



**A Live Performance in Ottawa!**  
**OperOttawa's presentation of George Frideric Handel's *Acis and Galatea***  
**by Lesley Robinson**

It was a thrill to attend a live operatic performance in Ottawa after so many months of virtual events. The presentation was held at the First Baptist Church on Laurier at Elgin. The audience was limited to 50 people, all wearing masks throughout and sitting in separated pews for social distancing.

The work was first performed in 1718 at Cannons in Edgware (northwest London) which was the seat of the Duke of Chandos, Handel's patron at the time. Handel lived at the estate which is now home to the North London Collegiate School, which I attended as a girl. The original palace was demolished and was replaced by a more modest building, known to me as "the old house", but it is still possible to visit the local parish church, St Lawrence's, where you can see the organ played by Handel during his time there.

*Acis and Galatea* is a work that has been adapted over the years and has appeared in a number of versions. It is not known exactly how it was originally performed - staged, semi-staged or as a concert piece, but it was summer and it is likely that it was performed outside in the gardens.

OperOttawa's production was largely a concert-style performance with the principals performing at music stands. Nevertheless, they were costumed, with colourful wigs and make-up. The chorus performed in masks and the musicians were pianist Frédéric Lacroix and Gerard Nieuwenhuis on recorder. The cast was as follows:

Acis - Alexander Cappellazzo (tenor);

Galatea - Erinne-Colleen Laurin (soprano)

Damon - Iain Macpherson (tenor);

Polyphemus - Norman E. Brown (bass-baritone)

Solo Voice - Patricia Beckett (soprano)



l-r: Erinne-Colleen Laurin, Alexander Cappellazzo,  
Iain Macpherson, Norman E. Brown

The music and singing were delightful and the short running time of an hour and 25 minutes felt all too short.

We look forward to more live performances in Ottawa in the not-too-distant future.

## President's Message – January 2022

Dear Members,

I wish everyone an excellent 2022 and selfishly I hope that we shall meet face-to-face to discuss and watch opera together. My wife and I were comfortable going to the Cineplex to watch the Met Live in HD. We saw three marvellous productions: *Boris Godunov*, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* and *Eurydice*. The latter two are impressive new works and very different from each other. One of the stars of *Eurydice* was Josh Hopkins! It is great to see his career flourishing. Given our current situation, we shall continue to organize Zoom meetings. In December the Board met and started planning for the next Brian Law Opera Competition. We look forward to that. In the interim my thanks go to all those who help with the newsletter, our website and our Zooms.

**Mark Robinson**

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## Editor's Message

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed articles or reviews to the newsletter in 2021 and to everyone involved in the preparation and distribution of the digital and printed versions.

Remember, any member or guest is welcome to submit anything related to opera. Your opinion and experiences are of interest to our readers - you do not have to be an expert.

**David Williams**

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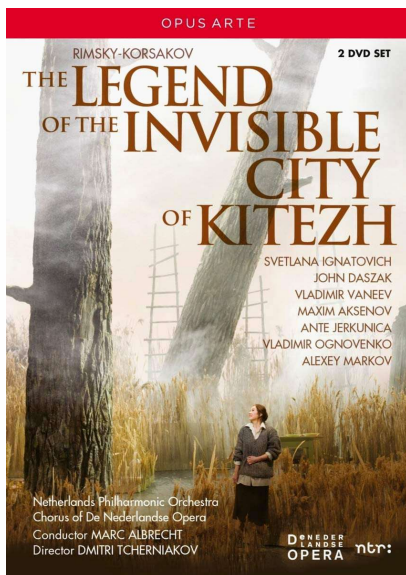
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**For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition contact Lesley Robinson at 613-769-5957 or consult [www.ncos.ca](http://www.ncos.ca)**

## The Russians Are Coming

An NCOS Zoom Event, Presented by Murray Kitts

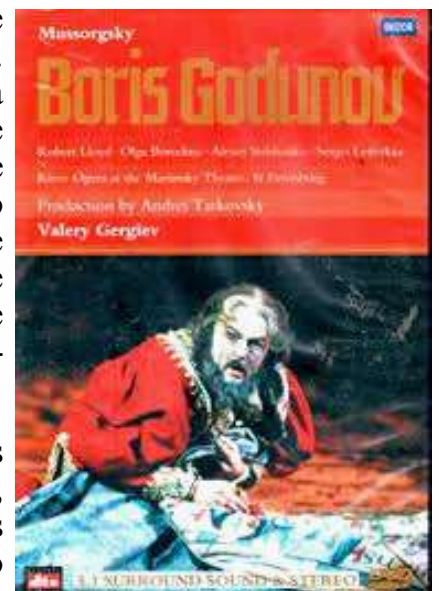
The 1960s were a terrible time in many ways. The Cuban Missile Crisis was followed by assassinations, there was the Six Day War and the Vietnam War, yet amidst it all, Expo 67 was a tremendous success. The Canadian Encyclopedia is a source of information on the astonishing festival that celebrated Canada's Centennial. The Bolshoi Opera was just a small part of what was on offer. Murray saw all of the Russian productions that were presented in Montreal. He bought tickets, figuring he would never go to Russia and this was a rare treat to see in North America.



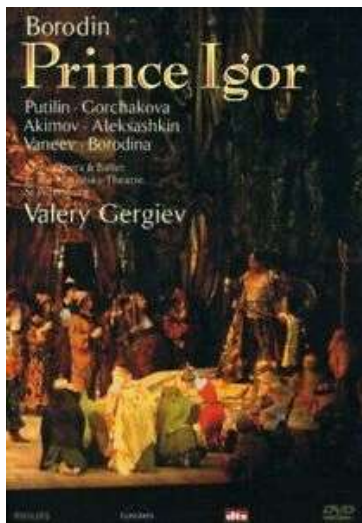
The performances presented are from DVDs of later productions of the same operas that were presented by the Bolshoi Opera in Montreal. The first selected excerpt is from an opera that, although a big mystery to Canadian audiences, is well known in Russia. It is Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov's *The Legend of The Invisible City of Kitezh*. In the first act we meet Fevronia, sung here by Svetlana Ignatovitch, accompanied by the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Marc Albrecht in 2012. Fevronia's aria is a lovely melody, superbly sung. Fevronia was made a saint by the Russian Church. Rimsky-Korsakov's operas are like fairy tales for adults. He wrote 15 of them. Many of them are only known for orchestral interludes such as "Flight of the Bumblebee", but they are all extraordinary. Rimsky-Korsakov was a master of orchestration. He was a naval cadet and was at sea for three years, but all the time was interested in music. He submitted samples of his work to the conservatory and they were so impressed with him that he was appointed professor of orchestration, even though he had no formal training for this. Nevertheless, he proved worthy of the appointment and many great Russian composers studied under him.

Modest Mussorgsky wrote one of the greatest operas ever, but there was reluctance to produce it because there were no female parts in it. Mussorgsky was obliged to do something about it and he wrote a section that had not been in the earlier version of the opera. The excerpt chosen is from *Boris Godunov*. Grigori is the pretender to the Russian throne. A scheming Jesuit convinces a Polish princess to marry the pretender to convert Russia to Roman Catholicism. The scene is from Act 3 of a 1990 production by the Kirov Opera from the Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, conducted by Valery Gergiev. The role of Marina is sung by Olga Borodina and Dmitri by Alexei Steblianko.

In the production that Murray saw in Montreal, the entire set was brought by ship from Russia. The selected scene had a huge staircase, a fountain and a great statue of a stag. The set was amazing. There has been much criticism of the changes made by Rimsky-Korsakov to Mussorgsky's work, but the whole thing is a marvel.



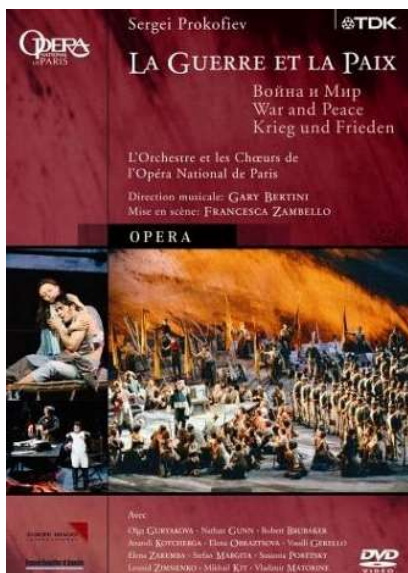
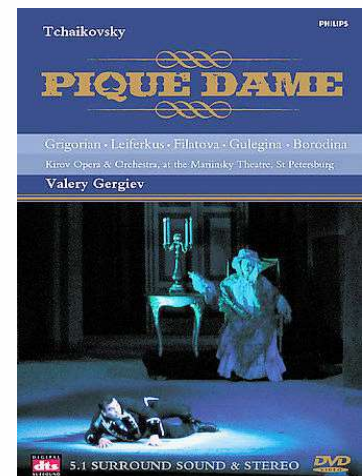
## The Russians Are Coming (continued)



Alexander Borodin was a chemist by training. He wrote about chemistry and wrote music in his spare time. He wrote an opera full of patriotism. Russian opera incorporated ballet, thanks to the very large ballet companies that existed. The orchestration of *Prince Igor* was completed after Borodin's death by Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov. The scene selected was the exciting Polovtsian Dances from a 1998 production from the Mariinsky Theatre, with the Kirov Orchestra,

Opera Chorus and Ballet, once again conducted by Valery Gergiev. In Montreal the sets and costumes were incredible. The only things the Russians didn't bring with them were the horses! Specially trained Canadian horses had to fill in. At that time the Place des Arts was undergoing a complete renovation. There was so much scenery and props that some had to be left outside and was rained on.

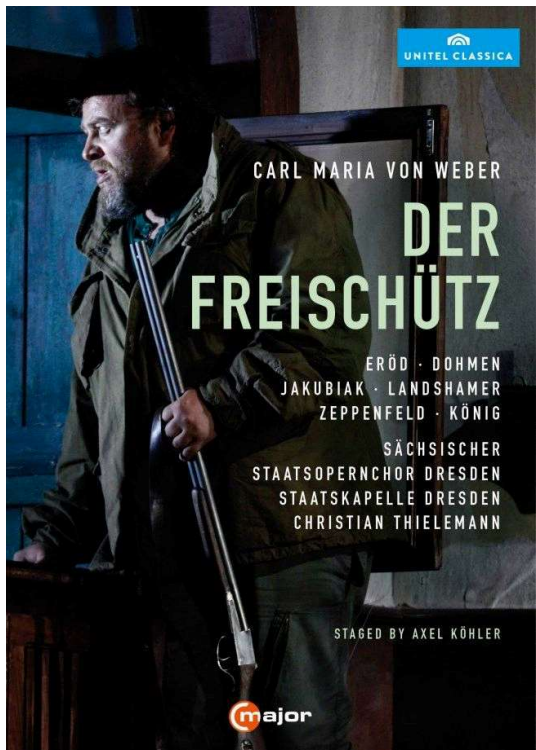
The next excerpt was a scene from Tchaikovsky. Western audiences might have expected to see *Evgeny Onegin* as the Tchaikovsky offering, but in fact *Onegin* was not a favourite of Russian audiences because it was thought that it did not follow Pushkin's work closely enough. Instead the Russians favoured *The Queen of Spades*. The excerpt selected is from a scene of an evening's entertainment. Tchaikovsky loved Mozart and his influence is clearly heard in the music. The DVD is from the 1992 Mariinsky Theatre production, of course conducted by Valery Gergiev. The duet is sung by Elena Mintova and Olga Borodina.



In *Prince Igor*, the threat to Russia came from the East, but in the final excerpt from *War and Peace* by Sergei Prokofiev, based on Tolstoy's novel, the threat was from the West. Napoleon went through Europe defeating army after army and now, at the gates of Moscow, a horrible battle has been fought. At the battle of Borodino there was a tremendous number of casualties. The scene selected involves the patriotism of the Russians in a seemingly impossible position. In this scene, Field Marshal Mikhail Koutouzov, sung by Anatoli Kotcherga, who had lost an eye in an earlier battle, has been given the power by the Tsar to make a final decision on what's to be done. With the French at the gates of Moscow, his advisors have told him he must fight and he has to make a really extraordinary decision. The recording is of a 2000 production at the Opéra National de Paris, conducted by Gary Bertini, with stage direction by Francesca Zambello. This was a moving conclusion to the afternoon. Thank you to Murray for sharing such wonderful memories.

## Ghosts, Ghouls and Witches, A Halloween Treat for Opera Lovers

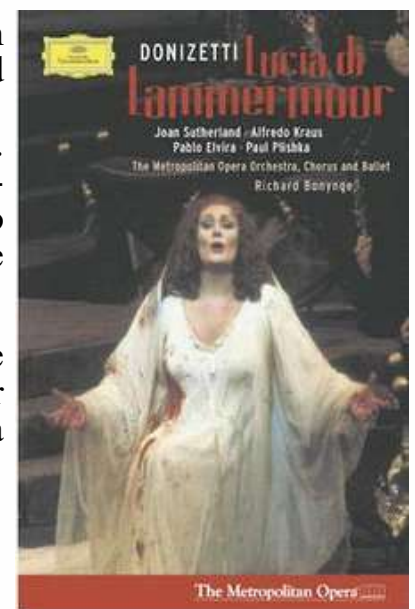
An NCOS Zoom Event Presented by Murray Kitts



The first opera we looked at was *Der Freischütz* by Carl Maria von Weber. This was a fairly recent recording from 2015. The plot involves a shooting competition. The day before the final match of the competition, our hero Max is unsuccessful and if he fails on the final day he will lose the chance to claim Agatha as his bride. Although he knows he's getting into something very strange, Max turns to a man called Kaspar to use his connections with the supernatural to ensure that he will win, little knowing that it was Kaspar who had made him lose the pre-contest by using a guided bullet that could be obtained by selling one's soul to the devil. Kaspar lures Max to the Wolf's Glen outside the city where they meet with Samiel (another name for the Devil or Lucifer). Here is the surprising ending of *Der Freischütz*: The shooting tournament takes place. Kaspar is exultant. His plan is that Max will fire the cursed seventh bullet which will not go to the target he has chosen. Alas it will go to Agatha's heart and kill her. As a result Kaspar will be free of Samiel's power and Max will take Kaspar's place in the clutches of the Devil. Fortunately one of the spectators is a Holy Hermit who uses his strong spiritual powers to deflect the cursed bullet to kill the evil Kaspar. As a result Agatha and Max will be married, but only in a year's time as Max has had dealings with diabolical powers.

The next opera is more familiar. It is a classic recording at the Met from 1982. The singer is Joan Sutherland and it is conducted by her husband Richard Bonyngé. It is from Donizetti's great *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Lucia has planned to meet the man she loves, but he hasn't shown up. What grabs her attention is a fountain where a woman had been murdered by her lover and her body disposed of in the fountain. Every so often the ghost of this woman would appear. Lucia sings an aria at the fountain.

The ending of *Lucia di Lammermoor*: Lucia's account of the appearance of the ghost of a woman and her burial in the fountain by her former lover prefigures the terrible tragedy of the murder by a demented Lucia of the man she will be forced to marry and her subsequent death.



## Ghosts, Ghouls and Witches, A Halloween Treat for Opera Lovers (continued)



The next offering was by Gounod: *La nonne sanglante*. Gounod is better known for *Faust*, but *La nonne sanglante* is a very unusual story which has all kinds of opportunities to send shivers down your spine, especially as you will note through the make up artist's skills. This was ironically a production of the Opéra Comique in Paris under the direction of Laurence Equilbey in 2018. Rodolphe and Agnès decide to elope at night so that they can marry against parental wishes - a chancy business at best. The ghost of the bleeding nun appears at night to keep people away. Agnès dons a costume of the bleeding nun, but alas, Rodolphe mistakes the apparition for his beloved and swears eternal loyalty by the ring he gives her. The ghost happily accepts and binds him to her for life.

The ending of *La nonne sanglante*: A complication arises as the death of Rodolphe's brother in battle could release the pledge to The Nun. But there is a condition. The man who committed that murder must be killed first. Rodolphe learns to his horror that this same murderer was his own father. He attempts to escape from this terrible situation. Already his enemies are planning an ambush to kill him. His father overhears the details of this plot, deliberately disguises himself as his son, and is killed by the plotters. Through the intercession of the Nun, Rodolphe is released from his pledge to her and is united with Agnès—a happy ending in spite of everything.



The next opera is based on Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*. We were going to look at the banquet scene, but it isn't bloody enough. We looked instead at something you might not always see in a production of *Macbeth*. As a teenager I saw an Old Vic production of the play in Ottawa—it was what I asked for as a birthday gift. It was a first-rate production with Michael Redgrave and Flora Robson. It was a marvellous experience, so it is one of my favourites, both as a play and an opera. In the opera composers and librettists can add choruses. The witches set about inducing Macbeth's cooperation. He comes to find out what is going to happen and the news is not good... and of course the outcome was as they predicted, even though they told him that "No man of woman born shall harm Macbeth." Like all the things they told him, there were different interpretations. He is shown a long vision of his successors as king and told to beware of Macduff, who will kill him in battle.

This is the 1987 French film version shown at the Cannes Festival. In earlier versions of *Macbeth* there was a long ballet of the witches. In this you will notice that they skimmed on the costumes! Usually the witches may be dressed in rags, but this was a different production.

## Ghosts, Ghouls and Witches, A Halloween Treat for Opera Lovers (continued)



Our next selection is a little known early work by a composer whose house I have visited. He is actually buried in the house with his wife. This is an opera that has been performed recently. It is a 2019 production with lead singers Maria Teresa Leva and Leonardo Caimi along with the corps de ballet, orchestra and chorus of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, under the direction of Marco Angius. The opera is *Le villi* by Puccini. If you look up “Le Villi” it is just translated as “the Willis”. These are women who seek to wreak revenge on men who have deceived or have ruined the lives of women one way or another.

Roberto, the man in question, has been seduced by a courtesan, forgetting his love for Anna. That poor girl, broken hearted and deserted by her Roberto, dies alone. It is left to the Villi, the ghosts of girls who died for love, to avenge Anna’s death. Roberto returns to find that Anna is dead and that her ghost demands his punishment by the Villi who force him to dance with them until he dies from exhaustion.



And now for something completely different—suppose that you are a kid and you and your sister get into trouble with a witch who wants to take terrible revenge on you. In today’s final extract from Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel* the pair get out of this horrible fix. It stars three of the greatest female singers of the past century, Brigitte Fassbaender, Edita Gruberova and Sena Jurinac. The Vienna

Philharmonic and Choir are directed by Sir Georg Solti in 1981. It is a treasure.

## CBC Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

Jan 8/22 FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES (Terence Blanchard) Libretto by Kasi Lemmons. Conductor: Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Will Liverman (Charles), Angel Blue (Destiny/Loneliness/Greta), Latonia Moore (Billie)

Jan 15//22 LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (Mozart) Conductor: Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Ryan McKinny (Figaro), Lucy Crowe (Susanna), Golda Schultz (Countess Almaviva), Christian Gerhaher (Count Almaviva), Anna Stéphany (Cherubino), Elizabeth Bishop (Marcellina), Maurizio Muraro (Dr. Bartolo)

Jan 22/22 LA BOHÈME (Puccini) Conductor: Carlo Rizzi; Maria Agresta (Mimi), Charles Castronovo (Rodolfo), Gabriella Reyes (Musetta), Lucas Meachem (Marcello), Peter Kellner (Colline), Alexander Birch Elliott (Schaunard), Donald Maxwell (Benoit/Alcindoro)

Jan 29/22 RIGOLETTO (Verdi) Conductor: Daniele Rustioni; Quinn Kelsey (Rigoletto), Rosa Feola (Gilda), Piotr Beczala (The Duke of Mantua), Andrea Mastroni (Sparafucile), Varduhi Abrahamyan (Maddalena)

Feb 5/22 The Met's First Decade On the Air Highlights from historic Met broadcasts

Feb 12/22 REQUIEM (Verdi) Conductor: Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Ailyn Pérez, Elina Garanča, Matthew Polenzani, Eric Owens

Feb 19/22 BORIS GODUNOV (Mussorgsky) Sebastian Weigle; René Pape (Boris), David Butt Philip (Grigory), Ain Anger (Pimen), Maxim Paster (Shuisky), Alexey Markov (Shchelkalov), Stanislav Trofimov (Varlaam)

Feb 26/22 IPHIGÉNIE EN TAURIDE (Gluck) Conductor: Nathalie Stutzmann, Kate Lindsey (Iphigénie), Etienne Dupuis (Oreste), Ben Bliss (Pylade), Elchin Azizov (Thoas)

Mar 5/22 Listeners' Choice: Great Met Broadcasts Opera TBA

Mar 12/22 ARIADNE AUF NAXOS (R. Strauss) Conductor: Marek Janowski; Lise Davidsen (Ariadne), Brandon Jovanovich (Bacchus), Brenda Rae (Zerbinetta), Sean Michael Plumb (Harlequin), Isabel Leonard (Composer), Johannes Martin Kränzle (Music Master), Sir Thomas Allen (The Major-Domo)

Mar 19/22 RODELINDA (Handel) Conductor: Harry Bicket; Elza van den Heever (Rodelinda), Iestyn Davies (Bertarido), Paul Appleby (Grimoaldo), Jamie Barton (Eduige), Anthony Roth Costanzo (Unulfo), Adam Plachetka (Garibaldo)

Mar 26/22 DON CARLOS (Verdi) – Conductor: Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Matthew Polenzani (Don Carlos), Sonya Yoncheva (Élisabeth de Valois), Günther Groissböck (Philippe II), Elina Garanča (La Princesse Eboli), Etienne Dupuis (Rodrigue), John Relyea (Le grand Inquisiteur)

Apr 2/22 EUGENE ONEGIN (Tchaikovsky) Conductor: James Gaffigan; Igor Golovatenko (Onegin), Ailyn Pérez (Tatiana), Piotr Beczala (Lenski), Varduhi Abrahamyan (Olga), Ain Anger (Prince Gremin)

Apr 9/22 LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (Mozart) Conductor: Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Christian Van Horn (Figaro), Aida Garifullina (Susanna), Federica Lombardi (Countess Almaviva), Gerald Finley (Count Almaviva), Sasha Cooke (Cherubino), Elizabeth Bishop (Marcellina), Maurizio Muraro (Dr. Bartolo)

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