



OperOttawa's Handel's *Messiah* by Norman E. Brown

On Sunday afternoon, April 3rd, at First Baptist Church, 120 lovers of great music were treated to a rare and alternative performance by OperOttawa of Handel's beloved oratorio *Messiah*.

OperOttawa enlisted some of the best soloists, musicians and choristers, totalling 45, to present a totally different interpretation of the well known work

Soloists Erinne-Colleen Laurin, Isabelle Lacroix, Carole Portelance, Sonya Sweeney, Colin Frotten, Jean-E Hudson, Norman E. Brown, and musicians Frédéric Lacroix, Peter Crouch and Gerard Nieuwenhuis are no strangers to Ottawa audiences, and have been part of many OperOttawa productions in the past. Relative newcomers Alexander Cappellazzo (first heard in OperOttawa's recent « Acis & Galatea ») and Jack Hui Litster (composer in residence and percussionist in « Rinaldo ») were welcomed back, and making their OperOttawa debut were Lukus Uhlman and Dorian De Luca.



In addition to many of the standard choruses (conducted by Norman E. Brown) and arias, audience members were treated with many new alternatives including: Soprano Erinne-Colleen Laurin singing « But who may abide » accompanied by Jack Hui Litster in the fast coloratura sections by snare drum with a thunderous cymbal ending. As well many of the arias, as well as the opening Sinfonia and the Pifa were played by Gerard Nieuwenhuis on obligatto recorder with the piano. Isabelle Lacroix sang the 12/8 version of « Rejoice greatly » with amazing beauty and interpretation of the text. In addition to the rarely performed chorus « Let all the Angels of God », audience members heard the NEVER PERFORMED chorus « Break forth into joy » which followed the equally never performed Alto duet « How beautiful are the feet » sung by Sonya Sweeney and Carole Portelance. Tenor Colin Frotten sang a most unusual aria version of “Their sound is gone out” (usually sung by full chorus rather declamatorily) in a gentle ballad like rendition. Tenor Alexander Cappellazzo sang the aria “Thou shalt break them” with force and strength. The famous aria « The Trumpet shall sound » was shared

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President's Message – April 2022

Dear Members,

It has been a challenging time as we worked to connect through the pandemic. Our successes have been our newsletter, our website and our Zoom gatherings. I specifically want to thank our tireless newsletter editor David Williams and our always available Webmaster Jim Burgess. I also want to thank Murray Kitts for his frequent and informative talks on Zoom. I also wish to thank everyone who made a contribution to our Newsletter, our Website and our Zooms, especially Lesley Robinson.

As we become more comfortable with face-to-face interactions, I hope we can restart our monthly meetings. The board is looking for a new venue. We need a room which can sit 30 people and has the audio video capabilities to show a video. Please send me your suggestions.

The next Brian Law Opera Competition is planned for October 2023. We had hoped to schedule the competition this year. However, it became clear that we needed more time.

In summary, the society is breathing and is looking to relaunch our in-person activities in the future. I thank each of you for your interest and support of the National Capital Opera Society. Lastly your generous donations to the Brian Law Opera Competition are greatly appreciated and will help new young singers.

Mark Robinson

Editor's Corner

This is the time of year when voice students at uOttawa's School of Music present their graduation recitals. These can usually be enjoyed in person or by livestreaming. Information on these recitals can be found at <https://arts.uottawa.ca/live/music-events> and uOttawa Covid guidelines can be found at <https://cst.uottawa.ca/en/csa>.

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For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition contact Lesley Robinson at 613-769-5957 or consult www.ncos.ca

OperOttawa's Handel's *Messiah* (continued)

tag-team style by baritones Lukus Uhlman, Dorian De Luca and Norman E. Brown, with virtuoso trumpet solo by Peter Crouch. Conductor Brown took artistic license to adapt many of the tempi to better suit the texts, using longer pauses to create tension and occasionally having the chorus sing a capella.

At the end after the final "Amen" chorus, even before the echo died away the entire audience was on its feet with thunderous applause. The cast enjoyed a good 5 minutes of well deserved ovation.

Next for OperOttawa is the world premiere opera "What is love?" by composer Jack Hui Litster (who wrote "The Day You Were Born" in 2021) scheduled to be produced by OperOttawa) on Sunday June 19, 2022 at 2:30 pm at First Baptist Church.

OperOttawa
presents
The World Premiere of
"WHAT IS LOVE"
based on the poetry of Kahlil Gibran

	Composed by Jack Hui Litster		with Frédéric Lacroix, piano String Quintet Dancers Chorus
	and Erinne-Colleen Laurin Carole Portelance Alexander Cappellazzo Norman E. Brown		
	and Patricia Beckett Jean-E Hudson Maria Delaney Victor Toma		

Sunday June 19 @ 2:30 pm
First Baptist Church
Tickets \$35
Available from Cast Members, EventBrite or at the Door

Lights, Camera, Action

Setting the Scene for Opera on Stage and Screen

An NCOS Zoom Presentation by Lesley Robinson

Why do we want to see the same opera over and over again? Every opera production is unique—different singers, musicians and conductors can subtly change a production. Even individual performances are unique. The subtleties of performances and the engagement of the audience makes the experience unique on any given day.

A new production may be set traditionally in terms of historical period or location, or the setting may be changed or updated. We might wonder about the point of making such changes. Resetting a story can highlight universal themes or emotions. It can help modern audiences to gain an appreciation for the relevance of themes in our day and age. A change of setting can highlight aspects of the story that may not be immediately obvious, inviting the audience to rethink something they thought they knew so well.

What if an opera is made into a film? What does that offer that you don't see in the opera house? Even a film of a staged performance changes the game. The modern Live in HD presentations are totally unlike the simulcasts of the 70s and 80s. Close-ups require enhanced acting and good wigs! There are two different approaches to filming an opera. You can film a stage performance for release on DVD, or you can make a film to be released in the cinema. Film allows for easy scene changes and can increase realism—outside scenes can be filmed outside. A film set can easily represent a field, a palace, a church or a city street. Alternatively, film can enhance the fantasy aspect of a setting. It makes special effects a breeze.

Let's look at some well-known operas for examples of how differently you can look at the same material. Here are two totally different versions of the overture of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Both of these are made by filmmakers rather than opera producers, but their approach is different. Both were released for the cinema and were first presented at film festivals.



The first is Ingmar Bergman's 1975 film (first shown at the Cannes Film Festival, but not entered into competition.) Bergman said that it was not with a realistic cinematic depiction of a fairy-tale world, but rather with a realistic depiction of a theatrical event, itself portraying a fairy-tale world. We see an amazingly diverse audience listening intently to the overture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufQxByt7dNM>



Kenneth Branagh's 2006 film was a part of the celebrations for the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth and was presented at the Toronto International Film Festival. It was set during World War I, directed by Branagh, with an English libretto, translated by Stephen Fry. Branagh, who knows little about music or opera, consulted with conductor James Conlon for the casting. René Pape sings the role of Sarastro, but the rest of the cast are little known singers who looked the part. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPLf3BBBBH8>

Lights, Camera, Action (continued)



The next example of contrasting approaches is the opening scene of *Rigoletto*. The 1979 film was shot on location in Mantua. It is a traditional setting. (The opera was adapted from a Victor Hugo play called *Le roi s'amuse*. The king in question was François I, a contemporary of Henry VIII, so *Rigoletto* traditionally has a sixteenth century setting.) The Duke of Mantua, Luciano Pavarotti, sings “Questa o quella”. Music is provided by the Vienna Philharmonic under the direction of Riccardo Chailly.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pcoq8NOwHX8&t=27s>



The contrasting version is a stage performance from Dresden featuring Juan Diego Florez. The set for the opening scene is a black marble staircase, creating a sinister and decadent atmosphere. The costumes are somewhat bizarre, with a hint of bestiality.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj1cmYKTGHM&t=3341s>



Historical pieces may be set in the relevant historical period, but sometimes in the period of the composer. This can highlight the attitude of the composer or his audience to the subject matter. John Fulljames’s 2013 production of Rossini’s *La donna del Lago* from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden is a brilliant example of this. The piece is essentially a work of historical fiction about King James V of Scotland (father of Mary, Queen of Scots) who was known to have gone out into the country in disguise and to have had many dalliances, resulting in more than half a dozen illegitimate children. The opera is based on a narrative poem by Sir Walter Scott, written in 1810. The opera was written in 1819, so Scott and Rossini were contemporaries. This version of the opera is set partly in their time. It deals with looking back at Scottish history. Scott and Rossini shared an interest in the conflict of love and duty, a fascination with nationalism and how the present connects to the past. The production is an imagined meeting of the Celtic Society of Edinburgh which really exists. Scott and Rossini are present, acting as stage managers to tell the story. The set depicts a wood panelled room with a painting of the Highlands as a backdrop and artifacts of Scottish history in glass cases.



Lights, Camera, Action (continued)



Here are two contrasting productions of Richard Strauss's *Salome*. We compared the original biblical setting of the 1975 made for TV film starring Teresa Stratas, with the 2010 Royal Opera House version featuring Malin Byström. The ROH version is set in a debauched palace in Nazi Germany, which chillingly highlights the sordid decadence of the story. It is also notable that in 1933 Strauss was appointed to some prestigious positions in Nazi Germany including Principal Conductor of the Bayreuth Festival, a position vacated by Arturo Toscanini who resigned in protest against the Nazi Party. The role of Salome is sung by the German soprano Nadja Michael.

We compared the scene where Salome voices her desire to kiss the mouth of John the Baptist with the final, gruesome scene where she fulfills this desire with his severed head. The whole film is available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJ1kHi1HjQE&t=209s> and there is a trailer of the ROH version at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNjdMe8dto4>.



Lights, Camera, Action (continued)



To end on something with a happy ending, we looked at two versions of Handel's *Rodelinda*. The story is set in the seventh century, but the source material Handel used was written shortly before he composed the opera. The 2011 Met version is set in the time of Handel. Andreas Scholl sings the role of Bertarido, the usurped King of Lombardy who is believed dead, but returns in disguise to find his wife Rodelinda. Here he is singing the aria

“Dove Sei, amato bene”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv46kx0sida>



The 1998 Glyndebourne production is set in the silent film era. The set and costumes are monochromatic and the actions are exaggerated like those of silent actors. The dastardly villain all but ties Rodelinda to the railway tracks to get his evil way with her! The duet "Io t'abbraccio" is from the end of act 2. The husband and wife have just been reunited, but he remains in danger, having revealed himself to save her honour. Andreas Scholl is again Bertarido with Anna Caterina Antonacci as Rodelinda. The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment is conducted by William Christie.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jmDAvJvFa4>

A Look at Steven Spielberg's New Film of West Side Story

By Lesley Robinson

**“It’s not an opera. It's a work on its way toward being one”
Leonard Bernstein on West Side Story**

West Side Story premiered on Broadway in 1957 with the original film version following in 1961. When composer Leonard Bernstein first conducted a recording in 1984, he said "I say it is not an opera. It's a work on its way toward being one. Some parts are operatic, but it isn't one." Yet the fact that it was an audio recording opened up new opportunities for the casting of opera singers. On stage and screen it was dreadfully difficult to cast. The actors had to be able to sing, dance and act whilst looking like they were just 17 years old. The audio recording enabled the casting of mature voices. Bernstein was particularly happy with the casting of soprano Kiri Te Kanawa. He envisaged Maria as a very mature 17 year-old and Dame Kiri (then 40) had the voice he had dreamed of for the character. The biggest problem was tenor José Carreras's Spanish accent in the Anglo role of Tony!

The most operatic feature of Steven Spielberg's new film is the music, played by the New York Philharmonic and conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, who knows a thing or two about opera. The crisp, atmospheric score includes original orchestration by Bernstein. The film was nominated for seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director (Spielberg), but it only won one—Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role which went to Ariana DeBose (currently aged 31) for her role as Anita. Rita Moreno won the same award in 1962 for her portrayal of Anita. She too was 31 at the time and now aged 90, she was given a sentimental and somewhat contrived role in Spielberg's film. She played the role of “Valentina”, a newly invented character, the widow of Doc, the wise old drugstore owner who dispenses sage advice to the young Jets in the original story. (The “operatic” Anita was Tatiana Troyanos, aged 46 in 1984.) The song “Somewhere” was a fantasy sequence in the original stage production, but Spielberg gives it to Rita Moreno who performs it more in the style of Rex Harrison than of mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne who performed “Somewhere” as an offstage voice in the 1984 “operatic” version. Incidentally, the 1961 version of the film was nominated for 11 Oscars and won ten, including Best Picture and Best Director, but this may say more about the evolution of Hollywood than about the relative merits of the two versions. The 1962 Academy Award for Best Music, Scoring of a Musical Picture went to four recipients: Saul Chaplin, Johnny Green, Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal, none of whom was known for classical music.

Although it is not an opera, West Side Story does have another operatic connection—it is set in the degenerating neighbourhood of Manhattan that was demolished in the late 1950s to make way for the building of the Lincoln Center, including the Metropolitan Opera House.

No, the Spielberg film is not opera, but it nevertheless made for an engrossing afternoon's entertainment.

NCOS Zoom Event - Aleko by Sergei Rachmaninoff by Lesley Robinson

For our April Zoom event we watched a complete one act opera on DVD - *Aleko* by Sergei Rachmaninoff. *Aleko* was the first of three operas by Rachmaninoff, written in 1892 as a graduation piece for the Moscow Conservatory. The opera is based (as is so often the case for Russian operas) on a narrative poem by Pushkin entitled *The Gypsies* (Цыганы - Tsygany in Russian). In fact at least 18 operas and several ballets have been based on this story.



Aleko is a Russian who has given up his life to join a band of Gypsies. The opera opens with the gypsies singing about their life. An old man tells of his long ago love story. He was deserted by the woman he loved who ran off with her lover and left him to raise their daughter Zemfira alone. Aleko and Zemfira now live together and Aleko is outraged that the old man took no revenge on her mother. In fact she has tired of Aleko and his possessiveness and is now interested in a young Gypsy. When Aleko finds them together he kills both of them in a jealous rage. The Gypsies shun Aleko for what he has done and he becomes an outcast from their society. The Old Man tells him to leave the Gypsies because his understanding of law, freedom and order is different from theirs. He has rejected “civilization” for freedom, but in fact it is clear that it is the Gypsies whose life is more morally proper.

Here is a translation from Pushkin’s poem:

Leave us, proud man!
 We are wild and have no laws
 We do not torture or execute—
 We have no need of blood or moans –
 But we don't want to live with a murderer...
 You are not born for the savage life
 You want freedom only for yourself.

The film is a Soviet era production (1986) with the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Dimitri Kitayenko. Bass Yevgeny Nesterenko sings the title role. He won a number of Soviet awards and had an international career featuring mostly, but not exclusively Russian repertoire, including many performances in Vienna where he died in 2021 at the age of 83 from COVID-19. Soprano Svetlana Volkova who sang the role of Zemfira is still performing in Russia. Russian bass Vladimir Matorin sang the role of the old gypsy. Of these, only the Nesterenko actually appears. Other roles are taken by actors and dubbed. Matorin is now 73 years old, so when the film was made he was under 40. The cast includes members of Gypsy folk ensembles, adding to the production’s authenticity.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908)

By Mark Robinson

For good reasons, we are boycotting Putin's Russia from our lives. I hope you agree we should not boycott Russia. I recently read two books about Rimsky-Korsakov. One was his autobiography "My Musical Life" and the other written by his granddaughter Tatiana Rimsky-Korsakov entitled "Letters to his Family and Friends". The two books are complimentary and describe how Rimsky-Korsakov's life evolves along with his private thoughts to his wife, his travel, his annual trip to the summer cottage and his living conditions. He started life by training to be a naval officer and completed a three-year voyage to North and South America. He visited Niagara Falls from the Canadian side (of course). RK had no formal music training and yet became a great orchestrator, often finishing or orchestrating other composers works. He met frequently with all the Russian composers of the day. He also went to Paris several times to meet with the French composers of the day. He wrote 15 operas mostly based on Russian folk stories, which are rarely produced despite beautiful tunes and lovely orchestral colour. RK was the principal teacher of Igor Stravinsky, composer of multiple ballets including *The Rite of Spring*. A fascinating read.



CBC Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

April 16/22 ELEKTRA (R. Strauss) Conductor: Donald Runnicles; Nina Stemme (Elektra), Lise Davidsen (Chrysothemis), Michaela Schuster (Klytämnestra), Greer Grimsley (Orest), Stefan Vinke (Aegisth)

April 23/22 The Gershwins' PORGY AND BESS Conductor: David Robertson; Eric Owens (Porgy), Angel Blue (Bess), Alfred Walker (Crown), Frederick Ballentine (Sportin' Life), Latonia Moore (Serena), Janai Brugger (Clara), Denyce Graves (Maria), Ryan Speedo Green (Jake). Performance from Fall 2021

April 30/22 MADAMA BUTTERFLY (Puccini) Conductor: Alexander Soddy; Eleonora Buratto (Cio-Cio-San), Brian Jagde (Pinkerton), Elizabeth DeShong (Suzuki), David Bizic (Sharpless)

May 7/22 TURANDOT (Puccini) Conductor: Marco Armiliato; Anna Netrebko (Turandot), Yonghoon Lee (Calàf), Michelle Bradley (Liù), Ferruccio Furlanetto (Timur)

May 14/22 DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG (Wagner) Conductor: Antonio Pappano; Michael Volle (Hans Sachs), Klaus Florian Vogt (Walther Von Stolzing), Lise Davidsen (Eva), Johannes Martin Kränzle (Beckmesser), Georg Zeppenfeld (Pogner), Paul Appleby (David), Claudia Mahnke (Magdalene), Martin Gantner (Kothner), Alexander Tsymbalyuk (Nightwatchman). Performance from Fall 2021

May 21/22 LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR (Donizetti) Conductor: Riccardo Frizza; Nadine Sierra (Lucia), Javier Camarena (Edgardo), Artur Ruciński (Enrico), Matthew Rose (Raimondo)

May 28/22 AKHNATEN (Philip Glass) Conductor: Karen Kamensek; Anthony Roth Costanzo (Akhnaten), Rihab Chaieb (Nefertiti), Zachary James (Amenhotep III), Disella Lárusdóttir (Queen Tye), Aaron Blake (High Priest of Amon), Richard Bernstein (Aye), Will Liverman (Horemhab)

June 4/22 HAMLET (Brett Dean) – Libretto by Matthew Jocelyn. Conductor: Nicholas Carter; Allan Clayton (Hamlet), Brenda Rae (Ophelia), Rod Gilfry (Claudius), Sarah Connolly (Gertrude), William Burden (Polonius), Jacques Imbrailo (Horatio), John Tomlinson (Ghost), David Butt Philip (Laertes), Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen (Rosencrantz), Christopher Lowrey (Guildenstern)

June 11/22 THE RAKE'S PROGRESS (Stravinsky) Conductor: Susanna Mälkki; Ben Bliss (Tom Rakewell), Golda Schultz (Anne Trulove), Christian Van Horn (Nick Shadow), Alice Coote (Baba the Turk), James Creswell (Trulove)