



## Jonathon Dove's *Flight* in Victoria

by Murray Kitts

This opera had its debut about 20 years ago at Glyndebourne with libretto by April de Angelis and music by Jonathan Dove who appeared in person at this Canadian premier on February 20th. The opera has been performed with considerable success in the UK and USA and the house was full for the final performance on March 1. The music was pleasant and fitted the text but was not particularly melodic. The orchestra played well, as usual, using extra percussion and a muted tuba to create effects particularly during the storm .

To convey the unconventionality of the story, opera devotees who are used to suicide or death by natural causes or by the headman's axe were treated to the birth of a baby onstage!

The original story is based on a real incident involving an Iranian man who was trapped in a Paris air terminal for 18 years. The man's story supplied by this opera inspired Steven Spielberg's film *The Terminal* which starred Tom Hanks.

Artistic Director and Conductor Timothy Vernon assembled a group of outstanding singers who were capable of the vocal demands of the score and were excellent actors and actresses.

The first character, introduced as the Refugee, was William Towers, a British Countertenor. He has performed in major Baroque and contemporary works throughout Europe and North America. His very strong voice in his range enabled him to capture the sympathy and understanding of the audience for a

person who has no passport or official papers and has not been able to locate his twin brother who was carrying all of their documents.

Heading the stellar cast of Canadian singers was Sharleen Joynt, familiar to Ottawa audiences and, of special interest to NCOS members, as twice a finalist

in our BLOC competitions.

Her previous appearances in Victoria as Queen of the Night and Musetta prepared the audience for stunningly beautiful color-

atura singing. As Controller of the airport she dominated the series of dramas enacted below her control tower, prompting some rather caustic remarks from "one who has seen it all".

Mezzo Soprano Allyson McHardy appeared as the Minskwoman, that is a woman obviously pregnant going to Minsk with her diplomat husband who has

just been assigned by his government to this remote city. Her role is very demanding as she is so uncertain about the move to Minsk that she allows her husband to depart on a plane for that destination and then regrets her decision. Neil Craigshead, one of two excellent Bass Baritones in the cast, is the Minskman, who returns from



Sharleen Joynt



Bill, Tina, McLaren, Towers, Brancy, McHardy, Botava

## Jonathon Dove's *Flight* in Victoria (continued)

Minsk declaring that he cannot be without the love of his wife and thus is able to assist with the arrival of their baby (a silent role).

Emilia Botava, Mezzo Soprano, is Older Woman, 52, as she quite often remarks, and is waiting for a young man, a bartender from a Caribbean island she has just visited, expecting her "fiancé" to meet her and become the successor to husbands one and two. Quite a comic role. Kimy McLaren, Soprano, plays the Stewardess with much verve and brilliance. The object of her passion is the fine Baritone who plays the Steward, John Brancy, who seems to have an infinite capacity for playing adult games with the Stewardess.

The final couple are Jacqueline Woodley, Soprano, and John Robert Lindsey, Tenor, the only persons in the opera to be named as Tina and Bill. Tina is hoping that their vacation will bring a new sparkle in their marital relationship but her references to a sex manual seems not to interest Bill in the least. But with the oncoming of night and with everyone wrapped in blankets Bill decides to cuddle up to Tina. When morning comes along Tina is present but Bill and the Steward are not. All becomes clear when the Steward arrives wearing Bill's trousers

and Bill is wearing no trousers at all but displaying his bright red jockey shorts. What comes of this is for the ladies to forgive all and even encourage Tina in her enthusiasm for Bill.

The final character to appear in the opera is the Immigration Officer sung by another great powerful Baritone, Justin Welsh, who shows compassion for the Refugee and provides an explanation for his apparent desertion by his brother because of the latter's accidental death.

The combination of Ken MacDonald's set and the lighting by Alan Brodie created an extremely practical production, and a magical final scene with the front of a huge plane projected on the scrim and the cast mounting the stairs into the plane, with the exception of the Refugee and the Controller who remain to contemplate the future.

The capacity audience at this performance showed great appreciation for the performance of this opera and I found myself laughing a lot at the all too human foibles and antics portrayed, and moved by the painful dilemma of the Refugee.

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## President's Message – March 2020

Dear fellow members: I write this on March 1<sup>st</sup> and hope the worst of the winter is behind us. I am looking forward to our next Opera Alla Pasta on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is a fun production of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. Prior to the screening, Norman Brown will provide a preview of OperOttawa's 2021 Season. I look forward to seeing you there.

In June, I am planning on another favorite, High C & High T. Murray has agreed to give a new talk and is busily preparing in Victoria. We look forward to seeing him back in Ottawa.

When I first came to Ottawa in 2002, one of the operatic events I loved was the Opera Lyra

Guild's Spring lunch recital. I am investigating restarting these. Let me know, if you would like to help.

By the way, membership is from January to December; I will be sending out a reminder to members who may have overlooked renewing. For those who renewed, a great big thank you. Also, a big thank you to all the contributors to our wonderful Newsletter. Feel free to join them. Every contribution is appreciated – no matter how small.

Lastly, I am looking forward to Spring and all our opera activities in Ottawa. See you soon.

**Mark Robinson**

For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition contact Lesley Robinson at 6137695957 or consult [www.ncos.ca](http://www.ncos.ca)

## uOttawa's *Così* - Another Triumph

by Shelagh Williams

We have come to expect our early March opera fix from Prof. Sandra Graham and the uOttawa Opera Company to lift us out of our doldrums with their always lively and innovative productions. And with an excellent chamber orchestra under Jean-Philippe Tremblay, they of course did not disappoint!

There were two performances, each with a different cast, and we were fortunate enough to enjoy both! Prof. Graham's concept was brilliant. Set in Ottawa, 1955, two uOttawa Gee-Gees football players brag about their girlfriends' faithfulness to their coach, Alf. He doubts any woman can remain loyal, and a bet on their constancy ensues! Surprise follows surprise as the lads are drafted to Winnipeg and the Blue Bombers! The footballers "return" disguised as Alf's soigné friends, in berets and scarves, from Paris, France! What fun!

This was a first class presentation, sung in Italian with English dialogue and recits, and including two screens with scene summaries and super 1950's B&W photos! The costumes were spot on, with the women in polka dots, crinolines, and white bobby sox with ruffles, and the players in genuine Gee-Gees football shirts and helmets, courtesy of uOttawa Sports Services!

In the Friday cast, tenor Iain Macpherson as Ferrando was a large burly centre, but with a great voice to open the opera with *La mia Dorabella*, while bass-baritone Kevin Burke was a young clean cut quarterback, Guglielmo, and they played and sang their roles to the hilt! Tall baritone Kevin Marimbu looked the part for the coach Alf (Don Alfonso) and showed great stage presence and acting ability for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year BMus/BSc student!

The two sisters, soprano Gabrielle Cote-Pickard as Fiordiligi and mezzo Kassandra Schantz as Dorabella, brought the sisters alive,

and with Alf treated us to a lovely *Soave* trio - one of my favourites! Finally, soprano Madeleine Levesque as Despina, the women's housekeeper, and three energetic cheerleaders (doing both performances) rounded out the female cast.

The Saturday cast all had very clear diction so jokes were easily understandable. Also the stage business was very well done, notably by Kevin Burke (here as Alf), such as when he played Solitaire, with help, during Fiordiligi's long (though well sung) *Come scoglio!* Tenor Ryan Tonelli as Ferrando and baritone Philippe Wandeler as Guglielmo sang and interacted well and were good looking and well built, and were both believable as football players. Another great pair of sisters, soprano Christine Hecker as Fiordiligi and mezzo Tessa Fackelmann as Dorabella, kept up the high standards. Soprano Danielle Girard, as Despina, was a revelation! Tall and slim, with a great voice and comic skills, she multi-tasked as Alf's "assistant" to give us the lively old Ukrainian Baba, in brightly flowered babushka, who saved the "Frenchmen" with a huge magnet, and also played an Elvis impersonator(!) who tied the knot at the Chateau fake wedding! In addition she knew how to do stage business, such as clearly and

comically rifling her employer's purse!

Overall, the piece was very well staged and performed : a triumph! Action throughout the hall during the overture introduced the players. Act I set up the action, while Act II was a brilliant resume of the rest. This abbreviated performance came in at just over two hours duration. In agreement with the usual traditional ending, the original couples stayed together, hopefully now much wiser!

A Mozart aficionado friend declared: "Mozart would have approved!"



L to R, uOttawa Gee-Gees player in uniform, Dorabella (Schantz), Guglielmo (Burke). uOttawa photo.

## Wozzeck at the Met

by Lesley Robinson

*Wozzeck* is a dark tale of poverty, jealousy, torment and despair, and the Met's new production hit exactly the right note. Alban Berg saw Georg Büchner's unfinished play, *Woyzeck* in 1914 and decided then and there that this work would provide the inspiration for his first opera. He adapted the libretto from the play and used the play's structure of a series of brief, abrupt scenes. His work on the opera was interrupted by World War I. Berg served in the army and was profoundly affected by his military experience, which greatly influenced the themes of *Wozzeck* and the opera became an obsession for him. It was completed in 1922 before finally premiering in Berlin in 1925.

In the opening scene *Wozzeck* is chatting with the captain who berates him for immorality because he has an illegitimate child. *Wozzeck* bemoans the fact that the poor cannot afford morality. It becomes clear later that as a poor man, neither can *Wozzeck* afford the luxury of treatment for the mental illness which undoubtedly plagues him. The disturbing visions that *Wozzeck* experiences are clear signs to a modern audience of mental illness, yet the doctor is interested in him only as a subject of his own bizarre, pseudoscientific experiments. *Wozzeck* has also shared his terrifying visions with Marie, the mother of his child, who reacts in fear and laments their poverty. When, by the end of the first act, Marie succumbs to the charms of the attractive drummajor, the scene is fully set for the juggernaut of misery that is to come.

Sabine Theunissen's set for this William Kentridge production is a jumbled heap of furniture, railings, walkways and inclined planes pointing in different directions, with a backdrop of projections placing the action firmly in the time and place of the production, Europe in the run up to the looming horror of the Great War. (Büchner's original play was left unfinished at his early death in 1837.) The set fittingly represents the chaos of *Wozzeck*'s turbulent situation. The child was represented by a somewhat stylised puppet. I overheard some audience members discussing how this was

essential — the action was too disturbing to subject a real child to its chilling adult content.

This was Peter Mattei's astonishing role debut. He thoroughly inhabited the character, portraying *Wozzeck*'s agitation along with the swirling undercurrent of his tangled thoughts. Elza van den Heever's Marie was at times wistful, indignant, tender, defiant and yielding. The roles of the Captain and the Doctor, sung by Gerhard Siegel and Christian Van Horn respectively, provided an opportunity to view *Wozzeck* through an other lens. They make what they think of as inconsequential remarks to *Wozzeck* and suggest to him that Marie is unfaithful to him, thus fermenting his inner turmoil. I particularly enjoyed Christian Van Horn's performance of the somewhat bonkers doctor, providing a little light relief, if any is possible in this miserable tale. I would have liked to have heard more from Tamara Mumford who has been noted for her deep mezzo voice and her melting lyricism. Yannick Nézet-Séguin was on the podium and directed the orchestra with his thoughtful passion and boundless energy. He has described the music of *Wozzeck* as incredibly of its time. The score helps to highlight the plight of individuals against the backdrop of catastrophic world events and the extensive orchestration serves to intensify the text and themes of the work. This was an intense hour and 50 minutes.



From l-r: Christian Van Horn as the Doctor, Peter Mattei as *Wozzeck*, Conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Elza van den Heever as Marie, Gerhard Siegel as the Captain, Christopher Ventris as the DrumMajor and Tamara Mumford as Margret

## One Crazy Day (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) at the Met, December 2019... The Difference the Cast Makes

by Lesley Robinson

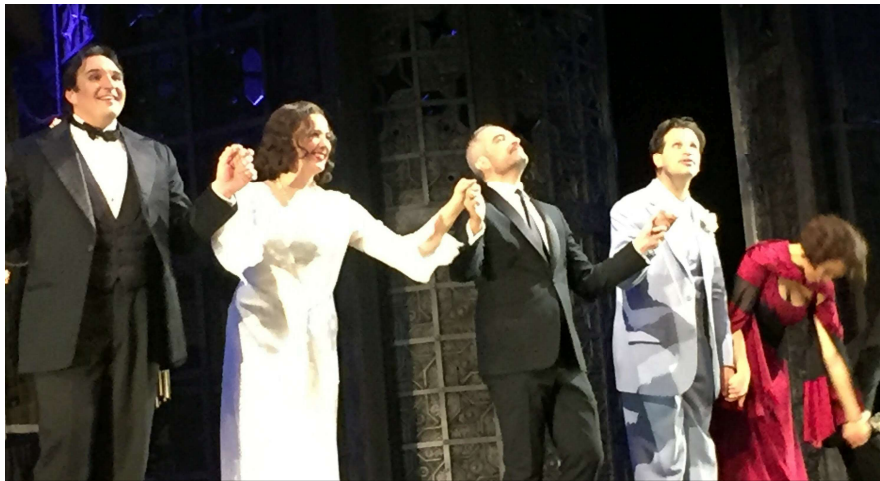
The full title of Beaumarchais's play (on which Mozart's opera is based) is *La folle journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro*. The craziness makes for a wonderful opera buffa and with all the hiding in closets, jumping out of the window, disguises and quick thinking, there is much opportunity for an array of delightful nuttiness and buffoonery.

The last time that Luca Pisaroni and Nadine Sierra performed together in *Le Nozze di Figaro* was in San Francisco in 2015. On that occasion they sang the roles of the Count and Countess, with Philippe Sly and Lisette Oropesa as Figaro and Susanna. In the Fall 2015 NCOS Newsletter I noted the splendid chemistry of the artists in that production. As Count and Countess, Mr. Pisaroni was charismatic with a touch of nonchalant entitlement and Ms. Sierra was charming, longsuffering and dignified. This time, the switch in roles allowed the chemistry to manifest itself differently. Mr. Pisaroni's Figaro was boyish with a dash of adorable naivety and Ms. Sierra's Susanna was affectionate, playful and indulgent of her lovable hero. The Count and Countess in the December 2019 run were sung by Adam Plachetka and Susanna Phillips. Mr. Plachetka's has a finetuned comic awareness which gave his portrayal of the Count a note of affable, bombastic ridi-

cule. Susanna Phillips gave a pensive, melancholy and wistful performance as the countess. (You may have seen Adam Plachetka singing the National Anthem at a Sens game in Ottawa when he was here briefly between performances in New York.)

Adam Plachetka returned in February for the production's second run this season. This time however, he sang the role of Figaro, with Hanna Elisabeth Müller as Susanna, Montreal native Etienne Dupuis as the Count and Anita Hartig as the Countess. This remixes the chemistry once again and the results yield subtle differences. We had seen this very production back in 2015 with yet another cast. Back then, Erwin Schrott was a more suave and confident Figaro. His Susanna, Danielle De Niese, was perky and effervescent. Mariusz Kwiecien was very funny as the Count, but in a different way from those mentioned above—his Count was debonaire and relentlessly lascivious. Rachel Willis Sorensen was a wistful and melancholy countess.

Whoever is singing the major roles, we knew that this would be the perfect opera to serve as an introduction to the genre for some young friends. They were delighted and once again Mr. Mozart has done a fine job of initiating some opera newbies to the art, with this perennially engaging musical and comic masterpiece.



Mr Adam Plachetka (Count Almaviva), Susanna Phillips (Countess Almaviva), Conductor Antonello Manacorda, Luca Pisaroni (Figaro) and Nadine Sierra (Susanna)

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## The Queen of Spades at the Met A Dazzling Debut

by Lesley Robinson

This production was the eagerly anticipated and stunning Met debut of Norwegian lyric, dramatic soprano Lise Davidsen in the role of Lisa. Ms. Davidsen was a First Prize and Audience Prize winner at the Operalia competition in 2015. She has already taken on some hefty Wagner roles and whilst in North America came to Montreal to sing the role of Leonore in a concert performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. She will reprise the role in the near future at the Royal Opera House in London and will spend summer 2020 in Bayreuth where she'll perform as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* and Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*.

Undaunted by the fact that her costars in this production (as is so frequently the case with Russian opera) were mostly native speakers of Russian, Ms. Davidsen's interpretation met with critical acclaim. *The New Yorker* praised her "rich, blazing tone", *The New York Times* stated that she sang "with confidence, power and purpose, with both freshness and maturity" and *The Observer* hailed her performance as offering "more than ample evidence she's got the voice and temperament to be the company's next A-list dramatic soprano". She excels in every part of her vocal range, with warmth and eloquence in the lower reaches and brilliant, shining top notes.



photo Ken Howard

Lise Davidsen and Yusif Eyvazov

The leading male character, Hermann, appears in every scene of the opera, requiring endurance as well as skill. Yusif Eyvazov took over the role for the entire run when

Aleksandrs Antonenko, scheduled to sing three performances, had to cancel due to illness. Mr. Eyvazov's performance was fervent and passionate. His Hermann was obsessive and scarily intense. The Countess, the once much admired and mysterious dowager, was portrayed by mezzosoprano Larissa Diadkova. Ms. Diadkova has performed roles in three Tchaikovsky operas at the Met—*Eugene Onegin*, *Iolanta* and now *The Queen of Spades*. She has performed recently as the Countess in the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, and the Mariinsky Theatre, Primorsky Stage in Vladivostok. The role of the ardent Prince Yeletsky was sung by Igor Golovatenko, also in his Met debut. His is a name to remember. His repertoire includes a number of Bel Canto and Verdi roles. The role of Prince Yeletsky was incidentally also the Met debut of the late, great and beloved Dmitri Hvorostovsky in the same production back in 1995.

This was a new production by Elijah Moshinsky in 1995 and it wears its 25 years well. Its sumptuous sets and costumes by Mark Thompson retain all their sparkle, pomp and circumstance. The story, based on a novella by Pushkin, is set in Saint Petersburg in the late eighteenth century, around the years of the French revolution. The Russian aristocracy was influenced greatly by all things French, a fact that was evident in the set, flaunting a nostalgia for the court of Versailles, which is echoed by the Countesses' reminiscences. Yet this is a story with a very dark side of manic obsession and that darkness is manifested in the sets of the Countess's boudoir and the dark hall surrounding the gambling tables.

The essence of the mystery, the opulence, the yearning love and the addictive fixation are all contained in Tchaikovsky's haunting score. He wrote the entire opera in 44 days in 1890 in Florence, keeping detailed diaries and in constant correspondence with his brother Modest, who had already written the libretto. The opera is richly orchestrated with 16 solo vocal parts and chorus. There is a dance sequence in the intermezzo.

As he worked through the composition, Tchaikovsky lived every emotion as he worked. He felt the horror of the scene where Hermann goes to see the old woman, and when he composed the scene of Hermann's death, it brought him to tears of pity. He said that he put his whole soul into the work and on the day the opera was completed he wrote to his brother, "The trick is to write with *love*. And *The Queen of Spades* was written with particular love."

## Opéra de Montréal *Written on Skin*

by Lesley Robinson

This was the Canadian premiere of a phenomenal twenty first century work by British composer Sir George Benjamin. It was his second collaboration with playwright Martin Crimp and was commissioned to be premiered at the Aix-en-Provence festival in 2012. In search of an appropriate story from the Rousillon region, Benjamin based his work on the mediaeval Catalan legend of *The Eaten Heart*, in which a husband takes his macabre revenge on his unfaithful wife by feeding her her lover's heart.

The title is intriguing. 800 years ago, when the story is set, each book was indeed a precious object, quite literally written on skin. Yet the text contains modern as well as mediaeval references, emphasising the relevance of its themes to the twentyfirst century audience. The angels take on the role of a Greek chorus, commenting on the action from on high, then crossing over to the world where the action takes place and taking on the roles of characters in the story.

We know the name of only one of the three main characters, Agnès. She claims her identity as she discovers herself, awakening to her passionate and carnal existence. Her oppression as a mediaeval woman is emphasised by the fact that she is illiterate in a world where the written word is considered so precious. She is able to experience books through the illumination created by the Boy's talent. The eventual revelation of her infidelity comes via the written words in a secret page of the book, which she cannot read.

Her husband is the Protector. This is an ironic title. Rather than protect, he subdues and abuses. The angels describe him as "addicted to purity and violence". We know from the work that he commissions from the boy, that he is ruthless and cruel and seeks the complete destruction of his enemies, wanting to see them in Hell and himself in Paradise.

It is the Boy who awakens the woman in Agnès. Married at the age of fourteen, her husband has always treated her as a child. There is a contrast be-

tween man and boy. It is the Boy who "illuminates" Agnès's life and is revered by the Protector for his talent before the latter succumbs to his anger and destroys his rival. Manhood is projected as violent and destructive, whereas the Boy represents passion and creativity. It is another irony that it is the Boy who seeks to *protect* Agnès by lying to her husband. The use of the counter tenor voice in this role gives the Boy a poignant youth and purity.

The music is astonishingly rich and mysterious, sometimes tense, sometimes explosive, with vivid and diverse orchestration. Instruments used in the score include the viola de gamba, mandolin, glass armonica and a lavish variety of percussion, fusing the sounds of past centuries into a complex modernday score. Conductor Nicole Paiement spoke in a preperformance interview of her delight in working with living composers. When she had thoughts or questions about the score, she could call the composer and discuss them with him. In this way, the score is a living item, continuing to evolve with input from its creator. Just as composers did in centuries gone by, Benjamin composed the piece with particular voices in mind. The premiere production featured Canadian soprano Barbara Hannigan as Agnès, who reprised the role for the British premiere at the Royal Opera House in 2013. You can watch the full premiere production on YouTube. Search for George Benjamin: *Written on Skin* (Festival d'Aix-en-Provence 2012).

The Montreal production featured an excellent, mostly Canadian cast who gave heartfelt and accomplished performances. Olivier Landreville's set and Philippe Dubuc's costumes were dark and stark, contributing to the ominous atmosphere of the production.

Agnès's costume included leather straps and buckles which she symbolically shed at her emancipation.

*Written On Skin* has been hailed as one of the best classical music works of the twentyfirst century. Thank you to Opéra de Montréal for bringing it to life for us.



The Angels surrounding at center (lr) Daniel Okulitch as the Protector, Magali Simard Galdès as Agnès, Conductor Nicole Paiement and Luigi Schifano as the Boy

## Events You Could Have Enjoyed by Shelagh Williams

### **Christmas with Music and Beyond**

Julian Armour produced another musical Christmas gem this year, the weekend before Christmas. Soprano Frederique Drolet gave us our first vocal selection, *Rejoice Greatly* from *Messiah*, and finished the concert off in style with two great carols, *Gesu Bambino* and *O Holy Night*. The Ottawa Children's Choir's entertaining three selections were followed by E.S. De La Salle's Senior Harp Ensemble, with treble Elliott Mennier. After the break Kerson Leong made his violin sing beautifully in a Bach solo prelude. This was followed suitably by Matthew Larkin's heavenly Caelis Academy Ensemble in five lovely pieces, highlighted by Graeme Thies-Thompson's trumpet in Larkin's *Christmas Eve* and baritone Michael Carty in Gordon Lightfoot's *Song for a Winter's Night*. Of course, a first class instrumental group including Armour on cello provided suitable Christmas music, both old and new, and both by itself and in vocal accompaniment, to get and keep us happily in the Christmas mood!

### **Orchestre Metropolitain**

Early in February Montreal's Orchestre Metropolitain under its energetic Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Yannick Nezet-Seguin - now of course also Music Director of the Metropolitan Opera - presented a concert at the NAC. Accompanied by its 100 member Choeur Metropolitain, it presented Jacques Hétu's choral *Symphony No. 5*, and Mozart's *Grand Mass in C Minor*, of especial interest. Alongside soloists soprano Carolyn Sampson, mezzo Julie Boulianne and tenor Jonas Hacker, our BLOC winner Philippe Sly sang the bass baritone part. We -and Philippe! - had to sit and wait until the final *Benedictus* for him to stand and us to hear his rich bass baritone voice ring out, despite the overloud orchestra! - but it was worth it!

### **uOttawa at the NAC**

This recital series is a showcase for outstanding uOttawa performers, and this year the vocal concert featured Graduate Diploma in Performance student, mezzo Tessa Fackelmann, with pianist Maxime Dube-Malenfant. She sang an interesting programme, beginning with a favourite aria, *Ch'io mi scordi di te?*, which, she explained, Mozart had written specially for his friend, Nancy Storace, who had created the role of Susanna in *Figaro*! She balanced this with the Debussy song set *Chansons de Bilitis*, then the *Violin Aria* of Nicklausse from *Hoffmann* not in the original! She finished trium-

phantly with the aria *Amour, viens rendre à mon ame* from Gluck's *Orphee et Eurydice* what an ending! These concerts take place in the casual and comfy 4<sup>th</sup> Stage in a cafétype configuration with a bar most welcoming!

### **OperOttawa: Don Giovanni Trionfante**

Described as "an abridged creative adaptation by Norman E. Brown", this interesting evening of most of Mozart's important arias managed in 11/2 hours (including break!) to follow Da Ponte's storyline, with interjections by an actor as Kierkegaard!

The singers were dressed all in black, but brightened by weird wigs in colours which glowed in certain lighting (matching colours for couples!), and pianist extraordinaire Fred Lacroix bravely sported a multicoloured wig! The arias were often moved about, with Don Giovanni accompanying his first seduction with his Act II *Serenade*, *Deh vieni alla finestra*! Norman E. Brown and John Holland were a good tag team as Don Giovanni and Leporello, in copper coloured wigs! The latter's *Catalogue Aria* here enraged Cristina Pisani as Donna Elvira to respond with her vehement *Ah che mi dici mai*. The attractive young couple, Zerlina and Masetto, Danie Friesen and Kyle Guglielmo, in matching silver wigs, precipitated the insinuating *La ci darem la mano* for the Don to seduce Zerlina. The very upset Masetto's *Ho capito* ended Act I.

Iain Macpherson as Don Ottavio began Act II beautifully with a marvellous rendition of *Dalla sua pace* sung to his Donna Anna, Erinne-Colleen Laurin, who responded later with *Non mi dir*, with both in blue wigs! Zerlina finally comforted Masetto with *Vedrai carino*. Two chords announced the Commendatore's ghost, sung by George Ossipov, with a good deep bass voice, to admonish the Don. In an ending switch, the Don's female victims mobbed him, pulling out his hair, and robbing him of his sex appeal, and so he shot himself in despair!

The concept was good, and the actor, John Collins, was suitably clad and presented well, but unfortunately his voice was not loud enough, nor his enunciation always clear, and so most of the commentary was missed, at least by my companion and me in the fourth row. However, there was no problem hearing the opera singers, all in good strong voice!



## Where did that story come from??

by Tom McCool

*L'Orfeo* (1607) by Claudio Monteverdi is usually considered to be the first opera of any significance. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice comes from Greek mythology and during the early years of opera most composers looked to mythology, ancient history or the Bible to provide the stories for their operas. A few examples of familiar pieces from that time: *Dido and Aeneas* (1685) Purcell, *Giulio Cesare* (1725) Handel, and *Idomeneo* (1781) Mozart.

In terms of opera stories, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) changed everything! This opera was based on a popular play by the French author Beaumarchais. The characters in *Figaro* are, for the most part, ordinary average people - Figaro is a barber and many of the rest of the cast are servants. There are no gods, goddesses, emperors or empresses in this piece.

After *Figaro* the stories came mainly from literary sources such as plays, novels and poetry plays being the overwhelming favourite. The most cited playwright is probably Shakespeare. Verdi based 3 of his operas on Shakespeare's works and had a lifelong, unrealized ambition to write the music for a fourth *King Lear*. Other notable authors who saw their plays used by opera composers were Goethe (*Faust* 1859), Schiller (*Don Carlos* 1867) and countless others.

*The Bride of Lammermoor* by Sir Walter Scott is one famous novel which provided Donizetti with the story that became *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). Other composers who used novels as the basis for their operas are Tchaikovsky (*Eugene Onegin* 1879), Bizet (*Carmen* 1875) and Puccini (*Madame Butterfly* 1904) to mention only a few.

Many of Wagner's operas came from a different

literary source and that is Germanic legends. His master piece *The Ring of the Nibelung* is the best illustration of this.

Sometimes determining the source of an opera story can get complicated. One of the more interesting is Verdi's *La traviata*. It is based on a play by Alexandre Dumas fils, *The Lady of the Camelias*, that was adapted from his own novel of the same name which was based on the life (and death) of an actual person, Marie Duplessis, who lived in Paris during this time.

Not all operas are based on literary sources. Some plots are based on actual incidents or events. An interesting example is *I Pagliacci*. Leoncavallo's father was a magistrate and *I Pagliacci* is based on a case tried in his court. Other events such as wars, battles and family conflicts have also found their way to the opera stage.

Recent operas tend to be based on real people and real events. *Nixon in China* (1987) comes immediately to mind. *Doctor Atomic* (2005) is a similar unusual story for an opera. *Dr. Atomic*, starring Gerald Finley in the title role of the original production, is about the creation of the atomic bomb in the New Mexico desert during World II. Steve Jobs, the founder of the Apple Corporation, would seem to be an unlikely subject for an opera but *The (R)evolution of Steven Jobs* (2017) has enjoyed great success. An incident in which a traveller became trapped in an airport terminal for years because of lack of a passport or other identification became the plot for *Flight* (1998), which has been produced numerous times on both sides of the Atlantic and had its Canadian premiere in Victoria last month. You can read a review of this production elsewhere in this newsletter (page 1).

## UOttawa Opera Ensemble

by Shelagh Williams

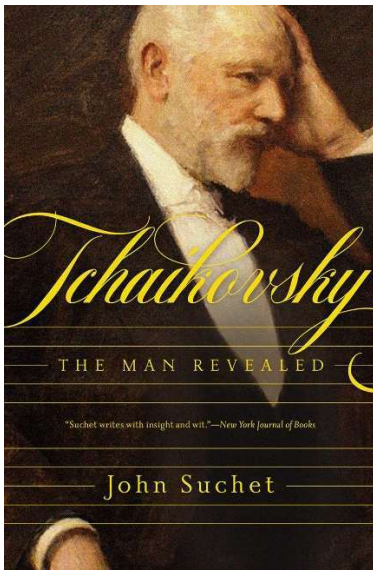
With a bumper crop of excellent undergrad female singers, in early February uOttawa Opera Artistic Director Prof. Sandra Graham presented a delightful afternoon galatypic concert of **Opera Excerpts: Musical Dreams**. With the active acting and musical skills of collaborative pianist Stephen Eckert, in p.j.'s, and his Teddy Bear, Prof. Graham and her eight soloists produced a clever, well integrated series of scenes from eight operas ranging from Gluck and Mozart to Applebaum and Menotti.

Touches such as having the letter writing in *Figaro* texted on a phone, Nicklausse rowing in *Hoffmann's Barcarolle*, and the (silk) worm's strands in *Erewhon* carefully strung across the stage - only to then be cut up!

- enlivened proceedings considerably. Costuming was appropriate, including some beautiful gowns, and the *Carmen* scenes were exceptional: Carmen in a spectacular red sequined flamenco dress, and her card playing friends also in red Spanish gowns. Rather than a chaise longue, a lovely antique couch served as scenery where needed. We were treated to a beautifully sung and well acted production (we saw the second of two performances), ranging through solos, and such favourite duets as the *Flower Song* from *Lakme* and the *Evening Prayer* from *Hansel and Gretel*, to the full ensemble for the *Fledermaus* festivities - a great way to overcome a very cold February afternoon!

## Tchaikovsky – *The man revealed* by John Suchet

Published by Pegasus Books



My first introduction to the man Tchaikovsky was when I was a teenager and watched Ken Russell's movie *The Music Lovers*. While the critics may have loved the nudity and violence, it was definitely not my cup of tea. Fast forward to Christmas 2019, and I received this hardback. I skimmed the pages and found beautiful illustrations and photographs.

The book is an easy read. It is clearly well researched and thorough. I found it fascinating learning about how Tchaikovsky produced his music and how he struggled with his sexuality in an unwelcoming society.

The book is full of fascinating gems. In 1875 in Moscow, two dancers performed privately a little ballet, *Pygmalion and Galatea*. Pygmalion, a sculptor, falls in love with his beautiful female statue, Galatea. Both dancers, while not professional, entered fully into the spirit of love declared and love received. The beautiful female statue was danced by Tchaikovsky and the sculptor by Camille Saint-Saëns. This book is insightful and accessible for anyone who would like to learn more about Russia's great genius.

**Mark Robinson**

## Music notes from Victoria

by Murray Kitts

Spring is here at last and some great music has arrived with it. Early in February in what is called The Naked Classics series, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, the *Pathétique*, was presented by the Victoria Symphony under the direction of Christian Kluxen. The naked part of the program is presented by Paul Rissmann, an excellent amateur who works with the London (UK) Symphony Orchestra. With the help of projections on a large screen he dissects the music, pointing out the the brilliance of the composer's work, assisted by the orchestra playing each exact section of music under discussion. He also filled in detail the up-to-date opinions on the composer's life and death. After the intermission the orchestra gave an excellent full performance of the great symphony to an audience who had been helped to appreciate its magnificence.

Over the past few years I have had the pleasure of attending a number of concerts sponsored by the Early Music Society of the Islands and looked forward to a concert entitled *The Four Seasons* including Vivaldi's famous work plus additions. This was the finest concert of Baroque music I have ever attended in my life. The Concerto Koln under the direction of Shunske Sato consisted of an outstanding group of string players along with baroque lute and harpsichord continuo. To give you some idea of the expertise of these musicians, the first selection by Vivaldi was the delightful *Concerto in B minor* for four violins plus orchestra. Each of the four violinists are concert masters in European orchestras. Superb playing.

The full ensemble played a beautiful, moving *Concerto Grosso* by Geminiani based on Corelli's theme *La Follia*. J.S. Bach's genius was not neglected with the playing of his familiar *Concerto for Two Violins*. But the highlight of the evening of course was *The Four Seasons*, played with such verve, brilliance and beauty, that it is impossible to describe the effect on the audience. Every movement of every concerto was perfect but conductor Sato's performance of the *Sudden Storm* was almost unbelievable in its violence and virtuosity. The North American tour of this orchestra is limited to New York, Washington, San Francisco and to Victoria whose music lovers work very hard to receive such a rare honour.

The following day we experienced the ferocious winds and rain expressed by Vivaldi in the *Summer* movement the previous night as we made our way by bus to the Farquhar Auditorium at the University of Victoria. The Victoria Symphony with Jean Claude Picard began the concert with Haydn's Overture to his opera *L'isola disabitata* which illustrates the "Sturm und Drang" movement in opera. No storms in the lovely Schumann *Piano Concerto in A Minor* played beautifully by Lorraine Min, a Victoria native with an international reputation. The final selection, Bizet's *Symphony in C Major*, full of delightful melodies pleased the capacity audience.

Still to come, a Beethoven Festival with all his symphonies performed. For choral music lovers there will be a concert at Christ Church Cathedral in late March.

## MET Opera HD LIVE 2019-20 Season

GIACOMO PUCCINI

**TURANDOT**

LIVE:

October 12, 2019

ENCORES:

November 2, 4, 6  
and 10, 2019

JULES MASSENET

**MANON**

LIVE:

October 26, 2019

ENCORES:

December 14, 2019,  
January 13, 15 and  
19, 2020

GIACOMO PUCCINI

**MADAMA  
BUTTERFLY**

LIVE:

November 9, 2019

ENCORES:

January 25, 27, 29  
and February 9,  
2020

PHILIP GLASS

**AKHNATEN**

LIVE:

November 23, 2019

ENCORES:

February 15, 17, 19  
and 23, 2020

ALBAN BERG

**WOZZECK**

LIVE:

January 11, 2020

ENCORES:

March 7, 9, 11  
and 15, 2020

THE GERSHWINS

**PORGY  
AND BESS**

LIVE:

February 1, 2020

ENCORES:

March 28, 30,  
April 1 and 5, 2020GEORGE  
FRIDERIC HANDEL**AGRIPPINA**

LIVE:

February 29, 2020

ENCORES:

April 18, 20, 22  
and 26, 2020

RICHARD WAGNER

**DER FLIEGENDE  
HOLLÄNDER**

LIVE:

March 14, 2020

ENCORES:

May 30, June 1, 3  
and 7, 2020

GIACOMO PUCCINI

**TOSCA**

LIVE:

April 11, 2020

ENCORES:

June 13, 15, 17  
and 21, 2020GAETANO  
DONIZETTI**MARIA  
STUARDA**

LIVE:

May 9, 2020

ENCORES:

June 20, 22, 24  
and 28, 2020

**Presentations may not be available at all participating theatres for all advertised dates.**

## Cinema Aylmer 2020

*Fidelio*, Beethoven (Royal Opera House)

Friday, April 17th – 3 p.m. and Wednesday, April 22nd – 7 p.m.

In this new production, conducted by Antonio Pappano, Jonas Kaufmann plays the political prisoner Florestan, and Lise Davidsen his wife Leonore (disguised as 'Fidelio') who daringly sets out to rescue him. Tobias Kratzer's new staging brings together the dark reality of the French Revolutionary 'Terror' and our own time to illuminate *Fidelio*'s inspiring message of shared humanity.

**As always check dates and times with the cinema at <http://www.cinemaaylmer.com>**

## Bytowne Cinema 2020

The Bytowne Cinema will show the Royal Opera House's *Fidelio* on April 25<sup>th</sup> at 1:15 p.m. For details see the published Bytowne Guide or visit <https://www.bytowne.ca>

# Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

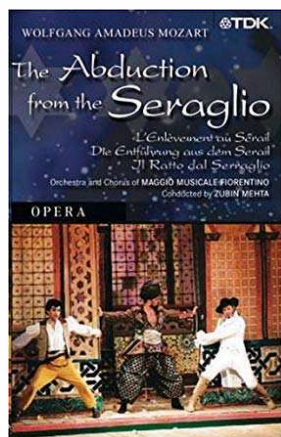
## from the Metropolitan Opera on CBC Radio

### 2020

March 21	<i>La Cenerentola</i>	Rossini
March 28	<i>Werther</i>	Massenet
April 4	<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	Gluck
April 11	<i>Tosca</i>	Puccini
April 18	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	Verdi
April 25	<i>Turandot</i>	Puccini
May 2	<i>Kát'a Kabanová</i>	Janáček
May 9	<i>Maria Stuarda</i>	Donizetti

All performances start at 1:00 p.m. except *La Cenerentola* (12:30 p.m.) and *Simon Boccanegra* (12:30 p.m.)

## Opera alla Pasta



March 22 *Abduction from the Seraglio* Mozart

Eva Mei (Konstanze), Rainer Trost (Belmonte)

Patrizia Ciofi (Blonde), Mehrzad Montazeri (Pedrillo)

Kurt Rydl (Osmin), Markus John (Bassa Selim)

Orchestra and Chorus of the MAGGIO MUSICALE FIORENTINO

Conducted by Zubin Mehta

The presentation will be followed by a delicious pasta dinner. The cost is \$25

2 p.m. at St. Anthony's Soccer Club. 523 St Anthony St, Ottawa.

For reservations call or text Lesley Robinson at 6137695957

April 5 *Beatrice di Tenda* Bellini

May 3 *Eugene Onegin* Tchaikovsky

May 31 *Stiffelio* Verdi after the AGM

June 21 *L'étoile* Chabrier