



A Tribute to Gerald Finley

Our president, Murray Kitts, having presented several excellent *High C and High Tea* opera pot-pourris for the late Opera Lyra Guild, prepared one more for the NCOS on our patron, Gerald Finley - and he excelled himself!

Murray began by mentioning Gerald's beginning in St. Matthew's Men and Boys Choir, under Brian Law, before Gerald moved to England.

As an example of Gerald's justly famous song cycles, Murray then played a lovely excerpt from Schumann's *Dichterliebe*.

Gerald's big breakthrough in opera came with Glyndebourne Opera, which opened its new house with *Marriage of Figaro*, starring him! Murray gave us his *Se vuol ballare, signor contino* from Act I of this production. Since Gerald later played the Count, we also enjoyed, in a different production, his performance of the Count's Act III rage aria.

Gerald made his MET debut in *Magic Flute*, and a bus load of NCOS enthusiasts, along with members of his family, went down for opening night! Cue a DVD of Gerald, in a concert setting, singing and playing and hamming up Papageno's comic aria, *Der Vogelfanger bin ich ja*.

Details of the NCOS's second trip down to the MET, for Gerald's *Don Giovanni* debut, were accompanied by DVDs of his rambunctious *Champagne aria* and delicate *Serenade*. Our final Mozart aria was, from *Così fan tutte*, Guglielmo's original aria with the phrase *Vienna to Canada*, which Gerald sang in a concert at the NAC sporting a Canadian flag!

Since Gerald sings other composers' operas we were treated to Hans Sachs' *Flieder* monologue from Wagner's *Meistersinger*, and, from Rossini's *William Tell*, his sombre advice to his son before shooting the apple off his head. Murray capped it all off with Gerald singing, with perfect diction, Cole Porter's hilarious *The Tale of the Oyster!* What a whirlwind of beautiful singing and acting, all carefully chosen and introduced by Murray!

As we filed out of City Hall's Colonel By Room to the High Tea in the Councillor's Lounge, who should greet us individually but the man himself, Gerald Finley!! In town quietly visiting his mother, he graciously stayed for the tea, shook our hands, and spoke to several of us, about himself and his career, and opera, of course!



Murray thanked the many people who contributed to the marvellous afternoon. These included Mark Robinson who handled all the technical aspects, and Lesley who looked after publicity and contributed to the food. Vera-Lee Nelson manned the reception desk. The High Tea was mainly the domain of Mary-Francis Taylor and the ladies from the former Opera Lyra Guild, and Carole Stelmack poured tea. But, of course, the icing on the cake was Gerald being there - what a fantastic and pleasant surprise! Finally, we have to

thank Gerald's family for sharing him with us. You should have been there!

President's Message November 2016

The Opera alla Pasta program has proven to be quite a success this season. The combination of Victor Hugo, Donizetti, René Fleming and a lavish San Francisco staging proved very popular. For the Yuletide season a magical production by Laurent Pelly brought to life the ordeals of a naughty child (Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*) and the 1981 TV version of the tale of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* was simply superb. To come, tributes to two giants of literature: in January Shakespeare, with Rossini's *Otello* featuring bel canto stars Cecilia Bartoli, John Osborn and Javier Camerena and Cervantes in February, with José van Dam giving his fairwell performance in Massenet's *Don Quichotte*. The success of *Simon Boccanegra* prompted the scheduling of a new production from Covent Garden of another Verdi masterpiece *Les vêpres siciliennes* with an all-star cast, on March 19. For our AGM on May 21, two short operas will precede our meeting. The first, *Der Zwerg (The Dwarf)* by Alexander Zemlinsky, is based on a short story by Oscar Wilde. This lavish Los Angeles production recreating the Spanish court at its height won DVD "Best of the Year" from Opera News. The second, a hilarious comedy by Rossini called *La cambiale di matrimonio (The Contract of Marriage)* concerns a London merchant who wants to get rid of some of his debts by offering his daughter in marriage. Slook, a Canadian merchant, comes to London to claim his bride. By the way, please do not hesitate to suggest operas on DVDs that we could show in the future and that you think we might enjoy.

Our "High C & High Tea" presented in conjunction with leading members of the former Opera Lyra Guild proved to be an unimaginable success. As far as the presentation was concerned all went reasonably well due to the deft handling of difficult technical problems by our treasurer. Just the right excerpts were found, even one from a final dress rehearsal of *William Tell*. Part of the presentation dealt with the two excursions by bus to New York to attend Gerald Finley's debut at the Met and later for his first performance as Don Giovanni in the same opera house. We used to have a bus going regularly to Montreal for the productions there. The trips to New York were always fully subscribed although we no longer have the fine services of the Harpers available to us. There seemed to be a certain amount of interest in reviving bus trips so this is something we might consider again. Of course the appearance of Gerald Finley himself was so unexpected and proved so delightful that it is difficult to express our gratitude to him. It was so wonderful for all those who attended to meet and greet him especially having just heard a talk about his extraordinarily successful career. What an extraordinary person is Gerald - so talented, so approachable, so generous of his time with us when he only had a short visit to Ottawa before going back to New York for the two final productions of *William Tell*.

Fortunately we have a number of great contributors who regularly share with us their impressions and experiences with opera. Enjoy their reports.

Murray Kitts

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Membership Renewal

You will find included with your newsletter a 2017 membership form.

In October 2017 the NCOS will be holding the next Brian Law Opera Competition; therefore, your support is much appreciated.

Best wishes to all of our readers and contributors for the coming year. Please continue to submit your articles, etc. to the newsletter.

David Williams

Opera Inside Out's First Production a Success!

by Shelagh Williams

Following the break up of Rapport Opera, three of the co-founders continued to produce opera in Ottawa, and have now taken the name Opera Inside Out (OIO). Their latest presentation was Bizet's early comic one-act opera *Le Docteur Miracle*, composed when he was 18. Since it won a contest sponsored by Offenbach, it was given performances at the Bouffes-Parisiens. We attended OIO's opening night at St. John's Church.

Director Cara Gilbertson and libretto adapter Hayley Swanton set the opera in OIO's favourite 1920's speakeasy, the Sanctuary (St. John's!), giving them ample opportunity for entertaining high jinks and comic action. Basically, Mario Le Podestat does not want his daughter Laurette to marry her sweetheart, army captain Sylvio Roni, although her much-married stepmother Veronique does not object to the good looking young man! Sylvio tries several ruses to gain Laurette, and finally, disguised as one-eyed Pasquale, he insinuates himself into the family establishment. In the big scene with great flair (*Voici l'omelette*) he produces an omelette which, however, after a grace and *Amen*, does not taste very good (*Mais cette omelette*)! Fearing poison, Mario calls for Le Docteur Miracle (Sylvio again!) to whom he promises, for a cure, anything he wants - which turns out to be Laurette! Cue love duet and rejoicing!

Music was under the direction of Nadia Boucher, who also played the piano, and she had a great crew to work with, half double cast, and singing in French with English dialogue. In the title role, handsome character tenor Jeffery Boyd was ideal, with great comic flair and

timing and a strong tenor voice. Baritone Alasdair Campbell combined good looks and a rich voice to please as Mario - here an Italian "Godfather". Running the emotional gamut from fun loving daughter through upset girlfriend to ecstatic fiancée, Alexandria Givens' high soprano negotiated Laurette's tricky notes with ease. Lydia Piehl, with her lovely mezzo voice, portrayed with style an hilariously funny tipsy gold digger of a trophy wife. You may remember her singing at a couple of Opera Lyra's Joy of Opera luncheons. The cast all sang well both alone and in ensemble. (In the photo, soprano Elise Haikkila is singing Laurette, and tenor Antonio DiRienzo is singing Le Docteur.)

To ensure that everyone had a good aria to sing, a couple of Bizet's hits from his later *Carmen* were added. Jeffrey Boyd, in Silvio's early female disguise as Ruby la Rouge, gave us an hilarious *Habanera*, while Lydia Piehl sang a lovely *Seguidilla*. A small group of mobsters, party girls and servers completed the cast, and

joined joyfully in the finale: *That's amore!*

Inventive Cara Gilbertson, aided by Maria Bamford, kept her lively cast moving so that our attention did not waver. Great costumes and a small stage helped us to see and distinguish the various characters. A bar for the audience kept us mellow!

It was a most entertaining evening and we can look forward to OIO's production of Haydn's *Il Mondo della Luna*, on a Star Trek theme, in Spring 2017. With ads and information on three other Ottawa companies in the programme and an announcement made of a fourth, opera is definitely not dead in Ottawa!



photo by Amy Huang

Tosca in Paris

by Laurent Leger and Diane Deschamps

There are moments in life that occur so seldom, when everything is perfect and when nothing could possibly break the spell. For us, such a moment happened in September when we flew to Paris on a vacation and we seized the opportunity to attend the Opéra Bastille to see Puccini's *Tosca*.

Though the hallowed halls of the Opéra Garnier are steeped in history, the Opéra Bastille is a marvelous venue that offers all the modern amenities to cater to a discriminating clientele and to stage a production such as *Tosca*. Opéra Bastille is a modern facility that was built in 1989 to mark the bicentennial of the French Revolution. With the Opéra Garnier, it constitutes the backbone of the Opera national de Paris.

Puccini based *Tosca* on Victorien Sardou's play that centers on the 1800 battle of Marengo, a conflict that pitted the forces of Napoleon Bonaparte against the armies of the Holy Roman Empire. In acts one and two, there are allusions to this epic battle where Napoleon was ultimately victorious. Puccini toyed with the idea of writing *Tosca* for several years and finally brought it to fruition in 1899. To this day, the character of Tosca still embodies the impetuous and passionate diva that remained a favourite of Maria Callas and with which she chose to end her stage career.

On this occasion, *Tosca* was produced by Pierre Audi who holds an impressive curriculum vitae in terms of production in several countries. However, when it comes to *Tosca*, critics were divided as to the quality of the production and the general consensus among them is that the event was saved by the singers' performance and charisma.

In the presentation that we witnessed, the stage for *Tosca* was set from the outset and the grim grays and blacks of the sets were a foreboding of the plot that was about to unfold. The colours or lack thereof cast a pall of lugubrious atmosphere over the scene; any trace of mirth and joy would be

totally absent from this presentation. A huge crucifix, hung horizontally above the stage, cast its ominous shadow on the protagonists who paced below.

Tosca is dramatic and its cast made it even more so. The role of Tosca belonged to Anja Harteros. It was indeed a rare opportunity for the French audience to hear her, especially the fans who do not have a chance to see her in Munich, her home base. Her rendition of Tosca was mesmerizing - her voice floats effortlessly across to the audience and she proves that she is undoubtedly a great classical singer. Her acting prowess on stage is nothing short of outstanding and she creates and develops with her stage partners a synergy that binds the play together and literally carries the audience into the plot.

If Harteros displays strength and grandeur, her sworn enemy, Baron Scarpia, played by Bryn Terfel, is her perfect match. Terfel gives a bone-chilling performance as his character and Tosca share center stage. He lends Scarpia a touch of evil and cruelty and the audience knows that he deserves the most ignominious of fates. The interaction between Scarpia and Tosca concludes with the latter stabbing the baron and even at this point, the knife play is hateful and passionate and the death is dramatic and so beautifully executed.

Marcelo Alvarez camped the role of Mario Cavaradossi, a painter and Tosca's lover. In his role, Alvarez pulled out all the stops and seduced the audience with his vocal rendition and the strength with which he endowed his character. Alvarez's wide experience on the best and most famous of the world stages is evident and he is destined to rise well above his present station.

All in all, the evening was wonderful and we enjoyed ourselves tremendously. What more could be hoped for than to spend this time being regaled by world-class performers who sing a timeless masterpiece inside an architectural marvel.

A 20th century *Norma* at Covent Garden by Marian Cumming

Given that we were heading for Europe anyway, we decided to make a detour via London and take in the new production of *Norma* at Covent Garden. Admittedly the decision was made when the original cast with Anna Netrebko and Joseph Calleja was announced. The replacement of Netrebko with Bulgarian soprano Sonya Yoncheva, however, was not a deterrent.

Reviews of this new production were not entirely favourable; the Daily Telegraph reviewer went as far as likening it to "The Vicar of Dibley" and "Monty Python"! Director Alex Olle' and Associate Director Valentina Carrasco moved the action from Ancient Gaul to Franco's Spain, and replaced Druids with Roman Catholics (in spite of the fact that there are no RC priestesses!). Set designer Alfons Flores provided a spectacular opening showing hundreds of crucifixes (I counted at least a thousand), hanging at different heights and angles all around the stage with one group forming a crown of thorns suspended in the centre. The stage itself was a religious space, with chairs set in neat rows, a confessional and a priest carrying a Monstrance under a canopy.

The costumes, by Lluç Castells, were striking with chorus and extras wearing black, white and red robes, some donning conical-shaped penitent hoods, and military uniforms. This is, after all, a story of religion, love and war. *Casta Diva* was sung from a thrust pulpit whilst a giant incense burner swung back and forth across the stage.

In the second act Norma's cave is transformed into a modern apartment with her two children playing and watching "Watership Down" on a flat-screen TV. I don't think flat-screen TVs existed in Franco's era, but never mind! Having listened to many versions of *Norma* over the decades and being very familiar with the music, I had never actually seen it on

stage and, therefore, have no basis for comparison. I found this production both innovative and imaginative.

The music is quintessential Bellini bel canto and the conductor, Antonio Pappano, together with the Royal Opera House Orchestra and Chorus, was able to bring out all of its lyricism and brilliance. Sonya Yoncheva had to study the role at short notice, having been asked to take over from Netrebko only in April. She has a powerful, sensuous voice and secure technique and her acting was flawless. This was particularly evident during her conflict about whether to murder or protect her children. Joseph Calleja with his inimitable golden tone, as Pollione, was in fine vocal form and was able to elicit both contempt and empathy. His duet *In mia man alfin tu sei* with Yoncheva was particularly moving. Sonia Ganassi, as Adalgisa, possessed a less than powerful lower register and, although her voice blended well with that of Yoncheva, it did not provide the contrast of tone achieved in the classic Sutherland/Horne or Callas/Ludwig renditions of the so-familiar *Mira o Norma* duet. Brindley Sharratt, a mellow bass, portrayed a stern Oroveso. The roles of Flavio, Pollione's friend, and Clotilde, Norma's confidante, were sung by David Jung-

hooon Kim and Vlada Borovko respectively, promising members of the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme.

There was a new and unexpected twist to the ending. As crucifixes glowed and flames spewed out of a giant cross, Norma and Pollione took the slow walk to the sacrificial pyre, but were intercepted by Oroveso, Norma's

father, who stepped forward and shot her.

All in all it was a very satisfying evening - there was no booing, as reported in some first night reviews, and generally the audience, judging by the applause, was responsive and enthusiastic. Definitely non-traditional but we certainly enjoyed it!



Photo by Bill Cooper

Norma and children

Ancient and Modern

by Shelagh Williams

Our three not-to-be-missed Toronto Fall operas were all set by their composers in ancient times, but that did not necessarily translate into productions in appropriately ancient settings! Fortunately, musical values were never in doubt with the Canadian Opera Company's (COC) *Norma* and *Ariodante*, and Opera Atelier's (OAt) *Dido and Aeneas*.

It is ten years since the COC tackled Bellini's bel canto masterpiece *Norma*, and they certainly did not stint in their new production, engaging superb singers in a co-production with San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu. The title role of the Druid High Priestess requires both singing and acting ability to a supreme degree, and now-Canadian soprano Sondra Radvanovsky certainly delivered both. While her hymn to the moon, *Casta diva*, elicited a suitable ovation, I did not feel her performance (Oct. 18th) was quite up to the opening night's rave reviews. I later learned (see below) that she was singing that evening through asthma - but that did not stop her! She looked good and delivered a fine performance and brought out every emotion. In the story, maternal love for her two children by Pollione, the Roman Proconsul, changes to jealousy of her erstwhile rival, the young priestess Adalgisa, who then becomes her closest friend. Finally she demonstrates courage in her sacrificial death.

Radvanovsky was paired with the strikingly lovely American mezzo Isabel Leonard as Adalgisa, a match in voice and acting ability, and great in their duets. Then, as the villain of the piece, Pollione, with his weakness for Druid priestesses, American Russell Thomas brought a big tenor voice, which he did manage to modulate for his duets. Finally, the tall Russian bass Dimitry Ivashchenko completed the major foursome as Norma's father, High Priest Oroveso. American conductor Stephen Lord, a bel canto specialist, and the COC Orchestra supported excellently, as usual, both the cast and COC Chorus, who did an especially fierce war chorus, *Guerra, Guerra!*

Debuting director, American Kevin Newbury, writes that he and his design team, David Korins on set and Jessica Jahn on costumes, researched "Druid and Gaulish mythology", but then updated the production to a "mythic Game of Thrones-inspired milieu"! They set most acts inside a symbolically decorated wooden "temple and war factory", rather than outdoors in the sacred forest. The back wall was occasionally lifted to show some tree trunks. There was also an ungainly wooden platform which was climbed upon whenever someone had something important to sing, such as Norma's *Casta diva*. The principals' costumes differentiated them nicely, and the chorus women's costumes were attractive, if medieval, but falling snow and their bare shoulders did not mix well! However, the overall direction and concept on stage did look good and allowed the brilliant cast to deliver a great performance of an equally great opera - no wonder the evening was sold out!



photo by Michael Cooper

Handel's *Ariodante* was a COC premiere, and another co-production, this time with Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Dutch National Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Again, first rate and appropriate singers, who were also capable of great acting, were engaged to deal with the complicated plot and sustain our interest over four hours! The original story, set in 16th century Scotland, concerns Prince Ariodante, who is to marry the King of Scotland's daughter Ginevra and become heir to the throne. However, his rival Polinesso, Duke of Albany, with the help of the lady Dalinda, who is in love with him, stages a scene to trick Ariodante into thinking Ginevra is unfaithful to him. The King disowns Ginevra; Ariodante becomes distraught and suicidal, and leaves. His brother Lurcanio seeks revenge, putting Ginevra in mortal danger. However, at the end, Dalinda confesses her part in the deception to Ariodante and Polinesso is mortally wounded by Lurcanio in a duel and also confesses. Dalinda is forgiven, and Ginevra is acquitted so that she and the returned Ariodante might be reunited - a truly Baroque plot!

Ancient and Modern (continued)

Among the excellent cast two stood out, singly and in their duets. Imported Brit mezzo Alice Coote, as Ariodante, was indefatigable in her/his many arias, and expert in the male role. Canadian coloratura soprano Jane Archibald, as Ginevra, sang her music beautifully despite her heart-wrenching situation. Also not to be missed was Ambur Braid, on stage almost the complete four hours. She was acting against type as the shabby and put-upon Dalinda, until her fine Act III revenge aria! Debuting Armenian mezzo Varduhi Abrahamyan will be remembered not for her singing, good as it was, but for her standout and believable male performance as the villainous Polinesso. He/she lied, cheated, accosted Ginevra whom he professed to love, and actually beat up Dalinda - altogether a nasty piece of goods, the sort you love to hate! Debuting Norwegian baritone Johannes Weisser had a suitably authoritative voice and presence for the King, and it was great to have COC Ensemble Studio grad tenor Owen McCausland on stage as Lurcanio. As expected, COC Music Director Johannes Debus led the COC Orchestra and the cast admirably, and the COC Chorus excelled itself, not only singing, but also dancing and manipulating puppets!

Presumably to keep the audience alert over four hours, U.K. director Richard Jones, with associate director Benjamin Davis (here quoted from the programme), set the production "on a remote Scottish island" in the 1960s, with lots of slacks and "Aran-style jumpers". Having travelled in 1967 in Scotland from the borders to John O'Groats, I can say that this was reminiscent of '60s Scotland, although ladies' trews were certainly not so prevalent as in this production, as I found out when I tried to purchase them!

The change in venue came with character changes, not always corrected in the surtitles! The King became the Clan leader, in a kilt, and Duke Polinesso became a preacher from the mainland. Ginevra is the central character in this production, not Ariodante, and was dressed in lovely feminine clothes. Ariodante, despite his status, was the worst dressed male on stage, with messy hair, and was played as ungainly and a bit of a dimwit.

Polinesso, as a Calvinist preacher, wore a long clerical robe which looked Roman, to me, not Presbyterian, and underneath a surprising jean jacket and pants, with tattoos! - quite rough! Beautiful and vivacious Ambur Braid amazingly looked downtrodden and plain as the drudge Dalinda!

Debuting British set and costume designer ULTZ went out of his way to make pretty well everyone's clothing plain and ugly! However, his set was brilliant: three rooms of a house - kitchen cum hall, main reception room, and Ginevra's bedroom - with between them two weird handles which were obviously opened and shut and which I finally figured out were on two invisible doors and walls! Unfortunately, this also meant that there was a lot of upstaging of lovely da capo arias by events going on in other rooms! (See page 14)

Baroque operas contain a lot of dance music, and director

Richard Jones was quite innovative in his use of it. To celebrate the expected wedding (twice!) he had the chorus execute some country dances, although they were certainly more Irish than Scottish in style! In his 2002 debut with *Queen of Spades* he used some memorable puppetry, and in this production he also used puppets during the music at the end of each act. We had visions of a wedding (act 1), then Ginevra's bad end (act 2), and finally another wedding (act 3)! Although well done, by the end it had become tiresome and annoying!

I do not in general like such updating for opera productions, especially when certain things do not make sense or add up. In this case, 1960s Scotland was certainly not so benighted as to condemn someone to death for supposed infidelity, on no concrete evidence, or even the name of the man supposedly involved! Nor did they fight many duels! However, some of the changes did work with the libretto, especially those of the King's, Polinesso's, and Dalinda's positions, and the use of a tight knit rural community. I especially liked this ending, where Ginevra quietly packed up and left, while everyone else was dancing and rejoicing at Ariodante's return, Ginevra's exoneration and the prospect of their marriage, as shown by the puppets! She was



Ancient and Modern (continued)

rejecting the prying community, its double standards, its trust in the scoundrel outsider Polinesso rather than in her, and the rejection and shaming by her father and betrothed. What was there to make her stay? This was certainly in keeping with 20th century mores! I heard a lot of grumbling during intermissions, and afterwards, about the production, but it must be admitted that it was interesting, and certainly incorporated great music and acting for a memorable evening!

When you attend an OAt production, you know you are going to experience a beautifully sung, played, danced and costumed presentation, with no aberrant director's conceits to distract one! Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, as director and choreographer respectively, are acknowledged experts on early opera style, and present a complete, integrated and satisfying whole. This year they restaged Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, which was their first fully mounted production, at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1986. This is one of the, if not the, greatest operas written by an English composer in English!

We were fortunate to attend opening night, with everything in the new production fresh and exciting. It was first performed at "Mr. Josias Priest's Boarding School at Chelsea, by young gentlewomen", and Pynkoski decided to stage it based on what would have been possible at its debut. It was still a very beautiful production, but not overdone in a Baroque way. The music of the prologue, having been lost, was reconstructed from other Purcell theatre music, and using words from Virgil's *Aeneid* the background story was related by Stratford actress Irene Poole and illustrated by dancers.

In the opera, Queen Dido of Carthage is a widowed refugee from the area of Syria/Lebanon and Trojan Prince Aeneas is shipwrecked by Juno in Carthage. They of course fall in love, but Aeneas is reminded by an evil sorceress and her witches that he must leave, destined to found Rome. This precipitates Dido's suicide. All of this was enacted, of course, to gorgeous music, and in English! (plus surtitles)

It was also marvellous to watch. Gerard Gauci's

gorgeous painted backdrops vied with Michael Le-gouffe's richly coloured women's gowns in their loveliness. The Trojans wore attractive long boots and tights, with boleros over full shirts, with little touches such as the Sailor, tenor Cory Knight, wearing a sailing ship as a hat to both sing and dance in! The witches' costumes had streamers attached, as flames, and the devilish sorceress had a headpiece that looked like tongues of fire!

Thankfully this was matched by the singing and acting. Mezzo Wallis Giunta shone as Dido, looking the part and matching a great voice with stately movement and remarkable dancing to portray her emotions. Her lament *When I am laid in earth* was truly heartbreaking. Good looking tenor Christopher Enns's role as Aeneas was much shorter, but the couple had a believable rapport on stage. As Dido's sister Belinda, Meghan Lindsay's soprano contrasted well with Wallis. Comic relief was provided by mezzo Laura Pudwell as the Sorceress, with a wicked laugh, and Ellen McAteer and Karine White as First and Second Witch, respectively - perhaps a little broad, but great fun!

Dancing is always important in OAt productions, and in this case it was beautifully integrated into the opera, because the singers portraying Dido, Aeneas and the Sailor were so slim and fit and nimble that they could blend in with the OAt Ballet when necessary! To add to the enjoyment, one of the many well choreographed and executed dances included castanets and finger zills!

Conductor David Fallis and the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, with a really good percussionist, Ed Reifel, provided lively music making and sound effects. As part of the production's paring down and simplicity, a tiny OAt Chorus of 8 males, including Joel Allison, combined effectively with the young voices of the Toronto Children's Chorus Choral Scholars, since this was written for young singers.

It was a great treat to enjoy three such well sung and produced operas in as many days in Toronto, especially as two of them were Baroque!



Dido Aeneas

photo by Bruce Zinger

Rising to the Challenge: Staging *Aida* at the Opéra de Montréal

by Lesley Robinson

Aida is undoubtedly the grandest opera in today's commonly performed Grand Opera repertoire. It is an epic piece in every way. Its subject matter deals with the heroic, the political and the majestic. Opéra de Montréal's website describes the production as a large-scale drama. Yet the vastness of the scale is merely a backdrop to the intensely personal drama that unfolds. The microcosm of the proverbial love triangle is set against the macrocosm of ancient Egypt with all the splendour that entails. It is this contrast that encapsulates the ubiquitous conflict of classical drama, that of love and duty, and the triumphal grandeur of the setting highlights the smallness of the personal drama. I am reminded of a quote from the final scene of the film *Casablanca*: "It doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world." Yet *Aida*, Radames and Amneris are not simply "little people" - they have a political as well as a personal role in the drama.

Herein lies the challenge of staging *Aida*. We need to be aware of both the microcosm and the macrocosm and this is no mean feat within the constraints of the size of the space available. Vast open-air spaces, such as Sydney Harbour, the Arena di Verona or Masada can meet the challenge, accommodating large numbers of supernumeraries and livestock including camels and horses for the Triumphal March. Even elephants have featured in grand scale productions. Twelve elephants appeared in the 1871 world premiere of the opera in Cairo and the Met routinely included elephants on stage in days gone by. As recently as 2008, animal rights groups expressed outrage at the appearance of two live lions and a cheetah in an Opera Africa production of *Aida* in Johannesburg! Despite the fact that the Wilfrid-Pelletier Hall is the largest opera venue in Canada, none of the above grandiosity would be remotely realistic for Opéra de Montréal.

Another way that productions have dealt with this challenge is to reset the action in a different period or a different location to highlight the universal aspect of the personal drama without the distractions of potentially over-the-top, yet inadequate (and possibly even laughable) representations of Ancient Egypt.

This can be a risky approach and may yield varying levels of effectiveness. Contemporary settings tend to elicit wary and circumspect reviews and many productions aim to steer well clear of this trap. A minimalist set can certainly focus attention on the protagonists, but opera audiences tend to expect what they know. Even the premiere production of *Elton John and Tim Rice's Aida*, a Broadway musical version, originally conceived as a possible Disney animated movie (following the success of *The Lion King*), made an attempt to root what is billed as "a timeless love story" firmly in a representation of Ancient Egypt, albeit a glitzy Broadway portrayal thereof!

Opéra de Montréal's response to these challenges was to play with scale within the framework of a traditional production. Set and costume designer, Claude Girard suggests the vastness of palaces and temples by showing us just a small section of something which we realize is a whole lot larger. Colossal statues and large-scale sculpted hieroglyphics suggest a massiveness beyond what we actually see. In another technique, Girard takes small details and magnifies them, for example Amneris's boudoir is decorated with a huge sculpted piece of jewellery.

The costumes also help to give the impression of large numbers of people. Small groups of soldiers, slaves, handmaidens, prisoners, dancers, all dressed for their roles, suggest that there are vast hordes of others out of our field of view. The stage was indeed crowded at some points, with the involvement of a total of 250 people (including the 70 musicians in the pit.)

Whatever the challenges of the backdrop, the drama revolves around the main protagonists and Opéra de Montréal's fine cast did justice to the endeavour. Russian soprano Anna Markarova as *Aida* and Bulgarian tenor Kamen Chaney as *Radames* were in fine voice, but for me it was Russian mezzo Olesya Petrova's portrayal of *Amneris* that stole the show. *Amneris*, as the third point in the love triangle, is left alone, like Rick in *Casablanca* and like Rick, she was the one whose actions have steered the drama. Bravo Opéra de Montréal!

Love, Death and Addiction - Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the Met

by Lesley Robinson

Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is a love story like no other. It is not merely a tragic love story in the same vein as *Romeo and Juliet* - it has an eerie, troubling darkness about it which leaves the audience shocked and numbed. Although love and death are a standard part of the operatic repertoire, Wagner's treatment of these themes is especially dark.

It is not that the lovers cannot live without each other, but that they choose death as the ultimate expression of the ecstasy of their love. Isolde talks of taking Tristan with her into the night, "There to pledge to you eternal love, to consecrate you to Death in company with myself." Suicide is not merely seen as painless, it is presented as a euphoric realization of their rapturous love. This is unsettling in the extreme. Isolde's final "Liebestod" evokes the theme of erotic death or "love death". Their love is consummated in death. Isolde's final words speak of drowning, of sinking into oblivion that is the "utmost rapture!" This destructive obsession is hauntingly disconsolate and downright creepy.

T & I is full of the imagery of light and darkness and of day and night, symbolizing life and death. Darkness is the Signal to Tristan to approach in act two and in the love scene that follows, the pair speak to each other of their love in terms of day and night. When Isolde talks of taking Tristan with her into the night, Tristan responds, "When I recognised sweet death offered to me at your hand.... there dawned gently in my heart the lofty power of Night; my Day was then accomplished."

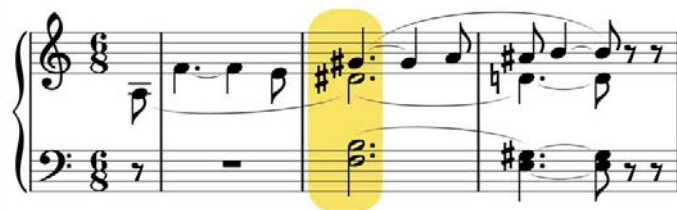
It is the effect of the love potion that turns what is already an inconvenient and inappropriate attraction into a dangerous obsession. They become totally ensnared by their passion - addicted to their love in a way that, just like any addiction, spiralling out of control, leads inexorably and inevitably to their own doom. Tristan hails the power of the potion: "Hail to its magic's sublime power! Through Death's portals wide and open it flowed towards me opening up the wondrous realm of Night." In his addiction, Tristan fails to see the macabre reality of this power.

The ancient tale of Tristan and Isolde passed into Arthurian legend and there are parallels between the love triangle in this story and that of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot. This is a more complex love triangle than many, in that there are three relationships involved. As

well as loving his wife, King Marke also loves his nephew, so that for him the betrayal is doubly poignant and his heartrending magnanimity in the final act adds to the ironic pathos of his loss. He feels the loss of Tristan as deeply as his loss of Isolde: "My hero, my Tristan! Most faithful of friends, must you even today betray your friend? Today, when he comes to avow to you his deepest faith?" The theme of this love triangle is evoked over and over. The setting is the triangle of Celtic lands - Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany. The opera is in three acts and the number three is significant in Celtic mythology and folklore. The ancient Celtic triskel, which is a figure composed of three spirals, signifies the three layers of the human soul and the sacred elements of earth, sea and sky. All three are significant in the setting of *Tristan und Isolde*.

The Met's new production hauntingly accentuates the above imagery. The set and costumes are monochromatic, evoking light and darkness, day and night, in black, white and at least 50 shades of grey. The only splash of colour is Isolde's red dress in the second and third acts. Whilst red is the colour of visceral lifeblood, it also evokes carnage. With much of the first act dominated by narration, the staging can be challenging. In this production, the set of the first act's ship is a masterful use of space. With its staircases and multi-levelled zones of activity, our eyes dart all over the ship as the action moves from deck to deck. We are aware of a multitude of intimate spaces. The set of the second act evokes a sort of darkened love-traffic-control tower, facing out into obscurity.

Above all it is the music that carries the dark themes of *Tristan und Isolde*. Right from the opening of the initial prelude, we hear what is known as the Tristan chord which forms part of Tristan's leitmotif. The chord is characterized by its unusual relationship to the implied key of its surroundings.



It holds an eerie tension which returns hauntingly right

Love, Death and Addiction - Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the Met (continued)

to the end of the piece. Wagner's music is complex, evocative and challenging. If Wagner ever had anything to say musically, he would never leave it unsaid. Such is the genius of his composition. The Met orchestra under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle acquitted itself magnificently. Never have I witnessed quite such an enthusiastic standing ovation at the Met. Nina Stemme and Stuart Skelton were magnificent in the title roles, full of passion and yearning and René Pape's King Marke was a fine portrayal of majestic magnanimity, evoking steadfastness and control. This production was an excellent initiation to an opera of notorious complexity, demanding copious exactitude from the performers and abundant stamina from the audience.



photo by Mark Robinson

A Showcase of Emerging Canadian Talent - *Don Giovanni* at the Opéra de Montréal by Lesley Robinson

The stellar all-Canadian cast of the Opéra de Montréal's recent production of *Don Giovanni* was as follows:

Don Giovanni	Gordon Bintner
Leporello	Daniel Okulitch
Donna Anna	Emily Dorn
Don Ottavio	Jean-Michel Richer
Donna Elvira	Layla Claire
Zerlina	Hélène Guilmette
Masetto	Stephen Hegedus
Commendatore	Alain Coulombe



This illustrious group includes award winners and graduates of some fine training programmes. Gordon Bintner was Grand Prize Winner at the OSM Standard Life Competition in 2011 and won First Prize and the People's Choice Award at the COC Ensemble Studio Competition in 2012. He is a graduate of the COC Ensemble Studio, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals and participated in San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program. Daniel Okulitch won the Ovation Award for Best Ensemble Performance from the Los Angeles Stage Alliance. Emily Dorn has won awards and grants, notably winning first place in the New England Region Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Layla Claire studied at the Curtis

Institute of Music in Philadelphia and is a graduate Lindemann Young Artist of the Metropolitan Opera.

Hélène Guilmette was a prize winner at the prestigious Queen Elisabeth Competition of Belgium in 2004 and was awarded grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Conseil des Arts et des lettres du Québec and the Jacqueline Desmarais Foundation. Stephen Hegedus was a prize winner at the Lyndon Woodside Oratorio Solo Competition, hosted by the Oratorio Society of New York and was a finalist at Plácido Domingo's Operalia.

This group has a vast collection of Canadian and international credits and upcoming engagements including performances at the COC, the Salzburg Festival, Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, the Paris Opera and Il Teatro alla Scala, Milan. We can expect great things from all of them in the future.

This terrific ensemble performed *Don Giovanni* with tremendous zest and the overall impression was that they were all having a marvellous time. The set was mainly static, with the occasional lowering of a chandelier or the setting up of tables and chairs. The costumes had a charming mid-twentieth century swagger about them and the ball gowns and masks were perfect.

A Mezzo Melange by Shelagh Williams

In October Third Wall Theatre presented an outstanding concert entitled *Gents, Gypsies, and Queens! A Saturday Afternoon At The Opera For Everyone!*, starring Canadian mezzo Catharin Carew, accompanied by pianist Dan Trumpler. We had heard her in Toronto this summer in the title role in SOLT's production of *Julius Caesar* (reviewed in Fall NCOS Newsletter), and were impressed, and so jumped at the chance to hear her again in Ottawa.

She did not disappoint. The programme was intended as opera for playgoers, not opera goers, and so Carew presented excellent ad libbed intros and translations for each aria, for example explaining that *Ombra ma fu* from *Xerxes*, also known as Handel's *Largo*, was really a love song to a tree! Additional necessary info on mezzo trouser roles and castrati was amusingly conveyed.

She managed, with ingenious costume changes, to alternate between male and female roles for almost every number, each costume complete and appropriate for the

photo from Third Wall Theatre programme



role and/or period. She even included a hat for *La favorita* and a moustache consisting of a strand of hair pulled across under her nose for Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus!* Three piano interludes from *La Bohème* (no mezzo role) let the pianist shine, and gave Carew a break and chance for a major costume change! It was all adroitly programmed.

Carew used her wide ranging voice to good advantage in mezzo roles from Handel, Purcell and Gluck, through Mozart, Meyerbeer and Donizetti. Of course, *Carmen* (two arias), *Delilah* from *Samson et Delilah* and, for a budding Verdi mezzo, his *O don fatal* from *Don Carlo* and *Stride la vampa* from *Il Trovatore* could not be left out. She finished, in a lovely suitable gown, together with the vocal fireworks, with *La Cenerentola*'s generous final *Non piu mesta*. Catharin Carew's voice comes with personality to spare, making her a great entertainer and this a great concert!

A Master Class With Stephen Lord by Shelagh Williams

Between the two Fall COC operas in Toronto, we attended a Niki Turofsky-sponsored master class at UofT, gaining three rewards! Firstly, the class was conducted by *Norma*'s conductor, Stephen Lord, who was exacting, but also encouraging, and a fount of knowledge, such as the tidbit about Sondra Radvanovsky coming to him the evening before to report that she had asthma, but would sing through it! He also distinguished between technical accomplishment, which can be taught, and innate talent, which is unique to each singer, and should be demonstrated. Lord emphasized the detailed study of both score and libretto, since note length and small pauses could be clues to interpretation. Also a repeated phrase should never be sung the same way twice!

Then, when we were queuing for the *Ariodante* pre-show chat, who should join us but Riki Turofsky herself! David congratulated her on her master class which we had just attended, and as we chatted she attested to the fact that on opening night Radvanovsky's *Norma* had indeed been stupendous, everything the re-

views said - and this from a supremely knowledgeable former opera star herself!

In attending the class, we had hoped that triple 2015 BLOC winner baritone Joel Allison (third, top male, audience favourite), now a Master's student, would be among the singers, and he was - our main reward! He sang the shortish aria *Vecchia zamarra* from *La Bohème* and received a detailed lesson and a final compliment: "You're very good!"

There was a reception afterwards, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Riki Turofsky classes, and we were able to chat with Joel. He is on full scholarship, and busy, and would be singing in the OAt chorus of *Dido and Aeneas!* He also explained that Ottawa would be well represented in *Dido and Aeneas*, since besides himself, the cast included Wallis Giunta as Dido, Meghan Lindsay as her sister Belinda, and Ellen McAteer as First Witch! Joel will be back in Ottawa in May to sing in *Venus and Adonis* with Seventeen Voyces and the Ottawa Baroque Consort - so you should be there!

Hooray for Co-productions *Norma* and *Ariodante* at the COC

by Lesley Robinson

This season began at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts with some spectacular co-productions, created in cooperation with a number of renowned international companies. *Norma* was a co-production with the San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. The partners in the production of *Ariodante* were the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Dutch National Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

The co-production of operas is a growing phenomenon and with the burgeoning cost of mounting productions of this consummate art form, it makes more and more sense for companies to join forces to spread the cost. Working in conjunction with other bodies allows each to give their audiences more, whilst holding costs to a minimum. This also gives a production a life longer than its brief run in a single opera house. Productions such as the Met's famous *La Bohème*, designed by Franco Zeffirelli, are rare indeed. This phenomenal production debuted in 1981 and there have since been over 400 performances in the house, as well as telecasts, videos and DVDs. The modern phenomenon of the co-production has allowed creative endeavours to last beyond an initial run in a single opera house, so that they too can enter our consciousness in the way that such gems as Laurent Pelly's *La Fille du régiment* has done as a co-production of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, the Vienna State Opera and the Metropolitan Opera, New York. Even such renowned and successful houses can benefit from pooling their resources.

So what do the companies share and what is individual to the house? The overall creative concept is a shared venture. Sets and costumes, as well as choreography and perhaps lighting design, come as a package. Each company does its own casting and selects the stage director and the conductor to work with its own soloists, orchestra and chorus. This allows each company to put its local stamp on the production and, despite the international cast, allows the COC to give opportunities to some local talent.

The creative team for *Norma* is largely American. Credits of the award-winning set designer, David Korins of New York City include the phenomenally successful Broadway production *Hamilton*. Costume designer, Jessica Jahn, also of New York City, is more

strictly involved in opera, with multiple credits throughout North America. The set had a certain unwieldiness to it, with a platformed cart serving as a ceremonial altar being wheeled around the stage. Imagery of the natural world is significant in Druid ritual and a tree literally takes centre stage in the set of the first act. Bullheads adorn the walls and the final pyre features a giant bull.



photo by Michael Cooper

Use is also made of the "Awen", the druid symbol representing three bars of light, which features in the make up. (It was also noted that cast members repeatedly made a gesture, supposedly a Druid greeting, which might be described as a slightly distracting two-fingered salute.)

Sondra Radvanovsky, COC's *Norma*, also played the role in Barcelona and San Francisco and is scheduled to play it in the same production in Chicago in early 2017 along with Russell Thomas who sang the role of Pollione in Toronto. There were two *Normas* in the Toronto production. We saw South African soprano Elza van den Heever whose performance, and notably her *Casta diva* in the first act, was vulnerable and gentle. The gentleman seated next to me was seeing the production for the third time, twice before with Sondra Radvanovsky, and he told me that the two portrayals were very different. Ms Radvanovsky gave a steadfast strength and passion to *Norma*, whereas Ms van den Heever was softer and more tender, giving the character a poignant fragility. It would certainly have been interesting to have seen both.

The innovative production of *Ariodante* is a good example of how updating a setting can be enlightening.

Hooray for Co-productions *Norma* and *Ariodante* at the COC (continued)

The creative team is largely from the British isles and the island setting works well in Canada with its maritime feel. Set and costume designs are by the award-winning British theatre director and set designer, Ultz. His ingenious set represents the rooms of the interior of a house, so that different scenes can take place within one set and action can flow from one room to another. There are no actual walls within the set, but the rooms are clearly designated and door handles swing open and shut in invisible doors within the invisible walls. Viewing the whole gives the impression of looking into a dolls' house. Whilst Handel's arias are a series of inner monologues, this set allows the action to continue alongside and helps to give an impression of the truth being hidden in plain sight.

hundred years. A new edition of the score was published in the 1960s which led to a revival of interest in the piece and this makes the setting of the new production feel particularly fitting. The modern setting is also enlightening in that it serves to highlight themes. There are hints in the staging of sexual assault and domestic abuse. This, along with a modern-feeling sort of slut-shaming of Ginevra, enhances our appreciation of the experience of the protagonists, by appealing to our modern sensibilities. The ballet sequences of Handel's music are performed by stunning puppetry, created by the same team that brought us the fabulous puppets seen in the Met's recent production of *Madama Butterfly*. The sequences depict a prediction of what might be to come: a happy ending with marriage and babies, or the exile of



photo by Pascal Victor from Festival d'Aix-en-Provence 2014

The modest simplicity of the setting, along with the plain feel of the 1960s era Fair Isle sweaters and kilts of the costumes, bring the focus to the personal aspects of the drama. In the original 1735 version, set in Medieval Scotland, *Ariodante* is a prince and Ginevra is the daughter of the King of Scotland. The opera was successful when it premiered as Handel's first production in the new theatre at Covent Garden. But after an initial period of success, it was largely forgotten for nearly two

the shamed Ginevra into a life of loneliness and degradation. Despite Handel's happy ending, what we see on stage is a very different conclusion, with Ginevra heading off alone to a new independence. The ingenuity of the production served to highlight the performances of a brilliant cast, most notably of the fabulous Alice Coote, who gives a pensive yet forthright strength to her trouser roles.

Hooray indeed for co-productions!

Triumphant Final Performance: *Guillaume Tell* at the Met

by Lesley Robinson

It was a privilege to attend the final performance of Gerald Finley's run in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* at the Met and it turned out that it was a very special occasion indeed. It happened to be Fabio Luisi's last performance as the Met's Principal Conductor, which put the entire cast and orchestra in an emotional and celebratory mood. This new production of Rossini's final masterpiece was the first to hit the stage of the Met since 1931 and for the first time ever at the Met, it was sung in the original French.

The production was a little bit of a mishmash of visual ideas - the set made use of the imagery of Tell's crossbow as an architectural symbol and it was echoed in the prow of an elevated boat which stretched across the stage. Seated to one side, we were unable to get the full effect of the mirror box that surrounded the set.

There was an abundance of elevated rocks on wooden structures, perhaps evoking the blending of the man-made with the natural, or suggesting the weight of oppression. The costumes of the Swiss were light in colour, whilst those of the oppressors were simplistically dark. Mr Finley had the appearance of a heroic Jedi knight who might just as well have been telling his son to "use the force" when preparing him for the famous shot of the apple from his head! Those who attended NCOS's *High C and High Tea* event on November 6th had been treated to a YouTube video of Gerald Finley's performance of the aria "Sois immobile" and may be surprised to know that its live performance on the stage of the Met on November 12th was unimaginably more tenderly, more emotively and more beautifully sung. It was the highlight of the performance for me. The cos-

tumes for the ballet sequence in the third act were interesting. The oppressors were dressed in black leather, evoking a sort of late nineteenth century Parisian decadence. Red stockings can-can dancers forced the Swiss literally to dance to their tune.

The brilliant cast did justice to Rossini's ebullient score. Mr Finley was not the only Canadian on stage - John Relyea, Toronto's accomplished bass-baritone,

gave rein to his dark side in his portrayal of the cruel governor Gesler, relishing the boos he received in the curtain calls. Bryan Hymel's performance as the lover Arnold, torn between his love of his homeland and love of the enemy princess, was virtuosic and aching-ly poignant. The two other tenors, Michele Angelini and Sean Panikkar (both seen in recent years at Glimmerglass) were

certainly worthy of note. Jenai Brugger, soprano (a 2012 winner of the Met's National Council Auditions) portrayed Tell's son Jemmy with a beautiful guilelessness and enduring optimism. Latvian soprano Marina Rebeka sang the role of Mathilde with a cautious grace and competent steadfastness. Of course it was our very own Gerald Finley who dominated the stage with his commanding presence, his moving performance and his beautiful singing. This was indeed bel canto.

The curtain calls were triumphant. When Mr Luisi came to the stage, he was bombarded with a shower of white roses, thrown from the pit by the enthusiastically applauding members of the orchestra. This show of appreciation was indeed well deserved. Under Mr Luisi's direction the orchestra had been magnificent, from the famous overture to the final chords. What a thrill to have attended!



Grey Cup Weekend in Calgary - *Die Fledermaus* at the Calgary Opera

by Lesley Robinson

The Ottawa Redblacks may have scored a spectacular victory in the Grey Cup, but when it comes to opera, Calgary is the only one of the two cities currently able even to field a team. We were fortunate to be in Calgary to attend the final November 25th performance of *Die Fledermaus*, so we were able to get a play-by-play feel for what is going on in the opera world in Calgary.

The Calgary Opera has tremendous corporate and community support including from banks, energy companies, the Calgary Herald, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Alberta Lottery Fund, Calgary Arts Development, Canada Council for the Arts, Canadian Heritage and the Southern Alberta Opera Development Foundation. If the Canadian government can help to support the flourishing of a professional opera company in Calgary, why would it not be realistic and indeed why would it not be seen as a responsibility to do the same in our nation's capital? There is an impression that corporate and community donors in Calgary consider it a given that opera is important. The average age of the audience seemed younger than the opera audience in Ottawa – it appears that in Calgary one supports and attends the opera because it is the thing to do. There was a feature page in the back of the programme entitled “New to Opera?” It is clearly hoped that the audience does not include only an erudite elite.

Leadership is important. Calgary Opera is led by its incredibly energetic and flamboyant General Director and CEO, Bob McPhee, who even appeared onstage (dressed in a kilt) as a guest at Prince Orlofsky's ball, drawing cheers from the crowd. The Calgary Opera is a thriving company, mounting three mainstage productions over the season - this year *Die Fledermaus*, *Filumena* (a new work by John Estacio and John Murrell, co-commissioned with the Banff Centre) and *Turandot*. In addition, the Company presents what it calls “opera extras”: concerts, master classes, a “Christmas at the Opera” event and a Valentine ball. When Anna Netrebko comes to North America

in the spring she will give two concerts in Canada, one at the Four Seasons Centre in Toronto and the other in Calgary. Once again, Ottawa's opera supporters are missing out. Calgary Opera is proud of its Emerging Artist Development Program (supported by corporate donations). As well as taking small roles and covering in the mainstage productions, the young artists will feature in the Christmas at the Opera production, *Le Docteur Miracle*, by an eighteen-year-old Georges Bizet.

Back to Friday's big game: Anticipation was high during the warm up. The Head Coach (conductor, Gordon Gerrard) received a warm reception on his arrival in the dugout. Incidentally, the orchestra was curiously boxed in, so that they were totally hidden from view in the pit. The strings players could only wave their bows on high to acknowledge the applause they received. Other than that, all we could see were the conductor's head and shoulders. I would have to say that the evening's MVP award would definitely go to the orchestra. The Calgary Philharmonic kept their eyes on the ball right from the snap. There was also a strong offensive (chorus) line, which included singers from the Emerging Artists programme and the plays were well choreographed, particularly in the ballroom scene. The starting

line up included some experienced players, for example Tracy Dahl in the role of Adele. I would have preferred to see the rookie players getting more playing time. With victory assured, the crowd showed their appreciation during the post-game analysis.

Despite being the underdogs, the Ottawa Redblacks were able to

bring football back to the city, delivering the Grey Cup championship in just three seasons. Why could the same not happen for opera? With such well-supported opera teams playing in cities like Calgary, Ottawa fans are going to have to make some noise if we want to get our franchise back in the nation's capital.



Events you should enjoy

by David Williams

Doors Open for Music at Southminster presents *Noël Nouvelet*, a Christmas program for harp and choir including Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*, **Caroline Léonardelli**, harp, and the De La Salle Secondary School Choir under the direction of Robert Filion. December 14, 12:00 p.m. Southminster United Church, Aylmer Avenue, Ottawa.

Ottawa Chamberfest and the Ottawa Choral Society present *Happy Holidays with Heppner*, December 15 & 16, 7:30 p.m. Dominion-Chalmers United Church, Ottawa. Ben Heppner hosts an evening of favourite carols and stories with conductor Jean Sébastien Vallée in his debut with the Ottawa Choral Society, soprano Mireille Asselin, and an ensemble of Ottawa's finest brass and percussion players.

University of Ottawa presents Bizet's *Carmen*. January 26, 27 and 28 at 7:30 p.m. and January 29, 2:00 p.m., Tabaret Hall. Doreen Taylor-Claxton, music & stage director; Alain Trudel, conductor.

St. Luke's Church Recital Series presents tenor **Jean-Sebastien Kennedy** and pianist **Nadia Boucher** in a performance of Schubert's *Die Winterreise*. January 29, 7:30 p.m. St. Luke's Church, Ottawa.

Music for a Sunday Afternoon features soprano **Measha Brueggergosman** and pianist **John Greer**. February 5, 2:00 p.m., National Gallery of Canada.

South Ottawa Performing Arts Collaborative presents *Suor Angelica* and *Pagliacci*, February 2, 4 & 5, 7:30 p.m., Glebe St. James United Church, Ottawa.

University of Ottawa Master Class. **Blaine Hendsbee**, voice, Monday, February 13, 6:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m. Tabaret Hall.

Music at Tabaret presents soprano **Christiane Riel** and guitarist **Louis Trépanier** in works by Granados, Ro-

drigo, and Villa-Lobos, and the premiere of a new work by Christine Donkin. March 5, 2:00 p.m., Tabaret Hall.

Pellegrini Opera presents Puccini's *Tosca*, March 10 & 11, 7:30 p.m. Dominion-Chalmers United Church.

Orpheus Musical Theatre presents *Catch Me If You Can*. March 10 - 19, Centrepointe Theatre.

University of Ottawa Visiting Artist Series. **Michael McMahon**, voice and collaborative piano. March 11, Art Song Class: 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.; Master Class: 2:00 p.m - 5:00 p.m. Freiman Hall.

University of Ottawa's Corus Artist Mentorship Program. **Jeff Nelsen**, horn, and **Nina Yoshida Nelsen**, mezzo-soprano. Master Class: March 17, Freiman Hall. In Recital: Saturday, March 18, 2:00 p.m., Tabaret Hall.

University of Ottawa's Orchestra presents **Mahler: Symphony No. 4** in G major, with **Jordanne Erichsen**, soprano and **David Currie**, conductor. March 24, 8:00 p.m., Saint Brigid's Centre for the Arts.

University of Ottawa's ORMTA Series presents soprano **Christiane Riel**, March 26, 1:00 p.m - 4:00 p.m. Freiman Hall.

Coro Vivo with the Orchestre symphonique de Gatineau and the Orchestra of the Conservatory of Music presents Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* March 31 and April 1, 8:00 p.m., Maison de la Culture de Gatineau.

Ottawa Chamberfest. **Karina Gauvin** joins Les Boréades de Montréal in a programme of baroque beauty featuring the works of Henry Purcell. April 10, 7:30 p.m, Dominion-Chalmers United Church.

Thirteen Strings and Seventeen Voyces present Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. April 14, 7:30 p.m. Dominion-Chalmers United Church.

A Sondheim Summer

by Shelagh Williams

Everyone was doing Sondheim musicals this summer!

Thousand Islands Playhouse presented *Into the Woods*, a mash up of five fairy tales, with lots of music. Director Ashlie Corcoran presented a class production, with a cast of 14 and 5 musicians. With two less than charming princes, two ugly sisters, a wolf and a witch, things didn't end up quite "happily ever after" for everyone - but all in an adult, entertaining and musical way!

Stratford Festival produced *A Little Night Music*

which was beautifully costumed and headlined Cynthia Dale. Versatile Juan Chioran, a memorable Count Orlofsky in OLO's *Die Fledermaus*, took a major role in this and the other Stratford musical.

Shaw Festival's departing Artistic Director, Jackie Maxwell, directed *Sweeney Todd*, starring their leading actor, Benedict Campbell.

Of course, Glimmerglass Festival also produced *Sweeney Todd* this summer.

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Verdi's rarely performed first grand opera.



May 21, 2017 *Der Zwerg* - Zemlinsky & *La cambiale di matrimonio* - Rossini