



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

February 2018

Farewell and Welcome

by Peggy Heiman

It is time for me to say farewell as San José Opera Guild's President. I have been privileged to hold the position for four years and have really enjoyed the experience. I will remain as an active member of the Board and serve as the Parliamentarian.

Let us all welcome Steve Zilles as the new President. He has been on the board since 2005 and certainly knows his way around the organization. Most of you know him as the chair of the Lecture Committee. He has done an excellent job coordinating with the San Francisco Opera Guild and the JCC to schedule our excellent lectures. We are very grateful that he will keep that role in addition to the presidency.

Steve graduated from MIT with a Computer Science Degree. Following graduation, he joined IBM in Cambridge MA and in 1974 moved to work at IBM Research in San Jose. Following his retirement from IBM, he worked for Adobe. He is now fully retired, if you don't count all his extracurricular activities. Steve is a docent at the Asian Art Museum. He and his wife Connie travel extensively. They have covered much of the Orient, Europe, Africa and South America, with his last trip being to Mongolia. His hobby is photography, creating excellent slide presentations of his travels.

Connie and Steve have two children and two grandchildren.

Opera Review

Thanks to David Packard for a remarkable new opera perfect for the holiday season

by Mort Levine

When David Woodley Packard made possible the restoration of a 1920s movie palace to create the lush richness of the California Theatre, he probably didn't realize he would one day make a multi-talented youngster's dream come true—as in a fairy tale.

The world premiere of the English language version of a 10-year-old's retelling of the Cinderella story in a fully staged opera went forward for seven performances last December. It was a gift, indeed, to the opera lovers in the community.

The unlikely star of the show was its composer, Alma Deutscher, now 12. She performed solo interludes impeccably on the violin, the piano and in the closing scene, the organ for the wedding of the handsome prince and his beautiful Cinderella. The happy ending brought some of the most rousing cheers, tears, applause and standing ovations to make the historic theatre's rafters ring.

Getting the opera to the stage with its lavish production values is as much a fabulously magical outcome as the Cinderella story itself. Thanks to the Packard Humanities Institute and the creative energies of Opera San José's creative team which outdid itself in direction (Brad Dalton), sets (Steven C. Kemp), costumes (Johann Stiegmeir). The full OSJ orchestra filled the pit and the hall with the richly romantic musical idiom created by its youthful composer and presented with verve, humor and pathos by British conductor Jane Glover.

Alma Deutscher's music genius was recognized at a very early age. When she was seven she created a 12 minute opera based on Neal Gaiman's short story "Dream Sweepers." It was selected by an Israeli Music Festival.

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She composed classical instrumental pieces and then at 10 began work on the full length Cinderella. It was performed in a concert version with a libretto in Hebrew. A year later a chamber opera version in German was presented in Vienna. It was that performance that attracted the interest of David Packard.

Acting as the producer of the opera, he brought Opera San José and the first rate set of collaborators into the effort.

The vocal talents represent an array of outstanding singer-actors in a cast whose members have distinguished themselves in many venues here and abroad.

Cinderella was sung by Texas soprano Vanessa Becerra who brought a buttery coloratura to the Cinderella role. She captured the essence of the anguish of the waif much abused by a nasty stepmother (soprano Mary Dunleavy) and her two equally nasty sisters, Griselda (Stacy Tappan) and Zibaldona (Karin Mushegain).

Excellent voices filled the other critical roles. Bass baritone Nathan Stark was the king who is anxious for his son to wed and provide an heir to the throne. The king's minister and humorous gadfly was performed by baritone James Myer.

Mexican mezzo soprano Claudia Chapa takes on the character role of a ragged old woman transformed into the magic-making fairy. She has a great range including some key contralto passages.

The Prince was performed by tenor Jonas Hacker whose previous roles range from Mozart to Philip Glass. His sweet tones blended well with those of Ms. Becerra as they finally find each other. The glass slipper is relegated to a minor incident in this Cinderella, who conjures up melodies as a hobby. The prince has a hobby of writing poetry.

Bent on finding the charming girl who dashed away from the ball at the stroke of midnight, the prince vows to visit every home in the kingdom singing the first six words of a song they sang together, hoping to find the one girl who could complete the song.

This production also had dancers at the ball, choristers at the cathedral wedding. "And in a small singing role as the ring bearer, was the composer's younger sister Helen."

Cinderella is indeed a tour-de-force for Alma Deutscher. For local audiences it was a most memorable event which shows what makes opera such a complex art form. And a most intriguing question is where does Alma go from here?



Wedding scene finale, with the composer Alma Deutscher performing on the organ. Photo by Robert Shomler.

Career Updates

by Susan English

One of Opera San José's former Resident Artists has made a return visit to the Bay Area in *Norma* with the West Bay Opera. **Christina Major** sang the title role this past October. John Orr wrote of her performance in the San Jose Mercury News, "Christina Major was powerful as Norma. She managed all of Bellini's fancy demands. Major stood there in a truly unfortunate costume and spouted an eruption of notes, from staccato chop-chop-chops to long, emotionally powerful phrases that knock us back in admiration." San Francisco Classical Voice interviewed Ms Major just before her performances noting the maturity demanded by the role. She said, "Life has certainly taken me on a route I hadn't expected, but to sing this role, you must have lived and experienced life from all angles—love, confusion, motherhood, secrecy—different faces for different situations: anger, betrayal, forgiveness, and purification through fire. The vocal demands are as difficult as her life painted in the score. With the arrival of our first child four months early and then eight months in the neonatal intensive care unit, I was forced to take a hiatus from the opera stage until we were both well. Eden is now 2 years old and a fireball. Watching her fight and come to life through all of that, it was clear I had to do the same. So why not the Everest of the soprano repertoire?"

West Bay Opera will feature another former Resident Artist from Opera San José in their next two operas. **Krassen Karagiozov** will perform in both *Fidelio* in February and in *Carmen* the coming May.

Opera News featured a former Merolini, **Samantha Hankey**, in their "Sound Bites" article in November. The article begins: "Samantha Hankey delivered a star-quality performance as Handel's Agrippina at Juilliard last season. Her luscious, amber-toned mezzo zipped through the evil queen's machinations with a dazzling combination of assurance and glamour..." Ms Hankey sang in *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall in December,

and will sing Rossini's Rosina in Oslo. Some of her additional credits include, "four summers at Aspen, a win in the Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions, the world premiere of David Hertzberg's *Rose Elf* at Opera Philadelphia and the title role in *La Cenerentola* at the Merola Program in San Francisco this past summer."

Another Merolini, **Ailyn Perez**, was again a focus of Opera News. She sang the title role in the Metropolitan Opera's production of *Thais*. Opera Wire noted of her performance: "In her role debut, Pérez's interpretation of the heroine emphasized her alluring and seductive qualities, her voice vibrant with a relaxed and confident quality. Her initial lines were deliciously sung, the legato elegant. You could immediately feel why this particular character was so iconic to those around her. As she taunted Athanaël in an ensuing scene, she threw off Massenet's sunny melodic lines with corresponding vocal quality, the climax of the scene featuring an astounding high note sung from a platform. If first impressions are everything, then Pérez had her audience won over." The Epoch Times reviewed the opera beginning with, "American soprano Ailyn Pérez has made the transition from promising young artist and award winner—including the 2012 Richard Tucker Award—to established star. This season, she has the leads in three operas at the Metropolitan Opera. The first is the title role in Jules Massenet's 1894 *Thais*, and she demonstrated why she has achieved that artistic stature."

Barihunks' November blog featured **Cody Quattlebaum** (Merola 2016 and 2017). He recently performed in the world premiere of *Der Traum von Dir* at the Zurich Opera. Xavier Dayer's opera translates to The Dream of You. It is a chamber opera based on the novella *Letter from an Unknown Woman* by Stefan Zweig. Mr. Quattlebaum also performed in Zurich Opera's *La Fanciulla del West*. The blog goes on to note that Quattlebaum appears on their 2018 Barihunks Calendar, "which includes 20 of opera's sexiest men."

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Island City Opera is taking advantage of the rich talents of Bay Area opera singers by bringing two Merolini to their January production of two one act operas by Rimsky-Korsakov. *Mozart and Salieri* and *Kashchey the Immortal* was performed in the Elks Ballroom in Alameda. **Alex Boyer** (OSJ 2008-2013, and Merola 2007) and **Bojan Knezevic** (Adler 1995), were featured in these operas. This opera company is five years old and is “committed to bringing professional opera productions at affordable prices to the Alameda community.” Their website goes on to say “We strive to show veteran opera-goers and novices alike the wonderful experience of great opera in an intimate setting, to be a showcase for talented artists and directors and develop young artists and technical theater personnel in our community. We try to help new audiences discover the excitement of opera, identify with the characters and plots, and feel the power of the music of opera.”

David Packard through the Packard Humanities Institute in conjunction with Opera San José hosted the astonishing Alma Deutscher, composer of *Cinderella*, an instant celebrity as a prodigy, accomplished musician, and performer. Many who attended thought it was a delightful holiday gift. Merolini **Natalie Image** sang the role of Cinderella for the December 21st performance, and will become an Adler Fellow this month. Former OSJ Resident Artist **Khori Dastoor** was the Associate Producer.

Editor’s Note: The December 20 Cinderella performance was simulcast by medici.tv and is available as a free webcast now until March 21: www.medici.tv/en/operas/cinderella-alma-deutscher-american-premiere/

As the Adler Fellows class of 2017 departs, we will be watching the careers of many of these former Merolini. In particular **Pene Pati** has made his own road toward fame. He began the Merola program in 2014, then decided to leave the program to develop another avenue for his voice. The San Francisco Classical Voice noted this saying, “In the long, illustrious history of the San

Francisco Opera’s Adler Fellowships, Pene Pati is probably among the handful of singers with the greatest promise ... and the biggest need for the discipline and training the program provides, but we’ll never know how that would have worked out.” But it turns out we did get some idea of the conclusion of his Merolini and Adler work. He returned to Merola and became an Adler—then performed in several main stage productions for the San Francisco Opera. His professional web site notes, “Pati became an Adler Fellow and has since performed and studied a wide range of roles in San Francisco including Messenger (*Aïda*), Count Lerma and Royal Herald (*Don Carlo*), and Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), as well as being part of the world premiere of Bright Sheng’s *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Most recently, a major debut on the stage of San Francisco Opera as Duca di Mantua in Verdi’s *Rigoletto* under Nicola Luisotti earned him universal praise and critical acclaim for his “suavely delivered” (San Francisco Chronicle) and “clarion clear” (San Francisco Examiner) performance.” Mr. Pati will be performing in *The Elixir of Love* with the New Zealand Opera in Auckland in May as Nemorino. We will be watching his career!

Another Merolini whose career we continue to watch is **Zanda Svede** (whom our Guild helped sponsor during her first Merola year.) She has just completed singing Grimmerde in Chicago Lyric Opera’s *Walkure*. In February she will sing with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Bernstein’s Mass with Dudamel, then travel in March to sing Maddalena with Lyric Opera of Kansas City’s *Rigoletto*. April will take her to the Atlanta Opera where she will sing the title role in *Carmen*.

One already famous Merolini, **Anna Netrebko**, made a “thrilling” debut as Aida at the Salzberg Festival. The London Telegraph wrote that she sang, “with a polish and elegance...Her richly beautiful middle register glowed throughout, and her tireless top register rode the stormier passages with amazing ease...much of the Nile scene was exquisitely achieved.” The opera was conducted by Riccardo Muti with the Vienna Philharmonic

Orchestra. Rupert Christiansen went on to write in the Telegraph, "An authoritative friend told me he thought she was the best Aida since Leontyne Price." Ms Netrebko just completed singing the title role of *Manon Lescaut* with the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. In February she will sing in two concerts with Yusif Eyvazov, first at the Grimaldi Forum in Monaco-Ville, and then at the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall in Moscow.

DATES TO REMEMBER

May 4 & 6, San Jose State University School of Music and Dance Theatre presents *Die Fledermaus* starring Sandra Bengochea as Rosalinda. Music Building's Concert Hall at 7pm. SJOG is a sponsor of this event so all guild members will be admitted at no charge.

June 4, San José Opera Guild Lecture on the Ring Cycle.

Camera 3 Cinema at 288 S. Second Street in downtown San Jose is being renovated and is now known as 3Below Theaters and Lounge. So far the offerings include musical stage programs, sing along to movies and independent, classic and retro movies and even an open mic opera night.

SJOG Newsletter

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CALENDAR

By Connie Zilles

February 10, 11, 15, 18, 23, 25, Opera San José presents *The Flying Dutchman* by Wagner, California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1½ hours before the performance.

February 16 & 24, (8pm), 18 & 25 (2pm), *Fidelio* by Beethoven, West Bay Opera, tickets 650-424-9999 or order online www.WBOpera.org. Student, senior, and group discounts. Free Piano Preview: Feb. 8 at 8 pm at the Palo Alto Art Center

April 7, 6pm, Merola Opera Spring Gala, *An Evening of Mystery*, The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco, cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, silent auction, dinner, dancing, black tie, \$450, 415 864-3330

April 14, 15, 19, 22, 27, 29, Opera San José presents *La Traviata* by Verdi, California Theatre, 8 pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1½ hours before the performance.

April 21, 2018, 8pm, Opera San José, a Hilarious and Glorious **Night at the Opera**. Join Headliner and Host Paula Poundstone live onstage at the California Theatre, along with the OSJ Chorus and artists on the set of *La traviata*. For reservations call 408 437-4450.

Met HD SIMULCASTS, shown at the Century 20 Oakridge, Santana Row 6, and AMC Cupertino.

Saturdays

February 12, 2018, 9:00am: *L'Elisir d'Amore*
(Donizetti) Encore 2/14

February 24, 2018, 9:30am: *La Bohème*
(Puccini) Encore 2/28

March 10, 2018, 9:55am: *Semiramide* (Rossini)
Encore 3/14

March 31, 2018, 9:55am: *Così fan tutte*
(Mozart) Encore 4/4

April 14, 2018, 9:30am: *Luisa Miller* (Verdi)
Encore 4/18

April 28, 2018, 9:55am *Cendrillon*
(Massenet) Encore 5/2

San José Opera Guild
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Thank you for electing me San José Opera Guild President

by Steve Zilles

I am looking forward to being president of the San José Opera Guild for the next two years. We have been very fortunate to have been operating in the black (or very nearly so) for a long time. A great deal of credit for this goes to our two past presidents, Susan English and Peggy Heiman and our treasurers, Elliot Swanson and Fred Heiman. We intend to continue the programs that we have produced on an annual basis: the Fall and Spring Opera Lectures, our annual Brunch with Singers, our outreach to local schools with Opera-a-la-carte and Opera San José, our newsletter, and our donations to Opera San José, Merola Opera Program, West Bay Opera, San Jose State University Opera Program and our recently added support for Starting Arts. Starting Arts works in collaboration with the schools it serves to create

and deliver educational, scalable and cost effective art programs for 36,000 K-12 grade students each year. (See the November Newsletter www.sjoperaguild.org/Newsletters/2017q4w.pdf).

We encourage everyone who is interested in opera to attend our lectures and events and to bring their friends as well. The San José Opera Guild acts as a cultural organization with both educational and social aspects. We have coffee available before all our opera lectures to allow people to meet others with similar interests and to share their experiences. We also have an annual brunch with a silent auction and raffle that allows for greater social contact and helps us raise funds for our programs. We welcome all who are interested and are always looking for new members, so do bring your friends and tell others about our programs.

I look forward to meeting you all and hearing about your interests and desires.