna, Niki immigrated to the United States in 1937 and was, in 1946, gloriously invited to come to Canada to originally run the new Royal Conservatory Opera School. A honeymoon visit to Scotland in 1948 to attend the recently new Edinburgh Festival (started by Rudolf Bing) convinced Niki that the “festival” idea was of great importance to the musical life of a country, that it could be splashy and internationally focused, with participants from all areas. Canada was his template.

Last But Not Least

by Shelagh Williams

In an outstanding January week, we enjoyed the final operas of three of the greatest operatic composers. It all started on Thursday evening in Ottawa with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's super production of *MAGIC FLUTE*, with Mozart's music performed by the NAC Orchestra, the Cantata Singers and 16 (count 'em!) excellent soloists — from our box we didn't know whether to watch the dancers on stage or the singers in the pit! Then on Saturday and Sunday in Toronto we attended the Canadian Opera Company (COC)'s blockbuster productions of Puccini's *TURANDOT* and Verdi's *FALSTAFF*, both ably conducted by COC's General Director, Richard Bradshaw.

Giacomo Puccini died before completing *TURANDOT*, leaving modern-day opera companies with a choice between Luciano Berio's recently composed ending and the traditional ending by Puccini's former student Franco Alfano. The COC had proposed using Luciano Berio's version but, after experiencing it in performance, Maestro Bradshaw decided that Alfano's ending was more dramatic and would be more pleasing to the COC audience. And please the audience this production certainly did, with three great singers to head the cast. Canada's own tenor, Richard Margison, 100 pounds slimmer over the past year, sang the egotistical, callous Prince Calaf, bringing his beautiful voice and the experience of 15 productions to

... a well-played, well-sung, thoroughly glorious production of TURANDOT.

his "Nessun dorma". Strong-voiced Czech soprano Eva Urbanova, last year's gripping Kostelnicka in *Jenufa*, returned as the cruel, self-centred Princess Turandot, and she and Margison had no trouble in

their final love duet soaring gloriously over the beautifully played orchestration. However, the singer who brought the audience to its feet was debuting Italian soprano Serena Farnocchia, singing and acting beautifully the devoted slave girl Liu, who had cared for blind old Timur, and was the only sympathetic character on the stage. In fact, the whole cast, including the chorus, was good, and, apart from debuting Bulgarian bass Deyan Vatchkov as ex-king Timur (Calaf's father), the rest was all-Canadian: Gregory Dahl, Luc Robert and Michael Colvin providing comic relief as courtiers Ping, Pang and Pong; John Krieter as the Emperor; and Peter Barrett as a Mandarin.

As befits a fairy tale love story where the princess is to be awarded to the man who solves three riddles, the scenery and costumes were neither naturalistic nor new! They were built by Minnesota Opera in the 90's, and were used in the COC's earlier 1997 production. The skeletal bamboo scaffolding, with imaginative lighting and projections, was suitably evocative of China, and having the three courtiers and the Emperor wheeled around indicated they considered themselves above mere mortals.

The costuming was also along class lines: the principals in magnificent, brightly-coloured satins and brocades, the guards and executioner in authoritarian black, and the rabble in dung-coloured rags. Maestro Bradshaw and director Peter Rothstein combined to bring us a well-played, well-sung, thoroughly glorious production of *TURANDOT*.

Amazingly, the production of Verdi's final opera *FALSTAFF* surpassed that of *TURANDOT*! This was one of the first operas that Richard Bradshaw ever conducted at Glyndebourne, and when the production moved to San Francisco, he was there to conduct it again. The COC production had obviously been very carefully and lovingly prepared, with every nuance of the score and the libretto brought out.

The sets and costumes were from San Francisco Opera and were first conceived by legendary French director and designer Jean-Pierre Ponnelle. A half-timbered Tudor frame surrounded the wonderful classic sets and the amazing Herne's Oak dominating the final Windsor Park scene. England's Colin Graham, who had earlier directed the COC's world premiere of *The Golden Ass*, didn't miss a trick as he successfully brought his imagination and skills to bear on the conning and conspiring of the merry wives of Windsor. The music moves along speedily, and the conductor and orchestra were more than up to its demands, while the actions on stage matched the pace, so that the story hurtled along, keeping one's eyes and ears glued to the stage. Again, a superb cast, many

... a marvellous, witty, meticulously prepared, and thoroughly satisfying production of FALSTAFF.

debuting with the COC, ensured vocal and stage excellence. These strong newcomers included English-born bass-baritone Pavlo Hunka absolutely living the title role of

Falstaff; Hungarian mezzo-soprano Judit Nemeth as Meg Page; Americans mezzo-soprano Jane Henschel as Mistress Quickly and tenor Franco Pomponi as Ford; and Italian tenor Riccardo Botta as young Fenton. Canadian soprano Wendy Nielsen was supposedly indisposed when we heard her as Alice Ford, but her voice and acting showed no sign of this — some may remember her lovely Countess in *MARRIAGE OF FIGARO* here a few years ago. Finally, the outstanding female singer was Russian soprano Elena Voznessenskaia, returning after *Il Viaggio a Riems*, who was both young enough to be a convincing Nannetta and experienced enough to successfully manage the difficult vocal line.

The fun-filled Windsor Park scene and final fugue brought to a wonderful conclusion a marvellous, witty, meticulously prepared, and thoroughly satisfying production of Falstaff.

We returned to Ottawa to find another production of *MAGIC FLUTE* on the boards, an abridged version by the Opera Workshop of Ottawa University's Music Department. The usual piano accompaniment was supplemented with flute and glockenspiel, and the students, some of them members of Opera Lyra (OLO)'s Young Artist Programme, acquitted themselves admirably, under the able musical and stage direction of Sandra Graham, herself a world-class mezzo-soprano, who played Amneris in OLO's production of *Aida*.

All in all, it was a great week of great composers' last operatic thoughts: the ultimate!

WHY OPERA?

If anyone asks you this question you might want to refer him to the following. Michael Billington, best known as a drama critic, wrote this in *The Guardian* a few years ago: *"...opera satisfies a hunger for the irrational, the ecstatic, the sensual, and the melodramatic that other art-forms and social institutions are failing to cater for. It provides a ritualised uplift that religion barely acknowledges, that modern drama largely fights shy of, that cinema has sacrificed to morbid flesh-creeping shock and that only the musical or the rock concert begin to compete with."*

Opera Lyra's *RIGOLETTO*

by Murray Kitts

First of all, thank goodness this was a traditional production of a great masterpiece. The Covent Garden DVD seems to be intended for kinky leather fetishists, while the recent Dutch production seen on Bravo has to be classified as soft porn with full frontal nudity, copulation and a Gilda who gropes the Duke.

I suppose it's inevitable that those of us who saw the last production of this opera by Opera Lyra would compare the present production unfavourably with the previous one if only for the unforgettable performance of Louis Quilico in the title rôle.

But just a moment – if my memory serves me right the recent production had sets and costumes far superior to the previous one. The same improvement applies to the orchestra under the direction of Tyrone Patterson. What a pleasure it was to hear a fairly large chorus for a change. The dancing in Act 1, Scene 1, though limited, also was an improvement on earlier efforts..

It's true that Warren Mok as the Duke does not possess a mellifluous tenor voice, but his acting is very good and the tenor from the previous staging was even more limited. One couldn't help being especially disappointed as Warren Mok was very good in *THE MASKED BALL*. His main problem seems to be with the Italian vowels. It appears that he is to sing the title rôle in next season's *THE TALES OF HOFFMAN*; let's hope that his French is better than his Italian.

Gary Simpson as Rigoletto has to overcome the problem that he is a big man and certainly doesn't fit physically into the part. Some judicious make-up might have helped the audience believe that he had led the tormented life he describes. He looked too young and handsome to be the character he portrayed. He has a good voice and is said to have sung the rôle almost 100 times. Perhaps this is just too many times to be really

convincing in the part.

Agathe Martel as Gilda possesses a lovely voice and uses it well. Her main costume, though virginally white, emphasized her physical development and made her appear older than the young Gilda. Her



appearance as a ghost in the final scene was effective enough but I feel that when the still living Gilda is in the arms of her despairing father the emotional impact is much greater.

Taras Kulish playing both Monterone and Sparafucile (Milton Cross on the old Met broadcasts used to love saying this name) did an excellent job.

Highest acting and singing honours to Brian Law Scholarship winner Julie Nesrallah who, as Maddelena, flaunted herself memorably.

Other small parts were fine, though Joyce El-Khoury could have been made up to appear much older. It's hard to believe that an extremely nervous father would entrust his daughter to a very young woman.

Stage direction was good on the whole. I really didn't like Monterone's entrance on the platform behind the Duke who is sitting down, especially when all Monterone had to do was descend some steps into the room. Using the amplified voice of Monterone and his captor instead of bringing them on near the end of Act 2 was effective.

Lighting – good. Too much lightning – bad, although the music calls for a lot of lightning.

All in all, this was an enjoyable production of not only one of Verdi's greatest hits, but one of opera's greatest hits.

Pellegrini Opera Presents:

Don Giovanni

By W.A. Mozart

*A prelude
to
Italian
Week*

May 29, 2004 at 7:30 p.m.

Glebe Collegiate Auditorium

212 Glebe Ave. (Carling at Bronson)

\$30 - Advance / \$40 at the Door

Ticket info.: 798-1479

Cast:

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Don Ottavio..... Gary Remigio Pereira

Leporello..... Neil Arnoff

Commendatore..... Fred Bradley

Masetto..... Nicholas Roch

Donna Anna..... Rachel Cleland-Ainsworth

Donna Elvira..... Marie Patenaude

Zerlina..... Evelin Pishé

Conductor: Yve Laconsiere

Pianist: Chris Deolin

Artist Director: Maria Pellegrini

Stage Manager: Samira Rose

Assistant Stage Manager: Pat Muller

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Mark on your calendar

April 16th, 2005.

Gerald Finley appears in Mozart's *DON GIOVANNI* with a stellar cast including Isabel Bayrakdarian and Samuel Ramey. We are currently engaged in planning to go to New York by bus to see this great performance. More details as they become available.