

# Opera Supers of Iowa City

Volume Three, Number 2

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Editor: Arthur Canter  
30 Brookfield Dr. Iowa City, IA 52240

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 12th at 7:00 p.m. in the Lounge of the Music Building.

## Letter from the Editor

The decision has been made. The Spring, 1988, opera will be Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. The explanation for the decision may be found in the report of the meeting of October 20 below. Your editor has had to put aside his notes and research material on the Rameau work originally planned and has taken up Mozart where he left him last spring for *Don Giovanni*. You may think that I shall repeat things about Mozart and Da Ponte, the team for *Così*, but I hope to have surprises and new material for you. Meanwhile orient yourselves and try to gain a new perspective on *Così* even though you may have seen past productions here at the University (over ten years ago) or elsewhere. I have had very little comment or reaction to items contained in the last issue of the newsletter. Have any of the readers attended the much heralded Houston Opera premiere of *Nixon in China*? If so, I would like to hear from you.

## Report of the Supers Meeting of September 22

The first meeting of the new academic year was very well attended despite the short notice of moving its time up to permit members to attend guest pianist, Natasha Ivanina's recital in Clapp Hall. The early part of the meeting was devoted to an explanation of the delay in reaching a decision about putting on Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* next spring. New members of the Supers were introduced. Dr. Joan Falconer gave information about resources in the Music Library that are opera related: books, tapes, video tapes, and playback equipment in the Listening Room. Peter Alexander, director of Arts Center Relations was introduced. He described the various organizations within the Iowa Center for the Arts and the University that his office services. There was a gen-

eral discussion of the use of media in gaining publicity for the University Opera Theater productions.

The project committees around which Supers' activities can be focussed during the year were defined and will remain the same as last year. The chairpersons, coordinators, managers, etc. will be listed at the end of each newsletter as in the past.

The remainder of the meeting was concerned with plans for receptions for some of the early fall events and an overview of the longer term goals.

## Report of the Meeting of October 20

Professor Glass announced the plans for the Spring opera: *Così fan tutte*. It was explained that the original plan to present *Les Indes Galantes* had to be postponed for a year. The inordinate amount of costumes needed would be an impossible task for the costume shop if they were to start construction at this late date; also the demands upon the Dance Department's faculty and staff to prepare for this opera were difficult to meet this particular academic year.

The members heard two letters of appreciation for their activities: one from the Kantorei for the reception Opera Supers held for them and the other from Michele Crider which referred to the help given at her recital. Michele's letter also brought the group up-to-date on her activities in Zurich.

The goals and philosophy of the Supers group were discussed. It was noted that our role has expanded over the last two years into a quasi "Friends of the School of Music" organization. While this seems appropriate because of the involvement of other performing groups in opera it was agreed that the primary focus of the Supers will be upon opera. However, we will continue to be supportive of other segments of the School of Music by assisting with receptions etc. The re-examination of the Supers informal structure led to the agreement that it should continue that way. It was expressed that more time should be spent on operating topics apart

from the target Spring and Summer Opera Theater offerings at some of the meetings. It was also brought out that the group can have a sort of lending library for its members in which books, video tapes, audio tapes or records, etc. may be requested in this newsletter. Plans for some receptions in the near future were made. The meeting was adjourned for refreshments at 9:00 p.m.

## A Rose by any name...

How shall we know the Mozart opera *Così fan tutte*? By its most common translation, "All women are like that"? By its subtitle *La Scuola degli amanti*, "The School for Lovers"? Professor Glass intends to use "Friends and Lovers" as the substitute title. Apparently the original title and story were rather disconcerting to many audiences of the 19th century although more because of the immorality of the story than its sexist implications. According to Nicolas John's *A Performance History* (in the English National Opera Guide *Così fan tutte*) "Countless versions were devised to modify the text... there were even productions where the music was married to wholly different stories." The first German translation (1791) was given as *Liebe und Versuchen* (*Love and Temptation*). Another version was given in Vienna (1802) as the *Two Aunts from Milan*, or *The Disguise*. A second version of this same reworked opera had been given earlier as *The Wager* or *The Love and Artfulness of Women*. Other alternative German titles in the 19th century (herein translated) included *The Fidelity of Girls*, *The Magic Test*, *The Experts in Women* or *Who Won the Wager*?

In Italy, the opera given in Italian was generally known by its subtitle (*La Scuola degli Amanti*), thus avoiding the sexist slam. A French version given in the 1870's was known as *Peines d'Amour perdues* (*Love's Labour's Lost*) which actually had its text based on the Shakespeare play.

A translation from England (1828) titled the opera *Tit for Tat* or *The Tables Turned*. It was noted that amateur productions were given in the 1840's as *The Retaliation*.

What of the source of the original title? Da Ponte always referred to the opera by its subtitle

and had little to say about the opera in his memoirs except that it "held third place among the sisters born of this celebrated father of harmony." Sheila Hodges in her biography of Da Ponte suggests that the librettist may have taken the title from a comment of Basilio's in *The Marriage of Figaro*, "*Così fan tutte le belle!—non c'è alcun novita*. (This is what all beautiful women do—there's nothing new about it.)" As for the origins of the story, that is another matter for a future newsletter.

## Comments from the Fall 1986 issue of DAEDALUS

This issue of *Daedalus* was devoted to "The Future of Opera" and contains transcriptions of a conference held in Venice in 1985. The following are some excerpts that I thought our readers would enjoy.

On the question of Opera: What constitutes longevity? Erich Leinsdorf had this to say:

"The requirements for an opera's long and healthy life before the public are three: 1) memorable set pieces; 2) dramatic situations and personae with whom the public can identify; 3) the calibre of the score."

He goes on to explain that his use of "memorable" includes two definitions: a) easily remembered and b) unforgettable. He uses *Rigoletto* and the *Meistersinger* as illustrations. "La donna e mobile" is easily remembered; it is both catchy and unforgettable. The quintet from the third act of *Meistersinger* cannot be whistled or sung but "once the piece has penetrated a sensitive nervous system it will remain a luminous and unforgettable happening. While both *Rigoletto* and *Meistersinger* meet all three criteria, the former has broader appeal, is more easily understood and will probably outlive the latter. As Leinsdorf puts it, many more of the public can and will identify with the drama of *Rigoletto*. The summary of its story in Leinsdorf's words is too good not to pass on to you:

"A crippled widower must watch helplessly while his dissolute boss seduces his only child; he hires a hit man; a warm-hearted prostitute saves the lecherous seducer; and to add a gothic touch, a curse on *Rigoletto* by another offended father has been fulfilled."

*"At least 400 words would be necessary to prepare a newcomer for even a minimal understanding of Meistersinger. While the locale of the original French story of Rigoletto could be changed to Mantua, and the king demoted to a duke, one can hardly conceive of relocating Wagner's Nuremberg and calling the work Le concours de Toulouse." He goes on to point out that Rigoletto is not bound by any ethnic borders whereas Wagner's comedy is "rooted firmly in German lore, and is based on premises that have to be known if there is to be more than a superficial appreciation of the work."*

Matthew Epstein, artistic advisor to the Lyric Opera of Chicago (among other roles), in the same issue makes the statement, "Operas are meant to be played to different audiences; then after a period it becomes clear whether or not they are worthwhile and will survive."

## Some Notable Quotes, Reverent and Irreverent

*No good opera plot can be sensible, for people do not sing when they are feeling sensible.*

—W.H. Auden

*More than any form of music, opera is an Event. It brings together many of the arts.*

—Harold Schoenberg, (*NY Times*)

*The first requisite of a successful operatic production is that it be believable... to the extent that the audience can identify with the characters on the stage... accept their appearance, their utterances, the sound of their voices, and the instrumental music that surrounds them as being suitable and compatible.*

—Boris Goldovsky (in *Bringing Opera to Life*).

*There is too much music in music drama.*

—Beaumarchais (in preface to *Tarare*)

## Notes, News and Miscellani

The University of Iowa Opera Theater **One-Acts** drew full houses in the Opera Studio Friday and Saturday nights, October 23 and 24. The Supers held a well-attended reception for the cast, production people and the audience following the Saturday night performance.

We have learned that **Michele Crider** won the preliminary **Pavarotti Competition** held in Zurich, Switzerland in early October, competing against 45 singers. She advances to the next level of competition that will be held in Italy in February. The winner of that goes to the finals held in this country in June.

If you are considering attending The **Minnesota Opera** Production *Rusalka* next spring, the following information may help you decide:

It will be sung in Czech (not in English as the brochure indicated) but English captions (projected) will be used. **Ashley Putnam** will sing the title role and **Walter MacNeil** will portray the Prince. The exact dates are April 22, 28, and 30 at 8:00 p.m. and April 24 at 2:00 p.m. All performances will be at the Ordway Music Theatre in downtown St. Paul. Prices for the evening performances as \$38, \$25.50, & \$19.00, with partial view at \$12.50. Matinee prices are \$30.00, \$20.50, & \$15.00, with partial view at \$10.00. Senior Citizens and Students are \$5.00 less in all prices. There are group rates for ten or more. You can write or call the Ordway Box Office (612-224-4222). Locally, Miriam Canter (338-1217) has information about the group sales and rates. One could go the weekend of April 22 and be able to attend our production of *Così fan tutte* the following weekend.

**NOTE THE CHANGE IN DATE OF THE NEXT SUPERS MEETING.**

**Next Meeting: Thursday, November 12th at 7:00 p.m. in  
the Lounge of the Music Building (Room 1028).**

## **Important Numbers**

**Arthur Canter, 338-1217, Newsletter**

**Miriam Canter, 338-1217, Hospitality**

**Shirley Harrison, 337-5729, Costumes**

**Mary Wall, 338-2618, Scenery**

**Mona Shaw, 335-1667, Music Public Relations**

**Dwight Sump, 335-1153, Opera Production Manager**

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