

## ENTR'ACTE

Newsletter of the Opera Supers of Iowa City  
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### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We are off to a new season for the Supers, building upon a new tradition of offering the women supers more opportunity to perform on stage. The "nuns" of the summer 1992 opera will not be forgotten by the audience, judging from comments and compliments that I continue to hear whenever meeting some person in Hancher who had attended Cav/Pag. In truth the Supers may have been more of a drawing card than the mules and the donkey - or even the children. Super Power? Super Sister Power? Whatever, it means that there should more attention paid to using supernumeraries of both genders in our opera productions, even if there should have to be cross-dressing. After all, if there are acceptable "trouser roles" in operas themselves, why can't this be extended to the roles that supers take?

Referring to CAV/PAG, I hope that many of the readers were able to watch the New York City Opera productions of the two operas shown on IPTV not long ago. The operas had their settings moved to New York City's Little Italy but taking place in the time of the original opera settings (Sicily at the end of the 19th century). It worked out very well and did not give the viewer the sense of incongruity of time and place one got from a recent NYC production of COSI FAN TUTTE set in contemporary New York. Some libretti do not translate easily to time and/or cultural change shifts without marked alterations.

As most of you know by now, the opera for Spring 1993 will be Smetana's BARTERED BRIDE, in place of Dvorak's RUSALKA which for one reason or another cannot be done by the University Opera Theater. Anyway, the idea is to celebrate the centennial of Dvorak's 1893 visit to Iowa even if it means substituting Smetana for Dvorak. There will be various music and festive celebrations scattered around Cedar Rapids, Iowa City and Spillville during 1993. It is possible that the UI Opera Theater will put on a Dvorak opera, THE JACOBIN, in a concert or semi-staged production (in Macbride Hall?) during the summer of 1993.

### REPORT OF MEETINGS

Unless otherwise indicated, the Supers meetings take place in the Lounge of the Music Building. Anywhere from 20 to 30 members usually attend. The meetings convene at 7:00 p.m. and adjourn fairly promptly, a little after 8:00 p.m. Generally, most Supers stay for a coffee/snack socializing period that may last about 30 to 40 minutes. Thus the attendees can count on being back home by 9 o'clock. We continually get new members. Invite your friends to join.

The Supers meeting of Monday, September 14, 1992 opened with a number of announcements of forthcoming broadcasts on KSUI featuring Evangeline Glass's recital and The Opera Theater's production of IL TROVATORE.

THE BARTERED BRIDE is to be the opera for Spring, 1993. Don Walker reported on the plans of the November First Coalition for a memorial concert and the need for volunteers to help distribute white carnations on November first. The matter of the Green Room renovation and decoration was discussed with the ad hoc Green Room committee under the direction of Howard Wenger and they were asked to continue their work.



The meeting of October 20, 1992 had to take place in a chorus practice room as the MB Lounge, the usual meeting place, was devoid of furniture. Nobody's feelings were hurt as the shared attitude was "at last the broken down chairs and couches were going to be replaced!" Announcements included calling attention to Himie Voxman's talk scheduled October 23rd at the Senior Center, Eldon Obrecht's talk for November 6th also at the Senior Center, and a reminder of the November 1 Memorial Concert. The Music School Archive photographs have been matted and framed and are now on display in Clapp Recital Hall. More discussion of the Green Room Redecoration project was held and the committee members will meet in the Green Room sometime soon to evaluate what needs to be done. It was decided to hold two receptions in the near future: one following the Opera Workshop on November 21st and the other a reception for the Music Department faculty after the University Symphony concert on December 2d. The usual procedure for volunteers preparing and setting up the receptions will be followed as the Supers are well experienced in these matters. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 16.

#### A LETTER FROM ELEANORE BOWERS

The following letter, on a beautiful Brittany Landscape (Monet) card, dated October 17, 1992, was received by the editor and read to the Supers at the meeting of October 20. I want to share it with all Supers.

"Dear Supers

Thank you for the wonderful retirement dinner party! I have started to write so many times and for just as many reasons have not finished, but today I am determined. After all I was a costume supervisor, not a writer of great prose. The party was great, as were the Stewarts' beautiful home and view, perfect Italian food and so many lovely people.

Thank you for the many gifts, candy, gift certificates, poem (given a prominent spot in my dining room) and the many happy notes that were in the guest book.

Since the party I have kept busy with sewing, home projects and travel. My last trip was to Montana for the birth of my first grandchild, a beautiful boy, born on September 13, named Miles.

Retirement is great and I look forward to getting to know you all better, while being more active in Opera Supers. Thank you, everyone, for such a memorable retirement party!

Sincerely

Eleanore Bowers "

Eleanore attended and participated in the October 20 meeting in keeping with her intent to be more active in Opera Supers.

#### TWENTIETH CENTURY OPERA, NEW OR OLD?

We so seldom see or hear contemporary opera that I decided to make a list for myself of all operas composed in the 20th century that I have on tapes or records in my own collection. It was at that point I realized that the 20th century is coming to a close in less than a decade and here we are still calling operas composed at anytime during this century as "new". Did the audience that attended the premiere of Verdi's AIDA (1871) refer to the operas composed from 1790 to 1830 (Mozart, Weber, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, etc.) as a new or old opera? Many of us consider Berg's LULU, Prokofiev's THE LOVE FOR THREE ORANGES, Shostakovich's LADY MACBETH, Janacek's KATA KABANNOVA, to mention a few, as "new" operas despite the



fact that they were all written more than 50 years ago. How about Puccini operas, most of which were composed in this century? Who refers to these as "new"? What about Benjamin Britten's operas? Bartok's DUKE BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE? Are these still regarded as "modern" operas because they are 20th century works or is it that what sounds unfamiliar or strange ("new" to your ears?) is so labelled? What would you do about Donizetti's ALINA? It would be new to most of your ears but the sound would not be unfamiliar. How many of you saw Robert Ward's THE CRUCIBLE either here by the University Opera Theater some years ago or more recently by Des Moines Metro (starring Kimm Julian)? That is considered a "contemporary" opera, is it not? Yet it was composed around 1960 (premiered in October 1961). That is 30 years ago! Less time intervened between Beethoven's FIDELIO (1814) and Wagner's DER FLIEGENDE HOLLANDER (1841). Let's go one better: Kurth Weill's AUFSTIEG UND FALL DER STADT MAHAGONNY, reacted to by many as "too modern" after its revival in the 1950's. That opera was composed over 60 years ago. What do you make of Kirk Mecham's TARTUFFE, Stephen Paulus's THE WOODLANDERS, Argento's THE ASPERN PAPERS, Menotti's GOYA, Adams's NIXON IN CHINA, Corigliano's GHOST OF VERSAILLES, or Philip Glass's THE VOYAGER? These really are contemporary operas that have been broadcast over KSUI or on IPTV the last couple of years. These operas sound different than the 20th century works such as Copland's THE TENDER LAND, Delius' IRMELIN, Respighi's LA FIAMMA, Richard Strauss's DAPHNE, Szymanowski's KING ROGER, Zemlinsky's A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY, Korngold's VIOLANTE, or Busoni's DOKTOR FAUST. A point I wish to make is that you can prepare yourself for truly contemporary opera by listening to (and viewing, if possible) the wide variety of early and mid-20th century operas that are rarely performed but are becoming available through recordings. However, new opera, with new sounds, hard-to-listen-to vocal passages may come across better to you if you can see the performances rather than merely listen to them. A case in point is Corigliano's GHOST OF VERSAILLE. Just hearing the premiere broadcast was difficult and a bit mystifying as to why the audience was laughing so hilariously in spots, despite having a synopsis of the story at hand. But when it was telecast and the performance could be viewed, it became not only more comprehensible but also easier to listen to. This suggests to me that introducing a new opera with a concert stage performance rather than a fully staged one is likely to fail unless the music and the vocal lines are outstandingly capable of a separate existence. Most present day new operas that I have heard do not reach that level. New operas tend not to have number pieces (arias, duets, etc.) to carry out the story as do our musicals. Perhaps that is why they lack appeal. If any of you want to compose an opera, keep that in mind. One can use modern musical structures, tempi, chromaticism (or lack thereof), atonality and neotonality and still make a work singable for the human voice and listenable for the human ear. The majority of musical composers whose works have lasted over the years are those who could and did write songs whether composing a theater work (opera) or an instrumental solo or ensemble piece. Brahms never wrote an opera, but he did write songs. Mozart did it all and he was a song writer, too, but a Mozart is a rare phenomenon. Schubert was a musical genius who wrote songs, great quartets and symphonies but had very little success with opera. Philip Glass, in our times, has composed several operas as well as piano pieces and works for small ensembles. He has recently expanded some smaller works into a "symphony" and has composed a new set of songs. Maybe he should write more songs before he attempts another opera or a new large scale instrumental (symphonic) work. Ned Rorem writes songs as well as small scale orchestral works. When will



he do an opera ? It would appear that the decision to write an opera is a more difficult and complex for the present day composer than it was for the one of the 19th or early 20th century. The reasons for this could be the topic of a dissertation. I'll leave it at that. But "new music" opera deserves the opportunity to be heard and seen and the judgment as to its worthiness held in abeyance for the next generation of music lovers to make.

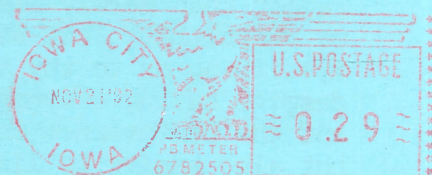
MISCELLANEOUS REMINDERS, REQUESTS, ETC.

Cookie/sweets makers and service helpers needed for the two receptions coming up in the near future (November 21, December 2). Call Miriam Canter, 338-1217.

COSTUME SHOP HELP NEEDED FOR SPRING OPERA. Cindy Kubu will be needing help for the production of THE BARTERED BRIDE. There will be work that can be done at home as well as in the Costume Shop. There will be work for non-sewers. It is not too early for the Supers who are able to help to call Cindy and let her know she can count on you. Call her at 335-1680.

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