



NEWSLETTER

Joan Shomler, Editor

August, 2018

A Preview of the Fall Lecture Series from SJOG

This fall the Opera Lecture Series begins on Wednesday, August 29th with a lecture on traditional pairing of *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni & *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo. This pair of one act operas highlighted the beginning of the Verismo (Realism) tradition in Italian opera. These are stories of the lives of ordinary people rather than nobles and kings. “Cav” as it is often known, was the first in the tradition premiering in 1890 telling the operatic story of lust, jealousy, betrayal and violent vengeance in a duel of honor with beautiful dramatic music. “Pag” the other half of the double bill premiered in 1892. It, too, tells a violent story of a jealous, older husband taking revenge for his younger wife’s desire for a better life (and lover), again with beautiful dramatic music. Helping us find our way through these two operas will be our lecturer, Kip Cranna, Dramaturg for the San Francisco Opera. As for all our presentations, the lecture will be at the Addison-Penzak JCC in Los Gatos and will begin at 10am (ending at noon).

The second lecture of the fall will be a week later, on Wednesday, September 5th and will discuss Gaetano Donizetti’s opera *Roberto Devereux*. This opera, one of Donizetti’s three Tudor operas, shows that betraying a Queen (Elizabeth I) can be as detrimental to your life as betrayal was for the above commoners, even if you are an Earl, as Robert Devereux was. It contains some of Donizetti’s best vocal writing, especially for Elizabeth and, of course, it is in the bel canto style. Here too, the plot is driven by desire, jealousy and betrayal.

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SJOG 2018 Brunch

This year’s Gala Brunch, on June 10th, was a great success. Guests arrived at the beautiful Saratoga Country Club setting to be greeted with offers of champagne, mimosas or orange juice. Arrayed before them were a wide variety of silent auction and raffle items. After adequate time to survey and bid on items and chat with their fellow attendees in the welcoming dining area, they sat down to a delightful brunch followed by inspiring entertainment by singers from Opera San José. The food, atmosphere and service were excellent. And, the Guild made more money than ever before. Check the SJOG website for the event’s pictures.

Comments from some guests were: “This was the best Brunch ever.” “I loved the room, the view and I could talk to the people at my table without shouting.” “The auction items were so varied and lots of fun.” “I loved the food selection. It was even better than other years.” “Have it here again. It was more festive.” “The flowers were beautiful.” “The singers were so enthusiastic. What a treat to hear them sing in such an intimate surrounding.”

Opera San José singers performed with style and passion. They were Amanda Kingston, Dane Suarez and Kirk Eichelberger. Veronika Agranov-Defoe was the pianist. Amanda and Dane sang two duets, one from the lovers in *Bohème* and the other from the Duke and Gilda in *Rigoletto*, as well as individual arias. Kirk treated us to two arias, including Méphistophélès’ aria mocking Marguerite from *Faust*.

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Our lecturer, Deborah Rosengaus, who will guide us through the twists of the plot and the music, is herself a mezzo-soprano with familiarity with singing bel canto arias and has performed locally with our local opera companies and classical music organizations. She last talked to us about *Don Pasquale* in 2016.

One of our favorite lecturers, Simon Williams, will deliver the talk on Richard Strauss' *Arabella*. This lecture will be on Wednesday, October 10th. *Arabella* is a romantic (not necessarily in that time frame, but in theme) opera. There are no violent deaths and no actual betrayals, just a bit of confusion as to who is promised to whom. It is, after all, a lyric comedy. The music is rich and soaringly lyrical. Arabella's soprano role is vocally stunning and particularly noteworthy. Simon will help us understand the somewhat confusing plot and provide examples of the opera's rich music.

Our fourth presentation, on Friday, October 19th, will be a West Bay Opera Season Overview. General Director (and Maestro) José Luis Moscovich will begin the presentation with an overview of the operas in 2018-19 season. These are: the perennial favorite, *La Bohème* in October, a rarely performed Verdi opera, *I due Foscari* in February and Verdi's final opera, *Falstaff* in late May and early June. This overview will be followed by a break and then singers from the West Bay Company will perform selections. Finally, at noon the monthly JCC Shabbat Lunch will take place. This is a particular opportunity to increase your familiarity with some of Verdi's less performed works, particularly *I due Foscari* which is the story of a Venetian Doge whose son is (wrongfully as it turns out) convicted of murder and exiled by the Venetian Council of Ten, a verdict that the Doge must uphold despite familial feeling to the contrary. The music is interesting because, in this 1844 opera Verdi introduces themes for the three principal characters (the Doge, his son and the son's wife) and one for the Council of Ten.

Our final lecture is on Wednesday, November 14th. Jake Heggie's setting of Gene Scheer's libretto for *It's a Wonderful Life* will be presented by the librettist and composer themselves. The opera is based on the beloved 1946 movie directed by Frank Capra and starring Jimmy Stewart. It tells the story of George Bailey in Bedford Falls, NY and the angel Clara who is sent to be his Guardian Angel and show him the value of his life when he is on the verge of suicide. The opera gives this story, which many have seen in one or more of its frequent pre-Christmas performances, new depth and meaning. In particular the role of the Guardian Angle, Clara (instead a male Clarence in the film) is expanded and that helps us understand her difficulties in dealing with the situation. The music is romantic with references to the jazz and dance crazes of the "20s".

As noted above, all of these presentations will be at the Addison-Penzak Jewish Community Center, 14855 Oka Rd, Los Gatos, CA 95032. The programs will begin at 10am and run to noon, but arrive early and share a cup of coffee and conversation with your fellow attendees. We look forward to seeing this fall.

Steve Zilles, Lecture Committee Chair

SJOG Newsletter

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Career Updates

by Susan English

Opera San Jose tapped Merolini **Pene Pati** to sing Alfredo in Verdi's *La Traviata* in April. Michael Vaughn wrote of his performance in Operwire: "There were some resounding voices coming from the California Theatre Saturday as Opera San José gave The Lady of the Camellias the royal treatment. The most startling of these belonged to Pene Pati, the New Zealand tenor who has already become an Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera and performed for that company in *Rigoletto* as the Duke of Mantua. Pati announced his presence right away, in the opening scene's "Di quell'amor," delivering a tone that was (dare we say it?) Lucianoan, gorgeously clear and fluid, with careful attention to phrasing and rolled r's (an art form in itself). The countryside monologues of the second act were a delight, as Alfredo exulted in his new love. In the Act 2 party scene, he showed that lyric can still be fierce, adding searing top notes to an already tense situation."

Also performing in this production was Merolini **Philip Skinner**. Vaughn wrote of his performance: "(He) gives the Baron Douphol a delicious sense of entitlement (Skinner has the perfect face for an opera aristocrat)."

Mr. Pati's professional web site includes performances with his wife, **Amina Edris**. They will both return home to New Zealand in their debuts as Nemorino and Adina (*L'Elisir d'Amore*) for their first appearances with New Zealand Opera, conducted by Wyn Davies. Both artists are recent graduates of San Francisco Opera's Adler program. Mr. Pene recently sang Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*) for Festival Opera in New Zealand and makes his European debut in the autumn at Opéra National de Bordeaux as Percy in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*. Ms. Edris sings her first Manon next season, also in Bordeaux, alongside debuts at Hawaii Opera Theatre as Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and Washington Concert Opera as Glycère in Gounod's rarely-heard *Sapho*.

Opera News featured Merolini **Anna Netrebko** in their July edition noting her April debut of *Tosca* at the Met, "was sensational, singing and acting with absolute surety and prodigious generosity. As a singing actress, Netrebko delivered everything – Tosca's passion for her lover, her devotion to God, her sense of her own worth as an artist and as a woman. Netrebko's *Tosca* was a gorgeous performance, rich in understanding and imagination, conceived and delivered with courage – and stunningly sung."

Operawire noted that The Metropolitan Opera Guild will honor Anna Netrebko at its 84th Annual Guild Luncheon on Friday, October 26, 2018. The president of the Guild Richard J. Miller said, "The guild is proud to honor the artistry and accomplishments of Anna Netrebko. Anna is an authentic 21st-century superstar whose generous spirit, passion for life, and amazing talent have thrilled audiences everywhere. Anna is more than just a great soprano – she is a true ambassador for the arts who has inspired thousands of people all over the world to love opera. Introducing opera to a wider audience has always been the goal of the guild's programs, and our Annual Luncheon helps make those programs possible."

Next season Ms Netrebko is set to perform *Aida* and *Adriana Lecouvreur* at the Metropolitan Opera. She will also make her Carnegie Hall recital debut and will perform at the Richard Tucker Gala. Additionally, she makes her role debut as Leonora in *La Forza del Destino* alongside Jonas Kaufmann at the Royal Opera House.

Closer to home, the San Francisco Opera presented three cycles of Wagner's Ring this June. Featured in two of the operas was Merolini, Julie Adams. She sang Freia in *Das Rheingold* and Gerhilde (one of the Valkyries) in *Die Walkure*. Backtrack reviewed the operas under the title: "Valkyries parachute into San Francisco." Ms. Adams will sing in *Silent Night* next Spring with Arizona Opera in Phoenix and Tucson, and next

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summer will sing Mimi in *La Bohème* with the Des Moines Metro Opera.

Die Walkure included seven Merolini as Valkyries. Reviewed in Backtrack: “The third act opened with a crowd-pleaser: Valkyrie body doubles “parachuting” towards stage. The eight Valkyries then appeared in aviatrix gear, parachutes in tow, shouting their rousing cries. Some of their solo singing was lost in the orchestral din, but they thrilled as an ensemble.” Clive Paget wrote for Limelight: “Completing the cast are the eight Valkyries: **Laura Krumm** (Siegrune), **Renée Rapiet** (Grimgerde), **Sarah Cambridge** (Ortlinde), **Julie Adams** (Gerhilde), Lauren McNeese (Rosswisse), **Nicole Birkland** (Schwertleite), **Melissa Citro** (Helmwige) and **Renée Tatum** (Waltraute). Between them they make for a fine ensemble, voices evenly matched. All come across loud and clear – except for some hard to catch off-stage singing – and they manage Wagner’s tricky eight-part choruses with an effortless sense of style.”

Several Merolini and OSJ Former Resident Artists performed in Festival Opera’s presentation of **Love, Lust & Laughter – An Opera Experience**, semi-staged excerpts from three beloved classic operas: Giacomo Puccini’s *La Bohème* and *Tosca*, and Johann Strauss II’s *Die Fledermaus*. The performance was held at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek in July. Featured were **Alex Boyer** (Merola 2007 and OSJ Former Resident Artist), **Eugene Brancoveanu** (Merola 2004), **Betany Coffland** (OSJ Former Resident Artist), **Zachary Gordin**, **Robert Norman**, and Philip Skinner joined by newcomers **Carrie Hennessey** and **Shana Blake Hill**.

Former Resident Artist for Opera San José, **Layna Chianakas** has held a tenured position with San Jose State University for the past ten years, presenting operas and concerts for the University and broader community. She wrote about her decision to leave academia with, “I am happy to tell you that I am going to be singing roles, directing four operas between now and next sum-

mer, taking on the Artistic Director, Performing Arts of the Assyrian Arts Institute, and also teaching 30 students (1/2 hours) at Valley Christian Conservatory!! I am looking forward to being my own boss and building my empire!!! So after 10 years of academia, which served me well, I am so excited to move on.” Ms. Chianakas recently created SJSU’s Opera Theatre’s production of *Die Fledermaus*, which included former OSJ Resident Artist, **Sandra Rubalacava-Bengochea**.

According to Merola’s web site, “each summer, San Francisco becomes a place where dreams come true for the young artists in the Merola Opera Program. Out of hundreds of young hopefuls who audition, approximately 23 singers, five apprentice coaches and one apprentice stage director are chosen to participate in the Program.” Although this Career Update tends to follow the singers, many of the apprentice coaches and directors have become professional artists of the highest caliber. July’s SFCV Newsletter considered the participation of two such artists with: “Under **Kathleen Kelly’s** dynamic musical direction and **Aria Umezawa’s** restrained staging, the Schwabacher Summer Concert provided four operas for the price of one, and an excellent showcase for the singers to perform, rather than ‘stand and deliver’.

Merolini Aria Umezawa is the Artistic Director of Toronto-based independent opera company, Opera 5, and the creator, director, and writer of the webseries “Opera Cheats.” According to Georgia Rowe in the San Jose Mercury News: “Umezawa, a rising star who hails from Toronto, first arrived in the Bay Area as a Merola participant. Local audiences have seen her work in the 2016 Merola Grand Finale concert, which she directed with impressive dramatic impact. Since then, she’s staged the 2017 Adler Fellows Concert, “Christmas with Sol3Mio,” for San Francisco Opera and last summer’s West Edge Opera production of Ambroise Thomas’ *Hamlet*. This month Joshua Kosman wrote of her recent work with the Schwabacher Concert, “director Aria

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Umezawa's nimble staging, only helped make the emotional crux of the piece feel even more three-dimensional."

In the same article for the Chronicle, Kosman considered another Merolini, Kathleen Kelly, who conducted the orchestra for the Schwabacher Concert. He noted she, "conducted...with an excellent sense of what the singers were up to." Her recent season included conducting at Carnegie Hall with mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, a follow up to their recital at Zankel Hall last December. She also lead performances of Bill Bolcom's *Dinner at Eight* at the University of Michigan. In September, she will conduct *Madama Butterfly* for Opera Columbus.

Directing the upcoming production of *Il re Pastore* for Merola is director Merolini **Tara Faircloth**. She has worked extensively on directing staff with such companies as Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Central City Opera, and Dallas Opera. Her professional website notes: "she has worked on some of the most complicated operas in the repertoire, assisting international directors and preparing cover casts of some of the best performers in our industry. She is increasingly sought out for her skills as an adapter and has created such pieces as the "Mini" *Grapes of Wrath*, and the "Mini" *Magic Flute*, commissions of Opera in the Ozarks and Utah Symphony & Opera. She has a private coaching studio in Houston, Texas, and regularly works with the talented singers in the Houston Grand Opera Studio and Rice University." Her upcoming schedule includes a busy Spring: *Agrippina* with Ars Lyrica Houston, *Le Nozze di Figaro* with Arizona Opera, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* with Boston Baroque, and in the Fall, *Rigoletto* with Austin Opera, and *The Little Prince* with Utah Opera in the Winter.

Starting Arts

Starting Arts was inspired by the simple observation that something special happens when young people connect with the arts. A unique learning environment materializes where students think and communicate through images, music and movement. Arts education creates opportunities for students to develop key life skills and evolve into confident, articulate, team-conscious members of our communities. We believe that an education without arts exposure is incomplete and falls far short of extraordinary. That unwavering belief has translated into a mission: to make arts education accessible to all students in Bay Area schools. From their website at: www.startingarts.com

Starting Arts presented *The Wizard of Oz* at the Hammer Theatre over the weekend of July 13 to 15.

Two of our members attended and below are their comments on the performance.

Susan English: I took my granddaughters and their mom to see this last weekend and it was WONDERFUL - really exceeded my expectations by miles. So proud that we are sponsoring this organization.



Grandchildren with Dorothy

Peggy Heiman: Fred and I went too and were so very impressed. They are very professional and you do not have to be a parent or grandparent of any of the performers to appreciate them and the fantastic experience participants had.

August Calendar

by Connie Zilles

Merola Summer Events

Tickets available at S.F. Opera Box Office
415 864-3330 or at www.sfopera.com

August 2, Thursday 7:30pm, August 4, Saturday 2pm, *The Rake's Progress* by Igor Stravinsky, San Francisco Conservatory of Music. \$55/\$80, Performed with English Supertitles.

August 18, Saturday 7:30pm Merola Grand Finale, War Memorial Opera House, \$40/\$50, Students \$25.00. Post-Concert Reception \$75.

San Jose Opera Guild's Lecture Series

Please note: San Jose Opera Guild's Lecture Series is on Wednesdays, unless otherwise listed. Lectures held at the JCC of Silicon Valley, 14855 Oka Road (cross street Lark Avenue) Los Gatos. 10 am to Noon. SJOG and JCC Members free. Non-members \$10.

August 29, Lecture with Kip Cranna on *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni and *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo.

September 5, Lecture, Deborah Rosengaus on *Robert Devereux* by Donizetti.

October 10, Lecture, Simon Williams on *Ara-bella* by Strauss, at the JCC of Silicon Valley.

October 19, FRIDAY, SJOG presents a Season Overview of West Bay Opera with WBO's General Director Jose Luis Moscovich and Singers at the JCC of Silicon Valley, Shabbat lunch to follow. Information on signing up for the luncheon will be available closer to the event.

Opera Performances

September 15, 16, 20, 23, 28 & 30, Opera San José presents *The Abduction from the Seraglio* by Mozart, California Theatre, 8pm except Sundays at 3pm. Tickets: 408-437-4450 or www.operasj.org. Introduction to Opera Talks 1½ hours before the opera performance.

October 12, 14, 20, 21, West Bay Opera presents *La Bohème* by Puccini in Italian with English titles, at the Lucie Stern Theater, Palo Alto, Friday at 8pm and Sundays at 2pm. \$70/65, Call 650 424-9999 or visit www.wbopera.org

Other Opera Opportunities

Metropolitan Opera Simulcast in HD, Showing at Century Oakridge 20, 225-7340 or Santana Row 6, 554-7010. Please confirm with theaters to verify that they will be showing a particular opera. (Prices may vary for the various HD operas.). For more information contact Met Opera Broadcasts.

Aida, Verdi Saturday, October 6, 9:55am

Samson et Delila, Saint-Saëns Saturday,
October 20, 9:55am

La Fanciulla del West, Puccini Saturday,
October 27, 9:55am

Encores the following Wednesday evening.



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Dignitaries included: Larry Hancock, General Director of Opera San José; Gillian Moran, President of the Opera San José Board; Barbara Brosh, President of Friends of Opera San José; Barbara Day Turner, Music Director, San José Chamber Orchestra; Ann Watts, Executive Director of Starting Arts; Steve Zilles, President of the San José Opera Guild; Ted Pickell, Merolini; plus five OSJ Board Members; nine SJOG Board Members; and four SJOG Emeritus.

We want to thank all of you who attended, bought raffle tickets and purchased silent auction items. We appreciate all the people and companies that donated auction items for our event.

For those who attended and those who missed this year, please mark your calendars now for next year's fabulous brunch gala. It will be on June 9, 2019 at the Saratoga Country Club.

Meet the Merola Singer sponsored by SJOG

Hailed for his “powerful voice” (CASA Magazine) and “tremendous” singing (San Diego Reader), bass-baritone Ted Allen Pickell is a distinguished and accomplished young artist on the rise.

This 2017/18 season, Mr. Pickell made his San Diego Opera debut as Samuel in *The Pirates of Penzance*, alongside Greer Grimsley as the Pirate King. Additional engagements include a return to the title role in *The Mikado* with the Northwest Indiana Symphony, and spending the summer of 2018 at the San Francisco Opera's prestigious Merola Opera Program, where he will sing Father Trulove in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. This season, Mr. Pickell joined the San Diego Opera's Apprentice Artist training program for singers, where he will perform in scenes from *La bohème*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Billy Budd*.

This year, he is also a San Diego District winner, as well as the Audience Choice Award winner, of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, an award winner in the Loren. L Zachary competition, a semi-finalist in the George London Foundation, and the winner of the "Most Promising Singer" award from the La Jolla Symphony & Chorus vocal competition.

In the 2016/17 season, Mr. Pickell sang the title role in *The Mikado* with the Northwest Indiana Symphony, Der Vater in *Hänsel und Gretel* with Point Loma Opera Theatre, The Giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and Basilio in *The Barber of Seville* with Opera Iowa's young artist outreach ensemble, and he joined Des Moines Metro Opera's roster of Apprentice Artists, where he sang Arthur Jones in *Billy Budd*, covered the role of John Claggart in that opera, and performed the role of Nick Shadow in scenes from Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. Mr. Pickell also performed as a soloist in the Margo Garrett Master Class at Carnegie



Hall, as part of Marilyn Horne's *The Song Continues*.

Mr. Pickell is a recent graduate of the Masters in Vocal Performance at Northwestern University. He received his Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from University of the Pacific.

Many of you had the opportunity to meet this tall friendly young man at the Guild's June Gala Brunch and there is still the opportunity to hear his wonderful bass-baritone in *The Rake's Progress* on August 2nd and 4th and singing an aria from *Thais* in the Merola Grand Finale on August 18th. In fact, all 23 singers in the Merola Opera Program will be singing at the Grand Finale so this is a wonderful opportunity to see them all in action. (See the Calendar section for more information.)



San José Opera Guild
P.O. Box 33025
Los Gatos, CA 95031-3025

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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