#### Semiramide

#### 1981

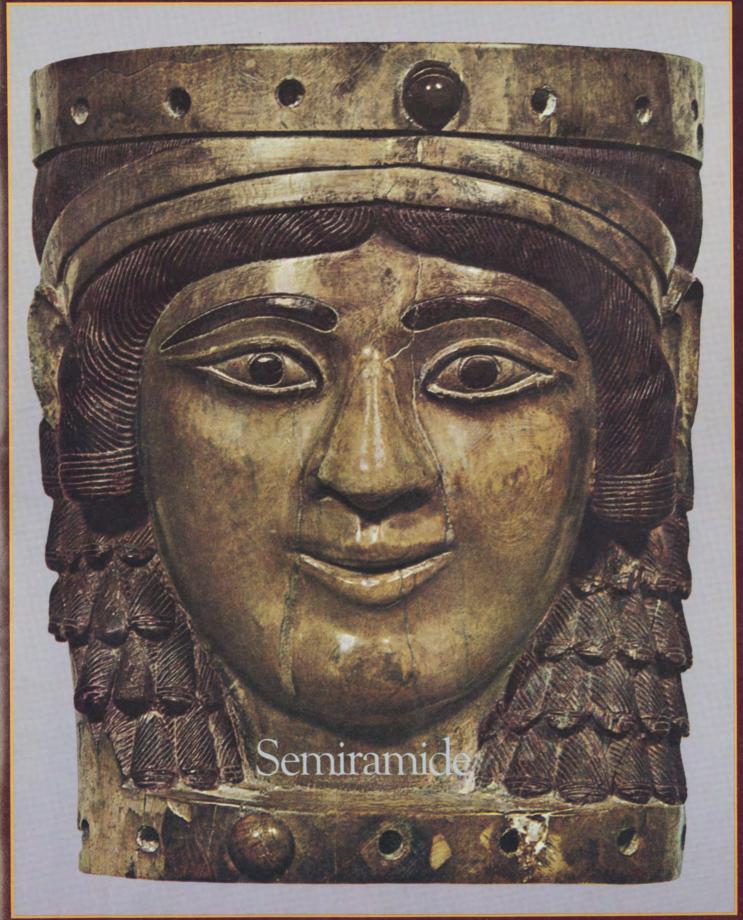
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Saturday, September 26, 1981 8:00 PM
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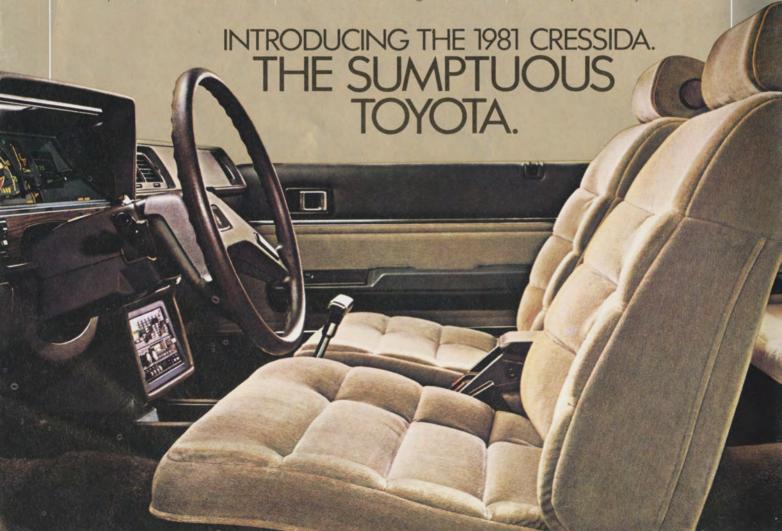
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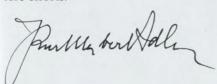


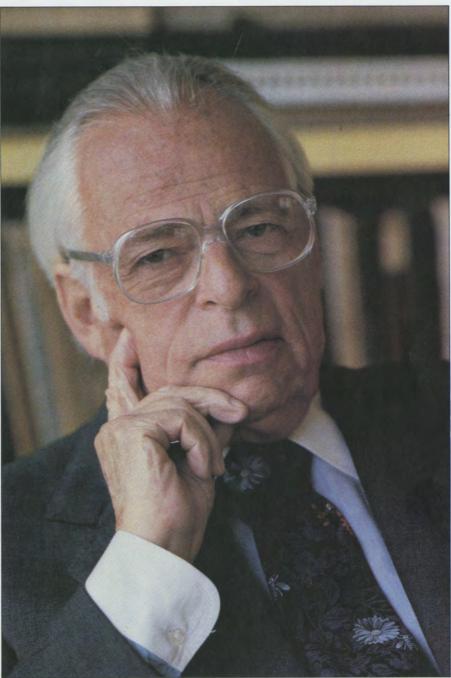
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A warm welcome to our 59th annual Fall Season, which climaxes the busiest year in the history of San Francisco Opera. We welcome back a host of dear friends of the Company and of mine, and we are also happy to introduce a number of exceptional artists new to San Francisco. Two of the most popular works in all opera — Verdi's Aida and Bizet's Carmen - receive new productions; the new Aida is San Francisco Opera's contribution to San Francisco's city-wide celebration of the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis of Assisi, the City's patron. Three works are presented here in premiere performances: Rossini's Semiramide, Massenet's Le Cid (which has never before been heard in the American West) and Lehár's The Merry Widow. Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, the original version of Katerina Ismailova, is heard for the first time in 45 years in the United States. After this season, I will step down from the position of general director of the Company, having enjoyed 38 years of association with San Francisco Opera. Together with you, our audiences and faithful supporters, we have built an opera company of international renown. In 1954, when I assumed directorship, there were five weeks of grand opera in San Francisco; this year, we are proud to present a total of twenty in the War Memorial Opera House. With inauguration of the Summer Festival, an extended Fall Season and the activities of our affiliates, opera is now a permanent part of the vibrance that makes San Francisco such an enviable place to live. I hope this new season, and many more to come, will bring you the artistic satisfaction you desire. Thank you, and may you enjoy our sincere efforts.

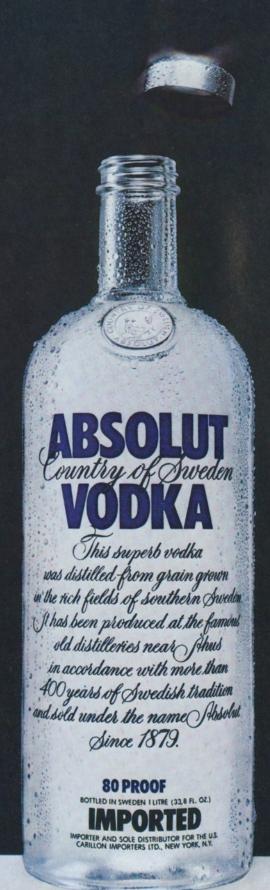




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## SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

Kurt Herbert Adler, General Director

Editors: Thomas O'Connor, Arthur Kaplan • Art Director: Frank Benson • Editorial Assistants: Robert M. Robb, John Schauer Editorial Offices: San Francisco Opera, War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco, CA 94102. Phone (415) 861-4008.

#### SEMIRAMIDE/1981

#### **FEATURES**

Voltaire's Sémiramis by Arthur Kaplan 27
The best-known dramatist of his day, Voltaire wrote a score of tragedies in the classical style — including Sémiramis — forgotten today except for the operas they inspired.

Semiramide: The Exaltation of

Pure Music

Semiramide occupies a unique place in the Rossini canon:
a consolidation of past triumphs and a step toward his

Pier Luigi Pizzi on Semiramide 56

Isabella Colbran: The First

Semiramide by Robert Baxter 60

One of the first great divas, Rossini's Spanish wife inspired 10 of his operas, including her final triumph: *Semiramide*.

THE COVER

French operas to come.

All 11 works in the 1981 Fall Season take their names from central characters. The covers for the magazines focus on non-operatic depictions of these title heroes and heroines, as seen through the filter of various other artistic media.

SEMIRAMIDE: "Monna Lisa," carved ivory head from Assyria, 8th century B.C., in the collection of the Baghdad Museum.

#### DEPARTMENTS

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### FROM THE PRESIDENT

When Kurt Herbert Adler lays down his baton after conducting the final performance of this 59th annual Fall Season, he will retire after nearly three decades as general director of the Company. It is characteristic that his last year in charge is a spectacular one of unparalleled activity and ambition. After launching a new San Francisco Summer Festival, he has assembled a fall opera season that, in breadth of repertoire and caliber of artists, is quite simply the dream of every opera lover.

We are deeply indebted to Mr. Adler for his development of San Francisco Opera to become one of the leading opera companies of the world. I know that all patrons of San Francisco Opera wish him good health and happiness in his retirement during the years to come, a retirement he has earned and richly

deserves.

As I am sure you know, Terry McEwen takes on the responsibility of leading the Company this coming winter. He is committed to maintaining the exceptional standards of quality that have characterized the Adler years, and we are fortunate to have someone of his ability, determination and vision.

As mentioned in previous letters, costs of producing operas of the quality for which we are famous are staggering, and ticket revenues cover only 55-60 per cent of the costs, even with sold-out houses. Further, the expenses of developing our new Summer Festival are significant and, of course, the ravages of inflation wreak particular havoc with our finances since we are a labor-intensive enterprise. As a result, our need for contributions to the annual fund drive is greater than ever. It is vital that we materially increase our contributed revenues this year if we are to maintain our financial health, which we must do if we are to continue our artistic strength. If you are one of our thousands of donors, I hope you will seriously consider increasing your contribution this year; if you are not, won't you please join them? We offer a host of attractive benefits to contributors, and a number of useful deferred giving plans have been developed. Please let us know how we can help you to help the San Francisco Opera, and please act now.

A number of the beautiful productions you see this fall are special gifts: Semiramide through a grant from the San Francisco Foundation, and the new Aida through the generosity of a friend of San Francisco Opera. Manon was made possible in 1971 through the sponsorship of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and a gift from James D. Robertson, while our Lucia di Lammermoor was created in 1972 thanks



Walter M. Baird President and Chief Executive Officer San Francisco Opera Association

to a gift from Cyril Magnin. We are also delighted this fall to present the Canadian Opera Company's production of *The Merry Widow*.

I would like to extend our continuing gratitude to the National Endowment for the Arts and its chairman, Livingston L. Biddle, Jr.; the California Arts Council and its chairman, Marl Young; the Honorable Dianne Feinstein, Mayor of San Francisco; Chief Administrative Officer Roger Boas; the City and County of San Francisco; the War Memorial Board of Trustees and the San Francisco Opera Guild for their invaluable support of the San Francisco Opera.

Enjoy the season!

Secretary

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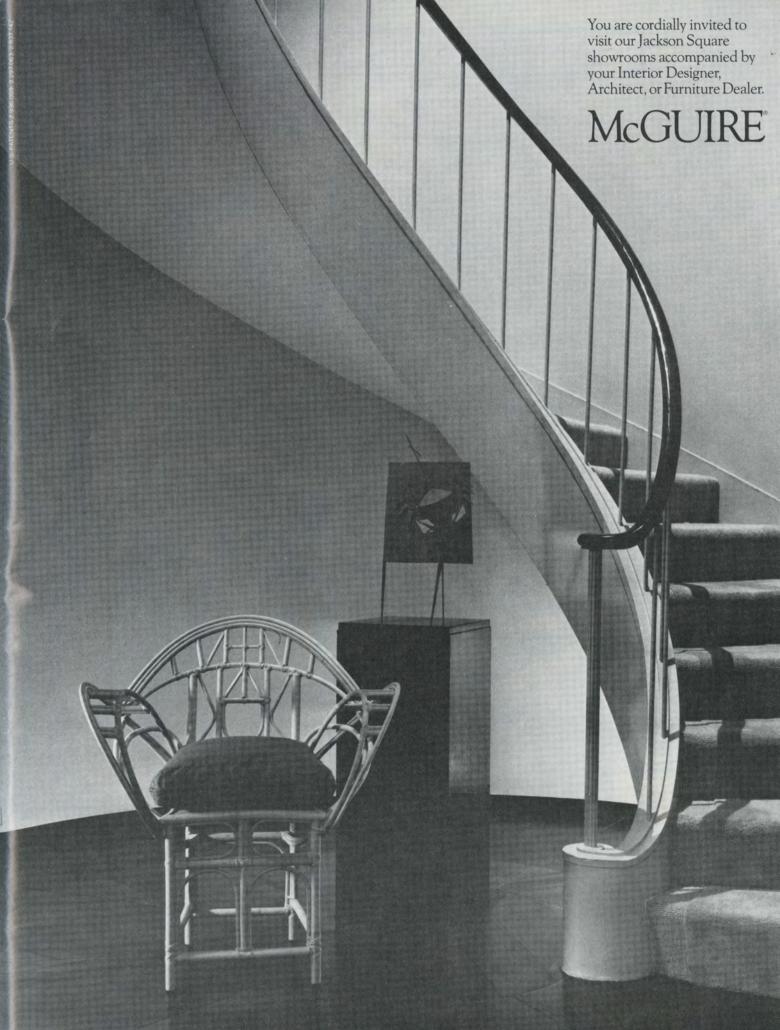
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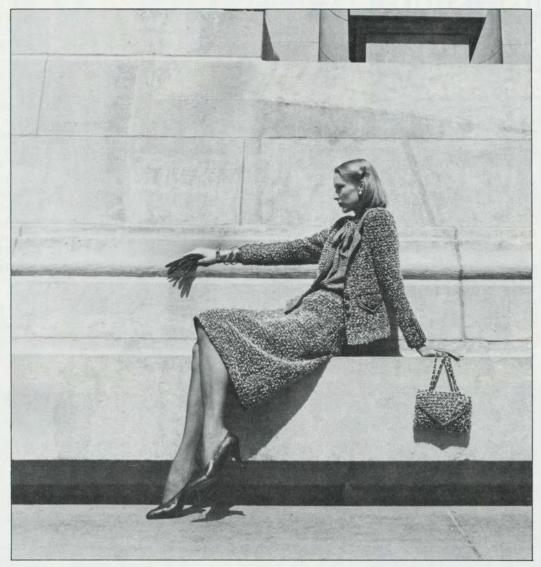
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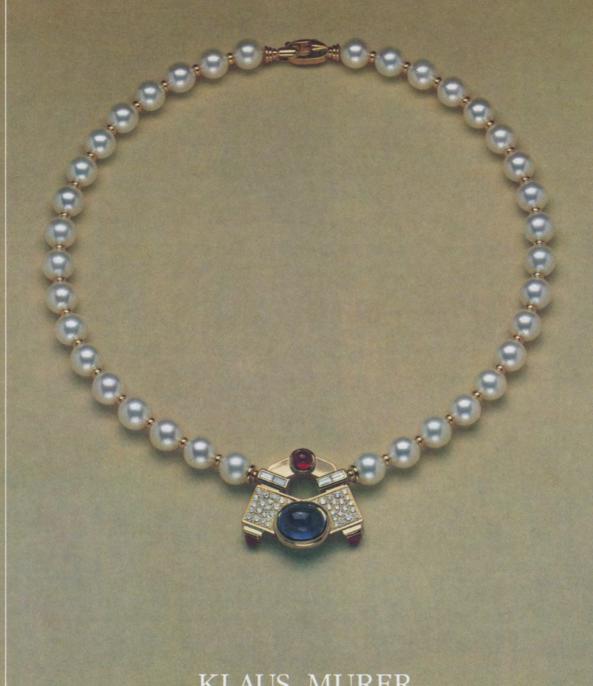
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### 1981 SEASON

Kurt Herbert Adler, General Director

San Francisco Opera Premiere

#### Semiramide

In Italian Rossini

This production of *Semiramide* was made possible through a generous and much appreciated grant from the San Francisco Foundation.

Caballé, Horne/Gonzales, Morris\*, Halfvarson, Green, G. Stapp

Bonynge/Pizzi\*/Pizzi

#### Manon

In French Massenet

This production of *Manon* was made possible, in 1971, through the sponsorship of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and a gift from James D. Robertson.

Grist, South, P. Hunter\*, Quittmeyer, Ganz/Burrows, Duesing, Malta, Castel\*, Gardner, Noble, Glaum

Rudel/R. Levine\*/Mitchell-George/Sakellariou

San Francisco Opera Premiere

#### Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk

In Russian Shostakovich

Silja, Nelson\*, de la Rosa, Olsson\*/W. Lewis, Trussel, Ludgin, Langan, Halfvarson, Harger, G. Stapp, Green, Freeman\*, Glaum, Noble, Woodman

Simmons/Freedman/Skalicki-Colangelo

San Francisco Opera Premiere

#### The Merry Widow

In English Lehár

Production from the Canadian Opera Company

Sutherland, Forst, P. Hunter, Ganz, Olsson/Hagegård\*, Austin\*\*, Stark\*, Isaac\*, Green, Woodman, Harger, Wexler, Del Carlo

Bonynge/Mansouri/Laufer\*-Mess/Sappington

New Production

#### Carmen

In French Bizet

Berganza, Cook, South, Quittmeyer/ Bonisolli, Estes, Eisler, Gardner, Langan, Noble

October 10, 14, 18 (mat), 22, 26, 30, November 3

Adler/Ponnelle/Ponnelle-Juerke\*

Schwarz, Mitchell, South, Quittmeyer/Domingo, Carlson\*, Eisler, Gardner, Langan, Noble

December 4, 7, 10, 13 (mat)

Adler/Ponnelle-Hope\*/Ponnelle-Juerke

San Francisco Opera and West Coast Premiere

#### Le Cid

In French Massenet

(Stylized Concert Version)

Neblett, Ringo\*/Domingo, Furlanetto, Noble, Halfvarson, Green, Glaum, G. Stapp, Woodman

Rudel/Frisell/Munn

#### Wozzeck

In English Berg

Martin, Nelson/Evans, Cox\*, R. Lewis, Kennedy\*, Harger, Green, Langan, Woodman

Rennert/Evans/Bauer-Ecsy-Mason

#### Lucia di Lammermoor

In Italian Donizetti

This production of *Lucia di Lam*mermoor was made possible, in 1972, by a generous and deeply appreciated gift from Cyril Magnin.

Putnam\*, Richards/Shicoff\*, Zancanaro, Furlanetto, Eisler, Freeman

Agler/Frisell/Toms

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Ringo, Richards/Morales\*, Gardner, G. Stapp, Freeman, Harger Bradshaw/Farruggio/Toms New Production

#### Aida

In Italian Verdi

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M. Price, Toczyska, Quittmeyer/Pavarotti, Estes, Mróz\*, Langan, Freeman

Navarro\*\*/Wanamaker\*/Schmidt-Casey/Sappington

#### Die Walküre

In German Wagner

Nilsson (11/20, 25, 12/1), Kovács\* (11/28, 12/6, 12/12), Rysanek, Denize\*, P. Hunter, Cook, Olsson, Quittmeyer, Morgan\*, Richards, Rice\*, Shaulis\*/King, Schenk\*, Rydl Suitner/Hager/Skalicki

#### Il Trovatore

In Italian Verdi

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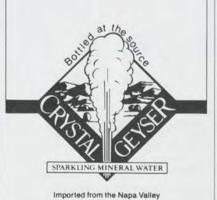
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**PRELUDES** 

#### Opera Museum Honors Adler

During the 1981 international Fall Season, the War Memorial Museum exhibit features a tribute to general director Kurt Herbert Adler and his 28-year leadership of the San Francisco Opera. A photographic retrospective, coordinated by Ann Seamster, highlights the major events and accomplishments of the Adler years. Sponsored by the Friends of the War Memorial/Performing Arts Center, the Opera Museum is located in the south foyer, box level, behind the Opera Shop, and is open free of charge records for attendance in New York during all performances.

#### Merry Widow Bows with Benefit

Franz Lehár's The Merry Widow will receive its first San Francisco Opera performance on Saturday, October 3, with a gala benefit premiere sponsored by the San Francisco Opera Association and the San Francisco Opera Guild. Tickets for this nonsubscription performance, which features Joan Sutherland in the title role, are available now through the Opera Box Office. Prices range from \$13 to \$75, and a portion of all ticket prices is Tickets are available now through the tax deductible.

The international cast joining Dame Joan Sutherland includes Canadian mezzo-soprano Judith Forst as Valencienne and three artists who are Films of Interest making their Company debuts: Swedish baritone Håkan Hagegård as Danilo, New Zealand tenor Anson Austin (also making his American debut) as Camille, and Canadian tenor Phil Stark as Baron Zeta. Richard Bonynge conducts, Lotfi Mansouri directs, sets are by Murray Laufer, costumes are by Suzanne Mess and choreography is by Margo Sappington for Herzog's Woyzeck (1978), based on this Canadian Opera Company produc- Georg Büchner's play and starring tion, which is sung in English.

the performance. Patrons who purchase tickets for the performance will receive an invitation to the party, for which there is an additional charge of \$50.00 per person. Those who choose to attend the party will be invited to "Maxim's," on the stunning Art Noveau set of the final scene of The Merry Widow, to toast Miss Sutherland and other members of the cast with champagne and wine.

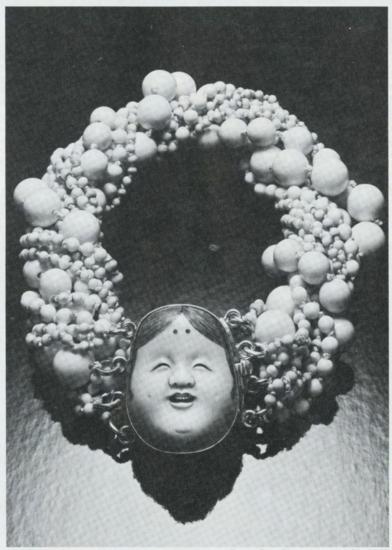
#### Film Masterpiece Napoleon at Opera House

As a special event the San Francisco Opera, in conjunction with Francis Ford Coppola, will present Abel Gance's 1927 film masterpiece Napoleon at 7 P.M. on October 23 and October 25 at the War Memorial Opera House. Carmine Coppola will conduct members of the San Francisco Opera Orchestra in his score, which accompanies the epic silent film.

Napoleon, which broke house and Los Angeles earlier this year, was hailed by Vincent Canby of the New York Times as "the best film event of the year." Charles Champlin in the Los Angeles Times recently called Napoleon "the measure of all other films, forever." With the advent of sound movies, Napoleon became one of the great lost masterworks of film history. Reconstructed through detective work by the English film-maker and historian Kevin Brownlow and others who used fragments and archival versions, Napoleon has now been restored to an almost complete version of the original.

Repeat showings are scheduled for next January 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Opera Box Office.

In conjunction with the 1981 Fall Season of the San Francisco Opera, Pacific Film Archive has scheduled showings of two film classics: Andrzej Wajda's Siberian Lady Macbeth (1961), based on Nicolai Leskov's short story, Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk; and Werner Klaus Kinski in the title role. Siberian A Premiere Party, on the stage of Lady Macbeth is shown on Monday, the Opera House, immediately follows September 28, at 7:30 P.M. and Woyzeck on Friday, October 30, at 7:30 and 9:00 P.M. at the University Art Museum in Berkeley, 2615 Durant



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Voltaire (1694-1778) at age 24, the year of the premiere of *Oedipe*, after Nicolas de Largillière.



# Voltaire's Sémiramis

The best-known dramatist of his day, Voltaire wrote a score of tragedies in the classical style — including *Sémiramis* — forgotten today except for the operas they inspired.

#### By ARTHUR KAPLAN

François-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), better known as Voltaire, is remembered today primarily as a political philosopher whose contes philosophiques (philosophical tales), of which Candide is the most famous, are still widely read in and out of classrooms the world over. He was so clearly the leading figure of the Enlightenment that the pre-revolutionary 18th century is often referred to, as in Will and Ariel Durant's historical series, The Story of Civilization, as the Age of Voltaire.

His liberal views on government, society, human rights and religion made him the most popular spokesman for the reform movement that would sweep France in the second half of that century and culminate in the French Revolution, whose advent Voltaire did not forsee and whose excesses he would surely have opposed.

Like his compatriot Victor Hugo, who dominated French letters in the following century, Voltaire is known abroad principally through his works of fiction and other prose writings. In their time, however, both extraordinarily prolific authors (each lived to the age of 83, writing to the end) were equally well known as poets and playwrights. In fact, especially at the beginning of their pursuit of recognition and fame in Paris, both were consumed with the burning ambition, soon realized, to become the most celebrated dramatist of their respective ages. For more than 200 years, after all, the center of literary activity in France was the theater. Both wrote and published plays for which they were almost universally acclaimed, plays that have long since disappeared from the standard repertory and are only occasionally accorded revivals at that bastion of French dramatic tradition, the Comédie Française. It is there

that both had their first great successes: Voltaire at age 24 with *Oedipe* in 1718; Hugo at age 28 with *Ernani* in 1830.

Unlike Hugo, who retired from the theater after the resounding failure of Les Burgraves in 1843, Voltaire loved the theater all his life and was constantly preoccupied with composing, revising or supervising his plays; he even directed and acted in them in small theaters he set up in his various residences over the years. Following the success of Oedipe, he adopted the nom de plume by which he would henceforth be known to both his contemporaries and to posterity. Sixty years later the production of his final tragedy, Irène, was the occasion of Voltaire's apotheosis upon his return to Paris after more than 25 years of political exile. Although too ill to attend the premiere (the great philosophe died a few weeks later), he did manage to recover sufficiently for the

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sixth performance, where he received a hero's welcome. His statue was crowned with laurel wreaths brought on stage by all the actors and actresses of the Comédie Française to the tumultuous acclaim of an adoring public. The people then drew his coach home in triumph through the streets of Paris.

Voltaire's fame as a playwright, which lasted some 80 years — into the

#### Voltaire loved the theater.

reign of Louis-Philippe - can be measured in part by the number of operas founded on his works. In addition to Grétry's opéra-comique Le Huron (Paris, 1768), based on the philosophical tale L'Ingénu, and Paisiello's Il Re Teodoro in Venezia (Vienna, 1784), based on an episode from Candide, there are a slew of works for the lyric theater inspired by Voltaire's plays. Most have vanished from sight along with the vast majority of late 18thcentury and early 19th-century works. These include an Alzira (Florence, 1794) by Nicola Antonio Zingarelli that preceded Verdi's ill-fated and rarely performed version of the same play, with a text by Cammarano (Naples, 1845); Olimpie, a three-act opéra-lyrique by Spontini that had its Paris Opéra premiere in 1819; and Bellini's tragedia lirica, Zaira, with a text by Felice Romani, that first saw the light of day in Parma in 1829 and was revived with Renata Scotto in the title role in 1976 at the Teatro Massimo Vincenzo Bellini in Catania.

The composer who most often and most successfully set to music libretti based on Voltaire's plays was

Gioacchino Rossini. His ninth opera, Tancredi, based primarily on Voltaire's Tancrède (1759), launched the composer's international career following its triumphant 1813 premiere at La Fenice in Venice. In 1820 he set Cesare della Valle's libretto Maometto II. after Voltaire's Mahomet (1742). for the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. The opera, a relative failure at its premiere, was refashioned by Rossini into a French grand opéra as Le Siège de Corinthe in 1826. This version, performed in Italy as L'Assedio di Corinto from 1827 onward, has received important revivals in recent years, starting with the production at the 1949 Maggio Musicale Fiorentino with Renata Tebaldi as Pamira. In 1969 it served as the vehicle for acclaimed La Scala debuts of three American singers: Beverly Sills as Pamira, Marilyn Horne as Neocle and Justino Díaz as Maometto II, under the baton of



Crébillon (1674-1762), Voltaire's rival and author of a previous *Sémiramis*.



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The recognition scene from Voltaire's Sémiramis.

Thomas Schippers. Rossini's final Voltaire-derived *opera seria* written, like *Tancredi*, to a text by Gaetano Rossi for La Fenice, was *Semiramide* (1823).

In 1745 Voltaire was commissioned by Louis XV to write a major work for the relevailles (the official services of thanksgiving for women after childbirth) of the Dauphine, Marie-Thérèse-Raphaële of Spain. His choice fell on Sémiramis for several reasons. First, as he explained in the preface to the play, the Dauphine was an avid reader of the classical playwrights and "liked works of this kind." More important, no doubt, was the fact that in 1732 he had written a play, Eriphyle, that had had a very limited success. He retracted it, eager to reuse at a later date the same situations and characters: a king's ghost; a queen in love with her own son; and a prince who, "blinded by the gods," stabs his mother. Such self-plagiarism was not unusual for the times (Rossini himself was notoriously guilty of the same misdemeanor), nor was the reworking of material previously used by other writers. In fact, Voltaire chose Sémi-

At the premiere of *Sémiramis* Voltaire arranged for a professional claque.

ramis precisely because it had been used by his archrival, Crébillon. Crébillon's version had received only eight performances in 1717 and was never revived. Voltaire had promised to redo all of his rival's plays to show his own superiority; he even asked Crébillon's permission to use the same material before setting to work.

Voltaire was somewhat apprehensive about the fate of his new play since Crébillon also happened to be the royal censor and had created obstacles to the performance of Mahomet and La Mort de César. Voltaire wrote to Monsieur Berrier, head of the Paris police, asking for his protection: Monsieur Crébillon, appointed by you to scrutinize works for the theater, previously wrote a tragedy called Sémiramis, and I may have the misfortune to displease him for having worked on the same subject." He needn't have worried; Crébillon ordered only four lines cut from the play, and Voltaire later succeeded in getting even those restored.

In memory of the Dauphine, who had died shortly after childbirth, Louis XV paid for the sets. *Sémiramis* received its premiere at the Comédie Française on August 29, 1748, along with a one-act comedy by Legrand and Alain, *L'Épreuve réciproque*.

Fearing a cabal from Crébillon's supporters, Voltaire arranged for a professional claque of his own to assure the success of the play. Although there were some whispers and whistles during the first scene, they were drowned out by applause, and the play went on to achieve an honest success, if not a great triumph.

The leading actors of the Comédie Française performed the principal roles. Mlle. Dumesnil, an uneven artist who excelled at playing tragic queens, portrayed the title role. She apparently rose to great heights in the dénouement, for Voltaire wrote that at that moment, "you thought you were viewing a Michelangelo painting." Mlle. Clairon, who was to go on to become one of the great actresses of the century, was still playing ingénue roles



Mlle. Dusmenil, who created the title role in Sémiramis.

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Grandval (left), the first Arzace, in a scene from Le Glorieux by Destouches.

and made a great impression as the tragic princess, Azéma (a role that unfortunately all but disappears in the opera to make way for a new character, the dramatically superfluous Indian prince Idreno, invented by Rossi to provide a role for the tenor at La Fenice). Grandval, the foremost leading man of his day, was an adequate Arzace, although he was more suited by his physical elegance and mellifluous voice to sentimental plays than to tragedies. De la Noue, an ugly man with a rough voice but with considerable intelligence and talent, performed Assur.

Despite the king's subsidy, the production was not on the magnificent scale Voltaire had wished. Instead of the four sets described in the manuscript to depict Ancient Babylon, Sémiramis was played in a unit set. Although the set itself was relatively simple, the scene changes proved long and difficult since in 1748 part of the audience still sat in tiers on the side of the stage called balcons that inhibited stage movement. With one quarter of the stage thereby rendered unusable, the number of supernumeraries for the processions and crowd scenes was severely limited.

The stage congestion was such that on opening night Legrand, who played Ninus' ghost (no edition of the play lists this character, incidentally, although he appears in Scene 6 of Act III and even has several lines to speak), couldn't make his entrance since the wings were blocked by the spectators in the balcons. A rifleman on duty cried out, "Messieurs, place à l'ombre, s'il vous plaît." ("Sirs, make way for the ghost, please"), which caused such an explosion of laughter that the play was nearly stopped dead in its tracks. A furious Voltaire entreated Berrier to place two adjutants on the stage during subsequent per-

### Ninus' ghost couldn't make his entrance.

formances to restrain the crowd of young Frenchmen who, in the playwright's sarcastic words, "were scarcely made to run into Babylonians."

Unhappy with the results of the premiere, on the day of the second performance Voltaire, dressed in a cassock and cloak lent to him by the Abbé de Villevielle, donned a tricorne and a huge wig and went incognito to the Café Procope, where the habitués gathered after the theater to exchange impressions. Among the criticisms he might have overheard as he kept his nose hidden in a newspaper and which



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later appeared in print were the following: How could Sémiramis, great queen of Babylon, have been so careless as to choose an unnecessary accomplice in the murder of her husband Ninus and then reveal her crime to a mere underling? Why did Arzace keep an unlocked box received from his father for 10 years without opening it or presenting it to the High Priest Oroès as he had been instructed to do, and why did Oroès wait until the last second to reveal Arzace's true identity to him, exposing him unnecessarily to the unspeakable crime of incest? Why did Sémiramis go down into Ninus' tomb without a lantern so that Assur as well as Arzace might have killed her, and why, since she didn't die immediately after twice being stabbed by her son, didn't Arzace recognize a woman's voice calling out to him, and realize from her royal costume and headdress that she was the queen?

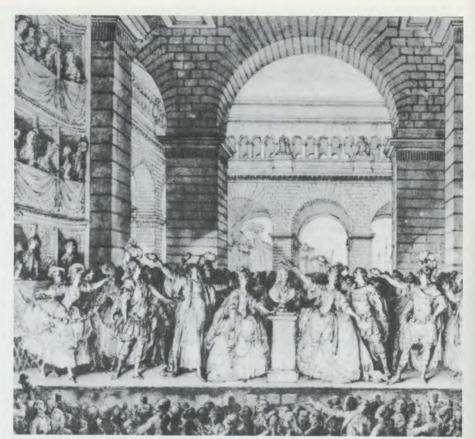
These are but a few of the dramaturgical improbabilities pointed out by contemporary critics. The modern critic finds even more serious grounds for harsh judgment. In artistic matters Voltaire was generally a traditionalist. The dedicatory epistle to *Sémiramis*, addressed to Cardinal Quirini, librarian of the Vatican, provides interesting commentary on the difference between French and Italian operatic treatment

### In artistic matters Voltaire was a traditionalist.

of themes from Greek tragedy, clearly preferring the more classical Italian approach, and, following a discussion on the relative merits of French vs. Greek tragedy, continues with a defense of the appearance of Ninus' ghost in *Sémiramis*. The playwright invokes Shakespeare's use of similar



Le Kain, great interpreter of the role of Arzace, as Orosmane in Voltaire's Zaïre.



The crowning of Voltaire at his "apotheosis" after the sixth performance of Irène in 1778.

material in *Hamlet*, which he otherwise characterizes as a "gross and barbarous play that wouldn't be tolerated by the lowest rabble in France and Iraly"

Voltaire vastly admired the classical tragedies of the great 17th-century French playwrights Pierre Corneille and, especially, Jean Racine, which he took as models for his own. The tragedies of Voltaire adhered to the same purity of language and rigid prosody (the 12-syllable rhymed couplets called Alexandrines) of the 17thcentury masters. There is even an unquestioning acceptance of the three unities of time, place and action, which Hugo and the Romantics would be so vehement in condemning. In matters of correct usage, Voltaire carefully consulted with the foremost grammarians of the day.

### He knew how to create scenes of considerable pageantry.

The result, at least to modern tastes, is a neoclassical style at once stilted and uninspiring. Not that Voltaire lacked a sense of the theater; he knew how to use local color effectively and how to create scenes of considerable pageantry and spectacle, as *Sémiramis* attests. Without approaching Racinian grandeur and sublimity, his

verses are, for the most part, skillfully wrought and can rise on occasion to considerable power or pathos. Sémiramis ends on the forceful pronouncement of Oroès, which Voltaire himself cites as the type of exemplary maxim that tragedy should instill in its audiences:

Par ce terrible exemple apprenez tous du moins

Que les crimes secrets ont les Dieux pour témoins.

Plus le coupable est grand, plus grand est le supplice.

Rois, tremblez sur le trône, et craignez leur justice.

By this terrible example may you all at least learn

That secret crimes have the Gods as their witness.

The mightier the guilty, the greater his torment.

Kings, tremble on your thrones and fear their justice.

The confrontation scenes between Arzace and Assur and later between Arzace and Sémiramis are developed in a truly dramatic manner. But the one scene between the Babylonian queen and Assur is curiously muted in the kind of prolonged double entendres and half-spoken truths that constitute the principal dramatic interest of the play (in Rossini's Semiramide, this scene is the occasion of an explosion of vocal fireworks of mutual re-

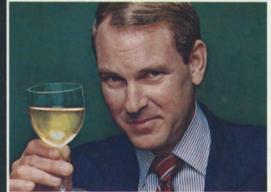
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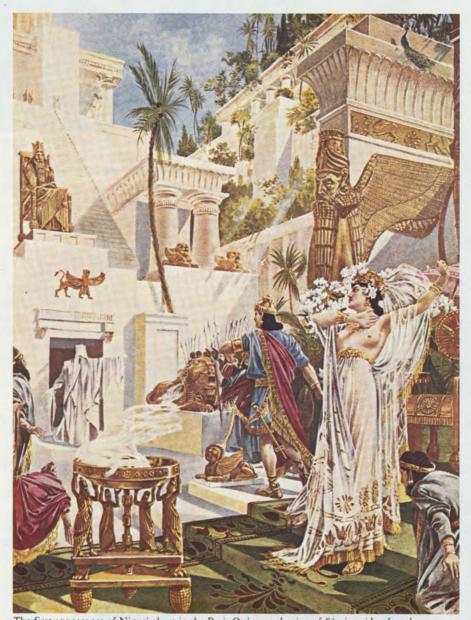
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# Semiramide The Exaltation of Pure Music

Semiramide occupies a unique place in the Rossini canon: a consolidation of past triumphs and a step toward his French operas to come.



The first appearance of Ninus' ghost in the Paris Opéra production of Sémiramide, after the painting by William de Leftwich Dodge.

#### By PHILIP GOSSETT

Near the beginning of his career, the young Rossini composed Tancredi to a libretto by Gaetano Rossi drawn from the tragedy of Voltaire. It had its premiere at the Teatro La Fenice of Venice on February 6, 1813. At the very end of his career in Italy, the mature composer wrote Semiramide to a libretto by Gaetano Rossi, drawn from the tragedy of Voltaire. It had its premiere at the Teatro La Fenice of Venice on February 3, 1823. Almost 10 years to the day separate these two operas, years of remarkable, profound growth for Rossini. But Semiramide is more than just another marker (the 34th, to be precise) along Rossini's compositional path. It has qualities historical, stylistic and structural that set it apart from his other operas. These qualities need to be understood if Semiramide is to be fully appreciated.

There is, first of all, its historical position. It is the last opera Rossini was to write for an Italian theater. Shortly thereafter, he and his wife, the singer Isabella Colbran, travelled to London and then Paris, initiating the final phase of his operatic career, as a composer of French opera. Semiramide is a point of departure, then, for this later development. Yet it also stands apart from Rossini's Italian years. After he became artistic director of the Neapolitan theaters in 1815 until his break with their impresario Domenico Barbaja in 1822, Rossini wrote important serious operas (opera seria) for no other city. Naples was a special place in the early 19th century. It had dominated Italian music throughout the 18th century. In the preceding generation, both of the leading composers, Paisiello and Cimarosa, London Records Salutes

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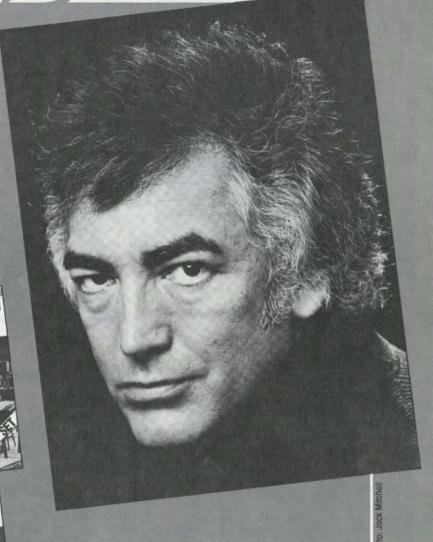
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Rossini in 1824.

were Neapolitan-bred and -trained; even in the following generation, Donizetti spent years as its composer in residence, while Bellini was educated and wrote his first operas at the Naples Conservatory. Naples was also a city of international musical taste, featuring many performances of works by French and German composers. Its citizens, therefore, boasted with justifiable pride of their culture, and Rossini conscientiously sought to develop his musical style and techniques for them, offering Naples operas more seriously prepared and executed than had been even conceivable for other Italian audiences.

In the context of contemporary Italian opera, therefore, Rossini's Neapolitan operas were patently experimental: their formal content was new; their use of chorus was audacious; they abandoned the traditional, Rossinian overture; their orchestration was vastly expanded; they exploited more fully the glories of the human voice, ranging from simple, unadorned melody to extraordinarily florid writing. Neapolitan audiences gloried in the achievements of their adopted son. As Rossini's operas outgrew the conventions of his earlier works, such as Tancredi, or even his first operas for Naples, such as Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra, however, they began to be considered more and more difficult, more and more Germanic (of all things!). Many fared poorly in other Italian cities. Ermione and Armida were practically never revived, Maometto II only rarely, whereas more youthful and significantly less interesting works, such as Aureliano in Palmira, maintained their popularity. When Rossini occasionally wrote for other theaters during his Neapolitan

years, he half-heartedly reverted to an earlier style. Not even the most devoted Rossinian has made much of a case for reviving Adelaide di Borgogna or Bianca e Falliero.

Rossini's definitive departure from Naples in 1822, first for a spring season of opera with the Neapolitan troupe in Vienna, then to take up residence in Bologna during the summer of 1822, represented a definitive rupture with the past. Rossini was now faced with the dilemma of being true to his own artistic needs, needs developed and cultivated in Naples, while composing for an audience unprepared for the more advanced Neapolitan style he had evolved. The result of this dialectic was Semiramide, certainly one of the composer's greatest operas, a work considered by many of his contemporaries to contain the essence of his art.

How often we have read that Semiramide was written and produced in less than five weeks. Indeed Rossini is often credited with the bon mot that, as a result, he had been able to take his time over it. Such anecdotes

## One of the composer's greatest operas.

still abound in the popular imagination, and it is true that Rossini could write quickly when necessary. But Semiramide was not a work to be tossed off lightly; indeed, its period of active gestation lasted at least four months, significantly longer than Verdi spent on Rigoletto. The initial contract with Venice was signed on August 15, 1822, a more formal document on November 15. It specified



Isabella Colbran, perhaps as Semiramide.



Filippo Galli as Assur in Semiramide.

that Rossini would compose a new opera for the Carnival season of 1823 (that is, the operatic season beginning on December 26, 1822) and supervise the production of an older opera (Maometto II), adapting it to the local company. But we know that Rossini was already hard at work on Semiramide at the beginning of October.

The librettist, surely chosen with Rossini's approval, was Gaetano Rossi, with whom Rossini had collaborated twice before: in his first performed opera, La Cambiale di Matrimonio (1810) and in Tancredi (1813). There exists fascinating documentation about their collaboration on Semiramide in letters written by Rossi to his friend, the German composer Giacomo Meyerbeer, who was active at that time in Italy. From these letters we know that Rossi arrived in Bologna on October 4 to work with Rossini. The next day they departed for Rossini's villa in Castenaso, a suburb of Bologna, which was, according to Rossi, "Delicious, really, in all its agreeable surroundings: beautiful gardens, a voluptuous little chapel, lake, hills, woods, and a magnificent and elegant home." On October 10 he wrote, "We have worked out the basic shape: he approved all the situations as I had sketched them out. He began to compose yesterday." By the end of the month, Rossi, still at Castenaso, could inform Meyerbeer: "I am at the end of the first-act Finale. I would have been done had not many distractions, little trips to nearby country homes, made us lose days of work. But Rossini is not behind schedule: he has written an Introduction 'alla Meyerbeer' [!] even Colbran appears in the Introduction. What pomp! A truly imposing picture." It is clear that by the end of

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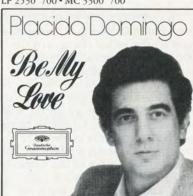
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The interior of the sanctuary, set by Alessandro Sanquirico for the 1824 premiere of Semiramide at La Scala.

October, when Rossi's letters end, Rossini had made significant progress in the composition of *Semiramide*.

We possess no other precise information about its compositional history. No later than November 20, Rossini and Rossi left Bologna for Verona, where two cantatas of his "composition" were performed for Prince Metternich and other heads of state gathered for the Congress of Verona. For these cantatas, however, Rossini simply told Rossi which previously composed pieces of music to employ. Rossi himself, writing to Meyerbeer, said that for The Holy Alliance (performed November 24), "The choruses and the two arias by Rossini were adapted by me for the circumstances," while *The True Homage* (performed December 3) consisted of "music of Rossini, put together by me." It is hardly surprising that Rossi spent little time thinking about his Verona "cantatas": not only was Semiramide under way, but Maometto II, for which he was composing several new numbers, was scheduled to be performed December 26. On December 9, Rossini departed for Venice, where he remained until after the premiere of Semiramide on February 3, 1823

What is musically and dramatically original about Semiramide in the context of Rossini's art? In particular, how does it differ from the Neapolitan operas? The first hint, important in itself and indicative of more general attitudes, occurs even before the curtain is raised. Semiramide begins with a fairly typical Rossini overture. If it is

typical, one might well ask, what's so special? The fact is that most of the Rossini overtures best known to modern audiences are from his youth. Practically every opera through 1817 has an independent overture. Then, suddenly, Rossini wrote seven operas for Naples, none of which has a traditional overture, most of which have no overture at all. The very presence of an overture in *Semiramide* seems to negate the Neapolitan experience, where Rossini believed an overture to be dramatically and musically superfluous.

If we merely list the formal numbers in the opera (uncut), we are in for another surprise. Except for the mammoth Introduction and two Finales, Semiramide consists of six arias and four duets. One has to return almost to Tancredi to find a similar preponderance of numbers for one or two voices. In Rossini's Neapolitan works, ensembles for several characters dominated the action: a quintet and quartet in Mosè in Egitto, a remarkable trio in La Donna del Lago, the famous "terzettone" (literally "big trio") of Maometto II, which incorporates a third of the first act. How different is Semiramide, with its succession of arias and duets.

What is more, these arias and duets are all constructed according to a single basic model: they are multisectional compositions concluding with a complete cabaletta. Though details differ from piece to piece (the extent to which arias incorporate dramatic action, the number of sections employed, the participation of the chorus), the basic formal archetypes were already clearly defined by Rossini at the time of Tancredi. But never before had these archetypes exercised such absolute sway in Rossini's art, never had the cabaletta reigned so supreme. In the Neapolitan operas, where arias normally did not dominate the dramatic action, Rossini frequently varied his aria forms, employing a romance, the Willow Song in Otello, or a theme and variations. In Semiramide expressions of the most varied kinds of love, of revenge, of courage, of delirium, all adopt the same external

Not only do all the Semiramide duets conclude with a full cabaletta,



Duet between Semiramide and Arsace in the 1860 Paris Opéra production of Rossini's opera with the Marchisio sisters in the lead roles.

but all have the same structure in their opening section: parallel musical periods, sung by one character, repeated by the other, with small changes at best. This is the classical pattern of the Rossini duet, but in no other opera are four complete duets treated in the same manner. In the Neapolitan operas, Rossini sometimes introduces a "duettino" in a single part, delicate, with a reduced orchestral accompaniment. In larger duets, he sometimes individualizes the characters, even when the poet provides parallel stanzas of text. In Semiramide these tendencies, these musical and dramatic experiments characteristic of the Neapolitan operas, disappear.

The large ensembles, especially the first-act Finale and Introduction, are also in typically Rossinian modes, although the roots of the Introduction are to be found more in earlier finales than in earlier introductions. But if

## Semiramide is dominated by arias and duets.

one looks to Naples, the Introduction of La Donna del Lago, to take one example, is every bit as impressive and far more original. We think of Rossini's operas as concluding with a prima donna who sings a set of elaborate variations. This does not happen in Semiramide, whose second-act Finale is very freely treated, but neither does it happen in many Neapolitan operas, such as Maometto II, Otello or Mosè in Egitto.

From the point of view of its musical and dramatic structure, then, Semiramide is essentially a conservative opera, one that breaks with the compositional experiments and advances of the Neapolitan period. The Italian critic Bruno Cagli has rightly called it an opera "of the Restoration and of restoration," an opera that negates the revolutionary experience, which, in Rossini's case, means the Neapolitan period. But this analysis must be taken a step further, because a true "Restoration," in either political or musical terms, is impossible. Lived experiences are not so easily forgotten, and a past Eden, no matter how desired, remains a chimera. In the idealized forms of Semiramide, Rossini created a skeleton much more schematic than in his pre-Neapolitan operas, a model of complete clarity and perfect proportion. It is a vision of an earlier world, rather than the world itself, the restoration of an ideal that never existed.

But if in this manner Semiramide negates the Neapolitan experience, in other ways it is its worthy successor. Semiramide seals the fate of secco recitative in Italian opera seria. It is the

continued on p. 70



Chagall, PROFILE EN BLEU, JAUNE ET BLANC, oil on canvas, 1977

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## **PROFILES**



MONTSERRAT CABALLÉ World-famous for her interpretations in the bel canto repertoire, Montserrat Caballé sings the title role in Semiramide. She has appeared as the Babylonian queen twice before - both times with Marilyn Horne - to thunderous acclaim: at the Hollywood Bowl in 1978 (in excerpts) and at the 1980 Aix-en-Provence Festival. The two will be paired again in Semiramide at the Paris Opera in November. Other Rossini heroines the Catalan soprano has portrayed include the title roles in Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra and La Donna del Lago, Mathilde in Guillaume Tell and Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia, which she sang earlier this year in Nice. Her other recent engagements include Turandot (a role she first performed in a spectacular San Francisco Opera debut in 1977) with the Paris Opera, and various concert appearances in New York: a solo recital at Carnegie Hall, a recital with José Carreras at the Metropolitan Opera and concerts with the New York Philharmonic, where she sang Beethoven's "Ah, perfido!" and Brünnhilde's Immolation Scene, and was heard in the Verdi Requiem, aired last fall on the Live from Lincoln Center series. Since her operatic debut as Mimi in La Bohème at the Basel Opera in 1956, Miss Caballé has been in demand at all the major opera houses in the world. Esteemed as a recording artist, she has a repertoire of over 100 roles encompassing Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini, several verismo composers, Strauss and Wagner. Miss Caballé made her American debut in 1965 at Carnegie Hall in a muchapplauded concert performance of Lucrezia Borgia and first appeared at the Metropolitan Opera as Marguerite in *Faust* the following year. San Francisco audiences have heard her as Tosca and Elizabeth I in *Roberto Devereux*, in addition to Turandot. For her outstanding artistry she received the Spanish government's highest award and title: "A Most Excellent and Most Illustrious Doña."



MARILYN HORNE

Internationally renowned as one of the leading Rossini interpreters of the century, Marilyn Horne performs Arsace in Semiramide. She portrayed the role opposite Joan Sutherland in Boston, Chicago and on London Records in the 1960s and, more recently, opposite Montserrat Caballé at the Hollywood Bowl and at the Aix-en-Provence Festival. She returned to the latter this summer to interpret another Rossini warrior hero, the title role in Tancredi, for which she received highest praise during the 1979 San Francisco Opera season. She created a sensation in the same part at her Rome Opera debut in 1977 and repeated her triumph with the Houston Grand Opera and at Carnegie Hall the following year. It was in another Rossini "trouser role" that she made her La Scala debut as Neocle in L'Assedio di Corinto in 1969. Other such roles for which she has been acclaimed include Handel's Rinaldo and Vivaldi's Orlando Furioso, Orfeo and Romeo in Bellini's I Capuleti ed i Montecchi. In 1975 Miss Horne returned to La Scala in Rossini's L'Italiana in Algeri, a role she first performed with Spring Opera of San Francisco in 1964, after appearing as Carmen and Rosina during the 1961 and 1962 seasons. She made her major American operatic debut with the San Francisco Opera in 1960, singing Marie in Wozzeck and Zita in Gianni Schicchi. Her credits with the Company in the next

two years included Marzelline in Fidelio, Hermia in Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream, Marina in Boris Godunov, Musetta in La Bohème, Nedda in I Pagliacci and Marie in The Daughter of the Regiment. Appearances at the Metropolitan Opera include her debut as Adalgisa in Norma in 1970, Carmen, Isabella, Rosina, Amneris in Aida, Fidès in Meyerbeer's Le Prophète and Eboli in Don Carlo. Earlier this vear Miss Horne was heard in her second joint recital with Joan Sutherland, this time joined by Luciano Pavarotti and televised in the Live from Lincoln Center series. Miss Horne was the first American to receive the Palcoscenico d'Oro (Mantua, Italy) and in 1980 was presented New York City's highest cultural award, the Handel Medallion.



**JAMES MORRIS** American bass James Morris makes his San Francisco Opera debut as Assur in Semiramide. He bowed at the Metropolitan Opera at the age of 23 as the King in Aida, but it was his last-minute substitution as Don Giovanni at that house four years later, in 1975, that catapulted him to fame. He has appeared with the opera companies of Miami, Santa Fe, Houston, Chautauqua and Vancouver, as well as at the Ravinia Festival, the Hollywood Bowl and Wolf Trap. During the 1979-80 season he made his debuts in Strasbourg as the four villains in Les Contes d'Hoffmann and in Florence as Mozart's Figaro. Other roles that year included Fiesco in Simon Boccanegra with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Reverand Blitch in Susannah with the Cincinnati Opera, Méphistophélès in Faust with the Baltimore Opera, and Claggart in Billy Budd at the Metropolitan, where he portrayed the same role at the work's 1978 New York premiere.

Other Metropolitan assignments have included leading roles in Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Carmen, Don Carlo, Fidelio, La Gioconda, Luisa Miller, Le Nozze di Figaro, Otello, Peter Grimes, I Puritani and Il Trovatore. In 1979 he sang Don Giovanni in a series of performances with the Australian Opera in Melbourne and Sydney. Last season he performed the same role at the Metropolitan Opera, Portland Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. In Pittsburgh and Baltimore he appeared as Reverend Blitch, with the Opera Company of Philadelphia as the Hoffmann villains, and with Tulsa Opera undertook the title role in Boris Godunov. He can be heard on the RCA recording of I Vespri Siciliani and the London Records version of Maria Stuarda and Le Roi de Labore.



DALMACIO GONZALEZ Following his successful San Francisco Opera debut as Argirio in Tancredi, Dalmacio Gonzalez sings another Rossini role for coloratura tenor, Idreno in Semiramide. In March 1979 he made his first appearance with the New York City Opera as Alfredo in La Traviata, a role he repeated that fall, along with the Duke in Rigoletto and Count Almaviva in Il Barbiere di Siviglia. His Metropolitan Opera debut occurred during the 1979-80 season when he sang two Donizetti roles, Ernesto in Don Pasquale and, on tour, Nemorino in L'Elisir d'Amore. The following season Gonzalez was heard in La Cenerentola in Trieste and in Handel's Ariodante at La Scala. He has appeared before in important engagements with both Montserrat Caballé and Marilyn Horne. With his Catalan compatriot he sang Ugo in Donizetti's Parisina in Barcelona and Nice and with Miss Horne he repeated the role of Argirio in the 1981 production of Tancredi at the Aix-en-Provence Festival. Following his San Francisco performances, Gonzalez will sing Nemorino at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Count Almaviva at the Met and in 1982 will portray Fenton in Falstaff under the baton of Carlo Maria Giulini with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and in June 1982 for his Covent Garden debut.



ERIC HALFVARSON

Bass-baritone Eric Halfvarson, who sings Oroe in Semiramide, the Inspector in Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk and the Comte de Gormas in Le Cid, made his first appearance with the San Francisco Opera this summer as Hermann Ortel in Die Meistersinger and Count Ceprano in Rigoletto. Since joining the Houston Grand Opera in 1976, he has been heard there in productions of Arabella, Norma, Aida, Tosca, Jenufa, Werther, Madama Butterfly and Die Meistersinger. During the 1980-81 season he appeared with that company as Ferrando in Il Trovatore and Sarastro in The Magic Flute. Other recent engagements include the Commendatore in Don Giovanni in Birmingham, il Principe in Adriana Lecouvreur in New Orleans, the Grand Inquisitor in L'Africana and Tom in Un Ballo in Maschera in Caracas, and his New York debut as the Ghost in Thomas' Hamlet at Carnegie Hall. Halfvarson made his professional debut at the 1973 Lake George Festival in The Barber of Seville and has since been heard there in The Magic Flute, Manon, Madama Butterfly, Summer and Smoke and Don Giovanni. In 1979 he made his Lyric Opera of Chicago debut in Prokofiev's The Love for Three Oranges.



**JONATHAN GREEN** After winning critical raves for his portrayal of the title role in Kurka's The Good Soldier Schweik with Spring Opera in 1980, tenor Jonathan Green made his San Francisco Opera debut last fall as the First Priest in The Magic Flute, the Shepherd in Tristan und Isolde and Beppe in I Pagliacci. A frequent performer with the New York City Opera, he bowed there as Don Basilio in The Marriage of Figaro in 1977 and sang 12 other roles that season. Highlighting the following season were performances as Lippo Fiorentino in Weill's Street Scene, telecast last year over PBS, the creation of the role of Raymond Pocket in the world premiere of Dominick Argento's Miss Haversham's Fire, both with NYCO, and a debut with the Cincinnati Opera as the Abbé in Adriana Lecouvreur and as Goro in Madama Butterfly with the Milwaukee Symphony. The last role served for his Lake George Opera Festival debut in 1980 following an appearance in Offenbach's Monsieur Choufleuri at the Spoleto Festival U.S.A. Other engagements during the 1980-81 season included The Tales of Hoffmann and Falstaff with the Opera Company of Philadelphia, and Manon and La Belle Hélène with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. This summer at the Spoleto Festival U.S.A. he repeated Monsieur Choufleuri and added Gluck's L'Ivrogne corrigé, which he also performed at the Spoleto Festival in Italy. Green's fall season assignments are Mitrane in Semiramide, the Teacher in Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, Vicomte Cascada in The Merry Widow, Don Arias in Le Cid and the Fool in Wozzeck.



#### GREGORY STAPP

Following appearances as Hans Foltz in Die Meistersinger and an Usher in Rigoletto during San Francisco Opera's first Summer Festival, bass Gregory Staff sings five roles during the Fall Season: the Ghost of Nino in Semiramide, the Priest in Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, St. James in Le Cid, Raimondo in the student and family matinee performances of Lucia di Lammermoor and a Gypsy in Il Trovatore. He made his company debut last fall in The Magic Flute and La Traviata, and was heard with Spring Opera this year as Pluto in Il Ballo delle Ingrate, Ajax in The Cry of Clytaemnestra and Friar Lawrence in Romeo and Juliet. A graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, he has appeared with both the symphony orchestra and opera company of that city. In 1980 he sang the role of Charlemagne in the American premiere of Schubert's Fierrabras with the AVA Opera Theater. In April of this year he appeared as soloist in an evening of opera excerpts with the Los Angeles Chorale conducted by Kurt Herbert Adler. A prize-winner in several important vocal competitions in recent years, Stapp is in his second year as the Atlantic Richfield Affiliate Artist in the San Francisco/Affiliate Artists-Opera Program.

#### RICHARD BONYNGE

Richard Bonynge returns to the San Francisco Opera to conduct Rossini's Semiramide and Lehár's The Merry Widow, the latter in his own performing edition. Bonynge left his native Australia in 1950 to continue his piano studies in London, where he became accompanist and coach for Joan Sutherland. His official conducting debut was in 1962 with Rome's Santa Cecilia Orchestra, followed quickly by appearances at the Hollywood Bowl and the Vancouver Opera Association. He soon acquired a reputation as a master of the bel canto



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# **PROFILES**



style and has rescued many works from oblivion or neglect. He made his San Francisco debut conducting La Sonnambula in 1963 and has since appeared on the podium in major houses throughout the world. For the American Opera Society he led a concert performance of Semiramide in 1964, followed by staged versions in 1965 in Melbourne and Boston. He later conducted the work at Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1971 and for Vancouver Opera Association in 1975. His Metropolitan Opera debut was a 1966 production of Lucia di Lammermoor. San Francisco Opera engagements for Bonynge have included La Traviata (1964), I Puritani (1966), Maria Stuarda (1971), Norma (1972), Die Fledermaus (1973), Esclarmonde (1974 — the first presentation of the work anywhere in over 40 years) and Il Trovatore (1975). He has served as music director for the Vancouver Opera Association, where he conducted Norma, Faust, Pique Dame, Mignon, Un Ballo in Maschera, Le Roi de Lahore and La Fille du Régiment, and serves in the same capacity for the Australian Opera in Sidney, where he has led Carmen, Lakmé, The Magic Flute, Lucrezia Borgia, Suor Angelica, Nabucco and, in 1978, The Merry Widow. During the 1980-81 season, his Australian performances included a new production of Les Huguenots and revivals of The Beggar's Opera and La Traviata. This season he will be seen there leading new productions of Alcina and La Buona Figliuola and a revival of Rigoletto. His work has been heard by millions on the historic series of three Live from Lincoln Center telecasts featuring Joan Sutherland in concert with Luciano Pavarotti and Marilyn Horne. In 1977 he was honored during the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, who named him

a Commander of the British Empire.

Bonynge's discography on London Records comprises excerpts and complete recordings of both familiar and rarely heard ballet and opera scores, including Semiramide and The Merry Widow.



PIER LUIGI PIZZI

Pier Luigi Pizzi makes his San Francisco Opera debut as stage director with the production of Semiramide he designed for the 1980 Aix-en-Provence Festival and has adapted for the War Memorial Opera House stage. His San Francisco Opera design debut was the 1971 production of Maria Stuarda, and his 1974 production of Simon Boccanegra for the Lyric Opera of Chicago was seen here in 1975 and 1980. Other Chicago credits include La Bohème, Tosca, Rigoletto, La Traviata and Manon Lescaut. He made his La Scala debut with Il Trovatore and subsequently has designed productions of Lucia di Lammermoor, Ernani, Oedipus Rex, Aida, La Cenerentola, Das Rheingold, Die Walküre, Siegfried and I Masnadieri, which he also directed, for that theater. Other recent director/designer assignments include Vivaldi's Orlando Furioso in Verona in 1978, subsequently seen in Dallas in 1980 and Paris in 1981; Verdi's I Masnadieri at La Scala and Penderecki's The Devils of Loudon in Rome in 1979; Gounod's Faust at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, and Verdi's I Due Foscari at La Scala in 1980; and this year, Bizet's Les Pêcheurs de perles in Paris and Handel's Ariodante at the Piccola Scala in Milan. In addition, Pizzi has created the sets and costumes for a Ring cycle at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. Among the designer's many awards are the Premio San Genesio (the Italian equivalent of the Tony) and the Nettuno d'Oro.



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This production of *Semiramide* was made possible through a generous and much-appreciated grant from the San Francisco Foundation.

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Opera in two acts by GIOACCHINO ROSSINI
Text by GAETANO ROSSI
Based on the tragedy by Voltaire

# Semiramide

(in Italian)

Conductor
Richard Bonynge
Stage Director
Pier Luigi Pizzi\*
Set and Costume Designer
Pier Luigi Pizzi

Lighting Director Thomas Munn Sound Designer

Roger Gans

Chorus Director Richard Bradshaw

Musical Preparation Kathryn Cathcart

Prompter
Gordon Jephtas\*

Assistant Stage Director Robin Thompson

Stage Manager Jerry Sherk

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CAST Semiramide Arsace

Assur Idreno

Azema Oroe

Mitrane

Ghost of Nino

Montserrat Caballé Marilyn Horne James Morris\* Dalmacio Gonzalez Candace Kahn Eric Halfvarson

Jonathan Green

Gregory Stapp

Priests, Guards, Babylonians.
Audience of Rossini's day.
\*San Francisco Opera debut

TIME AND PLACE: Ancient Babylon

There will be one intermission after Act I.

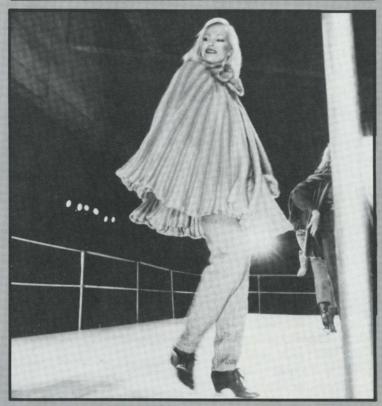
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# SYNOPSIS Semiramide

Time and Place: Ancient Babylon

#### ACT I

SCENE 1 — The military triumphs of Assyrian queen Semiramide are celebrated before the temple of Baal by the priests. Assur, one of the queen's generals and a descendant of the house of Baal, hopes to become king, counting on the favor of Semiramide, who is beholden to him for secret reasons. His presumption is questioned by both the high priest, Oroe, and Idreno, an Indian prince. Semiramide appears before her subjects, showing impatience at the absence of a personage whom she is not permitted to name. Lightning and thunder burst forth, extinguishing the sacred fire on the altar. Oroe declares that certain hidden crimes must be expiated before the gods can be appeased. Assur is told that the successor to the throne of Nino will be named that day, in accordance with the pronouncement of the oracle recently arrived from Memphis. Semiramide orders Idreno and Assur to meet her in the palace after she has received the oracle from Oroe.

SCENE 2 — Summoned from the army by royal message, Arsace, a victorious young general in the service of Semiramide, now appears. He had also been told by his dying father to visit the temple, and is further drawn to Babylon by his love for princess Azema. After presenting Oroe with a casket containing the sacred relics of Nino, which he received from his father, Arsace learns from the priest that the late king was poisoned. Assur appears and rebukes Arsace for leaving the camp. Learning that he was sent for by Semiramide, he guesses that Arsace aspires to the hand of Azema, whom he himself wishes to marry. Assur scornfully discounts the young general's presumption; they declare themselves enemies and rivals.

SCENE 3 — Arsace meets with Semiramide, who by this time has received the sacred oracle conveying in mysterious language that her woes will cease on the return of Arsace and on the celebration of a certain approaching marriage. Thus persuaded that the gods favor her marriage to the youthful general, she hints to him that a high reward awaits one who has so bravely defended her realm. Arsace misinterprets those allusions, thinking they regard his marriage to Azema. He is greatly

surprised and troubled when, before the nobles and generals assembled around her throne, Semiramide declares her intention to raise him to the throne as her consort, and gives the hand of his beloved Azema to Idreno. Assur is no less confounded at this decision and menacingly appeals to the queen's sense of their mutual position. At the same moment, thunder is heard from the mausoleum of Nino, and, to the horror of all, the portals of the tomb open and the ghost of Nino appears. The apparition declares that Arsace shall reign, but not before certain crimes are atoned for. He exhorts Arsace to heed the counsel of Oroe, to think of his father and to render aid to his — the ghost's — son. Semiramide, who declares that she is ready to immolate herself that instant to Nino's memory, is told to live on until she is called.

#### ACT II

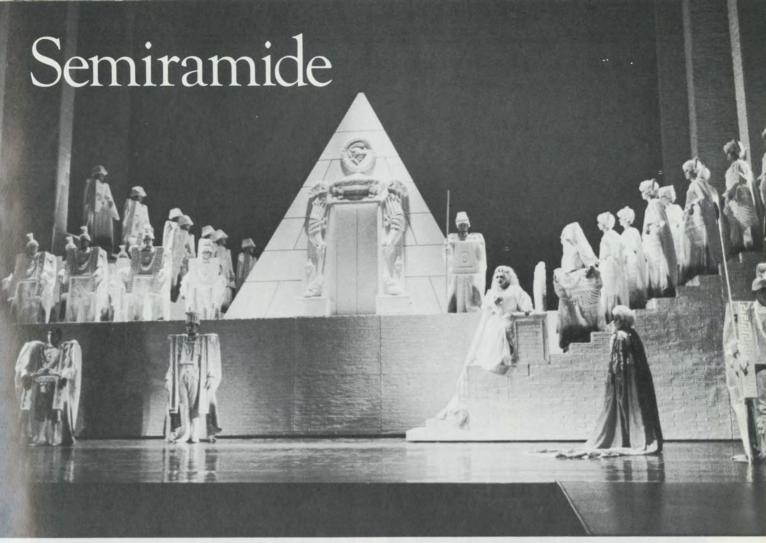
SCENE 1 — Ignoring the ghost's warning, the queen pursues her intention to wed Arsace, and drives Assur from her palace.

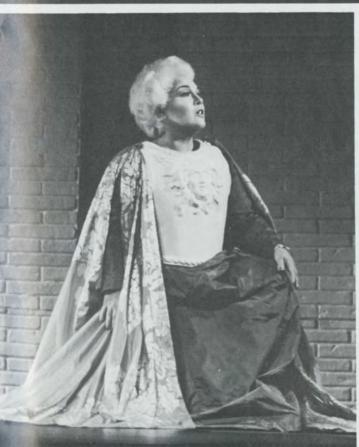
SCENE 2 — Arsace has been told by the apparition to descend into the tomb of Nino, which he has promised to do. Oroe informs the young general, on the authority of his supposed father's handwriting, that he is Ninia, the son of Nino; that Nino was not killed in battle as was believed; and that Semiramide, his mother, in league with her paramour, Assur, had poisoned her royal consort. For this deed a victim is demanded at the hands of the son.

SCENE 3 — In her apartments, Semiramide greets Arsace as her lover, but he confronts her with the truth about their relationship. She reproaches herself, but Arsace says he could never kill his own mother. He resolves instead to avenge his father's death by killing his mother's accomplice.

SCENE 4 — Assur, after being temporarily deterred by a horrifying vision, determines to kill Arsace in the dark labyrinths of the tomb.

SCENE 5 — Semiramide, anticipating Assur's murderous intention toward Arsace, goes to the tomb of Nino to try to shield her son. In the obscurity of the tomb. Arsace mistakes her for Assur and slays her with the avenging sword of her own husband. Divine justice being satisfied, Arsace ascends the throne and shares it with Azema.





Marilyn Horne



Montserrat Caballé



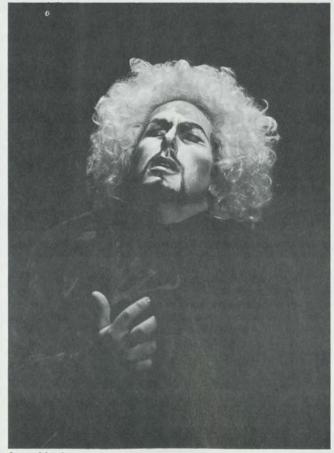
Marilyn Horne, Montserrat Caballé



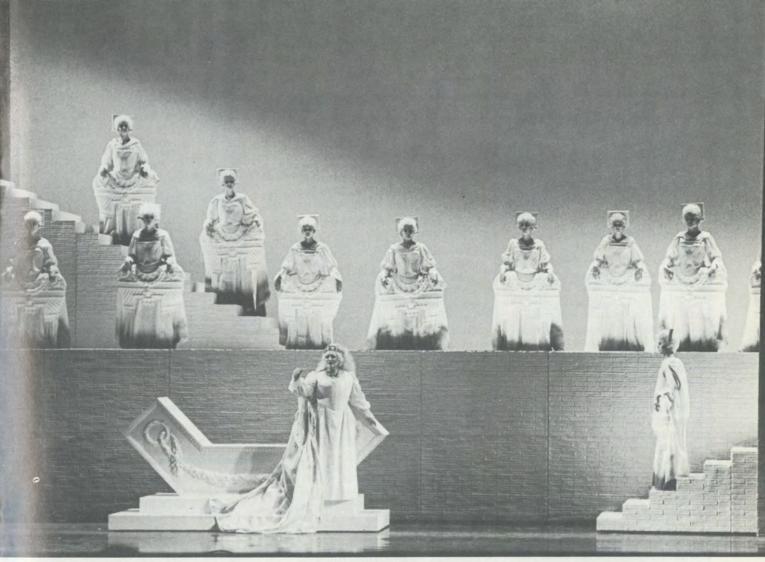
Dalmacio Gonzalez

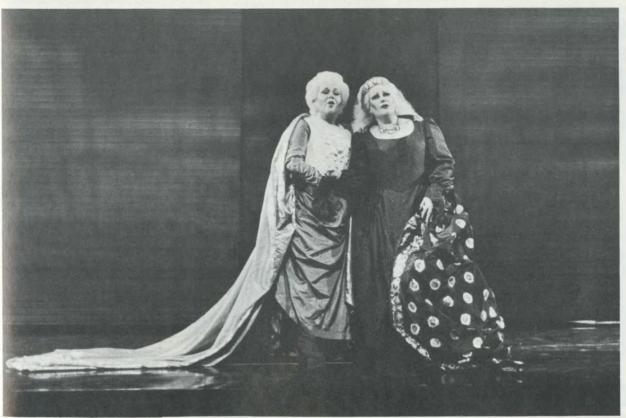


Eric Halfvarson



James Morris





Marilyn Horne, Montserrat Caballé

# Pier Luigi Pizzi on Semiramide

The Italian creator of this *Semiramide* has wrapped Rossini's opera in a dazzling white brilliance to create a performance within the performance.

#### By ARTHUR KAPLAN

Audiences entering the War Memorial Opera House for performances of Rossini's *Semiramide* will be literally dazzled by Pier Luigi Pizzi's sets. The curtain will be up and every piece of visible scenery, from the outer brick walls and stage proscenium to the sliding panels with their bas-relief designs that cover the length and width of the

stage are stark, pure white.

The effect, as Pizzi describes it, is like being in a gallery of plaster-cast statues, surrounded by white walls and viewing models of famous works of sculpture from various periods in various styles. "From the very first images they see, the public will visualize my concept as a director/designer," says Pizzi. "The use of such a décor gave me the possibility of suggesting a sense of bas-relief, as if everything were in marble, or, more exactly, in plaster. The action is therefore placed in a background where there are not only statues, but a variety of architectonic elements: large capitals, architraves, decorated ceilings, fluted columns and the like, in a mixture of classical and baroque styles - all in chalk white."

And when characters make their entrances, this startling uniformity of color is rigorously maintained. The panels part and the upstage brick wall and stairs that constitute the stationary décor of the opera are also white. For the first half-hour of Semiramide, until the entrance of Arsace, every costume and wig is as white as the scenery. The costumes echo the background not only in tonality but in shape and form since all characters except Semiramide wear architectonic robes of one kind or another, resembling something out of a baroque Alice in Wonderland chess game played with only white pieces.

The only hint of color comes from the external chorus, which the audience discovers sitting on the side wings of the stage dressed in evening wear of Rossini's day. This onstage "audience" is the only realistic element in the production. We are as far removed, visually, from Ancient

Babylon as possible.

"Everything is viewed through the distance of a time filter," Pizzi says. "It's a performance within a performance; you never lose sight of the fact that you are in the theater. You see the external chorus reacting moreor-less naturalistically to what they see on stage and occasionally participating emotionally in the stage action. That is why they sing several sections along with the onstage, internal chorus. But the reactions of the two choruses are completely different. The internal chorus members are almost like statues and appear to be moving elements of the décor. This implies a certain kind of stylized gesture and expression."

"You never lose sight that you are in the theater."

The audience should experience this entire stage picture, with internal action and external reactions. "I've tried to interpret the experience Rossini had in composing Semiramide," explains the soft-spoken director/designer. "Rossini had a brief but intense career in which he incorporated everything the 18th century had accomplished and anticipated everything the 19th century would accomplish. In his operatic output — both in the comic and serious works - he said musically everything that could be said. Rossini took cues from existing models and brought them to their ultimate perfection. He showed how opera seria could be written in a new, individual way, thereby opening the door to Donizetti and Verdi. That's why he is interesting as a composer.

"His was a unique and very important career. He utilized the entire 18th century experience, interpreting it in his own way and filtering it through his own strong personality, his own intelligence and, especially, his own irony. I've tried to invent images that would correspond to the filtering process Rossini achieved in his music. I've used baroque 18th-century architectural and sculptural elements as seen through the tastes of Rossini's neoclassical period.

"I think it's important to show the comparison between Rossini's public and ours. By creating a performance within a performance I have



Director/designer Pier Luigi Pizzi with Montserrat Caballé, Marilyn Horne and James Morris during a musical rehearsal of *Semiramide*.



The Ghost of Nino appearing on the threshold of the mausoleum in Pier Luigi Pizzi's production of *Semiramide* at Aix-en-Provence.

tried to view things in a objective way with a contemporary critical sense and sensibility. That way we can more clearly savor Rossini's irony, an irony felt more by today's public than the public of Rossini's time. Even in his opere serie, Rossini is often smiling secretly from within; there are situations which border on the comic. The audiences of his day must have been a little baffled and bewildered, receiving this incredible flood, this cascading waterfall of notes and musical themes. Without historical perspective we can understand what Rossini was doing and can appreciate his irony.

"I'm talking about the music, not the dramatic situation," Pizzi hastens to add. "Otherwise you have parody, not irony. Rossini obviously took great delight in his own extreme facility in

## "Rossini said musically everything that could be said."

composing and gave himself over completely and with great relish to his inspiration. I've tried to go back to Rossini's own taste for creating musical collages and pastiches. My usual method of working directly from the music, from which I get my only true ideas for staging a work, was particularly useful with Semiramide. In this opera the story is absolutely secondary; the development of the plot is of little importance, so I tried to understand how the opera was constructed and to tell through the stage picture what is happening in the music rather than following the path of the libretto.

"Rossini made no attempt to create an Assyrian musical context, so there's no reason to fashion a realistic production with a specific sense of time and place. I didn't go in this direction, and in today's world I don't think that this is an interesting direction to take. It's much more interesting and stimulating to the public to offer a completely fanciful vision of Semiramide's realm than to propose improbable images of a pseudohistorical Babylon.

'There's no reason for Semiramide to look like a Babylonian queen rather than an 18th-century monarch, a model much closer to Rossini's own era. In any case, Semiramide comes from the great classical tradition of the French theater. It's more accurate to take one's inspiration from the tragediennes of the Comédie Française in Voltaire's time than from any possible Babylonian queen. Even in the gestures, I go back to what we know of the French dramatic tradition, with its exaggerated tragic style of movement, to give a sense of baroque stage deportment.

One might expect a certain monotonous uniformity to prevail with such a concept. But Pizzi, again taking his cue from the music, has varied his stage picture to show the evolution in Rossini's style between the two acts of this melodramma tragico, as the opera was called. Act I is very much like an oratorio, the arias, duets and choral numbers rather generalized in nature and not arising from any specific dramatic event until the appearance of Nino's ghost in the finale. Except for Arsace's red cloak, symbolizing both his function as pivotal character in the drama and his future as the predestined ruler of Babylon, all the first-act costumes are white and the gestures extremely stylized.

The second act, while still more oratorio than melodrama, contains more elements of the 19th-century Romantic opera to come than of the 18th-century baroque *opera seria*.

"The second act is far more convincing



Montserrat Caballé as Semiramide in her firstact white wig and costume.



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Marilyn Horne as Arsace on the *cabaletta* platform, with the external chorus at left and the internal chorus at right.

dramaturgically," says Pizzi, "so it's more important to see what is happening in the story. The music here is much less static and has its origins in the drama. In Act I, Arsace's entrance aria and Semiramide's "Bel raggio" are very beautiful, but they are ends in themselves. The duets for Semiramide and Arsace in the two acts are very different. The first one is less motivated and doesn't have any real interior raison d'être; the second one springs from the action and the emotional context. I have tried to bring out these differences and to make them evident through the playing style.'

## "In this opera, the story is absolutely secondary."

Consequently, Act II is played in a more natural style than Act I. The external chorus becomes caught up in the action and responds with the kind of outward emotional intensity characteristic of the audiences of Rossini's time. There is a greater variety in the color of the costumes as well. In Act II Semiramide and Assur are both dressed in black. "They've become isolated from the others because of their crime. After the Act I finale with Nino's ghost, it becomes increasingly clear that they are the guilty ones; they must even feel different from the others because of their guilt complex. They are accomplices and adversaries at the same time, moving away from each other in the duet, divided by a hatred born from guilt, similar to what occurs in Macbeth. Their duet, which opens Act II, looks forward to Donizetti and even to Verdi in a certain

This is more the case in Assur's mad scene, the most modern piece in the score. Because of the completely different musical climate, Pizzi puts the bass into a dramatic style completely different from the previous

scenes. "Assur has already gone beyond the baroque, 18th-century world and must behave in a more modern, 19th-century manner."

Another feature of Pizzi's production that derives from the musical structure of Semiramide will surprise and delight San Francisco audiences the use of cabaletta platforms extending out over the orchestra pit. Of all Rossini's operas, Semiramide most thoroughly employs the fast section at the finale of an aria or duet know as the cabaletta, a word derived from the Italian for horse, cavallo, indicating the galloping rhythm of the music. "I wanted to glorify the moment of great bel canto virtuosity by bringing the singers - il divo and la diva, the idols of the public — as close to that public as possible to maximize the contact and exaltation for both the singer and the audience.

Pizzi, who created this production at last year's Aix-en-Provence Festival, relates an anecdote attesting to the

kind of frenzy and fascination exerted by the bel canto virtuosos not only of Rossini's epoch, but of our own. During the premiere, which, like the San Francisco Opera production, featured Montserrat Caballé and Marilyn Horne as Semiramide and Arsace, light rain began to fall at the beginning of the second act. Although the Aix orchestra pit, stage and rear audience are protected by an overhang, the majority of the audience was exposed to the elements in the openair theater. As the rain increased, certain spectators placed their programs over their heads in a vain attempt to keep dry. "No one got up to leave," the still-amazed director/designer recalls. "People were completely drenched after sitting through an hour's worth of music in the rain, but no one budged until the end. Then I expected everyone to run for cover. Do you know that people stood there applauding in the rain for 20 minutes? Unbelievable!"



Dr. Karl Böhm and Kurt Herbert Adler meet during a break in the *Elektra* recording session. Vienna, March 1981.

GAUSMANN PHOTO

A Tribute Karl Böhm, the dean of international opera conductors, passed away on August 13, just short of his 78th birthday. A champion of the Strauss repertoire, as well as the music of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Wagner and Berg, Dr. Böhm has left a legacy of recordings and legendary performances at the Salzburg and Bayreuth Festivals, and in opera houses and concert halls around the world. He worked with Richard Strauss for many years, and the composer dedicated his opera Daphne to Dr. Böhm. Although he conducted here at the War Memorial Opera House only once, his performances of Die Frau

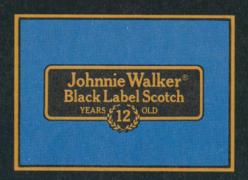
ohne Schatten in 1976 will long be remembered as among the most inspired in the Company's history. When I last saw him, on March 31 of this year in Vienna, he was at work on what was to be his final project, recording the soundtrack for a filmed version of Strauss' Elektra with Leonie Rysanek in the title role. Karl Böhm had the title of General Music Director of Austria, but he really belonged to more than his native country: the entire music world has lost one of its greatest.

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Success is often measured by how deeply you're in the Black.

# ISABELLA COLBRAN

# The First Semiramide

One of the first great divas, Rossini's Spanish wife inspired 10 of his operas, including her final triumph: Semiramide.



#### By ROBERT BAXTER

The early 19th century witnessed the rise of the prima donna. Commanding divas like Maria Malibran and Giuditta Pasta dominated opera stages throughout Europe. Those legendary sopranos, through their flexible, wideranging voices, their impassioned singing style and electrifying acting, drove from the stage the castrati, those emasculated songbirds who had dominated opera throughout the previous century.

Setting the stage for that conquest was the great Spanish diva, Isabella Colbran. Although less famous today than either Malibran or Pasta, Colbran provided the model for their careers and inspired Rossini to compose 10 operas for her, including Semiramide. Like Pasta and Malibran, she was a singer whose range extended from the low G of a coloratura contralto to the high E of a soprano leggiero. And, like her more celebrated successors, Colbran was a temperamental diva as well as a commanding singing actress. Between 1811 and 1822, Colbran reigned supreme as prima donna assoluta of Naples' Teatro San Carlo, then the leading Italian opera house.

Many of the great 19th-century prima donnas were formidable singers and impassioned actresses. Certain more controversial ones divided audiences into screaming partisans and hooting detractors, then conquered the warring factions by the splendor of their singing. Some were the favorites of royal monarchs; others became the mistresses of impresarios or the wives of composers. A few suffered a premature vocal decline and endured a bitter and unhappy retirement. But, of all the great 19th-century divas, only Colbran managed to accomplish all those feats.

She had a voice notable for its range and power as well as its extravagant technique. More than a superb singer, however, Colbran was also a strikingly beautiful woman, a tragic actress who held Neapolitan audiences

Isabella Colbran in the title role of Mayr's Saffo in a painting by Heinrich Schmidt at the La Scala Museum.

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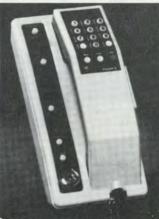
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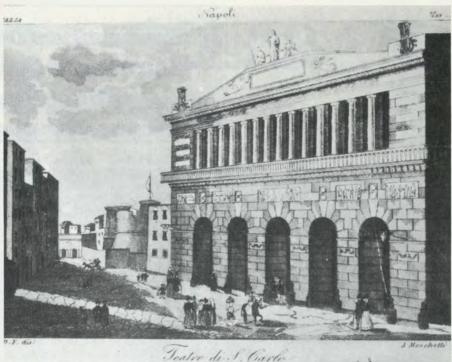
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The Teatro San Carlo in Naples, scene of Colbran's many triumphs.

spellbound with the grandeur of her presence and the nobility of her acting. She came to Naples under contract to Domenico Barbaja, who began his career as a kitchen servant and rose from supervising the gambling tables at La Scala to managing theaters in Naples, Vienna and Milan. For the soprano who soon became his mistress, Barbaja assembled casts featuring the world's greatest artists. He also brought to Naples Gioacchino Rossini, who supplanted the impresario as Colbran's lover and later became her husband.

Colbran became the favorite singer of the Bourbon family that ruled Naples, which cost her the support of the republicans. In Naples, partisan crowds thronged the theater to attack her with whistles and catcalls. But the diva silenced her opponents through the brilliance of her singing and acting. She was an imperious, temperamental woman who lost her voice and retired from the stage before her 40th birthday. During her retirement, she squandered her fortune in gambling and soon lost her husband, too.

Colbran was an extraordinary woman. And, like many extraordinary women, she has been widely misunderstood. Detractors called her a nymphomaniac who seduced Barbaja and then won Rossini with her feminine wiles. Critics and musicologists complained that she perverted Rossini's talent, forcing the composer to give up opera buffa to compose serious operas that displayed her tragic talents. And Colbran's political opponents charged that she sounded shrill and sang out of tune, that she maintained her career

through her favor at court and her powerful lovers.

The singer who inspired Rossini and provided the model for subsequent generations of prima donnas was born in Madrid on February 2, 1785. Her musicality was discovered by her father, Giovanni, a court musician who supervised his daughter's training from the age of six. By the time she was 25, Colbran had composed four books of songs, two of which were dedicated to the queen of Spain and the empress of Russia.



Domenico Barbaja, impresario of the Teatro San Carlo, was Colbran's lover before she met Rossini.



Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) in 1822, the year of his marriage to Colbran and the composition of *Semiramide*, in a portrait by Camuccini at the La Scala Museum.

She received expert vocal training from Francesco Pareja. Impressed by the young singer's gifts, Queen Maria Luisa provided a scholarship that allowed her to study in Italy, first with Giovanni Marinelli and then with the famed castrato Crescentini, noted for his mastery of legato and florid singing. Rossini's biographer Azevedo claimed that Colbran's only rival in singing trills was Crescentini himself and added that she was the only singer of her day who could execute fioriture expressively.

During 1801, Colbran performed publicly in both Bordeaux and Paris. Her Paris debut, a joint appearance with the violinist Rode, was successful but left no lasting impression. The next five years of Colbran's life are undocumented, but it is believed that she lived in Italy with her father and then returned to Spain, where she made her operatic debut in 1806. A year later, she emerged from the relative obscurity that shrouds her early life. Significantly, she made her Italian debut in Bologna with two recitals. The young Rossini, a student there, may well have heard Colbran in her appearances at the Accademia Polimniaca and the Accademia Filarmonica. In a review for the local journal Il Redattore del Reno, a critic wrote, The organ of her voice is truly an enchantment for smoothness, for strength, and for prodigious extension of tones: from the bass G to the high E — that is, for almost three octaves - it makes itself heard in a progression always even in mellowness and energy . . . The method and style of

her singing is perfect."



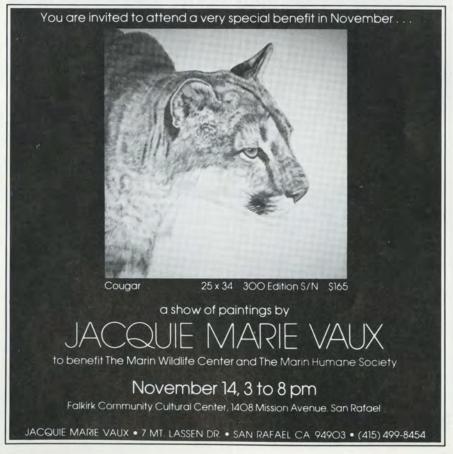
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Colbran in the title role of Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra, the first of 10 opera seria roles Rossini wrote for her.

Those vocal accomplishments brought the young singer to La Scala, where she made her debut on December 26, 1808, in the world premiere of Nicolini's Coriolano. During the next year, Colbran remained at La Scala, appearing in Federici's Ifigenia in Aulide and Lavigna's Oracamo. From the very start of her career, she began to specialize in the tragic heroines of the opera seria repertory. Colbran returned to Bologna to sing in Cimarosa's Artemisia and Nicolini's Traiano in Dacia at the Teatro Comunale. (Rossini probably played the recitative cembalo for those performances.) After singing in Venice, she traveled in 1810 to Rome, where she appeared in seasons at the Teatro Valle and the Teatro Argentina. Among her roles was the title part in Rossi's Alzira.

The following year, Barbaja brought Colbran to Naples. In mid-August, she appeared before a Naples audience for the first time, performing Pietro Raimondi's cantata L'Oracolo di Delfo. On September 8, Colbran made her Neapolitan opera debut, singing the role of Giulia in the first Italian performance of Spontini's La Vestale. For the next decade, she made Naples

her artistic home, undertaking almost 50 roles there.

After singing Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Colbran traveled to Turin, where she performed in several operas at the Teatro Regio for two seasons. At the same time, she continued to make operatic appearances in Naples. Among her

Colbran specialized in the tragic heroines of the *opera* seria repertory.

roles in those seasons were the Countess in Le Nozze di Figaro, Aspasia in Pavesi's Nitteti and the title role in Mayr's Cora. Colbran also created the title role in the world premiere of Mayr's Medea in Corinto in 1813. She appeared in forgotten operas by composers known today only in textbooks: Carafa, Nasolini, Morlacchi, Farinelli, García, Fioravanti, Andreozzi, Saccenti, Carlini and Paer.

Rossini arrived in Naples in 1815 and found more than a talented diva awaiting him. He found a magnificent theater, a knowledgeable operatic pub-

lic and a chorus of unusual quality as well as a company that included such famed singers as Manuel García and Andrea Nozzari. Taking advantage of these musical resources, Rossini composed Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra, a magnificent opera seria. To display Colbran's immense talents, Rossini wrote music filled with virtuosity and dramatic intensity. In the final rondo, "Bell'alme generose," Rossini utilized all of Colbran's virtuosity in one showstopping display piece that Stendhal, who attended the opera's premiere, called a "fantastic conglomeration of embellishments. We were regaled," he continued, "with a sort of illustrated catalogue of all the technical accomplishments which that magnificent voice could master.'

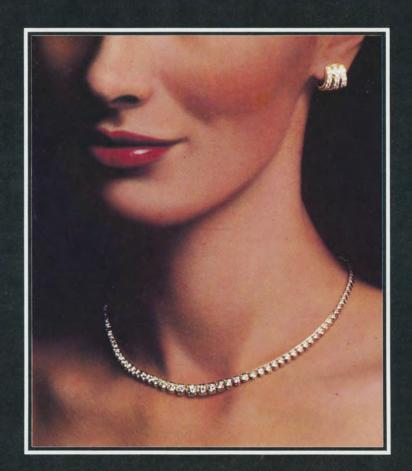
Colbran was an actress of extraordinary dramatic power. Stendhal recalled her stunning beauty. "It was a beauty in the most queenly tradition," wrote the French novelist, "noble features which, on the stage, radiated majesty; an eye like that of a Circassian maiden, darting fire; and to crown it all, a true and deep instinct for tragedy... The moment she stepped onto the boards, her brow encircled with a royal diadem, she inspired involuntary respect."

Colbran was an actress of extraordinary dramatic power.

Captivated and inspired by the Spanish diva's noble art, Rossini virtually renounced comic opera to concentrate on *opera seria*. Colbran created Desdemona in *Otello*, Rossini's next Neapolitan opera. One writer praised the soprano's ability to portray melancholy and arouse tragic terror in the last act of the opera. "La signora Colbran," he continued, "is outstanding in passages of bravura, in the execution of arpeggios and rapid runs, but she has no equal in music tragic or declamatory and in the difficult talent of expression."

By the premiere of Otello, Colbran and Rossini were probably lovers. In the next seven years, Rossini wrote a series of varied roles that exploited her talents. In Armida, Colbran created a pagan enchantress who, deserted by her lover, explodes in fioriture that would test the nimble fingers of a virtuoso instrumentalist. She also starred in Ricciardo e Zoraide, Ermione, Mosè and La Donna del Lago. In addition, she created Anna in Maometto II and the title role in Zelmira.

After the premiere of Zelmira on February 16, 1822, Rossini and Col-



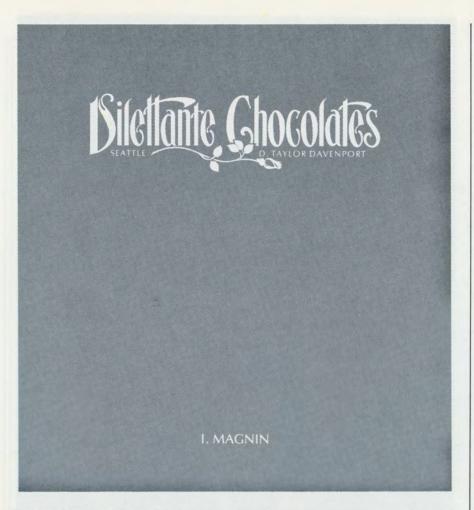
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bran left for Vienna, where Barbaja had become the manager of the Kärntnertor Theater. They never returned to Naples, scene of their great mutual triumphs. At the prima donna's villa in Castenaso near Bologna, they were married on March 16. To Rossini, Colbran brought a substantial dowry. Gossips claimed that the composer married the singer for her money. The passion between the two was apparently already spent by the time of their marriage. Rossini confessed later that he married Colbran to please his mother.

The newlyweds traveled to Vienna, where Rossini's operas had achieved extraordinary popularity. Colbran was indisposed at her debut in Zelmira, but she recovered form when she sang Elisabetta. "Signora Colbran performed the protagonist's role superbly," said the critic for the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung, "and she was truly the queen of the

evening.'

Later in 1822, after a sojourn in Verona, Colbran and Rossini arrived in Venice to undertake the premieres of a revised version of Maometto II and Semiramide. Maometto II was not successful. Colbran was unwell and sang below her best. At one performance, the audience showed its disfavor by whistling at the singer. However, Colbran celebrated a triumph with Semiramide. The Babylonian queen was tailor-made for her regal beauty and still-potent technique. After the first performance, Colbran and Rossini were accompanied home by 30 fantastically illuminated gondolas. The opera was repeated 28 times that season.

Semiramide proved to be Colbran's last new role and her final triumph, but her career was not yet over. Giovanni Battista Benelli signed the

## Semiramide was Colbran's last new role.

two artists for a season at the King's Theater in London. Rossini and Colbran left for England in the fall of 1823, traveling by way of Geneva and Paris. Colbran's debut as Zelmira on January 24, 1824, proved a failure. After appearing in *Ricciardo e Zoraide* and several celebrity recitals, she gave up her singing career.

The demands of a busy career and a difficult repertory had gradually taken their toll on Colbran's voice. Even as early as 1814, the French composer Hérold noted that she sang out of tune in performances of *La Vestale* and *Medea* that he heard in Naples. Stendhal also wrote of certain



Stendhal, the famous French novelist, was an inveterate operagoer who adored Rossini's music but was lukewarm to Colbran's talents.

deficiencies in her singing. "In 1815," he said, "she began to 'suffer from a strained voice," an affliction which in singers of lesser distinction would have been vulgarly termed singing off-key." Stendhal also relates how members of the audience left the theater when she sang an aria out of tune.

But Stendhal's evaluation of Colbran's singing was tinged by his political views. He describes her hold on the Neapolitan theater as "rank despotism" and "tyrannical oppression." "In the year 1820," he wrote, "one thing alone would have made the Neapolitans happy; not the gift of a Spanish constitution but the elimination of Signora Colbran."

#### Partisan crowds thronged to the San Carlo in Naples to cheer or attack her.

Naples, like other Italian cities, was passing through a turbulent political period. The turmoil spilled over into the city's operatic life. Because she was favored by the ruling Bourbons, Colbran was automatically despised by the opposition. The rival factions often turned her operatic appearances into political demonstrations. To assert their political convictions, the republicans whistled and hooted at Colbran.

Louis Spohr has left a vivid description of a typical evening at the San Carlo. His words also relay a rather more reliable evaluation of Colbran's singing than Stendhal's often biased accounts. The night before he heard a performance of *Elisabetta* with Colbran, Spohr attended Angelica Catalani's triumphant solo recital. The San Carlo, he noted, was filled with the Spanish soprano's detractors who were calling the previous evening "Colbran's requiem."

"At her first entrance, she was greeted with a mixture of hoots and applause. As the evening progressed, however, with Colbran singing and acting most beautifully, the hoots diminished and the applause increased until, at the end, she was unanimously

recalled.'

Stendhal's criticism of Colbran, much of it biased, has prevailed over the views of less famous sources. The author of *The Red and the Black* asserted that Colbran could excite but not move an audience, and yet many critics attest to her ability to stir her listeners. Spohr, for instance, wrote that Colbran "sings with true feeling

and acts with passion."

To cover up her deficiencies, Stendhal claimed, Colbran forced Rossini to compose roles that stressed virtuosity over legato singing. But Rossini wrote such lyrical arias for Colbran as the Willow Song in Otello and "Giusto ciel" in Maometto II. Rossini's music, in fact, is a powerful argument against Stendhal's judgments. There is little difference between the music for Elisabetta and Semiramide. Both roles call for smooth legato singing and florid pyrotechnics. The Babylonian queen, in fact, is a much longer and more challenging part. For a Colbran in supposed vocal decline, Rossini wrote "Bel raggio," one of the florid test-pieces for a coloratura soprano.

After a serious throat ailment in 1821, Colbran began to cut back her appearances and rested for six months each year. Her gradual withdrawal from the stage was dictated by vocal problems. But contemporary accounts of her singing indicate that she still commanded impressive vocal resources. After hearing her in Vienna in 1822, Giuseppe Carpani, the Italian critic and librettist, noted that she still had "a voice of the sweetest metal, full and sonorous." Carpani praised her "beautiful portamento [and] perfect intonation. . . . The embellishments emerge like sprays of nectar . . . She executes runs of almost two octaves in semitones polished like pearls.

After appearances that mingled failure with success in Vienna and Venice, and after the London fiasco, Colbran retired. Like many prima donnas before and after her, she entered a retirement that became a living death. Her career ended, Colbran was reduced to playing Signora Ros-

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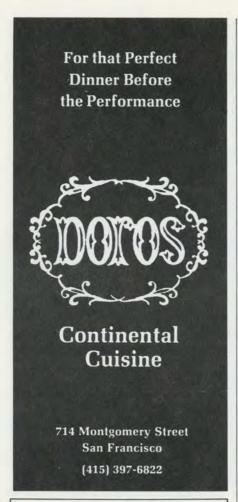
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The Villa Colbran in Castenaso outside of Bologna, where the diva spent much of her time after her retirement and separation from Rossini.

sini, a role that apparently brought her little satisfaction. For six years she traveled with her husband from city to city, witnessing his continued triumphs, attending social events and hearing performances of her roles interpreted by a new generation of divas.

After the 1829 premiere of William Tell, Rossini's final opera, the composer and his wife returned to Italy. In the fall of 1830, Rossini traveled to Paris, leaving her behind with his aging father. Husband and wife did not see one another again for four years. In Rossini's absence, Colbran led a life of extravagance, wasting her money on gambling and trying to recoup her losses by giving highpriced voice lessons.

#### The role of Signora Rossini brought her little satisfaction.

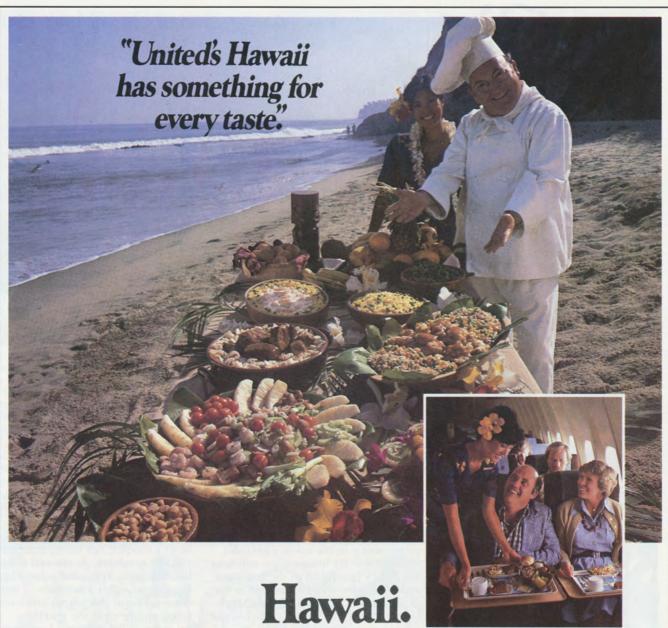
From her retirement, she wrote to Lorenzo Bartolini, "When fortune is remote from you, everything conspires against you. I must tell you that my health is always bad, that my affairs go from bad to worse, and in order to distract myself I have turned to gambling, with such disaster that I cannot take a card that doesn't become a victim." Colbran then pleaded with her friend to purchase a portrait that she described as "a remnant of past grandeur." After beseeching him not to abandon her, she ended her pathetic letter: "The daphnes have come to a sad end; the rain has ruined them all.

The gardener, having been very ill, left them on the ground and everything went wrong.

In 1837 Rossini returned to Bologna and a year later arranged a formal separation from Colbran in which he gave her a monthly stipend and the use of her villa. In the next eight years, Colbran passed her time between the villa and an apartment in Bologna. Her health began to deteriorate. In September of 1845, Rossini rushed to her side when he learned of her grave illness. He emerged from her room with tears flowing down his cheeks. A month later, on October 7, she died.

Isabella Colbran occupies a crucial position in vocal history. She was an important singer, an artist who bridged two epochs. She mastered the bel canto technique of the great castrati but suffused their technical brilliance with a new expressiveness. She opened up the Romantic era of Italian opera, portraying roles that led to the operas of Bellini and Donizetti. And she began an interpretive tradition that was carried on by Pasta, who heard her sing, and by Malibran, who learned her roles from her father, Manuel García, Colbran's colleague in Naples. In 1858, Rossini was asked to name the greatest singer in his early years. "The greatest was Colbran, who became my first wife," replied the composer, who then added, "But the one and only was Malibran."

ROBERT BAXTER has a Ph.D. in classics from Stanford and is music critic of the Camden Courier-Post. He contributes regularly to Opera and Opera News.



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#### The Exaltation of Pure Music

continued from p. 41

first opera written outside of Naples in which Rossini uses only recitative accompanied by the orchestra. Already early in the 19th century, in part because of contacts with French music, secco recitative disappeared in Naples. Rossini quickly adapted to Neapolitan custom, while continuing to mix secco and accompanied recitative elsewhere. Gradually, however, Rossini's accompanied recitative developed such dramatic vocal expression and elaborate orchestral participation that its roots in secco recitative were forgotten. By adopting accompanied recitative exclusively in Semiramide, he affirmed that secco recitative could no longer sustain the action of a music drama. Indeed, the recitative of Semiramide is perhaps the most beautiful and musical in all Italian opera during the first half of the 19th century: a model of passionate and expressive declamation.

In vocal style and orchestration, too, Semiramide continues Neapolitan developments. With such fabulous singers as Isabella Colbran, Rosmunda Pisaroni, Andrea Nozzari and Filippo Galli available in Naples, Rossini allowed his melodic lines to grow ever more florid. In Semiramide, writing for Colbran, Galli and the contralto Rosa Mariani, Rossini adopts under certain circumstances (though by no means everywhere) an impressively florid vocal technique. Here there is no restoration, but continuity of tradition. Only in Paris would Rossini set aside this style, almost at the very moment in which Bellini was writing La Straniera, an opera whose simplicity of declamation was practically a challenge to the vocal style of Semi-

# The music breathes with vast proportions.

ramide. The great Neapolitan orchestra, both in its size and quality of its players, had spoiled Rossini, and never again would he demand less of his instrumentalists.

In its use of the chorus, as well, Semiramide reflects the Neapolitan years. Before Naples, Rossini's chorus never emerged as an active force. Its minor role in Tancredi, for example, is absolutely typical. In Naples, the chorus becomes a protagonist. The enchanted garden of Armida is defined by the nymphs who sing there; the solemn world of Mosè in Egitto reflects the central position of the Hebrew people. The chorus in Semiramide is less a protagonist than a kind of "Greek chorus," following the sentiments of the protagonists and

commenting on them. It appears in four of the six arias and has a dominant role in the Finales and Introduction. On several occasions — one thinks particularly of the arias of Assur and Arsace in the second act — there is a notable expansion of its function. These arias, as a result, though they follow conventional models, develop a sense of monumentality far surpassing the Neapolitan norms.

This leads to the most important point about *Semiramide*. Having left behind the structural and dramatic Neapolitan experiments, Rossini nonetheless created an opera of grandiose design. It is the longest *opera seria* by



Giuditta Pasta as Semiramide.

the composer, even though in formal terms it seems quite simple. To understand this paradox, one must focus on the individual musical phrase, for on that level the enormous expansion in purely musical means that characterizes Semiramide emerges most clearly. Audiences that have heard Tancredi can perhaps recognize this tendency. Comparing any individual theme in a duet from Tancredi with the theme that opens the fabulous duet for Arsace and Semiramide in Act II. "Ebben, a te, ferisci," one can gain some conception of the growth that has taken place in musical ideas. Similarly, compare the first theme of the allegro section in the overture to Tancredi with the corresponding theme in Semiramide: again, the vast expansion



From left, Marietta Alboni as Arsace, Giulia Grisi as Semiramide and Antonio Tamburini as Assur from an 1847 London performance of *Semiramide*.

of the musical idea is apparent. Rossini has not invented dramatic structures in *Semiramide*; rather, he fills the basic structures with a more elaborate music, a music capable of creating within the older forms a new vision of those same forms, a vision impregnated with the sheer joy of music itself.

Wherever one looks, the same fact emerges. The Rossinian forms have become granite-like in *Semi-ramide*, but within these forms the music breathes with vast proportions, complex and harmonically developed themes, monumental architecture. A generation of composers drew inspiration from these models, seeing in *Semi-*

ramide the final assertion of Rossinian art. But it was to Semiramide, too, that others looked, others who were less taken with these fixed forms, this monumental art, others who thereby misjudged Rossini, viewing him through an opera clearly set apart in his career as composer and dramatist. The proportions of Semiramide would recur again, in Guillaume Tell, but there the composer would add to them the formal variety and originality

#### The sheer joy of music itself.

developed through his Neapolitan and French experiences.

Thus, the position of Semiramide in the works of Rossini is complex: it is a conclusion, a retrospective, and at the same time a step towards French opera. But, above all, Semiramide represents for Rossini the exaltation of pure music. In this it has few equals in the history of opera, and it will remain a monument to the genius of its composer.

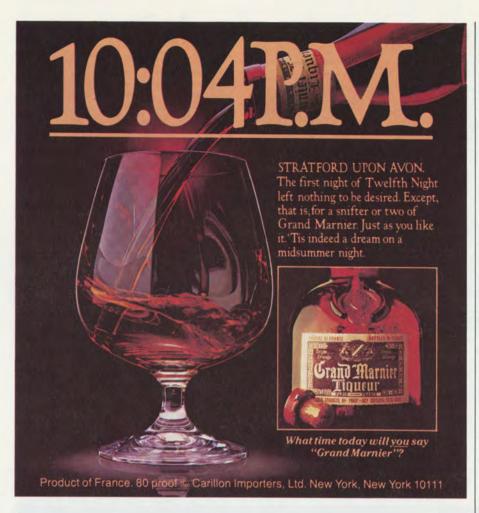
PHILIP GOSSETT teaches at the University of Chicago. He is a regular contributor to this magazine.



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#### Voltaire's Sémiramis

continued from p. 34

crimination between the two characters).

What is lacking in *Sémiramis*, as in the vast majority of Voltaire's more than 20 tragedies in the grand manner, is the depth of psychological insight and the true poetic gift one finds in Racine. Voltaire's characters relate to each other only superficially, perhaps befitting the exaggerated and implausible circumstances in which they find themselves. Racine knew instinctively how to move audiences by the emotional truth of his characters' reactions, caught as they are in untenable, but not unbelievable, predicaments.

The one moment in Sémiramis that achieves a touching eloquence is the recognition scene between mother and son. Arzace has finally been informed by Oroès of his true parentage and of the fact that his mother and Assur conspired to cause his father's untimely death by poison. He is filled with a double horror: the thought of the heinous parricide and the thought of the impending marriage with his mother. His filial feelings have not vanished, however, and he wishes to pardon the queen for her wrongdoing. Arzace tells Sémiramis, in the most operatic of language.

"Fuyez-moi pour jamais, ou m'arrachez la vie" ("Flee me forever, or take my life"). Unable to comprehend his sudden change of heart, and feeling an invincible force both attracting her to him and repelling her at the same time ("Et par un sentiment que je ne puis comprendre,/ Mêle une horreur affreuse à l'amour le plus tendre"), she demands to see the letter that has occasioned his turnabout of feelings and nearly faints upon learning the awful truth. In verses of poignant nobility she orders:

Venge tous mes forfaits, venge la mort d'un père;

Reconnais-moi, mon fils; frappe et punis ta mère.

Avenge all my crimes, avenge the death of a father;

Acknowledge who I am, my son; strike and punish your mother. Arzace rejects her plea and asks rather that she use the sword to end the life of an unhappy but devoted son. It is at this point that Voltaire, perhaps himself moved by the situation he has created, gives the Babylonian queen the most heartfelt and poetically expressive lines in the play, as she throws herself in mercy at her son's feet:

Ah! je fus sans pitié; sois barbare à ton tour;

Sois le fils de Ninus en m'arrachant le jour:

Frappe. Mais quoi! tes pleurs se mêlent à mes larmes!

O Ninias! ô jour plein d'horreur et de charmes!

Avant de me donner la mort que tu me dois,

De la nature encor laisse parler la voix;

Souffre au moins que les pleurs de ta coupable mère

Arrosent une main si fatale et si chère.

Ah! I showed no mercy; be merciless in turn;

Show yourself Ninus' son by taking my life:

Strike. But what is this! Your tears are mingling with mine! On Ninias! oh day of horror and of bliss!

Before giving me the death that is my due,

Let the voice of nature speak out one last time;

At least allow the tears of a guilty mother

To dampen a hand so deadly and so dear.



Statue of the elderly Voltaire by Houdon at the Comédie Française.

The nuances that give the play its modicum of eloquence (and that are totally absent from the opera's libretto—otherwise generally faithful to its source—written by Gaetano Rossi, who Herbert Weinstock says "typified the mediocre scribblers who labored for Italian opera impresarios during the first half of the 19th century") reach their height in this scene.

The remainder of the play, which alternates bombast with bathos, has

little merit. This includes the appearance of Ninus' ghost, about which Frederick the Great of Prussia lucidly advised Voltaire in a 1747 letter: "I don't know whether the ghosts you put in Sémiramis will give the play the pathetic quality you expect. The 18thcentury mentality is willing to accept supernatural effects if they are narrated by characters who witnessed them, but it's a bit dangerous to include them in the action. I doubt that the Ghost of Ninus will make any converts. Those who hardly believe in God will laugh when they see demons playing roles on the stage."

Although Voltaire heeded advice from friends and colleagues and rewrote over 200 verses for a prestigious court performance at Fontainebleau the following year, the basic flaws in the work were never corrected. Sémiramis was revived in 1756 with the celebrated actor Henri-Louis le Kain as Arzace, creating a far better balance between the two principal characters than at the premiere. The tragedian was particularly eloquent in the recognition scene and played the scene in the final act (where Arzace emerges from the tomb after killing his mother) so realistically that audiences that had laughed at Grandval's interpretation vigorously applauded le Kain's. As a disciple of classicism Voltaire at first disapproved such a naturalistic style, but changed his mind

#### Sémiramis was last performed in 1837.

upon seeing the results and congratulated the actor on his talent.

Thanks to le Kain and a more lavish production mounted by the Comédie Française in 1760, Sémiramis became a very successful play and entered the standard repertory. It was performed throughout the final years of the 18th century by all the great tragedians of that illustrious company, and in 1802 Mlle. George, Napoleon's favorite actress, made her Comédie Française debut in the title role. It became one of her most famous parts (as Rossini's Semiramide would be for divas in opera houses throughout Europe during the 19th century). Sémiramis was last performed on November 11, 1837, at the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin in Paris in a benefit for Mlle. George.

Given contemporary tastes and the current critical assessment of Voltaire's theater in general, it is not likely that *Sémiramis* will be revived in the near future. Had it not been for Rossini and his incredible melodic gift that created two great virtuoso roles for the female voice in *Semiramide*, Voltaire's play would long since have died a dusty death on library shelves.



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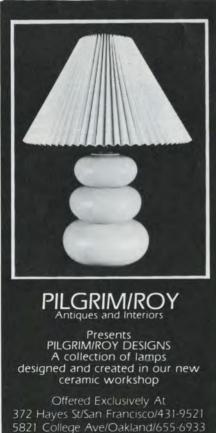
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#### SERVICES

#### **Bus Service**

Many Opera goers who live in the northern section of San Francisco are regular patrons of the Municipal Railways's special "Opera Bus."

This bus is added to Muni's north-bound 47 Line following all evening performances of the Opera, Symphony, Ballet and other major events. The service is also provided for all Saturday and Sunday matinees.

Look for this bus, marked "47 Special," after each performance in the north-bound bus zone at Van Ness Avenue and Grove Street — across Van Ness from the Opera House.

Its route is as follows:
North on Van Ness to Chestnut, then left to Divisadero where it turns left to Union. It continues on Union over Russian Hill to Columbus, then left to Powell — then right to the end of the line at North Point.

#### Taxi Service

Patrons needing a cab at the end of the performance should reserve one with the doorman at the Taxi Entrance before the end of the final intermission. Anyone desiring a taxi at other times of the evening may use the direct telephone line at the Taxi Entrance to summon a cab.

#### Food Service

The lower lounge in the Opera House is now open one and one-half hours prior to curtain time for hot buffet service. Patrons arriving before the front doors open will be admitted at the Carriage entrance.

Refreshments are served in the box tier on the mezzanine floor, the grand tier and dress circle levels during all performances.

#### **Emergency Telephone**

The telephone number 431-4370 may be used by patrons for emergency contact only during performances. Before the performance, patrons anticipating possible contact should leave their seat number at the Nurse's Station in the lower lounge, where the emergency telephone is located.

FIRE NOTICE: There are sufficient exits in this building to accommodate the entire audience. The exit indicated by the lighted "Exit" sign nearest your seat is the shortest route to the street. In case of fire please do not run — walk through that exit.

#### Watch That Watch

Patrons are reminded to please check that their digital watch alarms are switched OFF before the performance begins.

#### Ticket Information

San Francisco Opera box office. Lobby, War Memorial Opera House: Van Ness at Grove, (415) 431-1210. 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. Monday through Saturday. 10 A.M. through first intermission on all performance days.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: The box office in the outer lobby of the Opera House will remain open through the first intermission of every performance. Tickets for remaining performances in the season may be purchased at this time.

#### **Unused Tickets**

Patrons who are unable to attend a performance may make a worthwhile contribution to the San Francisco Opera Association by returning their tickets to the Box Office or telephoning (415) 431-1210. Donors will receive a receipt for the full value, but the amount is not considered a contribution to the fund drive or fulfillment of a fund drive pledge.

Opera glasses are available for rent in the lobby.

Please note that no cameras or tape recorders are permitted in the Opera House.

Children of any age attending a performance must have a ticket. Management reserves the right to remove any patron creating a disturbance.

For lost and found information, inquire at check room No. 3 or call (415) 621-6600, 9 A.M. to 4 P.M.

#### Performing Arts Center Tours

Tours of the San Francisco Performing Arts Center, which include the War Memorial Opera House, the Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall and the Veterans' Memorial Building take place as follows:

Mondays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. \$3.00 Tours last one hour. Rendezvous at the Box Office entrance of Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall; Van Ness & Grove, S.F.

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. \$1.00

Glimpse of the Opera House — 10 minutes

Meet at North Stage Door of Opera House for admission to main floor Opera guild office.

Tours are given by the PAC Tour Group. For further information, please call (415) 552-8338.

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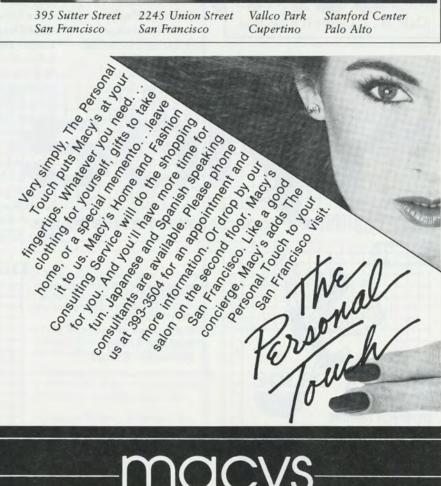
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Lola Lazzari-Simi

Cecilia MacLaren

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Susan McClelland

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Winther Andersen Mamoru Arimoto John Beauchamp Manfred Behrens Raymond Chavez Thomas Clark Angelo Colbasso David Durrett Dale Emde

Peter Girardot John L. Glenister Edgar C. Harris David House Conrad Knipfel Henry Metlenko Steven Meyer Eugene Naham Stephen Ostrow Autris Paige Robert Philip Price Robert Romanovsky Kevin Skiles Micaele Sparacino James Starkey James Tipton

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Dorothy Baune Sarah Castellini Renee De Jarnatt Diane Graham Liza Groen Jennifer Heglar Jennifer Holmes Heather Horsefield Candace Kahn Donna Martin Leslie McCorkle Ian Moody Tricia O'Brien Jessica Poli Katherine Prongos Gwen Reynolds Louise Russo Ellen Sanchez Janet Weil Mary Angela Whooley

Sky Bamford Jason Baron-Pinder Gil Bates William Burns Roy Castellini Dave Clover Chas Dargis Daniel De Jarnatt Julius Dorijoni W.J. Drummond Andrew Einkauf George Freiday Mickey Frettoloso Michael Grinnage Joe Hay Donald Jack Stephen Jacobs Clinton Jennings Julius Karoblis Joseph Kelley John Kovacs

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#### Dancers

Peggy Davis Anne Elizabeth Egan Marti Kennedy Cathy Pruzan Kathryn Roszak Katherine Warner Peter Childers Greg Gibble William Sanner Ramsdell Pete J. Shoemaker John Sullivan Charlie West

#### 1981 BROAD CASTS

Broadcasts of the San Francisco Opera can be heard nationwide on the member stations of National Public Radio and on other selected stations.

All broadcasts Saturdays at 11 A.M. Pacific time, 12 Noon Mountain, 1 P.M. Central, 2 P.M. Eastern. (Certain stations may choose to delay airing of the broadcasts; check local listings for the time in your area.

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- 9/12 Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg
- 9/19 Rigoletto
- 9/26 Lear
- 10/3 Semiramide
- 10/10 Manon
- 10/17 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk
- 10/24 The Merry Widow
- 10/31 Carmen
- -11/7 Le Cid
- 11/14 Wozzeck
- 11/21 Die Walküre
- 11/28 Il Trovatore

#### **KQED 88.5 FM**

All San Francisco Opera Broadcasts begin locally at 11 A.M. Sunday Morning at the Opera. Recorded operas and interviews with Sedge Thomson, host. 10 A.M. every Sunday.

**KPFA 94.1 FM** 

KPFA Opera Review with Bill Collins. Melvin Jahn and Bob Rose. September 20, 27; October 18, 25;

November 22, 29; December 13; all at 5 P.M.

#### GUILD PROGRAM

Opera for Young Audiences
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Donizetti In Italian

Wednesday, November 4, 1:00 p.m. Wednesday, November 11, 1:00 p.m. Thursday, November 19, 1:00 p.m.

Matinee for Senior Citizens and Disabled Patrons Friday, November 13, 1 p.m.

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#### 1981 PREVIEWS

#### 1981 OPERA PREVIEWS

Information on opera previews and lectures is always carried in the San Francisco Opera program magazines. To enable patrons to make advance plans, we are printing a list of all previews and lectures which are open to the public.

#### SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD PREVIEWS

#### SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD AUXILIARY

Opera "Insights" held in the Green Room of the Herbst Theatre, Veterans' Memorial Building, Van Ness & McAllister, in San Francisco. Lectures are free to the public and feature some of the season's outstanding artists in discussion. Schedule to be announced. For additional information, please call (415) 565-6432.

#### MARIN

Previews held at Park School Auditorium, 360 East Blithedale, Mill Valley; refreshments served at 7:30 p.m., previews at 8:00 p.m. Series registration is \$17.50 for 6 previews (\$15.00 for students and seniors). Single tickets are \$3.50 (\$3.00 for students and seniors). For further information, please call (415) 565-6432.

SEMIRAMIDE Arthur Kaplan 9/3

LADY MACBETH Speight Jenkins 9/17

CARMEN Robert Jacobson 9/24

LE CID James Keolker 10/8

WOZZECK Dale Harris 10/22

DIE WALKÜRE Henry Holt 11/19

#### NORTH PENINSULA

Previews held at William Crocker School, 2600 Ralston Ave., Hillsborough. Lectures begin at 7:30 p.m. Series registration is \$15.00; single tickets are \$4.50. For further information, please call (415) 342-8674 or (415) 343-7620.

SEMIRAMIDE AND SEASON HIGHLIGHTS Ramona Rockway and singers 9/8

CARMEN Robert Jacobson 9/28

WOZZECK and LE CID Arthur Kaplan 10/12

DIE WALKÜRE Henry Holt 11/16

#### FRIENDS OF THE KENSINGTON LIBRARY PRESENTS GENERAL LECTURE ON VERDI

A general lecture on the operas of Giuseppe Verdi, with an emphasis on *Il Trovatore* and *Aida*, will be given by Michael Barclay on Thursday, November 5 at the Kensington Library, 61 Arlington Avenue, Kensington. The lecture will begin at 7:30 p.m. and admission is free. For further information, please call (415) 526-3043.

#### PIEDMONT ADULT EDUCATION OPERA PREVIEW SERIES

Previews will be held at the auditorium of Piedmont High School, 800 Magnolia Avenue, Piedmont, at 7:30 p.m. on two Tuesday and ten Monday evenings. Lectures will be given by San Francisco Opera Magazine editor Arthur Kaplan and Opera Education International director Michael Barclay. Series registration is \$45; \$40 for Piedmont residents. Single tickets are \$5.00. For further information call (415) 653-9454 or 658-3679.

SEMIRAMIDE Arthur Kaplan 9/1

MANON Arthur Kaplan 9/8

LADY MACBETH Michael Barclay 9/14

CARMEN Arthur Kaplan 9/21

LE CID Arthur Kaplan 9/28

WOZZECK Michael Barclay 10/5

LUCIA Michael Barclay 10/12

AIDA Arthur Kaplan 11/2

DIE WALKÜRE Michael Barclay 11/16

IL TROVATORE Arthur Kaplan 11/23

#### JUNIOR LEAGUE OPERA PREVIEWS

All Junior League opera previews will be held at the Herbst Theater in the Veterans' Auditorium, Van Ness and McAllister. Lectures begin at 11:00 a.m. There is no admission charge. For information, please call Darralyn Saladino at (415) 931-0266.

SEMIRAMIDE Arthur Kaplan 9/10

MANON Speight Jenkins 9/15

LE CID Dale Harris 9/22

WOZZECK Michael Barclay 10/4

#### NAPA OPERA LECTURE SERIES

For the ninth year there will be a ten-week course called ADVENTURES IN OPERA in Napa. The course, which accompanies the Saturday and Sunday series at the San Francisco Opera, will be held on Wednesday nights from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 1917 Third Street, in Napa. Ernest Fly will again teach the course. Cost for the entire series will be \$18.00. Individual lectures will be \$3.00. For further information, please call Mr. Fly at (707) 224-6162.

SEMIRAMIDE 9/9 MANON 9/16 LADY MACBETH 9/23 MERRY WIDOW 9/30 CARMEN 10/7 WOZZECK/LE CID 10/14 LUCIA 10/28 AIDA 11/4 DIE WALKÜRE 11/11 IL TROVATORE 11/18

#### OPERA EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL PREVIEW SERIES

Previews of all the operas of the 1981 season will be given by Arthur Kaplan, editor of the San Francisco Opera Magazine; Michael Bar-



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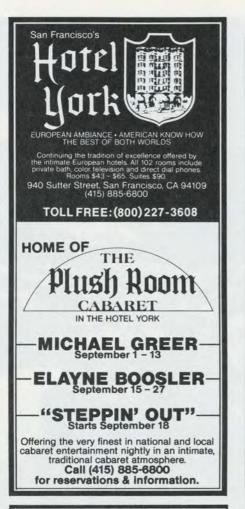
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clay, director of Opera Education International; and James Keolker, editor of *Opera Companion*. All lectures are given in the auditorium of the Dr. William Cobb School, 2725 California Street, between Scott and Divisadero, at 7:30 p.m. Free parking is available in the schoolyard outside the auditorium. Discount series tickets for all 11 lectures, including Barclay's discography "The 1981 Season on Records," is \$45. Individual admission is \$5. For further information call (415) 526-5244.

SEMIRAMIDE Arthur Kaplan 9/2

MANON Arthur Kaplan 9/9 LADY MACBETH

Michael Barclay 9/17

CARMEN James Keolker 9/22 MERRY WIDOW

MERRY WIDOW Michael Barclay 9/28

LE CID Arthur Kaplan 10/7

WOZZECK Michael Barclay 10/20

LUCIA Michael Barclay 10/29

AIDA Arthur Kaplan 11/5

DIE WALKÜRE Michael Barclay 11/10

IL TROVATORE Arthur Kaplan 11/16

#### SAN JOSE OPERA GUILD

Previews will be held at the Saratoga Civic Theater, 13777 Fruitvale Ave., Saratoga; November 9 lecture at West Valley College Theater. Series is open to the public at a cost of \$3.00 per lecture, \$2.00 for students and senior citizens (free of charge to San Jose Opera Guild members). For further information, please call (408) 741-1331.

SEMIRAMIDE

Arthur Kaplan 9/11, 10 a.m.

MANON

Speight Jenkins 9/14, 7:30 p.m.

LADY MACBETH Speight Jenkins 9/17, 10 a.m.

CARMEN Robert Jacobson 9/25, 10 a.m.

LE CID Dale Harris 10/2, 10 a.m.

WOZZECK

Dale Harris 10/23, 10 a.m.

Donald Pippin 10/26, 7:30 p.m. AIDA

James Keolker 11/6, 10 a.m. DIE WALKÜRE

Henry Holt 11/19, 7:30 p.m.

#### SOUTH PENINSULA

Previews held at the Palo Alto Cultural Center, 1313 Newell Road, at 8:00 p.m. Series registration is \$15.00; single tickets are available. For further information, please call (415) 941-3890.

LADY MACBETH Speight Jenkins 9/15

LE CID Arthur Kaplan 9/22 CARMEN Robert Jacobson 9/29

WOZZECK Dale Harris 10/20

LUCIA Donald Pippin 10/27

DIE WALKÜRE Henry Holt 11/10

There will be a special Champagne Gala Preview of SEMIRAMIDE with singers on September 15 at 8:00 p.m., also at the Cultural Center. Admission is \$5.00.

#### CHABOT COLLEGE LECTURE SERIES/OPERA FOR EVERYONE

A ten-week series of introductions to the 1981 San Francisco Opera season. Offered by Chabot College and conducted by Eugene Marker, these 10 lectures are open to all, free of charge, and will be given on ten consecutive Thursday evenings. All lectures are from 7:00 to 9:15 p.m. beginning on Thursday, September 10, and are located at the City of San Leandro Community Library Auditorium, 300 Estudillo Avenue, San Leandro. For further information, please call (415) 786-6632.

SEMIRAMIDE 9/10 MANON 9/17 LADY MACBETH 9/24 THE MERRY WIDOW 10/1 CARMEN 10/8 LE CID 10/15 WOZZECK 10/22 AIDA 10/29 DIE WALKÜRE 11/5 IL TROVATORE 11/12

#### BANK OF AMERICA PREVIEW SERIES

Previews will be held at the Bank of America, 555 California St., San Francisco, in the A.P. Giannini Auditorium, at 12:05 p.m. The series is open to the public at no cost. For further information, please call (415) 953-1000.

SEMIRAMIDE 8/27 MANON 9/15 LADY MACBETH 9/18 DIE WALKÜRE 9/23 CARMEN 10/26 LE CID 10/8 LUCIA 10/27 AIDA 11/6 IL TROVATORE 11/19

#### U.C. BERKELEY EXTENSION LECTURE SERIES

Eleven illustrated previews will be given by Jan Popper, professor of music emeritus, UCLA (8/31 to 10/5), and Natalie Limonick, professor of music, USC (10/12-11/16). All previews on Mondays (except Tuesday, 9/8) at 7 p.m. in the auditorium of the UC Extension Center, 55 Laguna St. (at Market), San Francisco. Series \$65, preregistration advisable; single previews \$7 at the door if space is available. For more information, please call (415) 642-4111.

SEMIRAMIDE 8/31 MANON 9/8 LADY MACBETH 9/14 THE MERRY WIDOW 9/21 CARMEN 9/28 LE CID 10/5 WOZZECK 10/12 LUCIA 10/19 AIDA 10/26 DIE WALKÜRE 11/9 IL TROVATORE 11/16













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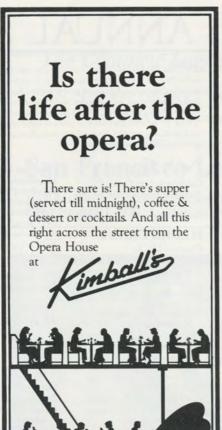
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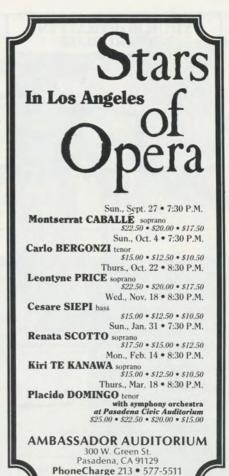
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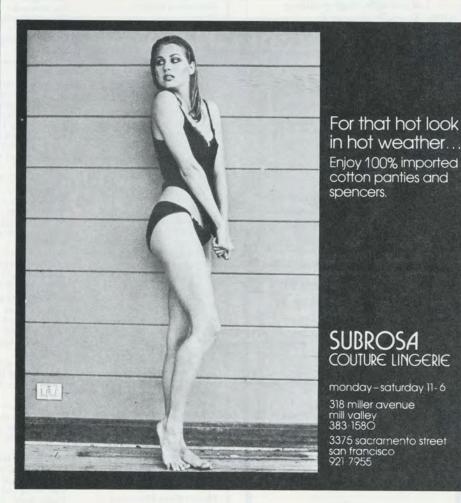
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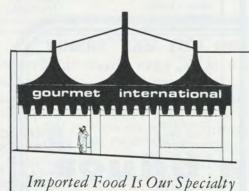
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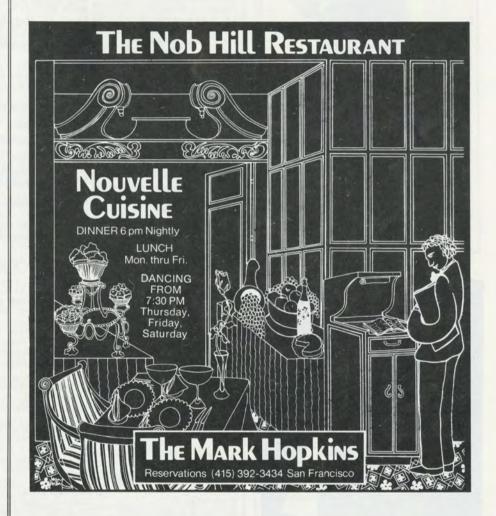
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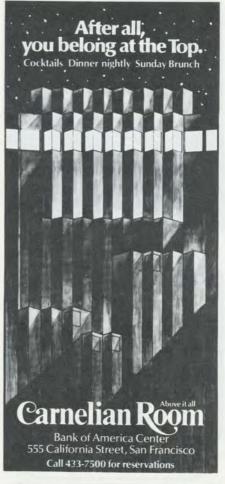
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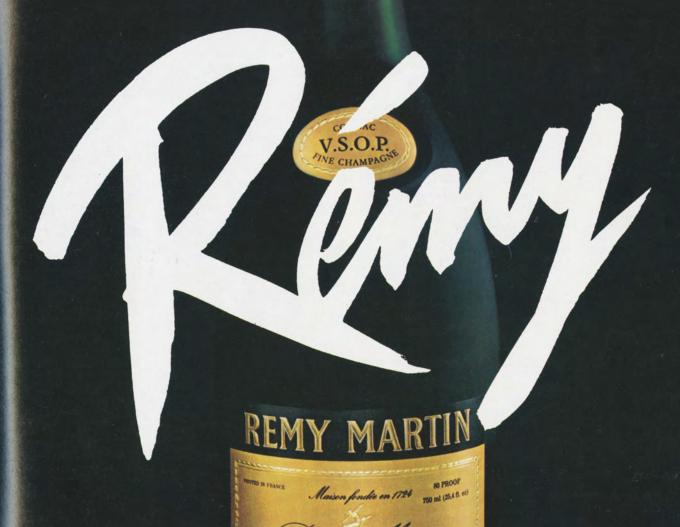
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