

ENTR' ACTE

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Next Meeting: 7:00 p.m. September 10
Room 1028 (Music Lounge), Music Building

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Letter from the Editor

We welcome new and visiting faculty and administrators of the School of Music for the year 1990-91: John Hill, Interim Director; Kristin Thelander, Interim Associate Director; Claudia Anderson, Flute; Lori Farnan, Music Therapy; Steve Grismore, Jazz Studies; Rene Lecuono, Piano; Scott McCoy, Voice; Arthur Rowe, Piano; Ellen Williams, Voice. We also extend welcome to Mona Shaw's new assistant, Sheila Hentges. Along with the new faces there will be visible signs of change in the Music Building, such as the new coat of paint and ceiling tile. The major changes will be hidden: the new air conditioning/heating system, ducts, tubes, wires, etc. *Entr'Acte* will continue with its general format, although perhaps in varied physical appearances depending upon the availability of desk top publishing facilities. If the readers desire changes in format, let them be heard and have someone come forward to take over the helm. Your editor is grateful for the material sent him from time to time. If it seems to fit our purposes for any one issue, it will be used, as for example the report by the Wengers in this issue. I hope that it will be possible to have an occasional article from a music faculty person or University guest. I am holding a feature column title in reserve labelled "From the Conductor's Podium." Keep in mind that next spring's presentation by the Opera Theater is Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This is most likely to be followed by a very special event for the summer of 1991, but more on that later if plans work out as expected.

My ear should catch your voice,

My eye, your eye

My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.

(Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I, Sc. 1, 186-189)

July 2, 1990 Meeting Report

There was a good turnout for the meeting held at the Huits' home. Announcements covered a number of events. Posters for *Carmelites* were to be ready July 12th, and volunteers were recruited to help with their distribution, assist in getting out mailings for the summer opera, and paint scenery and props. The bulk of the business meeting was devoted to discussions of future directions and activities. The spring opera will be Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This will be a big effort and will need attention early. The ubiquitous notion of an Opera Supers float came up with the same results: enthusiasm by many (not all), lack of means, and limits of time. Other matters discussed included a reception for new faculty, a "Patron Party" that is owed a group of supporters, the Strike Party needs, and last minute details of the 'tween performances Potluck Supper set for July 28th. The business portion of the meeting adjourned to permit socializing. The next meeting is set for Monday, September 10th, in Room 1028 (Music Lounge) of the Music Building.

What is Your Favorite Opera?

The question is asked of me periodically. We tend to ask one another what is a favorite author, movie, play, book, recreation, flavor of ice cream, place to visit, etc. So, why not opera? It could be to satisfy curiosity, or to compare one's choice with that of another's, perhaps to see if someone is in the mainstream, so to speak, or standing alone. I have asked similar questions to help decide on a gift without letting on the purpose of my question. But, what is my favorite opera? I was asked that the other day. Thinking about it brings to mind the line of a song which, if I remember accurately, is from *Finian's Rainbow*: "When I'm not near the girl that I love, I love the girl that I'm near." I seem to get that way about opera--it depends upon what I've been hearing lately. Yet, is there an enduring love that I have for one specific opera that does not depend upon its proximity to me in time or place? I confess to multiple loves for operas, and I don't want to give up any of the ones I love. But choose one--

that is what was put to me the other day. A few years ago I put forth a similar challenge to the newsletter readers, but I made it easier: I asked you to choose five music albums you could not part with if you had to live with only that few the rest of your life. Not many of you responded, so I have no idea if there is a sort of consensus among you as to great pieces of music or opera. My purpose indirectly was just that--was there a consensus? I also wanted to pick out the mavericks among you. It didn't work. Now, how should I answer the question? My immediate answer is the *Marriage of Figaro*, and, interestingly enough, this was my first choice several years ago. I have thought about it since then. Would I want to give up *Don Giovanni*, *Otello*, *Boris Godunov*, *La Boheme*, to name the first ones that pop into my head? It's an unreasonable demand. It is easier to give up certain foods and special dishes--one's health may be at stake. Youth is given up because there is no choice--besides age has its benefits not realized or understood by youth. But operas that I love? Why do I choose to remain with the *Marriage of Figaro*? It was not my first opera--one's first love is important--that was *Faust*. However, it was one of the first complete opera albums I acquired along with an LP of Pinza singing Mozart arias. Also, I remember hearing *Figaro* in the early Met broadcasts. Then, there is the experience with my daughter, our first child. I used to sing phrases and arias from *Figaro* to her when she was a baby and a young child, under a variety of situations: to soothe her, amuse her, walk her, etc. "Non piu andrai," "Aprite un po' quegli occhi" and "Se vuol ballare," all in fractured Italian mixed with English, I sang to her. That must be it. I have very personal associations wrapped up in the opera *Marriage of Figaro* which, embedded in the context of its marvelous music by one of the greatest composers of all times, make it the opera I can't give up. What are your choices and your reasons for sticking to them?

*I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:
Mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note.*

(Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act III, Sc 1, 144-145)

The Vienna Philharmonic Sound

Terrence Rafferty, in the *New Yorker* of July 16, 1990, reports on how he became aware of the fact that the instruments used by the players of the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna State Opera Orchestra (the personnel are the same) are different from those used in other major orchestras. I have run across this information elsewhere. The Vienna horns, woodwinds, strings and percussion have distinctive physical properties. For example, the Vienna kettledrums are capped with goatskin rather than the calfskin or plastic membranes used elsewhere. The Vienna violins are built to different patterns that yield a sweeter and rounder tone than the Italian style violins. The oboes differ in bore, body and key system resulting in a different timbre from the generally used French oboes. The Vienna F-horns differ in construction, using piston rather than rotary valves. The oboes and horns may be harder to control and less reliable than instruments used in other orchestras, "but they make more beautiful sounds." Rafferty fails to mention this, but it is my understanding that the VPO instruments are kept in the performance hall and are not taken outside by the players. Thus, they are not subjected to changes in temperature or humidity in storage and transport between concerts. What is done when the orchestra goes on tour I have no idea, but as Rafferty puts it, "Players, instruments and style are matched."

The following was provided by two of our active Supers, Helen Hensleigh-Wenger and Howard Wenger:

Even on a Generic Tour, You can Catch Some Opera!

Since comprehending Serbo-Croatian is not our forte, we hadn't the slimmest idea what the program in Zagreb stated about *Aida*. The small, opulently Baroque opera house was about ninety percent full. Our front balcony seats afforded a superb view of brilliant, semi-abstract scenery and stunning costumes. In that cozy interior, rich voices soared. Radames, however, got tinny sounding on a few high notes in the first of his arias. Older opera buffs were dressed formally and well, while the young Yugoslavians were garbed casually. The somewhat restrained applause was held until the end of the acts when the singers took their bows. It was

an exciting and pleasurable experience and fun to watch the animated crowd having ample refreshments between acts. Our tickets cost the huge sum of \$2.65!

The Grand Hotel in East Berlin made a substantial profit on our tickets to *Der Fliegende Hollander*. We paid \$30 each--they would take only the West German marks, for the shift in currency was imminent, and no one wanted to get caught with quantities of less valuable East German money. At the door of the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin (only a short walk from our hotel) the tickets were \$5, but unavailable as there was a full house. This famous opera house was not ornate on the exterior but quite elegant inside. Our usual U.S. media reports of the drab clothes worn by East Berliners were totally inaccurate. You could not have distinguished this audience from one at Hancher by their dress. The performance was electrifying--the majestic swelling of eloquent voices, adequate acting and exciting sets (especially the enormous crimson sails of the phantom ship) were wonderful. A rapt, devoted audience added to the pleasure.

In Prague we noticed in the paper that *Don Giovanni* was being performed at one of the lesser opera houses. By this near-the-end stop, I was "tripped out," but Howard bounded off to take the subway to a modest Baroque edifice. He stood in line, but the last ticket was sold to the lady before him. A Czech man about Howard's age overheard what happened and invited Howard to go with him. He refused any money because he was glad to have the chance to practice his English. He was a retired electrical engineer and a cello player. Those in the audience who had not purchased a program (including Howard and his new friend) were surprised when the overture to the music started. A last minute change had been made--the opera was *Figarove Svatba* and not *Don Giovanni*!

We attempt valiantly to stumble into any opera when we travel. A dazzling folk opera in Tbilisi (of which we understood not a whit), *Il Trovatore* by a German company in Sofia (no air conditioning and the singer in heavy velvets) and *Makama Butterfly* in Moscow have created precious memories and, in retrospect, have become the highlights of our travels.

Notes, Announcements, Miscellany

The Music Library will need help again to move books around sometime in the next few weeks. If you would like to offer your assistance, call Joan Falconer at 335-3086.

The spring and summer Strike Party committees want to thank everyone for their willingness to provide food for both these parties. Also, thanks to Eleanore Bowers and her crew for taking care of the food once it arrived and to Chuck Swanson for providing the refrigerator.

The Potluck Supper held between the two performance dates of the summer opera was a great success. It was gratifying to see so many who were participating in the Potluck for the first time. We wish to express our appreciation to the Behrendts for the use of their home for this party.

Volunteers will be needed to assist with the Opera Theater performance of *Opal* coming up soon. Supers will be hearing more on this shortly.

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