



## The *Barber* Transmogrified

by Murray Kitts

A combination of fine Canadian singers and musicians presented *The Barber of Seville* in a new and unusual production to Ottawa at the NAC. 2003 Brian Law Competition Winner Joshua Hopkins as Figaro dominated the action when he was on the stage. His vocal and acting talents are nothing less than astonishing. His professionalism and courage in the face of a family tragedy cannot be lauded too highly. Peter McGillivray with a very good voice certainly threw himself into the part of Doctor Bartolo but was presented in a puzzling relationship with the heroine. It was Marion Newman who had to meet the challenge of singing the familiar “Una voce poco fa” and did so quite well even though she had to follow the director’s instructions of putting on her dress and generally fussing around. Her lover, the Count, sung by Isaiah Bell, was not able to surmount some of the difficulties of his bel canto tenor role but should improve with time and experience. Giles Tomkins as Don



Basilio tried to make the best of a characterization that just didn’t fit, so that his “La calunnia” aria which should have been one of the highlights of the evening didn’t quite succeed. His comic scenes in Act 2 were spoiled by the arrival of a group of extras who only served to distract from the real fun provided by the “Buona sera” hilarity. What a pleasure it was to have Maghan McPhee (second prize winner in our 2005 Brian Law Competition) sing her aria on a deserted stage with no distractions, a novelty in this production. Maghan sang well in ensembles during the whole opera and really deserved a solo bow at the final applause. The chorus, directed by Lawrence Ewashko,

sang well but was at times overused on the stage, looking as though they were trying to find some reason for being there. The orchestra under Guiseppe Pietrarroia played exceptionally well throughout.

Maybe I’m just getting too old and my powers of concentration and understanding have degenerated, but for the life of me I couldn’t follow much of the plot of this version of Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* that was offered by Opera Lyra Ottawa. The play on

which it is based I studied in university and once saw performed by the Comédie Française who have been presenting this play regularly since 1775. The Rossini opera praised by composers from Beethoven to Verdi as one of the greatest comic operas ever written was presented in such a way that the music and singing seemed at times detached from the action on the stage. I think that the children who made up a select audience for the dress rehearsal must have enjoyed the presentation the most, although there were many mo-

ments to enjoy for all. My understanding was challenged right from the first when Rosina was introduced as a movie star. What hold would a director have over such a person? Why was a doctor making movies? Why was the Count sneaking around a movie studio? Why was Basilio’s evil nature downgraded to the publicity agent level and not presented as a religious figure who should have known better? Enough - or as Doctor Bartolo would say “Basta”. By the way, whatever virus prompted the transmogrification of *The Barber* also infected Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore* in a 2014 DVD production from Baden Baden which takes place in a Hollywood movie stu-

## President's Message November 2015

by Murray Kitts

Don't miss reading our Treasurer's Report on the latest Brian Law Competition. We need some good news dealing with opera in our community, considering all the continuing revelations about the demise of Opera Lyra Ottawa. It looks as though our organization will have to start again from the beginning to spearhead a movement to bring back opera performances where they belong - on the main stage of the NAC.

The fundamental problem to funding opera in Ottawa is that there are no large successful industries to provide sufficient sponsorship. The only real alternative has always been the Federal Government of Canada. But would the political leaders be brave enough to propose using public money so that the capital of Canada would be able to produce opera in a complex with an opera house built to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Confederation?

It has been willing to spend over \$100 million dollars on larger washrooms and a face-lifting to the building. Surely this could be extended to helping to support opera production so that for the 150th anniversary

of Confederation Canada's capital might take its place as an opera centre along with the most important world capitals.

In the meantime the National Capital Opera Society must do its best to promote any group which is keeping opera alive in the area. Our newsletter is always open to publicizing performances by local groups.

Through the Brian Law Competition we will continue to help young aspiring singers to make their careers in the opera field. We aim to keep you informed of the activities and successes of past finalists. In addition we have expanded our Opera alla pasta program to include an extra presentation. Already the response to the first two offerings – Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* and Tchaikovsky's *The Tsarina's Slippers* have been most favourable. Further presentations will provide opportunities to bring opera lovers together so that they can share their ideas as to how to bring back live opera experiences to our area.

Finally we invite any of our readers to send us their thoughts on this critical situation.

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### Editor's Corner by David Williams

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the newsletter this past year. This includes those who have written articles and reviews, those who have helped on the technical side by editing or proof-reading and those who have assisted with the electronic and postal distribution of the newsletter.

Thanks also to all members whose dues and donations enable this newsletter to be published.

I encourage all members to consider submitting articles and reviews. You do not have to be an expert to have an opinion or viewpoint. Most of our readers are not experts; they just love opera.

Finally, I wish all of you an enjoyable holiday season and good health and happiness for the coming year.

For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition contact Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 or consult [www.ncos.ca](http://www.ncos.ca)

## More from the BLOC

### A Message from the Winner



On Tuesday, October 13, 2015 , Eliza Johnson wrote:

Hi Mr Kitts,

Thank you so much for everything! I had such a wonderful time in Ottawa singing in the BLOC.

I just wanted to say a big thank you to everyone involved in organizing this event. Of course, the personal demands of singing and developing one's talents for a

career in opera are undeniable, but a lot of the success of young singers these days has to do with the amount of monetary support we are able to find in our communities when we are first setting out. It is incredibly expensive to pay for lessons, coaching, application fees, travel, accommodations, gowns etc; just to be in a position to be considered for the opportunities that will build a career.

Organizations like the NCOS are so important to the future of opera. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to compete and humbled to be chosen as this year's winner. Every one of the singers who performed on Saturday was so refined and accomplished. It is such a gift to have been able to perform in such a beautiful venue for such a warm and supportive audience. I can't say how grateful I am to everyone involved for making this possible.

I have some exciting news coming soon, but am not able to make it public at this time... I will certainly be in touch as soon as I am able!

Many thanks again for your hard work, kindness, and generosity!

All the best and Happy Thanksgiving!  
Eliza

## Treasurer's Report on the 2015 BLOC

by Mark Robinson

I want to congratulate all who helped ensure we held another wonderful Brian Law Opera Competition. We had great singers and pianists, expert judges, an excellent MC, a beautiful venue, more prize money than before and a lovely reception.

At the same time, we were able to reduce our expenses by \$3,400 compared to the 2013 competition, which was a 69% reduction in expenses excluding the prizes. This was all done through donations by our generous members of time, prizes, food for the reception, and a bouquet of flowers.

The BLOC is funded by ticket sales and the donations of members. In 2013 we had to use our capital to

cover the cost. In 2015, we not only reduced our expenses, we also increased our donations, so that our overall expenses were less than our income. If we can do this for every future competition, there is no financial reason why the BLOC will not continue for ever.

Thanks to your generous donations, we are in good shape financially. Where we need to focus is on recruiting and welcoming new members. We did increase our membership last year. Let's work to do the same in 2016.

Let me conclude by reminding you that your 2016 membership is due and congratulating you once again on a successful 2015 Brian Law Opera Competition.

## The *Barber* Transmogrified (continued)

dio where a Wild West film is being made. Great voices: Rolando Villazon, Miah Persson, Ildebrando D'Arcangelo – what a waste! The stage director is Villazon himself.

It's true that *The Barber* is not the easiest one to stage because the original opera starts with a scene outside Bartolo's house, then in the living quarters inside

the house and finally in Rosina's bedroom. The problem with Dennis Garnhum's staging is that it delimitates everything. There were two main playing areas. The first involved most of the stage and the director decided that this large area should always have something going on in it even though it might and did serve as a distraction from the main action. The other playing area was Rosina's dressing room which began to resemble the Marx Brothers' stateroom in *A Night at the Opera*. Amusing enough, but did the staging complement the



Photos: Opera Lyra Ottawa, Andrew Alexander Photography

music and the action or did it impede these extremely important factors? The lighting by Kevin Lamotte was fairly straightforward, but quite effective in the "frozen statue" scene. However, the lightning effects in the storm were pretty mild compared with the music which they were supposed to illustrate. I understand that the overall atten-

dance figures were quite low bringing on the crisis which seems unsolvable at this point. The very costly advertising in *The Citizen*, in colour no less, seems not to have worked. One of our members told me that the publicity photo showing Figaro clutching a brassiere around Rosina convinced her not to attend.

I think everyone enjoyed many of the sight gags but I can't help repeating what a new opera-goer said to me at the end: "I wish I had seen the original."

## *Elixir* Transplanted

by Shelagh Williams

St. John's Church was transformed into the Holy Roller Casino as Rapport Opera, in its second season under Artistic Director soprano Cara Gilbertson, staged an updated production of Donizetti's *Elixir of Love*. With clear English dialogue and keen young artists, Music Director and pianist Nadia Boucher and Stage Director and English script writer Claire Hafner gave us a lively, well sung Las Vegas-set version!

Soprano Susan Brown was a strong Adina, the casino owner, while tenor Grayson Nesbitt had a sweet voice and was suitably gawky and love struck for Nemorino, the lowly casino security guard. In the first of the character baritone roles, Jean-Sebastien Kennedy as Belcore, the egocentric heavyweight boxing champion holding his next match at the casino, strutted around with a false muscled torso, in spite of an injured knee.

Denis Lawlor sang Dr. Dulcamara, a perceptive and clever card sharp, with a thick Southern drawl and smooth insinuating manner to carry off his various deals, including bringing Adina and newly rich Nemorino together! Casino manager Gianetta was double cast, and we heard perky little Maria Bamford, while Kathleen Radke was cast for the other evening.

A simple but effective bar set and good and witty costuming, colour-coded to distinguish Adina and Gianetta from the chorus, with imaginative use of resources, produced an easily understood and entertaining evening of opera!

Several of the singers will be appearing in title roles in uOttawa Opera Company's March 2016 production of *Magic Flute* or Pellegrini Opera's April 2016 *Rigoletto*.

## Delight and Despair in Toronto by Shelagh Williams

This Fall's opera productions in Toronto bridged the gamut from the very beginnings of opera to a world premiere of one of this century's most recent compositions, all on the theme of doomed love!

Opera Atelier (OA) is now in its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary season, and going strong! It is still in the hands of its founders, with a strong vision, and is being well run, using small casts and orchestra, a black-clad chorus at the sides, and a small theatre as venue. Would that Ottawa's 30 year old Opera Lyra were in such a healthy state!

OA is not averse to remounting its successes - in this case its splendid 2012 production of Lully's *Armide*, which went on to Glimmerglass Opera and Royal Opera House Versailles. This year's production will be going again to Versailles (where the opera debuted in 1686) after the present run in Toronto! It is still a magnificent production, though of course with a few changes here and there. OA's Co-Directors Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, also the director and choreographer respectively, again produced their stylish presentation. Designers Gerard Gauci (sets), Dora Rust d'Eye (costumes) and Bonnie Beecher (lighting) provided a beautiful canvas with which to work. Gauci especially excelled with a departure from his usual "forced perspective" Baroque sets, giving us glowing colours, intricate details, and Islamic calligraphy as background. The sad story of the Christian knight Renaud and Saracen warrior princess Armide moved along well under Pynkoski, while Zingg and the Atelier Ballet's choreog-



Photo by Bruce Zinger

Lindsay

Ainsworth

raphy included both dashing male sword play and charming female castanet and finger cymbal playing. Maestro David Fallis contributed the third ingredient, music, with his Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir.

All these facets allowed the experienced cast to shine. Returning as the good looking leads, soprano Peggy Kriha Dye and tenor Colin Ainsworth sang their hearts out in roles they have made their own. Armide's two soprano companions, Carla Huhtanen and our 2013 BLOC winner Meghan Lindsay were again fascinating. Tenor Aaron Ferguson and bass-baritone Olivier LaQue- re added comic relief as the Chevaliers come to rescue Renaud from Armide, this time seeming to include the front rows of the audience as well as the orchestra in the group of hellish monsters to which they reacted hilariously! New to these roles, but not to OA, and so fitting in perfectly, were bass-baritone Stephen Hegedus as



Photo by Bruce Zinger

Gledhill

Kriha Dye

Hidroat, King of Damascus, and baritone Daniel Belcher as La Haine (Hatred), both in similar black Saracen costumes. However, I really missed barihunk Curtis Sullivan in the latter role, all muscles and swagger, semi-clad in his sexy body suit! Dancer Tyler Gledhill performed the role of Love, balancing nimbly both a huge set of wings and, at times, the leading lady!

It is always a delight to be able to enjoy such a marvellous production more than once - especially since OA keeps its standards up, ensuring that, for its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, all aspects of the performance are at their best!

Incidentally, at the OA performance, we met Joel Allison, a 2015 BLOC finalist, alive and well and enjoying both this opera performance and UofT!

The presentation of the Canadian Opera Company (COC) was entitled *Pyramus and Thisbe*, but was actually an amalgam of two early Monteverdi works concerning two entirely different sets of lovers, which preceded and then flowed into a modern work, which gave the evening its title. The unifying theme, according to the pre-opera lecturer was the subject matter "love too late".

## Delight and Despair in Toronto (continued)

In the good old days, one's court composer would whip up a new opera to entertain important guests at an aristocratic wedding - hence Monteverdi's two delightful works which were written in the 1600s for two different cities and which I was delighted to get the chance to hear at the COC. The 15-minute aria *Lamento di Arianna* (yes, the same anguished Ariadne of *Ariadne of Naxos!*), is the only fragment from Monteverdi's second opera, and was emotionally sung by mezzo

Krisztina Szabo to open the show. The second and more dramatic work was *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, "an operatic scena for three voices". Tenor Owen McCausland as Testo here took the main part in the story to movingly narrate the sad tale of the Christian knight Tancredi, sung by baritone Phillip

Addis, fighting to the death an unknown Saracen warrior who turns out to be his beloved Clorinda, again sung by Szabo. Johannes Debus conducted from the harpsichord with a small continuo of cello, bass, and the specialist theorbo player, Sylvain Bergeron. How often can one hear such early works so well sung and musically presented?

However, the main focus of the night was the world premiere of Canadian composer Barbara Monk Feldman's *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the third and largest part of the evening. Although directed by my least favourite director, Christopher Alden, it must be admitted that he did give some unity to the three works by using a moving platform, designed by Paul Steinberg, with blocks of colour as background, so that it could slide to the left and provide a suitable backdrop for each section. The modern libretto did not follow the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, but consisted of excerpts from

various pieces of unrelated literature, somehow concerning "subtle shifts in their unconscious" (as explained in the programme). Therefore, Alden really didn't have much to work with in managing his principal singers and the chorus, and it showed! The costumes weren't much either (see photo of *Pyramus and Thisbe*). Debus conducted a huge COC Orchestra which seemed to be resting more than playing, and certainly the music didn't support the soloists, although it did go along more

with the chorus. This work played out excruciatingly slowly - it certainly seemed to last much longer than an hour! My companion felt that the Slow Speaking Society would have approved! It was not as bad as Sellars' *Midsummer Night's Dream* last summer at Stratford - but only just! The composer considers the work a

"non-opera", and more of a tone poem, and she is definitely correct!

Since the number of occasions on which the COC performs works by Canadian composers or female composers, or world premieres, is rather limited, it was certainly good to have experienced this production - but this work is not one which I wish to see again!

We were very fortunate to be able to enjoy a noon hour COC concert by Hawaiian baritone Quinn Kelsey, starring in the COC's *La Traviata*. He used his deep rich voice in a preview of the programme he will soon be presenting in Wigmore Hall, London. It consisted, not surprisingly, of lovely renditions of mostly British composers' works: Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel* (R. L. Stevenson) and Gerald Finzi's *Let us Garlands Bring* (Shakespeare), both sung with very clear diction, book-ending three songs by Brahms, for a most satisfying recital!



## *Electra* – Passion and Fury in Montréal by Lesley Robinson

Wow! When it comes to an emotionally charged night at the opera, L'Opéra de Montréal certainly gets it right. During the pre-opera talk on the last night of the triumphant run of Richard Strauss's *Electra*, we were promised a treat, as the production was hailed as the finest of the company's 36-year history. We were not disappointed. As a total musical, dramatic and cathartic package, this ranks as the finest I have ever experienced in Montréal. The entire hour and forty-five minutes felt like an emotional crescendo of pathos, righteous indignation and fury, climaxing in a burst of elation.

Strauss's score calls for a very large orchestra. The pit of the Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier can seat a maximum of 88 musicians and it was filled to capacity. The sound was monumental, expertly crafted by the diminutive giant, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, who arrived in the pit in a t-shirt. As the evening progressed it became clear that this was indeed the appropriate attire, since the conductor's performance was a total workout. The magnificent night belonged to him, as he directed the entire musical experience and drew the best from all the performers, both in the pit and on the stage. The cast was well chosen. American Soprano Lise Lindstrom has made the role of Electra her own. On stage for the entirety of the one act production, the emotional build-up is entirely hers and she was captivating. She was magnificently supported by fine performances from German soprano Nicola Beller Carbone as Electra's sister Chrysothemis, Polish mezzo-soprano Agnes Zwiwko as her horribly nasty mother Klytemnästra and American bass-baritone Alan Held as her brother Orest.

The set evoked the larger than life presence of Agamemnon, Electra's father, who although already murdered before the action begins, is a major character in the drama that unfolds. The set consists of a 25 foot statue of the slain king, in a crouching, defensive position, which takes up most of the stage and is rotated by Electra herself, allowing the audience to see different facets of her father as the action progresses. The statue is the creation of Spanish sculptor and set designer Victor Ochoa. It's scale is monumental – in a standing position this portrayal of Agamemnon would have been 80 feet tall.



Composed in 1909, this work had the Expressionist movement and Freudian psychology as its backdrop. We are familiar with the Electra complex, a daughter's psychosexual competition with her mother for her father's love. However, this is not the interpretation we see here, nor in Sophocles's tragedy of the fifth century BC, on which the librettist's version is based. Electra's situation is similar to that of Hamlet. Her mother takes a lover and together they murder her father to rule in his place. Electra's passionate desire for revenge is completely understandable. She cannot do the deed alone and her sister's more passive feminine nature prevents her from participating. It is left to Electra's brother to do the deed. Orest equally feels the need and the duty to exact revenge. What is astonishing about the climax of the score is its joyous release. Compare this with the conclusion of a Shakespearean tragedy. The macabre dance of elation leaves us with a feeling of eerie discomfort. It was a magnificent experience!



## Another Yannick Nézet-Séguin Success by Ute Davis

On Saturday 21 November, the Opéra de Montréal staged *Elektra*. Now this Richard Strauss work with libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal is far from being my favourite opera and since its 1909 debut has acquired a reputation for shrill soprano voices competing with discordant music from a huge orchestra. On Saturday we learned better.

According to Sophocles, princess Elektra is crazed with grief following the murder of her father (Agamemnon) by her mother (Klytaemnestra) aided by her lover (Aegisthus). She longs for revenge but her sister Chrysothemis is of no help and she is horrified when rumour comes that her brother (Orestes), her last hope for an equally bloodthirsty ally, is dead. However Orestes reappears and, at her urging, kills mother and lover. In a macabre dance of vindictive joy, Elektra herself dies.

This production is directed by Alain Gauthier with simple sets and costumes with the exception of a huge 25 feet high and 16 feet wide statue of the kneeling Agamemnon, bowed down by worldly misfortune. It totally dominates a starkly lit stage just as it dominates Elektra's mental state. The statue is the work of Spanish artist-sculptor Victor Ochoa.

However the truly dominating feature of the evening was the music. Looking moderately scruffy in a black T-shirt (on opening night at Salle Wilfred Peller!!) Yannick Nézet-Séguin was absolutely dynamic throughout. From a front row vantage point I watched with mesmerized fascination as he ranged from making vigorous physical demands of his orchestra to delicate innuendo. The Orchestre Métropolitain has been "his orchestra" for 15 years now and they respond to his baton in a way which, in my presence, they have not done for any other conductor. Using the 86 member ensemble (reduced from the original 110 of Strauss), YNS gave us a superb interpretation of the score, com-

plementing the voices and offering a vast range of emotion from Elektra's manic ranting to the melodic interludes of the numerous waltzes.

Vocal quality was high throughout and the show well cast. Lise Lindstrom, a dramatic soprano, was able to rise to the demands of Elektra's vengeful fury at her mother but also to merge delicately with the orchestra in the lyrical phrasing of the scene in which she recognizes the long-lost Orestes. Pleased also by the quality of her German diction, I thought "Well that's what we expect of Swedish singers", only to find in her C.V. that she is American. Extra Kudos!

Klytaemnestra was Agnes Zwierno of Polish origin. She was appropriately venomous in voice and action and the blood-curdling scream at her off-stage death certainly convinced me.

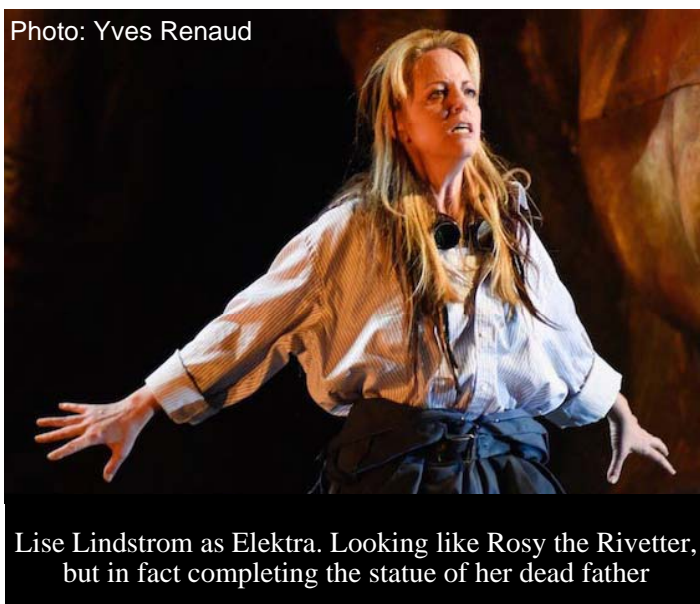
Married to a Spaniard, Nicola Beller Carbone of Germany, singing Chrysothemis, was a vocally glittering soprano presence and well matched with Lindstrom.

On the male side, Alan Held gave us another sterling bass-baritone performance, showing vocal strength and excellent quality. As in his San Francisco *Don Pizarro* (*Fidelio*) his German was also without flaw. John MacMaster was a suitably pompous and egotistical Aegisthus.

I enjoyed the production and especially enjoyed the music more than any *Elektra* I have seen before. Reading that Lindstrom has sung a number of Salomes and knowing that YNS has enjoyed conducting this opera, I would really like to see these two performing together in *Salome* as well. These two Strauss works are ideal opera twins. The similarities in music and story are uncanny.

In summary, let me quote Arthur Kaptainis of the Montréal Gazette "YNS has added a great score to his repertoire". Yes! In all senses.

Photo: Yves Renaud



Lise Lindstrom as Elektra. Looking like Rosy the Rivetter, but in fact completing the statue of her dead father



# A Masterly Masterclass by our Honorary Patron Gerald Finley

by Ute Davis

The McGill Schulich School of Music celebrated their 40th Anniversary of the McGill Song Interpretation Class on Oct 23-26, 2015. Guest of Honour, Gerald Finley, conducted two masterclass sessions and I was very fortunate to be present for the second of these, when four McGill students were put through their paces. This event followed the award of an Honorary Doctorate by McGill to Gerald, to add to the many honours previously given to him in recognition of his many accomplishments in the fields of opera, Lieder and other art songs.

I have attended many a masterclass in Canada, the US, Austria and Germany but never have I witnessed a comparable demonstration of teaching skill. Following his introduction by host Michael McMahon, Gerald briefly explained to the audience his perspective on the value of such a class for students, underlining the pressure put on these youngsters, and having the large Pollack Hall audience perform breathing exercises for relaxation!

Candidate #1 was mezzo soprano Cara, accompanied by Anna at the piano for her presentation of *Die Mainacht* (May Night) from Franz Schubert's *Lieder catalogue D.194*. Gerald began by praising her appearance and stage presence, delicately building her confidence. Then he turned and, with equal finesse, thanked Anna for the excellent quality of her accompaniment. How often I have seen a pianist at vocal competitions and masterclasses treated as part of the furniture! Returning to Cara, Gerald proceeded to analyze the piece, placing it in context in Schubert's work and showing Cara how she might use her talent for a better interpretation. He then carefully coached her in some phrases, had her repeat them to his satisfaction and constructively encouraged her to do the same thing with her regular teacher in order to get the maximum out of her personal vocal interpretation.

Each student received similar treatment. A careful audition was followed by appropriate praise of qualities and then a painstaking dissection of music and libretto with constructive suggestions, repeated practice of important passages in the work and ongoing advice to take back to the regular coach.

Candidate #2 was tenor Lee, accompanied by Bryn for the Liszt piece, S.272 of the *Rhein and the Dom zu Köln* (The Cathedral at Cologne).

Candidate #3 was soprano Kim, accompanied by

Magdalena for *Reine de Mouettes* from Poulenc's *Metamorphose Art Song Cycle*.

Candidate #4 was baritone Jean-Philippe accompanied by Mary for *The Roadside Fire*, one of nine *Songs of Travel* composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams. This last selection is, of course, right in Gerald's backyard. This again led to a detailed analysis showing more and great insight as well as attention to detail from Gerald, who has performed the piece many times and recorded it.



Photo: Ute Davis

Kevin Reeves and Donna Brown also attended Gerald's Masterclass

I have always admired Gerald's amazing knowledge of languages apart from his beautiful English. I adore baritone voices and whenever the CBC plays something for a baritone I judge the level of diction, especially when the piece is in German. When I hear a baritone sing German Lieder, I listen for a moment and then decide if it is a natural German speaker or not. Gerald Finley is the only one who has ever fooled me because his sung German is so unbelievably good.

All in all we were treated to a classic demonstration of what a teacher should be: tactful, supportive, well aware of the stresses of stage performance but also having in-depth knowledge of vocal technique and the underlying physiology, and equally aware of the artist's responsibility to the poet and composer. A truly impressive "performance" from Gerald much appreciated by students and audience alike! By the way, the only reason I managed to figure out the pieces sung by those four students was because of Gerald's faultless diction. The program stated nothing other than a couple of names in each case. The students truly did not pronounce the titles of their own presentations well enough.

## A Masterly Masterclass (continued)

Photo: Ute Davis



Maria Pellegrini and Ben Heppner at Carleton U.

May I mention that Ben Heppner was in the audience? Ben teaches at McGill for two days every week. Interestingly Ben also received an Honorary Doctorate recently, in his case from Carleton University. My husband and I considered ourselves most fortunate to be invited to the dinner on the Carleton campus to celebrate this event.

## Events You Could Have Enjoyed by Shelagh Williams

**Celebrating Vienna:** Besides bringing us gorgeous music in the summer, Julian Armour and Music and Beyond, with the Austrian Embassy, brought his Chamber Players and two accomplished opera singers to cheer us in the fall! Lovely Canadian soprano Kimy McLaren of the Montreal Opera was joined by handsome Italian baritone Marco di Sapia of the Vienna Folksopera. Marco made his professional debut in Vienna, but initially trained as an actor, and it showed! He MC'd the concert in flawless English, with appropriate election-themed asides.

The programme of Viennese operetta selections included, in the second half, all of the best loved and most well known vocal treats from *Merry Widow*, all accompanied liltingly by the Chamber Players, and interspersed with delightful Johann Strauss Jr. polkas and waltzes, sending us home happy!

**Golden Slumbers Kiss Your Eyes:** As a tribute to its founding conductor, Mario Bernardi, the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) commissioned an orchestral work by Canadian composer Ana Sokolovic, entitled *Golden Slumbers Kiss Your Eyes*. This 7-movement piece was given its world premiere at the NAC on Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> in the presence of Bernardi's widow, Mona Kelly, in a first class production.

In his NACO debut, the COC's Music Director Johannes Debus was brought in to conduct. Canadian countertenor David DQ Lee, with his magnificent swallowtail coat and marvelous vocal range, sang the various folk poetry settings in multiple languages, backed by a chorus of three local choirs.

It was suitably book ended by lovely performances of two substantial works by Mozart, Bernardi's favourite composer, a nice reminder of times past.

## Answers to the Opera Quiz (page 14) by Tom McCool

1	<i>Iolanta</i>	
2	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	
3	Margherita Barezzi, Giuseppina Strepponi, Virginia, Icilio	
4	Arturo Toscanini	
5	Rossini	
6	Marchese de Busseto	
7	<i>Un ballo in maschera</i>	
8	Liszt	
9	Cosima was married to Hans von Bulow at the time	

## Happy 40<sup>th</sup>, Glimmerglass! by Lesley Robinson

This year the Glimmerglass Festival turned 40 and celebrations were in evidence in Cooperstown, New York. Otherwise known as “a drinking town with a baseball problem”, Cooperstown bustles every summer with the unlikely combination of the Baseball Hall of Fame and its wonderful festival of opera and related events.

A vibrant and varied festival, Glimmerglass has mounted close to 160 major productions over the years by around 70 different composers and spanning five centuries. Its humble launch was with a single production of *La Bohème*, staged in the summer of 1975 in the Cooperstown High School. That year there were only four performances and the audience totalled a mere 1,200 people, but Glimmerglass’s international reputation was quickly established. This year 40 performances of four productions were spread over the Festival’s seven-week calendar, interspersed with dozens of complementary events. In the early years of the festival, works were sung in English, but more recently they have usually been performed in their original language with projected English titles. (This year’s programme included Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, in a new English translation by Glimmerglass’s talented resident dramaturg, Kelly Rourke.)

We first became acquainted with Glimmerglass in the early 1990s when we lived in Upstate New York, close enough to attend matinees as a day trip. This was where our children enjoyed many of their early opera experiences and we all developed an affection for those special features which stand out as characteristically “Glimmerglass”. The 900-seat Alice Busch Theater, with its unique sliding walls allowing for the flow of fresh air between acts, opened in 1987 and since then, Glimmerglass patrons have enjoyed its blissful, bucolic setting on the shore of Otsego Lake. Without a bad seat in the house, the theatre provides an intimate setting, drawing the audience into the atmosphere of each production. This year has seen some renovations to the facilities around the theatre, including a newly located bar, concession stand and shop. More renovations are to follow. (Some additional washrooms would be welcome!)



Photo courtesy of Glimmerglass Opera

Glimmerglass’s 2015 programme epitomized much of what we have always loved about the festival. Two of this year’s four major productions were composed in the eighteenth century, one in the nineteenth and one in the twentieth century. This span is typical of a Glimmerglass season. Along with new treatments of familiar pieces, the audience has the opportunity to enjoy both rarely performed early works and some newer pieces, not usually considered part of the traditional opera repertoire. This year that range of time and style has been represented on one end by Vivaldi’s *Cato in Utica* (1737) and on the other by Leonard Bernstein’s *Candide* (1956). Sadly Vivaldi’s music for the first act has been lost in the mists of time, but the Glimmerglass creative team made the decision to open the action with the second act, simply conveying what was missing with some brief opening, scene-setting projections. The set and costumes were sumptuous and the singing sublime, particularly from countertenor John Holiday in the role of Caesar. The acting was finely expressive, with the singers acting continuously through recitative and arias, giving the production a dramatic pace, which is often missing in this style of work.

A more complex piece than some of the works of twentieth century musical theatre that have graced Glimmerglass’s stage in recent seasons, *Candide* was a good choice for the Glimmerglass treatment. A witty satire on the competing world-views of optimism and pessimism, the piece gives centre stage to the non-singing role of Voltaire, the narrator and author of the novella on which the piece was based. This was a delightful, yet thought-provoking production.

The season was rounded out by some more standard repertoire: *The Magic Flute* (as mentioned above in a sparkling, updated English translation) and Verdi’s *Macbeth* in an interesting twentieth century setting. (The witches were oddly reminiscent of those in Roald Dahl’s children’s book.) The stand out performance for me was by bass Solomon Howard as Banquo.

This was a glimmering season which left us wanting more. Here’s to the next 40 years!

## A Strong Start for the MSO Season by Ute Davis

The evening of 8 Sep 2015 the Montreal Symphony Orchestra opened its 82nd season with a celebration of Kent Nagano's tenth season as Music Director. President of the Board Lucien Bouchard addressed the packed house, congratulating the maestro and proclaiming the orchestra's coast to coast U.S. tour in March 2016. We then settled down for the concert version of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the Claude Debussy opera based on the story of the same name by Maurice Maeterlinck.

Prince Golaud finds the mysterious Mélisande in the forest, brings her back to the castle and they are married. She is welcomed by his grandfather, King Arkel and mother Geneviève, but when she meets Golaud's half-brother Pelléas they fall in love. After she loses her wedding ring into a fountain Golaud becomes suspicious of her assignations with Pelléas, uses his reluctant son Yniold to spy on them, and finally accuses and kills Pelléas.

In this production the evocative score is delicately rendered by the MSO under the control of Maestro Nagano and the strong cast gave good performances throughout. My only criticism is of Hélène Guilmette (Mélisande) who was shrill at the beginning, and both she and Swiss tenor Bernard Richter (Pelléas) started with a tendency to press vocally to achieve volume.

Fortunately both settled down to give good, solid performances. Guilmette, once she had warmed up, again showed clean soprano technique with the strong lyricism appropriate to the mystic heroine. Richter demonstrated his warm tenor very appealingly and was well received by this audience. It took me a while before I finally realized where I had seen and very much liked Richter before. In 2012 I saw his Tamino at

the Salzburg Festival in a most amusing *Zauberflöte*, conducted by the masterful taskmaster Maestro Nikolaus Harnoncourt.

Count Nicky, as he is lovingly called by the locals (he is a true "blueblood" from Graz, Austria) conducted a huge amount of research into this production, which he did not like, and stated so in the local paper. While researching an opera Harnoncourt had probably conducted a few hundred times before, he came across the spelling of Monastatos (or was that Manostatos?) by Mozart which had never been previously noticed in the original score. Mozart apparently did not spell it Monostatos and the maestro was very happy he had added a detail which would, no doubt, have pleased his beloved Mozart! I managed to find a performance on a Sunday afternoon at the Felsenreitschule, which was populated by more young children than adults, all beautifully behaved. Hence is the future of opera in Europe and we should not snicker at the way they do opera on the other side of the pond. I immersed myself happily into the large number of sweet little children because I wanted to get into the mood for the continuation of *Zauberflöte*, called *das Labyrinth*, composed by Peter von Winter, a friend of Mozart. Philippe Sly, our 2009 Brian Law winner, sang a small part in that. Both operas are available on DVD.

But back to *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Sly (Golaud), possibly due to having the advantage of singing in the Maison Symphonique for Nagano on previous occasions, floated his voice beautifully to take full advantage of the excellent acoustics here (after all it is a Diamond-Schmidt design!) to give a truly artistic performance which was made to appear effortless. Sly is vulnerable to the criticism of being vocally and physi-



Philippe Sly and Soprano Hélène Guilmette

## A Strong Start for the MSO Season (continued)

cally very young for the role, yet he gave a superbly convincing performance as Golaud, initially confident and loving, then becoming increasingly suspicious of his wife and then insanely jealous. Following an aggressive confrontation in which he has the stance of a “High Noon” sheriff, he kills his half-brother. Subsequently succumbing to his guilt, he pleads for forgiveness from the dying Mélisande. Altogether an emotional tour de force by Sly in which he obtains that rarity, some sympathy for Golaud at the close of the opera.

Marie-Nicole Lemieux gives excellent value as the warm mother-figure of Geneviève, a small role for a singer of her superb quality. Nicolas Testé the French bass, who often appears with his wife, Diana Damrau,

was an excellent King Arkel, the dispirited figure, torn by his grandsons’ dispute and horrified at the outcome. Watch for D. Damrau and N. Testé in the upcoming Met HD *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, 16 January. Florie Valiquette made an appealing Yniold, a purely sympathetic figure and Hugo Laporte rounded off a high calibre cast, appearing briefly as doctor and shepherd.

In summary, the performance of the orchestra under the baton of Kent Nagano was exceptional and the whole vocal cast matched this standard. The production appeals to me as an exception to the general rule that concert performances are not as dramatically effective as fully staged works, this largely due to the portrayal by Philippe Sly.

## Déjà vu à Montréal

by Ute Davis

Opéra de Montréal’s Season Opening production of *Madame Butterfly* on 19 September 2015 was just another airing of the very traditional Roberto Oswald setting, staged by François Racine. Having seen the same format by this director at Opera Lyra Ottawa (OLO) in 2013, we were underwhelmed. Though I have to admit that I have always thoroughly enjoyed everything François Racine has undertaken with the OLO Young Artists Program.

Usually Puccini’s highly empathic and ingenious music will make the evening worthwhile but the Orchestre Métropolitain proved from the opening string chords of the overture that they were a couple of rehearsals short of opening night readiness under conductor James Meena. I suspect that they would have been a very different group with Yannick Nézet-Séguin in the pit. One hoped for some relief from really excellent vocal or acting interpretation by the cast and this hope was at least partly fulfilled.

Melody Moore is a big American lady with a big soprano voice. Cio-cio San she is not. Well cast as Lady Macbeth in this year’s Glimmerglass production, she did a superb job, but the role of a vulnerable Oriental girl being exploited by a coarse U.S. Naval Officer is just not in her range. This

was very poor casting and we saw people in front row who kept their heads down refusing to look at this very large Butterfly whenever she appeared on stage. I am sure her large frame will work to her advantage as Freia (*Rheingold*) and Ortlinde (*Walküre*) in the upcoming Washington D.C. Ring.

Antoine Bélanger’s singing of Pinkerton was announced from the stage, due to the indisposition of the listed Greek tenor. Antoine sang impressively with an Italianate tone nicely embellishing the Puccini Score. Indeed I thought he sounded better than when singing this role for Paterson in Ottawa in 2013. Morgan Smith made a thoroughly convincing Sharpless with both authority and delicacy of voice, a very credible portrayal of the American Consul.

Alison McHardy has progressed in the role of Suzuki since last I saw her. Her movements are now deft and much more Oriental as the loyal Japanese servant and her poses and hand actions more appropriate, especially and importantly when she is not singing. The opera played to a sold-out house on opening night but the unimaginative performance drew little more than lukewarm applause at the curtain.

Photo by Yves Renaud



A poorly cast and towering Butterfly

## Events you should enjoy

by David Williams

**Songs for Chamber Ensemble** at Southminster United Church, Saturday, January 30, 2016, 8:00 p.m. This concert highlights solo singers from the **Ottawa Bach Choir** accompanied by pianist Frederic Lacroix. Music performed will feature works from Schütz to Debussy to the choir's very own Nicholas Piper, including Brahms' *Zigeunerlieder*.

**The University of Ottawa Orchestra** with conductor David Currie and soloists Joyce El-Khoury and Jordanne Erichsen presents works by Mendelssohn, Strauss and Brahms. Friday, 5 February 2016 at 8:00 p.m. St. Joseph's Church, 174 Wilbrod Street.

The **NAC Orchestra** will perform the Brahms *Nänie*, Schumann *Piano Concerto* and Brahms *A German Requiem* on February 10 and 11, 2016. Pianist Alice Sara Ott returns for her concerto debut with the NAC Orchestra. Brahms's choral masterpieces feature soloists soprano Jessica Rivera and baritone James Westman.

**The University of Ottawa Opera Company** presents Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at Tabaret Hall. Performances: Thursday, March 3, 7:00 p.m., Friday, March 4, 7:00 p.m., Saturday, March 5, 2:00 p.m. and Sunday, March 6, 7:00 p.m. Sandra Graham is the stage director and Alain Trudel conducts a Chamber Orchestra.

**Orpheus Musical Theatre Society** will present *A Chorus Line* at Centrepointe Theatre, March 04 - 13,

2016. It will present *The Who's Tommy* at Centrepointe Theatre, June 3-12, 2016.

**Seventeen Voyces** presents *Ben-Hur*, Friday, March 4 and Saturday, March 5, 2016 at 7:30 p.m., Dominion Chalmers United Church. Directed by Kevin Reeves, Seventeen Voyces and the Ottawa Choral Society present the rarely seen 1925 silent classic film starring Ramon Novarro. Accompanied by music from Carl Orff's brilliant *Carmina Burana* with soloists Daniel Taylor, Susan Brown and Bradley Christensen. Featuring organ virtuoso Matthew Larkin and stunning percussion.

**Thirteen Strings A Baroque Easter** Friday, Mar. 25, 2016, 8:00 p.m. A Good Friday concert of sacred baroque works for Easter. Soprano Jennifer Taverner, countertenor Daniel Cabena, tenor Charles Sy and Seventeen Voyces join the orchestra for this program.

**Pellegrini Opera** will present Verdi's *Rigoletto* in a staged and costumed production with a chamber ensemble. Friday and Saturday 15th and 16th April, 2016 at 7:30 p.m., Dominion-Chalmers United Church.

The **Savoy Society of Ottawa** will perform the comic Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *Iolanthe*. The show will be stage directed by Meredith Matthews, and music directed by Gloria Jean Nagy. Performances May 13, 14 and 15, 2016 at Woodroffe United Church.

The **Ottawa Choral Society** will present Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah* on Friday, June 17, 2016 at 7:30 p.m., St. Joseph's Parish Church. Duain Wolfe, conducts the National Arts Centre Orchestra with soloists Isaiah Bell, Russell Braun, Susan Platts and Monica Whicher.

## The Opera Quiz

by Tom McCool

1. Another Tchaikovsky opera shares its name with a work by Gilbert and Sullivan. Which one?
2. What is the name of the "grand" opera composed by Sir Arthur Sullivan?
3. What were the names of Verdi's two wives? his two children?
4. Identify the cellist in the orchestra the night of *Otello's* premiere who went on to a spectacular career as a conductor.
5. Name another famous composer who wrote an opera called *Otello*?
6. Which aristocratic title did Verdi decline?
7. Which Verdi opera is set in Boston?
8. Who was the famous musician whose daughter became Wagner's second wife?
9. What was unusual about the birth of Wagner's daughter, Isolde?

## The Met Live in HD 2015 - 2016

Wagner's *Tannhäuser* October 31, 2015  
Encores: January 9, 11 & 13

Berg's *Lulu* November 21, 2015  
Encores: February 6, 8 & 10

Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* January 16,  
2016 Encores: February 20, 22 & 24

Puccini's *Turandot* January 30, 2016  
Encores: March 19, 21 & 22

Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* March 5, 2016  
Encores: April 9, 11 & 13

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* April 2, 2016  
Encores: May 14, 16 & 18

Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*, April 16,  
2016 Encores: May 28, 30 & June 1

Strauss's *Elektra* April 30, 2016  
Encores: June 11, 13 & 15

## Saturday Afternoon at the Opera, 2016

January 2	<i>Die Fledermaus</i>
January 9	<i>Anna Bolena</i>
January 16	<i>Les Pêcheurs de Perles</i>
January 23	<i>Tannhäuser</i>
January 30	<i>Turandot</i>
February 6	<i>Cav. Rusticana/ Pagliacci</i>
February 13	<i>Il trovatore</i>
February 20	<i>Maria Stuarda</i>
February 27	<i>Lulu</i>
March 5	<i>Manon Lescaut</i>
March 12	<i>Don Pasquale</i>
March 19	<i>L'Elisir d'Amore</i>
March 26	<i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i>
April 2	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
April 9	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>
April 16	<i>Roberto Devereux</i>
April 23	<i>Otello</i>
April 30	<i>Elektra</i>
May 5	<i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i>

Complete details on these broadcasts are on the Met's website: [metopera.org](http://metopera.org)

## Operas from the Royal Opera House

*Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*,  
December 12 & 14, 2015

*La Traviata*, February 6 & 8, 2016

*Boris Godunov*, March 26 & 28, 2016

*Lucia Di Lammermoor*, May 7 & 9, 2016

*Werther*, June 29, 2016

These operas will be shown at the Landmark Cinemas in Orleans. Confirm dates and times by contacting the cinema. Phone: (613) 830-4400

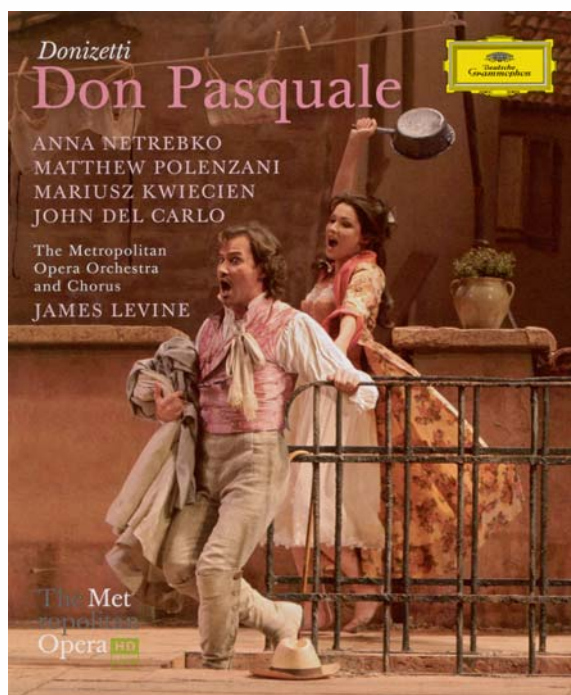
# Opera alla Pasta

## Sunday Afternoon at the Opera

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

Opera alla Pasta is held at St. Anthony's Soccer Club at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday. The cost is \$25. Call 613 721-7121 at least three days before the date of the DVD presentation in order to reserve a place.

### *Don Pasquale*



January 24, 2016

The Met's production of Donizetti's comic masterpiece is an event not to be missed. "Anna Netrebko, brazen, beautiful, and vocally indomitable, is an utterly winning Norina." The rest of the cast (Mariusz Kwiecien, Mathew Polenzani and John Del Carlo) is superb and the music is Donizetti at his best. The Met's Orchestra and Chorus is ably conducted by James Levine.

### *Simon Boccanegra*



March 13, 2016

"This stunning Royal Opera House Covent Garden production marks Plácido Domingo's triumphant return to his baritone roots. Conducted by Antonio Pappano, Domingo is joined in this performance by Mariana Polavskaya, Joseph Calleja, Ferruccio Furlanetto and Lukas Jakobski. In this production, Plácido Domingo extends his record of most roles held by any singer with this baritone debut."

The grande finale of the Opera alla Pasta season:

**May 22, 2016 *L'heure espagnole & Gianni Schicchi***