

OPERA AT RIDERWOOD NOTES & NEWS

for July 15

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

Arias for a Summer's Evening

Yes, it is still in the News to let you know who worked with Leah Solat to create the concert enjoyed by nearly 230 opera lovers who filled the Chapel last week. Many thanks for their energy and work to volunteers Barbara Adams, Paula Cook, Joseph Davidson, Judith Dighe, Betty Dunkins, Dave Knutson, Clinton Marshall, June Marshall, Harry Monocrusos, Mary Ann Stroker, Donna Suchmann, Mina Sweet, John Szabo, and Millie Trimble. As Leah said, it certainly takes almost a village to stage a concert. Chris Taydus, head of RWTV went more than an "extra mile" to ensure we have an excellent film of the concert. We'll let you know when it is to be broadcast. - Gene

OUR OWN OPERA QUIZ

From July 1
by Clint Marshall

Q: The group of works known as Bel Canto operas were primarily composed by only three composers. The first was Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) who composed The Barber of Seville that we watched two weeks ago. The second composer is Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) who wrote today's Lucia di Lammermoor. Who was the third Bel Canto opera composer?

A: Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835). We will see his masterpiece Norma on August 19th ...and the winner is **Larry Rodowsky**.

NEXT WEEK IN ENCORE

Verdi's **Don Carlo** is featured next Friday, July 22nd with Luciano Pavarotti doing the honors as Mr. Carlo, Daniela Dessi as Elisabetta Di Valois and Samuel Ramey as Filippo II. Maestro Riccardo Muti wields the baton in Franco Zeffirelli's production recorded live at La Scala in 1992.
— Gene

Steve Schwartz's Encore Notes

Daughter of the Regiment

Gaetano Donizetti

Don't be misled by the title of this opera. Although it's about an army unit, there's no violence or shooting. It's not even a drama, but an opera buffa, a light-hearted bit of fluff with a boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-wins-girl motif much like a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta. There's no tension about the outcome, only how the lovers overcome the roadblocks to true love.

When this opera premiered in 1840, the genre known as 'bel canto', (beautiful singing), was at its peak. It's audiences heard arias filled with coloratura riffs for sopranos, and tenors who could hit high "C" as well as sing sweetly.

A successful presentation of this frothy piece of fluff must have more than two first-rate opera voices in the lead roles. Those singers require an onstage presence with a flair for comic acting. Today's production has a pair of opera stars who more than meet that standard: the French diva Natalie Dessay and the Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Florez.

When this was recorded, Ms. Dessay was already considered one of the top tier of coloratura sopranos. Her reputation grew even more after this bravura performance. The role is a match for her marvelous vocal instrument, and her singing technique as well as her comic acting. For his part, Mr. Florez hits no less than nine high "C"s in his hit number "Mes Amis"!

The staging for this production premiered in 2007 in London's Royal Opera House where this recording was made. The opera crossed the Atlantic to the Met in New York the next year. (Some of us old-timers may recall taking a Riderwood bus in 2008 to see the Met's HD simulcast with the same leads. We have that same opportunity today, at no cost, and without the extra time and inconvenience of leaving Riderwood!!!

[As Steve often wished, these days we have the option and convenience of signing up for a Riderwood Trip to see a Met in HD production as well as other operatic programs in venues in our area. - GM]

"NOTES" Continued Page 2

ACT ONE - *An army encampment in the mountains*

The plot is as silly as one would expect of a comic opera.

We first meet the **Marquise de Berkenfield** (mezzo) who is accompanied by her faithful aide, **Hortensius** (baritone). War has come to this area in the Tyrol and she must leave her estate for now. Next, we meet a regiment of French Grenadiers, all of whom are good guys. Their foes are the bad guys; we never meet them. Finally we meet our heroine, **Marie** (soprano). Long ago she'd been found as an abandoned infant on the battlefield and has since been raised by the entire regiment, all acting as her 'Daddies'.

Since she is their joint pet, the men of the regiment decreed that when Marie came of age, she could marry whomever she chose, provided he was a member of the regiment. Therein lies a problem.

In most productions of this opera, the costuming for Marie is a female version of the colorful red and blue uniform of a French Grenadier. She carries a drum that she beats to accompany the men as they sing their regimental songs. Our Marie appears wearing army-issued breeches and a gray undershirt. She is the regiment's Jill-of-all-trades and just now she is their washer-woman, singing that she loves her life as she irons and folds their underwear.

Once alone with the regiment's Master Sergeant, **Sulpice** (baritone), she tells him that she was recently rescued from certain death by an unnamed man with whom (this being opera) she is madly in love. Sulpice is not pleased, reminding her that she must marry a Grenadier. The soldiers bring in a young man they caught hanging around the encampment whom they believe to be an enemy spy. It is, of course, her new-found beloved **Tonio** (tenor).

Marie is crest-fallen but Tonio proves to be resourceful. He solves the problem by enlisting in the regiment, thereby becoming eligible to marry her. Wait, complications arise!

First, the Marquise de Berkenfield and Hortensius return. Here, she is played by a doyen

from the past, Felicity Palmer, a leading lady in her hey-day. Even now, you can see her dignity and hear that her voice is as strong as ever.

She says she wishes to reclaim her ancestral estate, and requests a safe-conduct pass from the highest-ranking army officer present. Here, that man is Sulpice. Though he is only a Master Sergeant, she calls him 'Captain'. When he hears the name Berkenfield, he recalls that that name appeared on a paper found with the infant Marie when the regiment first adopted her. Sulpice produces the paper for the Marquise, who declares it authentic and identifies the girl, Marie, as the illegitimate daughter of her long-lost 'niece'. (But her manner tells us that that is not the complete truth.)

She insists that Marie, as scion of her noble family, must accompany her to her estate and be brought up properly as an aristocrat. Since the pass must be granted, the Grenadiers grieve that they must part with their beloved Marie. The lover's new problem is that since Tonio is now a soldier, he must stay with his regiment. His enlistment has back-fired. The lovers must part.

ACT TWO - *The Birkenfield palace*

Since returning home with Marie, the Marquise has been trying her best to train Marie in the ways of a noblewoman, but it's a losing battle. Wearing fancy clothes and learning how to dance and conduct herself with lady-like deportment are foreign to her. All Marie has ever known has been the army life, and she misses it and her former 'Daddies'. It's a formula for a host of comic shticks, and Ms. Dessay milks the situation to a fair-thee-well.

The Marquise has decreed Marie must marry the heir to the **Duchess of Crakentorp**, and invited Sulpice to be Marie's companion to ease her transition. They soon conspire to deviate from her prescribed lessons. So, when the Marquise gives Marie a singing lesson, she and Sulpice insert some verses from the regimental songs that we heard in the first act.

Marie is saddened by the emptiness of her new life. Money and social position are not an adequate substitute for love and companionship

(and Tonio). Then the entire regiment arrives and troops into the hall. Her old companions want to save her from a loveless marriage, and Tonio plans to marry her instead.

The Marquise will have none of it. She wants the family fortunes renewed, and sees Marie's marriage into a well-settled aristocratic family as her ticket. The Marquise orders the men to leave, and they comply. A miserable Marie retires to her room, leaving the Marquise alone with Sulpice and Tonio.

Having lost his lady-love, Tonio feels free to speak of an old rumor about the Berkenfield family and the fact that there was no missing 'sister.' He knows who was the mother of that abandoned child. When he leaves, the Marquise tearfully admits to Sulpice that Marie is her daughter, abandoned in infancy because she feared the disgrace of being an unwed mother.

Hortensius announces that the wedding party has arrived. As they file into the room, every Riderwood resident here will find it hard not to smile, for they look so much like us filing in to have dinner except none of them have walkers.

When it's time for the wedding to begin, Marie refuses to leave her room. Only after Sulpice tells her the Marquise is her mother, does Marie decide not to deny her mother's wishes and agrees to marry a man she does not love.

Just when it seems true love will be thwarted, the soldiers return, and all of them are armed! Tonio is mounted on a ridiculous excuse for a tank. They announce that Marie has lived with them all her life, and they will not stand by to see her enter into a loveless marriage. Under the circumstances, the Marquise wisely when to take yes for an answer and recognizes the innate goodness of her daughter. So, she 'allows' Marie to marry Tonio, even though he is a commoner. The curtain falls on a scene of unrestrained happiness, with everyone singing patriotic songs - in French, of course.

And we leave the Encore Theater with a smile on our faces, glad we have no need for a handkerchief this time. - Steve Schwartz

SOME PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Runtime: 132 minutes • Filmed at Royal Opera House in 2007 • DVD released in 2008 by Virgin Classics • MPAA NOT RATED • ASIN: B0013V33DG

A Co-production of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, the Wiener Staatsoper, Vienna and The Metropolitan Opera, New York. Produced for television by the BBC

PRINCIPAL CAST

Marie	Natalie Dessay
Tonio	Juan Diego Flórez
La Marquise	
de Berkenfeld	Felicity Pamer
Surpice Pingot	Alessandro Corbelli
Hortensius	Donald Maxwell
La Duchesse	
de Crackentorp	Dawn French
Un caporal	Brian Secombe
Un paysan	Luke Price
Un notaire	Jean-Pierre Blanchard
The Orchestra and Chorus of The Royal Opera House is conducted by Bruno Campanella	
Choreography by Laura Scozzi	

WARN

Your "opera-hating" (!) family and friends that Encore Opera considers *OKLAHOMA* (The Musical) an opera! and will present it on July 29th if they care (dare!) to come with you!

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

On *Daughter*...

Several years ago, we played a film clip of Natalie Dessay and her director preparing for *La Traviata* from the DVD *Becoming Traviata*. Watching that, I fell in love with her. She approaches her role of Violetta with self-aware humor, emotional courage, wonderful acting skill, openness to change, and great commitment. I have no idea how she prepared for this performance but I imagine equal intensity, even though Marie is nothing as demanding as Violetta: comic rather than tragic, healthy rather than ill, and well loved rather than learnedly cynical. Honestly, I wish her voice had more in common with Anna Netrebko's, but I could say that about many sopranos, and I have no such quibbles about Dessay's musicality. Besides, what do I know? When I share my personal feelings about these things, I'm just fishing to find out what others' opera experiences are. Let me know yours?

On *Netrebko*...

I have great interest in Anna Netrebko's conflict with Peter Gelb, General Director of the Metropolitan Opera who left the orchestra without pay during the pandemic shutdown and locked out the stage hands union in later labor negotiations. He fired and criticizes Ms Netrebko who has family in Russia and has stated her opposition to the Russian war against Ukraine because she declined to directly criticize Putin by name. However, Gelb was in Moscow on Feb 23 for Opening Night of a joint Met and Bolshoi production of *Lohengrin* because "Nobody really believed that Russia would invade Ukraine, not even the night before – at least nobody expected it from the artists." Nobody? Three days earlier, on Feb 20th the US warned its diplomatic staff to evacuate over invasion fears. Anna Netrebko has filed a grievance against the Met. I will continue to follow this story and update you as my time and our space permit.

SELECTION COMMITTEE

Selection? Select what? As founder of Encore Opera and owner of the DVDs and BDs we play, Steve Schwartz used to decide which version of a given opera to play since he usually owned several different recorded performances of it. After his death last year, Steve's family, in accord with his wishes, donated his collection to Encore Opera - to which I have added my vastly smaller batch. That left us with the questions of which operas to schedule each year and which version of each opera to play that year. The group Opera at Riderwood has assumed the responsibility and opportunity of answering these questions this year by means of a Selection Committee chaired by **David Blackman**. Members of the Committee include **Clint Marshall, Irwin Goldstein, Maxine Goldstein, Joan Kugler, and John Szabo**. Interested volunteers are invited to apply; contact Leah Solat: lsolat@comcast.net.

Opera at Riderwood

Opera At Riderwood is a resident group presenting recorded operas weekly as *Encore Opera* and live operatic concerts as *Purple Lady Productions*. *Notes & News* is published every week to inform the opera community at Riderwood and is distributed without charge to the cubbies of residents without email.

Residents are invited to join and work with O@R members who wear many hats and fill many shoes: Barbara Adams, Mike Beard, David Blackman, Paula Cook, Joe Davidson, Judith Dighe, Trudy Downs, Betty Dunkins, Irwin Goldstein, Maxine Goldstein, Sallie Holder, David Knutson, Luanne Knutson, Sally Koenig, Joan Kugler, Clinton Marshall, June Marshall, Gene Martin, Harry Monocrusos, Sally Porter, Mina Schwartz, Mort Schwartz, Leah Solat, Mary Ann Stroker, Donna Suchmann, Mina Sweet, John Szabo, and Millie Trimble, among others.

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FRIDAY, 1:00 PM • ENCORE THEATER
OPERA NOTES FOR:

