



# Entr'acte

The Opera  
Supers of  
Iowa City  
Newsletter

Volume X, No.1 September 1994 Editor: Arthur Canter, 30 Brookfield Dr., Iowa City, IA 52245

## Letter from the Editor

It has been a long time since the last issue of the newsletter. In contrast to the preceding volumes, the 1993-94 *Entr'Acte* (vol.IX) had only one number issued. The fault was mine but I shall not offer any excuses. The reasons are many. It is time for us to reflect on who the Supers are, what we have accomplished and failed to accomplish and where do we go from here. I have looked over the back issues of the newsletter and have noted the repetition of themes as well as the changes made in the newsletter over time. One recurring theme as you may guess is the inability to get larger audiences, in particular, students, to attend opera performances. Obviously, opera is just not their thing. What can change it? Students are at a university for an education which, we used to think, includes learning about and experiencing the products of our culture. Is not the attendance at a classical concert or an opera such an educational opportunity? The problem is not just an Iowa phenomenon --it's nationwide, as Wally Chappell can tell you. Who will be the audiences in symphony halls and opera houses twenty years from now? What will be on the programs? Maybe the fault lies in that we are not programming the musical events that will attract new audiences, or are embedding them in settings that are not conducive for participation. Perhaps the "etiquette" of classical concert/opera attendance is too overwhelming for the students. They tend to believe that they can't "have fun" at a classical concert as they do at a rock concert. After all, isn't that one of the reasons for going to college--to "have fun"? Or is it that the students don't *know how* to act? Imagine yourself as going to a performance of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto as the first concert experience in your life. The lights go down, the audience applauds as the conductor and soloist enter the stage, the hall becomes deathly quiet and the music starts. The sounds and the virtuosity of the playing get to you, emotionally, but no one bursts in with applause after a particular flourish or technical pianistic display. If someone even coughs near you, those next to you act annoyed. You really get caught up with the emotionality of the music which thunders to a stop at the end of the first movement. At this moment your natural feeling is to want to applaud vigorously--but if you do you are made to feel like a fool. You are not supposed to applaud until the *end* of the concerto. In Tchaikovsky's time and before audiences reacted spontaneously with applause whenever there was a break at the end of a movement much as we do at the opera after a well-sung aria. Nowadays you are lucky if the conductor holds up for an applause even after an aria let alone an instrumental solo. Can you imagine an audience applauding wildly after the third movement of a four movement symphony and having the conductor *repeat* the movement in response? Yet that is what could acceptably happen during 19th century concerts. Of course, we don't want the audience to stand on the seats, to smoke during the performance, or throw things. These behaviors are potentially destructive to the performance hall. (Ever attend an opera in Italy when the audience didn't like the performance?) Would changing the "etiquette" or allowing more spontaneity from the audience, increase the attendance by students? I don't know. Other recurring themes in past newsletters have included dearth of feedback or suggestions from readers and, what is more important, the need for financial support for the Music School in all its divisions, including the Opera Theater. I need not belabor the point, but reconsider your priorities and ask yourself if you can afford to give a little more to the Music School Opportunity Fund. Incidentally, your editor is completely independent of the School of Music. The opinions expressed in the newsletter are my own, the contents are not edited by the School of Music, nor am I under their supervision. Despite this, they continue to sponsor *Entr'Acte* even though it is not an official publication of the School. They just assume the costs of printing and mailing the newsletter and trust that I will not go off on the deep end. It is hard to stay on course at times. That's where I need your help. ---Arthur Canter

## On Becoming and Remaining A Member of the Supers

The following is provided as a reminder to the Supers and as an invitation for new members. The Opera Supers of Iowa City is a unique organization. It is informal and relatively unstructured. There are no By-Laws or Constitution. There are no officers and no dues. It is an organization of volunteers pledged to

support the University of Iowa Opera Theater and the School of Music in whatever ways they can. There is no need for jockeying for position or status among the members. No one is particularly interested in being a member to expand a resume to demonstrate "community participation". There is a facilitator (as she prefers to be called), Mona Shaw, who acts as the chairperson for meetings and as the liaison person for the School of Music. Meetings are held in the School of Music Building as frequently as once per month during the periods when the University is in session, sometimes less frequently, but as needed when projects are involved. Committees, if they can be called that, are formed on a voluntary basis to meet recurring needs or for special time-limited tasks. Thus sign-up sheets passed around during the meetings are a common phenomenon. Activities include: assisting the Opera Theater and Opera Workshop in whatever ways that are appropriate for a volunteer support group. Thus the Opera Supers learn about the operas being produced; share information and ideas about the opera world and the singers, including our local student singers; hold receptions for the Opera Theater, the School of Music, and new Music School faculty; maintain a "strike party" for students and production staff after the spring and summer operas; and hold a pot-luck supper for themselves after the major opera productions. Assistance is offered for distributions of posters and publicity when necessary. Some members serve as supernumeraries in the staged productions (thus the source of the name "Opera Supers"). Generally, about 24-26 members may be in attendance at any one scheduled meeting, rarely as few as 20, and sometimes as many as 32, but not always the same persons. It is estimated that about 40-50 different members will attend at least one meeting during the year. The meetings last one hour and are followed by a brief social/refreshment period during which time there may be special presentations. How does one become a member? Merely by indicating a desire to be involved and showing up at a meeting or letting a member know of the interest. This gets one on the membership list which means receiving notices of meetings and copies of the newsletter. What are the requirements to maintain membership? By supporting the activities of the group, as described above and, in the least, by contributing to the "strike parties" when asked to do so. To those who are not acquainted with the term "strike party" or do not understand why contributions to this event is made a critical measure of participation the following may clarify things. The strike party refers to the availability of food and beverage to the students, staff and stage crews that work to take down the sets after the last performance of the opera. The set-striking crew work hard to clear the stage and store materials, all of which takes much time and energy. In essence we provide a portable meal for them: the "party". The recipients are most appreciative and everyone concerned feels this is one of the most important support functions carried out by the Supers. The contribution by members may be food or money for the costs of the occasion (paper plates, plastic tableware, beverages, etc.). The Supers pot-luck supper is a separate and different event. This is a party for the Supers and their guests and is not considered a support activity. Thus contributing to the pot-luck supper does not replace an obligation to support the strike parties.

### **Report of Meetings and Activities**

The Supers met on March 7, and on April 12, to go over support activities in preparation for the spring production of Massenet's *Herodiade*. During the meetings discussions were held about budgetary limitations and publicity problems. The strike party and pot-luck supper dates were established. Volunteers took posters to distribute and signed up for various pre-performance tasks. The opera performances (April 27 and May 1) were an artistic success although without the stage presence of some important supernumeraries. The small size of both audiences was a disappointment. Perhaps the lack of familiarity with *Herodiade* had something to do with that. Maybe it did need a live camel or some other gimmick to attract more people.

The strike party following the last performance (Sunday, May 1) was well supplied by the Supers and graciously received by the "strikers".

The pot-luck supper was held on the Saturday evening between opera performance dates (April 30) at the home of Betty and Leslie Sims. As usual it was well attended and the food, marvelous to behold and to eat. Everyone had a good time.

A reception was held at Marlene and Bill Stanford's home for Thomas Hampson, on May 5 following his recital at Hancher. The Supers assisted the hosts and the event was a smashing success. Hampson was just as impressive as a guest as he was on the stage.

The Supers met on June 6 and on July 5 with the attention focused on the summer operas: Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and John Blow's *Venus and Adonis*. Sign-up sheets were completed for the food for the strike party (July 31) and plans formulated for the pot-luck supper to be held on the evening of July 31. Problems about the deficiencies in publicity for the spring performance of *Herodiade* by the **Daily Iowan** and **The Iowa City Press Citizen** (except for the usual special column by Johanna Beers) and the means for correcting these for the summer opera were discussed. It was learned that President Hunter Rawlings and David Nelson, Director of the School of Music would be sharing supernumerary roles for *Venus and Adonis*.

It was announced that the Music Library will hold a sale on September 24 and Supers will be needed to assist in preparing for and conducting the sale, much as they did in September 1991.

The performances of the operas were exceptionally well done and received but again by relatively small audiences. Even Clapp Hall could not be filled, although it looked fuller than would have been true in Hancher. The neophyte supernumeraries carried off their parts with professional aplomb, receiving applause upon their entries. The strike party and the pot-luck supper were also successes, as has been the case since both were inaugurated 10 years ago..

### **Opera on CD and LP**

Your editor, being currently involved in sorting through and pricing LP albums for the forthcoming Music School Library sale, once again draws attention to the availability of opera recordings. Not only do we have a richness in audio recordings these days but also one in video recordings, but it is the former that is of interest herein. The obvious advantage of the CD opera album is the ability to locate, instantly, an aria, set piece, or part of a scene that is indexed on the disk. After all the CD is a computer disk and all it takes is a press of a button or key to bring in the sound of the specific selection. The sound may be "cleaner", more vivid, and have a wider dynamic range than the LP. Also there are fewer breaks in that a CD may have as much as 70 minutes per disk as opposed to the 25 minutes per side of an LP. Most important is the apparent long life of the CD after repeated playing--pops and scratches less likely with careful handling. However the CDs cost more and it does not seem likely that prices will drop significantly with newly recorded material. Only reissued material may show up in so-called mid-priced sets. Cost aside, does this mean there is little sense in holding on to LP albums or to forgo purchasing them in a sale? On the contrary, as long as you have the equipment to play them, it makes good sense to keep your old LPs unless they are in worn-out or scratched in the critical places, and to buy sale-priced LP sets that are in good condition. There are many record collectors who would argue that the sound on LP is warmer and even truer to the ear than the digitalized CD sound. Too many CDs sound overbright, even harsher, and have a sort of artificial character to them. The range in dynamics creates problems in adjusting the loudness control on amplifiers to the comfort level of the listener when the music goes from *piano* to *fortissimo* and vice-versa. Also there are a number of LP opera albums that have not been reissued on the CD format both with respect to the cast or the opera itself. This particularly true of vocal collections of singers that were originally issued on single LPs. The CD industry is trying to catch up but it has a long way to go and the prospect of few sales may deter producers with reissuing collections by now lesser known or forgotten singers. The fact that a CD is produced containing obscure or rare material does not mean it is easily available, in particular if it issued on a small company label or on a foreign label. These issues are generally limited and while carried in current catalogues, may be impossible to get. Thus a rare or unusual item showing up on LP in a used record store or a library record sale may be a great bargain, and also the only way you can get a recording of that special performer or work. There are such bargains and opportunities to satisfy aficionados who will come and browse through the offerings at the Music Library sale on Saturday, September 24, 1994.

### **Notes and Reminders**

Anna Stranieri, chairperson for the strike party arrangements, and the Opera Theater Production staff and student "strikers" wish to express a BIG thanks to all Supers who contributed food or money to the strike parties for the spring and summer operas, and to the Supers in the telephone calling committee, helping to get it done.

If any reader of the newsletter who is currently carried on the membership list of Supers wishes to be taken off the list please let Miriam Canter(338-1217) or Mona Shaw (335-1667) know. It will be done and you will not be bothered by notices and phone calls.

Supers will be needed to assist in setting up sales tables and acting as monitors and/or cashiers for the September 24 Music Library Sale. Volunteers will be needed to work the evening (Friday) before the sale. Call your editor (338-1217) or Jodie Falconer, Music Library (335-3086), if you are unable to indicate your interest on sign-up sheets at the regular Supers meeting before that date.

The Music Library has been overwhelmed by contributions of LP records from estates and individuals. If you have such intentions, please hold off or find some other worthy recipient of classical recordings (school and college libraries, Sr. Centers, etc.). "Pop" records are a drag on the market but may be accepted by local public libraries for their book sales.

**Entr'Acte** can benefit by contributions of news items regarding opera, Super's opera experiences , the fate and accomplishments of former student singers and faculty, etc. from readers.

**Note:** The University Opera Theater will present Tchaikowsky's *Yolanta (Iolanta)* as the center piece of three one-act operas on Saturday, October 15 and Sunday, October 16. Watch for times and place (probably in the Opera Studio).

**September 1994 has been officially declared as CLASSICAL MUSIC MONTH**

The University of Iowa  
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