



Entr'acte

The Opera
Supers of
Iowa City
Newsletter

Volume VII, Number 1

January 1992

Editor: Arthur Canter, 30 Brookfield Dr., Iowa City, IA 52245

Next Meeting: Call Miriam Canter (338-1217) or Music Public Relations (335-1667) for the time of our February meeting.

Letter from the Editor:

Welcome to 1992, a new year and a new season for the Opera Supers of Iowa City. There are many reasons for the delay in issuing a Newsletter, and we will not go into them. Perhaps this will motivate a Super to take over the responsibility for writing the newsletter. Despite the lack of communication, meetings of the Supers have been taking place at their usual pace. It should be noted that there is a core group of about fifteen Supers who can and do attend almost all the meetings, which are usually held on either a Monday or a Tuesday night. There are at least fifteen others who can attend some meetings, so that we generally have about twenty-five Supers each time. There must be another ten to fifteen Supers who would like to be able to attend at least one meeting a semester but because of professional, work, or personal obligations cannot. However, they contribute to the Supers activities or volunteer for things outside meeting times. Thus, there seems to be about forty to fifty intensely "active" Supers and an equal number, yet harder to identify group, of less intensive but still "active" Supers. The current Supers mailing list, which is updated frequently, is just over 100.

For an informal, spontaneous-acting and unstructured group, this is remarkable. Whenever there is a need identified, help from the Supers is offered unstintingly. No wonder we are the envy of the more "structured" and formally organized arts support groups of the community. Having said that, it becomes apparent that the Newsletter could serve to enhance the network of communication we already have for the Supers—the word-of-mouth and telephone systems.

All readers of *Entr'Acte* are invited to become more actively involved in the Supers. Remember, there are no dues, no officers, and anyone can volunteer to "chair" a committee. All that is required is a

commitment to participate in a support activity to whatever extent you can manage and feel comfortable about. Saying, "Yes," if you want to or, "No," if you do not. Invite your friends to participate. If they are not sure about liking opera, we can help them to see the light. Our meetings are not dull. They are brief, to the point, and informative. Time is allowed for socializing and refreshments for those who can stay after the business meeting. Sometimes we add a brief operatic recital by students of the Opera Theater after the meeting. It is possible that some future meetings will feature a brief "workshop," "seminar," or demonstration after business and during the refreshment period. Who can say?

—Arthur Canter

Meetings and Activities Report July–December 1991

The July 25th meeting was highlighted by introduction of the new director of the School of Music, David Nelson, who expressed his appreciation for the support of Opera Supers. The plans for Supers involvement with the summer opera, strike party, potluck supper, etc. were wrapped up. The help of Supers for a Music Library Book Sale, scheduled for September, was also taken up.

The Potluck Super was held on July 27th, the Saturday between opera performances, at the home of the Behrendts. The affair was a great success, as usual, gastronomically and socially. The food for the July 28th "Strike Party" was well taken care of and distributed by the Strike Party Committee, again chaired by Anna Stranieri.

The meeting of August 26th was centered on final plans for the Music Library Book Sale. Many of the Supers volunteered time to assist in this project. *Die Fledermaus* is to be the 1992 Spring opera. The non-singing, acting role (comedian) of Frosch is to be taken by Dan Coffey, known by many as "Dr. Science" on KSUI. He has been associated with Duck's Breath Mystery Theater group for years. We were informed

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about the university budget cuts and their impact on the School of Music including the Music Public Relations Office (Mona Shaw's bailiwick).

The meeting of **September 30th** included a report on the success of the Music Library Sale. Joan Falconer, her staff, and the administrators of University Libraries expressed their gratitude for the assistance offered by the Opera Supers in this endeavor. A proposal for a "visual history" of the School of Music was presented by Ruth Baldwin. The need for renovation of a "green room" for Clapp Hall was also brought up as a project for Supers.

At the meeting of **October 29th**, the members considered the one-act opera presentations scheduled for February 15th in Mabie Theatre. Most of the meeting was taken up with matters relating to the School of Music archives display (as it may be called) and the Clapp Hall Green Room project. Regarding the latter, Howard Wenger agreed to act as coordinator or co-chair, as needed, for the Opera Supers involvement.

The last meeting of the year took place Monday, **November 25th**. Many members ordinarily attending meetings were unable to be present, but we still had fourteen persons there. The status of the Green Room project was reviewed. Projects for the first part of 1992 were considered, including a reception for the music faculty.



Opera One-Acts in February

UI Opera Theater will present two one-act operas on Saturday, February 15 at 8:00 p.m. in Mabie Theater. The double-bill is shared by the U.S. premiere of *Golem* by Nicolae Breton and *Signor Deluso* by Thomas Pasatieri. Beaumont Glass is stage-directing, and Daniel Kleinknect is conducting both works. Tickets are \$10, regular admission and \$5, students/senior citizen and may purchased through Hancher Box Office.



Is opera for everyone or only for the few?



From time to time the Supers get involved in discussions (often heated) about how to get more publicity and articles in local media on the UI Opera Theater productions as well as all the musical events that take place in Iowa City. One can come away from the meetings where these discussions take place with the notion that Iowa City's citizens are cheated by not learning about these events, and that, if they were to know about them in advance, more of them would attend concerts and the opera. Dismay has been expressed because it seems to take a production with cute children and animals on the stage for the media to be interested and for opera ticket sales to increase, as they did for *Carmen*. Some Supers have suggested various clever tactics and publicity stunts to raise the threshold of attention to spring operas.

It is time to ask the question. Would more publicity make any difference in the long run? Perhaps the truth is that most people are simply not interested in opera, and hitting them over the head with a "board" will not get their attention as it does proverbial mule.

Yes, it is true that there are more regional opera companies producing opera than ever. And, it is true that television has reached many thousands of viewers who have never seen an opera before. Despite this, opera seems to appeal only to a small

proportion of the public in the country. Getting 10,000 persons in the catchment area of about four million is no overwhelming demand, although it would certainly use the seating capacity of three good-sized halls. [In fact the typical 3500-member opera audience in Iowa City is sixteen times larger, in proportion to population, than audiences at the Metropolitan Opera. M.S.]

Recently, a segment of a television program (*Sixty Minutes*, *20/20*, or whatever) showed *thousands* of middle-aged and elderly fans pouring into the country/western music concerts at the *Grand Ole Opry* in Brandon, Missouri. The people came from everywhere in their RVs, autos, and buses to attend. It is a yearlong (at weekly intervals, at least) pilgrimage for these people to hear and see their popular singers with guitar ensemble accompaniments present ballads of forlorn love, family grief or joy, longing, all kinds of sentimentality that goes "right to the heart." (This doesn't differ from the sentimentality of much of grand opera, but who sees it that way?) These old-timers are going to be replaced by the grown-up rockers, rappers, and MTVers as they tire of the excessive energy demands of their current music. Or, maybe they will be seeking a nostalgia all their own, cast in a similar format to the Brandon and Nashville models. Are these sources our potential audiences for converts to opera? I doubt it. How do we identify *potential* audiences for opera and go about the task of bring them to the way Opera Supers want them to think and behave? Is there something inherent in opera that limits its popular appeal? After all, most people enjoy music in some form. Music is everywhere. Music also provides handsome incomes to many people who play instruments, sing, produce it, or market its production. Among our peers how many think of opera as absurd, outmoded, silly, not worth the effort or the cost? How many men do you know who would rather do something other than attend an opera with the wife? How many young people consider opera as just not relevant to their time, to their tastes, or needs for music? Is it a lack of experience coming from backgrounds in which opera had no place? Is it strictly an attitudinal thing? Is it an expression of anti-elitism, or a form of rejection of ties with the past, a sort of anti-heritage chauvinism that strikes many of our young people? Is it merely a lack of education, cultural education? The reasons are many and probably some combination of all the foregoing determines the lack of interest in opera. A recent interview on television with Paul McCartney (of Beatles fame), who was asked about the use of operatic voices for the premiere of his *Liverpool Oratorio*, was quite revealing. He indicated that as a child he heard nothing but derisive humorous remarks

about opera and opera singers from his father and thus grew up with completely negative attitudes about the subject. He altered his views only after actually working with the singers during rehearsals of the oratorio.

Opera is a distinctive kind of musical theater and like all theater requires the viewer/listener to suspend reality and accept the phantasy and the new/different reality of the moment as it takes place on stage. Not all people can do this comfortably, but most can, sooner or later, for non-musical theater. Where there is a tradition for participating in the musical theater experience, opera sustains itself very well even under conditions of adversity and deprivation. That has been true of opera in much of Europe during periods of war, revolution, siege, and even famine. Historically, opera had developed from the courtly stage to the public stages of cities and towns with only the elite able to attend. However, in some countries even the farmer sought to attend opera when possible, so opera can be for the three Bs—bourgeois, burgher, and bauer. In America we have maintained the tradition of theater for staged plays, movies, and television. Yet, for musical theater, the American tradition has been extended chiefly to the so-called "Broadway" type of musical as it has been derived from European operetta. The spring opera, *Die Fledermaus* is one of the most popular of this genre. Grand opera, as it too was imported from Europe, has never really caught on as a popular form of theater. Will we be able to build a tradition for opera that will be enough to sustain it and attract larger audiences? Any ideas as to what it will take to accomplish this? I would like to hear from you.



Green Room Renovation

A spring Opera Supers project will be the redecorating of the greenroom/dressing room in Clapp Recital Hall. Clapp Hall has not had the use of a dressing room since its inauguration in 1972. We are hoping to provide a pleasant space for guest and faculty artists to prepare for their concerts by the end of the semester. If you have furniture, area rugs, etc. that are in very good condition and are suitable for a dressing room, reception space that you would care to donate please contact the Music Public Relations Office (335-1667). Any gifts are tax-deductible.

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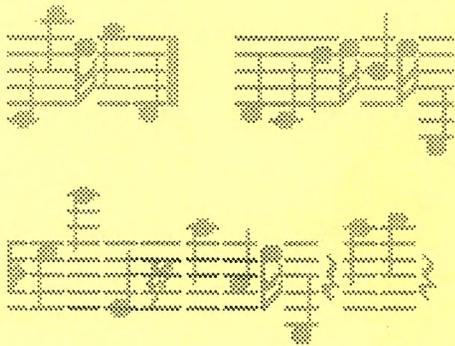
IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Next Meeting:

Call Miriam Canter
(338-1217) or Mona
Shaw (335-1667) for the
time of our February
meeting.

ARTHUR CANTER (newsletter) 338-1217
MIRIAM CANTER (hospitality) 338-1217
LINDA BEHRENDT (publicity) 336-5342
MARY WALL (scenery) 338-2618
MARLENE STANFORD (costumes)
354-0600
DAVID NELSON (School of Music director)
335-1601
BEAUMONT GLASS, Opera Theater director,
335-1669
MONA SHAW, P.R. coordinator, 335-1667
MARGARET WENK, opera designer, 335-2899
DWIGHT SUMP, opera production manager,
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