

Entr'acte

The Opera
Supers of
Iowa City
Newsletter

Volume IV, Number 3

January 1989

Editor: Arthur Canter, 30 Brookfield Dr., Iowa City, IA 52245

Letter from the Editor

The preparation for the 1989 Spring opera is upon us. As many of you already know, the opera will be Bizet's *Carmen*. As he has done for past spring and summer productions by the University Opera Theater, your editor will orient the newsletter toward the opera for the most part. There will be brief articles on the background of the opera *Carmen*, biographical sketches of the composer and the librettists, other relevant information and trivia, all chosen to arouse your interest and increase your enjoyment, if not your understanding of the opera. Anything on these matters that readers can provide the editor for inclusion in *Entr'acte* will be appreciated. The meetings of the Supers can also focus upon *Carmen* in terms of the aid the Supers can provide in its production, publicity, promotion, etc. Some of the less active Supers may find the opportunity to become more active over the next several months. We encourage you to do so.

This issue of *Entr'acte* contains two articles provided by Supers. May they inspire others to do likewise.

December 6 Meeting Report

The meeting was an unusual event in that it was held at the home of one of our active members, Linda Behrendt, and featured a brief recital by one of our former members of the Opera Theater, Kimm Julian. The turnout was almost overwhelming. There was a short business meeting, announcements were made regarding the spring opera and needs for Supers for some non-singing parts in the opera. Kimm Julian with Beaumont Glass at the piano entertained the group with two arias and three "holiday" songs. The meeting adjourned for fabulous refreshments which had been brought by the members attending the meeting.

Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the Behrendts for opening their home to the Supers for this meeting and being such gracious hosts.

Letter from Tokyo— Robert Carmichael

September 10, 1988

Just a note to assure you that Iowa Opera Supers keep popping into view. My own late-blooming and mercifully short opera career has taken a turn for the worse. After serving in the chorus of Iowa's spectacular *Boris Godunov* in 1986—and in which Art Canter and others there also did yeoman duty—I now find myself on the stage with La Scala opera company. For their tour to Tokyo they brought 700 people (plus 120 truckloads of sets, costumes, orchestra instruments etc.) from Milan for the month's stay. However, they also advertised locally for some non-Japanese extras (supers). Since I satisfied their main requirement (being non-Japanese), I find myself currently as a temple priest of the 6th century B.C. in Jerusalem and Babylon. The opera is *Nabucco* (short for Nebuchadnezzar), Verdi's first acclaimed opera. So in my quest to be an operatic "spear-carrier," I've been in two operas and haven't been able to carry a spear yet (much less a tune!).

Tokyo is heaven for opera-lovers. Within a year we'll have the N.Y. Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Bavarian State Opera, Vienna Opera, Bolshoi Opera (doing *Boris Godunov* among others, next July), and Royal Opera. All tickets are sold out for such events months in advance, at prices that range from \$150-\$300 per seat. I sprang for a ticket for my wife, Jocelyn (UI mezzo-soprano, teaching in Tokyo at the Mausashino Music University for the Year) for La Scala's opening of *Nabucco*—200 bucks got her a seat in the second balcony somewhere above cloud

(Continued on next page.)

(Tokyo Letter, cont.)

level. She still claims it was one of the finest operatic productions she's ever seen. I saw the opera from my standing-room spot on the stage (the only way I was going to be able to afford to go). Nice view, but noisy with all that singing going on.

The extras (about fifty of them) are drawn from the local foreign community—business, governmental and diplomatic, academic—and come from many nations. By extraordinary coincidence, the other temple priest and my constant companion "on stage" (although he's been in Japan for 23 years as a Methodist minister) is from Des Moines!

Our best to all in Iowa City,
Yours truly,
Robert Carmichael
UI Professor of Geology
Visiting Professor, '88-89
Meiji University, Tokyo

(Editors note: Robert's Tokyo address, for those who would like to write him, is c/o No. 3-3, 6-133-3 Sakuradai, Nerima-ku, Tokyo, 176, Japan)

Which Language Shall It Be?

by Mel Sunshine

Up until a few years ago, I was adamantly opposed to opera in any language other than the one in which it had been written. The first English-translated opera that I had heard was many years ago while I was a student at the University of Illinois. In one word, it was ludicrous.

The translation was bad—almost literal—so much so that the audience was laughing when we should have been crying and crying when we should have been happy. Additionally, no attempt was made to match sounds with notes so that the lyric beauty of *Boheme* became harsh and laughable. This experience, over the years, was followed by several rather poor translations heard on Saturday broadcasts from the Met.

And then I spent two years in Stockholm where I had the marvelous opportunity to attend 57 productions of 35 different operas. All were in Swedish except one *La Traviata* in which Violetta sang her role in Italian. This all took a lot of getting used to—not only could I not understand well the language into which

the operas had been translated but familiar operas no longer sounded familiar. Fortunately, other aspects of these productions predominated, and I am still able to evoke fond memories of opera in Stockholm.

After two seasons of the San Francisco Opera, I found myself in Iowa City where I initially shied away from opera performed by the U of I Opera Theater—thinking back to my disappointments at the U of Illinois. However, then came Beaumont...

I heard some operatic excerpts at the Old Capitol Mall during Beaumont's second year at Iowa. My curiosity was piqued—not only did the English make sense but it sounded rather nice. So, with some trepidation, I finally bought tickets to one of the full-length productions and was very much surprised to find that opera translated into English could be quite enjoyable both from the sense of understanding what is going on and from the beauty of the total sound. This feeling has grown over the years since my first opera here. I still enjoy hearing opera in the language in which it was written, but now I can equally enjoy opera in English.

(Editor's note: Mel has been so taken in by the Glass regime that he has performed as a super in several operas to date. He gets his cues in English.)

University of Iowa Opera before 1981

I have been able to determine what operas were performed by the University School of Music before the advent of Beaumont Glass as director of the Opera Theater. What follows is a list of operas presented by the School of Music during the 30-year span, 1951-1981. The list does not contain any operas performed by visiting companies, professional opera companies on tour, etc. Almost all performances were given in Macbride Hall for three or four days in July or early August. After Hancher Auditorium and Clapp Recital Hall became available, operas were performed in those halls late in the spring semester and during the summer session, as is the custom now.

Die Fledermaus, appears to have been the first opera presented by the School of Music's own students and staff and was performed in the summer of 1951. The following are the operas given subsequently and the year of the

performance. Where there was a later presentation of the same opera, the later date is included.

Così fan tutte (1952, 1966); *Love for Three Oranges* (1954, 1976); *Tosca*, Act 1 only (1955); *Marriage of Figaro* (1955, 1975); Albert Herring—Britten (1957); *Rita*—Donizetti and *Western Child*—Bezanson, a double feature with this being the world premiere of *Western Child* (1959); *Carmen* (1960); *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1961); *The Crucible*—Robert Ward, with the composer in attendance (1962); *La Traviata* (1963); *La Bohème* (1964); *Die Kluge*—Orff and *Angelique - Iberty*, a double feature (1965); *The Barber of Seville* (1968); *The Deluded Bridegroom*—Mozart and *\$4,000*—Tom Turner, with the Turner opera having its world premiere (1969); *Madam Butterfly* (1972, 1978); *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*, a favorite combination (1977); *Don Pasquale* (1977); *Pagliacci* (1979); *Oedipus Rex*—Stravinsky, an oratorio opera (1979); *Eugene Onegin* (1980).

The University School of Music had put on the first performance of at least one opera by William Fisher in the sixties. I have vague memories of one of them, *The Happy Prince*, that had its premiere performance around 1962 or 1963. This was an opera with a libretto based on a story similar to that of the *Emperor's Nightingale*, if I remember it accurately. Apparently there was a second opera written by Fisher that was presented by the University subsequently, but I cannot recall this event. Fisher, for those who are unfamiliar with the man, is the Marshalltown magnate who formed the Gramma Fisher Foundation which has supported a number of Metropolitan Opera productions in recent years as well as some University of Iowa School of Music programs. Do any readers recall either or both of these Fisher operas?

Including what the Opera Theater has put on since 1981, it would appear that *Madame Butterfly* and *Così fan tutti* were presented most often locally by University of Iowa groups. Note that at least three, if not four, world-premiere performances were offered during the 30-year period. Surely it is time for another one. What about it, composers or would-be composers out there? If Philip Glass can come up with *Nixon in China* as a suitable topic for opera, cannot one of the readers create a *Fall of the House of Bakkers*, a country-folk opera?

Strike Party Food Committee

Two or three persons are needed to supervise volunteers who will provide food and beverage for the Spring Opera Strike Party. All procedures for this aid have been carefully worked out and written down, so the chairpersons need not hesitate to serve this role. It is primarily a telephone-contact job.

Volunteers to Help in Staging *Carmen*

Now is the time to sign up to help in scenery and costumes. This will allow us to make a list of volunteers for these areas to offer the opera production staff when they are ready for help. Call the appropriate chairperson listed on the back page or Mona Shaw if unable to contact that person.

Supers to Attend *Fidelio*

If you wish to take advantage of group rates for tickets for the Saturday, March 18th performance of *Fidelio* by the Cedar Rapids Symphony and soloists, please contact Miriam Canter (338-1217). At the December meeting, the Supers indicated a preference for the Saturday night performance over Monday (the 20th). Group rates for this performance are: \$11.50 each for 10 to 25 persons; \$8.50 per, for over 26 persons in the group. There is a possibility of the group of Supers being invited to attend a post-performance reception. Deadline for the ticket arrangements is mid-February.

January Events

Events sponsored by the School of Music in January include:

1/22/ 89; Faculty Recital; Sylvia Wang, piano; 8:00 p.m., Clapp Recital Hall

1/25/89; Faculty Recital; Eldon Obrecht, double bass; 8:00 p.m., Clapp Recital Hall ^{Dark} _{School}

1/27/89; Iowa Woodwind Quintet; 8:00 p.m., Clapp Recital Hall

1/28/89; Guest Recital; William Scharnburg, horn; 8:00 p.m., Clapp Recital Hall

All events are free. Write Mona Shaw for a complete list of Spring events.

Important Numbers

Arthur Canter, newsletter, 338-1217

Miriam Canter, hospitality, 338-1217

Shirley Harrison, costumes, 337-5729

Linda Behrendt, publicity, 337-5342

Mary Wall, scenery, 338-2618

Marilyn Somville, Director of the School of Music, 335-1601

Beaumont Glass, Director of Opera Theater, 335-1669

Mona Shaw, Public Relations Coordinator, 335-1667

Dwight Sump, Opera Production Manager, 335-1153

Margaret Wenk, Opera Designer, 335-2988

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