

Société d' Opéra
de la Capitale Nationale



National Capital
Opera Society

Autumn 2020

NEWSLETTER : BULLETIN

Automne 2020

Wexford Festival Opera

Wexford Festival Opera has announced that it has taken the difficult decision to reschedule the original 2020 artistic programme to October 2021. However, for 2020, they have developed a reimagined program, *Waiting for Shakespeare - The Festival in the Air*. This will run for 8 days, October 11-18, and will be available on-line.

If you go to the Wexford Festival Opera web site you can view a video by Rosetta Cucchi, the newly appointed artistic director, and also download a brochure with full details. Highlights will be (i) a six-part mini-series rendition of Verdi's masterpiece *Falstaff* over six consecutive days, (ii) Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle*, (iii) a *Gala Virtual*

Concert featuring Barcellona, Calleja, Florez, Meade and some 20 other international stars, (iv) a concert by soprano Lisette Oropesa, (v) A new opera *What happened to Lucrece* composed by Andrew Synnott with Libretto by Alessandra Binucci and Rosetta Cucchi. This is written for four singers and piano and will be performed on three separate evenings. Each performance will have a different ending, (vi) interviews and lectures.

If you want to watch unusual operas by Wexford Festival Opera: *Il bravo* (The Assassin) by Saverio Mercadante, and *Dorilla in Tempe* by Antonio Vivaldi are available on Youtube.

David Williams

Joel Allison, bass-baritone

Joel was the Second Prize Winner in the 2017 Brian Law Opera Competition. He holds a master's degree in Opera Performance from the University of Toronto and a bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Ottawa. Last summer, he participated in the Young Singer's Project at the Salzburg Festival and signed with IMG Artists; in February, he sang in the semifinals of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions; in May, he completed his training at the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio; and in September he begins a one-year contract with Deutsche Oper Berlin, where he will be singing 18 roles in 14 productions. Recently he was named by CBC Music as one of the top 30 classical musicians under 30 in Canada.

COVID-19 permitting, Joel will perform with Oper Berlin as Escamillo in *Carmen*, Schaunard in *La bohème*, and the Speaker in *Die Zauberflöte*. He

would have had his debut with the Toronto Symphony as Monterone in a concert performance of *Rigoletto* but this has been postponed due to COVID-19.

In the 2019-2020 season, Mr. Allison sang the Mandarin in *Turandot* and Fiorello in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Canadian Opera Company, while covering the roles of the Father in *Hänsel und Gretel*, the Hunter in *Rusalka*, and the King of Egypt in *Aida*. In previous seasons at Canadian Opera Company, he made role debuts as Zaretsky in *Yevgeny Onegin*, Superior Senator in the world premiere of Rufus Wainwright's *Hadrian*, and Schaunard. Elsewhere, he recently portrayed Don Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Saskatoon Opera, Leporello in *Don Giovanni* at Music Niagara and the Westben Arts Festival, and Dr. Roland Angeler in Marius Felix Lange's *Der Gesang der Zauberinsel* at the Salzburg Festival.

David Williams

President's Message –September 2020

Time flies, now even faster with COVID-19! And autumn is here. The temperature is falling, the leaves are changing colour, and it is my favourite time of the year. Where did the summer go? I hope everyone has stayed connected during this time of separation. If not, now is a good day to do so.

There has been an abundance of live streaming opera. I hope you have participated. My personal favourites were the Glimmerglass "Glimpses" and the Met's "Met Live Stars in Concert". The Glimpses are still available and covered a wide range of topics from Wagner's first opera to a song cycle about Sally Hemings. Each one was about 30 mins and there was no charge. Each Met's concert costs US\$20 and lasts for 75 minutes and can be watched over 12 days. The next concert will be Anna Netrebko on Saturday, October 10 at 1 p.m. I can't wait!

During the summer, NCOS had two Zoom events in which Murray Kitts talked about "Fake News" and "Maria Callas Remembered". As always, Murray did a fine job and it is greatly

appreciated. Also it was lovely to see everyone on the Zoom and to chat before and afterwards. What I found especially nice was that our webmaster Jim Burgess also participated and he lives in Munich. This to me was an unexpected pleasure from Zoom.

For the fall, we are planning monthly Zoom events. If anyone would like to host a session, please let me know. It can be one subject or multiple subjects, preferably related to opera. The next NCOS Opera Zoom will be on Sunday 27 September at 2 p.m. Doors will open at 1 p.m. So come early and reconnect with your fellow members. The subject is "Sound and Fury... Shakespeare at the Opera" and will be presented by Lesley Robinson.

Stay safe, and I hope to see you at a Zoom event soon.

Mark Robinson

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For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition contact Lesley Robinson at 6137695957 or consult www.ncos.ca

Book Review: The Canadian Nightingale: Bertha Crawford and the Dream of the Prima Donna

This is a biography of Bertha May Crawford (1886-1937) by Jane Cooper. At the time of Crawford's death she was memorialized in numerous obituaries but then she quickly faded from memory. Fortunately Cooper searched the archives of European Opera Houses and newspapers for information on this opera singer who was far better known in Europe than in Canada.

As a young singer in Toronto, Crawford established herself as a soprano soloist in a number of churches and toured the Prairie Provinces with the Ruthven MacDonald Concert Party. With this group she sang solos and duets with baritone MacDonald. However, in 1911, she moved to London (UK) where she studied under Czech tenor Otto Morando. With his support she went on to Milan to study with Italian soprano Emilia Corsi. In 1913 Crawford made her Italian debut in *Pagliacci*, in Salò, and she also performed as Gilda in *Rigoletto* in Venice the same year, and toured provincial opera houses across Italy. Her signature roles were Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*, and Violetta in *La Traviata*.

In December 1913, Crawford debuted with the Polish National Opera. During the First World War Crawford left Warsaw for Russia where in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) she sang in *Rigoletto*, *Barber of Seville*, and in *La Traviata*, singing in both Italian and Russian. She

returned to Warsaw briefly in the summer of 1915 where she sang in *La Traviata* before escaping back to Russia where she made guest appearances with the S.I. Zimin Opera Company in Moscow. In late 1918 Crawford returned to Warsaw. During the 1920s, in addition to performing opera, she sang regularly with the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and the Warsaw Symphonic Orchestra. She also performed widely in the provinces of what was then Poland. She was also a frequent guest performer at the Poznan Opera (1921-1922), and she sang regularly with the Opera Pomorska (1926-1927).

At this point in her career, Crawford usually spent the summers in Poland and the fall and winter in Canada, where she performed in numerous concerts. In January 1923, she played Gilda in a production of *Rigoletto* at the Washington National Opera. Probably, this was her only performance in a full opera in North America.

Crawford became one of the early stars of Polska Radio, singing in concerts into the 1930s. Unfortunately, no recordings of her singing have been located.

Crawford died suddenly of pneumonia, on May 26, 1937 in Toronto, aged 50.

This book is available from the Ottawa Public Library and an extensive summary of her career can be found on Wikipedia.

David Williams

An Unexpected Bonus

Barely out of my teens, I was visiting friends in Glasgow when I decided to visit Edinburgh to attend the Edinburgh Festival. The main attraction at the time was the Tattoo of which I had heard a lot about. It didn't disappoint! I also managed to get a ticket for Moliere's *Le Malade Imaginaire* although I have to admit I do not remember much about it, other than that it was very humorous.

But what turned out to be the highlight of my trip, besides the beautiful sights of Edinburgh of course, was a production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Joan Sutherland in the title role. As I settled into my 5 shilling seat up in the rafters I was transported by the beauty of her voice, her agility and her range, particularly her upper register which she managed so effortlessly. What particularly struck me was the reaction of those present at the conclusion of the mad scene. The entire audience rose to its feet as one, me included, applauding for what seemed like an eternity. I can still see it as though it were yesterday. It was a truly memorable performance.

by Marian Cumming

That was 1961! It was the same Zeffirelli production in which Sutherland had made her Royal Opera House debut two years earlier, a performance which propelled her to international stardom and earning her the nickname of La Stupenda. Later that year she went on to make her debuts singing Lucia at the Metropolitan Opera and La Scala. Full disclosure! I admit I had to look up the rest of the cast. I had fully expected to find Richard Bonyngé as the conductor, it was, however, John Pritchard (later Sir John Pritchard). In addition to his work at Covent Garden, he was music director of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and later the BBC Symphony Orchestra, as well as being associated with Glyndebourne for most of his career. The rest of the cast included two French-Canadians, tenor André Turp and bass Joseph Rouleau, Australian baritone John Shaw and Welsh tenor Edgar Evans.

What can one get for 5 shillings nowadays, even if shillings were still legal tender!

An Interview with Composer/Arranger Andrew Ager

by Lesley Robinson

At a recent NCOS Zoom event, our President referred to one of our members, Andrew Ager, as our “Composer in Residence”.



Andrew Ager

We are indeed honoured to have him among us. Andrew has had five operas produced and recently adapted *Madama Butterfly* and *Romeo and Juliet* for production by Ottawa's Pellegrini Opera. He is currently writing an arrangement of Verdi's *Macbeth* for PO's fall 2021 performance. He has a number of other projects underway including: *The Waves*, a chamber opera commissioned by the Centre for Opera Appreciation in Toronto, Darryl Edwards, Artistic Director, and *Angel*, a chamber opera set in the underworld of 1970s New York City. Benjamin Spierman, General Director of the Bronx Opera, is set to direct the Ottawa premiere in due course. We are also grateful to Andrew for serving as a preliminary judge for the 2019 Brian Law Opera Competition.

Waves, a chamber opera commissioned by the Centre for Opera Appreciation in Toronto, Darryl Edwards, Artistic Director, and *Angel*, a chamber opera set in the underworld of 1970s New York City. Benjamin Spierman, General Director of the Bronx Opera, is set to direct the Ottawa premiere in due course. We are also grateful to Andrew for serving as a preliminary judge for the 2019 Brian Law Opera Competition.

NCOS: We've seen the recent announcement about "New Opera Lyra". Can you tell us about that?

AA: Everybody remembers the wonderful productions put on by Opera Lyra Ottawa, from 1984 to 2015. Things have changed on the opera scene overall in those last five years - much less general funding, escalating costs, decline in audiences. New Opera Lyra is a non-profit association which will build on the great artistic heritage of OLO. We are putting together a number of events for this very strange season of Covid shutdowns, including video and virtual attractions. We will be putting out an e-brochure in the early fall with details. When we get back on stage, our plans include *Gianni Schicchi*, *Dracula*, and an Opera Gala of wonderful Ottawa/Gatineau talent.

NCOS: When and how did you first decide that you wanted to be a composer?

AA: As early as I can remember. I started piano at four but never learned my pieces - I would just make up things. I'm sure the teacher was frustrated. She was nice about it anyway, and I did manage to play in the festivals after a while.

NCOS: A quick review of university music programs reveals that it is possible to study composition. How much of composition needs to be learnt? What is the inspiration/perspiration ratio?

AA: I can only speak for myself - school and me were a bad match. I didn't like public school music class and got in trouble for singing bad words in "choir time". Since I didn't play a band instrument, I didn't do any music for the two years I was in high school and I dropped out at 16 anyway. During all that time though, I was studying scores and theory on my own. I got into undergrad because the Dean of Music "liked" me and I wrote a good cover letter.

However, by November of that year (long ago) I had stopped attending classes and spent my time smoking in the student lounge and being delinquent. In spite of that, I got an "A" in piano and an "A" in composition because those were the only things I worked at. My later university history only gets worse, until I decided to get out and go on my own.

It's so hard to say how much is learnt, how much is just there for the stealing, how much is inspiration. I guess it's a mushy mix of all that. It is hard work though. Every time you think you're getting really good, you find out it never ends.

NCOS: Tell us a little about a day in the life of a composer. How do you go about your work?

AA: I tend to work afternoon/nights. Lots of memories of working 2-6 a.m. when I was living in Toronto. How to go about it. Well, I often just start something, writing with no scheme, and it usually leads into a plan or a scheme. You can't overthink.

NCOS: What about working with a librettist? Are the words written to fit the music, the music to fit the words or a combination of both?

AA: Historically, composer/librettist relations make for gruesome reading. I can explain a bit why with a modern example. Not too many years ago, the Canadian Opera Company premiered an opera with a libretto by Canadian author Robertson Davies, who I think was a good story-teller but a mediocre writer.

Anyway, he had just died, so this COC project was all about him. They found a composer and he wrote a beautiful, colourful score, completely clogged with a clunky, pompous, pun-laden text. The audience was verbally suffocated. I felt bad for the composer - the

An Interview with Composer/Arranger Andrew Ager

by Lesley Robinson

librettist was dead and famous, so "revisions" were impossible. He should have just chopped out nine tenths of it. No one would have known anyway.

On a positive note - I have worked closely with a number of very fine writers from Canada and England, all of whom understood that "less is more" in librettos. I'm shortly to begin work on a new opera about the life and times of the American statesman Aaron Burr—the man who shot Alexander Hamilton in a duel, of late-breaking rap-musical fame. The librettist (and originator of the project) is Benjamin Spierman, General Director of The Bronx Opera, and free-lance opera director. He and I share an enthusiasm for history and we look forward to depicting the life and times of a fascinating character. Usually it's words first and then the tinkering and music begins.

NCOS: What goes into getting a work produced on stage? What happens between the page and the stage and how much of the work do you do yourself?

AA: "Between the page and the stage" - I like that phrase. Well, first there is the crazy notion that it could actually happen. I can give an example. About three years ago I was at a concert at the wonderfully spooky Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre and all of a sudden thought "yes..*Frankenstein*..here..why not".

So that started a two-year process of fundraising, selecting a cast, and looking around for help to assist with all the other details. Once we got the ball rolling, people approached and wanted to get on board. They saw it was going to be a very exciting event. My wife Suzanne was our visionary (and very practical) Director. By chance I met Kathryn Racine, who makes beautiful costumes, and she became part of it right away (and is staying on for our future projects).

Then Mark Shulist, a total handyman, offered to build our imposing and eerie laboratory set out of scrap copper and old timber. It was perfect - Dr. Frankenstein was no interior decorator, he just needed a large electrical apparatus. And that's what we got. Music & Beyond gave us their usher list, volunteers joined up to help with publicity, and the reception help and costs were covered by generous donors.

Speaking of donors - how did the money come? We had an extremely successful "Frankenstein Night" and raised thousands from that. I upfront asked ten people I knew to bankroll one of the soloists because she's great and from Ottawa. A wine'n'cheese for that was held and it all worked out fine. We pushed pre-sales and did very

well. A lot of other people simply handed over thousands of dollars in cash because they saw it was going to be good and wanted to help. CTV and CBC did promos the day before. Production week started, and that's how it happened. I might add there were plenty of bumps along the way - that's to be expected.



Frankenstein's Lab up in smoke

NCOS: We are all looking forward to seeing *Dracula*. Can you give an update on when that will be possible?

AA: *Dracula* is the second in my "Gothic Trilogy", following *Frankenstein*. We originally planned to premiere it in November 2020. When that became impossible, we moved it to next spring. However, as there's no reason for optimism regarding Covid and large



Christensen

public events this season, now it's November 19-20, 2021 at CDCC. That date is booked—but we all know everything is a gamble right now. At any rate, the wonderful baritone Bradley Christensen, who was the Creature in *Frankenstein*, is booked to return in the title role of *Dracula*. He will be perfect for the role.

People on my List

by Vera-Lee Nelson

These folks are on my list to get to writing about someday. Each of them has hidden aspects we don't hear about and major talents to explore

Aretha Franklin: Known as the Queen of Soul, Aretha has a history right out of Detroit and its music traditions. She was an American singer, songwriter, actress, pianist and civil rights activist. Her flamboyance lasted until after her death. After she died she left instructions that her costume, hair and makeup were to be changed for each of the 3 days of her open coffin visitations.

Her voice was exceptional. She loved opera and studied with her friend opera singer Mary Callaghan Lynch for over 20 years; she was about to study with her to learn a new aria just before she died. At the 1998 Grammys, when Luciano Pavarotti was advised by his doctor not to sing because of a sore throat, he chose Aretha to sing in his place. Her rendering of *Nessun Dorma* was to great acclaim. Mary Callaghan Lynch was a great friend and colleague and together they developed and launched a program called The Motor City Lyric Opera to bring an appreciation of operatic music to the children in the Detroit area.

Dmitri Hvorostovsky: He had it all, a baritone of unparalleled beauty, dramatic ability, charm, charisma, sex appeal and at age 55 was poised to begin taking on the heavyweight roles of mature opera singers. Yet in 2015 he began to suffer the symptoms of a serious disease, which he ignored as long as he could. He died of glioblastoma (brain cancer) at age 55. He sang with beauty and joy as long as he could. At the Met, in a break from his treatment, he managed to appear in three performances of *Il Trovatore* as Count di Luna. At the last curtain call, how could we forget the shower of white roses the orchestra threw to him. Looking obviously ill, but with no diminishment of his voice, he gave a sold out recital at Carnegie Hall in February 2016. He died on November 22, 2017. Fortunately we have been left many of his vocal performances on recordings and on You Tube to enhance stories of his life and career.

Rupert Christenson: Chief Opera Critic of the London Telegraph. Probably the least known of my heroes, he is not a performer. He is educated, a writer, an author and an astute critic. Early in my career as an opera aficionado I purchased a pocketbook "A Pocket Guide

to Opera" which was an invaluable resource. Later when my husband began to share this interest, this small book became a resource to him as well. At the time I never noticed the author! After some winters spent in England, I purchased a subscription to the Telegraph, delivered to me online. And there he was/is. What a window on opera (in the day of course, and hopefully in the not too distant future): Covent Garden, ENO, Glyndebourne, smaller local companies and so on. An introduction to smaller operas, performances and singers. Rupert Christenson is a clever, perceptive and funny critic. I would love to meet him or at least correspond and potentially use some of his comments in our newsletter, attributed to him of course.

An "Opera Postcard" from the Robinsons



A local wine tasting on the roof of the Opera Hotel in Zürich, overlooking the back of the opera house. This was on the first amazing day of our 2017 anniversary/birthday opera trip. Four cities, four operas, one unforgettable week.

My Encounter With Joan Sutherland

by Tom McCool

The original heading for this report was “The Day I Met Joan Sutherland” but, because I never met Joan Sutherland, the heading was changed. No fake news here! What follows is the true story of my connection with Joan Sutherland.

Many years ago the Canadian Opera Company staged the Ambroise Thomas opera, *Hamlet*. It is a very good opera but not a blockbuster that would guarantee standing-room audiences at every performance. To that end the decision was made to attempt to engage Joan Sutherland to sing the role of Ophelia. There was one major obstacle to this endeavour. Shortly before this time, Sutherland had made it known, because she was nearing the end of her career, that she would not be taking on any more new roles AND she had never sung Ophelia before. But, as a special favour to her friend Lotfi Mansouri, the General Director of the C.O.C., she agreed to come to Toronto and sing this role which would be the last new role she would ever sing. Given the prominence of Sutherland, this was a pretty big deal in the opera world and there was a lot of buzz in the media about the upcoming performances of *Hamlet*.

The Saturday afternoon before the Sunday matinee performance I happened to be in Simpson’s department store in downtown Toronto when I looked up and saw standing directly in front of me none other than Joan Sutherland. She was so close that had I stretched a bit I could have touched her. She was dressed like a typical suburban housewife (I can still remember a large purse that

she was carrying and the sensible shoes she was wearing) on a Saturday afternoon shopping trip.

She certainly didn’t look like the opera superstar that she was. I wondered if I should approach her and tell her how much I admired her and how much I was looking forward to seeing her on the stage the next day. While contemplating my options regarding how I could initiate such a conversation she moved away and my golden opportunity had passed. I have always regretted not approaching and speaking with her. How often does anyone have the chance to speak to the greatest soprano of her generation and, perhaps, of all time.

Incidentally, I did attend the performance of *Hamlet* the next day at the O’Keefe Centre (did I mention that this was some time ago) and she was magnificent. Forget the fact that she was too old for the role, her voice was as fresh and youthful as it always had been. It was a great performance but I’ve always inexplicably felt that it would have meant more to me if I had made contact with her the day before.



Another “Opera Postcard”
from the Robinsons

Paris Opera 1930

Virtually Glimmerglass

by Lesley Robinson

Usually at this time of year I would be writing about the Glimmerglass Festival's summer season. Alas, this year it was not to be. Nevertheless, when Artistic and General Director Francesca Zambello announced back in May that the season was definitively cancelled, she pledged to focus on hope for the future and to take the opportunity to share innovative content online and she has delivered.

Throughout the summer a series of "Glimmerglass Glimpses" have been released every Thursday. These are described as a series of summer offerings celebrating song, story and community, all from the safety of home. They have featured special guests, performances and Virtual Town Hall events.

The first Town Hall focused on the role of an arts organization in the community and featured Francesca Zambello, Music Director Joseph Colaneri and Artistic Advisor Eric Owens. Questions were submitted in advance of and during the event itself. The Glimmerglass Festival is committed to working towards a more inclusive environment for Black artists, technicians and staff and in a statement on the website, Ms. Zambello acknowledges the long history of elitism and racism in the opera world and the need for Glimmerglass to take a long hard look at its work and expand its strategies for supporting communities which are not currently equally represented in opera and the arts.

The next Town Hall, entitled "Never Again", featured a discussion of how speaking of our past can influence our future, with special guests, historian Alexander Karn and documentary filmmaker and Holocaust survivor Tana Ross. This event was in the tradition of recent years when Glimmerglass has hosted Festival events covering human and civil rights issues.

The final Town Hall of the season featured Sister Helen Prejean, author of the book *Dead Man Walking*, which became the subject of the opera by Jake Heggie with a libretto by the late playwright Terrence McNally, along with criminal procedure specialist Teresa A. Miller of the State University of New York. As a Roman Catholic nun, Sister Prejean worked as a spiritual advisor for inmates on death row. It was her experience of corresponding with condemned murderer, Patrick Sonnier which inspired her to write *Dead Man Walking* and she subsequently became a fierce advocate against the death penalty. As a law professor and filmmaker Ms. Miller was a member of the American Bar Association Task Force which rewrote the Standards on the Legal

Status of Prisoners.

On the original calendar for this year's festival were the four main stage productions, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Wagner's *Die Feen* and Handel's *Rinaldo*. The Glimpses included some extracts from *Rinaldo* and *Die Feen*, along with films and animations. One Glimpse featured *The Jungle Book* by Kamala Sankaram and Kelley Rourke, the fourth youth opera commissioned by Glimmerglass to be performed by its youth chorus. Unlike some projects which use adaptations to arouse the interest of young people in the opera, Glimmerglass seeks to engage them by giving them the experience of performing themselves in a piece written especially for them.

Sadly the world premiere of *The Jungle Book* will have to wait for another time, but the Glimmerglass Glimpse featured Bagheera's aria, with a performance by dancer and choreographer Preeti Vasudevan. Kamala Sankaram and Preeti Vasudevan described elements of Indian classical music and dance. Other Glimpses featured performances by current and former Glimmerglass artists, including this year's Artists in Residence Isabel Leonard and William Burden.

Glimmerglass is rightly proud of its Young Artists Program which provided a wonderful Glimmerglass Glimpse. The Program usually gives young artists an intense learning experience, rehearsing and performing and spending the summer together, in a unique community of coaching, culture and camaraderie. (There is incidentally, a long list of Glimmerglass Young Artist alumni who have gone on to stellar careers including: Christine Goerke, John Osborn, Karina Gauvin, Kate Aldrich, Joshua Hopkins, Anthony Roth Costanzo, J'Nai Bridges, Mireille Asselin and Meghan Lindsay.)

In this year's unusual circumstances, the Young Artists nevertheless participated in a six-week online curriculum, which included specialized classes, Q & A sessions and individual coaching. They worked primarily with Isabel Leonard, William Burden and Joseph Colaneri, with additional sessions from artists such as Eric Owens, Renee Fleming and Russell Thomas.

The season culminated in Glimpse performances by young artists in a range of roles. There are too many to mention, but you can still watch this, as well as other Glimpses, by visiting the Glimmerglass website, <http://www.glimmerglass.org> and clicking on the Glimmerglass Glimpses "Learn More" button. Enjoy!

DVD Corner

Murray Kitts

Offenbach: *Un mari à la porte*

After a typical tuneful overture the opera begins in the bedroom of a woman. A musician named Henri falls down the chimney and arrives in the fortunately unlit fireplace of a newly married woman, Susanne. The plot is completely insane. Susanne enters telling her friend Rosita that she now feels that marriage that day to Florestan was a mistake. Henri hides but is discovered by the ladies. The new husband arrives at the door and wants to claim his bride. The door is locked and the key is missing. All sorts of complications ensue until the conclusion of this one-act operetta when all end up happily paired.

The sets and costumes are suitably bizarre and outrageous. The cast was directed to learn how to walk and move like birds and do so. All four cast members are excellent singers and actors. The music is fine, the singing most enjoyable and there's never a dull moment.

New production of the Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentina with the Orchestra conducted by Valerio Galli. Recorded February 2019.

Carl Maria von Weber: *Euryanthe*

Weber's opera *Der Freischutz* was a great success and still is performed today. He wanted to follow this with a grand opera containing the same sort of mixture of the supernatural and redeeming divine intervention. Unfortunately he persuaded a minor poet, Helmina von Chezy, who had never written an opera libretto before, to work on the opera called "Euryanthe" based on a 13th-century French romance. This new production by Theatre an der Wein reduces the grand opera to an almost chamber work. Filmed in 2018 it moves the action up to a much more recent Germany ruled by an Emperor and involved in war. One result of the most recently waged war, now concluded, was the death of a soldier who was loved by Emma, whose grief drives her to commit suicide. She leaves behind a ring, which if moistened with the tears of two chaste lovers will release her to join with her beloved in the next life. Emma's brother, Count Adolar, has returned from the

war ready to finally marry Euryanthe who is also being wooed unsuccessfully by Count Lysiart. Euryanthe has unwittingly told Eglantine the story of the ring not knowing that Eglantine was madly in love with Adolar and would do anything to help Lysiart win Euryanthe. Lysiart manages to get Adolar to agree to a test of Euryanthe's fidelity, which is faked by Lysiart.

Adolar plans to take his former love to slay her and then kill himself. But Euryanthe suddenly stops breathing and all mourn her fate. However, truth finally prevails when Eglantine confesses her role in the plot to convince Adolar of Euryanthe's infidelity. Lysiart then kills Eglantine. Euryanthe appears well and is finally united with Adolar who joins her in weeping over the ring allowing Emma to be united with her love.

A long room with windows along one side and two doors, one a double door to accommodate the entrances and exits of the large chorus. The only furniture in the room consists of a grand piano with bench and a bed resembling a hospital bed. The predominant costume colour is black for almost everyone. The villainous Eglantine has an appropriate dark red dress. The most unusual directorial effect is to have the villain Lysiart appear completely naked and sings for almost ten minutes. The adroit cameraman manages to capture distantly or conceal private parts from the DVD audience.

The vocal music is performed well by all the principles especially by tenor Norman Reinhardt joined by other European opera stars: Jacquelyn Wagner as Euryanthe, Theresa Kronthaler as Eglantine and Andrew Foster-Williams as Lysiart. Excellent is all the extensive choral work by the Arnold Schoenberg Choir. The ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra is conducted by Constantin Trinks.

An alternative would be to get hold of a copy of a CD from 1975 starring Jessye Norman, Rita Hunter and Nicolai Gedda. Perhaps this opera is better heard but not seen.

Four summers of music in Rome

by Murray Kitts

In 1968 I discovered a very economical way to spend the summer holidays - take a university course abroad. Being a teacher of history it was natural to choose Rome for my studies in art and archaeology. I can't remember what the University of Alberta charged me for the transportation and the course lectures but it was very reasonable. My living expenses will give you an idea how inexpensive Italy was in those days. I had a single room with shared bathroom, a typical continental breakfast, and a full course evening meal all for \$5.00 Canadian a day. Rome was bursting with classical concerts but first choice had to be a visit to the Baths of Caracalla for an open air presentation of Verdi's *Aida*.

Although the world's largest stage could have accommodated an elephant, only a lone camel appeared in the Nile scene. For the climax of the Grand Triumphal March Radames enters in a horse-drawn chariot. Not to spoil the action by what the horse had left behind a little man with a broom and long-handled dustpan rushed out to clean up. This always prompted audience applause and a bow from the cleaner. Seeing opera at night under the stars can be enchanting but somehow the magic is interrupted by the jets flying overhead on their path to the airport and by the horse drawn sightseeing carriages which pass frequently by on the nearby surfaced road. The touching farewell embrace of the two lovers is not enhanced by the hundreds of tourists taking flash bulb photos. But that's the way it was.

With a stage that immense with no mass scenes I thought that presenting Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* there would not work too well. But the place was full of Japanese tourists catered by the hawkers who before the performance begins call out "Caramelle-cocacola" to call out their wares in Japanese.

For the third opera of the 1968 season Verdi's *La traviata* was offered with the guests arriving at the party in horse drawn carriages. The male principals were very good. The baritone Mario Sereni was famous in Europe. The tenor

was a 33 year old from Modena who went on to a spectacular career. Believe it or not, it was Luciano Pavarotti and I possess a program to prove that I was there. In the following 3 years I was able to hear the great soprano Fiorenza Cosotto in Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* which began during the long orchestra introduction with a herd of goats being driven across the replica of the town square where the main action of the opera took place.

It became customary for me to guide the students from year to year to witness *Aida* at the Baths of Caracalla. We always sat in the upper rows to get a full view of the action and where the amplified singing and orchestral playing could be heard. The price of admission there was lower than for seats closer to the stage. In the year when a former college and continuing friend arrived in Rome he desired to go to *Aida* but insisted that we sit quite close to the stage. Unfortunately closeness allowed details to be seen; such as the hero well past his prime trying to portray the heroic leader of the Egyptian army. But what made sitting there memorable for the wrong reasons was the behaviour of the orchestra players. Anytime a musician was finished with his part he used the opportunity to chat to other players unoccupied at that time. This kept up for most of the opera and seemed to be acceptable behaviour to those opera goers around us. Never again would I want to sit so upfront at an outdoor performance of this nature.

Of course there were many classical music concerts to attend: two of my favourites were a performance in the ruins of the Basilica of Maxentius in the Roman Forum of Orff's *Carmina Burana* by the Santa Cecilia Orchestra and Chorus which Orff had himself conducted when he was teaching in Rome; and in the beautiful gardens of the Santa Cecilia Academy a concert given by the great French flautist Jean Pierre Rampal accompanied by the Solisti di Venetia.

Here's hoping that all this wonderful music will be heard live all over the world again soon.



Pavarotti at 32