

OPERA SUPERS OF IOWA CITY NEWSLETTER

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REMINDER: Next scheduled meeting is Monday, June 30, 1986 at 7:00 p.m. in the lounge of the Music Building

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As I think back to the times I have listened to opera on radio or recordings I become aware of some things that should be obvious to all of us who listen to opera more than we see performances. Each time I listen to the same opera on different recordings or hear a new performance is a new experience that is not conveyed by listening to the words but rather to the music itself. The different singers add to this feeling by the differences they have with respect to their voice quality, timbre, expression, etc. The different conductors of the orchestras produce changes in the experience by their different interpretations, pacing and emphases. In one of my future newsletters I hope to indulge in an essay of my views on these matters and what I call the musical language unique to the composer.

I can still hear in my head the sounds of BORIS as made by the UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA under the direction of JAMES DIXON. Being backstage during the performance I heard it differently than had I been in the audience. Later I heard the same performance on videotape. It was different but exciting both ways because the sounds carried to me differently. Incidentally, I always look forward to a performance by the University Symphony as conducted by Dixon and am continually amazed how he comes through with a group of such outstanding young musicians year after year. I anticipate his conducting DON GIOVANNI next spring and whatever symphony concerts he plans for the 1986-87 season.

Thinking about the University Symphony brings me to a point I was trying to make in the last newsletter. What is it worth to you to ensure our being able to maintain such resources? The Symphony has to replenish its stock of talented musicians each year. A number of these depend upon receiving performance assistantships. Not all students can afford to replace or repair instruments that may become damaged. Sheet music has to be provided for the musicians (remember, an orchestra of 100 needs at least that many pieces of music.) Programs need to be printed. Rental fees for Hancher Auditorium have to be paid. (Surely you did not think that Hancher's budget allowed open use for any units of the University? The University does not operate that way). There are many "little" things that add up as well as the obvious costs and expenses. Budgetary cut backs, restrictions and rearrangements of funding practices threaten the quality and vitality of the School of Music in all its endeavors. We should not be blinded by the success of BORIS GODUNOV. That was a special situation, at a special time, supported by unusual monetary sources and backed by unusual effort. We, the Supers, helped in this unusual effort for it was a particular challenge to show what a support group such as ours could do. Now there are new challenges and needs extending beyond the production of MADAME BUTTERFLY facing us. If we tackle aspects of the problems that are appropriate for us to deal with and do so with the same fervor and energy that we gave to BORIS, we may help in their solution. More about this follows in the report of the meeting earlier this month.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR CONT.

I wish to thank those of you who wrote to KSUI in reaction to my item about the fate of the Saturday noon program "The Vocal Scene." I have received a letter of explanation from the program director, John Fischer. It seems that I was mistaken about KSUI by inferring the station was planning to drop the program. Rather, the problem is with Parkway, the distributor of this and other programs carried on PBS stations, which will no longer handle "The Vocal Scene" and "First Hearing" (on locally, Sunday afternoons.) As both programs are produced by WQXR, New York, it is up to them to decide whether they will distribute "The Vocal Scene" and "First Hearing." KSUI is interested in receiving them and is in contact with WQXR about this. If I stirred things up mistakenly, it can do only good in that the expression of interest is always of value to programmers on FM. If we enjoy an offering by KSUI, we should make it a habit to let them know. Take nothing for granted.

REPORT ON MEETING OF JUNE 7, 1986:

We had a turnout of 17 for this meeting. Mona introduced Kathy Marsh who will be assisting her this summer. Before the meeting got underway, there was a brief discussion of the concerns about the KSUI program, "The Vocal Scene." We learned that there is no service available for the speed reproduction of video tapes as there is for audio cassettes. It may be possible for the Music Department to get a VHS copy of the original 3/4" professional tape of BORIS made by IPBN-TV. If this is the case, it would become possible for Supers to rent the VHS tape at a nominal fee. Those of us having made videotapes of the broadcast performance May 10 have the unique inclusion of the storm warning that is not present on the original tape.

Beaumont Glass indicated his needs for male singers for the BUTTERFLY chorus, a "boy servant" and a "fan girl" in addition to the child of Cio Cio San. Rehearsals were to start June 10. Costume problems were also discussed--these have to do with wigs and footwear. Margaret Wenk and Eleanore Bowers are in control of this situation.

Committee reports were heard:

NEWSLETTER: Art Canter--More quiz entries are wanted.

COSTUMES: Shirley Harrison and Eleanore Bowers--Indicated the main problem was getting hair for wigs.

SCENERY: Margaret Wenk and Mary Wall--All of the scenery comes trucked in. However, there is need for a model battleship for the child to play with.

PROMOTIONS: Mona Shaw and Mel Sunshine--The display in the Iowa City Public Library will be on the second floor. Mel had looked into videotaping programs for library cable but there is not enough time for a BUTTERFLY promotion. We can plan for next spring and summer if we get on the library calendar early enough. We discussed coordinating publicity and promotion activities with the opening up of the Asian Studies programs inaugurated by the university. A number of activities centered on Japan will be taking place this summer and fall. Madame Butterfly might serve as the opener of a sort of Japanese "Festival." There will be displays of origami, kimonos made by children, etc. It maybe possible to have an opening night reception at Hancher with a Koto ensemble. The BUTTERFLY posters are now ready and volunteers are needed to take them to stores and poster display areas.

PARTIES: Miriam Canter--It was agreed that another Chamber of Commerce sponsored party would be desirable. The one for BORIS was a great success. The question whether this could be held at a private home was raised. A piano would be necessary. Various locations were considered. A smaller pre-performance party targeted at a specific group, e.g. the Arts Council was also considered. Among the ideas that came out was to have a get-together with the community of Japanese people living in and around the Iowa City area.

After the committee reports and discussion centered about their activities, Mona led the Supers in a discussion about the problems referred to in my "Letter to the Editor," namely how to overcome budget limitations and whether an "umbrella" support group for the School of Music would be desirable and workable. An ad hoc committee to study the issue and organize a fund raising scheme for the support of the School of Music was formed with Mona Shaw as its chairperson. Committee members will be: Mary Wall, Miriam Canter, Arthur Canter, and Hope Solomons.

PUCCINI: THE START OF A CAREER

A little on the background of the composer of MADAME BUTTERFLY may help you appreciate the opera a bit more. While not a tragic figure as was Mussorgsky, Puccini was nevertheless a colorful and remarkable person. Born in Lucca in the province of Tuscany on December 23, 1858, he was to follow in the footsteps of a long line of musician ancestors. His father, Michele who died when Giacomo was five, had been a music teacher and a pupil of Donizetti and Mercadante. A grandfather, Domenico (1772-1815) had written operas himself and had studied under Paisello. The great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather were organists in churches in Lucca. A family tradition had developed for a male Puccini to be the church organist, a calling the young Giacomo entered at age 14. As a teenager he began composing organ pieces, largely improvisations into which he worked Tuscan folk songs and tunes from Verdi operas. At age 18, he attended a performance of AIDA at Pisa which "opened a musical window" to Giacomo, and he decided to break the family tradition and go to Milan to learn the craft of opera composition. This he did, entering Milan Conservatory in 1880 with the help of a scholarship and support from a great uncle. His chief teachers were Antonio Bozzini and Ponchielli. It is said that the life he led for the next three years as a poor student aped that of the young artists depicted in LA BOHEME. He broke into the opera composition world by entering a competition announced by the music publishing firm of Eduardo Sonzogno, Milan, for a one-act opera. Puccini was encouraged by Ponchielli to enter the contest. Ponchielli also arranged for Ferdinando Fontana to be his librettist. Fontana suggested the subject of LE VILLI, based on the legend that was also used in the ballet GISELLE (Adam). The opera LE VILLI did not win the competition, apparently not even having been reviewed by the jury because of the illegibility of Puccini's written score. But at a party at which Arrigo Boito was present, Puccini played and sang his opera at the piano, so impressing the audience that arrangements were made to stage the opera at the Teatro del Verme on May 31, 1884. The opera was a great success. Ricordi, the music publisher, acquired it, had Puccini extend it to two acts and commissioned him to write another opera. Thus was Puccini's opera career launched. The problems he had with his second opera, EDGAR, which later haunted him time and time again, is another story that reveals the tenacity, singularity of purpose, and the drive for perfection that became the hallmark of Puccini. Failure did not deter him. Fortunately for BUTTERFLY and for us, he held this characteristic from the start. But also note that he needed breaks, contacts and the ability to take advantage of them.

FROM PUCCINI'S LETTERS TO RECORDI ON THE TOPIC OF BUTTERFLY
AND QUIZ NUMBER TWO

An undated letter written by Puccini refers to his having "had a visit from Mme. Ohyama, wife of the Japanese Ambassador. She told me a great many interesting things and sang native songs to me...[and] promised to send me some native Japanese music...." (Ed. Puccini refers to having sketched the BUTTERFLY story for her.) "She liked it, especially as just such a story as BUTTERFLY is known to her as having happened in real life. She does not approve of the name Yamadori on the ground that it is feminine and otherwise not appropriate." (Ed. Puccini kept it--as in Long's novella and Belasco's play.) "The uncle's name of Yaxonpide is wrong too. Similarly, the names Sarundapiko, Izaghi, Sganami, etc. are all wrong."

QUIZ #2

Anyone who can come up with the changes Puccini made or failed to make on the above four names will be awarded a special prize.

The University of Iowa
School of Music
Iowa City, Iowa 52242



The University of Iowa School of Music Presents
Giacomo Puccini's
Madame Butterfly
University Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Lamkin
Beaumont Glass, stage director



UI OPERA THEATER
July 25 8pm
July 27 3pm
HANCHER AUDITORIUM
For tickets phone 353-6255 or
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