



Fall Lectures Announced

by Steve Zilles, Lecture Series Chair

The Fall Lecture Series of the San José Opera Guild begins early this year, in August rather than September. As always, the lectures will be on Tuesday morning from 10AM –Noon at the Addison-Penzak Jewish Community Center at 14855 Oka Road in Los Gatos. This is just off Lark Avenue near the interchange with CA Highway 17. There is one presentation that will be on a Friday.

The series begins on Tuesday, August 26th with a lecture by Simon Williams on *Norma* by Vincenzo Bellini. *Norma* is one of the great bel canto operas of the early 19th century and is famous for Norma's aria, "Casta Diva." The story is driven by the abandonment of Norma, a druidic priestess, by her Roman lover and his love for another priestess, all with beautiful melodies to carry the plot along. Simon Williams is a regular, well-loved lecturer and last spoke to us about *Mefistofele* last Fall.

The following week on Tuesday, September 2nd we have a lecture on Carlisle Floyd's opera *Susannah* that will be given by Derek Katz. Derek last spoke to us on *Rigoletto* in the fall of 2012. This time he brings us the San Francisco Opera premier of *Susannah*, a modern telling of the Biblical legend of Susanna and the Elders set in Appalachia. As in the Biblical story, Susannah refuses to be victimized but with an interesting twist in this telling. Many of you may have heard

the Reverend Blicht's aria, "Hear Me, O Lord," a favorite of bass-baritones. The opera was awarded the New York Music Critics Circle Award for Best New Opera in 1956.

In addition to the lectures, we have a presentation on West Bay Opera's 2014-15 Season. This presentation will be given on Friday, September 19th by José Luis Moscovich, General Director of WBO and will feature singers from their upcoming productions. The season includes *Il Trovatore*, *Abduction from the Seraglio* and *Faust*. Following the presentation, there will be a Friday, Shabbat Lunch which is open to seniors at a very reasonable cost.

The opera lectures resume on Tuesday, September 30th with a lecture on *Un Ballo in Maschera* by Giuseppe Verdi given by Jonathan Khuner. Also known as *The Masked Ball*, Verdi's opera is a fictionalization of the very real assassination of Gustav III of Sweden in 1792. In Verdi's version, it was misdirected love with a courtier's wife that led to the deed. Wonderful music and a gypsy fortune teller liven up the story. Jonathan last lectured to us on *Idomeneo* in 2008.

One lecture that I am really looking forward to is the lecture on *Partenope* by George Frideric Handel on Tuesday, October 7th by Bruce Lamott. Handel was known for his serious operas, but did compose operas that had comic twists,
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Career Updates

According to Opera Bobb, “Ailyn Perez (soprano, Merola 2005) is devastating as Violetta. I saw her yesterday [June 22, 2014] live from the Royal Opera in London along with her husband Stephen Costello. I have never gotten choked up at the end of *La Traviata* before (like every time at the end of *Butterfly*). This was a first for me. Perez was brilliant as an actress and brilliant as a singer.”

Julie Mackerov (soprano, OSJ 2001-2003) in Dec., 2013, Jay Weston wrote in the Huffington Post: “I treated myself to an evening at the opening of the L.A. Opera’s production of Richard Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman*, but all of the drama on that large stage was not planned. At 7:30 p.m., the curtain parted and the President/CEO of the opera, Christopher Koelsch, stepped onstage to announce that soprano Elisabeth Mathis, who was scheduled to make her company debut in the leading role of Senta, had suddenly become ‘indisposed’ and would be unable to perform. However, he said we were in for a treat because they were fortunate enough to have soprano Julie Mackerov to make her first appearance here as Senta.” Mackerov was the cover for the role. Weston went on to say, “At the conclusion, she received a standing ovation which lasted for all of five minutes from the normally jaded audience. A triumph, indeed.”

Recent engagements for Christopher Bengochea (tenor, OSJ 2005-2008) include a return to OSJ as B.F. Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* in February 2014. In March of 2014, he returned to Palm Beach Opera in the title role of *Tales of Hoffman*. During the summer of 2012, he was a featured soloist with the Midsummer Mozart Festival, performing the *Great Mass in C minor* and an aria from *Davide Penitente*. In 2011-12, Mr. Bengochea returned to OSJ to appear in the title role of Mozart’s *Idomeneo*, for which he re-

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operas such as *Semele* and *Xerxes*, which have been done by San Francisco opera in the past. *Partenope* (par-TEN-oh-pee) is very much in that tradition with wonderful music and a plot much like *Xerxes* that involves a jilted lover masquerading as a prince, one of four seeking the hand of Queen Partenope of Naples. Bruce Lamott last spoke to us on another of Handel’s operas, *Ariodonte*, in the summer of 2008.

Continuing in the comic vein, we have a lecture on Gioachino Rossini’s *La Cenerentola* given by Mary Ann Smart on Tuesday, October 28th. This opera is a very playful retelling of the story Cinderella with an evil father rather than mother and with the prince switching roles with his valet. Needless to say, this leads to a number of comic opportunities. It also has great beauty, such as, “Non Piu Mesta,” one of the best bel canto arias for a mezzo. Mary Ann has brought a number of bel canto operas to life for us, most recently *Lucrezia Borgia* in 2011 and *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* in 2012. ###

Career Updates

continued

ceived critical acclaim. Other OSJ roles recently performed included Stiva Oblonsky (*Anna Karenina*), Mario Cavaradossi (*Tosca*) Rodolfo (*La bohème*) and Rugero in the company premiere of *La Rondine*.

Sean Panikkar (tenor, Merola 2004) was praised by Willard Spiegelman in *Opera News* for the role of Nadir in Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers* at Forth Worth Opera. Spiegelman said Panikkar “has a thrilling voice--a tenor poised mid-way between lyric and heroic.” ###

Opera Travelers

Some short trips to witness some memorable opera presentations: from Benjamin Britten to Steve Stucky

By Mort Levine

Past summers always provided a good opportunity to enjoy new cutting edge opera or some never to be forgotten experiences of operas in the mainstream repertory. Nowadays, the diversity and mass of the Bay Area has convinced impresarios to bring together some fabulous performances close enough so that none of us need miss a night's sleep in our own beds.

As evidence, we can offer up two examples of the current summer crop. Alas, some of the offerings did indeed become a "cropper"--meaning they were well worth skipping. On that list we might place the recent *Streetcar Named Desire* by the Merola program and some of the easily forgotten offerings of the SF Opera's June season.

It only took going across the street from the big opera house to Davies Hall to see and hear the *Peter Grimes* produced by the San Francisco Symphony to chalk up a most remarkable opera experience. The magnificent Benjamin Britten score performed on stage by a very full orchestra was totally different from traditional pit orchestra performances.

Under the baton of Michael Tilson Thomas, the orchestra, augmented by a marvelous chorus, chilled the spines of the audience at the tale of a brutal fisherman and his victimized apprentices. The world-class vocalists, from a highly lauded English National Opera run, featured tenor Stuart Skelton in the title role and soprano Elza van den Heever as Ellen Orford who attempts to reform the violent Grimes. Important support came from Opera San José's Eugene Brancoveanu in the baritone role of Ned Keene, baritone Alan Opie as Balstrode, mezzo Ann Murray as Auntie and bass John Relyea as Mr. Swallow. Long time

Bay area favorite Kevin Langan added his deep bass as Hobson. Adam Larsen's video projections proved a dramatic and full-bodied kind of stage setting. The opera was the high point of a multi-concert event timed to Britten's 100th birthday celebration.

Across the bay, the annual trek north by the Ojai Festival orchestra, singers and instrumental soloists took over Hertz hall on the UC Berkeley campus for a week. This year the music director was pianist Jeremy Denk who teamed up with composer Steven Stucky to put the program together. There was a heavy influx from the east coast in the forces arrayed. The Knights are a large chamber orchestra. Brooklyn Rider is a chamber quartet, and Hudson Shad is a vocal quartet. In addition to their varied concert presentations, Denk and Stucky collaborated on an opera called *The Classical Style*. It had been germinating in Maestro Denk's mind for five years and was based on the book of the same name by famed musicologist Charles Rosen. Conducting the opera was Robert Spano.

Denk had asked himself this question: "If you made elements of music into musical characters, what kind of opera would that turn out to be?" Denk answers his own question this way: "This would be the first and last opera about musical analysis." In this comic opera we discover Beethoven (bass Ashraf Sewailam), Hayden (tenor Dominic Armstrong) and Mozart (soprano Jennifer Zetlan) as heavenly spirits who are concerned that their classical style is fading away. Each of the three double as characters in a riff from Don Giovanni. Three other characters drawn from musical chords are Dominant (sung by Rachel Callaway),

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Calendar

AUGUST 2 at 2 pm, Merola Opera Program will present *Don Giovanni* by Mozart at the Everett Middle School in San Francisco. San Francisco Opera Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$60/\$40/\$25/\$15 Students

AUGUST 16 at 7:30, Merola Opera Program will present the Merola Grand Finale at the War Memorial Opera House. San Francisco Opera Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$45/\$35/\$25/\$15 Students

AUGUST 26, Opera San José, previews of *Rigoletto* by Verdi. 12:00 - 1pm, MLK Library, San Jose, free

AUGUST 26, San José Opera Guild lecture, Simon Williams speaks on *Norma* by Bellini, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Tuesday - 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

SEPTEMBER 2, San José Opera Guild lecture, Derek Katz speaks on *Susannah* by Carlisle Floyd, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Tuesday - 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

SEPTEMBER 6, 7, 11, 14, 19, 21, Opera San José presents *Rigoletto* by Verdi. California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1 1/2 hours before the opera performance.

SEPTEMBER 6, Opera San José Season Opening Night Party, 11pm-12pm, \$50.00, Location to be determined, Tickets: 408-437-4450

SEPTEMBER 7, San Francisco Opera, Opera in the Park, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, 1:30pm, FREE

SEPTEMBER 19, NOTE: THIS IS A FRIDAY! San José Opera Guild lecture, West Bay Opera Season Overview with Director Jose Luis Moscovitch with singers, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Friday - 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10. Shabat luncheon after the program available to seniors who make reservations and pay in advance. More information closer to the date.

SEPTEMBER 30, San José Opera Guild lecture, Jonathan Khuner speaks on *Un Ballo in Maschera* by Verdi, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Tuesday - 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

OCTOBER 7, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Bruce Lamott speaks on *Partenope* by Handel, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Tuesday - 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

OCTOBER 9, West Bay Opera presents a free preview with piano of *Il Trovatore* by Verdi, 8pm, Avenidas, 450 Bryant Street, Palo Alto, for more information call 650 424-9999. Call to verify venue.

OCTOBER 11, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, 9:55 am, *Macbeth* by Verdi, The movie theaters have not been listed at the time of this publication but last year it was live at CineArts Oakridge 20, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and AMC Eastridge Mall 15, 274-2274. Simulcasts were \$24.00 for adults, \$22.00 for seniors. (The encores which occur later were \$22.00 for adults and \$20.00 for seniors. Prices may vary for the various HD operas.)

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OCTOBER 17,19,25,26, West Bay Opera presents *Il Trovatore* by Verdi at the Lucie Stern Theater, Palo Alto, Fridays at 8pm and Sundays at 2pm, \$70/65, Seniors \$58/52, Youth 45/40, Call 650 424-9999 or visit www.wbopera.org,

OCTOBER 18, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, 9:55am, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, a new production. See October 11 for more information.

OCTOBER 28, San José Opera Guild lecture, Mary Ann Smart speaks on *La Cenerentola* by Rossini, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Tuesday - 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

NOVEMBER 1,, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, 9:55am, *Carmen* by Bizet. See October 11 for more information. ###

Be Active!

If a current San José Opera Guild member is interested in serving on the San José Opera Guild board of directors or in volunteering for a committee, please contact Connie Zilles (connie@zilles.org) or Susan English (suenglish@yahoo.com) for more information.

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Tonic (bass Aubrey Allicock), and Sub Dominant (sung by mezzo Pamela Southwell). Added to the mix of musicological references is a character playing Charles Rosen, another named Snibblesworth, a UC Berkeley musicology student.

This spoof came close to falling on its face at times, packed as it was with musical in-jokes and arcane references to the world of the big university music schools. Stucky's music, with its frequent quotations from a varied palette of classical composers, kept the audience intrigued but always intellectually challenged.

As Denk predicted, we're not likely to see anything like it again, but it proved a worthwhile if quirky operatic experience. ###

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An Invitation to Join

Established in 1947, the San José Opera Guild was formed to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the operatic arts and to provide both volunteer and financial support to opera.

The Guild incorporated in September 1958 as a non-profit corporation under the laws of California. The original purpose of the Guild has not changed over the years since it's founding. Financial support of promising young artists in the community is a high priority for the Guild, which helps sponsor singers each year at Opera San José, and the Merola Opera Program, as well as other opera groups.

Throughout the year, the Guild sponsors lectures and previews at three different venues to coincide with the San Francisco Opera and Opera San José's seasons.

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