

HOME
 COMMENTARY
 FEATURED OPERAS
 NEWS
 REPERTOIRE
 REVIEWS
 ABOUT
 CONTACT
 LINKS
 SEARCH SITE

Enter Keywords

Search

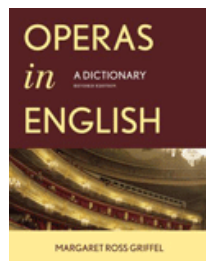
Subscribe to Opera Today

Receive articles and news via RSS feeds or email subscription.

Feature Articles

Email Address

Subscribe



Glimmerglass: *Butterfly* Leads the Pack

Every so often an opera fan is treated to a minor miracle, a revelatory performance of a familiar favorite that immediately sweeps all other versions before it.

Operalia, the World Opera Competition, Showcases 2014 Winners

On August 30, Los Angeles Opera presented the finals concert of Plácido Domingo's Operalia, the world opera competition. Founded in 1993, the contest endeavors to discover and help launch the careers of the most promising young opera singers of today. Thousands of applicants send in recordings from which forty singers are chosen to perform live in the city where the contest is being held. Last year it was Verona, Italy, this year Los Angeles, next year London.

***Elektra* at Prom 59**

The second day of the Richard Strauss weekend at the BBC Proms saw Richard Strauss's *Elektra* performed at the Royal Albert Hall on 31 August 2014 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Semyon Bychkov, with Christine Goerke in the title role.

Powerful Mahler Symphony no 2 Harding, BBC Proms London

Triumphant! An exceptionally stimulating Mahler Symphony No 2 from Daniel Harding and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, BBC Prom 57 at the Royal Albert Hall. Harding's Mahler Tenth performances (especially with the Berliner Philharmoniker) are pretty much the benchmark by which all other performances are assessed. Harding's Mahler Second is informed by such an intuitive insight into the whole traverse of the composer's work that, should he get around to doing all ten together, he'll fulfil the long-held dream of "One Grand Symphony", all ten symphonies understood as a coherent progression of developing ideas.

Nina Stemme's stunning Strauss *Salome*, BBC Proms London

The BBC Proms continued its Richard Strauss celebrations with a performance of his first major operatic success *Salome*. Nina Stemme led forces from the Deutsche Oper, Berlin, at the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday 30 August 2014, the first of a remarkable pair of Proms which sees *Salome* and *Elektra* performed on successive evenings

Santa Fe Opera Presents Updated, at One Point Up-ended, *Don Pasquale*

On August 9, 2014, Santa Fe Opera presented a new updated production of *Don Pasquale* that set the action in the 1950s. Chantal Thomas's Act I scenery showed the Don's furnishing as somewhat worn and decidedly dowdy. Later, she literally turned the Don's home upside down!

Dolora Zajick Premieres Composition

At a concert in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in San Jose, California, on August 22, 2014, a few selections preceded the piece the audience had been waiting for: the world premiere of Dolora Zajick's brand new composition, an opera scene entitled *Roads to Zion*.

Santa Fe Opera Presents Huang Ruo's *Sun Yat-sen*

By emphasizing the love between Sun Yat-sen and Soong Ching-ling, Ruo showed us the human side of this universally revered modern



15 Jun 2012

The Magic Flute in San Francisco

A feast for the eyes, a feast for the ears, a *Flute* from America's heartland that goes directly to your heart.

Maybe it's those three boy sopranos who impeccably deliver the words and tones of Mozart's three spirits and in their innocence make the hopes of mankind so real.

W. A. Mozart: *The Magic Flute*

Pamina: Heidi Stober;
 Tamino: Alek Shrader;
 Papageno: Nathan Gunn; The Queen of the Night: Albina Shagimuratova; Sarastro: Kristinn Sigmundsson; First Lady: Melody Moore; Second Lady: Lauren McNeese; Third Lady: Renée Tatum;
 Papagena: Nadine Sierra;
 Monostatos: Greg Fedderly;
 The Speaker: David Pittsinger; First Spirit: Etienne Valdez; Second Spirit: Joshua Reinier; Third Spirit: John Walsh; First Armored Man: Beau Gibson; Second Armored Man: Jordan Bisch.
 San Francisco Opera Orchestra and Chorus.
 Conductor: Rory Macdonald,
 Stage Director: Harry Silverstein; Production Designer: Jun Kaneko;
 Lighting Designer: Paul Pyant.
 War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, June 13, 2012.

Above: Albina Shagimuratova as *The Queen of the Night*

Photos by Cory Weaver courtesy of San Francisco Opera

Stream the web to your TV

google.com/Chro... wirelessly with Google Chromecast! Get yours for only \$35.

Chinese leader. Writer Lindsay Miyoshi has quoted the composer as saying that the opera is "about four kinds of love." It speaks of affection between friends, between parents and children, between lovers, and between patriots and their country.

Britten War Requiem – Andris Nelsons, CBSO, BBC Prom 47

In light of the 2012 half-centenary of the premiere in the newly re-built Coventry Cathedral of Benjamin Britten's War Requiem, the 2013 centennial celebrations of the composer's own birth, and this year's commemorations of the commencement of WW1, it is perhaps not surprising that the War Requiem – a work which was long in gestation and which might be seen as a summation of the composer's musical, political and personal concerns – has been fairly frequently programmed of late. And, given the large, multifarious forces required, the potent juxtaposition of searing English poetry and liturgical Latin, and the profound resonances of the circumstances of the work's commission and premiere, it would be hard to find a performance, as William Mann declared following the premiere, which was not a 'momentous occasion'.

Santa Fe Opera Presents an Imaginative Carmen

Santa Fe opera has presented *Carmen* in various productions since 1961. This year's version by Stephen Lawless takes place during the recent past in Northern Mexico near the United States border. The performance on August 6, 2014, featured Ana Maria Martinez as a monumentally sexy Gypsy who was part of a drug smuggling group.

Elgar Sea Pictures : Alice Coote, Mark Elder Prom 31

Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé Orchestra persuasively balanced passion and poetry in this absorbing Promenade concert. Elder's tempi were fairly relaxed but the result was spaciousness rather than ponderousness, with phrases given breadth and substance, and rich orchestral colours permitted to make startling dramatic impact.

Berio Sinfonia, Shostakovich, BBC Proms

Although far from perfect, the performance of Berio's Sinfonia in the first half of this concert was certainly its high-point; indeed, I rather wish that I had left at the interval, given the tedium induced by Shostakovich's interminable Fourth Symphony. Still, such was the programme Semyon Bychkov had been intended to conduct. Alas, illness had forced him to withdraw, to be replaced at short notice by Vasily Petrenko.

Four countertenors : Handel Rinaldo Glyndebourne

Handel's Rinaldo was first performed in 1711 at London's King's Theatre. Handel's first opera for London was designed to delight and entertain, combining good tunes, great singing with a rollicking good story. Robert Carsen's 2011 production of the opera for Glyndebourne reflected this with its tongue-in-cheek Harry Potter meets St Trinian's staging.

Santa Fe Opera Presents The Impresario and Le Rossignol

On August 7, 2014, the Santa Fe Opera presented a double bill of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Impresario* and Igor Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* (*The Nightingale*). *The Impresario* deals with the casting of an opera and *Le Rossignol* tells the well-known fairy tale about the plain gray bird with an exquisite song.

Barber in the Beehive State

Utah Festival Opera and Musical Theatre has gifted opera enthusiasts with a thrilling Barber,



Nathan Gunn as Papageno and Nadine Sierra as Papagena

Maybe it's the rhyming couplets of David Gockley's new translation of the lyrics, and the rhythm and flow, and the internal and period rhymes of his dialogues that harmonize like square dance calls. It's somewhere between cradle, pub and couch and makes you feel really good.

Certainly it's the kaleidoscope of lines and dots and a thousand colors, maybe more that percolate across the proscenium

canvas in always changing, never ending orders that make you feel that the good life will never end, and that, well, even if life may not always be that simple it keeps moving. Finally all those lines and all those dots will become a perfect circle!

This new *Magic Flute* is indeed a perfect circle, a masterpiece of conception and execution. There is even an illustrated book that engagingly documents the massive scope of a production process that traces the circle from idea to fact and makes artistic creation seem like a piece of cake.

Some of us like to think of San Francisco Opera as synonymous with Covent Garden and Vienna, like sharing productions with, uhm, La Scala (*Attila* for example) so it comes as a bit of a shock to realize that SFO is sharing productions with Omaha and Kansas City. In fact Japanese born artist Jun Kaneko, the creative force behind the sets and costumes of this production, makes his home in Omaha where he makes ceramics, conceives massive public art projects and designed *Madama Butterfly* for Opera Omaha.

San Francisco Opera has distinguished precedent for productions based on visual rather than theatrical art, like David Hockney's *Turandot*, and even like Marc Chagall's *Magic Flute*. And speaking of the *Flute*, South African artist William Kentridge created one for Brussels' Monnaie about a decade ago that set the benchmark pretty high.

and I don't mean . . . of Seville.

Stravinsky : Oedipus Rex, BBC Proms

In typical Proms fashion, BBC Prom 28 saw Stravinsky's Oedipus Rex performed in an eclectic programme which started with Beethoven's Egmont Overture and also featured Electric Preludes by the contemporary Australian composer Brett Dean. Sakari Oramo, was making the first of his Proms appearances this year, conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Singers and BBC Symphony Chorus.

Santa Fe Opera Presents a Passionate Fidelio

Santa Fe Opera presented Beethoven's *Fidelio* for the first time in 2014. Since the sides of the opera house are open, the audience watched the sun redden the low hanging clouds and set below the Sangre de Cristo mountains while Chief Conductor Harry Bicket led the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra in the rousing overture. At the same time, Alex Penda as the title character readied herself for the ordeal to come as she endeavored to rescue her unjustly imprisoned husband.

Rameau Grand Motets, BBC Proms

Best of the season so far! William Christie and Les Arts Florissants performed Rameau Grand Motets at late night Prom 17.

Adriana Lecouvreur, Opera Holland Park

Twelve years after Opera Holland Park's first production of Francesco Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, the opera made a welcome return.

Back to the Beginnings: Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* at Iford Opera.

The Italianate cloister setting at Iford chimes neatly with Monteverdi's penultimate opera *The Return of Ulysses*, as the setting cannot but bring to mind those early days of the musical genre.

OPERA TODAY ARCHIVES »



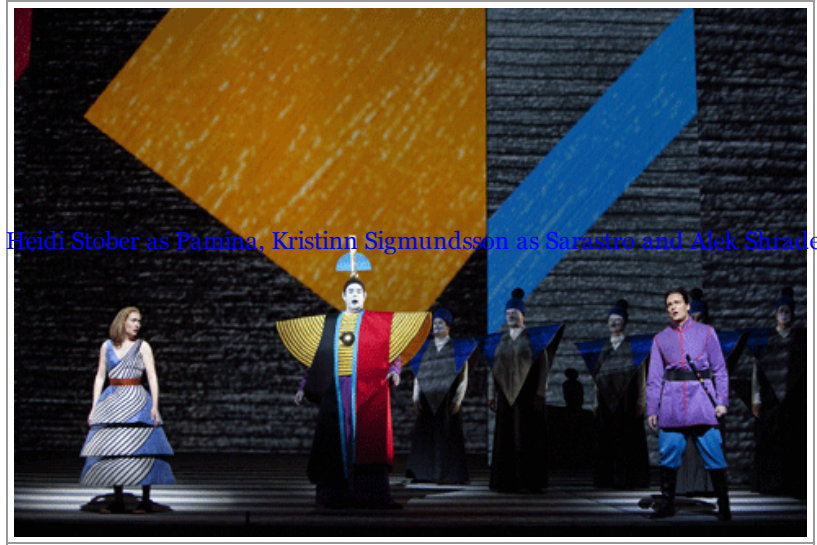
Greg Fedderly as Monostatos

But middle America has its own things to say these days, like Picasso's French Riviera had its things to say a hundred years ago at the Opéra de Monte Carlo. Maybe it says most about the America that looks westward to Asia for so much of its persona that remains so hidden. Artist Kaneko who emigrated to the U.S. in 1961 creates an endless landscape, like the American Midwest, but in Asian lines and colors. He constructs a Chinese puppet dragon and draws costumes that seem made of glazed clay or painted porcelain. In fact we felt quite at home as all of this is so much a part of our national heritage. Come to think of it.

Within this visual realm stage director Harry Silverstein finds constant movements and antics to enliven Gockley's earthy contemporary banter. Things are left pretty basic, the cosmic conflict between Sarastro and the Queen of the Night has the weight of a domestic spat. It is taken for granted that women need to be put in their place, not to mention that people of color exhibit libidos that are not philosophic and that love conquers all obstacles, like fire and water.

Casting was young and fun. Rather than attempt the more usual and appropriate *jugendliche* dramatic voices for Tamino and Pamina, San Francisco Opera cast light lyric tenor Alex Shrader and soubrette Heidi Stober. The fine singers brought youth and lightness and consummate charm to Mozart's young lovers, plus they seemed the very embodiment of corporate promise. Baritone Nathan Gunn was Tamino's cool sidekick Papageno, everyone's good friend who isn't going to make it out of the warehouse.

Russian dramatic coloratura Albina Shagimuratova with her threatening accent (even if slight — she is an alumna of the Houston Opera Studio) was the appropriately toned Queen of the Night. Like nearly always this role gets the biggest ovation because she has the highest notes, and of course the niftiest arias as well. Mlle. Shagimuratova well earned her ovation with extraordinarily clean delivery of her stratospheric notes. Iceland born bass Kristinn Sigmundsson used his Germanic accented English to add more imperative to righteousness though vocally he no longer has the equipment to embody such depth and authority.



Heidi Stober as Pamina, Kristinn Sigmundsson as Sarastro and Alek Shrader

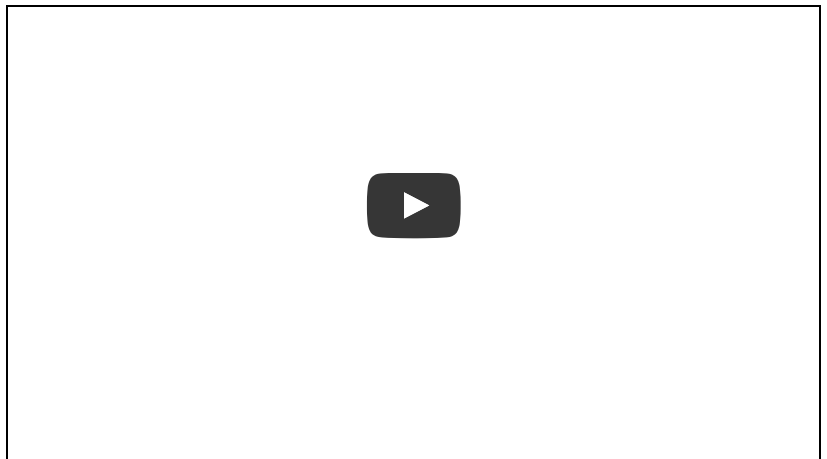
as Tamino

Baritone Greg Fedderly made Monostatos absolutely delightfully unthreatening, because as we all now know libido is fun after all. Mr. Fedderly is in good voice. Melody Moore Lauren McNeese and Renée Tatum were First, Second and Third Ladies, lighter voiced than the usual specimens, appropriate to convey the Valley Girl syndrome they knowingly managed.

Not least were the Three Spirits, Etienne Julius Valdez, Joshua Reinier and John Walsh who have to have been the best Three Spirits that ever hit the earth.

Where was the music in all of this, you ask. Well, we were having so much fun that we almost didn't notice it. But when we did it seemed to support the words with grace and ease and the San Francisco Opera Orchestra did play with lovely sterling tone. British Conductor Rory Macdonald felt tempos that seemed quite slow, but they were tempos that allowed the words to sail across the pit and amuse us. Mozart's ultimate symphonic thrust, the sublime musical process that propels Tamino and Pamina to an advanced humanity sadly did not happen.

Michael Milenski



Send a link to this article to a friend with an optional message.

Friend's Email Address: (required)

Friends Email Address

Your Email Address: (required)

Your Email Address

Message (optional):



Send to a Friend

Copyright © 2005–2014 Opera Today, Inc. All Rights Reserved. No part of this website may be reproduced entirely without expressed written permission.



Plus 392,839 pageviews since 1 January 2009 before joining SiteMeter on 30 September 2009