

# Newsletter • Bulletin

Spring

2009

Printemps

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## Brian Law Winners to Star in *Magic Flute*

Opera Lyra Ottawa's 2009-10 season will feature *The Magic Flute*, *Macbeth* and *Manon* (in concert). Three Brian Law Scholarship winners will star in OLO's September production of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. Shannon Mercer (winner in 2001) will sing the role of Pamina, Joshua Hopkins (winner in 2003) the role of Papageno and Joyce El-Khoury (winner in 2005) the role of Second Lady.

Shannon Mercer has already sung the role of Pamina with Opera Hamilton in October 2008 and is scheduled to sing Pamina with Pacific Opera in Victoria (April 2009) and in London, Ontario (May 2009). She should be well settled in the role by the time she sings it in Ottawa. As well as her expanding opera career with its many prizes and awards, Shannon has been equally successful in her recording endeavours. Two of her CD's have been nominated for this year's Juno awards. Check Shannon's web site for further biographical details and photographs ([www.shannonmercer.com](http://www.shannonmercer.com)).

Joshua Hopkins is also a seasoned performer in the role of Papegano, having sung this role with Calgary Opera, Arizona Opera, and Sante Fe Opera. It has been reported in Opera Canada that Joshua will make his Metropolitan Opera debut during the 2009/10 season and that Joshua will soon sign an exclusive recording contract. Consult Joshua's web site for further biographical details and photographs ([www.imgartists.com](http://www.imgartists.com)).

Joyce El-Khoury will be singing the role of Pamina in the SilverCast matinee performance of *The Magic Flute* for high school students. As a member of their Apprentice program Joyce covered the role of First Lady at Sante Fe Opera. She is currently participating in the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. Further biographical details and photographs can be found at [www.avaopera.org](http://www.avaopera.org).



Shannon Mercer



Joshua Hopkins



Joyce El-Khoury

## President's Message

Great news keeps coming in just as we are preparing for the next Brian Law Competition on November 21st. Joyce El-Khoury is to join our other two scholarship winners mentioned below in OLO's fall production of *The Magic Flute*. Shannon Mercer has been nominated for Juno Awards to be presented in late March for two discs: *Bach and the Liturgical Year* and *Gloria! Vivaldi and his Angels*. I can't wait to hear Shannon and Joshua Hopkins in their marvellous duet in Act 1 of the Mozart opera. And now Yannick-Muriel Noah, our most recent winner, is to sing the title role in *Madama Butterfly* with the Canadian Opera Company in October. I'm certain that all our members will feel pride and joy that we have endeavoured in a small, but significant way, to help these singers embark on their most promising careers. My apologies to those who were planning to attend the Opera alla Pasta presentation of *Don Pasquale* on February 15th. It's going to be necessary for the Board to work out a firmer arrangement with the management of St. Anthony's Soccer Club so that we can continue to

show excellent opera DVD's and enjoy the delicious meals we always receive and at the same time coordinate our presentations better with their schedule. Thanks again to Elizabeth Meller who notified everyone. With the help of my subscription to The Gramophone I can pass on a few tips about internet resources. On YouTube one can find samples of many of the greatest singers of the past and present, not only Juan Diego Florez, but our own Joyce El-Khoury singing and acting beautifully "Addio del passato" from *La Traviata*. Just enter her name. See what else you can find. If you are interested in introducing a young person to opera go to [operalive.ca](http://operalive.ca). Click on "Read" and then "Manga" and you will find a number of Japanese style graphic stories of a number of operas including *Eugene Onegin* all courtesy of the Vancouver Opera. The new technology can be wonderful.



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Jim Burgess: Webmaster

# The Queen of Spades

by Vera-Lee Nelson

It was an appropriately dull and rainy Saturday evening in New York City when we attended a performance of *The Queen of Spades*, the tragic Russian drama composed by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, with libretto by the composer and his brother Modest Ilyich Tchaikovsky. We had been looking forward to this performance as our own heroic tenor Ben Heppner was singing Ghermann, the obsessive gambler. Seiji Ozawa was returning after 15 years to conduct the Metropolitan Opera orchestra. Both have been favourites of ours for some time and of course, Ben Heppner is Canadian; he is also a gracious performer who interacts well with his audiences and admirers. Ozawa conducts with intensity, seemingly using his whole body to guide the orchestra. Over the years we have seen how he develops rapport with the orchestra he conducts, most notably with the Boston Symphony where he was musical Director for 29 years. He respects a good orchestra and they clearly respect him. In an interview later in the year, conductor Marco Armiliato was asked how he would describe conducting the Met opera orchestra. He likened it to driving a car, with the Met Opera Orchestra as a Ferrari, exceptional and sensitive! That night the combination of orchestra and conductor was superb with the orchestra perfectly in concert with the performers.

The setting and costuming by Mark Thompson were outstanding, much in keeping with the sombre theme of the opera. The stage was framed by a structure akin to a picture frame. Colours of the set and cos-

tumes were in shades of grey, taupe, black and white. The Countess wore red, a focal point of intense colour as the plot unfolded.

When the opera opened on November 21, 2008 in New York Ben Heppner was clearly suffering from a cold. This night (December 6) it seemed he was still intent on saving his voice and there was little power in his singing. Fortunately his stature and dramatic ability were able to compensate to some extent for the lack of vocal power. However in the last act, he apparently relaxed and let it all out. His final singing was magnificent, the powerful and dramatic Heppner that we know and that lived up to the demands of the plot. Mezzo soprano Felicity Palmer as the Countess gave a beautifully sung performance, perhaps even more outstanding in her appearances as a ghost.

Soprano Maria Guleghina sang Lisa, the innocent woman drawn into Ghermann's descent into madness, the only Met role she will sing this season in her native Russian. Mezzo soprano Ekaterina Semenchuk performed as Lisa's confidante Pauline. Baritones Mark Delavan as Count Tomsky and Vladimir Stoyanov and the other males sang agreeably but I did find it hard to keep track of who was who in this dark plot.

Far less often performed than *Eugene Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades* is a lengthy opera with a grim and depressive story line. Dramatic performances and lyrical music do make it an evening to be remembered and being at the Met is always an experience in itself.

## Saturday November 21, 2009

### Mark Your Calendar

#### The Ninth Brian Law Scholarship Competition Recital

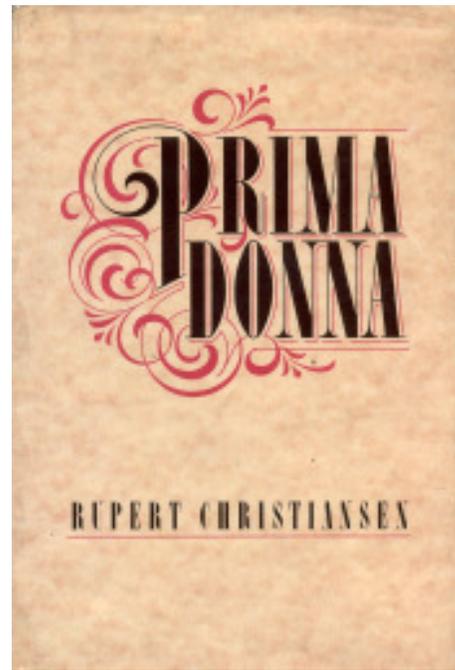
## Book Review

*Prima Donna* by **Rupert Christiansen**. New York: Viking, 1985. Reviewed by Tom McCool

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a prima donna as “the principal singer in an opera”. Through the years the term has come to have additional meanings: self-centered, conceited, domineering, exasperating, impossible, “a woman who wants her own way” and so on. Most recently the term has evolved into “diva” with even more negative connotations: a “diva” is definitely a lady to be avoided. This book is a history of those singers who were prima donnas and covers the period from the beginnings of opera until 1985. The names of some of the singers that are featured will be familiar: Malibran, Lind, Patti, Melba, Ponselle, Garden, Sills, Sutherland and, of course, Callas. These are just examples, as the book is a truly comprehensive account of the subject. All the prima donnas are here! Even “Miss Piggy” receives a mention.

Although they had their differences all the prima donnas did have one common quality: they had the ability to capture the imagination of the public. They were celebrities and enjoyed a dominant position in the opera world. Until Caruso, excluding the era when the castrati were supreme, “in terms of salary, status and glamour female singers were a greater box office draw” than men. Their fees would make a bank CEO envious. Furthermore, many learned how to use their power to make outrageous demands. Examples of excess are legendary and there are many illustrations detailed in this book. One example is Angelica Catalani’s requirements in an 1826 contract: “Madame Catalani shall choose and direct the operas in which she is to sing; she shall likewise have the choice of the performers in them; she will have no orders to receive from anyone; she will find all her own dresses.” Furthermore, she expected to receive half of the box office receipts. In addition to her need for control, Catalani was known for her generosity and one of her charitable endeavors was a school for young potential prima donnas. There were no fees but there was a stipulation that every student had to adopt “Catalani” into her surname. Catalani was one among many prima donnas who knew how to use her position.

Despite incredible power and wealth many, if not most, prima donnas did not have what might be described as happy lives. Disastrous marriages, attempted suicides, nervous breakdowns, abuse and exploitation were com-



monplace. A few specific examples: Elizabeth Billington, an early English prima donna, was abused by her French husband who harassed her for her money after she left him and was suspected of murdering her; Francesca Cuzzoni was thrown into prison for debts and spent her last years in Bologna living in extreme poverty as a button maker before dying in 1770; Ernestine Schumann-Heink was reduced “to singing in movie theatres between the features, finishing up performing four times a day in vaudeville”. Luisa Tetrazzini died in 1940 and was buried in Milan at the expense of the Italian state and, of course, the sad demise of Maria Callas is well known. Oh, how the mighty did fall.

Although this is a serious and scholarly work many intriguing bits of trivia are included. For example, when Nelly Melba first arrived in London she was told by Sir Arthur Sullivan to come back in a year and he would consider her for the D’Oyly Carte chorus. Another: an appendix contains a summary of the fees for some of the singers at the Met from 1898 to 1957. One of the more interesting entries concerns the fee paid to Emma Eames in 1900. Her \$1000 fee was to be paid in gold the morning after her performances. Another positive feature of the book is a multitude of photos and illustrations.

Unfortunately, because this book was published in 1985, the current crop of star singers is not included. Another unfortunate circumstance is the fact that *Prima Donna* is now out-of-print. However, it is readily available from a number of used book-sellers on the Internet. Also, the Ottawa Public Library has a copy.

## Met: Live in HD

The following operas will be presented in live transmissions in **2009-10**:

**Tosca** October 10 - Levine; Mattila, M. Álvarez, Uusitalo, Plishka

**Aida** October 24 - Gatti; Urmana, Zajick, Botha, Guelfi, Scandiuzzi, Kocan

**Turandot** November 7 - Nelsons; Guleghina, Poplavskaya, Giordani, Ramey

**Les Contes d'Hoffmann** December 19 - Levine; Kim, Netrebko, Gubanova, Garanaca, Villazon, Pape

**Der Rosenkavalier** January 9 - Levine; Fleming, Graham, Schafer, Cutler, Allen, Sigmundsson

**Carmen** January 16 - Nezet-Seguin; Frittoli, Gheorghiu, Alagna, Kwiecien

**Simon Boccanegra** February 6 - Levine; Pieczonka, Giordani, Domingo, Morris

**Hamlet** March 27 - Langree; Dessay, Larmore, Spence, Keenlyside, Morris

**Armida** May 1 - Frizza; Fleming, Brownlee, Ford, Zapata, Banks, van Rensburg

As part of this season's Live in HD series, the Metropolitan Opera will premiere **The Audition**, a feature-length documentary directed by Susan Froemke, on screens across Canada on June 6 and 15 at 1:00.

## Events You Could Have Enjoyed!

by Shelagh Williams

**Cathedral Arts:** If you were listening to *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* on January 24th, you would have heard, in the *Opera Encores* section, an interview with Canadian soprano Meredith Hall, which served as an introduction for her concert the next day, on Robbie Burns Day, at Christ Church Cathedral. Entitled *My Love is like a Red, Red Rose*, the delightful selection of Burns songs and instrumental pieces with the Montreal ensemble La Nef did not disappoint. Her voice was clear and warm, her manner charming, and her diction superb. Musical arrangements were by Sylvain Bergeron, on baroque guitar and lute, and the other instruments included harp, viola da gamba and a variety of flutes and even bagpipes!

**Black and White Opera Soiree:** This year's was one of the best: *Gilbert and Sullivan on Parliament Hill!* With the NAC Orchestra under Maestro David Lockington and superb soloists - soprano Tracy Dahl, mezzo Marion Pratkanicki, tenor Philippe Castagner, super "patter" specialist baritone Frederick Reeder and the OLO chorus - the music-making was fantastic. And so was the comedy! With new lyrics for some numbers by David Mayerovich, a veteran G&S updater, plus satirical "newscasts" by news anchors Peter Mansbridge, Lloyd Robertson and Bernard Derome, and many humorous cameos by political figures, the energy level was kept high. A highlight was Craig Oliver as *The very model of a modern telejournalist*, complete with dance step! What a fun-filled evening and all in a good cause!

## OPERA ALLA PASTA

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May 3, 2009

Rimsky-Korsakov's  
*The Tsar's Bride* Bolshoi  
Production



## Two Top Canadian Tenors in Toronto! by Shelagh Williams

What a treat! For our February trip to Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company (COC) gave us two ace Canadian tenors in two days - one scheduled and one a last-minute "surprise" - in Dvorak's *Rusalka* and Beethoven's *Fidelio*, respectively. The productions proved to be mixed Valentine blessings, but at least supplied superb singers.

Richard Bradshaw programmed Dvorak's *Rusalka* for the 100th birthday of long-lived Czech-born Niki Goldschmidt, a COC cofounder - but unfortunately neither gentleman lived to see the day - hopefully they toasted each other in heaven! Fortunately for those of us who could enjoy it, Dvorak's best known opera proved to be well worth listening to. The production, a COC premiere, but first seen at Theatre Erfurt, was designed by Hartmut Schorghofer, sets, and Corinna Crome, costumes, both making their COC debuts. Using a spectacular revolving stage to easily alternate between the watery and earthly domains, the overall concept delineated underwater by lovely colours, blues and greens predominating, while the land, where the unreliable humans dwelt, was completely in stark, cold, black and white, all lit with marvellous light and water effects by Thomas C. Hase. Ubiquitous goldfish bowls emphasized *Rusalka*'s exposed yet trapped existence while on land, with water splashed to evoke the watery world. The story is fairly simple: Water nymph *Rusalka* falls in love with a Prince, and the witch *Jezebaba* who agrees to make her human to pursue him makes the change irreversible plus takes away *Rusalka*'s voice - in an opera! Nor is the transformation easy for her - the thought of eating oysters, fellow water dwellers, at a Royal reception, where she wears a goldfish-coloured gown, sickens her! Of course, the Prince soon loses interest and flirts with the Foreign Princess, which is doubly fatal - no happy ending here! Under the direction of unromantic Russian Dmitri Bertman, who brought us the COC's execrable *La Traviata* in 1999, inexplicably revived in 2007, we had no ballet for the ballet music, the Prince wandering in to upstage *Rusalka*'s famous Aria to the Moon, and the funny but confusing setting of the Turnspit and Gamekeeper's arguments in the middle of the audience, which were all a bit off-putting. However, with a great cast under American conductor John Keenan, any flaws in staging were

generally overshadowed by the voices and music. Two of the three wood nymphs arrived dramatically on huge flies, and were chased by the water gnome *Vodnik*, sung by baritone Richard Paul Fink, who similarly as *Alberich* dealt with the Rhine Maidens in the COC's *Ring*! The two evil women were in red: Russian mezzo Irina Mishura potently portrayed the witch *Jezebaba*, playing maliciously off everyone else in her sexy gown slit way up, and Canadian dramatic soprano Joni Henson was the scheming Foreign Princess. Canadian tenor Michael Schade was of course good, but one wondered if the role suited his voice that perfectly, as it seemed a bit low for him in places. In spite of some unbecoming costumes, American soprano Julie Makarov beautifully portrayed *Rusalka*'s longing and disappointment, a pleasant surprise after her unsympathetic *Cio-Cio-San* in *Madama Butterfly* at Sarasota. In the finale she took her place on a stone plinth as the Little Mermaid statue, commemorating Andersen's story. The only major problem was that the orchestra often covered the singers in spite of them all being powerful singers. This was not helped by our being in the first row beside the large percussion section. Still, all in all, it was a most enjoyable performance, of which our two gentlemen could be proud!

The surprise Canadian tenor occurred in *Fidelio*. The scheduled American tenor Jon Villars, a veteran in the *Florestan* role, and debuting German conductor George Buhl, conducting *Fidelio* for the first time, had a disagreement over tempi, causing the tenor to walk off the stage in the dress rehearsal, in effect firing himself. I am no expert, but I will acknowledge that I have never heard the Leonore no.3 Overture, played between the two scenes of Act II, galloped through at such a pace as this conductor used! This gave us the unexpected pleasure of hearing Richard Margison as *Florestan*, since he was available to sing the final performances! This was a coproduction with Opera national du Rhin and Staatstheater Nurnberg, giving us another weird European staging. The German team, all debuting with COC, consisted of director Andreas Baesler, set designer Andreas Wilkins, and costume designer Gabriele Heimann. The director changed the setting from 18th century Spain to 1940's Spain and set it mainly in a prison office with overpower-

## Tenors in Toronto! (continued)

ering stacks of file drawers reaching the ceiling. The director seemed to have a clothes fetish, since young Marzeline spent her time mysteriously sorting clothing, lines of clothing descended during one scene, and the dungeon was incomprehensibly being filled with rejected clothing coming down a laundry chute! The actual costumes themselves were quite acceptable. A plethora of long winded useless text projections became rather annoying, and several other directorial decisions were surely questionable. In spite of this environment created by director and conductor, the cast and chorus managed to sing well. The chorus's big scene, their joyous Prisoners' Chorus as they were allowed to see sun for a few minutes was well sung, but rather diminished as they appeared from between the filing cabinets, rather than emerging from underground, and then reached up to the lines of clothing. Soprano Virginia Hatfield's lovely aria as Marzeline in the first act was delivered beautifully, in spite of being upstaged by prisoners being checked in. Bass baritone Gidon Saks personified evil as the prison governor Don Pizarro, and was a magnet for eyes whenever he was on stage, as he prowled around like a panther. Swedish bass Mats Almgren was a sympathetic Rocco, chief jailor and Marzeline's loving father, and, fortunately for the story, fundamentally incorruptible. Canadian soprano Adrienne Pieczonka, in fine voice, was debuting as Leonora and fit in very well as a young worker in male attire called Fidelio, as she searched for her "disappeared" husband, Florestan. I actually preferred her to Karita Mattila, whom we went to Covent Garden specially to hear in the role! But then we came to the "dark dungeon" where the starving Florestan was imprisoned - with a corpulent prisoner in blazing bright light and the Monty Pythonesque torture of the comfy swivel chair! Of course Richard Margison managed to sing Florestan beautifully bewailing his lot, in spite of the chair, but it all seemed a bit farcical, rather than poignant. The final triumphant chorus, where everything has turned out right, was again upstaged by prisoners changing incongruously into hat, grey suit and tie - another uniform! - supplied by their wives, also in matching skirt suits and bowlers! - belying Beethoven's uplifting message. Fortunately, in spite of the director's distracting efforts, Beethoven's music, and the excellent cast, saved the day!

## A Cuban *Carmen*

by Shelagh Williams

As an antidote to winter, the University of Ottawa Opera Workshop, under the able musical and stage direction of Sandra Graham, presented a novel production of Bizet's *Carmen* in our very cold late January. She chose to set it in the welcome warmth of Cuba, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, with Carmen a Havana nightclub singer in the aptly named "La Habanera", where she of course sings her famous *Habanera*! Escamillo became the hero Che Guevara, with another venue decorated with his iconic image cleverly entitled "Chez Guevara"! Don Jose was a member of Batista's army, Carmen and the gypsies smuggled the revolutionaries' munitions, and the final scene took place amid celebrations of the guerrillas' final victory. Appropriate costumes, Juliane Gallant on piano and Matthieu Leveille on guitar, plus a pair of dancers in the nightclub added to the authentically Cuban atmosphere. The male leads were both superior, although tenor James O'Farrell as Don Jose took a while to warm up, while baritone Phillippe Courchesne-Leboeuf as Che Guevara was uniformly excellent. The female parts were doubly cast, with mezzos Whitney O'Hearn and April Babey alternating in the title role and sopranos Natalya Matyusheva and Sophie Bertrand as Micaela, of which we enjoyed the first named. Natalya Matyusheva looked the demure part of Micaela and had a good voice, though with little modulation throughout her singing. However, Whitney O'Hearn looked, acted and sang Carmen to the hilt, with great facial expressions and body language. In contrast to most *Carmens* I've seen, she really fought for her life at the end, even pulling out a small pistol, all to no avail! This was a first class production, with good singing from leads through minor roles to chorus, well thought out concept and stage direction, and excellent musical direction and accompaniment, making for a most enjoyable evening's entertainment!

The Opera Workshop's February presentation of Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief* was likewise a treat, well sung and both delightful and humorous. The cast included Susanna Doherty as busybody Miss Pinkerton, mezzo Candace Cheung as sweet Miss Todd, Kareen Lacasse as servant Laetitia (sung by Alaina Viau other times), and Mark Wilkinson as Bob. Katrina Pak was at the piano, and, of course, Sandra Graham again directed.

# Events You Should Enjoy!

by David Williams

**Opera Lyra Opera Studio Artists** will (i) present **Operantics** featuring excerpts from *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Canadian Museum of Civilization on March 14th, 2009 and (ii) workshop at the NAC Fourth Stage at noon on March 20th, 2009 a newly commissioned children's opera by Dean Burry which will be premiered as part of OLO's 25th anniversary season.

**Opera Lyra Opera Studio Competition** The OLO Studio Artists will also compete in the annual OLO Competition on March 22, 2009, 2 pm, at the Unitarian Church. Contact Timothy Wisener at [twisener@operalyra.ca](mailto:twisener@operalyra.ca) or 613-233-9200 ext 224

**The Kiwanis Music Festival** takes place from April 14th to May 2nd. The senior and open voice sections are provisionally scheduled for the week of April 14-18, 2009.

**St. Lukes Anglican Church** in its Sunday evening recital series will feature mezzo Carole Portelance on March 22nd, 2009 at 7:30 pm.

**Yoriko Tanno's 14th Shooting Stars Operatic Showcase** will present a staged and costumed operatic production entitled *A Cendrillon Entertainment* at Carleton University, Kailash Mital Theatre, on March 28th, 2009, at 7:30 pm.

**Julie Nesrallah** will perform with the University of Ottawa Orchestra and Choirs at Saint Brigid's Centre on April 3rd, at 8 pm. The program includes Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody*, Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* and Bruckner's *Te Deum*.

**Pellegrini Opera** will perform a staged and costumed production of *Madama Butterfly* on April 18th, at 7:30 pm, at Dominion Chalmers United Church. Vito Lo Re will conduct with Michel Ross at the piano.

## BC Scene

**Simone Osborne** will give a recital on May 1, National Gallery of Canada, Rideau Chapel, at Noon. The 22-year old was the youngest recipient of a Grand

Winner award at the Metropolitan Opera's National Council Auditions held in New York City. She was also a co-winner at the Marilyn Horne Foundation Vocal Competition in Santa Barbara. Pianist **Andrea Grant** will accompany Simone in a program that includes Richard Strauss's *Brentano Lieder*, a selection of French songs by Liszt, and the world premiere of a new work by young B.C. composer Iman Habibi.

**Jack Pine**, a 45-minute opera for young audiences, will be performed on April 26 at the NAC Fourth Stage, 13:30 & 15:30. *Jack Pine* is based on the children's book of the same name by Christopher Patton, with music and libretto by **Veda Hille**. **Hiather Darnel-Kadonaga** (soprano), **Rose-ElLEN Nichols** (mezzo-soprano), **Adam Fisher** (tenor), and **Michael MacKinnon** (bass) are the talented cast, accompanied by pianist **Andrea Wood**.

The **NAC Debut Series** will present baritone **Jonathan Estabrook** and **Maghan Stewart** at noon on June 19th. The same evening at 7 pm they will participate in the "Exploration of Brahms *Requiem*" prior to that evening's concert.

The **Ottawa Choral Society** will present Mozart's *Grand Mass in C Minor* at St. Joseph's Church on May 3rd at 7:30 pm. The featured singers will be **Gary Dahl** (baritone), **James McLennan** (tenor) and the Society's 2008 New Discoveries Winners **Laura Albino** (soprano) and **Aidan Ferguson** (mezzo-soprano).

Graduate and undergraduate vocal (and other) recitals will take place at **Ottawa University** during March, April and May. (Information [www.music.uottawa.ca](http://www.music.uottawa.ca))

The **Carleton Music Showcase** will feature classical voice, piano and chamber music on April 1st, 7:30 pm, at Carleton University, Kailash Mital Theatre.

**Ottawa Pocket Opera** has scheduled Mozart's *Magic Flute* and Haydn's one act opera *La Canterina* on May 29th and 30th at 8 pm. Both in English. Check [www.ottawapocketopera.ca](http://www.ottawapocketopera.ca) for location and other details.

## OLO Studio Activities

by Shelagh Williams

Opera Lyra Ottawa (OLO)'s Opera Studio presented for Christmas their English language production of *Cinderella*, prepared by Director Robert Herriot from the music of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and Massenet's *Cendrillon*. It was delightful, for children and adults alike, combining first class singing with audience participation by child "mice" helping to make Cinderella's ball gown. For the adults, there were lines such as the sister's put-down: "Nobody wears glass slippers after Labour Day!" A cast of five expertly played all the roles, with two mezzos, Valerie Arboit and Marion Newman, alternating singing Cinderella and her sister Rubella(!), soprano Christina Tannous covering both the Blue Fairy and sister Roseola(!), tenor Michael Carty being Prince Albert, and baritone Mark Gough as Crantini, with minor roles such as coachman, mice and horses shared amongst them. Video projections, still and moving, added tremendously to the production - hey, the Met doesn't have a monopoly on hi-tech! - with a particularly memorable view of two horses' derrieres, driving between green fields, to cover the time of Cinderella going to the ball, while everyone changed costumes! Indeed, the costumes were good and clever, allowing quick changes with little fuss, and one dressing gown even accommodated both sisters when necessary! Masks for the two ugly sisters also made it easy to tell who was who. At our Sunday matinee we had Marion Newman as Cinderella, executing Rossini's coloratura with ease, and Judith Ginsburg, the music director, accompanying - Evelyn Greenberg shared piano duties on other days. A short Question and Answer session at the end showed the audience's true appreciation of the art, although one young listener commented that she had an English language film of *Cinderella*, which drew the anguished remark - "But we were singing in English!" It was amazing how much action and great music could be squeezed into 45 minutes!

Studio Artists Christina Tannous, Valerie Arboit, Michael Carty, and Mark Gough treated those attending the OLO Guild's Joy of Opera Luncheon to a charming concert of favourite operatic selections. The lovely solos, duets and ensembles were deftly accompanied by Judith Ginsburg, the Opera Studio Manager and Principal Repetiteur. This event is always a welcome chance to meet opera friends, enjoy a delicious lunch, and check out the current crop of OLO's young singers!

## The Gondoliers and other Upcoming Savoy Society Events!

by Bruce Patterson

The annual main production of the Savoy Society of Ottawa, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*, will take place at Centrepointheatre March 27-29 and April 1-4. Music director Allison Woyiwada and Stage director Sandra Graham, who worked together on last year's acclaimed production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, return to present Gilbert and Sullivan's sunniest work, set in Venice in 1750. Savoy Society productions are fully staged with costumes, sets and choreography, and accompanied by a professional orchestra. Like many G&S operas, *The Gondoliers* features sudden changes of social status, long-hidden secrets, and political satire. To order tickets, visit [www.centrepointheatre.com](http://www.centrepointheatre.com)

Besides the main show, the Savoy Society has several other events planned. On May 31, a fundraising brunch featuring soprano Shawne Elizabeth's rendition of Anna Russell's classic comedy piece "How to write your own Gilbert and Sullivan Opera" will be presented at the Ron Kolbus Lakeside Centre. To find out more, call 613-825-5855 or check our website.

This autumn, the Society will present its first production of *The Zoo*, a one-act comic opera by Arthur Sullivan and librettist Bolton Rowe (B.C. Stephenson). *The Zoo* is a lighthearted tale of love triumphant, set amidst the refreshment area of the London Zoo.

Since 1976, the Savoy Society of Ottawa has presented an annual production from among the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, and this year marks the Society's fifth production of *The Gondoliers*. The Society has recently considered expanding its repertoire further to include other comic operas and operettas. Gilbert and Sullivan will always be the main focus, but in future years the two Englishmen might occasionally be joined by L  har, Strauss, Offenbach, Romberg and others. Information on the Savoy Society of Ottawa is available at [www.ottawasavoyociety.org](http://www.ottawasavoyociety.org).



# From the Met to the Movies

by Vera-Lee Nelson

Most of us have not had the privilege of regular attendance at the major opera houses of the world. Yes, we can visit from time to time, or make special trips to see specific performances or enjoy particular venues. Here in Ottawa we are fortunate to have Opera Lyra, a local company presenting quality performances and putting much effort into nurturing young singers. We are within easy travel distance of fine opera in Montreal and Toronto, but still the variety of opera available in most midsized and smaller cities such as ours is necessarily limited by time and distance.

Then 3 years ago Peter Gelb of the Metropolitan Opera had an idea and it has grown since then. For decades Saturday Afternoon at the Opera on radio has featured performances from the Met. It was wonderful to sit back, relax, and let the wonderful music fill the room around you. Still, it was the music only and the excitement of the visual performance was missing. Now in its third season, HD live performances will have given us the experience of seeing 20 of the operas produced and presented by the Metropolitan Opera. It is a new experience and more and more people of all ages and interests are catching on. Let's see - it's Saturday morning and we make the sandwiches, usually egg or salmon salad, and pack them in a cooler with some mandarin oranges, a couple of Chocolate bars and some drinks. In our most comfortable clothes, jeans or jackets, we set off to join the procession of folks heading into one of the 5 theatres in Ottawa showing the *Live in HD* program from the Met. After paying the bargain admission price of about \$20.00 we settle into our seats, at least an hour early to get the location of choice. As we eat our lunch we chat with the friends, old and new, who come to the same performances. It is a great social outing and we have been surprised at just who shows up!

The performance starts! We see the audience take their places under the magical Swarovski crystal chandeliers at the Met. The hostess for the day comes on screen, usually a singer from one of the other performances. We are taken backstage as the curtain prepares to open and are awestruck by the complexity of the sets and electronics necessary to put on the performances. The call comes "Maestro to the pit, please" and we join the live audience in anticipation. Over the 3

years of production there have been some changes in the filming. In the beginning it was very much a filming of the opera as it was performed. There was some experimentation with odd shots, like over the shoulders of the performers looking into the audience, that did not quite work and we occasionally caught glimpses of the cameras rolling across the stage.

It was fun to see the curtain calls, especially from backstage as well as the front. Remember Anna Netrebko's "thumbs up" after her awesome performance in *I Puritani*? Now it has all gotten much more professional and slick. The close ups are great - not available to live concert attendees but sometimes there are so many that you miss the overall panorama. In the recent *Orpheo ed Euridice* I was longing to take in all the marvellous costumes of the chorus on the balconies cum Elysian fields, but there were simply not enough straight shots to do this. A big plus is the sound, particularly for older persons with any degree of hearing loss. It is clear and surrounding in the best possible way. The curtain calls are viewed now from the front as the credits roll and any spontaneity there is lost. The intermissions are shorter now, which must be a great relief for the performers who need that time to change and just relax. It is fascinating to be backstage and observe the set changes, as those hundred plus workers manage to completely change the sets in less than 30 minutes! An entertainment in itself.

BUT - what can ever replace the thrill of being there? Entering the gracious red carpeted lobby, under the actual chandeliers, watching the early supper patrons and ascending the curving staircase - no jeans and popcorn here! Seated we wait for the curtain to rise. The surtitles are unobtrusive on the back of the seat ahead and if you feel a cough coming on there are convenient water fountains at the back of the auditorium. During the intermission there is excitement and superb people watching - even if we do glance at the curtain and imagine the noise and activity behind.

Nothing replaces being at a live performance in my opinion but the Met has brought us not just the next best thing but a marvellous opportunity to see the very best of performers and performances in our home cities and around the world.

## Opus Arte Opera in HD

***Un Ballo in Maschera*** (Opera) - Verdi  
Teatro Real in Madrid March 14 and 15 at 1:00pm  
2 hours, 30 min (includes 20 min intermission)

***Easter at King's: Messiah*** - Handel  
The Choir of King's College, Cambridge  
April 11 at 1:00pm 2 hours, 45 min (includes 20 min intermission)

***Castor & Pollux*** (Opera) - Rameau  
The Netherlands Opera, Amsterdam  
April 25 and 26 at 1:00pm  
2 hours, 35 min (includes 20 min intermission)

***La Fille du Régiment*** (Opera) - Donizetti  
Royal Opera House Covent Garden  
May 30 and 31 at 1:00pm  
2 hours, 19 min (includes 20 min intermission)

Films to be shown at Empire Theatres

## Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

The Toll Brothers Metropolitan Opera Saturday  
Afternoon Live Radio Broadcasts from Lincoln Center

March 7 Puccini: *Madama Butterfly*

March 14 Dvořák: *Rusalka*

March 21 Bellini: *La Sonnambula*

March 28 Wagner: *Das Rheingold*

April 4 Donizetti: *L'Elisir d'amore*

April 11 Wagner: *Die Walküre*

April 18 Wagner: *Siegfried*

April 25 Wagner: *Götterdämmerung*

The CBC Radio 2 schedule for May and June is still to be announced

## Opera Lyra Ottawa Guild

### Viva Verdi

***Rigoletto*** March 24, 2009. 7 pm  
Pavarotti and Guberova filmed live in Vienna.  
DVD big screen presentation of this opera.

These events take place in the auditorium at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington Street.

### "The Grandest of the Grand Operas" and High Tea

Hosted by Murray Kitts  
Sunday April 19, 2009, at 1 pm.

## 2009 Metropolitan Opera Live on the Big Screen

***Orfeo ed Euridice*** - Gluck  
Encore Saturday, March 14 (1:00 pm) 1 hour 31 minutes / no intermission. Conductor: James Levine; Production: Mark Morris; Stephanie Blythe, Danielle de Niese

***Lucia di Lammermoor*** - Donizetti  
Encore Saturday, April 4 (1:00 pm) 3 hours 20 minutes / two intermissions. Conductor: Marco Armiliato; Production: Mary Zimmerman; Anna Netrebko, Rolando Villazón, Mariusz Kwiecien, Ildar Abdrazakov

***Madama Butterfly*** - Puccini  
Encore Saturday, April 18 (1:00 pm) 3 hours 21 minutes / two intermissions. Conductor: Patrick Summers; Production: An-

thony Minghella; Cristina Gallardo-Domâs, Marcello Giordani

***La Sonnambula*** - Bellini  
Saturday, March 21, 2009 (1:00 pm) Encore April 25. 2 hours 40 minutes/one intermission. Conductor: Evelino Pidò; Production: Mary Zimmerman; Natalie Dessay, Juan Diego Flórez, Michele Pertusi

***La Cenerentola*** - Rossini  
Saturday, May 9, 2009 (12:30 pm) Encore May 23. 3 hours/one intermission. Conductor: Maurizio Benini; Production: Cesare Lievi; Elina Garanca, Lawrence Brownlee, Simone Alberghini, Alessandro Corbelli, John Relyea

# Opera Within Reach

## OTTAWA

### Opera Lyra Ottawa

*Eugene Onegin* by Tchaikovsky  
April 4, 6, 8 & 11

All performances are at the NAC.  
Information: 613-233-9200 x221 [www.operalyra.ca](http://www.operalyra.ca)

### Orpheus Society

*Nunsense*  
March 6 - 14

*The Full Monty*  
June 5 - 14

### Savoy Society

*The Gondoliers* by Gilbert & Sullivan  
March 27-29, April 1-4

Orpheus and Savoy performances are at Centrepointheatre.  
Information: 613-580-2700  
[www.centrepointheatre.com](http://www.centrepointheatre.com)

## MONTREAL

### L'Opéra de Montréal

*Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti  
May 23, 27 & 30, June 1 & 4

Performances are in Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at Place des Arts  
Information 1-514-985-2258  
[www.operadumontreal.com](http://www.operadumontreal.com)

## TORONTO

### Canadian Opera Company

*Simon Boccanegra* by Verdi  
April 11, 14, 18, 22, 24 & 28 May 3 & 7  
*La Bohème* by Puccini  
April 17, 19, 25 & 30 May 4, 9, 12, 14, 17, 20, 22 & 24  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Britten  
May 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 19, 21 & 23  
*Così fan tutte* by Mozart  
June 15, 17, 19 & 21

All performances are at the Four Seasons Centre.  
Information: 1-800-250-4653 [www.coc.ca](http://www.coc.ca)

### Opera Atelier

*The Coronation of Popea* by Monteverdi  
April 25th to May 2nd, 2009  
All performances are at the Elgin Theatre.  
Information: 1-416-872-5555 [www.operaatelier.com](http://www.operaatelier.com)

### Opera in Concert

*Kamouraska* by Charles Wilson  
March 28 (8 pm) & March 29 (2 pm)

Performances in the Jane Mallett Theatre.  
Information: 416-922-2147 [www.operainconcert.com](http://www.operainconcert.com)

## SYRACUSE

### Syracuse Opera

*Little Women* by Adamo  
May 1 & 3  
Information: 1-315-476-7372 [www.operasyracuse.com](http://www.operasyracuse.com)

Check for times and other details on the Websites.