

Opera Supers of Iowa City Newsletter

Vol. III, No. 6
July 1988

Arthur Canter, Editor
30 Brookfield Drive
Iowa City, IA 52245

Letter from the Editor

It has been gratifying to have heard from a number of the readers and to have received material for inclusion in the Newsletter. I am encouraged to keep on with its production.

In recent meetings the Supers have discussed the perennial problem of getting adequate publicity for the Spring and Summer Operas. Complaints have been heard about the dearth of timely publicity for other musical and cultural events. It appears that whatever space is given to them by the local press is often poorly timed, if sufficient, and too late to have the desired effect of increasing audience participation. It ill serves our community to have a feature about the background or other material of an opera if it appears in the newspaper only the day before the event. It is not as if we had the opportunity to take in a performance the next week as would be the case in a large metropolitan area where such events occur over an extended season. There are many individuals in the community who are involved in the creation, production, staging, and performance of musical events. The same can also be said for the theater (Community and University), and other performing arts productions in the community. Is there no interest in who these people are, what they do, how they do it, for whom it is being done, at what expense, and what difference it makes to the community? Are cultural affairs only for the elite? What if the newspapers were to make the effort and give the space to educate and inform the public regularly about such events that take place locally, regionally and nationally? A calendar of events, while useful, does not take the place of interesting and enlightening feature articles.

Iowa City is no ordinary community. It is a center for the arts as well as a medical center, an education center, a sports center, and a retail business center.

What can the Supers do? Start writing letters to individuals--not to the "Letters to

the Editor" column. The only ones who will read what you have to say in that will be those who already agree with you. Rightly, or wrongly, write as if you are dealing with an executive editor or a publisher who personally does not care one whit about cultural events. Personal biases should not dictate public policy. Can you imagine a publisher who hates sports not including a sports column in the paper? Let it be known that Hancher Auditorium purchases advertising space in the newspaper as does the Opera Theater and other arts groups if quid pro quo is an issue. (See names and addresses at end of Newsletter)

Report on the Meeting of June 20, 1988

We had a good turnout for the meeting. Charles and Ruth Severson, Supers attending their first meeting, were introduced.

Rosemary Lack gave details of her benefit recital to take place on Sunday, the 26th. The Supers would be providing the refreshments. Professor Somville announced plans for a recital to be given by Simon Estes on September 17 (date he selected). This will be a limited tickets affair. Mary Louise Plautz reported on her proposal that the Supers help promote the Summer opera, and opera in general by mingling downtown with pedestrians wearing costumes, singing, handing out elixirs, flyers, etc. the week before the opera. This led to discussion of how this could be carried out. It was suggested that it be timed to coincide with the July Sidewalk Sales days (July 15 and 16).

Miriam Canter read a letter from Michele Crider's mother giving more up-to-date news about Michele's activities. Miriam also passed around a 1918 Metropolitan Opera playbill sent to her by the Cortons and a copy of the Des Moines Metro Opera playbill for the current season. This led to discussion of getting the Metro to advertise in our Spring opera playbill and what it takes to get such a thing done.

The rest of the meeting was devoted to details of activities centered on the Summer opera: the strike party food, the post-performance party for Supers and opera performers and staff, etc. The post-performance party will be hosted by the Behrendts on Tuesday evening, August 2, beginning at 6:00 p.m. The usual potluck will emphasize Italian cuisine and elixirs. The meeting adjourned for cool refreshments.

Report on the Meeting of July 5

We had a surprisingly good turnout for this meeting which was billed as having as its major focus the plans for promoting Elixir on Sidewalk Days, Saturday July 16. There was a brief discussion on the matter of press relations which led to a decision to have some of the Supers arrange a meeting with the publisher of The Press-Citizen. (Refer to the Letter from the Editor, this issue, for points of concern.) Hope Solomons reported on her contribution of menu and recipes for our post-performance potluck supper to be given space in the newspaper by Johanna Beers.

Miriam Canter brought word from Rosemary Lack who wished to thank all the Supers for providing the reception following her recent recital. She will be sending thank-you notes to individuals in the near future. The rest of the meeting was spent on details for the July 16 promotional event. The meeting adjourned early to permit volunteers to try on the costumes they will wear for the promotional. Mona Shaw felt compelled to express her appreciation on her own and on behalf of the School of Music for the supportive work done by the Supers.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, August 30, to go over any involvement of the Supers for the September benefit recital to be given by Simon Estes (see end of Newsletter for details!).

Guest Features

Mel Sunshine, one of the most active of our active Supers and I have shared the Spring opera stage on at least two occasions and now I share the Newsletter stage with him. He was working in Norway for a two-month period (Mel is a microbiologist, if you must know) and just had to report on an experience with opera there. In past years he had spent time in Sweden and became well acquainted with operatic offerings in that country.

I Never Thought I'd . . .

What is it that I thought I'd never do? After doing it, I walked home wondering what I had done it. Well, I never thought I'd do it but I walked out in the middle of an opera.

I walked out in the middle of a production of Eugene Onegin given by Den Norsk Opera in Oslo, Norway. As I have been told, Den Norsk Opera is the only professional opera company in Norway. So why would anyone walk out of a production of a professional opera company, let alone me. I still ask myself why I did it and the only answer I come up with is that I have become accustomed to a high level of professionalism from the many excellent opera productions put on the by Opera Theater of The University of Iowa.

So, what was it about Den Norsk Opera's production of Eugene Onegin that prompted me to walk out during the middle of the performance? The reasons are many and each by itself would not suffice. Overall, I would say that the production was hokey, the scenery was tacky, the orchestra played too loud, and what came out didn't sound like Tchaikovsky, the staging was ludicrous--buxom ladies shouldn't cavort around the stage trying to be virginal maidens, and the lead singers couldn't sing--all I know is that I could have done a better job singing any of the roles and the only place I'm allowed to sing by my family is when I'm driving alone in the car.

Was I right to walk out of such a performance? I think so. After all, it was my 170 N kr (\$27.75) which had paid for the ticket and for that kind of money, I think I deserved a production at least equivalent to those which we are so fortunate to experience right here in Iowa City. --Mel Sunshine

Steve Slezak and Don Walker Join the Exiles

Steve Slezak is a producer/announcer for KSUI-FM and operates "The Collector's Vault," a tape recording service specializing in rare opera and symphonic performances. My question about what five recordings or sets of recordings one would take on exile prompted him to submit the following item:

While with the American Forces Radio & Television Service during the Vietnam War era, I was stationed in some of the most desolate, remote, and lonely places one might imagine, so I have a clear concept of what that other-planet existence might be like. What I wouldn't have given to have had

some of my favorite recordings with me during some of those real-life "exiles"!

I must confess that, for me, most commercial recordings are about as interesting as a glob of hot fat. The endless issues of already overly recorded works, and the total neglect of many other outstanding compositions and artists I find hard to accept. That is why my interests have turned from normal fare to the "tape underground," and rare operas and concert works the record companies have never bothered to make available. That is another long story however.

Among those numerous commercial recordings of certain works, there are some real jewels, of course, and some of those are rather neglected. I'd like to share with you five outstanding favorites in that "rather neglected" category, suitable for taking along on that exile to another planet.

The first three were issued in the Vanguard Everyman series in the late fifties and are still available . . . and even affordable.

Beethoven-Symphony #3 (Eroica) Sir Adrian Boult conducts the Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra of London (a pseudonym for the London Philharmonic). Excellent sonics and orchestral balance, and magnificent performance. A perfect model for all others to follow. (SRV-127SD)

Beethoven-Piano Concerto #5 (Emperor) Halle Orchestra of Manchester; Sir John Barbirolli, conductor. The pianist is the Rumanian artist Mindru Katz. He is hardly known in this country, but what a fabulous performer! His handling of the middle movement puts all others to shame. An all round winner. (SRV-138SD . . . issued July 1959)

Sibelius. Symphony #1 Halle Orchestra, Barbirolli conducting. Of the 47 performances I've encountered, this still ranks as the finest concept ever committed to disc. Barbirolli captures all the lyricism and special nuances of this work that most other conductors go through like a plow horse. This rendition is even superior to his remake on Angel, issued shortly before his death. Gorgeous. (SRV-132SD, issued 1958)

My other two recordings are on the London label:

Giuseppe Di Stefano--his 1959 operatic recital of French and Italian areas. A few years later, this gorgeous voice would be a shell of what it had been. This recording

is what got me hooked on opera, so I have a great devotion to it. (OS25081, issued November 1959)

Gustav Mahler. Symphony No. 8. No recording of this is really ideal, but Solti's is about as close as one can get. I still like the air-check tape in my collection of James Dixon's 1977 Hancher performance. With a primarily student ensemble, he achieved a performance better than most of the commercially available recordings. Listening to a really fine performance of this gargantuan work is as close to a religious experience as I usually get--a very uplifting work.

This may prompt you to investigate these recordings, and if so, I'm sure you'll find them as special as I do.--Steve Slezak

Don Walker, who has been one of the active Supers since the inception of this organization, also submitted a list of recordings that he might like to take on the exile trip. He admitted having great difficulty in making up his mind and seems to have taken delight in seeing how many records he could find to fit within the rule of five albums. We shall charge him excess baggage fees.

"My record choices for exile music:

1. Beethoven: Complete String Quartets (Amadeus) DGG (11 records)
2. Mozart: 21 Piano Concerti (Anda, Salzburg Orchestra) DGG (12 records)
3. Wagner: Die Meistersinger, Tristan, Lohengrin (set) (Vravisio, Bayreuth Festival) Phillips (14 records)
4. Stravinsky: Music Set (Stravinsky, Croft) CBS (31 records)
5. Schubert Lieder v. 2 (Fischer-Dieskau, G. Moore) DGG (13 records)

Total: 81 records!--Don Walker

If I take Don along with us, I can change my choice on the Beethoven quartets and substitute something else, but can he get away with what he proposes?

Addendum to the Non-Operatic Donizetti from Joan Falconer

As the Editor noted in the last issue, Donizetti wrote other music besides operas. The Music Library has been acquiring a large number of his piano pieces, both for solo piano and for piano four-hands, most of them dating from the composer's youth. Look for them in the Music Library card catalog under Donizetti's name, conveniently grouped together under "Piano Music" and "Piano

Music, 4 hands." Opera Supers who do not already have borrowing privileges in the University Libraries may apply for a borrower's permit; just identify yourself as an Opera Super, and you may borrow any music for a period of two weeks. Hint: If you want to bypass the card catalog, most of the solo piano pieces are in call number M25.D67, and most of the solo piano pieces are in call number M25.D67, and most of the piano duets in M202.D66.--Joan Falconer, Music Librarian

More on Donizetti and His Approach to Music

According to John Allitt, in a Donizetti opera "The music is demanding yet tailor-made for the voice, whilst the orchestration is as hard to play correctly as any of Mozart's operatic scores. Donizetti not only asks for first-class singers and musicians, but above all for sensitive performers who are capable of penetrating beneath the conventional operatic veils in order to reveal something of the music's essence." (in his essays on Donizetti and the Tradition of Romantic Love, published by the Donizetti Society, 1975). Allitt makes a number of points about Donizetti that help to give us a new look at this music. The important issue is that Donizetti followed very closely the principles of composition laid down by his teacher Johann Simon Mayr. Thus it was that Donizetti did not use the piano for developing his musical ideas but rather composed directly for the instruments and orchestration to be used for the work. If he used the piano, it was for compositions to be played on that instrument. In his notes for a lecture he gave to the French Academy in 1842, Donizetti wrote (translation by Allitt), "Music is only declamation accented by sounds. Therefore, every composer must conceive and compose from the accent of the declamation of words." The melody, rhythm and orchestral texture of his operas were intended to follow the flow and patterning of the words. In a very true sense we are violating the nature of his operas by having them sung in translation unless the translator is able to give meticulous attention to the fit of music to the "accent of the declamation of words." Thus it was that when Donizetti revised the successful opera La Fille du Régiment into La figlia del reggimento, the work took on quite a different musical flavor. We can only conjecture what Donizetti would

have done to a German Die Regimentstochter.

Donizetti also made use of the traditional symbolism in the use of various instruments in his orchestrations. Each instrument was said to have a different "color," "personality" or "inflexion" to offer to a dramatic situation. "Anyone who cannot succeed in this or who is mediocre will only compose music devoid of feeling (i.e., content)." He used the particular instruments and sets of them in ways that would draw attention to certain words and phrases of the libretto to provide echoes, so to speak, rather than the mere doubling of the sounds. His lecture notes go on to state: "A composer must have, besides the ability to create through the intuitive and imaginative faculties of the mind, science, taste and practice . . . a painter who excels in painting may fail miserably in music. Michelangelos arise but seldom. One may have science but lack of taste; one may have taste and practice [i.e., craft in the art] but lack science; one may have it all and be a genius. Science may be learnt by anybody through conscientious work, practice comes with practice and with diligent work practice is acquired. Taste and genius, however, must be innate in the composer."

As did his teacher Mayr, Donizetti considered no opera ever "finished." Each revival of a work called for changes. Some he revised to such an extent he retitled them. These include the three-act Maria Stuarda, revised as a two-act Buondelmonte; Poluita (3 acts) into Les Martyrs (4 acts); L'ange de Nisida, reworked as La favorita; and Rosmonda d'Inghilterra into Eleonora di Gujenna.

Announcements, Miscellani **A Special Benefit Recital**

By the time this newsletter circulates, you will have already received an invitation, but in any case all Supers should become aware of this event and plan accordingly: A special benefit recital is to take place on the evening of Saturday, September 17 in Clapp Recital Hall. The purpose is to raise money for music student scholarship aid.

Featured will be bass-baritone Simon Estes. Michele Crider will also be on the program. Beaumont Glass will be the accompanist, as will Eldon Obrecht (to provide bass continuo for some selections). The seating will of necessity be limited.

Tickets will be priced at \$100 per seat with a special section at \$250 per seat. Special payment plans for tickets will be arranged for Supers and music faculty members (contact Mona Shaw, School of Music).

The program as currently set will include:

The three Mozart Concert Arias for Bass (Estes)

Two opera arias (Crider)

The Four Serious Songs--Brahms (Estes)

A group of spirituals (Estes)

Duet from Porgy and Bess (Crider and Estes)

Show tunes (from South Pacific, etc.) (Estes)

An operatic aria encore (Estes)

The University of Iowa Foundation and the School of Music are the sponsors for the event which had been proposed by Mr. Estes. Patrons will be invited to a reception following the concert.

The Post-Performance (Elixir) Potluck Supper

This now "classic" event will be hosted by the Behrendts on Tuesday evening, at 6:00 p.m., August 2. The address is 822 Park Road. Supers, opera theater staff, performers and faculty are invited. Parking is available on Lee and on Normandy Drive if the Behrendts' driveway is full. Linda says to bring your swim suits. Please call Miriam Canter (338-1217) if you plan to attend. We will feature Italian food but this is not required.

Names and Addresses for Commentaries Regarding Publicity

Mary Parks Stier, President and Publisher, The Iowa City Press-Citizen, 319 East Washington, Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Richard N. Thien, Executive Editor, The Iowa City Press-Citizen, address as above

Joe Hladky, Publisher, Cedar Rapids Gazette, 500 Third Avenue SE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401

Peter M. Alexander, Director, Arts Center Relations, OPL, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242

William Casey, Publisher, The Daily Iowa, 111 CC, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242

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