



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

November 2015

General Membership Meeting, Board of Directors Election and Lecture, December 2, 2015

Members of the San José Opera Guild will elect directors and officers at the general membership meeting to be held at 10:00 am, December 2, 2015 prior to our scheduled San Francisco Opera Guild Lecture.

Following the meeting, we will hear from Timothy Flynn. His topic is *La Chute de la Maison Usher* by Debussy and Getty, (based on the short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe).

The following slate was recommended by the Nominating Committee and approved by the Board of Directors. Serving on the Nominating Committee were Chair Diane Snow and her committee Corinne Elliott Carter, Susan English, Olga Nespole and Colette Siegel.

Directors

Corinne Elliott Carter
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Edna Herman
Ingrid Kallman
Diane Marlowe
Marshall Marlowe
Heidi Munzinger
Olga Nespole
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Diane Snow
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Career Updates

by Susan English

The summer opera festivals gave many Merola alums prominent roles to display their talents. Santa Fe Opera included many Merolini as principal artists this summer: **Alek Shrader** (2007), **Kevin Burdette** (1998-99), **Quinn Kelsey** (2002), **Brian Jadge** (2009), **Michaela Martens** (1992, 1994), and **Bill Burden** (1991). Also five Merolini were Apprentices at the Santa Fe Opera this summer: **Adelaide Boedecker** (2014), **Ben Werley** (2014), **Daryl Freedman** (2013), **Cooper Nolan** (2011), and **Kevin Thompson** (2010). **Sarah Mesko** (2012) debuted at Glimmerglass Opera this summer, and **Casey Candebat** (2012 and 2014), is an Opera Colorado Young Artist.

Of these Merolini, Baritone **Quinn Kelsey** garnered high praise, as Rigoletto in the Santa Fe production. His performance was reviewed by Charles Downey in *The Classical Review* as: “Baritone Quinn Kelsey made a sensational company debut in the title role, with a powerhouse voice that was also capable of luscious tenderness, as in the second act ensemble where he begs the court to let him see his abducted daughter, Gilda (‘Pietà, signori’). His was a brutish, hulking Rigoletto, with desperate anger roiling inside him, costumed in a large bowler hat capping his mop of curly hair and lopsided shoes accentuating his limp.” *The Santa Fe New Mexican* also praised his talents: “As a singer, he hit the ground running; his voice stood out from the crowd from his first lines in the opening party scene, and it kept on growing in vividness from there, assuming a luxurious, velvety quality by the show’s end.”

Another Merolini receiving great reviews in Santa Fe this summer was **Alek Shrader** as Tonio in *The Daughter of the Regiment*. James

Keller wrote in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*: “the reason to attend this one is tenor Alek Shrader, as the Tyrolean suitor Tonio. He is the only singer in the cast whose voice can be described as truly sonorous. His sound is distinctive, its upper register focused with tight intensity, and there is no overlooking that his is a serious instrument.”

Closer to home, West Edge Opera’s summer festival opened with *Lulu*. According to Joshua Kosman in the *San Francisco Chronicle* the company: “proved itself bold and resourceful, as the ‘Lulu’ that opened the company’s summer festival season Saturday night at the abandoned train station in West Oakland is a powerfully impressive undertaking from top to bottom — fearless in its dramatic imagination, arresting in its musical particulars.” Kosman went on to consider the performances of two Merolini in this production. “Tenor Alexander Boyer (Merola 2007, and OSJ 2008-13) sang with clarity and grace as Schön’s son Alwa, bringing out the sinuous beauty of Berg’s writing in this role.” Alwa’s father was sung by **Philip Skinner** (Merola 1985). Kosman noted: “Bass-baritone Philip Skinner remains one of the Bay Area’s most reliable operatic treasures in roles both large and small, and he brought robust vocal presence and theatrical force to the role of Lulu’s lover and victim Dr. Schön, and again to the part of Jack the Ripper who serves as her dark nemesis.”

Festival Opera’s summer production also featured former OSJ Resident Artists: **Daniel Cilli**, **Roberto Perlas Gomez**, and **Betany Coffland**. The *San Francisco Classi-*

Continued on page 3

cal Voice noted: “A sunniness and charm suffused the whole performance.”

Coming up for Festival Opera are West Coast Premieres of *Savitri* and *River of Light* to be performed at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center in mid-November. These two chamber operas will feature **Philip Skinner** as Death in *Savitri*, and **Daniel Cilli** (OSJ 2006-10) as Burton in *River of Light*.

San Francisco Opera’s fall season has begun, and includes many Merolini in prominent and supporting roles. The opening opera, *Luisa Miller*, featured **Leah Crocetto** (Merola 2008) in the title role. Joshua Kosman wrote of her performance on October 10, 2015: “Crocetto’s strongest suit has always been at the top of her range (in all senses). She delivers climactic high notes with a combination of precision and dramatic urgency that can be thrilling to witness, and the conclusion of her big showpiece at the beginning of Act 2 (‘Tu puniscimi, o Signore’) found her operating at full ferocity.” Also in this cast was Adler Fellow, **Daniel Sumegi** (Merola 1991) who sang Count Walter.

SFO’s *Lucia Di Lammermoor* featured four Merola alumni, one in the title role: **Nadine Sierra** (Adler 2011-12). Joshua Kosman reviewed this opera for the San Francisco Chronicle and noted of Ms Sierra: “A recent Adler Fellow whose career has burgeoned internationally, she stepped into the role as a late replacement for the originally scheduled Diana Damrau and delivered a full helping of musical elegance, marked by crystalline tone and deftly placed passagework.” Also in this production were **AJ Glueckert** (Merola 2012) as Normanno, **Chong Wang** (Merola 2014) as Arturo, and **Zanda Svede** (Merola 2013 – whom our Guild helped sponsor) as Alisa.

Livermore Valley Opera’s *Madama Butterfly* featured several former OSJ Resident Artists and Merolini. Cio-Cio was sung by **Marie Plette** (Merola 1992), and her faithful ser-

vant Suzuki was sung by **Michele Detwiler** (OSJ 2002-2007). **Alexander Boyer** (OSJ 2008-2013 and Merola 2007) sang Lt. Pinkerton, and bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** sang the US Consul



Marie Plette as Mimi in *La Bohème*
Merola at Montalvo 1992
Photo by Bob Shomler

Sharpless. Sarah Bobson reviewed the opera for *The Independent* raves about the singers. “...this production has a stellar cast. Marie Plette, a favorite with LVO audiences, sings *Butterfly*, a role she has done before, with that marvelous stentorian voice of hers that is almost too large for the Bankhead auditorium.” About Mr Boyer she writes: “[he] has a beautiful, large tenor voice, one that certainly doesn’t pale in the shadows next to Plette’s. He has a commanding stage presence as well. There is a twist to his character at the end of the opera that is not to be missed.” Ms Bobson concluded, “Mezzo-soprano Michele Detwiler, who sang in LVO’s last *Madama Butterfly*, was a warm-voiced Suzuki. Philip Skinner, as Pinkerton’s compatriot Sharpless, displayed a handsome, resonant voice.”

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New San Francisco Opera Center Adler Fellows Announced

Every year a small fraction of the participants in the summer Merola Opera Program for young singers are selected to be Adler Fellows. The Adler Fellowship is a multi-year performance-oriented residency offering advanced young artists intensive individual training, coaching and professional seminars, as well as a wide range of performance opportunities. For example, Zande Švēde, a mezzo-soprano Merola graduate sponsored in part by SJ Opera Guild and an Adler Fellow, has sung the roles of Tisbe (one of the evil sisters) in *Cenerentola* (last year) and Alisa in *Lucia Di Lammermoor* (this year) as well as other roles.

The 12 Adler Fellows for 2016 were announced on October 12th. They included soprano Julie Adams (Burbank, California); mezzo-sopranos Zanda Švēde (Valmiera, Latvia) and Nian Wang (Nanjing, China); baritone Edward Nelson (Santa Clarita, California); bass-baritone Matthew Stump (Goshen, Indiana) and bass Anthony Reed (Alexandria, Minnesota) returning for a second year (or in the case of Zanda Švēde a third year). In addition to these singers, two Apprentice Coaches, Ronny Michael Greenberg (Montreal, Canada) and Noah Lindquist (Brooklyn, New York), are also returning. The outgoing 2015 Adler Fellows are soprano Jacqueline Piccolino, who gave a recital at the Jewish Community Center jointly sponsored by the SJ Opera Guild in 2014, soprano Maria Valdes, tenor Chong Wang and baritone Efraín Solís.

The new Adler fellows are sopranos Amina Edris (Christchurch, New Zealand) and Toni Marie Palmertree (Fleetwood, Pennsylvania); tenor Pene Pati (Auckland, New Zealand); and bass-baritone Brad Walker (Lake Zurich, Illinois). Amina was Norina in last

summer's production of *Don Pasquale*. Toni Marie was Violetta in *La Traviata* and Elizabetta in *Don Carlo* at the Schwabcher Summer Concert. Brad was Beppe in the production of *Gianni Schicchi* also last summer. And, Pene Pati, a 2013 Merola graduate (along with Zande Švēde) is returning to become an Adler Fellow after a hiatus performing in the very successful SOLE MIO operatic/pop trio, a group of three tenors he formed in New Zealand together with his brother Amitai Pati and his cousin Moses Mackay (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sole_Mio). Pene is also setting another precedent for the Adler Program. Pene and Amina Edris are engaged to be married after he proposed to her on stage at "Christmas in the Vines" in New Zealand in December, 2014 making them the first couple to be Adler Fellows together.

The 2015 Adler Fellows' season culminates with a special year-end concert featuring the singers in an evening of opera scenes and arias with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. This year's concert, The Future Is Now: Adler Fellows Gala Concert takes place on Saturday, December 12, 2015 at 7:30 p.m. at San Francisco's Herbst Theatre. The 2016 Adler Fellows will participate in performances throughout 2016 and some will also be featured in the 2016 Schwabacher Debut Recital Series.✿



CALENDAR

November

November 4, Wednesday, 10 am to Noon, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Derek Katz will speak on *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* by Richard Wagner, at the JCC of Silicon Valley. Free to members. Non-members \$10.

November 14, 15, 19, 22, 24, 29, Opera San Jose presents *Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart, 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.

December

December 2, Wednesday, 10 am to Noon San Jose Opera Guild lecture and General Membership Meeting with election of officers. Timothy Flynn will speak on *La Chute de la Maison Usher* by Debussy and Getty, (based on the short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe), at the JCC of Silicon Valley. Free to members. Non-members \$10.

December 11, Friday at 7:30pm, **December 12, Saturday** at 12:00pm, and **December 13, Sunday** at 2:30pm, San Jose State University Opera Theatre presents *Orfeo ed Euridice* by Gluck in the Dance Theater, SPX 216

Save The Date !!!!! Saturday, April 23, 2016, Annual San Jose Opera Guild Champagne Brunch at La Rinconada in Los Gatos. Plan ahead for April!

Besides our wonderful live opera presentations at the San Francisco Opera and Opera San Jose we have the following simulcasts and movies presented in our area.

Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, Showing at Century 20 Oakridge;

Santana Row 6; and AMC Cupertino. Simulcasts are \$24.00 for adults, \$22.00 for seniors. For more information contact www.metopera.org/Season/In-Cinemas/?.

Saturday, November 21 — Berg's *Lulu* 9:55am
Encore December 2, 6:30pm

Saturday, December 12 — Mozart's *The Magic Flute* Holiday Encore, 9:55am

Saturday, January 16, 2016 — Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* 9:55am,
Encore January 20, 6:30pm

Saturday, January 30, 2016 — Puccini's Turandot 9:55am,
Encore February 3, 6:30pm

For the 2015-16 season 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 noon, and a repeat show Tuesday evening at 7:15pm. Tickets are \$18.50 and free validated parking is available in their attached covered parking garage. No discount cards are accepted for the special event. For ticket information, www.cameracinemas.com/camera3

November 22, & 24 — Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* — Opernhaus Zurich, Switzerland

December 13, & 15 — Mozart's *The Magic Flute* — Bregenzer Festspiele

December 20 — The Three Tenors Christmas

January 17, & 19 — Bizet's *Carmen* — Teatro Antico di Taormina, Italy ❀

OPERA DISCOVERIES

Does Opera San Jose have a few selected Broadway musicals in its future? And why would that be so bad?

By Mort Levine

Prior to the curtain raising on *Tosca* at Opera San Jose in September, General Director Larry Hancock was explaining the opera. With a few minutes remaining, he began ruminating on the gloomy financial future of the company. That didn't surprise the opera-goers. They've heard that from virtually every American opera company ad infinitum.

But then he said something that just might happen, suggesting that it would cause everyone to gasp in shock.

"We might think seriously about including a Broadway musical in our season!"

Despite the Hancock trepidation, there didn't seem to be a quick intake of breath, a jaw drop or an anguished moan.

He went on to explain that he had recently listened again to *South Pacific*, one of the great works of popular musical theater. It and other masterpieces by Rogers and Hammerstein are now rather hoary with age—almost as ancient as the *Tosca* that would go forth following the lecture. Thus there are many potential ticket buyers who weren't even born when the "great age" of the Broadway musical lit up New York and made its way throughout the world on stage and screen.

Many of the great opera houses of Europe perform each season one of the top ten American musicals like *Fiddler on the Roof*, *West Side Story*, *Carousel* and *Oklahoma*. They do it because it sells tickets.

About the same week of the Hancock "bombshell," San Francisco Opera was doing

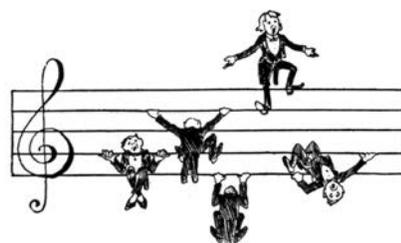
Sweeney Todd, the gruesome but witty Sondheim satire about baking people into meat pies. Clearly not a "real" opera. But not only did it sell well, but it attracted younger audiences who mostly steer clear of opera houses.

Presumably there are still purists who don't want opera as we know it defiled by this lesser art form that panders to popular tastes. The same opposition occurred years ago in Europe with the disdain for operetta. Yet over the past hundred years, works like *Merry Widow*, *Die Fledermaus* and assorted Offenbach bonbons have inserted themselves into the world's top opera houses to the great satisfaction of audiences and company bean counters.

In fact, it was the operetta genre that stimulated the growth of the Broadway musical, partially by the influx of composers, singers and musicians who left Europe and partially because audiences in the US liked what they heard. The works of Lehar, Friml and Victor Herbert, not to mention Gilbert and Sullivan, were just too good to pass up.

Worry not, the unique aspects of grand opera or smaller scale verismo works will always keep a tight hold on audiences. The marvel of the un-amplified voice filling a huge hall or scaling several octaves with sureness and the intellectual heft of serious musical drama is worth perpetuating.

But opera companies obviously must respond to changing demographics. It is evident that Opera San Jose must pay attention to those changes if it is to survive long term. ❀





Cecilia Violetta Lopez as Leonora in
Opera San José's *Il Trovatore* 2013
Photo by Bob Shomler

Clearly our Bay Area opera companies are producing emerging opera stars for our region. But Opera News' October 2015 edition features a cover article titled, "Opera's Exciting New Voices...The Talent You Need to Hear." This is testimony that our area is creating the opera stars for far more than this region. Included in the twenty-five artists Opera News sees as their favorite new voices are: **Sol Jin** (Merola 2015), **Cecilia Violetta Lopez** (OSJ 2012-14), **David Portillo** (Merola 2005-06), **Jania Brugger** (Merola 2010), **Andrew Stenson** (Merola 2012), **Andrew Bidlack** (Merola 2007), and **Nadine Sierra** (Merola 2010).☼

Free Met HD tickets Metropolitan Opera HD at Century 20 in Oakridge

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Five pairs of tickets for each performance are available for the rest of the 2015-16 Metropolitan Opera HD season. Complete list of live and encore performances available at www.sjoperaguild.org/news.html

To enter: email your name, email address, the opera and date you would like to attend to: membership@sjoperaguild.org.☼



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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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