



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

August 2015

Fall Lectures Begin

by Steve Zilles, San Jose Opera Guild Lecture Series Chair

The Fall Lecture Series of the San Jose Opera Guild begins September 1st, Tuesday morning from 10am to 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. Beginning on September 9th, the lectures will be on Wednesdays, except for the West Bay Opera Friday program on September 25.

The series begins on Tuesday, September 1st (the only Tuesday) with a lecture on *Luisa Miller* by Giuseppe Verdi. *Luisa Miller* was written just a little before *Rigoletto* and although it begins with bel canto it finishes with the Verdi of *La Traviata*. The plot has love (frustrated), intrigue, threats, murder, parental conflict, aristocratic pressure and poison, all set to Verdi's beautiful music. The lecture will be given by Mary Ann Smart who has spoken to us on operas by Donizetti, Bellini, Rossini and Verdi, having last spoken to us on *La Cenerentola* in 2014.

The following week on Wednesday, September 9th we have a lecture on Stephen Sondheim's opera (Broadway musical) *Sweeney Todd* that will be given by Simon Williams. Simon is one of our most popular lecturers who last spoke to us on Bellini's *Norma* in 2014. *Sweeny Todd: The Demon Barber of*

Fleet Street is a big step away from *Norma*. A story of hidden identity, magisterial abuse, wicked revenge, razors, meat pies, and love (of course), it has been performed by opera companies throughout the United States, Canada, Japan, Germany, Israel, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Australia.

We are once again privileged to have a presentation on West Bay Opera's 2015-16 season. This season will have *Rigoletto* in October, *Eugene Onegin* in February and *Madama Butterfly* in May. This presentation will be given on Friday, September 25th by José Luis Moscovich, General Director of WBO and will feature singers from their upcoming productions. 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 Wednesday, September 30th with a lecture on *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti given by Alexandra Amati-Camperi. Poor Lucy (Lucia) is caught in the middle of a feud between her brother and her lover. Forced to marry against a vow of marriage to her lover, she goes mad (in one of the great scenes in opera). The survivors can only lament their

Please see Fall Lectures page 7

Career Updates

by Susan English

An impressive production of Berlioz's *The Trojans* opened Sunday afternoon, June 7, 2015 at the San Francisco Opera, with five hours "of sumptuous music, elaborate spectacle and epic vision," according to Joshua Kosman in the San Francisco Chronicle. He went on to add: "But the one that will stay with me longest and most piercingly was the performance of mezzo-soprano **Susan Graham** as Dido, the Carthaginian queen pulled back into love almost against her will and then betrayed by the demands of empire." Ms Graham was a Merolini in 1987, launching a career that was recognized following the opening of *The Trojans*, by her award of the San Francisco Opera Medal. This award was celebrated on the 25th anniversary of her debut with the company. Kosman noted: "she marked the occasion with one of the most powerful showings in her long history on the stage of the War Memorial Opera House — a tour de force of vibrant vocalism and searing theatricality."

Ms Graham was joined by numerous Merola alumni and current Adlers in this epic opera. Her Aeneas was sung by **Bryan Hymel** (Merola 2001), and **Philip Skinner** (Merola 1985) sang both King Priam and The Ghost of Priam. Pantheus was sung by **Philip Horst** (Merola 1999), and **René Barbera** (Merola 2008) sang Iopas. Current Adler Fellows also joined in the cast, including **Matthew Stump**, **Chong Wang**, **Nian Wang**, and **Anthony Reed**.

Kosman noted contributions of two of the Merola alumni: "Scattered throughout the afternoon were other contributions of nobility and grace...tenor René Barbera sang sweetly

in his set piece as Dido's court poet Iopas, and tenor Chong Wang, an Adler Fellow, brought down the house in Act 5 with a remarkably soulful and beautiful rendition of the homesick lament of a young sailor." He continued his praise of Ms Graham with: "Her robust vocal tone sounded practically unweathered, and as rich in color as ever. In duets with the bright-toned, tireless tenor Bryan Hymel, making his company debut as Aeneas, and with the lustrous mezzo-soprano **Sasha Cooke** as her sister Anna, Graham provided lush and impeccable partnership".

The San Francisco Classical Voice (SFCV) reviewed *The Trojans* noting that, "Hymel, a 2001 Merola alumnus, made one of the most impressive debuts of recent years, singing with poise, heroic ring, easy control over a big, cool-toned tenor, and far and away the best French in the cast."

The world premiere of *Two Women* at the San Francisco Opera also employed the talents of former and current Merolini. Giovanni was sung by **Mark Delavan** (Merola 1985) and current Adler **Zanda Svede** sang both Lena, and a country woman. **Edward Nelson**, also a current Adler, sang John Buckley. The San Francisco Chronicle reviewed the premiere noting, "Mark Delavan as Giovanni and Christian Van Horn as the local Wehrmacht functionary divided the low-lying villainy between them capably. Adler Fellow Zanda Svede sang alluringly as two different village women, and so did Edward Nelson as a wounded American soldier whose final reappearance as a miracu-

Please see Career Updates page 3

lous deus ex machina marks the screenplay's most risible moment. Pasquale Esposito, a charismatic and dulcet-toned singer, showed up at the end to deliver a splendid account of the Italian pop song ("La strada nel bosco"). Mr. Esposito is an alumnus of SJSU.

A relatively new opera company, Opera Parallèle, is a professional, nonprofit organization that develops and performs contemporary opera. According to its website, it "is the only organization in the Bay Area presenting fully cast and staged contemporary chamber operas exclusively." A recent production of *Heart of Darkness*, received rave reviews from the San Francisco Chronicle and San Francisco Classical Voice (SFCV). According to SFCV: "That the opera was cast with some of the best local singers contributed greatly to its success. Philip Skinner's haunted, terrifying Kurtz dominated the opera despite the brevity of the role. As Marlow, Isaiah Bell brought a sweetly beautiful tenor and a suitably innocent air. **Thomas Glenn** was a shifty, layered Harlequin. **Shawnette Sulker** made a strong impression in the tiny role of the archetypal River Woman. Heidi Moss's soprano has gained depth since I last heard her, and she was sad and eloquent as the fiancée. Baritone Aleksey Bogdanov was a hearty, funny boilermaker. Michael Belle, **Daniel Cilli**, and Jonathan Smucker ably filled the smaller roles." (Names in bold print are artist alumni of Merola and/or Opera San Jose.)

Over Father's Day weekend, Festival Opera created a summer concert in Walnut Creek to celebrate dads. Featured artists included two mentioned above: Shawnette Sulker and Daniel Cilli. In July, Festival Opera will present *Ariadne auf Naxos* with many of the cast who are OSJ former Resident Artists. They include:

Bettany Coffland as Dryad, **Kirk Eichelberger** (Merola 2000) as Music Master, **Adam Flow-ers** singing Officer, **Roberto Gomez** as both Wigmaker and Truffaldino, and Daniel Cilli singing Harlequin. **Robert Breault** (Merola 1990) performed Tenor/Bacchus in July at The Leshner Center of the Arts.

In April, Opera Santa Barbara presented *A Streetcar Named Desire* which was well received. The Independent's review noted: "This production (sets, costume, and staging) was developed in collaboration with San Francisco Opera's Merola program and the Kentucky Opera to introduce a new 'reduced' score that would make André Previn's masterful adaptation available to smaller opera companies. It succeeds admirably in that goal, and kept the Granada audience spellbound through three hours and two intermissions." Many Merola alumni participated in this production. **Jose Maria Condemni** (Adler 2001-2002) created this production for the Merola program and brought it to the Granada Theatre. He is the Artistic Director of Opera Santa Barbara. **Mark Morash** (Merola 1987) conducted, and **Casey Candebat** (Merola 2012, 2014) sang Mitch.

Le Nozze Di Figaro was presented by the San Francisco Opera this summer. Former Adler Fellows and Merola alumni **Philippe Sly** and **Bojan Knežević** were featured. Mr. Sly sang Figaro, while Mr. Knezevic sang Antonio. Also featured were current Adler Fellows. SFCV reviewed the opera and noted of those current Adlers: "**Maria Valdes** was a sweet Barbarina, plaintively singing her aria in Act IV. Bojan Knežević made the most of his small role as intemperate Antonio and got a lot of laughs as

CALENDAR

August

AUGUST 6, Thursday at 7:30 pm and Saturday August 8 at 2pm, *Don Pasquale*, Cowell Theater at Fort Mason, SF. \$40.00/\$60.00 Tickets available at S.F. Opera Box Office 415 864-3330 or at www.sfopera.com

AUGUST 23, Donizetti's *La Fille du Regiment* by the Vienna State Opera shown at Camera 3 Cinema, located at 288 S. Second Street in the heart of downtown San Jose: an exclusive series of first class pre-recorded operas from the legendary European opera houses in HD Digital Projection with Dolby Digital sound. There is an opera scheduled each month, with screenings Sunday mornings at 12 noon, and a repeat show Tuesday evening at 7:15pm. For ticket information, Cinema Cinemas.

AUGUST 27 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.

September

SEPTEMBER 1, Opera San Jose, preview of Opera San Jose's Fall production of *Tosca* by Puccini. 12:00 - 1pm, MLK Library, San Jose, Free Lecture

SEPTEMBER 1, Tuesday, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Mary Ann Smart will lecture on *Luisa Miller* by Giuseppe 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.

SEPTEMBER 9, Wednesday, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Simon Williams will lecture on *Sweeney Todd* by Stephen Sondheim, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Wednesday - 10 am to noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

SEPTEMBER 12, 13, 17, 20, 25, 27, Opera San Jose presents *Tosca* by Puccini California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1½ hours before the opera performance.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE SAN JOSE OPERA GUILD'S LECTURE SERIES NOW MEETS ON WEDNESDAYS, NO LONGER ON TUESDAYS, UNLESS THERE IS A CONFLICT.

SEPTEMBER 25, Friday, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Season Overview of West Bay Opera with WBO's General Director Jose Luis Moscovich and 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, Shabbat Lunch to follow. Information on signing up for the luncheon will be available closer to the event.

SEPTEMBER 27, Bellini's *Norma* presented by the Gran Teatro del Liceu, Barcelona, shown at Camera 3 Cinema, located at 288 S. Second Street in the heart of downtown San Jose. See August 23 for more information.

SEPTEMBER 30, Wednesday, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Alexandra Amati-Camperi will speak on *Lucia di Lammermoor*

Please see Calendar on page 5

Calendar from page 4

by Gaetano Donizetti, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Wednesday - 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

October

OCTOBER 3, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, 9:55 am, *Il Trovatore* by Verdi, Showing at Century 20 Oakridge, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and AMC Cupertino 252-5960. 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.)

OCTOBER 16, 18, 24, 25, West Bay Opera presents *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe 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 17, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, 9:55 am, *Otello* by Verdi, Showing at Century 20 Oakridge, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and AMC Cupertino 252-5960. Simulcasts were \$24.00 for adults, \$22.00 for seniors. See October 3rd for more information.

OCTOBER 25, Verdi's *Aida* from the Teatro alla Scala di Milano, shown at Camera 3 Cinema, located at 288 S. Second Street in the heart of downtown San Jose. See August 23 for more information.

OCTOBER 31, Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, 9 am, *Tannhauser* by Wagner, Showing at Century 20 Oakridge, 225-7340; Santana Row 6, 554-7010; and AMC Cupertino 252-5960. Simulcasts were \$24.00 for adults, \$22.00 for seniors. See October 3rd for more information.

November

NOVEMBER 4, Wednesday, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Derek Katz will speak on *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* by Richard Wagner, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. Wednesday - 10 am to noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.



Career Updates from page 3

he trimmed hedges in the background during Act III.” The review also considered Mr. Sly: “Philippe Sly is a prepossessing Figaro, with a rich sound and a physical grace that serve him well. He seemed comfortable in the role and completely at ease in his arias.” The opera was conducted by **Patrick Summers** who was a Merola Apprentice Coach in 1986-87, and is Artistic and Music Director at the Houston Grand Opera.

OPERA DISCOVERIES

Ariadne auf Walnut Creek: sometimes our feisty regional companies just let you down
by Mort Levine

We have some remarkable regional opera companies within easy reach. Most of the time they come forth with worthwhile endeavors, and occasionally they fall flat. One example emerged this summer when the Festival Opera of Walnut Creek's Leshner Performing Arts center presented *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hoffmansthal.

From its inception back before WWI, this opera has been problematic. It was born out of the pressures to deliver something after the success of *Der Rosenkavalier*. It took some incidental music written to accompany a Moliere play about the mythic Ariadne as act two, followed by the creation of a trivial back story as a prologue to be an act one. The two parts have only the most slender relationship. But the music satisfied Strauss and his librettist created another 18th century tale to tie up the package.

Ever since there have been noble efforts to give it a true operatic life. Staging it in the lavish home of "the richest man in Vienna" during the glory days of the empire often provides enough of the "weltschmerz" to satisfy opera buffs.

Festival Opera's artistic leader, Michael Morgan, working as both conductor and stage director, instead chose a contemporary setting for the first part (sung in slangy English) and a slightly more traditional second half on the Greek island where Ariadne is exiled (sung in German). Sets were deliberately simple platforms and hangings while costumes were pretty much limited to what the singers wore to get to the theatre.

Morgan, who has been the conductor of the East Bay-Oakland Symphony for the past quarter century, has guided Festival Opera since 1996. In his program notes he explains it this way: "I am setting the piece in the current day with minimal sets, allowing nothing to be taken away from the music...the piece is a feast for the ears...wonderful cast singing gorgeous music and fun for all."

We agree that the cast had much to recommend it. Many of the voices have been heard in other venues. Among the alumni of Opera San Jose, for example, were bass-baritone Kirk Eichelberger, tenors Roberto Perlas-Gomez and Adam Flowers, mezzo Bettany Coffland, soprano Sara Duchovnay and baritone Daniel Cilli. A remarkable coloratura soprano, Othalie Graham took on the challenging role of Ariadne. The sprightly Shawnette Sulker sang Zerbinetta with her high range soprano. Mezzo Catherine Martin reprised the Composer role she had sung earlier at the Glimmerglass production in upstate New York. Normally this role is a pants role which channels Strauss himself, but Morgan's current day staging recognizes that these days we do have female composers.

That Glimmerglass production provided a translation of the Hoffmansthal language which liberally inserted topical references to New York and New Jersey which made the first half even more implausible than the staging.

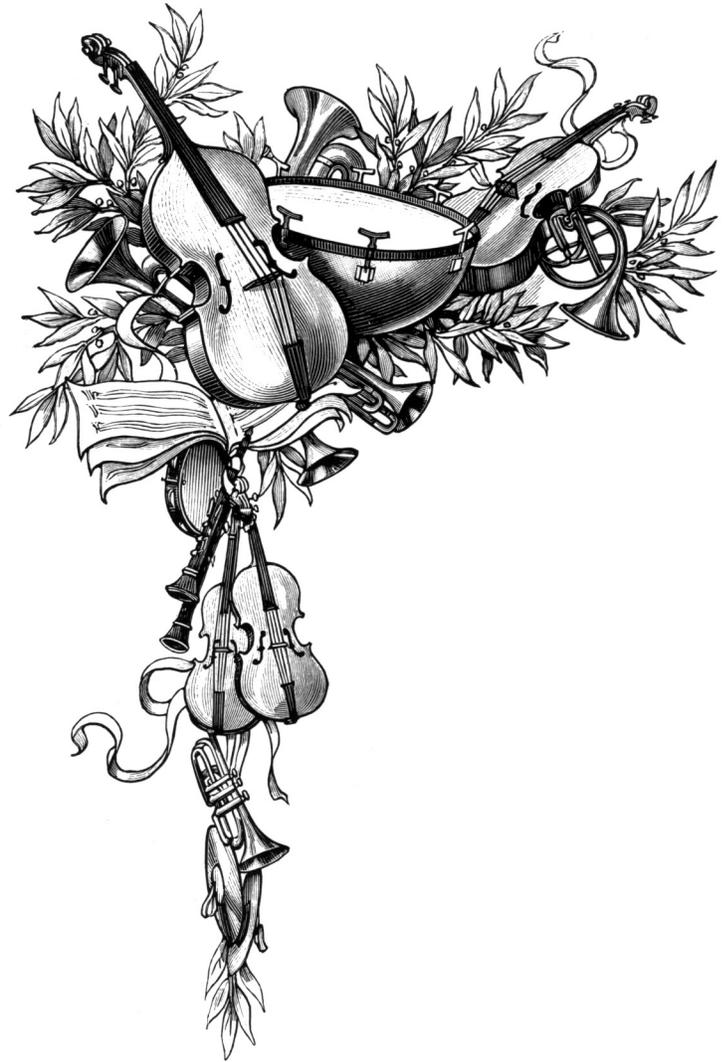
Audience members who hope for a total experience in an opera house or even just "fun for all" come away disappointed despite the fine singing and the elegant Straussian musical offerings. There were indeed some exalting ear-feast moments sprinkled among the three hours of a desultory presentation of an operatic mash-up that calls for much more than Festival opera was prepared to give it.

decisions. Alexandra last spoke to us about *Falstaff* in 2013. This time she will tell us about this great bel canto opera written at the height of Donizetti's career.

If you are a fan of Richard Wagner, we have a lecture on one of his greatest operas, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* on Wednesday November 4. This lecture will be given by Derek Katz, who lectured to us on *Susannah* last fall. This is Wagner's only comedy and it is a blatant parody of the critics that were hostile to his music; a parody transferred to Nuremberg in the 16th century. The figure of Hans Sachs is based on a real master singer and it is his love of music, his compassion and intelligence that drives this story of love and invention.

Edgar Allen Poe provides the source for the final two operas which we will review: *Usher House* by Gordon Getty and *La Chute de la Maison Usher* by Claude Debussy (and Robert Orledge). This classic gothic tale of an old castle, the last owner and his dying sister and the fatal mistake that ends all is given two different treatments, one in English, one in French. Our lecturer on Wednesday, December 2nd is Timothy Flynn who has given us a number of lectures on 19th century French operas and most recently talked to us on *Les Troyens* by Berlioz.

This fall season features many operas that we only see rarely and gives us an opportunity to become more familiar with these works.



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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 to coincide with the San Francisco Opera and Opera San José's seasons.

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