



## A Feast of Ottawa Singers!

by Shelagh Williams

The Canadian Opera Company(COC)'s final two offerings of the season, Verdi's *Otello* and Puccini's *La Bohème* were a testament to Ottawa singers, the NCOS, and the Brian Law Opera Competition (BLOC)!

To begin, we saw the last night of *Otello*, starring the NCOS patron, baritone Gerald Finley, as Iago, originally Verdi's title character! The production was created by English National Opera as a co-production with Royal Swedish Opera and Teatro Real Madrid, and so came with director David Alden. He gave us a fairly straightforward production, with only a few quirky, head scratching aspects to distract one from the opera itself and its marvellous music. Alden and UK set and costume designer Jon Morrell brought us an exciting *Maometto II*, which we saw first at Santa Fe and then at the COC in 2016. However, for *Otello* they gave us a single dull serviceable Byzantine arena set with a changeable rear midsection and adjustable shutters on a large right wall opening. The costumes were of Verdi's era, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and were neither interesting nor sumptuous. Fortunately, the lighting was fantastic, with great contrasts of darkness and light, especially for the opening storm scene, and also the brilliant use of shadows and silhouettes to magnify the menace in several scenes!

Maestro Johannes Debus had a cast of great voices to work with, and the COC Chorus and Orchestra were absolutely glorious in the opening act by the port!

The best performer on stage was Gerald Finley, combining great singing and smooth acting! When dealing with other characters he sang beautifully and

butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but when he was alone his voice and manner revealed his true nature, as in his *Credo*. His eyes had a red, devilish gleam and twice he dropped a lit match to dramatically light a fire on stage! The staging of the oath of vengeance between Iago and Otello at the end of Act II, with the knife to cut and blood to smear, was very powerful. At the end, with Desdemona and Otello both dead, Iago just sat there with a big satanic smile on his face, like the devil incarnate. It was fascinating to watch Gerald Finley, without overacting, seem so easily to orchestrate the downfall of first Cassio, then Otello, and finally Desdemona, all the while appearing to be such a loyal friend!

Iago and his wife Emilia, sung by Canadian mezzo Carolyn Sproule, were trim and attractive looking, whereas most of the rest of the cast looked short and dumpy, no thanks to their costumes - big coats in Cyprus? But could they sing! American tenor Russell Thomas has a glorious voice, entering on his *Esultate*, and, being black, clearly pointed out Otello's racial difference to the Venetians. Soprano Tamara Wilson, also American, was, as Desdemona, contrastingly

very fair and blonde, and sang a lovely *Ave Maria*. COC Ensemble Studio (CES) grad tenors Andrew Haji and Owen McCausland, as golden-voiced Cassio and foppish Rodrigo respectively, strongly kept up the Canadian content!

This was altogether a marvellous production of a masterpiece - Shakespeare would have been proud!

We managed to sandwich in a quality noon hour COC concert by the Canadian Art Song Project. Soprano Alexandra Smither sang two items by Jeffrey

Photo: Michael Cooper



## Co-President's Report May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019

It was an honor and a pleasure to be Co-President with Murray Kitts over the last 12 months. Murray has great enthusiasm and knowledge of opera which we all enjoy. In addition, I am personally glad he made it back from all his travels to be at this Annual General Meeting.

Murray asked that I focus on the future in my remarks. And I am excited about the next 12 months. However, before I talk about the future, let me tell you about our Finances and our membership. Our financial situation remains very solid with a record amount of cash in the bank. We have no debts. All we really care about is that we maintain a healthy balance, which we do. Regarding membership, it is healthy, neither growing nor declining, staying steady at around 60 members.

Now to the future, this is a Brian Law Opera Competition year. The date is Saturday October 19<sup>th</sup>. We are again at Southminster United Church. This year, we have made a few changes which I hope everyone will like. First, we have increased the prize money by 40% from previous years. We have the funds to do it, so why not? This is really the main purpose of the society. We have moved the competition to the afternoon to 2 PM. My fingers are crossed that this will increase the attendance and not reduce it. If anyone would like to help on the day please let me know. Volunteers and donations are always welcome. This is the one event every two years where we benefit from your generous donations. Thank you.

Murray has kindly agreed to give another High C and High Tea presentation. We have decided to hold this in September and are targeting Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>. I am not sure of his topic, but as always it will be informative and enjoyable. And of course, we will be serving a delicious English high tea with lovely scones and jam and tea beautifully poured by Carole. We hope to see you there.

Regarding Opera Alla Pasta, we are considering skipping January and February in 2020 since the weather was terrible this year. We still intend to have seven events. In preparation we need to decide on the operas. I was fortunate enough to spend a lovely Saturday afternoon with Murray watching some excerpts for possible next Operas to watch. It included Rossini, Bellini, Verdi, Ponchielli, Meyerbeer, Handel and Tchaikovsky. Nothing is decided. If you have any operas that you would like to propose, please let me know. Also, if you have any feedback on anything we do, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Lastly let me finish where I started; I want to thank Murray for sharing his love and enthusiasm for opera. We all greatly appreciate it.

Mark Robinson

### Board of Directors

At the recent AGM, Mark Robinson was elected as President with Murray Kitts assuming the role of Past President. The following members were elected to the Board of Directors - specific positions will be decided at the next meeting of the Board.

Francesca Fiasche, Diana Gnarowski, Vera-Lee Nelson, Peggy Pflug,  
Lesley Robinson, Carole Stelmack, Mary Frances Taylor .

### Newsletter Editors and Website Manager

Newsletter  
Webmaster

David Williams, Tom McCool  
Jim Burgess

For information on the National Capital Opera Society or the Brian Law Opera Competition scheduled for October 19<sup>th</sup> 2019, contact Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 or consult [www.ncos.ca](http://www.ncos.ca)

## A Feast of Ottawa Singers! (continued)

Ryan, while tenor Michael Colvin sang the world premiere of Dean Burry's *Sea Variations*. The hall was packed, and both composers and Lawrence Williford, co-founder of the Project, were in attendance.

We paired *Otello*'s more mature principals with *La Bohème*'s alternate cast with exciting new voices, appropriate to the roles! That it starred two more Ottawa singers was an added bonus! Mimi was sung by BLOC finalist, soprano Miriam Khalil, and the musician Schaunard by bass-baritone Joel Allison, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the 2017 BLOC. *La Bohème* is one of the world's most popular operas - the pre-show presenter mentioned that this year 99 companies in 38 countries are producing it. The COC has its own production, from 2013, by Canadian director John Caird, to now revive. Set and costume designer, David Farley, used lovely paintings to make up the scenery, arranged on two turntables for entertaining super quick scene changes, and supplied attractive costumes for the cast, ensuring a visual as well as an aural treat!

The production was prepared by conductor Paolo Carignani, but the final night was led by Antonello Allemandi, also Italian, making his COC debut. And, with Puccini's beautiful music, of course the singers were great! The young American tenor Joshua Guerrero



Photo: Michael Cooper

had a lovely ringing timbre for the poet Rodolfo, which blended nicely with Miriam Khalil's lovely Mimi, for a well matched couple. COC debutante Polish baritone Andrzej Filonczyk played an attractive painter Marcello,



Photo: Michael Cooper

to partner recent CES grad Danika Loren, a capricious Musetta with a vivacious waltz, *Quando m'en vo*, to catch our - and his - attention! Joel Allison made the most of his role as Schaunard - his first major role with the COC - and energetically and musically dispensed food and money as the one Bohemian apparently earning! Turkish bass Onay Kose, also debuting, sang a great *Coat Song* as Colline; Italian bass Donato Di Stefano doubled effectively as the landlord Benoit and as Alcindoro, Musetta's sugar daddy; and CSE member baritone Samuel Chan sang the Customs House Sergeant.

What with the lovely music, the fresh voices, the attractive ambiance, and the overall quality of the presentation, this was an absolutely delightful evening! As with *Otello* it was again the last performance of the run, and again proved that last can be best!

## Opera Alla Pasta Alert!

Earlier in the year Donizetti's *La Favorite* was cancelled due to bad weather. It has now been rescheduled to June 23<sup>rd</sup>. As usual it will be held at St. Anthony's Soccer Club at 2:00 p.m.

The cost is \$25. Call Lesley at 613-769-5957 or Murray Kitts at 613-830-9827 at least three days before the date of the DVD presentation in order to reserve a place.

## A Weekend of Lasts

by Shelagh Williams

If last is best, then our April weekend of end of run shows was as good as it gets! We started with the second last performance of *Kopernikus* (see review, p7) and followed it with the final one of Mozart's *Idomeneo*, a remount of Opera Atelier(OA)'s glorious 2008 production. That was noteworthy for the debut of soprano Measha Brueggergosman both in Mozart and with OA, and now she has returned to sing Elettra again.

When the young Mozart received the commission for the 1781 Munich "Carnival Opera", he had at his disposal both great singers and a superb orchestra drawn mainly from the Mannheim orchestra - the forces to perform a masterpiece! He also was saddled with a libretto by Giambattista Varesco, which he changed and cut, in collaboration and correspondence with his father! Fortunately when Mozart conducted the premiere in January 1781, almost exactly on his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, it was a success!

The story takes place at the end of the Trojan War, when the returning King Idomeneo of Crete encounters a storm. He is saved by Neptune after vowing to sacrifice the first man he encounters on Crete. Of course, this has to be his son, Idamante, setting off a train of conflicts!

OA responded to the challenge with another marvellous production, starting with resident set designer Gerard Gauci's painted backdrops. The extreme perspective of the palace as seen from below was magnificent, as were his bolts of fabric for the tempest. Both Michael Gianfrancesco's detailed costumes and Jennifer Lennon's lighting, especially for the storm and for Neptune's appearances, really delighted the eyes. Choreographer Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg took advantage of Mozart's integration of the dances into the action, most notably for the freeing of the Trojan captives and in the final celebration, with one ballerina in toe shoes! Zingg still dances with her Atelier Ballet, but excused herself from some of the more vigorous choreography. Under Marshall Pynkoski's always perceptive direction, scenes were played beautifully, especially the touching one where Princess Ilia, Priam's daughter, sent home ahead with the rest of the Trojan spoils and captives, declares to Idomeneo that she will consider him now her father, and he realizes with shock, and humour, that she is already in love with his son Idamante!

Musically, conductor David Fallis again enjoyed the services of the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Daniel Taylor's Theatre of Early Music and UofT Schola Cantorum, plus a great cast. Tenor Colin Ainsworth in the title role was at first glance a bit young, but was actually a believable participant in the Trojan War, and his voice seemed to have



deepened. In a pants role, mezzo Wallis Giunta gave us a most attractive son, Idamante, her voice easily filling the larger hall. Soprano Meghan Lindsay was his Ilia, especially pleasing singing her lovely opening aria. Interestingly, these two were in the *Idomeneo* chorus 11 years ago, and of course are, respectively, runner up and winner in different BLOCompetitions! Measha, naturally, was in good voice as she returned as Elettra - now a bright blonde! - and gave us another impassioned rage aria! Favourite baritone Olivier Laquerre sang Arbace, while barihunk Douglas Williams was an impressive Neptune, and will return as Don Giovanni in the fall. Altogether another triumph!

Tafelmusik's long standing bass Alison Mackay was playing her last performance with them, and received a gorgeous bouquet during the curtain call: another last!

The transfer to the attractive and larger Ed Mirvish Theatre, down the block from the Elgin, did not adversely affect the production. However, it made for an extremely crowded lobby and abysmal ladies' washroom availability!

Our last theatrical experience was the final performance of Lucas Hnath's *Doll's House, Part 2*, a sequel to Ibsen's play. Fifteen years after Nora walked out and slammed the door, she returns to her family, for a fascinating, funny encounter, which elicited various reactions from the audience! Starring the perfectly cast Deborah Hay of Shaw and Stratford, it was a tour de force, well cast, swiftly paced, and most entertaining! I'm glad we didn't miss it.

## BLOC Talent on Show at Opera Atelier Mozart's *Idomeneo* at the Ed Mirvish Theatre

by Lesley Robinson

Ten years ago, two future Brian Law Opera Competition prizewinners, Wallis Giunta and Meghan Lindsay, sang in the chorus in Opera Atelier's production of Mozart's *Idomeneo*. This year they returned in leading roles (as lovers) in the company's revival, which marked its debut at the historic Ed Mirvish theatre in Downtown Toronto. Wallis Giunta sang the role of Idamante and Meghan Lindsay that of Ilia. Here's a brief review of what they have been doing and what is to come on their calendars.

Meghan Lindsay is a regular artist with Opera Atelier and has travelled with the company to Versailles,

Mary Magdalene in the company's production of Handel's *The Resurrection* in spring 2020.

Wallis Giunta has a busy international schedule and is currently based in Europe, so it was a thrill to welcome her back to Canada for *Idomeneo*. Her recent credits include performances as Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Siebel in *Faust*, Angelina in *La Cenerentola*, Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, the title role in *Carmen*, Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* and roles in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre* and *Parsifal*, all at Oper Leipzig, as well as



The principals acknowledge the orchestra. From l to r: Measha Brueggergosman (Elettra), Meghan Lindsay (Ilia), Colin Ainsworth (Idomeneo) and Wallis Giunta (Idamante)

Chicago and the Glimmerglass Festival. Her Opera Atelier roles include Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Sidonie/Nymphe des Eaux in *Armide*, Agathe in *Der Freischütz*, Nymphe Guerrière and Venus in *Persée*, the title role in *Alcina*, Amour in *Orpheus and Eurydice*, Giunta in *Lucio Silla*, Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas*, Nerine/Un Captif in *Medea* and La Statue/Aréthuze in *Actéon and Pygmalion*. Meghan's European debut was as Euridice in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* at the Opera Studio Nederland. Earlier this year she sang the role of Paride in Gluck's *Paride ed Elena* with Opera Odyssey Boston where she performed opposite Mireille Asselin to great acclaim. Meghan has an active concert calendar and has performed on television and radio. She has recorded with Ars Lyrica. In the near future Meghan returns to Opera Atelier as Donna Anna in Atelier's revival of *Don Giovanni* and she will appear as

performances at Oper Frankfurt and Opera North (UK). Wallis has also performed at the Metropolitan Opera, at the Canadian Opera Company and of course in 2015 as Cherubino at Opera Lyra Ottawa. Wallis will be busy throughout the coming summer at the Grange Festival (in Hampshire, UK) and at the Edinburgh International Festival, and

she will lead a masterclass in Cambridge at the King's Singers Summer School. In the 2019-20 season, Wallis will be singing the role of Angelina (*La Cenerentola*) at the Seattle Opera, Bradamante in Handel's *Alcina* at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein (Düsseldorf) and Sesto in *Giulio Cesare* at the Boston Lyric Opera. She also has a busy recital schedule with concerts in Toronto, Australia, Germany and London.

One of the criteria for qualification for the Brian Law Opera Competition is a focus on a performing career. These two prizewinners have fulfilled that requirement by the bucket load! It was a thrill to see them performing together with intense chemistry on the stage of Opera Atelier. We congratulate them and joyfully admit to a sense of pride that the BLOC has picked some real winners.

## Gerald as Iago: *Otello* at the COC

Lesley Robinson

Verdi, Shakespeare and great performances—what could be better? It was a thrill to see our Honorary Patron, Gerald Finley in the role of Iago at the Canadian Opera Company's production of Verdi's *Otello*. Gerald had debuted in this role recently at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich to great acclaim and his return to the stage of the COC was eagerly anticipated.

Iago is a fascinating character—he is a manipulative, vengeful, envious, sinister and treacherous puppet master. With more lines in Shakespeare's play than Othello, Iago can be said to be the central character of the drama (and if you want to fathom Iago, I would highly recommend Kenneth Branagh's magnificent 1995 film performance, in which he delivers the monologues directly to the camera.) Motivated by more than simple evil, Iago is often described as Machiavellian. His resentment is sparked when he is passed over for promotion, so he uses his cunning for a complex, self-serving revenge. (This is exactly what happens to another fictional arch manipulator, Frank Underwood in the TV drama *House of Cards*, who is passed over for a cabinet position. Incidentally, he is another character who speaks to the audience directly through the camera.) Gerald Finley's Iago is creepily malevolent and

eerily vindictive. The make up in this production gave him a red-eyed pallor which matched his characterisation. Just as in the play, Iago has more lines than the title character, but in the opera, there is an economy of words and the characterisation resides in the music as well as the libretto. The singer's interpretation is therefore paramount and Mr. Finley's Iago was chillingly characterised, both through his elegant vocal performance and his studied dramatic portrayal. He exhibits a maniacal gleefulness as he surveys what he has wrought in the dying moments of the opera.

The other principal roles were finely sung. For tenor Russell Thomas as Otello, this was a role debut in a staged production. (He has sung the role before in concert performances.) His on-stage Otello was raw and hot-headed, all too easily succumbing to the green-eyed monster and the manipulation of "honest" Iago. Tamara Wilson's delicately sung Desdemona highlighted her fragile vulnerability. Her delivery of the willow song in the last act was particularly poignant. The role of Cassio was sung by Canadian tenor Andrew Haji, a graduate of the COC ensemble studio. Mr. Haji has a gorgeous sound and gives fine expression to Cassio's youth and inexperience.

The stark set of this production allows for a concentration on the human drama. An area of dark and light, it serves as a cauldron for sizzling emotions. The stage is so bare that there is even no bed to serve as the site of Desdemona's unjust demise.

According to Opera Canada, this production features "one of the best Iagos of the current generation". All things considered, there is no doubt of this. Gerald Finley was the magnificent star of the show.



I. to r. Gerald Finley as Iago, Russell Thomas as Otello, Tamara Wilson as Desdemona and Andrew Haji as Cassio

## Something Completely Different!

by Shelagh Williams

When *Kopernikus*, the only opera of Canadian Quebecois composer Claude Vivier (1948-1983), was being produced by the indie opera company Against the Grain Theatre (AtG) for the first time in Toronto since 2001, I felt we just had to attend!

Subtitled *A Ritual Opera for the Dead*, its central character is Agni who has just died and passed over to the after-life. Dressed originally in orange, as befits her name Agni, Sanskrit for fire, she is, according to Vivier's synopsis of his own libretto, initiated by characters from her own dreams, all dressed in bland, nondescript colours and with eyes rimmed in black. Although there is no real story surrounding her encounters, by the end she too is dressed in a dull blue-grey and has also attained the spirit state.

Vivier studied under Stockhausen in Cologne, and the music of the opera itself was appropriate to the theme, but not memorable, with no noticeable melodies.

reographed by Matjash Mrozewski and throughout there seemed to be various rituals going on, with complicated arm movements, which Agni tried hard to imitate - at one point to the amusement and laughter of others of the cast! In fact there was far too much going on, so that one did not know where to look, and missed important things - my companion and I had to compare notes later. I found it confusing.

The musicians taking part were all top notch, starting with Canadian mezzo Danielle MacMillan as Agni. The other characters were sung by mezzo Krisztina Szabo (of the COC), sopranos Anne-Marie MacIntosh and Jonelle Sills, baritone Dion Mazerolle, bass Alain Coulombe, and baryton-Martin Bruno Roy. Besides singing, every so often the singers went into gentle war whoops, hand tapping mouth! Since the libretto was in French, German and a nonsense language of Vivier's devising, surtitles were provided to some extent, but were often

hard to decipher, especially near the end when lights on the scaffolding were illuminated in white and colours. Unfortunately, Bruno Roy performed a lot of the sung exposition in this unknown language, which certainly did not aid one's comprehension - all rather puzzling! Fortunately I had booked early and we had superb seats in the front row centre of the VIP Reserved section, which overlooked the conductor, Topher Mrozkowski, who really worked up a sweat as he endeavoured to corral his forces! Although the work was only 67 (timed) minutes, wisely with no intermission, near the hour mark both my companion and I found ourselves checking the conductor's score to see if the piece was soon coming to an end! According to the

article by Catherine Kustanczy on Vivier in the most recent *Opera Canada* (Spring, 2019, v.LIX, #3), Vivier considered Copernicus "the cosmic seeker...who opens the gates of heaven", and so he "is not introduced until the end of the opera"! Thus, finally, the name *Kopernikus* was repeated several times and the troupe processed, still performing, up the stairs and out of sight, in the finale!

This was a very well produced presentation, to a full house, of what may be the most performed Canadian opera outside of Canada. Having seen it performed, in Canada, I now know why!



Perhaps to combat this, AtG Director Joel Ivany kept everyone involved in constant motion. Designer Jason Hand had delivered a set of scaffolding pipes with at least three acting levels, plus ladders, and even before things started Ivany had people busy shining and polishing! Then the space was filled with the seven singers and two dancers, interspersed with the seven members of the orchestra playing from memory and also with onstage roles! The dispersed orchestra included one violin, one oboe, three clarinets, one trumpet, and one trombone, plus a number of pieces of percussion which were played by various musicians. They were all cho-

## SOPAC's Sparkling Double Bill!

by Shelagh Williams

The Tulip Festival's opening weekend may have been deficient in tulips, but we compensated with opera! We offset the MET's moving *Dialogues of the Carmelites* in the afternoon with a live comedic double bill by Ottawa's SOPAC in the evening.

SOPAC's Morgan Strickland and Tania Granata always do class presentations, engaging great singers and with good production values. They were here using a very good new venue, All Saints Event Space, which, we discovered, was hosting a big wedding in the large former sanctuary, a few people in the restaurant, and our opera on the stage of the hall - which also had a bar!

The first presentation was Menotti's *The Telephone*, or *L'amour a trois*, as we were informed by the excellent bilingual subtitles at the sides, run by Bert Tecter. In the story, Ben, off to catch a train, tries first to propose to Lucy, but she's always on the phone, so he finally leaves and himself calls her - successfully! Director Emma Farrante effectively used every bit of the hall, with Ben's place at the front of the hall, Lucy's apartment up on the stage, and an unusual opening high up for his "offstage" phone call! She also provided Julie Ecker and Parker Clements with plenty of interesting action - such as Ben trying to flush Lucy's cell phone down the (centre stage) toilet! They perkily managed all this while still singing - and dancing - very well, to Aude Urbancic's piano, and under Tania Granata's music direction. A great opener!

For the main opera, Douglas Moore's *Gallantry: A Soap Opera*, stage managers Susanna Doherty and Lynlee Wolstencroft swiftly changed the very detailed set from Lucy's apartment to a TV Operating Room, while Ben's place below became the Announcer's comfy dressing room. This is a satire on TV soap opera, with the Announcer commenting and singing the commercials for the sponsor, Lochinvar Soap! But it is also a spoof on grand opera, with set pieces, recits and dialogue, and the music quite over the top!

In the daily soap opera episode, the eminent surgeon, Dr. Gregg, declares his love for his anaesthetist nurse assistant, Lola Markham, just before an operation, and she repulses him. The patient turns out to be Lola's fiancé, Donald Hopewell, who asks after Dr. Gregg's wife - and all hell breaks loose - with, of course, interruptions for several commercials!

A great cast was assembled for music director and pianist Nadia Boucher, and director Emma Farrante, to work with. The ads and comments were quite entertaining, as supplied by the rather seductive Announcer,



Kathleen Radke. Jean-Sebastien Kennedy was an impressive Dr. Gregg, despite playing a cad, while Morgan Strickland gave us a lovely young nurse. Dillon Parmer managed to look elegant while in pyjamas as the patient, Donald! These three acted well together, and succeeded in doing so seriously, which made it even funnier! The finale was quite glorious, with the Announcer doing a big commercial while Lola and Donald sang a heartfelt love duet! It was all great fun and so well done - quite splendid!

The two operas provided an excellent evening's entertainment - SOPAC does such great productions!

## NACO Summer Institute June Vocal Events

by David Williams

The NAC will have three events which should be of interest to NCOS members. These are a Vocal Master Class (June 15<sup>th</sup> (Sat.), 4 p.m., Rossy Pavilion, NAC); a talk by Arianna Zuckerman and Joyce El-Khoury (June 17<sup>th</sup> (Mon.) 5 p.m, Rossy Pavilion, NAC) and a Final Concert (\$11) (June 19<sup>th</sup> (Wed.) 7 p.m., Freiman Hall, uOttawa).



## Sir David McVicar's *Tosca* at the Met

by Marian Cumming

As I walked down the centre aisle towards my front-row seat I realized that the gold curtain was missing. In its place was a canvas in bold magenta depicting an angel with oversized wings, brandishing a sword, very reminiscent of the angel atop Castel Sant'Angelo. This was the first glimpse of the faithful reproduction of the settings in which *Tosca's* three acts take place, namely the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle, Palazzo Farnese and the aforementioned Castel Sant'Angelo. These are all familiar landmarks in Rome which I have visited many times, and can attest to their authenticity. I was particularly struck by the attention to detail given to the scenery in the first act. The naves, the chapel, the decoration and gold leaf detail on the pillars – it was magnificent to see. What made the setting of the first act different from other productions was that, rather than having the procession walk down the centre of the stage with all the choristers filling the space, the rich and colourful cortege moved slowly down the left nave with most of the participants disappearing off-stage leaving the young boy choristers at the front left of the stage with Scarpia overseeing the proceedings while standing on the painter's raised platform to the right.

The lighting in the second act, Scarpia's chambers in Palazzo Farnese, was rather dim and the set sparsely furnished, probably an attempt to reinforce the unfolding of the dark plot but at the same time allowing easy movement. The third and final act was dominated by the familiar Angel in the background with, at the front of the stage, steps leading down to a trap door where prisoners were escorted on and off the castle's turret. Bravo Sir David, the months of meticulous research paid off.

With the opera's powerful opening bars, cymbals crashing and drums beating, Puccini sets the tone for the drama that was to unfold. For a large man, tenor Joseph Calleja is very light on his feet, bounding onto the stage, up the steps to his canvas depicting Mary Magdalen and soon thereafter launching into one of the two most significant of Mario Cavadossi's arias, *Recondita armonia*. In this, along with the last act's *E lucevan le stella*, Calleja gave beautiful impassioned renditions. His high notes are always effortless and strong while still sounding mellifluous.



Photo Marty Sohl

Calleja

I also found his acting much improved. His cries of *Vittoria* in the second act, sung from a kneeling position, were thrilling.

Jennifer Rowley made her Metropolitan debut as Musetta in *La Bohème* in 2014, although this was the first time I had heard (or heard of) her. Her lyric soprano is sound and secure, well suited to the title role and her acting, particularly her facial expressions, very effective. In the first act she was a more playful Tosca, flirting in almost a schoolgirl fashion. In the remaining two acts she was more forceful and her *Vissi d'arte* was beautifully expressive, with a hushed ending.

Her inner turmoil was in full display as she struggled with whether to disclose Angelotti's hiding place or respect the promise she made to her lover to keep his secret. The interaction between tenor and soprano in the last act was very moving, conveying hope mixed with trepidation.

The role of Scarpia was sung by Wolfgang Koch. His voice is too small for the Met (and I was sitting in the front row of the orchestra!), definitely not the dramatic baritones we are used to hearing. I have also heard more powerful *Te Deums*. Except for the occasional flash of passion in the second act, I found that his portrayal was not forceful enough and his acting, to put it kindly, was understated. In supporting roles, Oren Gradus as the fugitive Angelotti displayed a strong bass. Philip Cokorinos's rich baritone was vocally convincing but he tended to underplay the usual fastidious, exasperated and humorous role of the Sacristan. Tony Stevenson, a graduate of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, was sufficiently oily as Spoletta.

The superb Metropolitan Opera Orchestra was ably led by Carlo Rizzi who seems to be a popular conductor with both the orchestra and the audience.

All in all a very satisfying, sold-out performance as evidenced by an appreciative audience. It was also interesting to note that this production was made possible in part by a gift from the late Jacqueline and Paul G. Desmarais Jr. of Montreal.



Photo Ken Howard

Koch

Rowley

## Machine Made: Wagner's *Ring* at the Met

Lesley Robinson

Wagner would have loved it! Robert Lepage's outrageously ambitious staging of *The Ring* exemplifies the visual and technical aspects of the total work of art that Wagner had envisaged. The set for all four operas is created through the operation of what has come to be known as "the machine" and it is a breath-taking spectacle, its magic far more astounding live than in HD.

The machine itself is comprised of 24 30-foot planks of aluminium, connected along a central axis and suspended between two 26-foot towers. The planks rise and fall and pivot around the axis, sometimes together and sometimes independently, to create an infinite range of possible frameworks and landscapes. The set was constructed in Quebec and was transported to New York City (quite a feat in itself), and at a weight of 45 tonnes, the Met stage had to be reinforced in order to support it. Considering the vast space of the Met's stage, this could surely happen nowhere else on the planet!

The machinery itself is comprised of a 1,700-psi hydraulic system with pneumatic brakes which are used to engage or disengage each plank separately and a system of weights inserted or removed by hand, so that gravity can play its part in the operation. A team of stagehands provides the manpower, manoeuvring the constituent parts and taming the beast.

The icing on the cake of the set is provided by lighting and projections, so that it can equally represent the river bed, a forest, an underground network of roots and slithering creatures, a fire-encircled mountain top or the rainbow bridge to Valhalla. In the forest scenes, the planks tilt and lean whilst the projections yield an uncanny impression of perspective. The versatility of this set highlights the immense challenge to mere mortals of staging Wagner's work. With so much dramatic music accompanying lengthy periods of narrative and shifts in space and time, it is problematic to combine the visuals with the sound, so that in some of the

most dramatic-sounding passages, nothing much seems to be happening onstage. The machine solves this problem by supplying dramatic images to match the music.

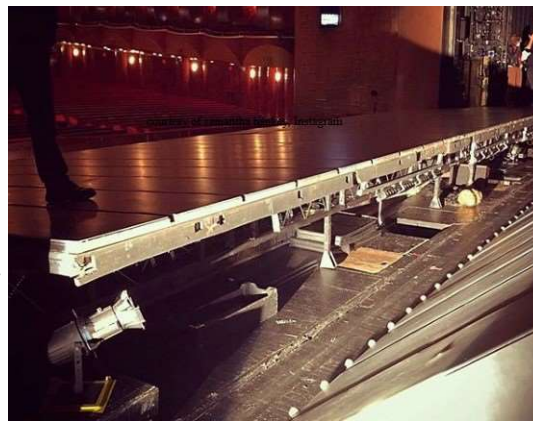
The machine debuted during the 2010-11 season and in its early days it was beset by a number of unforeseen technical glitches. The kinks were subsequently ironed out by a team of techies and stagehands who assembled the machine in a vast warehouse 110 km north of New York in the Hudson Valley. It was impossible to have the structure assembled on the Met stage for the months it would take to make adjustments. No one would ever be able to tell now that things had not gone completely smoothly from the outset. In 2019 the mechanism worked faultlessly. It manoeuvred quietly, creating undulating staircases, forested terrain, riverbeds and river banks, mountaintops and the depths of Nibelheim.

The interaction of the performers with the machine is remarkable and sometimes terrifying. In the first scene, the Rhine maidens are suspended high above the stage, as they "swim" in the waters of the river. My heart was similarly in my mouth during the Ride of the Valkyries, as one by one, they slid down the sharply tilted planks of the machine, to land abruptly in a concentrated effort to remain on their feet. At other times, seemingly impossible feats are performed by body doubles—scaling mountaintops or walking up a vertical path. In the final scene of *Die Walküre*, Brünnhilde is suspended upside down in the centre of the raised and pivoted machine, within a ring of fire. It would certainly take a totally fearless hero to get to her!

Robert Lepage's ambitious vision has brought *Der Ring des Nibelungen* to a glorious twenty-first century synthesis of technology and art. The epic proportions of the machine combine coherently with the prodigious depths of sound from the stupendous Met orchestra (including eight double basses and six harps) and a remarkable range of voices to make this a total artistic experience.



Samantha Hankey as Wellgunde, Amanda Woodbury as Woglinde and Tamara Mumford as Flosshilde rehearse "swimming". Photo by Jonathan Tichler/Met Opera,



The "apron", the downstage part of the machine, where three Rhine maidens, eight carpenters and three electricians crawled together! photo by @metoperastagehands

## Opera Amore ends OSO season

Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, after its festive and fun gala cocktail fundraiser on the OAG terrace, *Oh, So Opera*, Sunday May 26, ended its solid 2018-19 season May 27 with an opera themed concert, *Opera Amore*. Carleton University's community performance venue, Dominion Chalmers, was sold out long before - to opera starved Ottawans. Ovviamento!

The star of the evening was New Brunswick's internationally noted diva, soprano Measha Brueggergosman. She was joined by Toronto born soprano Elizabeth Polese and baritone Ryan Hofman.

Maestro Trudel started the evening with the "Overture" to *La Forza del Destino*, an opera Verdi composed for the St.Petersburg court Opera House. "Quando me'n vo" Musetta's coquettish aria from Puccini's *La Bohème* followed, beautifully rendered by Elisabeth Polese.

From Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Ryan Hofman sang "Non piu andrai" in which Figaro describes his future life in the army to Cherubino. One had the impression that Ryan seemed to be slightly nervous as the orchestra drowned out his voice.

*La Traviata's* Prelude to Act III was performed with much sensitivity before Measha Brueggergosman was raucously welcomed to the stage for Alfredo Catalani's "Ebben, Ne andro lontano" the beloved aria from *La Wally*, Wally's farewell to her mother. Measha gave a beautifully nuanced reading of the aria. It was followed by the syncopated "Moon of Alabama" from *Rise and fall of the City of Mahagonny*, music by Weill and Libretto by Brecht.



photo by Richard Tardif

by Paul Schaub and Gerard Lavelle

The last piece before the intermission was John Estacio's "Bootlegger's Tarantella" from his opera *Filumena*, the story of the last woman to be executed in Canada,

After the intermission the enormous Community Choir joined the orchestra. The choir consisted of the best singers chosen from 14 local choirs. The well rehearsed choir sounded very much an Opera choir performing the "Triumphal March" from Verdi's *Aida*, to which the audience gave enthusiastic applause.

Following came the Gypsy inspired "Noi siamo zingarelle" from another Verdi opera *La Traviata*. Polese

and Hofman joined in as duet. The choir continued with "Vedi! le fosche notturne spoglie" from *Il Trovatore*. The choir then intoned "Va, pensiero" from Act III of *Nabucco*, also by Verdi, which really needs native Italian diction and sentiment to capture the beautiful melancholy, as only Italian patriots know how - "Vaaaaaaah pensiero."

No short-shrift "Vaah pensiero." Ache, suffering, and longing require that undulating swoop of A's.

Differently gowned, Measha Brueggergosman reappeared on stage intoning a passionate vibrant "Habane-ra" from Bizet's *Carmen*, winning loud "Brava"s and extended applause. For the "Barcarolle" from Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* Brueggergosman was joined by Elisabeth Polese in this duet.

"Les voici! Voici la quadrille" by choir and orchestra from Bizet's *Carmen* ended the thrilling *Opera Amore* evening. Operatic chestnuts all, but OSO had promised to offer an opera concert. Definitely, there is demand, a hunger, for opera in Ottawa!

## Da Capo 2019 – Remembering our Past, Celebrating our Present, and Building for our Future

by Lori Burns, Director

The uOttawa School of Music will join together with alumni and friends on October 5th to celebrate our 50th anniversary during uOttawa's official Homecoming 2019 Weekend. Please join us for an Open House in Pérez Building, where we will honour some very special guests: Evelyn Greenberg and Jean-Paul Sevilla, two of our founding professors; and Joyce El-Khoury (BMus 2005), the inaugural recipient of the Angela Hewitt Distinguished Alumni Award. We will also announce a number of new initiatives in the School and celebrate our generous donors, both past and present. All those in attendance will be invited to visit the spaces within Pérez to witness some of our current students in a range of creative activities. Join us for this first-hand view of the excellent musical training that is happening within our walls in 2019!

The 2019-20 season will offer many opportunities for celebration, including a special collaboration with the Choeur classique de l'Outaouais in November, an Opera Gala and another collaboration with the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra in March. All details to come on our Arts Live Music website: <https://arts.uottawa.ca/live/music-events>

## Nosferatu: The Comic Opera

by Shelagh Williams

Every spring Seventeen Voyces, under Kevin Reeves, performs an unusual opera, and this year it was the world premiere of librettist/composer Reeves' own opera, *Nosferatu: The Comic Opera*. This was a well-produced chamber opera showcasing Ottawa, and especially uOttawa graduate, singers, and accompanied by a string quartet augmented with clarinet, piano and harpsichord.

The humorous libretto involves film director F.W.Murnau's trials while trying to film the story of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, here called *Nosferatu*, with the second act envisaging Stoker's widow arriving dramatically on the scene to sue Murnau for plagiarism, resulting in more shenanigans! Supplying a full libretto in the programme ensured that the jokes were not missed, even though the piece was sung in English.

Kevin Reeves conducted his own score, and the chorus, 11 members of Seventeen Voyces, was of course great, and suitably clad as Slovakian peasants. In fact, the costumes were all good, with even Andrew Ager on the harpsichord and piano in costume - including arm bands! Plus the makeup and prosthetics for Count Orlok (*Nosferatu*), by Michael Pennington, were fantastic! Centre stage



on a screen, suitable silent film clips were projected, really enhancing the story and the whole atmosphere.

We attended the second of two performances, and the talented cast was headed by tenor Corey Arnold as the beleaguered film director; baritone Ryan Hofman as Fritz Wagner, his trusty cinematographer; and baritone Luc Lalonde as Max Schreck, playing the creepy Count Orlok (*Nosferatu*). Sopranos Kathleen Radke and Rachael Jewell portrayed, respectively, Bram Stoker's rampaging widow, and the lead film actress. Soprano Ilene McKenna of Seventeen Voyces was memorable as the comically enthusiastic film fan, Madlenka. Tenor Grayson Nesbitt had a fun role as the lead male actor who also dressed up as Charlie Chaplin (don't ask!), and gave us a tap dance and a hilarious Chaplin-style costume change hiding behind the chorus - the second act was very funny!

This was a most entertaining high value presentation of a brand new Canadian opera, with an all-Canadian cast and crew, and which obviously pleased the good-sized and enthusiastic audience.

## uOttawa Events You Could Have Enjoyed

by Shelagh Williams

**Lobgesang:** What if you could get Mendelssohn to write a Hymn of Praise for your celebration? Well, the city of Leipzig could, for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gutenberg's invention of printing. We enjoyed this magnificent piece performed by the uOttawa Orchestra on March 21<sup>st</sup>, with a full 70-piece orchestra under the NACO's Donnie Deacon, plus Laurence Ewashko's Choral and CalixaLavallee Ensembles and Robert Filion's uOttawa Choir and three soloists - sopranos Lynlee Wolstencroft and Juliana Krajcovic and tenor Philip Klaassen. The work began majestically with the instrumental *Sinfonia* followed by a lovely *Adagio*. Then, suddenly, the choir rose and launched into the major cantata portion of the symphony, using words from the Bible. Along with solos and duets from the soloists, the theme went from praise of God to glorious thankfulness that night had gone, due of course to the illumination provided by printing! Then followed the beloved chorale, *Now thank we all our God*, finishing off

with a final *Hallelujah!* Quite marvellous! They did the School of Music proud!

**Ein Liederabend:** Laurence Ewashko's Graduate Art Song Interpretation Class followed its Fall *Schubertiade* with an excellent concert of German Art Songs. A delightful variety was presented with both piano and guitar collaborators, and solo and duo singers. The first half ended with Brahms' humorous *Die Schwestern*, with the two singers arriving arm in arm, and both in red dresses, but leaving separately in a snit! However, harmony reigned in the remainder of this enjoyable concert.

**Viva il recitativo!:** Julien LeBlanc's Vocal Repertoire Class's Final Concert consisted of beautifully sung - and acted - duets, trios and ensembles from various operas, all preceded by their respective recitatives and nicely accompanied by several pianists. This enjoyable concert included the *Soave il vento* trio from *Così*, one of my favourites, and so I came home especially happy!

## SUMMER OPERA

**Chautauqua Opera** - Chautauqua N.Y.: *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (July 5, 8 & 25), *Figaro!* (June 28 & 30, July 7, 14 & 26), *The Ghosts of Versailles* (July 27) website: chq.org  
 Note: For the first time audiences will be able to experience these three operas on consecutive nights during the company's "Trilogy Weekend" happening July 25-27, 2019.

**Festival d'Opéra de Québec** - Québec City: *Le nozze di Figaro* (July 29, 31 & August 2), *The Flying Dutchman* (July 28 & 30, August 1 & 3) Website: festivaloperaquebec.com

**Opera North** - Lebanon, N.H.: *The Pirates of Penzance* (July 26, 27 & 28), *Macbeth* (August 4, 6, 8 & 10) Website: operanorth.org

**Highlands Opera** - Haliburton, Ontario : *Ariadne auf Naxos* (August 22, 24, 25 & 26), *Suor Angelica* (August 15 ) Website: highlandsoperastudio.com

**Halifax Summer Opera Festival** - Halifax, N.S. : *Die Zauberflöte* (August 2, 3, 8 & 10), *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (August 3, 4, 7 & 10), *Alcina* (August 4, 6, 9 & 11)  
 Website:halifaxsummeroperafestival.com

**Glimmerglass Opera** - Cooperstown N.Y. : *La Traviata* (July 7, 15, 21, 27 & 30, August 4, 8, 10, 13, 16, 19 & 24), *Showboat* (July 6, 16, 20, 22 & 28, August 1, 3, 5, 11, 15, 17, 20 & 24), *The Ghosts of Versailles* (July 13, 23 & 25, August 3, 9, 12, 18 & 23), *Blue* (July 14, 26 & 29, August 2, 6, 10, 17 & 22) Website: www.glimmerglass.org

**Opera Saratoga** - Saratoga Springs N.Y. : *The Daughter of the Regiment* (June 29, July 1, 7 & 13), *Ellen West* (June 30, July 6 & 12), *Hansel and Gretel* (July 5, 8, 10 & 14), *Mozart & Salieri* (July 11) Website: www.operasaratoga.org

**Summer Opera Lyric Theatre** - Toronto : *La Traviata* (July 26, 28 & 31, August 3), *Earnest, The Importance of Being* (July 27 & 30, August 1 & 4), *Gianni Schicchi/Riders to the Sea* (July 27 & 31, August 2 & 3) Website: solt.ca

**Westben** - Campbellford, Ontario : *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* (July 27) Joyce El-Khoury & Jason Howard Website: www.westben.ca

**Tanglewood** - Lenox, MA : *The Brightness of Light* (with Renée Fleming) (July 20), *Die Walküre* (July 27 & 28) Website: www.bso.org

Check the websites listed above for additional details (times, casts, tickets, etc.) of the productions as well as information about other musical and theatrical events that will be staged at the various locations.

**Tom McCool**

## The Met: Live in HD 2019–20 Schedule

***Turandot*** (Puccini) October 12, 2019, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Cast: Christine Goerke (Turandot), Eleonora Buratto (Liù), Roberto Aronica (Calàf), James Morris (Timur)

***Manon*** (Massenet) October 26, 2019, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Maurizio Benini, Cast: Lisette Oropesa (Manon), Michael Fabiano (Chevalier des Grieux), Carlo Bosi (Guillot de Morfontaine), Artur Ruciński (Lescaut), Brett Polegato (de Brétigny), Kwangchul Youn (Comte des Grieux)

***Madama Butterfly*** (Puccini) November 9, 2019, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Pier Giorgio Morandi, Cast: Hui He (Cio-Cio-San), Elizabeth DeShong (Suzuki), Andrea Carè (Pinkerton), Plácido Domingo (Sharpless)

***Akhnaten*** (Glass) November 23, 2019, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Karen Kamensek, Cast: Dísella Lárusdóttir (Queen Tye), J’Nai Bridges (Nefertiti), Anthony Roth Costanzo (Akhnaten), Aaron Blake (High Priest of Amon), Will Liverman (Horemhab), Richard Bernstein (Aye), Zachary James (Amenhotep)

***Wozzeck*** (Berg) January 11, 2020, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Cast: Elza van den Heever (Marie), Tamara Mumford (Margret), Christopher Ventris (The Drum-Major), Gerhard Siegel (The Captain), Andrew Staples (Andres), Peter Mattei (Wozzeck), Christian Van Horn (Doctor)

***Porgy and Bess*** (Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, Ira Gershwin) February 1, 2020, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: David Robertson, Cast: Angel Blue (Bess), Golda Schultz (Clara), Latonia Moore (Serena), Denyce Graves (Maria), Frederick Ballentine (Sportin’ Life), Eric Owens (Porgy), Alfred Walker (Crown), Donovan Singletary (Jake)

***Agrippina*** (Handel) February 29, 2020, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Harry Bicket, Cast: Brenda Rae (Poppea), Joyce DiDonato (Agrippina), Kate Lindsey (Nerone), Iestyn Davies (Ottone), Duncan Rock (Pallante), Matthew Rose (Claudio)

***Der Fliegende Holländer*** (Wagner) March 14, 2020, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Valery Gergiev, Cast: Anja Kampe (Senta), Mihoko Fujimura (Mary), Sergey Skorokhodov (Erik), David Portillo (Steuermann), Sir Bryn Terfel (Holländer), Franz-Josef Selig (Daland)

***Tosca*** (Puccini) April 11, 2020, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Bertrand de Billy, Cast: Anna Netrebko (Tosca), Brian Jagde (Cavaradossi), Michael Volle (Scarpia), Patrick Carfizzi (Sacristan)

***Maria Stuarda*** (Donizetti) May 9, 2020, at 12:55 p.m. Conductor: Maurizio Benini, Cast: Diana Damrau (Maria Stuarda), Jamie Barton (Elisabetta), Stephen Costello (Leicester), Andrzej Filończyk (Cecil), Michele Pertusi (Talbot)

Tickets for the 2019–20 Live in HD season go on sale to the general public on Wednesday, July 17, 2019, in the U.S. and Canada. Tickets may be available Thursday, July 11<sup>th</sup> to certain groups (Scene and MET members). Check with your local cinema.

## CBC Saturday Afternoon at the Opera

Every week this summer and fall Ben Heppner brings you outstanding productions from the greatest opera recordings of all time. The “Best Operas Ever” series features prominent contemporary opera stalwarts such as Gerald Finley, Brett Polegato, Lawrence Brownlee, Tracy Dahl, Jonathan Darlington and others (one every week) who will select, play and discuss what they consider to be the greatest opera recordings ever. This series will continue until next November on “Saturday Afternoon at the Opera.” Details of future broadcasts will appear on the CBC website as they become available.