



NEWSLETTER

August 2010

NEW LECTURE SERIES

By Steve Zilles

The Fall Lecture Series of the San José Opera Guild is almost upon us. We have a terrific line-up of events all of which will be at 10 AM on a Tuesday at the LDS Church in Los Gatos (15985 Rose Ave.). There will be five lectures on operas that will be presented by San Francisco Opera and two season previews by Opera San José and West Bay Opera, respectively.

The season begins, earlier than in the past, on August 24th with a lecture on Verdi's *Aida* by Phillip Gossett. *Aida*, one of the ultimate spectacles, the grandest of grand operas, is set in Egypt. It tells the story of a bitter love triangle among the Egyptian Princess Amneris, her Ethiopian slave Aida, and the heroic Ramfis, captain of the guard. The lecturer is Phillip Gossett, who is a world renowned scholar on Verdi and Rossini. He last lectured to us on Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* in 2005. He is the Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Music at The University of Chicago where he has been since 1968. He has produced critical editions of a number of operas used in performance by many of the world's most important opera companies, including the MET.

Our second lecture, on September 7th (the day after Labor Day), is on *Werther* by Jules Massenet. This tragic opera is based on a nov-

el by Goethe and tells of a young romantic idealist, Werther, and his disappointed love for Charlotte, who is engaged to a man 11 years her senior. Only too late does Charlotte realize her feelings for Werther. Our lecturer is Steven Huebner, who is a specialist on French and Italian operas of the 19th and 20th centuries. He teaches at McGill University in Canada, where he currently holds the position of James McGill Professor.

On September 14th, our third lecture is on *Le Nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang A. Mozart. This comedy shows the valet, Figaro, outwitting Count Almaviva. Figaro is helped along the way (and confused) by his bride, Susanna, and the Countess. The story is both amusing and bittersweet, one of Mozart's best known works. Evan Baker, who last lectured to us on *Abduction from the Seraglio* in 2009, is our lecturer. He is an internationally published and recognized scholar in the history of opera production, who specializes on the interplay of theatrical traditions, the requirements of production, and the musical inspiration required to produce an opera.

Our next event, on September 21st, is not really a "lecture". It is a preview of the West Bay Opera season given by José Luis Moscovich and singers from West Bay Opera. Their

NEW LECTURE SERIES

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season includes: *La Forza del Destino* by Verdi, *Turandot* by Puccini, and the double bill of *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell and *La Vida Breve* by Manuel de Falla.

The week following the above season preview, on September 28th, we have a preview of the last three operas in the Opera San José season. (Their first opera, the West Coast premiere of *Anna Karenina*, will have already been performed by this time.) Larry Hancock, the Director of Productions and General Manager, and singers from Opera San José will give us an introduction into what is to come: *Tosca* by Puccini in November, *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini in February and *La Bohème* by Puccini in April-May.

In a season in which Puccini is already well represented, our fourth lecture on San Francisco Opera operas, on October 5th, will be on *Madame Butterfly*. This is the tragic tale of a naïve teenage girl's faithfulness to a naval officer who sees her as a mere incident in his life. This has some of Puccini's most beautiful music. Our lecturer is Timothy Flynn, who last lectured to us on *Il Trittico* in 2009. He currently holds the chair of Performing Arts at Olivet College (which is between Lansing and Battle Creek, Michigan). He directs choral groups, and the opera and musical theater performances on campus and also plays the organ. He has published recent books on Saint-Saëns and Gounod.

October 19th is the date for our fifth lecture which is given by Prof. Richard Taruskin on Franco Alfano's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. This is a story known to many of us even if the opera is not so well known. In San Francisco, Plácido Domingo and the rest of the cast will bring *Cyrano* (and his famous nose) to life via Alfa-

no's "soaring lyricism". Prof. Taruskin is well known to us, having last lectured on Strauss' *Salome* in 2009. Prof. Taruskin is known for many things, as a performer, conductor, musicologist and critic. His writings range from program notes to scholarly papers, and he is recognized for his contributions to the Oxford History of Western Music. His lectures give refreshing new insights into the works that he describes.

The final lecture of the Fall Season is on November 2nd. The topic is an opera by Leos Janáček, *The Makropulos Case*. This opera tells of the 300 year old daughter of a 16th century alchemist, Markropulos, who has discovered an elixir of life and given it to his daughter, Elina. This daughter, who is also an accomplished singer, has left a trail of interesting incidents (and people) in her rather long life. Our lecturer is Derek Katz who is an Associate Professor of Music History at the University of California Santa Barbara. Dr. Katz is the author of a book, *Janáček Beyond the Borders* which has just been published by the University of Rochester Press. He has also written for the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

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NOTICE

If a current SJOG member is interested in being on the San José Opera Guild Board, or in volunteering for a committee (such as education outreach), please contact Peggy Heiman (Peggy@Heiman.com) or Hannelore Romney (rrhromney@aol.com) for more information.

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Opera Travelers

World of Opera Coming to Our Doorsteps This Fall

by Mort Levine

To the opera fan, more choice is always better. And this fall season bodes especially well to fulfill those wishes. Let's take a quick look around at the gusher of opera offerings. There are a number of exciting live performances without the need of packing even an overnight bag. Opera San José's west coast premiere of *Anna Karenina* will bring in lots of travelers from elsewhere when it opens this fall at the California Theatre in San Jose. Likewise a mecca for opera lovers is promised by San Francisco Opera's first time roll out of *Cyrano de Bergerac* with Placido Domingo.

The Metropolitan Opera is coming on strong with a lineup of 11 high definition films from its extensive 2010-2011 season. These will be presented in real time Saturday mornings (in our time zone) and then will repeat in a later evening performance midweek. At least six different multi-screen complexes will show the Met series in our own valley. These sites provide a marvelous opera experience at reasonable cost literally minutes away from most of our members.

The exciting new development this season is the expanded lineup from the world's most famous stages which will be at Camera 7 in Campbell's Pruneyard center. Not only will the number of operas expand from previous years but there will be added ballet and theatre performances from such venues as the Bolshoi in Moscow, and London's Covent Garden and the Old Globe Theatre.

The operas at Camera 7 were already underway this summer with Barcelona's *Abduction from the Seraglio* concluded July 28 and Bellini's *Norma* from the Teatro Comunale

in Bologna which is on now, August 8 at 11 a.m. and August 11 at 7 p.m.

The ambitious lineup just ahead includes *Götterdämmerung* from Valencia's stunning opera house on August 29 and Sept. 1, followed by Shakespeare's *Love's Labor Lost* Sept. 12 and 15 from London. *Tosca* will be presented on Sept. 26 and 29 and a *La Bohème* will show on October 10 and 12. Tchaikovsky's magical *Queen of Spades* from Barcelona runs October 24 and 27.

Two ballets are on view over the next two months: a Bolshoi offering of *Les Flamme de Paris* on Nov. 7 and 10 and a *Nutcracker* from Covent Garden before Christmas. There will also be a *Carmen* from Barcelona on Dec. 5 and 8.

All of Camera 7's shows run at 11 a.m. Sundays and at 7 p.m. Wednesdays. Prices are \$20 with a discount to \$17 for purchase of three tickets at the Camera 7 box office.

And, if all these didn't begin to appease that opera hunger, perhaps you might want to help San Francisco Opera make a bigger splash with its HD roll out. SFO's only venue close to us has been as part of a film series at Fremont's Ohlone college Smith Center theatre. They are showing San Francisco Opera's *Samson and Delilah* on August 7. For information and tickets call 510-659-6031.

But San Francisco Opera's Jessica Koplos is actively interested in finding additional venues in Santa Clara county. If you have some leads, why not give her a call at 415-565-3234 or email her at jkoplos@sfoopera.com.

Looks like we're all going to enjoy an opera-packed season.

###

Bold and Beautiful: *Anna Karenina*

Opera San José proudly launches its 27th Anniversary Season with the West Coast premiere of *Anna Karenina*, an American opera by composer David Carlson with libretto by the late Colin Graham. Eight performances are scheduled from September 11 through 26 at the California Theatre, 345 South First Street in downtown San José. Opera San José will present *Anna Karenina* with a new scene added by the composer following the opera's 2007 world premiere at Florida Grand Opera. Tickets are on sale at the Opera San José Box Office, by phone at (408) 437-4450 or online at www.operasj.org. *Anna Karenina* is sponsored by a grant from the Carol Frank Buck Foundation and is made possible, in part, by a Cultural Affairs Grant from the City of San José.

Anna Karenina--beautiful, wealthy, aristocratic—is nonetheless vulnerable, unhappy, and caught in a rigid society that crushes anyone who does not follow the rules of the game. Her deeply personal, tragic story has long been familiar through the practically perfect novel by Leo Tolstoy and the two most memorable film versions starring Greta Garbo and Vivien Leigh. Told with compassion and unsentimental observation, the story follows an upper-class woman in 19th-century Russia through a loveless marriage, burning love affair, wrenching heartbreak, and finally her sudden death. Yet more than a terminal end to an unfortunate existence, *Anna Karenina* concludes with the transcendent beginning of new life underscoring both the tragedy and the happiness of Tolstoy's masterpiece. It is opera at its most affecting, combining Tolstoy's very human drama with powerfully expressive American music that draws on Tchaikovsky

for its orchestral models while utilizing arching melodic utterances unique to composer Carlson's personal style.

In collaboration with noted British librettist and stage director Colin Graham, Florida Grand Opera commissioned David Carlson to compose *Anna Karenina* in celebration of the 2007 opening of the Ziff Opera House in Miami, with a co-production by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. The premiere production attracted sold-out audiences and received wide critical acclaim. The *New York Times* applauded Carlson's "well-crafted lyrical score" and "romantic and luxuriantly textured music." *Opera News* praised the "powerful, entertaining, and moving" orchestrations, and *The Toronto Star* lauded the production as one of Graham's "major successes."

Anna Karenina at Opera San José is the third production of the opera, presented with a new scene written by Carlson and Mark Streshinsky, director of the world premiere in Florida. "Both director Mark Streshinsky and I felt that [the character] Vronsky needed further fleshing out, to have it make sense that Anna would fall for him, and we both saw that a new scene could fix that to some degree," Carlson remarked. "It's only four minutes long, but it seems to fill the missing link. I had a lot of fun with this new scene, evoking for a few moments the style of Tchaikovsky."

Opera San José is pleased to welcome renowned music director and conductor Stewart Robertson to conduct *Anna Karenina*. Maestro Robertson conducted the premiere production in Florida and has long been associated with composer Carlson, having conducted the premieres of *The Midnight Angel* in 1993 and *Dreamkeepers* in 1996. Robertson was music

Anna Karenina

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director of Glimmerglass Opera from 1988 to 2006, and from 1998 until 2009 he was music director and principal conductor of the Florida Grand Opera. He has also served as music director of the Zürich Ballet and Scottish Opera Touring Company and conducted New York City Opera productions broadcast on Live From Lincoln Center.

Award-winning stage director Brad Dalton returns to Opera San José to direct *Anna Karenina*. Dalton's previous credits with the company include *Così fan tutte* and *Madama Butterfly* for which he received critical acclaim. He has directed productions for opera companies throughout the United States and abroad, including San Francisco Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, Washington Opera, and the State Opera of South Australia. Dalton is joined by a distinguished creative team to bring *Anna Karenina* to the opera stage - choreographer Lise La Cour, set designer Steven C. Kemp, costume designer Elizabeth Poindexter, lighting designer Kent Dorsey, and wig and makeup designer Jeanna Parham.

Alternating in the role of the beautiful and passionate Anna are sopranos Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste and Jasmina Halimic, two new members of Opera San José's resident company. Jean-Baptiste made her mainstage debut with Florida Grand Opera in the role of The Abbess in *Suor Angelica* and has been a semi-finalist in The Jensen Foundation Vocal Competition. Halimic received accolades for her Opera San José debut as Magda in the company premiere of Puccini's *La Rondine* during the 2009 - 2010 season. Other recent performances include the Countess (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for the Intermezzo Foundation in Belgium and Mimì (*La bohème*) with Amore Opera in New York City.

Three former artists from Opera San José's resident company return as guest artists for *Anna Karenina*. Soprano, Khori Dastoor (resident company member 2007-2010) performs the role of the beautiful, yet vulnerable Kitty Scherbatsky. Dastoor thrilled Opera San José audiences during the 2009- 2010 season with her performance as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* and the title role in *Manon*. Recent performances featured Dastoor as Blondchen (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) in her debut with the Midsummer Mozart Festival. Appearing in the role of Anna's elder brother Stiva Oblonsky will be tenor Christopher Bengochea (resident company member 2005-2008). During Opera San José's 2009-2010 season Bengochea received praise for his performance of Ruggero in Puccini's *La Rondine*. His previous roles include Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, the title role in *Roméo et Juliette*, and Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*. In addition to Opera San José, Bengochea has appeared with Opera Idaho, Atlanta Opera, and Opera Saskatoon, to name a few, and was a featured soloist with the San Juan Symphony and Modesto Symphony. Bass, Kirk Eichelberger (resident company member 2001-2003, 2005- 2006) takes on the role of Alexei Karenin, Anna's husband and a highly placed politician. Eichelberger has performed numerous roles with Opera San José including Frere Laurent in *Romeo and Juliette*, Leporello in **Don Giovanni**, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* and Colline in *La Bohème*. He was recently seen as The Emperor in *Tan Dun's Tea: A Mirror of Soul* with the Opera Company of Philadelphia and sang the roles of Timur in *Turandot* and Mephistopheles in *Faust* with The Festival Opera of Walnut Creek. ###

TOSCA

A study in political and audience upheaval

By Susan English

The Munich Opera Festival premiered Luc Bondy's production of *Tosca* at the Nationaltheater on June 28, 2010. This is the same production the Met performed on their opening night last September. The *New York Times* review was titled "For Opening Night at the Metropolitan, a New Sound: Booing." Quoted in the review was Renaud Machart, chief critic of the French newspaper, *Le Monde*, "the booing resulted from ingrained expectations based on 'fake traditions' of opera directions." (This is the same production broadcast in HD for the Met.)

At the Munich premiere, audience members were delighted with the singing of Karita Mattila and Jonas Kaufmann in the two starring roles. The audience also supported Juha Uusitalo as the villain Baron Scarpia, and Fabio Luisi as the conductor. However, when the production team, including Luc Bondy, was brought on stage, many boos could be heard. The director blamed a "strain of hidebound traditionalism" for the lusty boos.

This audience member was enthralled by the experience of Munich's opera experience. Women arrived in flowing gowns, flashing jew-

els, and patrician smiles. Men made sure their tuxedos didn't obscure their oversized gold or platinum watches. Many on the street came to admire the procession of beautifully dressed audience members as they climbed the broad stairway to the Bayerische Staatsoper. Once the opera began, however, the focus was riveted on the stage.

A reviewer noted that the director's vision is a sparse one. The sets and costumes are stark. There are violent and lewd touches. Tosca gashes the portrait of the Magdalene, Scarpia clasps a statue of the Madonna in a sacrilegious embrace, and three lascivious women drape and fondle him in his study at the outset of Act II. But Mr. Bondy said that his direction was rooted in the text. He seemed to capture the root of the booing when he noted, "To think one work exists, and it has a final interpretation, is a problem."

All of this controversy has apparently produced a positive outcome. All further performances of the opera were sold out, so on July 10 an audio-visual transmission was broadcast at Max-Joseph-Platz, and television stations televised the performance that same day. ###

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

At the end of August, West Bay Opera will email Bay Area schools to announce their opera in the schools program. Helpers are needed to telephone an assigned batch of schools to verify their receipt of the email and to determine interest in the program. Whenever a school says that it wants to schedule a program, others will take over and handle all the details. With enough telephone help, the schedule is usually full by

the end of October. If you are interested in volunteering your time to help promote this opera in the schools program, please call Thelma Dry at 408-356-7276 or email at thelmadry@yahoo.com.

If you are interested in volunteering for Opera San José, please contact Virginia Perry, Senior Director of Marketing and Development, at perry@operasj.org or 408-437-4463. ###

CALENDAR

August 5,6,7,8 *L'Elisir d'Amore* by Gaetano Donizetti, Merola Opera, Cowell Theater at Fort Mason Center, San Francisco Opera Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$40-\$60, Students \$25.

August 21 Merola Grand Finale, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, San Francisco Box Office, (415) 626-1729, \$25-45, Students \$15.

August 24 San José Opera Guild Lecture, Philip Gossett speaking on *Aida* by Giuseppe Verdi, 10 am, LDS Church, 15985 Rose Avenue, Los Gatos, SJOG Members free or \$10 at the door.

August 31 Preview for *Anna Karenina*, San Jose Woman's Club, 75 South 11th street, San Jose. \$25. Wine and light hors d'oeuvres, 6:30pm; Program 7-8pm. Vocal preview from members of the cast followed by a lecture by General Manager, Larry Hancock. Reservations required; 408 437-4450.

September 7 San José Opera Guild Lecture, Steven Huebner speaking on *Werther* by Jules Massenet, see Aug. 24th for further information.

September 11 Opening Night Dinner for *Anna Karenina* Arcadia Restaurant, downtown San Jose, \$125 pp. No-host reception with composer David Carlson at 5pm; dinner at 6pm. Reservations are required: 408-437-4450.

September 11, 12m, 14, 17, 19m, 23, 25, 26m (m=matinee) . Opera San José presents the West Coast premiere of *Anna Karenina*, an American opera by composer David Carlson, based on Leo Tolstoy's literary classic. California Theatre, 8 pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org.

September 14 San Jose Opera Guild Lecture, Evan Baker speaking on *Le Nozze di Fi-*

garo by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, see Aug. 24th for further information.

September 21 San José Opera Guild Lecture, Jose Luis Moscovitch from West Bay Opera with a Season Preview, featuring singers, See Aug. 24th for further information.

September 28 San José Opera Guild Lecture, Larry Hancock from Opera San José with a Season Preview featuring OSJ Resident Artists, see Aug. 24th for further information.

October 5 San José Opera Guild Lecture, Timothy Flynn speaking on *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini, see Aug. 24th for further information.

October 10 Save the Date "The Big Birthday Bash and Variety Show". Join Opera San José for a Champagne benefit and tribute to General Director Irene Dalis, featuring the current and former resident artists of OSJ, 1-3 pm, The San Jose Improv, Tickets \$250 and \$150. For reservations call 408 437-4450.

October 15, 17, 23, and 24 West Bay Opera, *La Forza del Destino* by Giuseppe Verdi, tickets \$55-\$60 general admission, \$45-\$50 for seniors, box office 650 424-999.

October 19 San José Opera Guild Lecture, Richard Taruskin speaking on *Cyrano*, by Franco Alfano, see Aug. 24th for further information.

November 2 San Jose Opera Guild Lecture, Derk Katz speaking on *The Makropulos Case*, by Leos Janáček, see Aug. 24th for further information.

November 13, 14, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, 28, Opera San José presents *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini, California Theatre, 8 pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.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 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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