

Entr'acte

The Opera
Supers of
Iowa City
Newsletter

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Letter from the Editor

This coming 1995-96 season will have some big events for the Opera Supers as we shall see. The past summer performance of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* was an artistic success and the students, staff and production crew are to be commended. The fact that the opera was put on in Clapp Recital Hall deserves comment. Considering the relatively small size of an audience we can get to attend opera in Iowa City and the dependence upon young voices not ready to project sound in a large hall, it would seem that Clapp is the ideal size for our Opera Theater productions. The hall was practically filled for both performances of *Figaro*. Also, the chamber-sized orchestra that fit into the hall's pit did not overwhelm the singer's voices—the conductor let them sing.

It's too bad Clapp Hall was not designed for staged productions—no curtains, wings for holding scenery, no backstage, no dressing rooms and an organ loft that cannot be hidden from view. But it is ideal for chamber opera and semi-staged productions. The biggest drawback is the seating for the audience. The extent of broken-down seats is beyond belief. There must be a plot by local orthopedic surgeons to keep it this way. Surely the university administration must be aware of this, or maybe the right ones rarely, if ever, attend events in Clapp. I'd like to see an assembly of all University of Iowa officers, members of the Board of Regents and Iowa City public officials be seated in Clapp Hall instead of in Hancher, Pappajohn School of Business, the Memorial Union, the East Room of University Hospitals, or other favorite assembly places of the campus for special events that run continuously for at least one hour. Include some of the orthopedic surgeons—I'd like their opinions, too. As an emeritus member of the university, I am embarrassed by the condition of the seats in that hall!

Get angry about it. I am. Write to Professor David Nelson, Director, School of Music and let him know what you think about the seats in Clapp Recital Hall. I did. He is not to blame, but he can convey the attitudes of others to those at the top who can do something about the situation.

—Arthur Canter

Report of Meetings and Activities

The meeting of June 13, 1995, was devoted to catch-up news, the revised schedule for the summer opera, and finalizing plans for the Supers potluck, July 29th, between performance dates. It was decided to have European dishes, in the general sense, to be the theme for the potluck as the production of *The Marriage of Figaro* involves a German (Austrian) composer, a story with a Spanish locale written by a French playwright, an Italian libretto and to be sung in English.

Letters from the Voxmans were read to the group thanking the Supers for help with the May 2 reception held for Himie Voxman. With respect to the May 2 reception, thanks from all of us to the Opera Supers who baked hundreds of cookies, donated money and helped set up and serve refreshments. Many of the music faculty expressed appreciation for the support by Opera Supers. Several voice students also expressed their gratitude.

Professor Glass spoke on the factors that led to the decision to use Clapp Recital Hall instead of Mabie Theater for the summer opera. There were questions about budgetary problems and a discussion about current trends in ticket pricing, costs, etc.

Mary Wall is to attend the Arts Council meeting on Tuesday June 27 to contribute to the discussion on what the *Press-Citizen* can do for the Arts in this community.

During the meeting of July 17, Mariene Stanford shared material on Michele Crider's Covent Garden debut (*Un ballo en maschera*) she obtained when she attended the event. Mary Wall announced Michele's wedding plans for July 29, 1995. Opera Supers are invited to the reception to be held at Quincy College at 6:00 P.M. Discussion followed about Opera Supers contributing to a wedding gift. Various suggestions were made.

Jodie Falconer informed the group about plans for the 10th anniversary celebration in observance of the death of Rita Benton for whom the Music Library is named.

Internet users among the group learned that World Wide Web carries news about La Scala performances.

Details about the summer opera performances, the Strike Party and the potluck were reviewed. The meeting adjourned for the usual refreshments.

The Strike Party went off successfully. The shift to Clapp Hall proved to be no problem. About 40 Opera Supers contributed food or money for the event.

The summer potluck held at the Behrendts' home was also a great success, in food, conversation and relaxation. Attendees were able to park their cars without guidance from our perennial parking guide. That speaks well for future events.

The money collected for the wedding gift for Michele Crider was spent on a walnut clock with a University seal on the face, made in Kalona. Mary Wall delivered it to Michele when she and several of the Supers attended the wedding reception. The remaining money will be used to purchase CDs that Michele has recorded, and which will be released within the next year. These CDs will be donated to the Rita Benton Music Library in Michele's name. Michele was informed about this and expressed approval of the plan.

The meeting of August 28 drew a large number of the Supers despite the fact that many of the regulars were unable to attend. Judy Hurtig, Director of Marketing and Program Associate of Hancher Auditorium, was invited to inform the Supers about the plans for Hancher's presentation of Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Eurydice*. This will be the premiere of a new production of the work by the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston and the Mark Morris Dance Company to be staged at Hancher on April 8 and 9 1996. There will be a number of events, including movies, on the Orpheus theme, a symposium, outreach activities, a mini-play, etc. making the occasion a sort of festival centered about the showing of the opera. Opera Supers will be offered opportunities to assist in some of these events. More information and details will be issued over the next several months.

Jonathan Thull, graduate student (voice) in the Music Department provided details about the one-act operas to be presented by the Opera Theater October 6 and 8. Opera Supers may assist in the publicity for this endeavor by distributing posters when these become available and help during performances by assuming roles of ticket-takers and ushers.

Professor David Nelson, Director of the School of Music, described the changes in the integration of the various performance units of the the Arts campus (music, theater and dance) and how this will affect joint activities. He also thanked the Supers for their support and assistance in various activities and gave the group a look into the future of an Iowa Center for the Arts.

There was a general discussion about the foregoing matters and the meeting closed with refreshments and the opportunity to see some slides of Michele Crider's wedding reception. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 25.

Guest Column: "Remembering" by Betty McCollister

The September meeting of Opera Supers brought back memories of early days in the music department.

The no-smoking sign on the entrance to the building is a symbol of how times have changed. It revived memories of my very young days when Professor Koelbel taught cello and Dr. Clapp a symphony appreciation class in the old music building.

Hans Koelbel was a fine musician and a patient, thorough teacher. He was also a connection to the great cello pedagogue, Julius Klengel, whose exercise books every cello student practically memorizes. Professor Koelbel studied at the Leipzig Conservatory when Klengel headed it and had a photo of his graduating class. Emanuel Feuermann, the marvelous artist who died too young, was a classmate.

How would Koelbel have managed in a smoke-free building? He always had a cigar in his mouth—except when he removed it to spit out bits of tobacco.

And Dr. Clapp, a chain smoker: what would he have done? When he sat at the piano with a full orchestral score in front of him, his cigarette was burning, removed when it was down to a tiny butt by Charlie Eble and replaced with a fresh one which Charlie had lighted (in between turning pages). The ashes would come to rest on Dr. Clapp's paunch and land on the floor when he stood up.

When David Nelson mentioned the ceremony at which Himie Voxman was rightly honored for the splendid way he built on Dr. Clapp's foundation and brought Iowa's music department to its eminence, I remembered the Voxmans when we musicians in the City High orchestra were lucky enough to have them. Lois Wilcox, as she was when I came to City High as a junior, was our inspiring string teacher and quartet coach. Her gift to this untalented cellist has stayed with me all my life, as did Himie's fine work with aspiring wind players.

When they decided to marry, they got permission to go to New York City over Xmas vacation and did so secretly. At that time—again, how times have changed!—women teachers couldn't be married. However, the license bureau helpfully sent information to the *Press Citizen*, which blew their cover and allowed them to set up housekeeping right away.

The whole arts complex, Virgil Hancher's dream brought to fruition, reminds us oldtimers of the days when concerts and plays were presented at Macbride or the Memorial Union.

One thing, I suspect, hasn't changed too much: the provincial easterners' perception that Iowa is inhabited by uncouth hayseeds. Back in the 30s, a noted violinist, in a recital at the Union, played a terrible collection of junk apparently aimed at the "rubes" from the hog farms. Professor Righter wrote the manager a blistering letter and thereafter required all visiting artists to submit programs in advance for his okay.

—Betty McCollister

Miscellaneous Notes and Remarks

Betty's reminiscences, while not specifically about opera, bring some memories of mine to the fore. How many of the readers recall the Boris Goldovsky Opera Theater (or whatever it was officially named) that used to tour the country? Every once in a while the troupe would give a performance in Iowa City at the Memorial Union. They set up their own portable stage, appeared in costume and sang mightily. As I recall it, they brought their own musicians but for all I know they used pick-up players from the local community. Does anyone remember enough about the details? Goldovsky, of course, was for years a regular commentator for the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts and I can recall, in my head, the distinctive sound of his accented voice.

I also remember the fine, fully staged University Opera Theater productions of the 1960s put on in Macbride Hall auditorium under the direction of Professor Herald Stark who left Iowa for Texas. Talk about difficulties and limitations in staging an opera in Clapp Hall, that is nothing compared to the challenge presented by Macbride. In recent years, the opera presentations in Macbride have been semi-staged, with piano accompaniment, much like they are in the Opera Studio. I particularly remember Stark's productions of *La Bohème*, *The Crucible* (Ward), and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Nicolai). We had some fine singers among the students then, too. Also, Stark had singers from the local community (wives of faculty members, for example) in major roles. I remember Debbie Treger as Mimi.

Tucked away imperfectly in my memory bank is a performance of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* by the University Symphony Orchestra at the Memorial Union. It seems to me that Herald Stark was one of the soloists, but I am hazy about this. I may be mixing it up with an earlier performance of *Das Lied* or some other Mahler work for orchestra and a tenor (David Lloyd?) conducted by Professor Clapp. Recall would be aided by being able to peruse old playbills and printed program notes. This is an argument for not destroying the handouts one gets in concerts and theater productions any more than one would destroy written memoirs or diaries (unless you are a Senator or a government employee). How else can a biographer, historian or chronicler reconstruct the past? **Why not Puppet Theater Opera?**

Recently I came across an LP of Haydn's one act opera *Philemon und Baucis* (1773). I learned that this is the only one of five puppet operas by Haydn that is still in existence. That fact got me to thinking about puppet theaters putting on operas not only for children but for the public at-large who might have little opportunity to see and hear an opera. While opera is on TV now and then, it still does not get out to the public easily. TV has so many other competitive drawing cards put on simultaneously.

What better way to acquaint school children and their parents with opera than by putting on a puppet show featuring a one-act opera, or an abridged form of full length opera? The music and the voices would come from recordings. All it takes is a bit of coordination by the puppeteers and sound-person running the equipment. The show could be put on in a school, a community center, the public library (ICPL can easily handle this), or even in a public square. A puppet show is an intimate form of theater that has an immediate appeal in the way it can involve an audience. The viewers do not have to mind their manners or sit still. They can talk, laugh, (even at the "wrong" places), point, gesticulate, hiss at villains, walk out when tired, etc. without fear of disturbing the actors or the singers.

I remember watching and listening to full length standard operas in the puppet theater of the K ngsholm Restaurant that used to exist in the near North side of Chicago. One could go there for their fabulous sm rgasbord and watch *Aida* in the opera puppet theater after dinner.

Opera puppet theater could be a great project or undertaking for music students. The vocal music students could even sing the roles behind the puppet stage curtains while the puppeteers manipulate the characters. How about a student doing a dissertation on the topic of puppet opera and its role in bringing opera (and other theater arts) to villagers and the non-aristocratic public during the 17th-18th (and early 19th?) centuries? Or has some thesis student already done this?—I haven't checked it out.

I'll just remind you that the Don Juan story became familiar throughout much of Europe by puppet shows in the villages and towns well before the time of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. That familiarity helped make the opera accessible and understandable to audiences of that time in ways current audiences do not appreciate.

Let me hear from you. Your reactions, comments, suggestions and contributions to Entr'Acte are valued.

—Arthur Canter

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