

ENTR'ACTE

Vol. VI, Number 2, January, 1991
Next Meeting: 7:00 p.m. January 14
Room 1028 (Music Lounge), Music Building

Editor: Arthur Canter
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Letter from the Editor

Happy New Year to you all. I had intended to get out a November issue of *Entr'Acte*, but it never happened. The delay is in part due to my ambivalence in continuing as editor of the newsletter. It is not that I have lost interest or fail to find it challenging to do the research necessary to provide you with opera news, trivia and background information. It is, rather, a reflection of the periodic frustration I feel with the lack of feedback from readers other than my friends. It is as if I am working in a vacuum. I never know if I am writing (talking) primarily to myself or if what I put down in these pages, other than announcements, is of any consequence to the readers. Ordinarily, I do not mind entertaining myself by reading about opera, music, composers, music history, etc. As a chronic reader for my own entertainment and curiosity, this sort of activity would continue whether I am editor of the newsletter or not. But I cannot judge my effectiveness in this capacity without feedback. Is the format suitable, is the content appealing, is there something I should add, delete, etc.? It is not as if I could judge effectiveness by sales and subscriptions or demands for advertising space. What say you? Do let me hear from you. Perhaps someone else should take this position over. In that case I would be willing to contribute a regular column if desired.--Arthur Canter

Report of the Meeting of October 9, 1990

Attention was given to the question of Opera Supers involvement in fund-raising activities for the School of Music. A future meeting will focus on this problem. With respect to the reception following the performance of *Opal*, we have not been getting responses from the music faculty despite the RSVP request. The details for the reception were being worked out. Joan Falconer indicated a need for help in unpacking material in the Rare Book Room of the Music Library. The forthcoming concert by Simon Estes with the Cedar Rapids Symphony Orchestra was given attention. Professor Glass expressed a need for a prompter for the Bartok *Bluebeard's Castle* performance scheduled for February 16. The prompter would need to attend rehearsals. He also asked if anyone would be able to provide one month's lodging for a countertenor (March 25-April 23). This could be shared among different homes: for example, two weeks in one and two in another, etc. The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, November 15.

Report of Meeting of November 15, 1990

Miriam Canter read a note of thanks to the Supers from the Nassif family for the reception after *Opal*. The Des Moines Metro Opera program for 1991 was announced. John Hill, Interim Director of the School of Music, gave the group words of greeting, encouragement, and recognition of the work of the Supers. He reported on the general status of the School of Music. Attention was called to the shrinking pool of students in the context of rising out-of-state tuition. Many of the music students attracted to our school come from the "Chicago-Iowa City Corridor" and with the University of Illinois actually lowering its tuition, it has become exceedingly difficult to compete.

Professor Glass indicated that the February 16 "one-act" operas will be Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*, Hindemith's *Hin und Zurück*, and Seymour Barab's *The Ruined Maid*. [One might conclude that the maid was running back and forth in the castle after she was "ruined"?--Ed.]

The meeting adjourned with the usual refreshments but not until the next meeting date was decided for **Monday, January 14.**

What *Midsummer Night's Dream* Has Wrought in Opera

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Opera lists seventeen operas based on Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, including two which are based only on the Act III playlet. Other than Henry Purcell and Benjamin Britten, the composers listed are all obscure, long forgotten, or never considered important composers during their time. We shall be seeing Britten's work in the spring of 1991, and more will be covered on the Britten opera in subsequent issues of *Entr'Acte*.

Closest to the time the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was published (1600) comes *The Fairy Queen* (1692). The libretto of *The Fairy Queen* is thought to have been written by Elkanah Settle, who took the Shakespeare text, shortened it, and introduced four separate entertainments of singing and dancing into the last four acts. In essence, the work is a succession of masques and probably not a dramatic opera in the sense that Purcell's *King Arthur* is. The score mysteriously disappeared in 1701 and was found again in 1901 in the library of the Royal Art Museum.

I call your attention to an opera based on Shakespeare's play by Alexander Alyabev (1787-1857). Alyabev, while essentially unknown to most of us, was an important Russian composer who played a significant role in the development of Russian opera before Glinka. He was born in Siberia, moved to Moscow, got involved in musical composition and performance while also dabbling with the so-called Decembrist movement in Russia which aimed at the overthrow of the czarist regime. This connection led to his being exiled back to Siberia in 1828 after a card game fight in which a participant he had struck died. Alyabev was charged with murder but

later was allowed to return to Moscow where he became established as a composer of music for the theater. He is known for his song "Solovey" ("The Nightingale") which has been sung by Patti, Viardot, and Sembrich, among others, in the lesson scene in Act II of Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. Alyabev was a prolific composer of 170 songs, music for 17 vaudevilles, four symphonies, a number of chamber works, and several operas, including a sequel to the *Magic Flute*. He turned to Shakespeare for inspiration for his later works. *Volshebnaya Noch (The Enchanted Night)*, composed in 1838-39, was his opera based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He also composed an opera based on *The Tempest* and incidental music for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. His songs and theater music made use of texts by Pushkin and other contemporary Russian poets and dramatists. Unfortunately, I could not find any specific information in English, German, or French on *The Enchanted Night* other than it is in three acts. Perhaps a reader of *Entr'Acte* who reads Russian may be inspired to look up Alyabev (Aliabev) and his *Volshebnaya Noch* in Russian language sources.

More Opera Trivia

The only Shakespeare plays for which no opera, to date, has been composed and published are: *Henry VI*, parts 1, 2 and 3; *Titus Andronicus*; *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (leaving aside any musicals); *Richard II*; *King John*; *Two Noble Kinsmen* (assuming this was written by Shakespeare); and *Henry VIII*. (The Saint-Saëns work of this name is not based on the Shakespeare play.)

Did you know that Peter Pears, the well-known British tenor, collaborated with Benjamin Britten to adapt Shakespeare's play into a libretto for the opera, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? More than that, Pears sang the title role in the premiere of Britten's first major operatic work, *Peter Grimes*. He also premiered the major tenor roles in ten subsequent operas by Britten. (In MND he appeared in the role of Flute.) Not even the famous composer-singer relationship of Rossini and Isabella Colbran achieved that much, although Rossini did marry the woman.

Noted from the Rules and Regulations of the Royal English Opera (1860): "For not being reasonably perfect at the last Rehearsal (sufficient time having been given for study), the same forfeiture in proportion to salary, as if absent from a whole Rehearsal." And then this one (entirely italicized in the original): "*Any person found obviously intoxicated, or smoking in the Theatre, to forfeit a Week's Salary, and if the offence be repeated, the person so offending to be liable to the cancellation of His or Her Engagement, at the option of the Managers.*"

Music to Give Away? Remember the Music Library

If anyone--or anybody anyone knows--ever has music to dispose of, the Music Library earnestly hopes that it may be considered as a possible recipient. As the Library budget diminishes in proportion to the amount of music published, and the value of the dollar declines, the Music Library is less able each year to purchase much of the essential repertoire, especially for orchestral instruments--strings, woodwinds, brass. While the music students must purchase their own copies of music that they study intensively with their teachers, there is no way they can each afford to buy the hundreds of pieces that constitute the study and recital repertoire for their instruments, nor the thousands of chamber music works in which their instrument is included. It is the Music Library's responsibility to try to provide the bulk of that music for study and read-through. But we are falling more and more behind; furthermore, for various reasons no basic collection was ever provided for most non-keyboard instruments, so we have huge deficiencies to make up as well as new materials to acquire.

In addition to the problems created by diminishing budgets, decline of the dollar, and expanding repertoire, the recent changes in IRS policies (particularly the non-allowance for depreciation of stock) have resulted in smaller press runs and faster remainderings, with the consequence that most new music does not stay in print very long. This is especially true of domestic publications; we have ordered things published in 1987 and even in 1988, only to be told they were already out of print. No longer, therefore, can we assume that we can't afford one year can be bought the next. It is the amateur players now who can buy things hot off the press, and it is their gifts--5, 10, 25 years from now--that we hope may flesh out our skeleton collections so that future performers, and future researchers, will have a good collection on which to draw. Similarly, we hope that gifts from musicians who have been purchasing music for the past quarter- or half-century may occasionally come our way to provide the earlier goodies we do not have and which are now unobtainable.

The Music Library does not turn down any gift. We have received collections of all sizes, from the magnificent windfall of 5000-plus items from John Simms to a couple of boxes of somewhat tattered "sheet music," which, however, included the Malotte "Lord's Prayer," a piece often requested but which we'd never had. The typical gift consists of a handful of chamber music or a box or two of books, miniature scores, piano music, songs, etc. We send the donor a letter of thanks, with an item count by type (e.g., so many miniature scores, quality paperbacks, violin/piano collections, violin/piano singles, etc.) which the donor may use in calculating IRS deductions. (We are not permitted to give evaluations.) We then go through the gift item by item to find out what we already have; duplicates may be used to replace worn-out copies, or (if a piece is heavily used) may be added as a second copy. Of things we don't have, some are catalogued immediately; others are held for future cataloguing, or (if not in a condition to be bound and shelved) for indexing in a vertical file collection. All pieces kept here are filed alphabetically by composer so we can locate something if a library user is looking for a piece not in our catalogued collection.

What about the duplicate copies and editions we don't need? Those will be put to use also. The School of Music is planning to have a sale late in the spring semester of unneeded books and music that have been accumulating in faculty offices and homes (and perhaps other people's homes), chiefly for the benefit of the Music Scholarship

Fund. To the extent that the Music Library also contributes material to the sale, the Music Library will get a cut of the proceeds. In any case, everything will go to assist music in some fashion, and it is likely that the sale will be repeated from time to time.

Please, therefore, as people who are best equipped to be "in the know" about musical pursuits in this area, keep your ears cocked for any music that needs a home. We most need solo music, "recital repertoire," for strings and winds, but we will accept and be able to make use of anything. Let me emphasize that the need will be long-term, permanent; we don't expect, nor could we probably handle, a flood of large gifts during the next six months! Six years, or sixteen years, will be fine, also.

And another thought to ponder: gifts to a library make wonderful memorials. These can take any form or be for any amount, from a \$14 CD to \$100--or \$500--to spend at Eble's on trumpet music, to a handsome music publication with a price tag in four figures, or a rare item of incalculable value, and so forth. I always have a list of things I'd love to get but cannot justify from the regular budget; it was heartbreaking that we were unable to afford, while it was available, the magnificent four-color facsimile of the original manuscript of Stravinsky's *Firebird*. Books and music given as memorials will so state on the bookplate, and large or unusually special gifts will be cited in Books at Iowa. But most of all, the donor will have the satisfaction of knowing that s/he has enriched the Music Library and has enhanced its value to present and future generations of music students.--
Joan O. Falconer, Music Librarian

If you have something to donate or need more information as to how to make the gift, contact Joan Falconer, 319-335-3086, or write to her c/o Music Library, 2000 MB, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242.

Notes, Announcements, Miscellany

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