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Opera in German Sparkles from San Francisco

By Erica Miner

XLNC1's upcoming San Francisco Opera season presents two German language favorites. *Die Tote Stadt* (The Dead City) premiered with great success in Hamburg and Cologne in 1920, when composer Erich Korngold was only 23, and is based on a novella by Georges Rodenbach. If you have ever visited Bruges, as I have, you would find striking its atmosphere of a city lost in time. The canals and ancient buildings, at once enigmatic and sensuous, are the perfect setting for this story enshrouded in mystery and intrigue. Most of it takes place in the imagination of Paul, the protagonist, and reflects his active fantasies centering on his love for his deceased wife and for the new woman in his life. The opera, which has been compared to Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*, is the stuff of high drama, and the Wagnerian vocal writing and huge orchestration add to its flavor.

Banned by the Nazis because of Korngold's Jewish background, the opera fell into obscurity but was famously revived in 1975 at the New York City Opera. I was playing violin in the NYCO Orchestra at the time, and I vividly remember its landmark use of film and photographic projections as a staging device, as well as the composer's granddaughter Kathrin Korngold being in attendance at the final performance. Excerpts from two of the opera's most famous arias, as well as scenes from the SF Opera production, can be found at: <http://sfopera.com/o/266.asp>.

In my recent lecture "Opera Favorites" on Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, I was asked which opera was my favorite to play as a violinist with the Metropolitan Opera. Without hesitation, I replied, *Der Rosenkavalier*. Its melodies and harmonies sparkle with sensuality, and the story, bedroom farce meets lush romanticism, is captivating. But for me as an opera orchestra musician, the piece represents an opportunity to perform a score as challenging and pleasurable to play as any Richard Strauss Tone Poem.

Hugo Van Hoffmannsthal's libretto for *The Knight of the Rose* is loosely based on a comic novel by Louvret de Couvrai, a contemporary of Beaumarchais, and inevitably compared to Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, which was of course by... Beaumarchais. Premiered in Dresden in 1911, the opera remains one of the most beloved in the repertoire. I also witnessed some of the most spectacular casting possible, including the incomparable Christa Ludwig as the Marschallin and Luciano Pavarotti as the tenor. (Talk about high-strung divas!) Before my time, there was also that infamous story of the dogs coupling on stage in the middle of the first act... Well, that is the stuff of legend

Log on to <http://sfopera.com/opera> for more details on this splendid production.

Email: eminer@xlnc1.org

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1690 Frontage Road
Chula Vista, CA 91911



Fortissimo Notes

This Newsletter is also available online visit: xlnc1.org/newsletter/autumn09/index.html

Member Newsletter | Autumn 2009 Issue

Saving classical music and opera

By Valerie Scher

The 16th-century Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León wasted considerable time in Florida searching for the "fountain of youth," a mythical water source that restored youthfulness to anyone who drank from it.

Nowadays, classical music and opera organizations are seeking something that's almost as elusive: Young performance-goers. The hope is that youthful patrons will replenish the audience and prevent the classical music and opera following from dying out.

It's a noble quest. But what if it's not the best strategy? "I don't think reaching a young audience is the answer," Washington Post music critic Anne Midgette recently wrote. "I think that we need to stop fixating on the young audience and focus on reaching an audience, period."

Exactly how to do that is a topic of discussion, both nationally and locally. There's no question that San Diego's musical institutions deserve loyal audiences. During the upcoming 2009-10 season, enriching programming will be provided by organizations ranging from the San Diego Symphony and San Diego Opera to Mainly Mozart and the La Jolla Music Society; from UCSD's ArtPower and the La Jolla Symphony & Chorus to Lyric Opera San Diego and Orchestra Nova San Diego (formerly known as the San Diego Chamber Orchestra).

"We should look at the 40-plus audience as our primary audience," San Diego Symphony Executive Director Edward B. "Ward" Gill says about orchestra-goers. "These are the people who have the time, availability and (financial) resources."

What's the key to attracting them?

"The most important thing in San Diego is that you must present the highest artistic quality within your financial parameters," believes Gill, who works closely with music director Jahja Ling. "Quality is the be-all and end-all."

For examples of high-caliber classical programming, consider the Jacobs' Masterworks Series (which opens Oct. 2), the Beethoven Festival, and concerts devoted to such guests as violinist Itzhak Perlman and the Moscow State Radio Symphony Orchestra.

"We want to make (Copley Symphony Hall) a fun place to be," Gill explains.

He cites such enticements as "Power Player" cards that orchestra members hand out in the lobby and performances involving commentator/conductor Nuvi Mehta, the "Voice of the San Diego Symphony" (who also hosts "World of Music" on XLNC1).

Yet attracting new fans is hardly easy, especially for opera, the most labor-intensive and expensive, of the performing arts. Ticket prices can be steep. And there's not enough hands-on music education to fully prepare the audiences of tomorrow. Generous funding, both public and private, would help greatly. But in this economy no one's counting on it.

"That is not to say that new audiences are not being found," San Diego Opera General and Artistic Director Ian Campbell pointed out in a recent commentary published by San Diego News Network. "Verdi was concerned about the future of opera audiences in the 20th century, but we made it to the 21st after all."

The choice of repertoire is "important where opera is concerned," he said, adding that "newbies" want to hear the classics.

That they will during the

company's 2010 season, which opens in January with Puccini's beloved *La Bohème*, closes in April with Verdi's ever-popular *La Traviata*, and features Verdi's *Nabucco* and Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* in between.

By contrast, Orchestra Nova's Jung-Ho Pak believes the context in which music is presented is crucial.

"Programming, in my opinion, is not the primary key to building audiences," says the conductor/artistic director. "As I tell my orchestra, we are essentially in the business of love and enthusiasm... If (audience members) feel a personal connection with you, they'll have the same feeling about your art."

Pak and Orchestra Nova continue to build a following, not just through concerts (the new season begins Sept. 11) and special programs (Pak hosts "The Tasting Room" on XLNC1) but through other means as well.

"The way we dress, the way we enter on stage, the way the guests are greeted at the door, the beautiful program magazine, the hip Website - these are things that are new to the classical music world," he says.

Whatever the strategies, they're part of the admirable effort by local music organizations to attract new audiences to a wonderful old art form.

Valerie Scher is the Arts & Entertainment editor of San Diego News Network (sdnn.com) and host of "On the Town With Valerie Scher" on XLNC1. You can reach her at valerie.scher@sdnn.com



1690 Frontage Road, Chula Vista, CA 91911

Editorial Advisor:
Gary Shaw

Membership Services:
(619) 575-9090 Ext. 413

Volunteer Inquiries:
(619) 575-9090 Ext. 413

General Questions:
(619) 575-9090

Design:
Alanis Design

Executive note

In an effort to reinforce XLNC1's youth outreach program, we're working on several projects that will help us reach younger audiences to share the pleasure that classical music brings to our lives, the intense joy we experience when a piece moves us and changes our state of mind.

So we started a group: "Generation XLNC." This volunteer committee will become the station's ambassadors: spreading the word about classical music through events, word of mouth and outreach programs at their colleges and universities. Also, we recently started streaming on iPhones. Even though iPhones are not just for young people, we're aware that many like to listen to music on the go. So now we can be one of their choices.

Last week I met with Dalouge Smith, the executive director of the San Diego Youth Symphony. They are starting a program similar to the one in Venezuela, "El Sistema." The SDYS will form regional orchestras with the help of school districts. XLNC1 will be joining this initiative.

In addition we are considering joining efforts with "Classics 4 Kids" in San Diego, and starting a new interactive Internet children's program on our Website that we are trying to get funded.

You may ask: Why are we so focused on reaching a younger audience? Well, if you consider that more and more classical music stations are being sold, changing formats or moving to a less powerful frequency like WQXR in New York or K-Mozart in Los Angeles, I'm sure you'll understand our motivation and realize how this could benefit our community. No successful product will survive without attracting new consumers. If you know someone who would like to collaborate with any of these programs, please contact us at 619-575-9090 ext. 406. It should be fun!

Lisette Atala
Executive Director
Email: Latala@xlnc1.org

Discovering Great Trees In The Forest

By Kingsley McLaren

Think back to 1985. Does the year ring a bell for you? Well, in case it doesn't, let me remind you that 1985 was the 300th anniversary of the births of Handel, Bach and Scarlatti. Much was made of that year and by sheer serendipitous happenstance a discovery was made of previously unknown chorales by the great Johann Sebastian Bach. Now on first sight it did seem a little suspicious to have these discoveries not only made almost on the eve of the 300th anniversary, but to have a brand new recording of them ready to hit the market in the birthday month. Such coincidence is enough to make one say: Hm-m-m-m-m!

In fairness though, there was a little more to the story. The discovery was actually made in December 1984, and it was a total of 82 "Chorales without Text" that were discovered, and only about 35 were credited to Bach. They are part of what is known now as the Neumaster Collection. And how did they get to the United States? Between 1705 and 1710, Bach composed the chorales. In the 1790s, Neumeister, an organist in Freiberg, copied the chorales. Between 1770 and 1846, the collection passed to Rinck, the organist at Darmstadt. In 1852, Mason purchased Rinck's library, and in 1873, the manuscripts headed to Yale by Mason.

Now we have more amazing discoveries. A few years back, a single sheet in the young Mozart's handwriting was discovered by a French library. The work was described as the preliminary draft of a musical composition, found as the staff was going through the library archives in Nantes in western France. Ulrich Leisinger, a Mozart authority from Salzburg, said, "It's a melody sketch. So what's missing is the harmony and the instrumentation, but you can make sense out of it."

"The tune is complete," he continued. "It's only one part and not the whole score with eight or twelve parts. One can really get a feeling of what Mozart meant, although we do not know how he would have orchestrated it."

Liesinger also identified the handwriting and said, "His handwriting is absolutely clearly identifiable," adding "There's no doubt that this is an original piece handwritten by Mozart."

But now we have an even more amazing discovery of two works that may be even earlier. Of all places to find them, they were discovered in Wolfgang's home town of Salzburg, Austria. The two compositions -- a concerto in G and a prelude in G -- have long been in the files at the International Mozarteum Foundation in Salzburg as anonymous works and were even published in the book "New Mozart Edition" in 1982.

The compositions were found in a book compiled by Mozart's father that was used for practice and the musical education of both Mozart and his sister. Ulrich Leisinger believes "that they were actually composed by the young Mozart, who was not yet versed in musical notation, and transcribed by his father as the young Wolfgang played the works at the keyboard." Leopold Mozart transcribed his son's early works as a way of preserving them.

Jeffrey Kimpton, president of the Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan, called the works "a remarkable historical find," adding that discovering such historical treasures is like detective work.

What is truly remarkable is how works composed so long ago can still be rediscovered today. From Mendelssohn's discovery of a Bach manuscript wrapping fish in Leipzig to our most recent Mozart discovery, excitement follows every new find, and so it should. Truly amazing is the fact that the latest discovery was in the hands of the world's top Mozart experts all along. So they didn't exactly "find" them as they had them all along.

Kingsley McLaren is a longtime classical music radio personality. He has been an announcer and collaborator of XLNC1 for more than 8 years. Email: KmcLaren@xlnc1.org



On The Town

San Diego Symphony

Opus 2009 Season

-Jacobs' Masterworks:

Dvorak, Handel

Oct. 2, 4m

-Opus 2009 Season Opening Gala:

Schumann, Kodaly

Oct. 3

-Jacobs' Masterworks:

Shostakovich

Oct. 16, 17 and 18m

-Jacobs' Masterworks:

Wagner, Bruch, Mozart

Oct. 30, 31 and Nov. 1m

Orchestra Nova

-Flying Solo

Oct. 21, 24, 26

-Haydn Seek

Nov. 20, 21, 23

La Jolla Music Society

-Shanghai Quartet

Oct. 17

-Shanghai Symphony

Nov. 19

The Metropolitan Opera

Live in HD:

-Tosca, Giacomo Puccini

Oct. 10

-Aida, Giuseppe Verdi

Oct. 24

To view a list of cultural events please visit xlnc1.org/culturalcalendar.htm

The Legend, Menachem Pressler

By David Amos

Classical music enthusiasts, of chamber music in particular, know of the iconic pianist Menachem Pressler and his legendary recordings and performances with the Beaux Arts Trio. My first live exposure to the Trio was during my student days at Indiana University in the early '70s, when the famed ensemble comprised violinist Isidore Cohen, cellist Bernard Greenhouse and Mr. Pressler. I had already owned several LPs of the Beaux Arts Trio, but hearing the live concert was very impressive.

So you can imagine the anticipation when the La Jolla Music Society promoted the Aug. 5 SummerFest chamber music concert as "An Evening with Menachem Pressler," featuring the pianist as a soloist and ensemble player. All at Sherwood Auditorium were treated to a study of artistry and musicality.

What makes a pianist such a legend? We may ask ourselves, what more is there than playing the right notes at the right time, at the right volume and tempo? Quite a lot more. We should not be impressed by an interpreter who simply plays loud and fast.

This is where great artistry comes in. The more familiar we are with the great pianists and the literature, the more seriously refined playing becomes obvious. We, as listeners, become more musically discriminating in hearing the subtleties of interpretation, the drama, the minute pauses between the notes, the shadings, the dramatic impact, and the overall message the artist conveys when playing an instrument, or singing, or conducting.

All of the above were gloriously done by Mr. Pressler. To start the recital, he was joined by pianist Orion Weiss, in the *Sonata in D Major for Two Pianos, K. 448* by W.A. Mozart. This sonata has the freshness of youth. It is not bombastic or ostentatious, but it displays Mozart at his best, with direct, uncomplicated melodies, transparency, and purity of balance and form.

Music for two pianos is not easy to perform. I have conducted recordings in four albums of music for two pianos and orchestra. The necessary "meeting of minds" and coordination that is required to make two pianists, facing each other from a distance of ten feet and attempting to sound as a single instrument, is no small matter. But, as expected, Messrs. Pressler and Weiss,

seasoned performers that they are, gave us a most satisfying reading.

Mr. Pressler continued the recital with Beethoven's *Piano Sonata in A Flat Major, Op. 110*. He preceded the performance with a brief, but personal explanation to the audience on how important this sonata was to him in his early years; after leaving Germany and living in Palestine, later Israel, he was in frail health at the time, and the impact at his first exposure to this sonata was emotionally overwhelming. His vivid account of the work symbolizing Beethoven's four stages in life -- idealism, hedonism, regret and triumph -- formed what I call an "artistic arch," which he so vividly communicated in his playing.

Considering that this is a fairly late Beethoven opus, it is not as harmonically daring as one would expect. Never mind the few technical and rhythmic glitches. They all took a back seat to the impressive artistry and beauty. The message is what counts.

The best was reserved for the second half, when Mr. Pressler was joined by violinists Cho-Liang Lin, Margaret Batjer, violist Heiichiro Ohyama and cellist Carter Brey in a masterful interpretation of Antonin Dvořák's *Quintet in A Major for Piano and Strings, Op. 81*.

This is where the Pressler legacy was at its very best. This quintet is a magnificent work of chamber music, and I have always considered Dvořák to be one of the greatest composers of all time, someone deserving of far greater appreciation and recognition.

If you are not a seasoned live chamber music aficionado, you may envision a string quartet with piano as a source of puny, delicate sounds. Not at all! This was energetic, dynamic, colorful music that filled the auditorium with rich, and when called for, LOUD, dramatic sounds.

Under the spiritual and technical guidance of Mr. Pressler, every member of the ensemble was distinctly heard, and the overall sound was cohesive as a single musical unit. This was the first program I have attended this year where a standing ovation was truly justified.

David Amos is conductor of the Tifereth Israel Community Orchestra. His article originally appeared in *San Diego Jewish World*.



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with Kingsley McLaren
Sundays at 6pm and
Wednesdays at 7pm

• **The Tasting Room**
with Jung-Ho Pak
Sundays at 4pm and
Thursdays at 7pm

• **World of Music**
with Nuvi Mehta
Sundays at 10am and
Wednesdays at 6pm

• XLNC1 Opera Series

San Francisco Opera

Saturday Mornings at 10am

August 22, 2009

Simon Boccanegra (in Italian)
Giuseppe Verdi

August 29, 2009

The Bonesetter's Daughter (in English)
Stewart Wallace

September 5, 2009

Die Tote Stadt (in German)
Erich Wolfgang Korngold

September 12, 2009

Idomeneo (in Italian)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

September 19, 2009

Boris Godunov (in Russian)
Modesto Mussorgsky

September 26, 2009

The Elixir of Love (in Italian)
Gaetano Donizetti

October 3, 2009

La Bohème (in Italian)
Giacomo Puccini

October 10, 2009

Der Rosenkavalier (in German)
Richard Strauss

October 17, 2009

Tosca (in Italian)
Giacomo Puccini

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La Traviata (in Italian)
Giuseppe Verdi

October 31, 2009

Don Giovanni (in Italian)
W.A. Mozart

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