

# Newsletter • Bulletin

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## Tosca "Blessed" Not "Cursed" by Murray Kitts

First off let me dispel the claim in the Ottawa Citizen that *Tosca* is an opera which has the reputation of being trouble for opera singers comparable to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*'s reputation with actors. Verdi's *La forza del destino* is the opera which claims notable misfortune. The great baritone Leonard Warren actually died of a heart attack on the stage of the Met during a performance of this opera. Luciano Pavarotti refused to sing the tenor role during his career. And it is said that Franco Corelli took the usual Italian male precaution against the evil eye when he sang in this opera. Even the opera sets were considered dangerous by some involved in its production.

So how was the performance of *Tosca* by Opera Lyra Ottawa *blessed*? Let me explain. Great sets from New Orleans, especially the Act III setting of the Castel Sant' Angelo, were a significant change from previous productions like the functional sets for *Butterfly* or the dysfunctional ones for *Bohème* and much better than those in the Met's new version. The costumes from Malabar were remarkably fine. Great stage direction by Guy Montavon, e.g. Scarpia's first appearance out of nowhere, the use of the full stage even when only a few characters are onstage, the thrilling climax of Act I, etc. Great singer-actors, two fine Canadian singers, Michele Capalbo as Tosca and David Pomeroy as Mario were excellent in their roles although the performance by Todd Thomas as Scarpia was truly outstanding. The smaller parts were all done very well, although I would have relished having the incomparable Peter Strummer as the Sacristan again. The children's chorus, well trained by Jamie Loback, were suitably bratty (can't say boisterous) on entering and angelic when required. The chorus under the direction of Laurence Ewashko continues to make excellent contributions to our opera enjoyment. And all was backed up by our excellent NAC

Orchestra under the direction of Tyrone Paterson. It's true that there was a sudden illness on opening night but it was a blessing to have such a talented and devoted repetiteur as Judith Ginsburg who was able to act out the part on stage while a chorus member sang from the wings.

After all this praise I have a few comments. The introduction of the young shepherd onto the roof of the Castel Sant' Angelo may be for the practical reason of allowing the immature voice to be projected better into the auditorium. But what is a shepherd doing on the roof of this massive building which was originally Hadrian's Tomb? The interaction between the boy and the painter is puzzling. It doesn't seem to lead anywhere as far as the story is concerned. It's true that there is a long musical introduction which is usually filled in with actions by the soldiers and accompanied by changes in the lighting effects to show

the approach of dawn, the hour of execution. But the score actually calls for sheep bells. In any event I don't think it's a good idea to leave unanswered questions in the minds of the audience. Having Tosca shot by the same firing squad that killed her lover can make sense as it seemed to adapt itself to the set very well. Variations are possible. When I saw a production of *Tosca* from

the Met in Minneapolis with the great but aging diva Renata Tebaldi as Tosca she didn't actually jump but disappeared around the side of the building. The mother of two children who went to the dress rehearsal of this *Tosca* told me how disappointed her daughters were with the final scene because they had heard Ben Heppner's story about the Tosca who jumped onto a trampoline and was bounced back into view.

Now that might constitute the beginning of a real curse - a comic ending to a tragedy.



photo by Andrew Alexander

Tosca

Scarpia

## President's Message

I was particularly pleased when Gerald Finley was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Canada on June 1<sup>st</sup>. At "An Evening with Gerald Finley" two years ago it was suggested to me by Barbara Clark and by Norma Mellon that the NCOS should nominate Gerald for this honour. So I went to the proper website and followed the instructions carefully – no public announcement of the nomination, no notification to the nominee or to persons who are cited as references being able to confirm his worth and no write-in campaign from supporters. You can read my reasons for the nomination which emphasize his relations with NCOS and the Brian Law Competition on page 3 of this newsletter. I was warned that it could take up to two years for a result and that was almost the amount of time taken. I expressed to Gerald our joy at his appointment and Gerald replied how he was so grateful to all those people across Canada who had sent him congratulations. I should mention that the three persons cited as references were Barbara Clark, Stuart Hamilton and Richard Turp. We now have Gerald Finley O.C. as our Honorary Patron. I'm sure many of you will go to see and hear this extraordinarily fine actor and singer in *Falstaff* in Toronto. I can only hope that when Gerald sings the title role in Covent Garden's forthcoming *William Tell* that there will be a DVD made for worldwide enjoyment.

Another development which should give us all pleasure was the release of the DVD from the Met's production of Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*. I recall one of our members saying after the live transmission that, although Joshua Hopkins was in the cast, he didn't make much of an appearance in the opera. Happily the DVD is an edited version of the live performance and we see much more of Joshua as the camera includes him when he makes numerous interjections. The huge

photo of Joshua on Toronto's billboards advertising his appearance as Rossini's *Barber* can only help to further his career.

And now for the bad news. Canada Post has drastically increased the price of mailing to such an extent that we are forced to ask members who wish to receive our newsletter by mail to pay an additional fee on top of their membership fee. The membership fee is no longer sufficient to cover the costs of producing the "hard" copy of the newsletter and the increased mailing costs. We realize that not all our members would prefer to receive the newsletter by email but we cannot afford to keep mailing the newsletter at a financial loss to our organization. This is in step with the publications of many other organizations. We can send you a copy with coloured photos by email. Or you can access the newsletter on our website. The decision to ask for a special fee is only one of many important ones made at our Board's summer meeting. If the Brian Law Competition is to continue we must try to cut the costs of our competition. Some of the proposals include: 1) finding a new, more central and much less expensive venue; 2) eliminating the mini-recital as it has become more and more difficult to find former winners who are available (but having someone participate if it is convenient); 3) suspending our financial support of other opera organizations until our financial position improves; and 4) reducing the amount spent on the reception. We will keep you up to date as these suggestions are implemented. The fact is that if we fail to attract the numbers of supporters to the contest we are in danger of not having sufficient funds to continue our support of potential opera singers.



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# The Order of Canada Nomination by Murray Kitts

I believe that Gerald Finley has brought honour to Canada through excellence in singing opera and giving song recitals throughout Europe and North America and deserves to become a member of the Order of Canada. Rather than try to list all of his activities and accomplishments I would like to refer you to the following website: <http://newgeraldfinley.info> which will give you a complete picture of this great musician. I do hope that this is satisfactory. He has sung in the great opera houses and recital halls of two continents. He has had contemporary composers write operas with Gerald's vocal and acting talents in mind as the composition progressed. His recordings have won many important awards in best of year category. His most recent award was the 2012 Opera Canada Rubies award. His portrayal of Oppenheimer in "Doctor Atomic" has become a classic. Having sung all the major Mozart baritone roles he is now finding acclaim in the demanding new roles such as Hans Sachs in "Die Meistersinger".

The July, 2012, issue of Opera News (published by the Metropolitan Opera Guild) presents Gerald on its cover and praises his achievements as a recitalist in a six-page article entitled Song Champion. You will note the connection between Gerald and Brian Law who was his teacher and mentor in Ottawa. After the National Capital Opera Society decided to foster a biennial competition to honour Brian Law in 1993 Gerald Finley through the



photo by Sim Canetty-Clarke

years has helped to raise funds designed to assist young singers to an operatic career by donating his time to give a recital, attend fund-raising receptions, and be the object of two fund-raising excursions to New York to the Metropolitan Opera to attend his debut (with an excellent reception by the Canadian consul in New York) and a few years later for his first appearance there as Don Giovanni. With the death of Maureen Forrester, our first patron, it seemed only natural to ask Gerald to become our patron to which he readily agreed. I have seen him helping young aspiring singers to reach their goals.

## Finley Reviews

"Mr. Finley has long been recognized as a recitalist of rare versatility, a concert artist of the first rank and an opera singer of distinction in a broad repertory." *The New York Times*

"[The words] were sung [...] by the baritone Gerald Finley [...] whose understanding of their quiet, autumnal ecstasy was palpable in a performance heaped with throbbing tenderness and sublime passion." *Brahms' German Requiem, Edinburgh Usher Hall - Kenneth Walton, Scotsman.com*

"Finley's tone was velvety smooth, and his projection and characterisation impeccable." *Andrew Clements, The Guardian*

His elegant baritone, which has gained in muscle since his Hans Sachs at Glydebourne in the summer, brought beauty as well as Nordic angst to the two Swedish songs and rose proudly to the lyrical grandeur of the epic 'Koskenlaskijan morsiamet'." *Richard Fairman, Financial Times*



# Upstate Treats

By Shelagh Williams

We decided to combine this year's Glimmerglass Festival (GGF) with summer professional theatre in the Berkshires, next door in north-western Massachusetts. We just missed Renée Fleming in her acting debut as an opera diva in the world premiere of *Living on Love* at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, but we caught the first preview of their next production, the musical *The Visit*. This starred the legendary Chita Rivera, the original Anita in *West Side Story*, and since she was playing a rich serial widow returning to the impoverished village of her youth, she was about the best dressed and looking person on stage - still going strong at 81!

Of GGF's four offerings, we missed *An American Tragedy*, and so I am leaving it and *Carousel* for Lesley Robinson to review. We went again with Road Scholar, to benefit from the extra insights offered in talks by the marvellous GGF performers which Daniel Egan, a former NYC Opera singer, manages to arrange!

Our first speaker, GGF's new Music Director and conductor Joseph Colaneri, gave us the scoop on next year's season, introduced us nicely to *Madama Butterfly*, which he was conducting this summer, and also prepared the afternoon's performance of Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* for us, explaining its genesis and humour. We then heard a pre-show chat by GGF Artistic and General Director, Francesca Zambello, *Ariadne*'s director, who explained her directorial choices - which worked! She updated the staging from 18th century Vienna to the barn of a local gentleman farmer in Naxos, NY state, with young goats and chickens for colour! Canadian set designer Tony Hourie started off with a large pair of closed red barn doors, and then opened them to reveal the barn frame, which curiously and gradually disappeared during the performance! The Prologue, which sets up the narrative, is often done in local languages and so Zambello chose to perform the Prologue in English, so that both the story and comedy were clear and understandable to us - which certainly was not the case in two earlier all-German productions we've seen! In the GGF scenario, the nouveau riche owner has arranged a lavish do to impress his guests - a new opera seria, *Aradne in Naxos*, commissioned from a young Composer, plus Zerbinetta and her *commedia dell'arte* troupe, and then fireworks - but unfortunately time restraints between dinner and the scheduled fireworks impel the

owner to order the two entertainments be combined into one! The Prologue, Act I, covers all this plus preparations by the two groups for the combined Act II opera, which Zambello cleverly has Zerbinetta's people sing in English, and the *opera seria* characters sing in German! Finally, she decided that the composer nowadays could be a woman, and so the mezzo's trouser role became another woman, with further developments - what an imagination!

Needless to say, the musical side of the production was of equally fine quality, with conductor Kathleen Kelly bringing to the score her experience in Vienna at the Wiener Staatsoper as director of musical studies. She had an excellent cast of past and present members of GGF's Young Artists Programme (YAP), inventively costumed by Erik Teague, and supplied with an excellent English adaptation by resident Dramaturg and surtitlist, Kelley Rourke. Singing the title role of Ariadne was soprano Christine Goerke, whom we had seen in 1997 at GGF in *Iphigenie en Tauride*, and who will be

photo by Karli Cadel



singing Brunnhilde in *Die Walkure* at COC this coming season and then at the MET. She brought a rich, almost too huge, soprano to the *opera seria* of Act II, plus a keen sense of humour (who knew?) to the Prologue, obviously enjoying mocking the Prima Donna character! Of equal, if not more, importance in this production, the real diva of the opera was Zerbinetta, and coloratura soprano Rachele Gilmore was more than up to the task, both lovely to look at

## Upstate Treats (continued)

and exciting to listen to. Her long intricate 18-minute showpiece aria in the second act was delightful, being sung in English so one could actually understand what it was about. In the talk back afterwards she did say that singing in English meant that, for some of the lower passages, she had to sing in almost a musical theatre style. For Bacchus, heldentenor Corey Bix provided sufficient size and a strong tenor voice to pair with Goerke's Ariadne in their Act II love duet.

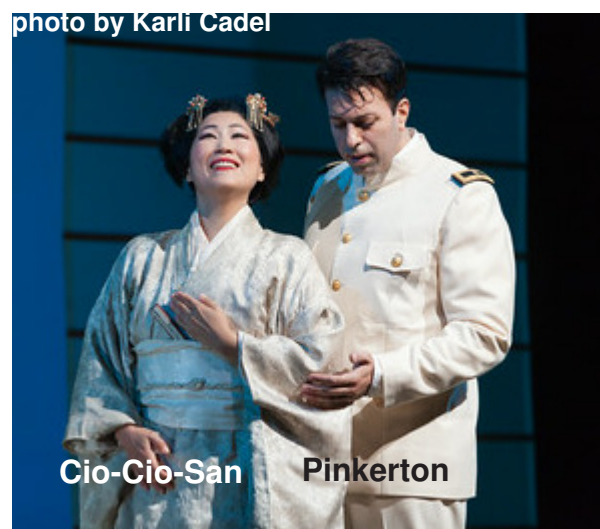


Mezzo Catherine Martin was effective both theatrically and vocally as the young Composer, upset in the Prologue that her masterpiece's debut would be less than ideal, and in this production her role was enhanced. Instead of disappearing after Act I, she remained, passing out revised scores to the orchestra as we returned for Act II, then sitting at the piano beside Zerbinetta to whisper and watch the Act II encounter and pairing of Ariadne and Bacchus, and at the end forming a second couple with Zerbinetta - very 21st century! The creative team is to be congratulated for assembling such an entertaining and understandable production, and the musicians for successfully pulling it off!

It was our third *Madama Butterfly* of the year, after Chicago Lyric Opera in the fall and Opera Lyra (OLO) in the spring, and, I think, the most satisfying of all! - tho', of course, not perfect. The delightful young tenor singing Pinkerton in his GGF debut, Dinyar Vania, was our second speaker. He took a different path to becoming a principal: rather than opera school and YAP programmes, he studied privately and learned by working his way up at NY City Opera, starting in the chorus (to get in the union), then second year auditioning for small roles,

and third year singing Rodolfo in *La Bohème*! He has had Pinkerton in his repertoire for awhile, steadily working on the role to make this very young fighting man on shore leave more sympathetic - successfully, I believe!

Francesca Zambello also directed *Madama Butterfly*, and again put her stamp on the production. She opened the opera not with the traditional Japanese house, but in the busy US Consulate, to emphasize that Cio-Cio-San was the outsider. This changed everything, not always for the better, I felt. For example, Goro was reduced ridiculously to showing Pinkerton a model of the house to let and was certainly not the usual controller of the action. The wedding then took place in the Consulate, with a few kimono-clad Japanese companions for Cio-Cio-San and a gaggle of women, who came from heaven knows where, in Western dress! - admittedly all attractively envisioned by Chinese designer Anita Yavich. Awkwardly, the Bonze appeared inexplicably as *adeus ex machina*, and finally, thanks to set designer Michael Yeargin and lighting designer Robert Wierzel, two white panels descended and we were suddenly in the house for the *Love Duet*. The letter scene also transpired in the Consulate, giving Sharpless more authority, but making the sudden appearance of Sorrow, Cio-Cio-San's son, quite mysterious. Nevertheless, Zambello moves people well, and gets her points across.



Puccini specialist Joseph Colaneri conducted, with a great cast of principals and YAPs and the GGF Orchestra all combining in a marvellous emotional whole. Korean-born soprano Yunah Lee, not surprisingly, specializes in singing Cio-Cio-San, since she has both the voice

## Upstate Treats (continued)

and appearance for the role, and gave us a lovely *Un bel di*. Dinyar Vania both looked and sounded great as Pinkerton, and the *Love Duet* between the two was marvellous. Ukrainian-born Aleksey Bogdanov has a lovely baritone which he used to good effect as Sharpless. The YAPs in the secondary roles were also exemplary, including Kristen Choi, as Suzuki, who sang a beautiful *Flower Duet* with Cio-Cio-San and Ian McEuen who gave us some comedy as marriage and real estate broker Goro bustling about the Consulate.



Young Louis McKinny, 4-year old son of Ryan McKinny, *Carousel*'s Billy Bigelow, was an adorable blonde child and quite amazing as Cio-Cio-San's son Sorrow. In spite of my reservations over Zimbello's cavalier tampering with the venues of various scenes, she does know how to direct, and certainly catches one's attention, and her final scene was well-timed and superb. Facing us, Cio-Cio-San started her suicide just as Pinkerton came on, singing "Butterfly", and a blood red curtain descended behind her, which he tried to claw down. Unfortunately it wouldn't drop, but our Pinkerton was sharp enough to run around it and still be there for Cio-Cio-San to die in his arms, as young Sorrow rushed in to join them - what a great, albeit wrenching, ending! - at least three hankies! Afterwards, Vania was kind enough to speak to our group, acknowledging our congratulations and commenting jokingly on the amazing blonde child he and Butterfly had produced, before then joining his extended family and fiancée, Rachele Gilmore (*Ariadne*'s Zerbinetta), who had all also attended the Sunday matinee! As I said earlier, this was overall a most convincing and enjoyable production - what we've come to expect from GGF!

### DVD Corner by Murray Kitts

I have for some time sympathized with opera artists who were required by their directors to appear in bizarre or ludicrous productions of operas. Now I find in the OPL examples of productions by opera singers themselves which are quite as bad as anything perpetrated by theatrical directors. We haven't had a new Saint-Saens *Samson and Delilah* for some time so, when I discovered a 2010 production by the Badisches Staatstheater, I decided to have a look at it. José Cura not only sings the role of Samson but also directs the production. The curtain rises on an oil production field with derricks and towers manned by baddies oppressing Samson and his pals. Delilah, sung excellently by Julia Gertseva, is not your usual Hedi Lamarr type of seductress. When the boss gets too familiar she stabs him in the arm (only a flesh wound) with a small dagger that she wears on a chain around her neck. (Surely that is not blood she is licking off her fingers). Waiting to seduce Samson, she is surrounded by lounging, scantily-clad young women who show their interest in what

she is singing by caressing one another. Deprived of his strength Samson is forced to pump oil singing with his head in a sack. Various nasty things are done to his pals who are tied to the towers while the Bacchanale music plays with no ballet or, if there is one, the dark lighting hides it. I was sure that the towers would come down to destroy the wicked but the director settled for a big fiery explosion. The second DVD was of Verdi's *Falstaff* with Berndt Weikl in the title role and directing the 2010 production from the Pfalztheater Kaiserlautern. Weikl chose to do this as a kind of circus performance far from Shakespeare or Verdi. The most intriguing prop on stage and usually in Falstaff's arms is a large doll about one-quarter size of our hero and dressed just like him. When Falstaff as ringmaster gets dressed in a frock coat to pay his respects to his lady loves, the doll gets a similar coat also. All the staging is flat and unfunny. Most of the singing is all right but I have never seen a Nannetta so unattractive in features and voice. Don't bother with this one but you might look at *S and D* just to see how awful things can get with a singer directing.



## **An American Tragedy in Upstate New York** by Lesley Robinson

Upstate New York is the setting for *An American Tragedy*, a twenty-first century opera by Tobias Picker with libretto by Gene Scheer. It also happens to be the home of the Glimmerglass Festival, which mounted a new and revised production this summer, contributing to the local feel of this year's festival programme.

The opera was commissioned by the Met and had its premiere in New York City in 2005 with Francesca Zambello directing. Zambello, now Artistic and General Director at Glimmerglass, envisioned a revised version that would be more accessible for young artists, for intimate spaces (such as Glimmerglass) and for university productions. She got her wish with this revision, for which major roles were competently sung and acted by members of the Glimmerglass Young Artists Program. This gave a freshness and believability to the portrayal of the youthful protagonists, notably by Christian Bowers, baritone, as Clyde Griffiths, Vanessa Isiguen, soprano, as the ill-fated Roberta and Cynthia Cook, mezzo-soprano, as Sondra Finchley, the high society young woman who catches Griffiths' eye. Cuts were made to the original piece, including the twenty-minute opening scene of exposition. It was decided that it would be more effective to engage the audience immediately by going straight into the action, right from the first scene, similarly to the way that *Don Giovanni* does.

The subject matter of *An American Tragedy* is definitely the stuff of opera - sex and murder. It is based on the highly acclaimed 1925 novel by Theodore Dreiser. Dreiser's real life source was a notorious 1906 murder case, which grabbed international attention due to the callousness of the accused towards the victim, his inconveniently pregnant girlfriend. Numerous adaptations

of the story have absorbed theatre and cinema audiences over the years, most notably the 1951 film *A Place in the Sun*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift and more recently, Woody Allen's 2005 film *Match Point*, which although set in a different time and place, contains recognisable elements of the story. *An American Tragedy* does not have the feel of a tragedy in the Shakespearean sense; Clyde Griffiths' character is way too flawed. There is interest in his harsh, religious background, yet his callousness towards the plight of his pitiable girlfriend and his total lack of remorse make it hard to identify with him. It is the vain hope of the American Dream, dangling tauntingly just out of his reach, that make this an intrinsically American tragedy.

The innovative sets by Alexander Dodge were evocative of the haunting atmosphere of the piece. The opening scene takes place in the shirt factory where the characters are working. Row

upon row of shirts hang in the void, suggesting the monotony of the workplace, dominated by its omnipresent product. The boat scene was magnificently staged with a metal skeleton of the boat, suspended high at the front of the stage.

The boat was unfinished when it was required for use in rehearsals and it was decided that the skeletal boat was so effective, that it was kept like this for the performances.

The music was a refreshing surprise. Although the arias were largely tuneless, amazing things were going on in the orchestra, carrying the atmosphere with minute detail. This too added to the fresh feel of the opera. All in all I was glad not to have missed *An American Tragedy*.

photo by Karli Cadel



Roberta

Clyde

Sondra

## Do Musicals Belong in the Opera House? *Carousel* at the Glimmerglass Festival and *Show Boat* at the San Francisco Opera

by Lesley Robinson

It is worthy of note that the word “Opera” has been dropped from the title of the renowned Glimmerglass Festival, which will celebrate its fortieth anniversary next year in its bucolic setting near Cooperstown, New York. In recent years, an annual offering of musical theatre has been included in the festival programme. Sadly this has happened not in addition to, but at the expense of an operatic production. (The festival includes four major productions each year.) This year’s offering was *Carousel* by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Meanwhile, far away, on the west coast, Glimmerglass’s Artistic Director, Francesca Zambello, was also responsible for mounting a production of *Show Boat* by Jerome Kern, also with book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II at the San Francisco Opera (a co-production with Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera and Houston Grand Opera.)

Whilst traditional opera-going audiences might be shocked by the inclusion of musical theatre at the opera house, there is a rationale for its admittance. The Broadway musical might be considered to be a direct descendant of the opera, although purists might view it as the slightly embarrassing, wayward cousin of contemporary opera. The longevity and appeal of art forms is due to the universality, not to the banality of their themes and emotional content, so although comic treatments are plentiful in the opera world, there is nevertheless always a degree of circumspection and a poignancy of expression that goes straight to the heart, in anything that has earned its place in the established repertoire. Considering the emotional power of a song such as *You’ll Never Walk Alone* from *Carousel*, a fervent anthem if ever there was one, it is possible to see how such pieces might be admitted into the repertoire.

Glimmerglass has argued for the inclusion of the musical in order to appeal to a larger audience, simply to put bums on seats. For the intimate, 900-seat venue of Glimmerglass’s Alice Busch Theater, this has not particularly been a problem, other than in times of economic leanness. It is the quality and bold innovation of the productions and the renowned Young Artists Program that have given Glimmerglass its well-deserved

reputation over the years. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the inclusion of a musical might be a way of introducing a wider public to what Glimmerglass has to offer. It would seem false logic to introduce potential audience members to opera by showing them something else - it would be like introducing someone to haute cuisine by offering them an albeit high-quality burger and fries. There remains also the question of appealing to the more traditional supporters of the festival who might well be turned away if the programme is a disappointment to them.

Another rationale for mounting productions of musicals in the opera house is that the space available lends itself to the lavish scale that was originally intended for mid-twentieth century Broadway extravaganzas. The use of a full orchestra, in a pit designed for opera without amplification, does justice to the music in a way that no Broadway theatre can. This is even true in the relatively intimate space of Glimmerglass. In the case of *Show Boat* in San Francisco, we were aware of some amplification from the stage, which gave rise to some distortion as well as to enormous disappointment in the space being used in this way. It certainly felt like sacrilege.

When it is given the full operatic, Glimmerglass treatment, the Broadway musical can truly shine. What could be more glorious than hearing Deborah Voight blasting out *Anything You Can Do* from *Annie Get Your Gun*? Ms. Voight’s performance notwithstanding, on only one occasion did it seem to me that a musical had indeed been given the full treatment at Glimmerglass. That was the 2008 production of *Kiss Me Kate* which formed a cohesive part of that year’s theme of productions based on Shakespeare’s plays. This year’s theme of One Hundred Years of Music was a little broad and although it provided a rationale for the inclusion of a musical in general, there appeared to be none for the choice of *Carousel* in particular. Perhaps parallels can be drawn between *Carou-*



## Do Musicals Belong in the Opera House? *Carousel* at the Glimmerglass Festival and *Show Boat* at the San Francisco Opera

(continued)

*sel* and *An American Tragedy* (also featured this season) both of whose main characters are men who lack moral fibre and cannot be redeemed. Nevertheless, the Glimmerglass orchestra was reliably brilliant under the baton of Doug Peck. Ryan McKinny, bass-baritone (seen last year at Glimmerglass as the Dutchman in Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*) bestowed a charming affability on the character of Billy Bigelow. The gusto of the Young Artists contributed spirited verve to the production and although the set lacked the colour and movement that the carousel would have brought to the drab lives of the protagonists, overall the performance was enjoyable.

In the past I have only once ever left a performance at the half time intermission. This was many years ago at an outdoor production of *Don Giovanni* at the Herod Atticus Theatre on the Acropolis in Athens. It had been raining and as the sun went down and the wind whipped up, it was cold and uncomfortable on the stone seats of the amphitheatre. In addition it was sung in Greek, without titles and my travelling companion was unfamiliar with opera, so the combined circumstances colluded to assuage my guilt. No such factors came into play in the case of *Show Boat* in San Francisco, but no guilt was experienced when we left our comfy, front row seats at the intermission and headed promptly for the exit. Perhaps there might have been some hope for the production to redeem itself in the second act, but whether or not it did, I hope that the hobo to whom we handed a ticket in the street upon exiting, was at least able to enjoy the warmth and comfort of the auditorium.

*Show Boat* was a disappointment in many ways. At the pre-performance talk we were told that this production plays up the undercurrents of racial inequality, which lurk beneath its surface. This is baffling to those who are familiar with the Hollywood movie version, from which any such sinister undercurrents seem totally absent. Even more perplexing having been told this, was the choice for the

cover of the programme of a painting entitled African-Americans picking cotton on plantation beside the Mississippi, which was cropped so that the people portrayed were absent from the visible detail on the cover. It was further suggested that the show's best known song, *Old Man River*, was a vehicle for the theme of the hard life of African Americans in the southern states. To me the song symbolizes the permanence of the river, stalwart and dependable, whatever life may throw one's way. This is true for all those who make their living from, on or close to the river. There is one incident in the action which could be said to exemplify the social theme of racial intolerance. Steve Baker, an actor on the boat, shows solidarity with his mixed race partner, Julie La Verne, by insisting that he has negro blood in him, having just sucked some blood from her cut finger. Racially mixed marriages were at that time (the 1880s) strictly prohibited in the United States. Overplaying such a serious theme seems incongruous with the overall character of the piece. In general the treatment we saw in San Francisco included much painful overacting and not only in the scenes of a play within a play, when it was relevant to the plot. This was the kind of performance that was well on the embarrassing side of awkward.

Patricia Racette played the wise and loyal Julie. Her rendition of *Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man* was engaging, but this music does little to showcase her talents in the way that Puccini does, so this too left a disappointing aftertaste. The sets were vibrant and on a grand scale, not quite larger than life, but the vastness of the Mississippi is somewhat daunting to capture, whatever the scale of the stage. Perhaps it is Hollywood that is best suited to meet the extravagant demands of the backdrop.

To return to the original question posed by the title of this piece - do musicals belong in the opera house? - my answer is yes and no, or rather it depends. It depends on how they are presented, on how they fit thematically in the repertoire, on the particular talents of casts and crew and, to an extent, on the will of audiences. Opera-goers will vote with their ticket purchases and only rarely with their feet at the intermission.

## Events You Might Have Enjoyed by Shelagh Williams

**Floyd Collins:** Norma Torontow's grandson Michael Torontow has been singing in the musical *Floyd Collins* at the York Theatre in Vancouver. The music and lyrics are by Richard Rodgers' grandson Adam Guettel, who also composed *The Light in the Piazza*, both of which pieces the Shaw Festival has recently produced. A review of *Floyd Collins* appeared in the March 20th *Globe and Mail*.

**Opera Lyra (OLO) 19th Annual Garden Party:** Fortunately, a rain date is always provided for the OLO Garden Party, since this year OLO's weather luck ran out, but on the second date we enjoyed perfect weather in the Italian Ambassador's lovely garden. Delicious refreshments and a strolling fashion show from Earlene's House of Fashion put us in the mood for the entertaining operatic concert accompanied by OLO's Principal Repetiteur, Judith Ginsberg. Coloratura soprano Ania Hejnar, one of our latest BLOC finalists, started off proceedings by giving us a scintillating preview of her Queen of the Night aria from the OLO Opera Studio's upcoming *Magic Flute*. Several delightful treats, in the form of arias and duets, followed. Our two male leads from *Madama Butterfly*, tenor Antoine Belanger as Pinkerton and baritone James Westman as Sharpless, finished off with the sublime duet from *Don Carlo* - another marvellous event!

**Burnt at the Steak:** The Ottawa Fringe Festival can be a bit hit or miss, but is always worth a visit. This year the one woman musical, *Burnt at the Steak*, created and performed by Carolann Valentino, was definitely a hit! It was a funny, well-produced entertainment autobiographically covering her stint as the manager of a large NYC steakhouse, highlighting 18 different characters: herself, fellow employees, and especially customers! Mixing several clever parodies of songs, it hilariously showed her also trying to get to auditions on her way to Broadway, stand-up comedy, and us. (Awarded Best of Fest at the venue!)

**Choir of Christ College, Cambridge:** Summer is the time when choirs like to tour, and this summer this excellent choir was in town, singing at Christ Church Ca-

thedral. Evensong is a lovely service, and July 6th aptly commemorated Thomas More, Chancellor of England, Martyr (1535). The visiting choir opened with a divine Introit by Orlando Gibbons, while the *Evening Service in D* - a magnificent *Magnificat* and restful *Nunc Dimittis* - and Anthem were by Sir Hubert Parry. The Psalms were sung with precision and vigour. The rousing Postlude by one of the two accompanying organ scholars sent us off well prepared for the week ahead!

**Music and Beyond Festival:** For the fifth Anniversary season of the Festival, Founder and Artistic and Executive Director Julian Armour gave us another example of the wide range of his programming talents with concerts and events to keep us entertained and engaged in July.

Winnipeg soprano Ellen Wieser and local harpist Caroline Leonardelli, originally from France, paired in a delightful musical tour of Europe.

The 12-voice a cappella San Francisco-based male chorus Chanticleer flew in from Chicago to perform a quite marvellous programme. With voices ranging from countertenor to bass and selections covering the spectrum from the Renaissance to Joni Mitchell, there was something for everyone, all beautifully performed and presented.

The Cantata Singers sang their last concert with Artistic Director Michael Zaugg, before he leaves for Edmonton's Pro Coro Canada. They started with their normal Romantic repertoire of Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff and moved through more modern pieces including two short anthems by Canadian Stephen Eisenhauer, a premiere.

The day of three far-ranging Canadian Celebration concerts included sopranos Ellen Wieser and Charlotte Corwin each in a song cycle, while tenor Adam Fisher sang the aria *All Yesterday* which he had just premiered in the new Canadian opera *Pauline*. The Capital Chamber Choir under Jamie Loback featured among its several pieces works by Ottawa-based composers Nicholas Piper and Timothy Mott, both choristers, and Tony Dunn, who accompanied his selection!

## Events You Might Have Enjoyed (continued)

***She Loves Me:*** This summer's musical at the Thousand Islands Playhouse (TIP) was the romantic comedy *She Loves Me*, of 1963, written by the same music and lyrics team which wrote *Fiddler on the Roof*, of 1964, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, and based on the 1937 Hungarian play *Parfumerie*, which also inspired the films *Little Shop Around the Corner* and *You've Got Mail*. We had enjoyed the musical in London a few years ago, and were pleased that the TIP production was equally excellent, from the very clever art nouveau set and appropriate costumes by Gillian Gallow, through TIP Artistic Director Ashlie Corcoran's sparkling direction of the cast to the musical co-ordination of Greg Gibson and his six-piece orchestra. The first rate singers included some debuting actors we recognized from Shaw and Stratford, and the creative team was equally stellar, making for a most enjoyable evening.

***Cabaret:*** This year's Shaw Festival musical was *Cabaret*, by Kander and Ebb who also wrote *The Visit*, in a marvellous production directed by Peter Hinton, former Artistic Director of the NAC English Theatre. His always thoughtful care for his productions, combined with a brilliant setting by Michael Gianfrancesco consisting of a double set of stairs towering up on a turntable, ensured that characters were easily visible and the story line was clear. Judith Bowden's colourful costumes and Shaw Musical Director Paul Sportelli's orchestra allowed the cast to do an exceptional, edgy job on the piece. Mention must be made of Juan Chioran, "stolen" again from Stratford to provide the devilish looking and acting Emcee, even more outstanding than when he was wicked Count Orlofsky in the OLO's *Die Fledermaus* a few years ago! On the distaff side, Deborah Hay was an equally persuasive Sally Bowles, whether singing, acting or dancing is concerned - where do the players get the energy and stamina, since they are all in at least two productions?!

***Stratford Festival:*** *Crazy for You* is a musical written by Ken Ludwig (*Lend Me a Tenor*) to utilize the best of over 400 Gershwin songs - how

could it not be great? The 19 songs from 9 shows combined with director and choreographer Donna Feore's fantastic dances phenomenally performed by N.Y. Follies girls and Nevada cowboys added up to a great show. Potential disaster, when leading lady Chilina Kennedy withdrew because of pregnancy, was averted when talented Canadian Natalie Daradich stepped in as Polly Baker, opposite New Yorker Josh Franklin as Bobby Child. Amazingly, Shakespearean Tom Rooney became a singing Hungarian impresario named Zangler, and the two male leads had a hilarious scene to end all drunk scenes! Conductor Shelley Hanson and her orchestra provided great backing and designer Debra Hanson kept things visually alive, matching the incredible energy of the chorus - I was feeling exhausted just by intermission!

Unfortunately, the Stratford four-person (two men plus two women) chamber production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* by opera director Peter Sellar was a travesty! The scenery was non-existent, unless you felt that Abigail DeVille's transformation of the Masonic Hall ceiling with attached foil and garbage day scroungings of cast-off furniture, bedsteads, mattresses and upside-down pictures was artistic - I did not! The stage itself was tiny and stage movement was minimal and repetitive - certainly without imagination. What with Sellar's cuts and re-visioning of the text, and no clear delineation of who was playing whom, or modulation of voices, it was impossible to make head nor tail of most of it even though we knew the play! Shakespeare must have been turning in his grave!

***The Bytowne Cinema:*** During the summer the Bytowne Cinema on Rideau Street presented films of three Covent Garden productions: *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Nabucco*. Unlike the Live From the Met shows these filmed presentations were not live but they were recent and they were excellent, every bit as good in terms of production values and musical quality as the Met telecasts. On October 27 and 28 the Bytowne will be showing the Covent Garden production of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. Whether the Bytowne will continue to show these films from Covent Garden beyond October is not certain at this time. A continuation of these operas films would be a blessing to all Ottawa opera enthusiasts. (Tom McCool)



# Saturday Afternoon at the Opera



Sept. 27, 2014

*Samson et Delilah* - Saint-Saens - MET Archive  
(originally broadcast April 18, 1987)

Jon Vickers, tenor, Samson

Marilyn Horne, mezzo-soprano, Delilah

Louis Quilico, baritone, High Priest of Dagon

October 11, 2014

*Der Wildschutz* - Albert Lortzing

October 18, 2014

*Die Tote Stadt* - Korngold

October 4, 2014

*The Flying Dutchman* - Wagner

October 25, 2014

*Iphigenia in Aulis* - Gluck arr. Wagner

For a listing of the opera broadcasts in November consult the CBC website:

<http://music.cbc.ca/#/Saturday-Afternoon-at-the-Opera>

For a detailed description of the operas to be broadcast from the Met beginning in December consult the Met website: [www.metopera.org](http://www.metopera.org)

## The Met: Live in HD 2014 – 15 Season

Verdi's *Macbeth*

October 11, 2014, 12:55 pm

Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* – New

Production, October 18, 2014, 12:55 pm

Bizet's *Carmen*

November 1, 2014, 12:55 pm

Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

November 22, 2014, 12:55 pm

Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von*

*Nürnberg* Dec. 13, 2014, 12 pm

Lehar's *The Merry Widow* - New Produc

tion, January 17, 2015, 12:55 pm

Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*

January 31, 2015, 12:55 pm

Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* / Bartok's *Duke*

*Bluebeard's Castle* - New

Production, February 14, 2015, 12:30 pm

Rossini's *La Donna del Lago* - Met

Premiere, March 14, 2015, 12:55 pm

Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* /

Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* - New

Production, April 25, 2015, 12:30 pm

# Opera Within Reach

## Ottawa

### Opera Lyra Ottawa

*The Magic Flute* (Mozart)

October 25, 26 & November 1 at Arts Court Theatre

*The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart)

March 21, 23, 25 & 28 at the NAC

Information: [www.operalyra.ca](http://www.operalyra.ca)

### Orpheus Society

*Fiddler on the Roof* (Bock)

November 21 - 30 at CentrepoinTE Theatre

Information: <http://orpheus-theatre.ca>

## Montréal

### Opera de Montréal

*Nabucco* (Verdi) September 20, 23, 25 & 27

*The Barber of Seville* (Rossini) Nov 8, 11, 13 & 15

Le Gala December

Information: [www.operademontreal.com](http://www.operademontreal.com)

## Toronto

### Canadian Opera Company

*Falstaff* (Verdi)

October 3, 9, 12, 14, 25, 29 & November 1

*Madama Butterfly* (Puccini)

October 10, 11, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30 & 31

Information: [www.coc.ca](http://www.coc.ca)

### Opera Atelier

*Alcina* (Handel)

October 23, 25, 26, 28, 31 & Nov 1 at the Elgin Theatre

Information: [www.operaatelier.com](http://www.operaatelier.com)

## Syracuse

### Syracuse Opera

*Die Fledermaus* (Strauss) October 24 & 26

*A Little Night Music* (Sondheim) Feb 6, 8, 13 & 15

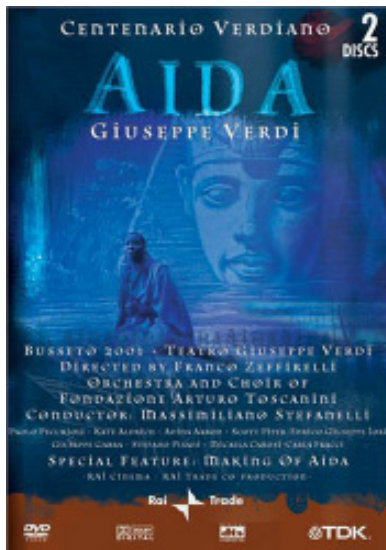
*The Barber of Seville* (Rossini) April 17 & 18

Information: [www.syracuseopera.com](http://www.syracuseopera.com)

For additional details check the opera company websites.

# Opera alla Pasta

DVD presentations of outstanding operas from the great opera houses of the world followed by a delicious meal.



## November 9, 2014

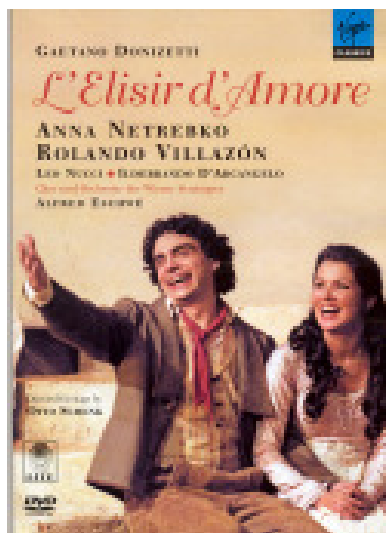
“The opera was staged as part of the commemorative of the 100th anniversary of Verdi’s death in his home town of Busseto, in the tiny Teatro Giuseppe Verdi. ... The performance is totally captivating from beginning to end.”

“This is a lovely production, intimate rather than stupendous.”

“This Aida goes straight to the top of the list.”

“unique and unconventional”

“I had chills through the entire performance.”



## February 8, 2015

“Charming and beautiful. Netrebko and Villazon are wonderful”

“These two have fabulous voices and a great chemistry together on stage”

“BRAVO!”

“A charming, traditional production from Vienna with star power.”

“A musical and visual triumph”

“Opera at its best”

All of the comments quoted above are from Amazon.com's website. The comments were made by customers who purchased the DVDs.

**March 1, 2015**  
*Andrea Chénier*

**Date:** to be determined  
*Salome*

**Opera alla Pasta** presentations are held at St. Anthony's Soccer Club at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday afternoon. The cost is a modest \$20. Call 613-721-7121 at least 3 days before the date of the DVD presentation in order to reserve a place. For additional information on Opera alla Pasta contact Elizabeth Meller at 613-721-7121.