



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

August 2017

Metropolitan Opera 50th Anniversary Gala

by Peggy Heiman

On September 16th 1966, the Metropolitan Opera opened its doors for the first time in a new home at Lincoln Center, with the world premiere of Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra*, starring Leontyne Price and Justino Díaz. The New York Times declared the opening of the new opera house a "crescendo of splendor," and a new era of theatrical possibility was born.

On May 7th 2017, the Metropolitan Opera celebrated its 50th Anniversary and my husband Fred and I were there. We did not attend the midnight dinner gala, but were there for five hours of the most memorable opera performances we have ever seen. Elaborate backdrops and sets accompanied each performer, who dressed in costume appropriate to the selection. There were more than three dozen star singers, excerpts from 29 operas, a stage full of vintage film footage and marvelous projected images of classic productions.

The evening opened with Mr. Nézet-Séguin conducting Leonard Bernstein's overture to *West Side Story*, as a video montage showed decrepit buildings being removed, and animated projections depicting the halls of Lincoln Center rising in an uplifting surge. The emotional high point came with an unscheduled performance: Peter Gelb, the company's

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Fall Lecture Series

by Steve Zilles

It is once again time to begin thinking about Opera in the Fall. This fall we have four opera lectures beginning on Wednesday, August 30 with a lecture on Puccini's *Turandot* by Jonathan Khuner. *Turandot* has an oriental setting; the name is a corruption of *Turandokt*, daughter of Turan. Turan, the traditional enemy of the Iranians, is the area to the Northeast of Iran, about where Uzbekistan is today. This is the story of a powerful woman being confronted by the power of a sincere love and how she handles it. It was Giacomo Puccini's final opera. In fact, he died prior to completing the opera, but it has some of his very best music. Everyone familiar with the Three Tenors concerts knows "Nessun Dorma" (No one sleeps) and there are other spectacular arias as well. Our speaker, Jonathan Khuner has been Artistic and Musical Director of West Edge Opera since 1993. He earns his living as Assistant Conductor and prompter for San Francisco Opera. He last spoke to us on Verdi's *A Masked Ball* in 2014.

We then follow that presentation with a talk by Derek Katz on Richard Strauss *Elektra*. *Elektra* is Strauss retelling of the classical Greek story of Agamemnon returning from the Trojan war and being killed by his wife's lover. It is his daughter *Elektra* that seeks (successfully) to avenge this travesty. Strauss' music,

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general manager, announced from the stage that the Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky had “defied all the odds and the gods to be here tonight.” Mr. Hvorostovsky, 54, is being treated for a brain tumor; in December he announced that he would stop performing in staged opera and he was shaky on his feet when he walked out. The audience broke into a long, welcoming ovation as the beaming Mr. Hvorostovsky blew kisses to his fans and the orchestra. He sang the stormy “Cortigiani” aria from Verdi’s *Rigoletto* and the distinctive dark colorings of his sound and his communicative intensity came through in a valiant performance.

The conductors were Marco Armiliato, James Levine and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. The program included: *Antony and Cleopatra* (From Alexandria, this is the news) sung by Metropolitan Opera Chorus; *Andrea Chénier* (Nemico della patria) sung by Plácido Domingo; *Luisa Miller* (Oh! Fede negar potessi ... Quando le sere al placido) sung by Piotr Beczala; *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Hai già vinta la causa ... Vedrò mentr’io sospiro) sung by Michael Volle; *Don Pasquale* (Pronta io son) sung by Pretty Yende and Mariusz Kwiecien; *Tosca* (Vissi d’arte) sung by Krisine Opolais; *Boris Godunov* (Boris’ mad scene) sung by René Pape; *La Bohème* (Che gelida manina ... Sì, mi chiamano Mimi ...) sung by Sonya Yoncheva, Joseph Calleja, Dwayne Croft, Yunpeng Wang and Sava Vemić; *Werther* (Va! Laisse couler mes larmes) sung by Joyce DiDonato; *Die Zauberflöte* (Der Vogel fänger bin ich ja) sung by Michael Volle; *Les Troyens* (Nuit

d’ivresse) sung by Susan Graham; *Adriana Lecouvreur* (Acerba voluttá, dolce tortura) sung by Dolora Zajick; *La Fille Du Régiment* (Ah! Mes amis ... Pour mon âme!) sung by Javier Camarena; *Macbeth* (Nel di della vittoria ...) sung by Anna Netrebko; *Tannhäuser* (Entance of the guests into Minstrels’ Hall) sung by Metropolitan Opera Chorus; *Porgy and Bess* (Bess, you is my woman now) sung by Pretty Yende and Eric Owens; *Samson et Dalila* (Mon Coeur s’ouvre á ta voix) sung by Elina Garanča; *Don Carlo* (Grand Inquisitor Scene) sung by James Morris and Günther Groissböch; *Tosca* (E lucevan le stele) sung by Vittorio Grigolo; *Thaïs* (Baigne d’eau tes mains et tes lèvres) sung by Renée Fleming and Plácido Domingo; *I Lombardi Alla Prima Crociata* (Qual voluttá trascorrere) sung by Angela Meade, Michael Fabiano and Günther Groissböch; *Semiramide* (Bel raggio lusinghier) sung by Joyce DiDonato; *Madama Butterfly* (Un bel di) sung by Anna Netrebko; *Aida* (Act II Finale) sung by Latonia Moore, Dolora Zajick, Yusif Eyvazov, Željko Lučić, James Morris and Sava Vemić.

What a fantastic *once in a lifetime* opera evening!



Career Updates

by Susan English

Merola celebrated its 60th year in June, “In a thrilling, star-studded concert, famous alumni and the youthful Class of 2017 joined together on Sunday to mark the Merola Opera Program’s 60th birthday.” This from the San Francisco Classical Voice which also noted, “Merola alumna, world-renowned soprano **Deborah Voigt** came to Herbst to give opening and closing remarks. She and opera-world heartthrob **Dolora Zajick** started the 90-minute program with the “Belle nuit, o nuit d’amour” barcarolle from Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffmann*.” The evening illustrated just how successful the Merola Program has been and continues to be. Currently there are “1,200-plus alumni, including some illustrious singers who sent their birthday wishes via video. Among them: **Thomas Hampson** (now singing in a La Scala *Don Giovanni*), **Susan Graham** (on her way to sing Prince Orlofsky at the Santa Fe *Die Fledermaus*), **Joyce DiDonato** (from Berlin where she is appearing with the Philharmonic), and **Patricia Racette** (branching out next year and making her directorial debut with *La Traviata* at Opera Theater of St. Louis).” According to Joshua Koffman for the SF Chronicle in reviewing the evening and Merola, “It is no exaggeration to say that the foundations laid during summer after summer of education — providing everything from vocal and language training to the sheer power of industry networking — have had a lasting impact on the American operatic landscape.”

Another clear demonstration of the impact of Merola on opera was the San Francisco Opera’s production of *Rigoletto* this summer. The title role was sung by **Quinn Kelsey**, (Merola 2002). Opera News featured him on the

June 2017 cover, noting “Ready for action as *Rigoletto* in San Francisco” next to his photograph. Steven Winn, writing for SFGate said of his portrayal, “It was the singer already well known to San Francisco Opera audiences who dominated and largely defined the dramatic character of the evening. In a performance marked by blighted dignity, baritone Quinn Kelsey played the title role of the jester in a strikingly forthright manner.”

Additional Merola alumni singing this production included **Pene Pati** as the Duke of Mantua. Winn wrote, “For sheer tonal pleasure, Pati’s Duke made a connection. His tenor, if a little light in spots, was buttery and suavely delivered.” Pati’s wife and Merolini, **Amina Edris**, sang Countess Ceprano, and his brother, **Amitai Pati**, another Merolini, sang Motteo Borsa. Adler Fellow, **Andrew Manea**, sang Marullo.

Yet another Merola alumna, **Zanda Švēde** (whom our Guild helped sponsor!) sang Maddalena in this production. Winn wrote, “Mezzo-soprano Zanda Švēde was seductively repellent as Maddalena, his co-conspirator sister.” Both Ms. Švēde and Quinn Kelsey will reprise their roles in the *Rigoletto* that the Chicago Lyric Opera will present next fall. Zanda will also sing Grimgerde in *Walkure* for the Lyric Opera of Chicago in November, Maddalena in *Rigoletto* with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City in March, and the title role in *Carmen* for the Atlanta Opera in the spring.

Bryan Hymel (Merola 2001) is having a busy year. April, June and July he sang in *Carmen* with the Opera National de Paris, and in May he sang the title role in *Don Carlo* at the Royal Opera House. Tim Ashley wrote in The

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Guardian, “Hymel is singing Carlo for the first time, and does so gloriously, with real ardour in his voice, ringing top notes that go on forever, and a wonderful, innate sense of Verdian lyricism.” Additional upcoming appearances include *Madama Butterfly* with Festival Castell de Perlada, and *La Damnation de Faust* at the Aspen Music Festival (August) and at Barbican Hall in London (September).

Schwabacher Debut Recitals is now in its 34th season. Presented in the Taube Atrium Theater, these feature up and coming singers and collaborative pianists, and occasionally directors. April’s concert featured an all Merolini cast: **Renee Rapiere**, mezzo-soprano, **Anthony Reed**, bass, **John Churchwell**, piano, and **Aria Umezawa**, director. Steve Winn in the SF Classical Voice noted, “At once witty and wide-ranging in its musical and emotional effects, this Schwabacher Sunday repurposed a duo recital into something fresh. The audience would have been perfectly happy and well-served to hear a conventional stand-and-deliver program. But in spinning out its slight but suggestive storyline, *The Woods* made the songs vibrate off each other and matter more.” Perhaps these recitals will take a new direction following this well praised departure from the more staid pattern of previous recitals.

In May, West Bay Opera presented *Salome*, featuring former Opera San Jose Resident Artist **Isiah Musik-Ayala** as John the Baptist. Steve Winn wrote for the SF Classical Voice, “Musik-Ayala’s ominous vocal lines and steely authority, even in heavy chains and coarse long hair, powerfully reconfigure the drama.” In the same edition of SF Classical Voice, Lisa Hirsch reviewed Opera Parallele’s production of Philip Glass’ *Les Enfants Terribles*. **Hadleigh Adams** (Merola 2012) sang Paul with Ms. Hirsch commenting: “*Les Enfants*

Terribles is strongly cast...Baritone Hadleigh Adams, tall and robustly built, was none the less a persuasively sickly Paul, singing with dark manliness.” In June Mr. Adams joined former Merolini and former Resident Artist (OSJ) **Alex Boyer** at Festival Opera in Walnut Creek. In Pagliacci, Mr. Boyer sang Canio and Mr. Adams sang Silvio. Earlier in May, Mr. Adams sang Jesus in *St Matthew Passion* with the Denver Symphony in Colorado.

In early August, West Edge Opera will be presenting Ambroise Thomas’ *Hamlet*, with **Edward Nelson** (Merola 2014) singing the title role. The San Francisco Chronicle (11/2/2016) published an article about him as he became an Adler Fellow noting “Sheri Greenawald, the director of the San Francisco Opera Center since 2002, has confidence that Nelson has what it takes to go the distance because of the choices he’s making now.” She notes the importance of Mr. Nelson’s August performance with, “He’s going to try out lead roles in smaller places. He’ll do a smaller role in a big house. Until *Hamlet*. That will be his role. It’s perfect.” His profile from San Francisco Opera Center notes that in addition to singing *Hamlet*, “after completing the Adler Fellowship, his 2017 engagements include the role of Steward in Jonathan Dove’s *Flight* with Opera Omaha, and Schaunard in *La Bohème* with Cincinnati Opera.”

Nikki Einfeld (Merola 2003) sang at Opera San Jose’s fundraiser, *Sonora DiVino*. In May she sang Violetta from *La Traviata* with the Diablo Symphony Orchestra. Alfredo was sung by OSJ’s former Resident Artist, **Christopher Bengochea**. Ms. Einfeld will sing *Francophilia* (Works including Chansons de Bilitis (C. Debussy), Chansons Madecasses (M. Ravel), Songs of Emily Dickinson (A. Copland) and a world premiere performance of

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Power is Everywhere by Kurt Rohde) for the Left Coast Chamber Ensemble at the SF Conservatory of Music and the Berkeley Piano Club.

Soprano **Nadine Sierra** (Merola 2010) has been named the winner of the 2017 Richard Tucker Award. The announcement comes on the heels of Sierra's performances last month as Ilia in the Metropolitan Opera's *Idomeneo* under James Levine, which the New York Classical Review called "musically superb" and "incandescent all night." The Tucker Award (often referred to as the "Heisman Trophy of Opera,") comes with a cash prize of \$50,000. The list of past winners includes former Merolini, **Joyce DiDonato**, as well as many other opera luminaries: **Renée Fleming**, **Stephanie Blythe**, **Lawrence Brownlee**,

Matthew Polenzani, and **Christine Goerke**. Ms. Sierra will be awarded the prize at the Foundation's annual gala, to be held this year on Sunday, December 10th at Carnegie Hall.

In April **AJ Glueckert** (Merola 2012) made his Met debut as Erik in Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* and sang the role in the first four performances of the opera at the Met this season on April 25, 29 matinee, May 4, and 8. The American tenor replaced the originally announced Jay Hunter Morris, who has withdrawn from his scheduled performances for personal reasons. The Observer noted of his performance, "AJ Glueckert's warm tenor as Erik made domesticity sound downright seductive." This was also Mr. Glueckert's role debut as Erik, a role he will reprise at Oper Frankfurt later this season.

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Additional activities of Merola alumni sent to us by Heidi Munzinger:

Seattle Opera:

- Renee Rapiere (Adler 2012-13) as Suzuki & Daniel Sumegi (Adler 1993-94) as The Bonze in *Madama Butterfly*, Aug 2017
- Daniel Sumegi as Don Basilio in *Barber of Seville*, Oct 2017
- Daniela Mack (Adler 2008-09) as Beatrice & Alek Shrader (Adler 2008-08) as Benedict in *Beatrice & Benedict*, Feb 2018
- Leah Crocetto (Adler 2009-11) as Aida, Brian Jagde (Adler 2010-12) as Radames & Daniel Sumegi as Ramfis in *Aida*, May 2018

Lyric Opera Chicago:

- Zanda Svede (Adler 2014-15) as Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, Oct 2017

Opera Colorado:

- Andrew Garland (Merola 2003-04) as Schaunard in *La Bohème*, Nov 2017
- Cynthia Clayton (OSJ 1992-96) as Alice & Susanna Biller (2010-11) as Nanetta in *Falstaff*, May 2018

Arizona Opera:

- Catherine Cook (Adler 1991-92) in *Candide*, Jan 2018
- Mark Delavan (Adler 1986-87) as Wotan in *Das Rheingold*, Apr 2018

San Diego Opera:

- Daniel Montenegro (2011) as Arcadia in *Florenzia en el Amazonas*, March 2018

Symphony Silicon Valley:

- Adam Lau (Merola 2011) in Haydn's *The Creation*, May 2018

especially the orchestra, is a chilling (and thrilling) accompaniment to the verbal duels between Elektra and her mother Clytemnestra. Derek Katz is an Associate Professor of Music History at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His specialty is Czech music, but he is well versed in 20th century music as well. He has recently spoken to us on *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* and *Susannah* (by Carlyle Floyd).

There is now a long hiatus in lectures because the upcoming opera is one with which we are likely to be familiar so there will be no lecture: *La Traviata* by Verdi. Our next presentation is on Wednesday, November 8 and it is *Manon* by Jules Massenet. Manon is the story of a young girl about to enter a convent who, instead, runs off with a young gentleman to Paris. She soon sees greater opportunities and he, dejected, enters the church. Only later when she realizes what she lost does she seek out her lover, but what follows, I cannot say. Our speaker is Timothy Flynn who has his Masters and Ph.D. in musicology from Northwestern University. He is currently Chair of Performing Arts at Olivet College and has spoken to us on many occasions, most recently: *La Chute de la Maison Usher*, *The Trojans* and the *Tales of Hoffmann*.

Our final lecture of the fall, on Wednesday, 15 November, is on *Girls of the Golden West*. No, this is not the Puccini opera, but a brand new opera by John Adams with a libretto by Peter Sellars who is also directing the production. This is based on the memoirs of Louise Amelia Knapp Smith who went by "Dame Shirley" when she was in Gold Country (in California). This is a story of what life was like for the various 49ers of both sexes and all races. It is an opera with a local affiliation, if only the Sierra Nevada. Our speaker is the

Dramaturg of the San Francisco Opera, Kip Cranna. Kip is both an excellent speaker and a member of the San Francisco Opera staff with a particular assignment to help with the creation of new operas. As such, he is able to bring particular insight into new works, such as *Girls of the Golden West*.

A date for West Bay Opera's season preview will be announced later,

As has been our custom, all the lectures will be a 10am at the Addison-Penzak Jewish Community Center at 14855 Oka Road, Los Gatos, CA 95032. This location is just off Lark Avenue between the entrance/exit to/from Highway 17 and Winchester Boulevard. Coffee is served prior to the lecture and at the break in the middle of the lecture.



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CALENDAR

By Connie Zilles

AUGUST

Summer Merola Events: To order tickets call S.F. Opera Box Office (415) 864-3330 or order online at www.sfopera.com, For more information see the article in May Newsletter by Susan English.

August 3, 7:30pm Thursday and Saturday
August 5, 2pm, *La Cenerentola* by Rossini, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, \$70/\$50.

August 19, 7:30pm, Merola Grand Finale, War Memorial Opera House, \$50/\$40/\$25.

LECTURE SERIES

August 30, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Jonathan Khuner discusses *Turandot* by Puccini at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10

SEPTEMBER

September 6, San Jose Opera Guild lecture, Derek Katz will discuss *Elektra* by Richard Strauss. See above for location.

PERFORMANCES

September 9, 10, 14, 17, 22, 24, Opera San Jose presents *Così fan tutte*, California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1½ hours before each performance.

OCTOBER

October 13, 15 (2pm), 21 & 22 (2pm), *Norma* by Bellini, West Bay Opera, tickets 650-424-9999 or order online www.WBOpera.org. Student, senior, and group discounts. Piano Preview: October 5 at 8 pm at the Palo Alto Arts Center

OPERA IN CINEMA

For the 2017-18 season at Camera 3 Cinema, 288 S. Second Street, an opera scheduled each month, with screenings Sunday mornings at 12 noon, and a repeat show Tuesday evening at 7:15pm. For ticket information, Cinema Cinemas.

August 13 & 15 *Un Ballo in Maschera* (Verdi) Bayerische Staatsopera, Munich

September 17 & 19 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—Ballet—de L'Opera National de Paris

October 22 & 24 *Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci* (Mascagni /Leoncavallo) Salzburg Festival, Austria,

MET HD

Met HD Simulcasts, at Century 20 Oakridge, Santana Row 6, and AMC Cupertino. For more information; metopera.org tickets are \$24 for adults and \$22 for seniors

October 7, 12:55pm *Norma* by Bellini, new production.

October 14, 12:55pm *Die Zauberflöte* by Mozart.



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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. The Guild helps sponsor singers each year at Opera San José, the Merola Opera Program, as well as San Jose State Opera Workshop.

Throughout the year, the Guild sponsors lectures and previews to coincide with the San Francisco Opera, West Bay Opera and Opera San José's seasons.

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