



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

May, 2018

Spring Lectures

Steve Zilles

We have two presentations in May and June this year. On May 18, prior to the May Shabbat Lunch, Larry Hancock (General Director of Opera San José) will present an overview of the 2018-19 Season of Opera San José. This season opens with Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. This is a musically delightful story about Belmonte's rescue of his girlfriend Konstanze from the harem of Pasha Selim. This would be a simple task if it were not for Pasha Selim's major domo, Osmin. The second opera is Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, the tragic story of love, betrayal and jealous revenge in a company of travelling actors. A story famous for the aria, Ridi (laugh) Paglicci; that is, put on a good face despite personal tragedy. *Moby Dick*, with music by Jake Heggie and lyrics by Gene Scheer, is the third opera. This excellent compression of the great American novel about one man's obsession and the destruction that this brings comes to life with wonderful storytelling and engaging music. This is one of the 21st century's great operas. The season finale is Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, yet another story of betrayal and devotion set to some of the most wonderful music of the 20th century.

Come hear Larry's introduction to these operas, excerpts sung by Opera San José artists and stay for the Shabbat Lunch (see the calendar for details).

On Monday, June 4 (note the day change), we will have another survey of four operas. These operas are the four operas of Richard Wagner's Ring Cycle: *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. Our speaker will be Prof. Simon Williams of UC Santa Barbara. Simon has brought us many wonderful lectures and

Champagne Brunch & Opera Entertainment at Saratoga Country Club, Sunday, June 10, 2018

Join us for champagne and no-host cocktails at 11:30 am, followed by a gourmet brunch, silent auction, raffle, and an exceptional music program by Opera San José Resident Artists.

Tickets are \$75 for Guild members, \$85 for non-members; reservations required.

A portion of each reservation may be tax deductible.

RSVP by May 25, 2018

Proceeds support the San José Opera Guild's Outreach Programs.

Information and reservations at:
www.sjoperaguild.org/temp/2018_Invitation.pdf

is a specialist in the performance of operas, and especially Wagner's operas. The Ring Cycle - *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is a 17 hour saga of a god's obsession with power and the trouble into which it leads him and his offspring. This is a story in which love plays a powerful role, more powerful than the obsession with power. The opera is set to dramatic and moving music, music in which the orchestra and the singers all have their own roles to play. Come hear how love, in the end, conquers all and peace is restored to a more hopeful world.

Career Updates

by Susan English

February brought Opera Parallele and SF Jazz together to honor Leonard Bernstein on his 100th birthday with a new production of his one act opera, *Trouble in Tahiti*. Jake Heggie contributed to this celebration with his chamber opera *At the Statue of Venus*. Both operas shared a cast including Merolini **Renee Rapier** (2010-2011) and **Kyle Albertson** (2006) and **Eugene Brancoveanu** (2005-2006). Opera Parallele's conductor, and the opera company's artistic director, Nicole Paiement, said of Bernstein, "We celebrate this maverick composer by presenting his first opera...and combining it with Jake Heggie's chamber opera. Both works investigate the universal theme of longing for love and intimacy and are heavily influenced by the syncopated rhythms of jazz and the distinctive American vernacular of Broadway." Joshua Kosman wrote of the double bill: "As if the conjunction of the two pieces weren't telling enough, the production underscores every virtue in each work." Mr. Albertson debuted at Lyric Opera of Chicago in their production of *Das Rheingold*. He will cover the role of Wotan in San Francisco Opera's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* this summer. Recently he sang Masetto in *Don Giovanni* with the Metropolitan Opera. Ms Rapier has made debuts at LA Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Opera Theatre St Louis, the Ravinia Festival, Opera San Antonio, San Francisco Opera, Dallas Opera, and Seattle Opera. Mr. Brancoveanu won the Tony Award for over 500 performances as Marcello in *La Boheme* on Broadway, and was a part of the national tour of *The Thomashefskys* with Michael Tilson Thomas.

Island City Opera also presented a double bill including the work of Rimsky-Korsakov. Joshua Kosman identified and reviewed the production as: "the terse two-hander 'Mozart and Salieri' and the exotic fairy tale *Kashchey the Immortal*—with just enough theatrical dexterity to put both works across." Reviewing *Kashchey the Immortal* Kosman noted of former Opera San José Resident Artist and Merolini: "most impressive,

though, were the skillful contributions by the cast, including tenor **Alex Boyer** in a chillingly muscular and venomous account of the title role." The San Francisco Classical Voice continued praise for Mr. Boyer with, "Tenor Alex Boyer was splendid as Kashchey, grotesquely costumed with long metal fingers and black vulture-like plumage (overall, most of the costumes were spectacular). Boyer's powerful and rhythmic delivery brought the scene to life whenever he was onstage"

Yet another Merolini reviewed by Mr. Kosman is **Toni Marie Palmertree**. "After an increasingly accomplished stint in the Merola Opera Program and as an Adler Fellow, capped by an impressive September showing in Puccini's *Turandot*, Toni Marie Palmertree is off to forge a path through the treacherous world of opera. But on her way out the door, the promising young soprano stopped to deliver an elegant and forceful performance as part of the Schwabacher Recital Series." Ms Palmertree just completed singing Cio Cio San in *Madama Butterfly* for Festival Opera of New Zealand, and will sing that same role with Syracuse Opera this month.

Yet another opera company is calling upon alumni from OSJ and Merola to stage their season. Townsend Opera, which stages their performances in the Gallo Center of the Arts in Modesto, describes the origin of the company with: "The Townsend Opera was founded in 1983 by Modesto native Erik 'Buck' Townsend. The Modesto High grad returned home after a successful international career as an opera singer. Over the next 25 years Buck devoted all his considerable energies to leading the company, often directing, conducting, or singing in performances, building sets, and organizing costumes." They will be presenting *Madama Butterfly* this month with OSJ Former Resident Artist **Christopher Bengochea** as Lieutenant Pinkerton. Mr. Bengochea has performed with many opera companies including Opera San José, Atlanta Opera, Opera

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Idaho, Opera Canada, da Corneto Opera, Center City Opera, and Opera Company Brooklyn. His last performance with Townsend Opera was in *La Bohème* as Rodolfo. Recent engagements included the title role in Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann* for Palm Beach Opera, the tenor part in the Verdi *Requiem* with the San Jose Symphony, Rodolfo in *La Bohème* and Cavaradossi in *Tosca* with Opera Santa Barbara.

Anthony Tommasini, writing for the New York Times, praised the Metropolitan Opera's recent production of *Elektra*, noting the contributions of former Merolini and Adler Fellow **Elza van den Heever**. "Ms. van den Heever's melting, plaintive singing conveyed the character's fragile emotions beautifully. But during intense confrontations with *Elektra*, Ms. van den Heever cut loose with steely outbursts that showed inner strength you don't normally detect in the this character, making her seem, however fleetingly, like *Elektra's* soul mate." Operawire agreed with Mr. Tommasini noting, "As Chrysothemis, Elza van den Heever was a revelation and arguably the scene-stealer of the night. Every time she opened her mouth, you just shifted all your attention and energy to her. It is a glorious sound that carries beautifully into the hall, no matter how demanding the orchestra is being in the moment." Ms van den Heever will travel to Germany in June to sing the title role in *Norma* with Oper Frankfurt.

From West Edge Opera, the "2018 summer festival includes Debussy's *Pélleas and Mélisande*, Luca Francesconi's *Quartett*, and Matt Marks' *Mata Hari*. The artists include soprano Heather Buck, baritones **Hadleigh Adams** (Merola 2012) and **Efrain Solis** (Merola 2013), actress Tina Mitchell, directors Elkhanah Pulitzer, Keturah Stickan and Paul Peers, conductors John Kennedy, Jonathan Khuner and Emily Senturia. The West Edge Festival 2018 opens August 4 and closes August 19. This year's venue is The Craneway Conference Center, a former Ford assembly plant on the Richmond waterfront. Series tickets go on

sale April 1 with a significant reduction in the price of general admission tickets. Single tickets go on sale June 1." Mr. Adams recently sang in San Francisco Symphony's semi-staged production of *Candide*. This season he made his debut performance with the Brooklyn Academy of Music, American Bach Soloists, the American Repertory Theatre, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, Pacific Symphony, and a return to the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Also singing in the SFS's tribute to Bernstein's opera was **Sheri Greenawald**. Ms Greenawald currently serves as Opera Center Director for the San Francisco Opera and Artistic Director for the Merola Opera Program, positions she has held since 2002. Of the production, San Francisco Classical Voice noted, "Hadleigh Adams had a vocally and comically assured turn as Maximilian...(and)... Local favorite Sheri Greenawald, who first sang with the San Francisco Symphony in 1979 and currently heads San Francisco Opera's Merola program for young singers, chipped in a comically and extravagant performance as The Old Lady."

San Francisco Classical Voice praised the West Bay Opera's production of *Fidelio* with, "Opera at its best is more than a show—it involves, moves, enralls. And so it was at West Bay Opera's Sunday matinee of Beethoven's *Fidelio* as the majestic finale's delirious celebration of freedom and the triumph over evil moved to tears." This article noted the contribution of Former OSJ Resident Artist, **Krassen Karagiozov**. "As symbols of evil and good, Krassen Karagiozov's prison warden Pizarro and Kiril Havezov's Fernando were both splendid, vocally and theatrically."

Opera San José presented Merola alum and former Adler fellow **Pene Pati** as Alfredo in Verdi's *La Traviata*, April 14, 19, 22, & 29 at the California Theatre in downtown San José. Mr. Pati just completed singing Pinkerton in Jennifer Ward-Lealand's new production of *Madama Butterfly* for the Festival Opera in New Zealand.

The March edition of OPERA NEWS featured Merolini **Anna Netrebko** on the cover and in its main article. F. Paul Driscoll described the

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Merola Program Announces Stravinsky, Mozart, and “Much More”

By Janos Gereben, March 27, 2018

The Rake's Progress is a unique opera. Igor Stravinsky pays homage to classical music while turning it on its head — gloriously. It also demands much from singers and the orchestra, so a great performance stays in memory forever ... or, in this case, at least 13 years.

The wait is over: Merola's 2018 season, July 5 – Aug. 18, announced today, includes performances of *Rake* on Aug. 2 and 4, at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. The Concert Hall has only 400 seats, so when tickets go on sale on April 16, act quickly by visiting or calling the S.F. Opera box office at (415) 864-3330.

The conductor is San Francisco Opera Center Director of Musical Studies Mark Morash (Merola 1987) and the stage director is Robin Guarino.

Merola's other fully staged opera will be Mozart's *Il re pastore*, on July 19 and 21, also in the Conservatory.

Public performances begin in the Concert Hall on July 5 and in Stanford's Bing Concert Hall on July 7, with the Schwabacher Summer Concerts presenting scenes from *Vanessa*, *Il tabarro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Pearlfishers*, accompanied by full orchestra. The conductor is Kathleen Kelly (Merola 1991–1992), the first woman and first American named as Director of Musical Studies at the Vienna State Opera.

The season-closing grand finale on Aug. 18, with the participation of all Merolini, is held in the War Memorial Opera House, conducted by Dean Williamson, music director of the Nashville Opera, and directed by Merola Apprentice Stage Director Marcus Shields. The concert is followed by a big fund-raising reception.

The late James Schwabacher was one of the Merola Program's greatest boosters, the program-opening Summer Concerts are named for him. In addition to these public appearances by the young artists, they can be seen and heard during the program's 12 weeks at masterclasses, rehearsals, and many other activities, but admission is for

Merola Opera Program members who contribute to the program's approximately \$3 million operating budget.

For more than a half a century, the international training program started by S.F. Opera General Director Kurt Herbert Adler, and named for his predecessor and company founder Gaetano Merola, has helped to launch the careers of hundreds of now-famous artists, including Patricia Racette, Joyce DiDonato, Carol Vaness, Deborah Voigt, Susan Graham, Dolora Zajick, Thomas Hampson, and Stuart Skelton.

For this summer, 29 young artists have been selected from more than 800 applicants around the world. They range — alphabetically — from SeokJong Baek of South Korea to Meigui Zhang of Chengdu, China.

For 12 weeks, under the guidance of local and visiting artists, Merolini are trained in musical style and interpretation, role preparation, movement and acting, accompaniment and conducting, languages and diction.

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An Invitation to Join

Established in 1947, the San José Opera Guild was formed to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of the operatic arts and to provide both volunteer and financial support to opera.

The Guild incorporated in September 1958 as a non-profit corporation under the laws of California. The original purpose of the Guild has not changed over the years since its founding. The Guild sponsors singers each year at Opera San José, the Merola Opera Program, San Jose State Opera Workshop and supports Starting Arts.

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

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