



NEWSLETTER

Argo Gherardi, Editor

November, 2006

Board Election Vote on November 14

On September 13, the Board of Directors accepted the recommendations of the Nominating Committee as follows:

Vice President, Lari Yamaguchi
Recording Secretary, Margaret Boddy
Corresponding Secretary, Nina Gherardi
Treasurer, Elliot Swanson

Ann Haggerty will continue as President for the second year of her elected term. Gerry Pighini will continue as Parliamentarian. No new Board members will be added at this time.

Serving on the Nominating Committee were Myrna Fleckles, Chair; Nina Gherardi, Joan Shomler, Dorothy Tarowsky, and Phyllis Whitney.

The election of officers and continuing Board members will take place at the final lecture meeting on November 14. Please plan to attend and cast your vote.

Continuing Directors are:

Corinne Elliott Carter	Olga Nespole
Dominic A. Donato	Mary E. Riley
Susan English	Joan Shomler
Jan Eurich	Jack H. Silveira
Myrna Fleckles	Margaret B. Slemmons
Lea F. Frey	Ginger Stoddard
Argo Gherardi	Alice Swanson
Peggy Heiman	Dorothy Tarowsky
Joy Hulme	Genevieve Torresola
Judy Jaeger	Beth Weymer
	Phyllis Whitney

Opera Travelers It's Time to Plan for Next Summer's Festivals

by Mort Levine

The growing phenomena of summer opera festivals, both at home and abroad, give the opera lover a renewed stimulus to travel to interesting places but also indulge in some very diverse and even occasionally memorable operatic experiences. In a few months the annual festival line-ups will be listed in Opera News magazine and on various websites. But the time to do some preliminary planning may be right now especially where good accommodations get snapped up early by the repeat festival goers.

Just about a year ago, we began researching the upcoming festival scene trying to align interesting opera offerings with a location which held equal interest. We began focusing on England where four or five new outdoor opera venues have been established in the past few years, similar to the long successful Glyndebourne model.

Then we broadened our scope to include older festivals and settled on the spa town of Buxton 50 miles southeast of Manchester in the north of England. It is in the midst of The Peaks National Park with a delightful collection of elegant structures for opera, theatre, lectures and recitals. The Buxton Opera House once was a 1920's movie palace on the order of San José's California Theatre remodeling. It features fine sight-lines and acoustics. Dozens of excellent restaurants and places to stay surround the venue.

The clincher was the offerings.

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Travelers, from page 1

It has been the festival's mission to showcase the "next best" of famed composers who are known for just one or two great works. Seven well-known composers were represented by six works we had never seen or heard. All seven were done with excellent professional casts but none of the big names which would put box office charges far above the very modest prices normal for the festival. Each was done in English eliminating the need for supertitles.

We managed in an 8-day span to see all seven. These included a gripping *L'Armide* claimed by Gluck to have been his best work. It had hints of *Orphée et Eurydice*, his best known masterpiece.

Georges Bizet may be known for *Carmen* and *Pearl-fishers*, but his *Fair Maid of Perth*, based on a Walter Scott novel, also deserves to be better known. It is a melodic romp with a full-range of the usual operatic characters from noblemen to gypsies.

Coronation of Poppea is the most performed of Monteverdi's operas and is based on a true tale of Roman royal intrigues and love affairs. It grabs the audience early and doesn't let go until its bloody climax.

Shostakovich's satyric comedy, *The Nose*, was written during a brief window of artistic freedom in the 1920s although Stalin slammed it shut pretty quickly snuffing out the opera until long after the deaths of the composer and the dictator. With aspects of broad farce

and surrealist absurdity, this is a work to which contemporary audiences can really relate. In hindsight, it may have been the most worthwhile of the entire festival when placed in its historic cultural context.

It was Mozart's anniversary, so the festival gave us an amazing work rarely seen, *Apollo and Hyacinthus*. This was written when Mozart was 11 years old and purports to be his very first opera. It could easily pass for the work of a veteran composer, and some cynics might even cast an eye at Wolfgang's papa.

Another surprising presentation was from Georg Philipp Telemann. His 1725 chamber opera *Pimpinone* is the telling of a wealthy old bachelor taken advantage of by a scheming chambermaid, a simple tale well staged and acted with stirring baroque arias.

It wouldn't be England without a Benjamin Britten opera. *Noye's Fludde* tells the story of Noah and his wife, children, endless animals and birds. This was in an adjacent church venue where the performance flowed like the flood throughout the audience. Hundreds of child-choristers, musicians and soloists almost equalled the audience in size.

Traveling to Buxton is quite simple after a trans-Atlantic hop. There is a train station right in the Manchester airport [with service] to the town. The festival runs for about three weeks each July. It also features a vigorous fringe festival of plays, literary lectures, chamber mu-

sic and vocal recitals. The surrounding historic villages invite exploration even without a car. There are excellent local bus services throughout the Peak district and Derbyshire. Many of the huge houses that were backdrops for *Brideshead Revisited* or various Jane Austen novels can be found in this region.

The range of hotels and B&Bs within a few blocks is ample but fills up by late spring. After that it might be a bit more of a walk. Web-search using Buxton Festival will get all kinds of information as will calling up Summer Opera Festivals in England.

The friendliness encouraged by a festival setting is remarkable to experience. The intimacy of the setting coupled with delightful weather and charming surroundings make it a good bet for any opera lover.

San José Opera Guild
November 2006 Issue

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Calendar

OCTOBER 31 TO NOVEMBER 30: SAN FRANCISCO OPERA will present Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Tickets \$25 to \$245. Information: 415-864-3330 www.sfopera.com.

NOVEMBER 7: SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD LECTURE. Heather Hadlock will lecture on Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* at 10AM at the Los Gatos History Club, 123 Los Gatos Boulevard, Los Gatos. Members, free; non-members, \$10. Lunch will be offered after the lecture for \$10 per person.

NOVEMBER 14: SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD LECTURE. Dr. Kern Holoman will lecture on Bizet's *Carmen* at 10AM at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 15985 Rose Avenue, Los Gatos. Members, free; non-members, \$10.

NOVEMBER 14: SAN JOSÉ OPERA GUILD'S DOWNTOWN LECTURE/PREVIEW. Larry Hancock will lecture on Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at noon at the San José Museum of Art, Wendel Center. Artists from Opera San José will sing excerpts from the opera. Free admission. Co-sponsored by Opera San José and the San José Opera Guild. Information: Gerry Pighini 408-275-6199 or MrPio@comcast.net.



NOVEMBER 18 TO DECEMBER 3: OPERA SAN JOSÉ will present Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at the California Theatre, 345 South First Street, San José. Tickets \$65 to \$85. Information: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org.

NOVEMBER 19 TO DECEMBER 10: SAN FRANCISCO OPERA will present Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Tickets \$25 to \$245. Information: 415-864-3330 or www.sfopera.com.

NOVEMBER 21 TO DECEMBER 9: SAN FRANCISCO OPERA will present Bizet's *Carmen* at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Tickets \$25 to \$245. Information: 415-864-3330 or www.sfopera.com.

Career Updates

Following on the heels of playing the President of the United States in *The Beastly Bombing* in Los Angeles, **Jesse Merlin** returns to the Bay Area to sing Marquis d'Obigny in *La Traviata* with Martinez Opera in November. He'll make his Sacramento Opera debut as Zuniga in *Carmen* in February 2007, alongside longtime colleague and friend **Joseph Wright** as Escamillo. Joseph's personal update includes his engagement to **Lori Decter**.

Barbara Divis is currently performing *Butterfly* in Kansas City, receiving standing ovations. Next she'll travel to the Arizona Opera where she'll again sing *Butterfly* in January and February. In March she'll sing *Butterfly* in Maui at the Hawaii Opera Theatre.

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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 its 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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