



Champagne Brunch and Opera Entertainment at La Rinconada Country Club Saturday, April 23, 2016 @ 11:30am

Save the date for the San Jose Opera Guild annual champagne brunch at La Rinconada County Club. There will be a gourmet brunch, silent auction and raffle, and an exceptional music program by Opera San Jose Artists. The details of the brunch, the wonderful auction items and the opera program details will be available on our web site. You will also receive an invitation next month.

Last year we had 100 attendees. Everyone had a fabulous time socializing, drinking complimentary champagne, eating gourmet food, bidding on auction items and listening to Opera San Jose artists perform for a half hour. They received a standing ovation.

Tickets are \$68 for guild members, \$78 for non-members; reservations required. A portion of each reservation is tax deductible. Please RSVP by April 12, 2016.

Proceeds support the Opera San Jose Opera Outreach Program, the San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program, the San Francisco Opera Guild's Education Program (Opera à la Carte), the West Bay Opera and the San Jose State University Opera Theater. For information: 408-243-2404 or 408-354-2771 or visit our website at: www.sjoperaguild.org or see our Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/sjoperaguild. *

OPERA DISCOVERIES

A course on
"The Voices of Opera"
raises the intriguing question
of what makes different
singers so special

by Mort Levine

"Nothing about opera is subject to more disagreement than a discussion of voices." That comment in the course catalog for Music 191 in Stanford's Winter Continuing Studies came from the now retired general director of Seattle Opera, Speight Jenkins. It was followed by "students will be encouraged to share their opinions and challenge the instructor."

Jenkins is a most articulate and energetic 79-year-old with a vast treasury of experiences of opera going back nearly 60 years. He has critiqued, auditioned, recruited, staged and in many cases befriended hundreds of singers. And now over a span of five lectures he will be sharing all that with 100 or so opera-lovers.

In his opening salvo he talked about tenors, arguably a voice type fraught with an amazing range of characters through the years. It also has a series of generally accepted classifications within which some unique singers move up and down. In future lectures, similar classifications will focus on sopranos, mezzos, baritones and basses. All with lots of vocal examples and opinions on specific singers.

The earliest and highest tenor voices were the Castrati, an Italian phenomenon, that kept a boy soprano's voice into adulthood by surgery. These voices ruled the top operatic roost for about 175 years until 1824. The true Bel Canto tenor then emerged to sing the Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini roles. One example was John McCormack who had fantastic breath control and was adept at decorative fioritura those roles offered. Bel Canto tenors of today include Juan Diego Flores who does those nine high C's in *Daughter of the Regiment* effortlessly. Jenkins made special mention of newcomer Lawrence Brownlee, a Bel Canto tenor, who debuted at Seattle and is now featured at the Met.

Most tenors are in the category of Lyric tenor, with a range that doesn't normally go as high as the Bel Canto, but are comfortable going into the lower register of the Spinto (for more powerful effects) or the Dramatic tenor (ideal for many Verdi roles). Best of the Lyric tenors in Jenkins' view were the versatile Nicolai Gedda, and Tito Schipa, whose vocalism possessed a unique elegance. He made special mention of Matthew Polenzani, who just appeared in the *Pearl Fishers* at the Met HD movie earlier this month.

Among the great Dramatic tenors who ruled the opera world through much of the 20th century were Benjamino Gigli, Giovanni Martinelli and Georges Thill.

As Verismo operas came into popularity from composers like Puccini, Mascani and Leoncavallo, it created Verismo tenors like Franco Corelli and Mario del Monaco and Richard Tucker.

Finally, in the Jenkins spectrum, is the Heldentenor doing the Germanic heroic repertory, especially Wagner. Exemplars include the magnificent Lauritz Melchior, Wolfgang Windgassen and Jon Vickers who recently died.

Distinction needs to be drawn between singers who possess outstanding vocal qualities and those who emphasize the dramatic possibilities in a role. Alas, it is not always found in the same singer. There are, and have always been, singers with special star power who came to dominate a certain repertory through mastery of one or the other. Four examples of these tenors include Melchior, Jussi Bjoerling, Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo. Jenkins lists Domingo as especially notable for his dramatic skills. Bjoerling is cited for outstanding vocalism and Melchior for both—especially as Tristan.

It's enough to send one rummaging through old 78 record albums. *

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CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

February 2, Tuesday Opera San Jose, preview of Opera San Jose's production of *Carmen* noon-1pm, MLK Library, San Jose, Free

February 13, 14, 21, 26, and 28, Opera San Jose presents *Carmen* by Bizet, California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Opening Night Reception February 13, 11-12pm, Tickets: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1½ hours before the opera performance.

February 11, 8pm, Opera Preview with piano of West Bay Opera's *Eugene Onegin*, Lucie Stern Ballroom, Palo Alto, Free

February 19, 21, 27, 28, West Bay Opera, presents *Eugene Onegin* by Tchaikovsky, 8pm except Sundays at 2pm, tickets 650-424-9999 or order online www.WBOpera.org. Student, senior, and group discounts.

MARCH

March 30, Wednesday Opera San Jose, General Director's Dinner, California Theatre, 5-9pm, \$500 per plate, 408-437-4450.

APRIL

April 5, Tuesday Opera San Jose, preview of Opera San Jose's Spring production of *Streetcar Named Desire*, noon-1pm, MLK Library, San Jose, Free

April 16, 17, 21, 24, 29, and May 1, Opera San Jose presents *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Andre Previn, 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.

OPERAS IN MOVIE THEATERS

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

Met Opera HD performances, Met Opera Simulcasts are shown at Century 20 Oakridge, Santana Row 6, and AMC Cupertino. For more information: metopera.org Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$23 for seniors. Encores are at 6:30pm.

Puccini's *Turandot* — January 30

Encore — February 3

Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* — March 5

Encore — March 9

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* — April 2,

Encore — April 6

Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* — April 16

Encore — April 20

Strauss's *Elektra* — April 30

Encore — May 4

Opera in Cinema

For the 2015-16 season at Camera 3 Cinema, located at 288 S. Second Street San Jose: Tickets are \$18.50 and free parking is available. For ticket information www.cameracinemas.com/operas.shtml

February 14 & 16, 2016 — *Der Rosenkavalier* by Strauss — Salzburg Festival, Austria

March 27 & 29, 2016 — *Tosca* by Puccini — Opera Royal de Wallonie, Liege

April 24 & 26, 2016 — *La Damnation de Faust* by Berlioz — Opera Nationale de Paris

SAVE THE DATE — SATURDAY, APRIL 23,

Champagne Brunch and Opera Entertainment at La Rinconada Country Club

Career Updates

by Susan English

Audiences got an opportunity to see several alumni from both OSJ and Merola in Opera San Jose's production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* in November. Former Resident Artist, **Michael Dailey**, sang Don Basilio, and former Merolini, **Eugene Brancoveanu** sang Count Aimaviva. Another Merolini, **Amina Edris**, sang Susanna and was reviewed in the San Jose Mercury News by Elijah Ho with: "Amina Edris, as Figaro's fiancée Susanna, sang so vivaciously she received the loudest ovations of the evening. Her chemistry with Wager [Figaro] was heartfelt, and the soprano's uncommon performance of 'Deh, vieni, non tardar' was laced with well-placed expressivity and color."

Another Former Resident Artist from OSJ has received recognition from many sources. **Lori Phillips** was nominated for a 2015 Grammy for her recording of *L'Orestie d'Eschyle*. The New York Times praised Ms. Phillips as "impressive with formidable vocal power" and Opera News noted: "Soprano Lori Phillips was terrific. Her voice started out in excellent form and kept getting better, her clarion upper register sending chills down one's spine" (review for Burnnhilde in *Die Walkure*).

West Bay Opera showcased another former OSJ Resident Artist in their production of *Rigoletto*. **Krassen Karagiozov** sang the title role. The San Francisco Classical Voice reviewed Mr. Karagiozov's performance: "The most commanding singer on the stage was undoubtedly Krassen Karagiozov as Rigoletto. He deployed his baritone voice to great effect with a wide range of textures. Booming resonance contrasted with suave legato lines and sharply barked taunts. Karagiozov also kept up an impressively consistent limp and

hunch throughout his stage time. His gestures and expressions often felt melodramatic in the small theater, but then so did the rest of the show." Joining this cast was former Merolini, **Phil Skinner**. The same reviewer noted: "Phil Skinner made a wonderfully creepy Sparafucile and exited his first scene with an incredible, droned, low F."

Former Merolini and Adler Fellow, **Laura Claycomb** joined the San Francisco Symphony with Michael Tilson Thomas to sing Strauss' *Brentano Lieder, Opus 68, nos. 1-5*. The San Francisco Chronicle wrote of that performance "There was pure delight as Claycomb — now an international star but still well remembered locally from her days as an Adler Fellow at the San Francisco Opera — brought grace and astonishing precision to five of the six 'Brentano Lieder.' ... the others [songs] took wing on the strength of Claycomb's incisive diction and effortlessly placed coloratura. The sliding outbursts that erupt in the middle of each phrase of *Ich wollt' ein Sträusslein binden* sounded utterly organic, and the fluttery vocal filigree and impeccable trills of the final 'Amor' were simply exquisite." Ms. Claycomb currently serves as consultant for the Bolshoi Young Artists Program, giving master classes there and at the Centre for Operatic Studies in Sulmona, Italy.

Opera News reviewed San Francisco Opera's production of *Luisa Miller* noting the contributions of Merolini **Leah Crocetto** who sang the title role. The magazine noted: "Crocetto, who has been charting a path into Verdi roles in recent years, has the voice for Luisa, and she brought her customary sonic opulence and precision to the role of the Tyrolean soldier's ill-fated daughter."

Continued on page 5

Another of this fall's San Francisco Opera productions utilized the voices of many former and current Merolini and Adler Fellows. *Il Barbiere Di Siviglia* featured alumni **Lucas Meachem** as Figaro, **Daniela Mack** as Rosina, **Rene Barbera** as Count Almaviva, and **Catherine Cook** as Berta. Current Adler Fellows were **Matthew Stump**, **Edward Nelson**, and **Efrain Solis**. The San Francisco Classical Voice reviewed the opera noting: "As Figaro, Lucas Meacham drew all eyes whenever he entered the stage. He delivered every line with such naturalness and variety that he seemed to be thinking them up in the moment. This barber-matchmaker has ingenuity, guts, and an endearing ability to laugh at himself, so for once, his claims of the demand for his services hardly seem exaggerated. He also has a strong baritone with a warm top and an excellent facility for delivering patter at breakneck speed." They also noted: "Catherine Cook got a brief star turn as the housekeeper, Berta. Her resonant voice found a distinctive place in the ensembles, and her obvious exasperation with both Rosina and Bartolo, plus her opportunistic plan to enjoy whatever time remained to her, provoked lots of laughs."

San Francisco Opera featured many current Adler Fellows in their production of *The Magic Flute*. Two of the Three Ladies were sung by Adlers: **Nian Wang** and **Zanda Svede**. **Efrain Solis** sang Papageno and **Maria Valdes** sang Papagena. Other Adlers included: **Chong Wang**, **Anthony Reed**, and **Edward Nelson**. The San Jose Mercury News complimented the acting ability of one Adler noting: "Baritone Efrain Solis, singing his first Papageno, was funnier than most."

Bay Area composer Jake Heggie has created a new opera that premiered in Dallas, Texas and featured former Merolini

Joyce DiDonato. *Great Scott* premiered with another Bay Area resident, mezzo-soprano **Frederica von Stade**, and former Merola coach **Patrick Summers**. Of Mr. Summers, Bachtrack noted: "Conductor Patrick Summers has a long association with Jake Heggie, including conducting the world premiere of *Dead Man Walking*, and this showed in his handling of the score." Their review of the singing included: "Joyce DiDonato gave the dramatically thoughtful and vocally stunning performance one expects from her. There were some passages in the score that seemed a bit high for Ms. DiDonato, but she negotiated them well. Her Act II mad scenes (one as Arden and one as Rosa) were magic. Frederica von Stade was in fine form vocally and gave a noble performance of a woman who has sacrificed her ambitions for marriage, and she and Ms. DiDonato had a lovely chemistry singing together." Alexandra Bonifeld writes on Criticalrant.com: "Heggie/McNally wrote the challenging, mercurial role of Arden Scott for DiDonato. She executes it — she kills it, in today's vernacular — with vivacious charm, elegance and an easy modernity that illuminates her consummate skill and talent as a performer at the pinnacle of a distinguished career. Given the sumptuous praise heaped on DiDonato at a national and international level, it's hard to find new words to describe her awe-inspiring performance. Indefatigable? Graced with a voice to melt hearts and the stamina and resilience to define and drive the show from her first note to the final faux opera aria's triumphant, tragic conclusion, DiDonato is the real article at supernova scale. She's a giant of an artist imbuing her art form with boundless love, dignity and profound, breathtaking talent. She is "the BOMB." For those who wish to experience *Great Scott*, this opera will be performed in May 2016 in San Diego. *

San José Opera Guild
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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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