



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

May 2016

Summer Series begins

by Steve Zilles

The Summer Lecture Series of the San Jose Opera Guild begins on June 1, this year and on a new day, Wednesday 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 are two lectures in this series. The first of which is on Verdi's *Don Carlos* by Kip Cranna. *Don Carlos* was originally written (in French) for the Paris Opera, but was translated into Italian shortly afterwards and that is the version that will be done in San Francisco. It is a story of power, of the power of King Philip II of Spain and the Grand Inquisitor. It is a story of love, of love frustrated by power and of jealous love. It is an opera with beautiful music and glorious singers. I am sure that our speaker, Kip Cranna, who is the Dramaturg for San Francisco Opera will bring this wonderful work to life.

The second opera lecture on Tuesday, June 7 is on *Jenůfa* by Leoš Janáček. The lecturer will be our old friend Prof. Richard Taruskin from Berkeley. The opera, one of Leoš Janáček's best works, tells the story of a young girl who is betrayed, has an illegitimate son who is killed by her prospective mother-in-law who sees no other alternative. It is a tragic tale offset by late blooming love and wonderful music. Richard Taruskin is a world famous musicologist who has often given us very interesting presentations on Russian operas.

Come experience our summer opera lectures. 🎭

A Spring Event

by Corinne Elliott Carter

San Jose Opera Guild celebrated success with a Champagne brunch at La Rinconada Country Club. Success for the guild is due to the wealth of support from members, both in volunteering and in attendance at lectures and events.

Members and guests arrived just before noon on April 23 to feast at the sumptuous buffet table with a delectable array of foods, making it hard to resist trying a little bit of everything. Notable at the event was Opera San Jose General Director Larry Hancock. Accompanied by pianist Veronica Agranov-Dafoe, Opera San Jose singers Christine Capsuto, Lisa Chavez, Kirk Dougherty, Matthew Hanscom, and Silas Elash entertained with selections from *Carmen*, *Eugene Onegin* and *Streetcar Named Desire*. The fresh energy in the beautiful and promising young voices filled our hearts.

With champagne in hand, browsers examined tables brimming with auction and raffle items including an exquisitely hand-sewn quilt, an African safari, a sail on the bay, and many other bargains. Sales were a boon to our coffers. This annual brunch, our only fundraiser, is a major source of the guild's income. Photos of the event will be available online.

Overlooking the golf course bathed in sunshine, listening to beautiful music, and enjoying the elegant buffet are now lovely memories. But wait, there is another brunch in the planning for next spring — stay tuned. 🎭

Career Updates

by Susan English

Zanda Švēde, the Merolini our Guild helped sponsor, is making her title role debut in *Carmen*, with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City this month. The Kansas City Star (4-17-16) anticipates this opening with an article by Patrick Neas who notes that Zanda is “a rising opera mezzo-soprano star.” Another Merola alumnus, **Jose Maria Condemi**, is directing the Lyric Opera’s production. Neas goes on to write, “Mezzo-soprano Švēde, who will be singing the role of Carmen for the first time, was born in Latvia and is an Adler fellow with the San Francisco Opera. Although Condemi has worked extensively with the San Francisco Opera, this will be the first time he is directing Švēde.”

“I am just absolutely fascinated by her talent,” he said. “The good thing about Zande is that she’s new, so everything we do is fresh. She is making decisions about the character as we go. That freshness and the immediacy to her character will be palpable to the audience because there’s no way anything could feel stilted.”

Švēde began singing in choirs while growing up in Latvia. Singing in Latvia is centrally important to the culture. Švēde is proud of her native country’s musical heritage.

To read more: <http://www.kansasccom/entertainment/music-news-reviews/classical-music-dance/article71856982.html#storylink=cpy>

Another Merolini alumnus (2002), **Daniel Okulitch**, performed in one of the first events to be held in the Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera. The Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater is the new home for the Schwabacher Debut Recitals. Daniel presented a showcase of American composers, including music by

Ricky Ian Gordon and Emmy Award-winning composer Glen Roven. He was accompanied on the piano by **John Churchwell** (Merola 1996).

Stuart Skelton (Adler 1997) was cast in the Met’s 2016 season this fall as Tristan in a new production of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. He will again sing Tristan with the English National Opera (Gardner) this June and July.

According to OperaBobb: “**Thomas Hampson** and **Rolando Villazon** (Merola 1998) are now appearing at Munich’s Bavarian State Opera in Mirolav Srnka’s world premiere opera *South Pole* based on the 1910 race between British and Norwegian teams to be the first humans to reach the South Pole.” Bachtrack reviewed the opera with: “Two men. Two nations. One goal. Can there be anyone who doesn’t know the gripping tale of Roald Amundsen, Robert Falcon Scott and the race for the South Pole? Bavarian State Opera has taken this myth-laden material and...served it up as a full length opera, entitled *South Pole*. The resulting production is a glamorous one.” Bachtrack further noted, “The undisputed star of the evening was Thomas Hampson” while Rolando Villazon “showed irreproachable stagecraft in bringing to life the epic race to the South Pole, crucial in bringing significant warmth to a meagre staging.”

Also from OperaBobb: “At the end of the La Scala *Rigoletto* second act last night, the standing ovation audience demanded former Adler **Nadine Sierra** (Adler 2011-2012) and **Leo Nucci** repeat the final aria (conducted by SF Opera Music Director **Nicola Luisotti**)” (Taken from OperaBobb posting in February.)

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In January, former Merolini and Adler, **Leah Crocetto**, debuted as Liù in the Met's production of *Turandot*. Courtney Smith reviewed her performance in Bachtrack: "Fragile and delicate, Liù is indebted with the plot's powerful dénouement – her selfless sacrifice in the name of love sparks the thawing of Turandot – yet Leah Crocetto's characterization of the slave girl was determined and strong-willed. 'Signore, ascolta!' brought great warmth, high polish, control and strength from a lush, healthy instrument with excellent phrasing and inflection climaxing at 'Ah, pietà!'"

Former Merolini and OSJ Resident Artist, **Alex Boyer**, has found a home at Island City Opera in Alameda. Alex performed the role of the heroic Edgardo Ravenswood in Island City Opera's inaugural season production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In 2014, Alex sang Manrico in Island City Opera's predecessor organization Virago Theatre's production of *Il Trovatore*. He has recently sung in both *Rigoletto* and *La Bohème* for this new opera company. According to San Francisco Classical Voice, "Tenor Alex Boyer...shone as the Duke of Mantua. His appealing sound was particularly impressive in "La donna è mobile," which was the high point of the opera."

Another former OSJ Resident Artist (1997-1999), **Robert McPherson**, made his Met debut as Don Basilio in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Writing in the New York Times (2-29-16) James Oestrich noted: "Robert McPherson made his Met debut as an amusing buffo, Don Basilio." The New York Classical Review wrote, "...a fine debut by Robert McPherson who brought a bright tenor to his glib Don Basilio."

Pocket Opera featured OSJ former Resident Artist, **Adam Flowers** as Lyonel in Friedrich von Flotow's *Martha*. West Bay Opera's

production of *Eugene Onegin* cast **Silas Elash** as Prince Gremin.

Opera San Jose called upon several former Resident Artists for their February production of *Carmen*. **Lisa Chavez** sang Carmen, **Daniel Cilli** sang Morales, **Cybele Gouverneur** sang Mercedes, and **Layna Chianakas** directed. The San Francisco Classical Voice said of the directing, "Stage director Layna Chianakas' thoughtful production uses a lot of coordinated movement, especially for the chorus." Georgia Rowe, in the San Jose Mercury News, raved about the production. "Layna Chianakas keeps the action focused and fluid, and her staging yields a series of attractive tableaux." She also notes of Lisa: "Chavez, a former member of OSJ's resident ensemble, has appeared in a variety of roles for the company. From Humperdinck's Hansel to Rossini's Isabella, she's established herself as a versatile artist. But Carmen seems tailor-made for her. From her first appearance as the seductive gypsy who prizes freedom above all else, Chavez sounded terrific. Singing her mesmerizing entrance piece, the "Habanera," her smoky, richly colored voice shaped the music in expressive, voluptuous phrases. Chavez may surprise operagoers expecting stock gestures and poses. This Carmen avoids the hip-swinging clichés that have become synonymous with the character. Haughty and intense, she radiates sensuality with a minimum of schtick. And her singing is secure, unfettered and beautiful right up to the opera's tragic final scene." 🎭



CALENDAR
by Connie Zilles

May 20, 22, 25, 28, and 29, West Bay Opera presents *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini, 8pm except Sunday at 2pm, tickets 650-424-9999 or order online www.WBOpera.org. Student, senior, and group discounts. Piano preview, May 12, 8pm, Post-show cast discussion, May 22.

May 22, Sunday, 5-9pm, Opera San Jose's Opera Hoedown, at the Doubletree Inn in San Jose. This Texas-themed fundraiser will include dinner, a silent and live auction, plus square dancing accompanied by a live country western band. Guest artists and the resident company will perform selections from *Oklahoma*, *Paint Your Wagon* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. Tickets are \$150pp, a portion of which is tax-deductible. For more information or to buy tickets call OSJ Box Office at 408-437-4450 or order online.

LECTURES

**Don't Miss Our Two Spring
San Francisco Opera Lectures!**

June 1, 10am, Wednesday, San Jose Opera Guild lecture: Kip Cranna will speak on *Don Carlos* by Giuseppe Verdi, at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

June 7, 10am, NOTE this is a Tuesday, San Jose Opera Guild lecture: Richard Taruskin will speak on *Jenůfa* by Leoš Janáček 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.

**OTHER OPERA OPPORTUNITIES DURING
THIS SLOW SEASON**

Opera in Cinema

For the 2015-16 season at Camera 3 Cinema, There is an opera scheduled each month, with screenings Sunday mornings at 12 noon, and a repeat show Tuesday evening at 7:15pm. Tickets are \$18.50 and free parking is available in their attached covered garage.

May 15, 2016 (noon), 17 (7:15pm) — *Il Trovatore* by Verdi — Salzburg Festival, Austria

June 12, 2016 (noon), 14,(7:15pm) — *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti — Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona

July 10 (noon) and 12 (7:15 pm) — *Turandot* by Puccini — Bregenzer Festspiele

Summer Merola Events.

July 7 Thursday and Saturday July 9, 7:30 pm, Schwabacher Summer Concerts, \$25.00/\$40.00, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, 50 Oak Street, SF. Performed with English Supertitles.

July 21, Thursday at 7:30 pm and Saturday July 23 at 2pm, *Transformations* by Conrad Susa, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, 50 Oak Street, SF. \$45.00/\$65.00, Performed with English Supertitles.

August 4, Thursday at 7:30 pm and Saturday August 6 at 2pm, *Così fan tutte* by Mozart, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, 50 Oak Street, SF. \$45.00/\$65.00, Performed with English Supertitles.

Tickets available at S.F. Opera Box Office 415 864-3330 or at www.sfopera.com

OPERA DISCOVERIES

Small scale opera is with us in full force
and it is carving out a permanent niche

by Mort Levine

Perhaps nothing can quite match grand opera for its magnificence of voices, rich orchestration, dazzling sets and costumes. But today's trend toward smaller scale, almost chamber opera, is definite evidence that you can have great opera, if not grand opera.

We need look no further than the winning Opera San Jose production of *Streetcar Named Desire* by composer Andre Previn, which just closed out their season. It was a dramatic contrast to the conventional San Francisco premiere in 1998. The Mercury News critic couldn't fathom the minimalist staging and the curtain-less performance. To this viewer, it actually provided an intimacy with the audience rarely experienced at the California Theatre. Credit director Brad Dalton with a creative vision which reshaped this widely known Tennessee Williams' tale of love, lust, rape and madness across class lines into compelling naturalistic music drama.

The trend toward smaller scale opera is popping up in lots of places.

New Yorker critic Alex Ross recently took note of the plethora of shoestring opera companies surfacing in a range of venues all over New York. Names like Loft Opera (in a bus repair garage), Heartbeat Opera (in a church) along with On-Site Opera, Apotheosis Opera, Floating Opera (perhaps on a river boat?) Opera Noire, Utopia Opera and several others.

They provide cheap seats for the curious, opportunities for young performers, and a theatrical intimacy with the audience which simply cannot be duplicated in the big traditional mainstream opera houses.

Every established opera company is now looking at ways to capture some of that youthful exuberance and zest for the new. San Francisco Opera just opened a small venue, the Taube Atrium located in the Veterans Memorial across the plaza and the home of the new \$21 million Wilsey Opera Center, with rehearsal halls, set and costume shops, and administrative offices. The 65-foot by 65-foot Taube recently staged *Svadba-Wedding*, a chamber opera by Ana Sokolovic. It was an example of an operatic form, SFO's David Gockley explained, that has hit like a wave coming out of nowhere but is going to attract new audiences.

Los Angeles Opera is now doing smaller productions away from the cavernous Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Covent Garden's Royal Opera in London is remodeling its 400-seat Linbury Studio Theatre to do similar small works. La Scala has had a Piccolo Scala since 1955. Even the Met is looking at equipping a truck to take smaller productions out to the NYC hinterlands.

This welcome breath of fresh air may be just what opera needs as more and more of the traditional season ticket holders begin to age and exit the scene. 🙌

Published in February, May,
August and November
by the San José Opera Guild,
P.O. Box 33025,
Los Gatos, CA 95031-3025

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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.

Memberships: Dual \$70
 Single \$50
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