



Entr'acte

The Opera
Supers of
Iowa City
Newsletter

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Letter from the Editor.

Since the last newsletter I have been ruminating more about the rather poor attendance by students for fine-art music performance events. I know this is not just a local situation, for the same complaint is made on major university campuses across the country. It has been called a "generation X" phenomenon. Maybe we should take a lesson from Dan Coffey, who is quoted in the October 19, 1994 *Daily Iowan* "If you want to be successful in the performing arts, you've gotta get hip to how it's (publicity) done. You have to have a hook or a concept." Obviously we haven't come up with the right hook. To get an idea what cultural emphasis is promoted by a sizeable minority of the contemporary college students just look in the arts and entertainment sections of the *Daily Iowan*. Read the descriptions and the "hooks" they contain for the entertainments the paper's editors apparently push. Also note that despite the amount of advertising of Hancher events, you'll see most of the space (not paid advertising) is devoted to write-ups of the rock groups playing in the local bars. The few exceptions generally have to do with unusual dance and ethnic music groups which is all right. After all, the experience of the new and unusual should be a part of a student's education. However, even with advance publicity, these events do not draw many students. When widely known (famous, or notorious, depending upon your interpretation) groups come to the campus to appear at the Memorial Union or Hawkeye Arena it is different. They are the more familiar and conform to this generation's adopted culture (a generation of *conformists* in the worst way—within-group individualism is a rarity). Whole page descriptions previewing the concerts of pop/rock, hard rock, metal, etc. will be in the *DI*. The amount of space given to these groups and the contents of the articles should tell us something. Just read some of the descriptions that are the *hooks*: "a black whirlwind of noise and warped adulation"; "the concert will be a wall of pulsating noise---just don't expect a kiss good night"; " --a mass of turned-on , wiped out teenangsters" (referring to the inspiration for the music)—angsters? They suffer *angst* ? —talk about hyperbole! This type of colorful writing is an art-form in itself. It's part of the hook. Can we preview, or review classical music groups and opera in analagous ways ? We are not used to feeling compelled to attend a concert chiefly for an experience that will drown us with angst or makes us vibrate in unison and feel mashed while we scream and *have fun!* It may be that too many of the generation X members don't know how to experience fun that is not at the same time a high induced by a markedly intense and externally applied stimulus. I include consuming strong doses of a stimulant in this rubric. Isn't it possible to get a "high" from just listening to unadulterated Mozart? Is the standard for music performance going to be one in which all sounds, instrumental or voice, will be amplified to the point where dynamics are of no consequence and talent in music-making so masked as to be indistinguishable?

How many of the readers saw the Maly Theater group from Russia do *Gaudeamus* at Hancher recently? To me that was an exciting and unforgettable performance combining the characteristics of dramatic theater, mime, dance and even opera. The fact that the dialogue and singing were in Russian, requiring the use of supertitles, made it more like an opera experience. Considering all the pre-performance publicity in the local papers, including the *DI* and the unusual nature of the show, one would have expected a much larger audience, particularly of students, but that was not the case. Apparently Hancher Auditorium and Wally Chappell did not find the the right "hook". Maybe nobody can. We'll have to depend upon redirecting the current crop of school children for we have already lost a complete generation of fine-art music concert-goers. It is not that there ever was or will be a large proportion of the public as fine-art music lovers, but rather we are failing to replace ourselves.

—Arthur Canter

Report of Meetings and Activities

The Supers held their first meeting of the 1994-5 year on Monday, September 19. Jodie Falconer presented the preparatory procedures and plans for the Music Library Sale to take place on Saturday, September 24. A number of the Supers volunteered to serve as cashiers, counters and monitors during the sale. Members attending the meeting were brought up-to-date regarding the Opera Theater presentations for October and future activities. The meeting recessed early to have a showing of slides by Patrick Nefzger on his recent visit to the Ukraine with the Dvorak descendants' family.

The Music Library Sale was held as planned on Saturday September 24th. Many Supers participated in the preparation as well as in the operation of the sale in cooperation with the Music Library staff. Supers also provided refreshments for those working the night before and during the sale. Everybody worked hard and but the results of the sale were worth the effort.

We were treated to two wonderful performances of Menotti's *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, and Mark Bucci's *Sweet Betsy from Pike Part II*, by the Opera Theater students on October 14 and 16. Both performances were well attended although not to full houses.

The meeting of October 27 was on a Thursday night when many of the regulars had commitments elsewhere, but the meeting still drew about 20 members. Kathleen Wachel (on behalf of Jodie Falconer who was unable to attend) reported on the results of the Music Library sale. To date almost \$4,000 was raised by the sale of records, books and music scores. The remainder of the LPs, chiefly pop/rock, country/western and jazz will be included in a sale by the Main Library on December 3. It is understood that proceeds (minus a "handling charge") from the sale of these LPs at that time will go to the Music Library (which received them as donations). Announcements of forthcoming Music School events were made. Highlights include a performance of Mahler's Symphony No.3 by the University Symphony Orchestra on Thursday, February 16 and a Beethoven sonata series. The complete set of Beethoven piano sonatas will be performed by Daniel Shapiro of the music faculty beginning on February 19th, continuing on Sunday and Thursday evenings over a four-week period. After a discussion and comments about opera events in the world and the success of some of our past students, the meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM to enjoy the usual refreshments. The next meeting is set for Monday, December 5.

The Opera Theater class will present their program on December 4, following which the Supers will hold a reception for the class members and the voice faculty. Watch for details

Notes and Comments on Russian Opera

The one-act operas, Tchaikovsky's *Yolanta* and Rachmaninov's *Aleko*, that are scheduled for Spring 1995, will be a subject of more detailed commentary in subsequent issues of the newsletter. However, some background in Russian opera may be offered now as an introduction to these operas and their composers.

Opera played a leading part in the growth of music nationalism throughout Western Europe. Such works were generally intended for performance in the country of origin, not for export and few made their way into foreign countries. This was also true for Russian national opera. Up until the latter part of the 18th century, the operas performed in Russia, as in most of Europe, were Italian, and French with some of the German singspiel. Under the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796), St. Petersburg became a cosmopolitan center for opera on a level with London. Many of the Italian composers and leading composers of the French opéra comique spent varying lengths of time in residence in the court at St. Petersburg. Over 300 operas had their premieres in Russia during Catherine's reign. Most of the foreign works presented in St. Petersburg were sung in the original language. Even some by Russian composers had foreign-language librettos, but by the 1770s operas with original Russian texts began to appear. Most of them were comic opera, some satirical and later, toward the end of the 18th century, sentimental or fairy-tale elements began to be used. The arias that alternated with spoken dialogue in these works were on occasion nothing more than the popular folk tunes of the day. More often the composers, as they developed their own sophisticated style, incorporated the elements of traditional folk songs into their music.

Under the reign of Alexander I (1801-1825) there was a great upsurge in Russian national sentiment in the arts which also inspired national opera. One of the prominent composers of Russian opera during this period was actually a Venetian, Catterino Cavo (1776-1840) who came to St. Petersburg in 1789 and remained there for the rest of his life, composing to Russian, French or Italian

texts. One of his works in the Russian language was *Ivan Susanin* (1815) which stood as a model of music nationalism in Russia until Glinka's opera on the same subject replaced it nearly twenty years later. Glinka's work, originally titled *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), is considered an important milestone of Russian opera. However, despite the popularity of *A Life for the Tsar* it has been said that Glinka's second and last opera *Ruslan i Lyudmila* (1842) was even more significant in the development of Russian national opera. Its libretto, referred to as a fantastic and incoherent fairy tale, was adapted from a poem by Pushkin and its music is deemed more original than that of Glinka's earlier opera. *Ruslan* became the model for a number of distinct styles or procedures that would become characteristic of later Russian music. The first important Russian opera after *Ruslan*, also based on a text by Pushkin, was *Rusalka* (1856) by Alexander Sergeivich Dargomyzhsky (1813-1869). In *Rusalka* the music was written to reflect the dramatic rather than the lyric aspects of a Russian national style. It makes use of realistic spoken speech in the recitatives, a style of declamation that peaked in the composer's last opera, *Kamenny gost* (The Stone Guest). In this opera, the actual spoken drama by Pushkin, a setting of the Don Juan story, served as the libretto. The entire work (except for some songs near the beginning of Act II) was written in a melodic recitative using Pushkin's words from the original drama. Dargomyzhsky died before the work was completed. It was finished by Cesar Cui, orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov (setting a new tradition ?) and first performed in 1872.

It was the group of the "mighty handful": Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov who continued the struggle for Russian national music after Glinka and Dargomyzhsky. The interesting point is that all but Rimsky-Korsakov were amateurs, i.e. not having had conventional technical training in composition. The non-nationalists, in contrast, were professional, foreign-trained and officially supported composers. While they were not primarily interested in developing Russian nationalistic music *per se*, they did aspire to develop a tradition of Russian music along the same stylistic lines as was done in Western Europe, particularly Germany. Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894) headed this group when he became the first director of the Imperial Conservatory at St. Petersburg. Rubinstein wrote nineteen operas, eight on Russian and eleven on German texts. Of these operas, only *The Demon* achieved much success both in Russia and abroad.

Rimsky-Korsakov, the professionally-trained and most productive composer of the nationalist school (15 operas) made extensive use of Russian folk tunes and original tunes in the style of folk-songs, drawing upon his own collection of Russian folk-songs (published in 1876) for his works. Despite his training and having been influenced somewhat by Italian opera and the chromaticism of Wagner, he championed the cause of the nationalists. Except for some early historical dramas, most of his operas have to do with Russian themes of fantasy, legend, and mythology. In contrast to Mussorgsky, whose operatic works reflect attempt at realism and a rather dark aspect of the Russian character, Rimsky-Korsakov was essentially a lyrical and pictorial composer, owing much to Glinka in these respects.

Tchaikovsky was the leading composer in Russia of the non-nationalist school. While he supported nationalistic music, especially the folk music of Russia, his works, including opera, showed the influence of his German training and appreciation of Italian opera and French ballet. In his earliest attempts at opera he did experiment with the then-favored nationalism, producing *Voevoda* (1869), *Oprichnik* (1874) and *Kuznets Vakula* ("Vakula the Smith", 1876) but having little success with them he turned to more old fashioned romantic opera. Among American opera goers, the best known Tchaikovsky works of this genre are *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades (Pique Dame)*. However, in Russia, *Yolanta*, (or *Iolanta*) the last opera composed by Tchaikovsky (1892) is almost as popular. It was written to a Russian text by the composer's brother, Modeste, based on a Hans Christian Andersen story.

Tchaikovsky's influence may be seen and heard in the operatic works of Ippolitov-Ivanov (1859-1935), Alexander Grechaninov (1864-1956), Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915) and Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943). Rachmaninov will be taken up in more detail, as will more about Tchaikovsky, in a future issue of *Entr'Acte*.

Notes and Reminders

Michele Crider will be singing two roles in Boito's *Mefistofele*, Marguerite and Helen of Troy, at La Scala in February 1995. Muti will be the conductor. She will also be the Amelia in a Covent Garden (London) performance of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* during the 1995 season.

Kimm Julian will do the title role in *Rigoletto* for the Minnesota Opera some time in April 1995. He informs us that he will be doing the title role in Verdi's *Macbeth* for Des Moines Metro during the 1996 summer season.

The Cedar Rapids Symphony will put on Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, directed by Beaumont Glass, on Saturday March 25 and Sunday March 26, (matinee) 1995. Tiemeyer will be the conductor.

Pairs of tickets to Lyric Opera of Chicago performances of R. Strauss's *Capriccio*, on Friday December 2 and to Verdi's *Aida*, on Friday, December 30, 1994 are available for sale by Anne Burnside. Anyone interested can call her at 337-9575 and leave a message on the answering machine

The Opera Theater class will do Purcell's one-act opera, *Saul and the Witches of Endor*, duets from *Lakme* and *Arabella*, a trio from *Rosenkavalier*, and a scene from *The Marriage of Figaro* for their class recital on December 4 at 3:00 p.m. The performances will be given in the Opera Studio in the Music Building. This will be followed by a reception given by the Supers for the students and voice faculty. You are urged to attend the performances and the reception.

Send comments, materials, notes for **Entr'Acte** to the editor. (Thanks, Mel, your contribution will get to be used from time to time.)

Reminder: Next meeting of the Supers will be at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, December 5, 1994. in the lounge of the Music Building.

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