

OPERA SUPERS OF IOWA CITY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME TWO, NUMBER 5

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EDITOR: ARTHUR CANTER

30 BROOKFIELD DR. IOWA CITY, IOWA 52240

Next Meeting: Tuesday,* March 3rd at 7:00 p.m.
Music Lounge of the Music Building (*Note
change from Monday meeting time.)

Letter from the Editor

If you were unable to attend the last meeting and wish to make your services as a Super available for the *Don Giovanni* production, be sure to let one of the committee chairpersons know or contact Mona Shaw. We will try to keep you informed of needs and events in the Newsletter. If you have not reserved tickets for the opera, do so before the best seats are taken. If you have never seen *Don Giovanni* in a live performance before, this is your opportunity to do so. In all truth, the opera is one of the greatest ever written and easy to listen to and enjoy even if one is inexperienced in hearing opera.

Members who attended the last meeting were given copies of the Opera Supers Informational Packet and a synopsis of *Don Giovanni* as a bonus for attending. If you wish to receive copies, come to the next meeting. The packet is in short supply. Your editor prepared the material which contains information about the background of the opera, its sources, a brief history of its fate and a biographical sketch of the librettist, Da Ponte. The synopsis is based on the English version by Amanda and Anthony Holden (1985) that is to be presented by the University of Iowa Opera Theater. A biographical sketch of Mozart was deliberately left out as it was assumed that most of you have some knowledge about the composer. However, if what you know about Mozart came chiefly from the movie or the play *Amadeus*, it is best that you correct it now before I send Betty McCollister after you. While fact is said to be often stranger than fiction, in the case of *Amadeus*, the fiction that may make good theater is much stranger than fact.

I am pleased to report that more readers of the Newsletter are contacting me and offering material to be included. This is the way it should be because it is your newsletter. I offer you a platform for your views as well as mine, although I take advantage of my position as editor to assert my viewpoint. That is my prerogative but there is no reason for you not to challenge me. I am no expert nor am I trained in things operatic let alone musical. But I do like to read in these areas: I listen and I try to learn. Neither do you have to be the

expert, the scholar or the professional to express your views, or opinions about the facts that you have discovered. If we are in error, then let us become the more knowledgeable and correct us. As a professional psychologist I am quite used to having laymen express views on psychology, some accurate, some inaccurate. Doesn't everybody think he or she is a psychologist about something or other? I want "everybody" to be expert enough in opera to speak with some degree of intelligence about it and more than that, to enjoy opera and help perpetuate it as a musical/theater art form. We become too passive about the art forms and performances presented to us. Doesn't your curiosity ever get aroused about what is behind the art? Who is that artist, composer, performer? Not just the name, but something about the person. What went into its making? Does it have a history? There are all kinds of questions one could ask, if one gets involved. If you ask, why not try to find the answers? Does it take time? Yes, it does. All aspects of living take time and even doing nothing takes time. If you get curious enough you will do something about it even if only to fantasize an answer. But I remind you that fantasy also takes time.

Like any opera lover I can watch and/or listen to a performance of *Don Giovanni* and enjoy it immensely without having to delve into any esoterica about its background or the Don Juan legend. But my curiosity became aroused when the Opera Supers were to become involved with the opera, and I just had to look beyond the obvious (libretto, record reviews, etc.). Now look at what my curiosity has done to me. I came across A.E. Singer's *The Don Juan Theme. Versions and Criticism: A Bibliography* (West Virginia University Press, 1965) and discovered that there are at least 4460 titles of books, plays, papers and articles written on the topic in all the major European languages! That is a remarkable amount of material centered about a legendary character. How will I ever get to even a small portion of it? Why so much interest and concern about a man described as a deceiver, a trickster, a blasphemous, a murderer, a womanizer (and whoremonger at that) and a supreme egotist who insults a stone statue only to be dragged to hell by it later. Is there some element of the Don Juan legend that *fails* to attract you? How can you and your friends resist the opportunity to see a musical drama based on this man created by one of the greatest musical composers of all time?

Report of the Super's Meeting of February 2, 1987

We had a good turnout of 18 at the meeting. Mona Shaw introduced her new intern, Margaret Lord, and a new member of the Supers, Linda Behrendt. We heard reports from the committees. The reception for Stephen Dickson was reported to be a success. The champagne and flowers were donated by Claret and Friends and Flowers by Coleman. Plans for *Don Giovanni* promotional parties were discussed. There will probably be four of them. We need to consider appropriate target audiences for them. The suggestion was made that University dormitory officers as well as the Greek societies be contacted for possible promotional parties to attract students. A symposium is tentatively planned for April 4th to be open to the public and would offer a panel of speakers to discuss the Don Juan legend from the viewpoints of literature, opera, psychology, and the forthcoming opera production. Where this symposium should be held and how it should be presented, use of the media, if any, etc. are yet to be determined. Beaumont Glass described aspects of the production for the opera and the need for supers to be in several scenes. Shirley Harrison is looking for volunteers to help with costumes. Dwight Sump desperately needs storage space for the overflow of materials used by the Opera Theater. Apparently the fire marshal has already decreed that the Opera Theater Studio can no longer be used as it has been for the storage of the material already there. It will take about a single car garage capacity to meet the needs. The meeting adjourned in time for everybody to enjoy the usual refreshments.

Department of Correction and Further Amplification

A note from Joan Falconer (Music Library) helps set things straight: The recordings available at the University School of Music Library may be "borrowed" for outside use only by faculty. However the recordings may be listened to in the facilities of the Music Library by others. The library is open fairly long hours, Sunday through Thursday until 10p.m. Call 335-3086 for a complete schedule.

Joan also called our attention to an error in the second "notable quote" provided by Betty McCollister for the last Newsletter (Vol 2, no. 4). The quote should be attributed to *Alfred* Einstein, not Albert. Alfred was a notable musicologist and

while *Albert* Einstein, the scientist, did play the violin he was not the source of the quotation. The error was made by the Newsletter in transcribing the material and *not* by Betty McCollister. Joan Falconer pointed out that the two Einsteins were not related but bore a resemblance to each other and were acquaintances. Apparently a famous photograph of the pair was printed in an early issue of the *Music Quarterly* with the caption "Zweistein."

No Room in Hell for Don Giovanni?

There have been reports that stage technicians run into problems in making sure that the Don gets to hell as he is supposed to in the last act of the opera.

Laurence Vittes (Cedar Rapids) has come up with the following anecdote about an episode during a *Don Giovanni* performance in Dublin some years ago.

At the height of the dramatic scene in which the Don resists the Stone Guest's attempt to haul him down to hell with him, the elevator portion of the stage upon which Giovanni is standing became stuck. "While stage hands worked furiously to free the elevator mechanism and assure the Don of his just desserts, one slightly besotted fan in the back row stood up and called out 'Faith I' begorrah, Hell's full at last!'"

H. Vickers in *Great Operatic Disasters* relates a similar episode that took place in a 1958 Vienna State Opera performance of *Don Giovanni*. The stage lift taking Don Giovanni for the descent to hell got stuck half-way down leaving the Don's head and shoulders visible to the audience. The stage hands brought him up again, and the singer, not walking off, challenged the lift operator to a second attempt, working the challenge into the context of the opera! However, the second attempt did no better and he was stuck half-way down again. "Amid the shocked silence of the Staatsoper a single voice rang out, in Italian 'Oh my God, how wonderful -- hell is full!'"

As there is no elevator mechanism in the stage at Hancher, it is likely that the Don will get to hell by some other means in the UI production, but if for some reason he gets rejected or can't be pulled off the stage, it surely will be because there really is no room in hell for him in 1987.

Does it Pay to be a Composer?

The commission Mozart received for *Don Giovanni* in Prague was 100 ducats (about \$1200). The first performance in Vienna got him twice that amount as an additional honorarium. In 1786 the standard fee for composers to write an opera (and there were many) was a little over \$2,200 which was approximately the equivalent of Mozart's annual rent in the 1780's. An excellent restaurant meal in 1786 Vienna cost about \$2.50. It is estimated that during his most productive years, Mozart's annual income may have reached \$50,000 (10,000 gulden) which by 18th century Vienna standards was very good! He was a poor manager of his financial affairs, but it seems that he was cheated on the commission for *Don Giovanni*.

The Opera Supers of Iowa City Newsletter Don Giovanni Quiz

This is what many of you have been waiting for. The questions are both easy and difficult. The easiest can be answered by looking through the opera's libretto or having familiarity with past performances. A few items will require research and thought but do not depend upon esoteric sources. To the persons having the most correct answers I will present an audio cassette of Mozart arias selected from his operas. Duplicate prizes will be awarded to all winners who are tied for the most correct answers. However, the first person correctly answering all the questions will earn a bonus. This will be something from the Hancher Showcase. Members of the School of Music faculty, the Opera Production staff (regular and temporary) and members of the cast are ineligible.

The Questions

1. As Donna Anna tells it in Act I, she mistook Giovanni for someone else when he appeared in her bedroom that fateful night. Whom did she think he was?
2. Why did Giovanni insist that Leporello change clothes with him? (First scene, Act II).
3. According to Leporello's cataloguing the Don's affairs, how many conquests did Giovanni make in France?
4. In the last act when Giovanni is at his supper before the Stone Guest arrives, the orchestra plays music that consists of excerpts from three

operas that were recent successes at the time of *Don Giovanni's* first performance. Identify two of these by name, their composer(s) and librettist(s).

5. In what city and what year was the first United States performance of *Don Giovanni* (under that title) given?

6. Referring to the above, what famous family of singers sang four of the major roles in this U.S. premiere?

7. What was the family name of Don Giovanni (Don Juan...)?

8. Referring to the stuck stage episode during the 1958 Vienna Staatsoper performance described earlier in this issue of the Newsletter, who was the famous Italian singer in the title role that worked the scene so cleverly?

The deadline for entries is April 6th. Mail them to the Editor.

Notes from the Hospitality Chairman

Many thanks to Marlene Stanford for masterminding the lovely reception held honoring Stephen Dickson. Thanks also to Roy and Marcia Pitkin for providing their home and to the many Supers who provided the wonderful array of appetizers. About 75 people attended.

On Friday, March 13 we will host a reception for Met star Martina Arroya who will be here to present master classes. The party will be held at the home of Ed and Gloria Kottick, 2001 Muscatine Ave. from 8 to 10p.m. All Supers are invited but please call Mona Shaw (335-1667) or Miriam Canter (338-1217) if you plan to attend. Some of you will be called to bring cookies or other refreshments. This will be a unique opportunity for Supers to meet a famous opera singer.

The Supers have been asked to have a reception on April 6 following a recital inaugurating the new organ in the Music Building. Many of you will also be asked to help with the opera promotion parties in April. More about these events later.

-Miriam Canter

Reminders, Announcements, Needs

Remember the next meeting of the Supers is on *Tuesday*, March 3. The date is changed because of a Chamber Singers performance on Monday, March 2.

Two or three males are needed as supernumeraries for servant roles. They must be able to lift the "corpse" of the Commander between them and carry him off-stage. Contact Beaumont Glass or the Editor of the Newsletter if interested.

Storage space needed for the Opera Theater studio material. Call **Dwight Sump** (335-1153).

Scenery Painting--Call Mary Wall (338-2618) for information and scheduling.

Costumes--Call Shirley Harrison (337-5729) for information and scheduling. Costume shop also needs fabrics, trimmings, old jewelry, etc.

Party for Martina Arvo--RSVP to Miriam Canter (338-1217) or Mona Shaw (335-1667).

GIOVANNI CAST

Don Giovanni
(Understudy)
Leporello

Don Ottavio

Commendatore
Donna Anna

Zerlina

Masetto

STEPHEN DICKSON
BRIAN BURKHARDT
JEFFREY HOOK¹
GREGG LAUTERBACH²
ROB ECKERT¹
JOSHUA BRECK²
ALBERT GAMMON
MICHELE CRIDER¹
ROSEMARY LACK²
KRISTI TIGGES¹
KERRI ROSENBERG²
BRIAN BURKHARDT¹
MICHAEL JEWELL²

¹ Sings in Friday's performance only.

² Sings in Sunday's performance only.

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School of Music
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