



Entr'acte

The Opera
Supers of
Iowa City
Newsletter

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Letter from the Editor

It has been a long time since the last issue of *Entr'Acte*. There have been many interruptions and distractions interfering with my intentions to get an issue of the newsletter out before the end of 1989. I suggest you reread the last issue to refresh your memory about the events that were to take place in November and December and how Supers were to be involved.

You can be assured that the plans for these things were capably met by Supers. I take this opportunity to remind readers that the drop-in box for donations to the School of Music Opportunity Fund has been in operation the past couple of months and will be in place in Clapp Recital Hall and Hancher Auditorium lobbies for future free concerts/recitals by the School of Music.

The dollar or two dropped into this box will help students and will hardly be missed by most adult concert goers. How many of your friends think nothing of buying desserts at the Hancher cafe, a drink now and then, or a chocolate truffle? How much does a greeting card cost these days? Tell your friends to think of the donation as sending a congratulation card to the School of Music performers. If it helps, liken a donation to the leaving of a modest tip for the waiter after a good meal at a good restaurant—only here the meal is free!

October 10 Meeting Report

Announcements were made about *Tosca* as the choice for the spring opera and *Dialogue of the Carmelites* (Poulenc) for the summer of 1990. Various receptions and activities are planned for the next two months. There was no problem in getting volunteers to help in these matters. A decision was made to meet alternately on Mondays and Tuesdays when possible, as there are enough activities on both nights to prevent some Supers from attending the meetings.

November 6 Meeting Report

We had a large turnout (32). The cast for *Tosca* was announced: Rosemary Lack and Leslie Morgan will sing the title role (Friday, April 20, and Sunday, April 22, respectively). Philip Bologna will sing Cavaradosi, and Kimm Julian will be Scarpia. Thus, it will be a

mix of current students and professionals. The set and costumes will be rented. The spring, 1990, "one-acts" will be Puccini's *Gianni Schicci* staged in modern dress and scheduled for March 10. The meeting was devoted to ideas for promotions and receptions. The strike party food program was explained for new members, and three Supers (Anna Stranieri, Jean Walker, and Donna Davis) volunteered to manage the affair.

December 16 Meeting Report

As had been previously announced, after some brief "business" details this meeting was given over to the viewing of a videocassette of "A Profile of Divas Who Have Sung *Tosca*." We managed to get through only about one-third of the tape before refreshments and adjournment. Future meetings of Supers will involve similar activities and presentations from time to time.

January 16, 1990, Meeting Report

The meeting, the first after the holiday break, was well attended. Mona Shaw reported on the Chamber of Commerce S.T.A.R. Award to a couple of Supers. Professor Glass brought the group up to date on plans for *Tosca*. He indicated a need for five males to perform as supers. Mona Shaw reported on plans for the Iowa Festival for this year. The post-performance party after *Tosca* is scheduled for Monday, April 30. Promotional ideas in support of *Tosca* were discussed. The meeting adjourned to Harper Hall where members of Opera Theater presented the final trio scene of *Rosenkavalier*.

Classic Recordings of *Tosca*

It was jokingly said that Puccini wrote his arias to fit the sides of the ten-inch records that were developed for the phonograph at the beginning of the twentieth century. These old ten- and twelve-inch 78 rpm platters, if you remember, could hold about three to four minutes of music per side. Thus, most of the great opera arias, some with a little cut here and there, could fit on one side of the record. It was a rare thing for an operatic excerpt to be carried over to the second side or to another disc. Many opera lovers of the 1920s

(Continued on next page.)

and 1930s had recordings of arias sung by their favorite Golden Age opera stars that had been made during the era of acoustic recordings. With the advent of electrical (microphone) techniques, the 78s of the late thirties and early forties continued the tradition of one aria per side, but with greater fidelity, especially of instruments. In a few instances, complete opera recordings were attempted on such records, but they were cumbersome albums, vulnerable to damage. *Tosca*, composed in 1900, could well have been written to fit the phonograph, but there is no evidence to support this view. The great arias from the opera, "*Vissi d'arte*," "*Recondita armonia*," and "*E lucevan le stelle*," are examples of the "ten-inch aria" as phonograph aficionados were wont to call them.

The invention of the long-playing record (LP) spurred recordings of complete operas. *Tosca* was well served by the LP; its three acts conveniently fit on four sides of the new discs without annoying or disjuncting interruptions. A two-disc LP album of *Tosca* was a bargain in its day. (There was one album spread out over three discs, a definitely uneconomical use of the LP.) Currently, complete operas are to be found on the compact disc (CD). A single CD can easily accommodate 70 minutes of music, if the producer wishes to do so. *Tosca* is now available on two CD albums. The reissues of older recordings of operas found on so-called midline priced CD labels are still a good buy—cheaper than the price of two tickets. Unfortunately, not all "old" opera albums are reissued on budget line CDs. The transfer to CD usually involves "remastering" the sound as well as digitalizing the music information. In case you are not clear about the CD, the whole format is based on the electronics and mechanics of computers. A CD is essentially a computer disc and the CD player a computer that can read it and translate it to sound. The manufacturer, the record company, wants to charge what the traffic will bear, royalties aside.

It may be possible to find some of the old LP albums at bargain prices and in good condition in some used book/record shops or from persons getting rid of LPs as they shift completely over to CD. Certainly, more and more of the classic recordings of operas, once on LP or pirated from tapes of live performances, are beginning to be issued on CD. Regarding the "pirate" taped source, let the buyer beware.

As for classic recordings, I offer the following material in which I want to provide some opinions on four *Tosca* albums. Each set is identified as to the date of original recording, its *Tosca*, Cavaradossi, Scarpia, conductor, opera group, issuing label, and present availability, in that order: Set A (1938): Caniglia, Gigli, Borgioli, de Fabritis, Rome Opera, originally produced for 78 rpm discs, transferred to LP, last issued on Seraphim label, out of print; Set B (1951): Tebaldi,

Campora, Mascherini, Erede, Santa Cecilia Academy, last issued on Richmond LP, currently available only on cassette from mail-order book dealers (e.g., Barnes & Noble); Set C (1953): Callas, di Stefano, Gobbi, de Sabata, La Scala, originally issued on Angel LP, remastered and reissued on CD; Set D (1956): Milanov, Bjoerling, Warren, Leinsdorf, Rome Opera, originally issued on RCA LP, remastered and reissued on CD. There are other classic and great performances that have been recorded on LP and newer ones on CD, but I cannot cover them all. Maybe your favorite is not included. Let me know about it. Each of the above sets has its own special merit vis-a-vis a singer's characterization of the role, voice quality, etc. One may prefer the soprano of one set, the tenor of another, the baritone of yet a third, and the conductor of any or none. It is no easy task to decide which to recommend.

For the sake of my analyses I am disregarding the quality of the recording as to its high fidelity, etc. Older recordings, not remastered, may suffer in this respect, but good singing and pace will come through no matter what. Besides, remastering does not guarantee more pleasing sound even when ticks, pops, and hisses are removed. Set A with Caniglia and Gigli is the only one of the four that I did not own but wished I did. Fortunately, Betty McCollister loaned me her album, and I did make a copy, so now I own all four sets (on LP or tape, not on CD). A bit of research on the origins of Set A revealed that this *Tosca* recording was designed primarily for Beniamino Gigli, who was considered by many in the 1930s to be the successor to Caruso. His preference for the soprano for the title role was Iva Pacetti. Pacetti had to withdraw during the production (I do not know why), and Maria Caniglia, not known particularly as a great *Tosca* at the time, was selected as her substitute. Listen to this album, and you will note that she was a most fortunate choice. Caniglia's voice and style of singing on the recording superbly fit the character of *Tosca*. She provides plenty of bite where appropriate. She observes Puccini's marking *maliziosamente* in the first act duet with Gigli when she tells her lover that he had better paint the eyes of the portrait "as black ones." Thus, we can sense her intense jealousy and potentially explosive nature that Scarpia was to exploit later. Caniglia gives a remarkable *parlando* instead of singing in a monotone when she comments about Scarpia after murdering him. Gigli's Cavaradossi is without blemish and has to be one of the finest portrayals of the role. His two great arias are better in this album than on some of his singles on the old 10- and 12-inch "shellacs." If there is a weakness in Set A, it is with Borgioli's Scarpia, but that is only a relative matter for it is really quite adequate and does not detract from the album. If Set A is ever remastered and put on CD, get it.

The 1951 Set B (not to be confused with the later

1959 Tebaldi *Tosca*) is the one that has been used to support the Tebaldi fans in the rivalry between this artist and Callas. Tebaldi may well have been at her best in the 1951 recording. She gives forth with an extroverted "*Vissi d'arte*" which, while not as pretty as in other recordings, is more suited to the character. She is quite secure in her vocal range and displays dramatic expressiveness throughout. Erede's pacing of the music is commendable. The Cavaradossi of Campora, however, is without distinction in characterization—he is too bland. Enzo Mascherini sounds too young to be a Scarpia.

Set C: This 1953 recording with Callas, di Stefano, and Gobbi is held by many aficionados as *the Tosca* of all time. The tonal color, the range, the drama, the change in expressiveness, and the vocal security make this one of Callas' greatest recordings. She *is* Tosca. Di Stefano is about as close to Gigli as one can get in this performance, and his tone may be even more heavenly in "*E lucevan le stelle*." Gobbi's Scarpia has come to be the standard by which to judge all other Scarpias, and we can hear why in this album. It is remarkable to hear the changes in his voice from the calm restraint of a respected authority to the cruel, threatening chief of police that he really is. Now we can understand why Tosca was so ready to believe anything he said at first. When the mask is off after she betrays her lover, the change in Scarpia as portrayed by Gobbi is almost frightening. Now that this album is on CD you must have it.

Set D is my sentimental favorite. It has the voices of a trio of singers that I have admired from the start. Bjoerling, to me, was the greatest, Milanov thrilled me, and Warren—who can forget his *Rigoletto*? But what about Set D? Milanov was undoubtedly a great Tosca, but in 1956 maybe she had faded somewhat. Her tone is still beautiful in this album, but something is not quite right, perhaps too much vibrato, some scooping? One can argue the matter. What can I say about Bjoerling? He is Bjoerling, and I can't fault him. He sings beautifully. Too beautifully for the role, some would say—not enough change in characterization of the different situations Cavaradossi finds himself in. I would be hard pressed to choose between him, di Stefano, and Gigli. Warren now seems a bit disappointing, especially after hearing Gobbi. He sounds a bit wobbly and lacking the richness I remember. Perhaps he was trying too hard to be the villain from the very start. Leinsdorf's pace and handling of the orchestra have been criticized as "heavy-handed," but who am I to say.

So there you have it: four choices among classic *Tosca* albums. My solution is to own all four (plus a few others I have not mentioned), and I would not part with any of them. If you want to prepare yourself for the spring *Tosca*, get a bargain classic album or a

newer one on CD—just make sure it has a libretto. Listen to it, not with the idea of judging the performance to be presented here, but rather to familiarize yourself with the dimensions of the drama and the music. It will increase your enjoyment of the opera.

Reminders, Notes, and Miscellany

Tosca cast members with Beaumont Glass, director of U.I. Opera Theater will present a program of scenes from *Tosca* on March 30, 1990, from noon to 1:00 p.m. in Meeting Room A of the Iowa City Public Library. The program will be video-taped for later broadcast on the Public Access Channel.

School of Music Events calendars for the spring semester are now available from the Music Public Relations Office, 335-1667.

Tickets are now on sale for *Tosca*. As well as regular and student admission, patron and sponsor tickets are also available. Patron tickets are \$30 and include priority seating and a free opera poster. Sponsor tickets are \$35 and include priority seating, a free opera poster, a performance reception, and a listing in the playbill for orders received by April 1.

S.T.A.R. Award

The Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce this past fall approved adding the S. T. A. R. (Service to the Arts in our Region) award to its annual schedule of awards. It was decided that the award should go to an individual or entity who has had an exceptional impact on the life of the arts locally and beyond the local area for a period of at least five years. The Chamber Arts Committee accepted nominations for the award during the month of November and on January 11, 1990 the committee selected the first recipient (actually joint recipients) of this first annual honor.

Winners of the award were Arthur and Miriam Canter. The Canters received the award at the Chamber of Commerce's Annual Awards Banquet, January 26, in the Main Ballroom of the Iowa Memorial Union. The School of Music (along with the many other arts enterprises the Canters have touched) have long admired and appreciated the amazing and exemplary contributions made by Arthur and Miriam to the arts for many years. It is wonderful and fitting that their constant love and dedication has been officially recognized.

—Mona Shaw
Public Relations Coordinator

MEMO

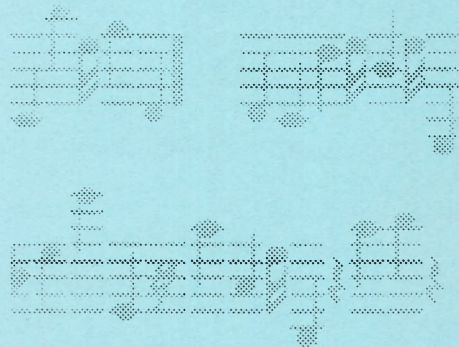
MEMO

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

**Next Meeting:
Tuesday, February
13th at 7:00 p.m. in
the lounge (Room
1028) of the Music
Building.**

ARTHUR CANTER (newsletter) 338-1217
MIRIAM CANTER (hospitality) 338-1217
LINDA BEHRENDT (publicity) 336-5342
MARY WALL (scenery) 338-2618
MARLENE STANFORD (costumes)
354-0600
MARILYN SOMVILLE (School of Music
director) 335-1601
BEAUMONT GLASS, Opera Theater director,
335-1669
MONA SHAW, P.R. coordinator, 335-1667
MARGARET WENK, opera designer, 335-2899
DWIGHT SUMP, opera production manager,
335-1153

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