

OPERA SUPERS of Iowa City NEWSLETTER

Volume One, No. 2

January 1986

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30 Brookfield Dr., Iowa City

REMINDER: Next Opera Supers meeting is Monday, February 10 at 7:00 p.m. in the Lounge of the Music Building.

Letter from the Editor

The first issue of the Newsletter seems to have been well received, judging by the comments reported back to the editor, although no written communications were received to support this view. Much of the credit for the apparent success of the first issue should go to Mona Shaw, who prepared the final copy and designed the masthead. Until I receive comments and suggestions to do otherwise, I shall continue with the general format used in the first issue.

I am disappointed that no one has submitted an answer to the BORIS Quiz. Can it be that it was too difficult, or is it that none of you felt it worth the effort to find the answers and try for the prize? The prize was, of course, a mystery, but those of you who know me should trust that it would be interesting and in keeping with the spirit of the venture. Make amends by submitting answers to the follow-up quiz in this issue of the newsletter.

Deadlines for material to be included in any Newsletter are difficult to establish as we have no regular schedule for publication. However, I can include anything received up to one week before publication. Ordinarily we plan on a newsletter issue to be in your hands at least one week before a meeting of the Opera Supers. At the end of this letter, there is a tear-sheet for you to complete and return regarding your wishes to receive the Newsletter, serve as an "active" member, etc. Your response will be appreciated.

DECEMBER 16TH MEETING REPORT

Mona Shaw, P.R. Coordinator, convened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. About a dozen were present including staff and Opera Supers. This group prepared the pre-order Boris mailing while Opera Theater designer, Margaret Wenk presented models and sketches of the BORIS set designs. It was exciting to get a glimpse of things to come and ask questions of Margaret.

Committee reports were then heard. Art Canter reported on the newsletter. (See comments in editor's letter.) Mona Shaw reported on Public Relations activities by giving a rundown of preparations of announcements and advertisements in newspapers, magazines, radio and t.v. P.R. assistant, Meg Sump described plans to develop a slide show oriented to the high school student, but also suitable for the general public. A suggestion was made to publicize BORIS through the volunteer efforts of Supers on Iowa

Public Television during IPTV Friends Week. Miriam Canter, Hospitality Committee chairperson, reported on the meeting held by that committee to discuss a variety of BORIS parties including a strike party, a Russian potluck, a pre-performance party for Supers only, and other special functions by Supers for friends and targeted audiences in Iowa City and elsewhere. The committee also discussed suggestions to bring programs into dorms, hosting student groups, involving music and theater students, etc. Other business included defining membership in Opera Supers. Any firm decision was postponed until our next meeting, but it was agreed that the Newsletter be sent to a wide audience, not restricting it to members, but not considering all Newsletter recipients official Opera Supers entitled to the privileges of membership. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m. and was followed by social and refreshment time until 9:00 p.m.

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Report Continued:

Perhaps this account of the meeting will entice more of you to attend in the future, if only out of curiosity or desire for the camaraderie of opera lovers and the refreshments served. Future meetings may even include entertainment. You will note also that Mona Shaw runs a tight meeting, comes prepared with an agenda, and sticks to it very well indeed. The meetings are productive and enjoyable. If you prefer to not to come as a member of the Supers, we welcome you as a guest or visitor.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. CALL FOR HELP! Shirley Harrison, Costume Committee chairperson, is desperately looking for more costume volunteers. The projects involved are simple, so don't be intimidated if you're not an expert tailor. We need to know by Feb. 18 how many will be helping (although actual work times will be scheduled later), so please contact her by this date.

Also, we need the following items donated: old leather coats, curtains, mattress pads, fake fur, rag rugs, wigs, and old costume jewelry. For any of this contact Shirley at 337-5729.

2. MORE SUPERS are needed for extra roles in BORIS. Prof. Glass is looking for about seven more men. If you're interested, please contact Kimm Julian at 353-4286.

3. Tax deduction forms for donations-in-kind (any expenses incurred on behalf of Opera Theater) may be obtained from Mona. If you wish to make cash donations, designate the recipient specifically, i.e. "The School of Music" or "Opera Theater Gift Fund" even though the donation is sent to the Iowa Foundation office. This specific designation ensures the gift will go to the organization of your choice.

4. CHILDREN ! Auditions will be held Monday, Feb. 3rd from 5:30-7:00 p.m. in the Opera Studio of the Music Building for children. Ten children, ages 7-10, will be cast. For more information, contact Kimm Julian at 353-4286 or Mona at 353-5626.

5. We need co-chairpersons for all of our committees. Refer to our last newsletter for names and addresses and contact committee chairs directly.

NOTES, NEWS, AND TRIVIA

David Hamilton, formerly associated with Opera Theater as a graduate student, sang the role of Lorenzo da Ponte in Argento's new opera CASANOVA which had three performances at the New York City Opera. Argento's opera, originally entitled CASANOVA'S HOMECOMING, was commissioned by the Minnesota Opera for the opening of the Ordway Theatre in St. Paul. Jennifer Ringo, also a former student, sang in Gounod's ROMEO AND JULIET at the Lake George (New York) Opera Festival in July 1985. She is scheduled to appear in FALSTAFF (Verdi) in Sarasota, Florida on Feb. 8th. Simon Estes is scheduled to be in PARSIFAL at the Met on April 10, 14, and 19, only a week before appearing as our Boris. Des Moines Metro Opera will be doing the world premiere of Hoiby's THE TEMPEST this coming summer. Also scheduled are FALSTAFF AND ROMEO AND JULIET. I have no information about casts. Czech opera fans should enjoy the U.S. premiere of Smetana's LIBUSE to be presented March 13th by the Opera Orchestra of New York, conducted by Gueler at Carnegie Hall, New York City.

A SEQUEL TO BORIS

Dvorak wrote an opera called DIMITRIJ (1882) which takes up the fate of the false Dimitri after the death of Boris. It is still performed occasionally and there are tapes available from some dealers. I do not know if there is a disk recording of the opera available. If anyone knows, I'd like to get the information.

THE BORIS QUIZ REVISITED

As I've indicated the response to the first BORIS quiz was disappointing, but the answers are as follows:

1. Anyone familiar with the opera libretto or even the synopsis should have been able to answer the first part of the question dealing with the crimes committed in BORIS other than the murder of the Czarevitch Dimitri ascribed to Boris. (As a matter of historical fact, it was never established that Boris did actually commit this crime, but it obviously made good theater for Pushkin.) The first crime was when "Grigor," the false Dimitri, fled the monastery. Apparently it was against the law in that time to defrock oneself. Police were looking for him as a criminal. The second crime was when the "Fool" had a penny ("groat", "kopek," whatever) stolen from him by the children. He even asks Boris to murder those who robbed him, just as Boris had murdered the child Dimitri.

2. The first American to sing Boris at the Bolshoi was George London (1960) and he sang the standard Bolshoi production of the second Rimsky-Korsakov version.

3. The librettist of BORIS was, of course, Mussorgsky. He based the libretto on both Puskin's drama (1826) and Karamzin's History of the Russian Empire. (1829 edition)

BORIS QUIZ REPRIEVE (Questions 4 & 5)

This will be easier for BORIS buffs. Answer these two questions and you will be eligible for the prize. The prize is an audio cassette tape of excerpts from my own collection. It will contain the same aria or monologue from BORIS comparing George London and Boris Christoff (same orchestra version). To be eligible you must be on the Opera Supers mailing list and not be a member of the School of Music faculty or Opera Theater staff. In case of duplicate correct entries, the earliest received will earn the prize. Should there be ties, the entry with the most interesting comments will get some sort of preferential treatment.

I am not adverse to giving two prizes, but I may add something for the "best" winner.

4. What was the real (full) name of "Dimitri" the Pretender?

5. What was the source of his belief that he was the true Dimitri?

Incidentally, it may help you to know that the name sought in question #4 is used in the title of an early, if not the original, version of Pushkin's drama which he called A COMEDY OF THE DISTRESS OF THE MUSCOVY STATE _____ (?).

A BORIS OPERA BEFORE MUSSORGSKY

I could have used this for a quiz question, but it is too far out. The historical subject was set to an opera in 1710 (even before Pushkin's play) by Johann Mattheson (1681-1764). Mattheson was a German organist, harpsichordist, singer (sang female roles), and composer (eight opera among other compositions) who was befriended by G.F. Handel and is said to have learned much from Handel. I have no information as to the actual title of the opera, whether it was successfully produced, staged and its subsequent fate.

A LINCOLN OPERA

Awhile back, Prof. Somville mentioned possibly commissioning an opera based on the life of Abraham Lincoln. Has anyone taken her up on this yet? The story is a natural: the intrigue of Cabinet members, the marriage conflict, the "other" woman (early, anyway), and the assassination. A librettist could even go to Stephen Vincent Benet's epic poem, John Brown's Body for segments dealing with the Lincoln story. Feel inspired?

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