

Maometto II

1988

Saturday, September 17, 1988 8:00 PM

Monday, September 19, 1988 8:00 PM

Sunday, September 25, 1988 2:00 PM

Friday, September 30, 1988 8:00 PM

Thursday, October 6, 1988 7:30 PM

Sunday, October 9, 1988 2:00 PM

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1988 SEASON

Maometto II

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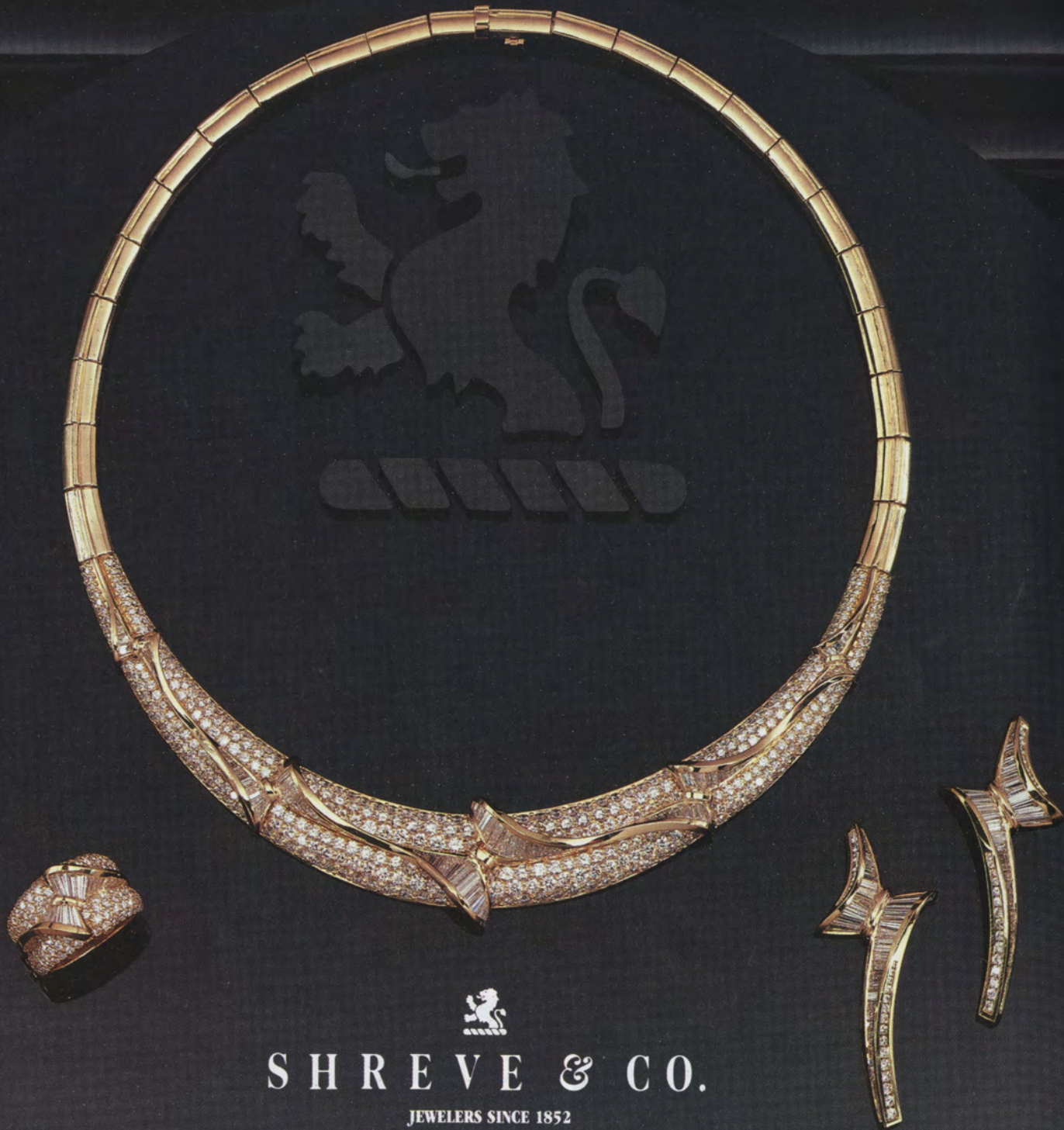


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Lotfi Mansouri, *General Director*

Sir John Pritchard, *Music Director*

Maometto II

1988 SEASON

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The noted Rossini scholar, whose edition of *Maometto II* is being performed by the San Francisco Opera, looks at the work at hand and its creator.
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Nicola Benois, 1901-1988

Detail of the design for *L'Assedio di Corinto/Maometto II*.

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MCCARTHY

From the Chairman of the Board and the President

We are pleased to welcome you to the 66th annual season of the San Francisco Opera, a season marked by many changes in the San Francisco Opera family. By now you are all aware of the arrival of Lotfi Mansouri, our new general director. He is no stranger to our audiences, having staged an astonishing 40 productions here in the last 25 years. So it is with great pleasure that we welcome him back as a permanent part of our Company and anticipate many fruitful years of collaboration under his artistic leadership.

Other changes over the last year have not been as happy, and it was with deep regret that we witnessed the passing of General Director Emeritus Kurt Herbert Adler and the resignation due to ill health of General Director Terence A. McEwen. Kurt Herbert Adler is universally acknowledged as the force that raised the San Francisco Opera to its remarkable status among the world's great opera houses during the 28 years that he led the Company. He was called the last of the old-time opera impresarios, and we shall not see his like again.

Terence McEwen had fewer years in which to give expression to his own personal vision for the Company, but his tenure was rich in outstanding new productions, including his world-

acclaimed *Ring* cycle, which continued to uphold the tradition of excellence of the San Francisco Opera. Terry's encyclopedic knowledge of opera and his great sense of humor will be fondly remembered by all of us. We wish him well in the future.

Our Board of Directors also suffered the loss of two great champions of opera in San Francisco with the passing of our Directors Emeriti Cyril Magnin and Mrs. Nion R. Tucker. Their generosity and enthusiasm will serve as an inspiration to the entire Board, which this year includes eight new members.

In looking at our repertoire this season, we have many old friends to thank for their generosity in underwriting productions, as well as new donors, whom we welcome with deepest thanks. Funds for our new *Parsifal* have been provided through the generosity of an anonymous friend, and we have the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation to thank for our production of *Maometto II*. Four production revivals have been generously underwritten: that of *L'Africaine* by the Sells Foundation; *The Rake's Progress* by Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Naify; *Così fan tutte* by the San Francisco Opera Guild; and *La Bohème* by the Bernard Osher Foundation. We also would like to express our gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. William Rollnick, whose financial assistance has made

possible most of this season's Supertitles.

As always, it is a privilege to be able to acknowledge our governmental funding sources, including such stalwarts as the National Endowment for the Arts and the California Arts Council. We also extend our deep gratitude to Grants for the Arts, Mayor Art Agnos and Chief Administrative Officer Rudolf Nothenberg, whose support has been most encouraging.

As in previous years, we extend our appreciation to the San Francisco Opera Guild, the Merola Opera Program, and the War Memorial Board of Trustees for their ongoing support.

We are further pleased to note this year's increase in our subscription base, but the reality of opera production is that ticket sales can cover only slightly more than half of our expenses. The interest of our audience in the magnificent art form of the opera has been amply demonstrated over the past years. With your continued support, and increased contributions wherever possible, we can together continue the glorious tradition of opera in San Francisco.

Reid W. Dennis, Chairman
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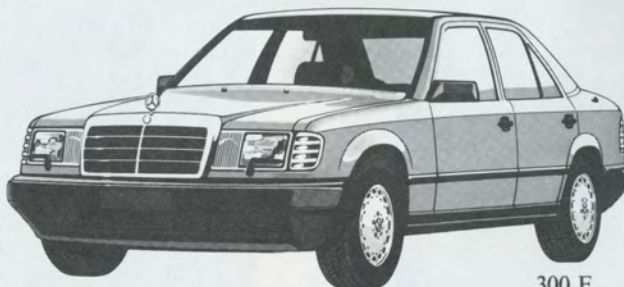
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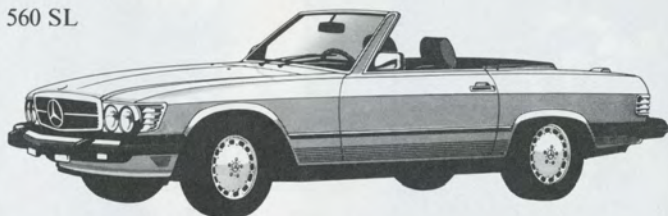


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General Director's Message

Returning to San Francisco has always been a pleasure for me, but never more so than this year, as I embark upon my new position as general director of San Francisco Opera. Long before I received this appointment, I wrote in my autobiography that I regarded San Francisco Opera as my "home" company, and the important role it has played in my career and life cannot be overstressed. During my student years in Los Angeles, I came to know and love the operatic repertoire through San Francisco Opera performances, and my earliest participation was as a supernumerary with the Company during its tours to Los Angeles.

I've always been a great believer in the power of kismet, and I am convinced that way back when I first carried a spear in *Otello* I was already beginning to fulfill part of a grand design—a master plan of some sort that has now come full circle as I assume leadership of my "home" company.

In my work at other opera companies around the world, I have always used the excellence of San Francisco Opera productions as the standard against which all others must be measured. Now it is my fervent hope that I can contribute to the artistic growth and financial stability of this wonderful institution. To use whatever talents I may have been given, all of my energy, my fullest capabilities to maintain San Francisco Opera's status as one of the foremost performing arts organizations in the world—and to prepare the Company to enter the 21st century—that is my pledge to you, the San Francisco Opera family. I am delighted to join with all of you as together we embark upon the next stage in the continuing evolution of the most marvelous of art forms in this, the most marvelous of cities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Letitia M. Davis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

San Francisco Opera

Lotfi Mansouri, *General Director*

Sir John Pritchard, *Music Director*

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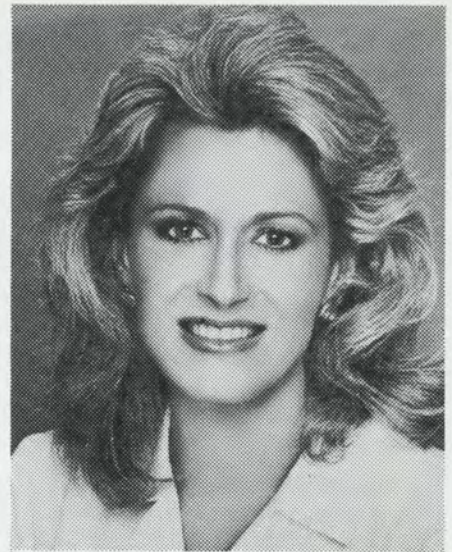
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1988 Season

<i>Opening Night</i>					
Friday, September 9, 7:00		Saturday, September 24, 8:00		Thursday, October 13, 8:00	
L'Africaine	Meyerbeer	L'Africaine	Meyerbeer	Così fan tutte	Mozart
Verrett, Swenson, Spence*; Domingo, Diaz, Devlin, Anderson, Delavan, Skinner, Rouleau		Sunday, September 25, 2:00		Saturday, October 15, 7:30	
Arena/Mansouri/W. Skalicki/A. Skalicki/Munn/Ray*		Maometto II	Rossini	Der Fliegende Holländer	Wagner
<i>1988 production underwritten through a generous gift from the Sells Foundation.</i>		Tuesday, September 27, 8:00		Sunday, October 16, 2:00	
		L'Africaine	Meyerbeer	Manon Lescaut	Puccini
		Wednesday, September 28, 7:30		Lorengar, Manhart; Dvorský, Vanaud*, Capecci, Wunsch, Travis, Petersen, Skinner, Anderson, Potter Pritchard/Asagaroff/Klein/Arhelger	
		The Rake's Progress	Stravinsky	Tuesday, October 18, 8:00	
		Thursday, September 29, 7:30		Così fan tutte	Mozart
		Der Fliegende Holländer	Wagner	Wednesday, October 19, 7:30	
		Polaski*, Young; Van Dam, Ochman, Koptchak*		Manon Lescaut	Puccini
		Kaltenbach/Calábria/Ponnelle/ Halmen/Munn		Friday, October 21, 8:00	
		<i>Production originally made possible, in part, by the Gramma Fisher Foundation.</i>		Così fan tutte	Mozart
		Friday, September 30, 8:00		Saturday, October 22, 7:00	
		Maometto II	Rossini	<i>New Production</i>	
		Saturday, October 1, 8:00		Parsifal	Wagner
		Der Fliegende Holländer	Wagner	W. Meier*, S. Patterson, Panagulias*, Williams*, Manhart, Hoffman*, Spence; Kollo, Moll, Hynninen*, Berry, J. Patterson, Wunsch, Potter, Anderson, Ledbetter	
		Sunday, October 2, 2:00		Pritchard/Joël/Halmen/Munn	
		The Rake's Progress	Stravinsky	<i>Production made possible by a generous gift from a friend of San Francisco Opera.</i>	
		Tuesday, October 4, 8:00		Sunday, October 23, 2:00	
		The Rake's Progress	Stravinsky	Der Fliegende Holländer	Wagner
		Wednesday, October 5, 8:00		Tuesday, October 25, 7:00	
		Der Fliegende Holländer	Wagner	Parsifal	Wagner
		Thursday, October 6, 7:30		Wednesday, October 26, 8:00	
		Maometto II	Rossini	Manon Lescaut	Puccini
		Friday, October 7, 8:00		Thursday, October 27, 7:30	
		Der Fliegende Holländer	Wagner	Così fan tutte	Mozart
		Saturday, October 8, 8:00		Friday, October 28, 7:00	
		Così fan tutte	Mozart	Parsifal	Wagner
		Csavlek, Montague*, Rolandi; Gulyás, Dickson, Krause		Saturday, October 29, 8:00	
		Bradshaw/Gleue*/Ponnelle/Munn		Manon Lescaut	Puccini
		<i>Production originally made possible by a grant from Crocker National Bank.</i>		Sunday, October 30, 2:00	
		Sunday, October 9, 2:00		Così fan tutte	Mozart
		Maometto II	Rossini		
		Tuesday, October 11, 8:00			
		Der Fliegende Holländer	Wagner		

Tuesday, November 1, 8:00 Manon Lescaut	Puccini	Saturday, November 26, 8:00 La Bohème	Puccini	Saturday, December 10, 7:30 La Gioconda	Ponchielli
Wednesday, November 2, 7:00 Parsifal	Wagner	Sunday, November 27, 1:30 La Gioconda	Ponchielli	Sunday, December 11, 2:00 La Bohème	Puccini
Thursday, November 3, 7:30 Così fan tutte	Mozart	Tuesday, November 29, 8:00 La Bohème	Puccini	(Same cast as December 9)	
Friday, November 4, 8:00 Manon Lescaut	Puccini	Wednesday, November 30, 7:30 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk	Shostakovich	** American opera debut * San Francisco Opera debut	
Sunday, November 6, 1:00 Parsifal	Wagner	Thursday, December 1, 7:30 La Gioconda	Ponchielli	All performances are in the original language with English Supertitles. Supertitles for <i>L'Africaine</i> , <i>The Rake's Progress</i> , <i>Maometto II</i> , <i>Manon Lescaut</i> , <i>Parsifal</i> , <i>Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk</i> , <i>La Bohème</i> and <i>La Gioconda</i> provided by a generous and most appreciated gift from William and Eloise Rollnick. <i>Così fan tutte</i> supertitles underwritten through a generous grant from American Express. Supertitles for <i>Der Fliegende Holländer</i> are underwritten through a grant from Pacific Gas and Electric Company.	
Tuesday, November 8, 7:00 Parsifal	Wagner	Friday, December 2, 8:00 La Bohème	Puccini	Repertoire, casts and dates subject to change.	
Wednesday, November 9, 7:30 Manon Lescaut	Puccini	Saturday, December 3, 7:30 La Gioconda	Ponchielli	Box Office and telephone sales: (415) 864-3330.	
Saturday, November 12, 8:00 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk	Shostakovich	Sunday, December 4, 2:00 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk	Shostakovich		
Barstow, Golden*, de la Rosa, Ganz; Trussel, Lewis, Devlin, J. Patterson, Travis, Petersen, Skinner, Gudas, Coles, Anderson, Delavan, Potter Pritchard/Robertson (December 4)/ Freedman/W. Skalicki/Munn		Tuesday, December 6, 7:30 La Gioconda	Ponchielli		
Wednesday, November 16, 7:30 La Bohème	Puccini	Thursday, December 8, 7:30 La Bohème	Puccini		
Freni, Pacetti; Pavarotti, G. Quilico, Dickson, Ghiaurov, Tajo, Harper, Coles Patanè/Zambello/Mitchell/Button/Munn <i>Production originally made possible by a gift in memory of George L. Quist; revival made possible by the Bernard Osher Foundation.</i>		Friday, December 9, 8:00 La Bohème	Puccini		
Saturday, November 19, 1:00 La Bohème	Puccini	Gasdia*, de la Rosa; Lima, Malis, Delavan, Langan, Tajo, Harper, Coles Fiore/Zambello/Mitchell/Button/Munn			
Saturday, November 19, 8:00 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk	Shostakovich	Saturday, December 10, 1:00 <i>Family Matinee</i>			
Sunday, November 20, 1:30 La Gioconda	Ponchielli	La Bohème	Puccini		
Marton, Ciorca, Nadler; Polozov*, Opthof, Giaiotti, Irmiter*, Petersen, Pittsinger Kord/Ewers*/Brown/Munn/Sulich <i>Production originally made possible by a friend of the San Francisco Opera and the San Francisco Opera Guild.</i>		Hartlieb, Williams; Wunsch, Ledbetter, Potter, Skinner, Travis, Harper, Coles Fiore/Zambello/Mitchell/Button/ Munn			
Monday, November 21, 8:00 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk	Shostakovich				
Tuesday, November 22, 8:00 La Bohème	Puccini				
Wednesday, November 23, 7:30 La Gioconda	Ponchielli				
Friday, November 25, 8:00 Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk	Shostakovich				

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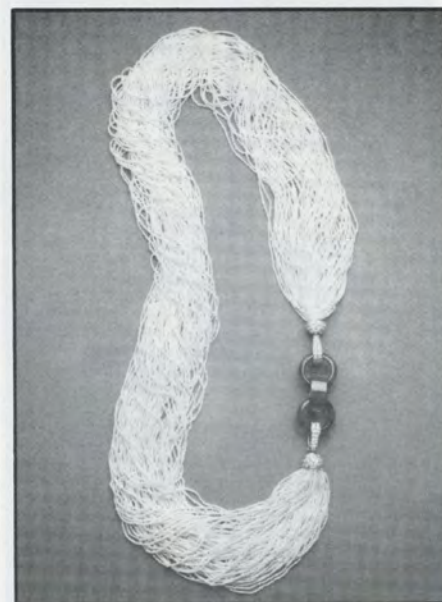
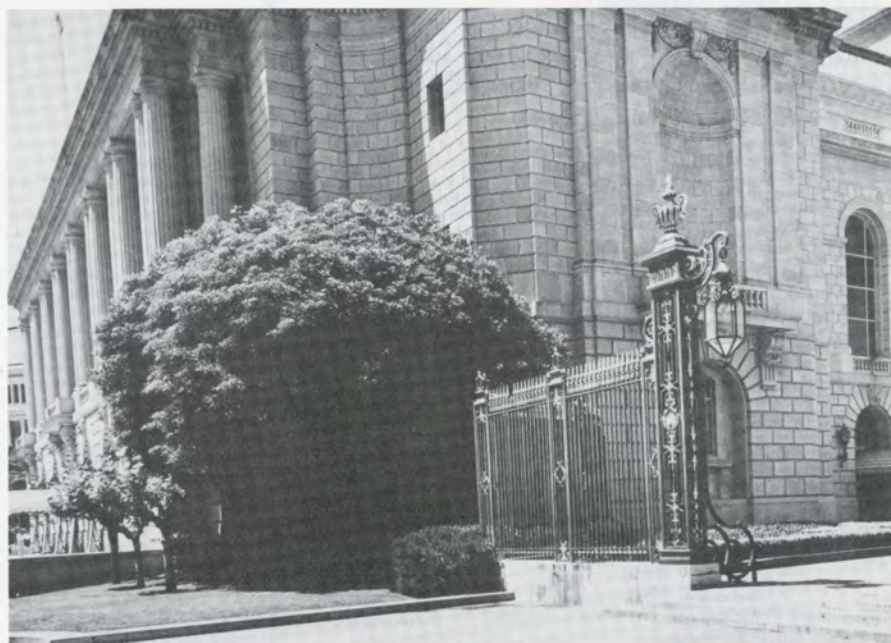
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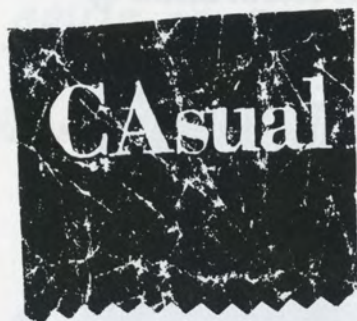
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Gioachino Rossini, 1792-1868. Engelmann etching after a painting by Julien de Paris, made in the mid-1820s.



Isabella Colbran, 1785-1845. The first Anna Erisso in *Maometto II*, Mme. Colbran was the mistress of the impresario Domenico Barbaja and the favorita of the King of Naples. She deserted both for Rossini, whom she married in 1822.

Rossini and *Maometto II*

By PHILIP GOSSETT

Faced with the American premiere of an opera written almost 170 years ago, a modern audience might well ask: if this piece is really worthwhile, why has it never been performed in the United States before? After all, we know about Rossini: he wrote *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Cenerentola*, and *L'Italiana in Algeri*. Some serious works were extensively performed in America during the 19th century, and have been revived occasionally in recent years. But *Maometto II*?? Where did they dig that one up?

Since the mid-19th century Gioachino Rossini's reputation has rested primarily on his comic operas. Indeed, in dedicating to God his *Petite Messe Solennelle* (1863), the masterwork of his late years,

Philip Gossett, the Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor of Music at the University of Chicago, is general editor of The Works of Giuseppe Verdi and directs the Opera Omnia di Gioachino Rossini, the series in which the edition of Maometto II being performed at San Francisco Opera is to be published.

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Filippo Galli, 1783-1853, the first interpreter of the role of Maometto II. A leading Italian tenor for 10 years, Galli became a basso following a serious illness and proceeded to excel in that vocal category as well.



Rossini himself wrote: "I was born for *opera buffa*, you know it well. A little science, a little art, that's all. Be blessed, then, and grant me a place in Paradise." But these words, laden with irony, cannot be taken at face value. They are words of a composer who prepared 40 operas between 1810 and 1829, culminating in *Guillaume Tell* for the Paris Opéra, and then abandoned the stage. The reasons behind his silence, artistic, psychological, physical, economic, political, are complex. Suffice it to say that Rossini lived on for 40 years, during which time practically all his operas disappeared from the repertory, victims of the public's desire for novelty, fundamental aesthetic changes in musical theater, and the absence of singers capable of meeting the rigorous demands of his vocal style.

Rossini's contemporaries knew him equally as a composer of comic operas and serious ones. Two of the latter frame his mature Italian career, *Tancredi* (1813) and *Semiramide* (1823); both were written for the Teatro La Fenice of Venice, and both exerted a major influence on the history of Italian opera. In many ways, however, Rossini's most important artistic achievement lies in the group of serious operas he prepared from 1815 through 1822 in Naples, where he served as music director of the principal theaters, under the administration of the famous impresario Domenico Barbaja. Barbaja, who began his career as a Milanese café waiter, was ultimately to have under his control the major opera houses of Italy and Austria: the Teatro alla Scala of Milan, the Teatro San Carlo of Naples, and the Kärntnertortheater of Vienna. From his first position, in Naples, Barbaja watched the comings and goings of young composers attentively, and Rossini's talent did not elude him. His invitation provided Rossini with the opportunity to concentrate his efforts at a theater which provided some of the best facilities in Italy, a budget large enough to assure the best singers of the age, and a personal situation in which the composer could devote himself fully to his art. The resulting works constitute a remarkable chapter in the history of

Italian opera.

After two preparatory efforts, largely based on earlier music (*Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra* of 1815 and *La Gazzetta* of 1816—the only comic opera in the group), Rossini undertook eight additional works, mostly for the Teatro San Carlo. They are compositions to which he devoted ample time, scores written with extraordinary care and precision. Though all share certain elements characteristic of Rossini's mature style, each work develops a unique atmosphere: from the chivalric and magic realm of *Armida*, to the neo-Romantic forests of *La Donna del Lago*, to the severe classicism of *Ernione*, to the Biblical grandeur of *Mosè in Egitto*. Recent productions of these operas at the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro and elsewhere have demonstrated that they are as different from one another as, for example, the operas that make up Verdi's famous trilogy: *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata*.

Of the operas written for Naples, Rossini's most ambitious works, those in which he experimented freely with the underlying structures of his art, were nonetheless met with indifference, even hostility, by the Neapolitans. *Maometto II*, first performed on December 3rd, 1820, is one of the finest of these operas. Despite a splendid cast, including the soprano Isabella Colbran, the contralto Adelaide Comelli, the tenor Andrea Nozzari, and the bass Filippo Galli, its fate was unhappy. That Rossini nonetheless believed in *Maometto II* is evident from the fact that he revised it twice: once to open his last Italian season, at the Teatro La Fenice of Venice in December of 1822 (the season for which he also wrote *Semiramide*); then for the Paris Opéra, where, under the name of *Le Siège de Corinthe*, it became his first French opera. There are positive things to be said about both revisions, to be sure, but they compromise Rossini's original vision: the Neapolitan



Marilyn Horne as Neocle in *L'Assedio di Corinto* at *La Scala* in 1969. Neocle is a role that evolved out of Calbo in *Maometto Secondo*.

version remains the most audacious, unified, and effective.

Maometto II has a musical and dramatic coherence, a linearity of development, an artistic seriousness of purpose that reveal the composer at the height of his powers. The libretto, derived by Cesare Della Valle, the Duke of Ventignano, from his own verse tragedy, *Anna Erizo*, is set in Negroponte in 1470, where the Venetian settlement was besieged by the Turks, under their Sultan, Maometto II. At the center of the drama is Anna (soprano), daughter of the Venetian leader, Paolo Erisso (tenor). He intends her to marry Calbo (contralto), a Venetian general, but Anna has pledged her faith already to "Uberto," a young man she has met in Corinth. "Uberto," however, turns out to have been Maometto II (bass) in disguise. When Calbo and her father are taken captive, Anna, rushing in to plead for their lives, recognizes her beloved. The remainder of the libretto explores the conflict between her love for Maometto and her sense of duty to her people. Ultimately, she will refuse Maometto's hand, assist Calbo and her father in their escape, and, faced with the Sultan's fury, commit suicide with the dagger given to her by her father, rather than face dishonor.

Each of the central characters is carefully developed psychologically, and it is precisely the internal struggles they undergo that render Anna's suicide and Maometto's despair profoundly tragic. Plots that grow from conflicts between love and duty abound in Italian opera of the first half of the 19th century, and Gilbert and Sullivan parodied the genre relentlessly in *The Pirates of Penzance* (subtitled *The Slave of Duty*). Yet, unlike Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto*, where the conflict is neatly resolved for the Hebrew Elcia by God's thunderbolt, which strikes her Egyptian lover Osiride dead, Rossini and Della Valle allow no such *deus ex nube* in *Maometto II*. The conqueror Maometto, torn between his love and his desire for revenge, helplessly witnesses Anna's suicide; Anna herself, beside her mother's tomb, joins her hand in Calbo's (whom she does not love) and then inflicts on herself a physical martyrdom she has already suffered spiritually. The hopelessness is rendered darker yet by our knowledge that, despite the momentary success of the Venetians, led by Paolo Erisso and Calbo, their destruction is assured.

It is worth noticing two elements of vocal scoring very different from those of a later generation of Italian composers. First of all, the father, Paolo Erisso, is sung by a tenor, not by the typical baritone of Verdian persuasion (Amonasro in *Aida*, Germont in *La Traviata*, or the hero of *Simon Boccanegra*). This was highly common in vocal scoring of the time, when the young hero was less likely to be sung by a tenor than by a contralto *en travesti*. Calbo is one of a long line of Rossinian heroes of this kind: Tancredi, Malcolm (in *La Donna del Lago*) and Arsace (in *Semiramide*) are others. The practice persists from the 18th century, when heroic roles were generally sung by castrati. On those occasions when castrati were unavailable, it was preferred to substitute an appropriate woman's voice, rather than sacrifice the range and balance of the music. As changing (and more "enlightened") customs gradually dried up the supply of castrati by the early 19th century, composers in Italy at first continued to employ lower women's voices for the roles of young heroes. Only with Bellini and Donizetti was this practice eventually replaced by the more "realistic" convention that prevailed through the remainder of the century.

Rossini's artistic commitment is visible throughout *Maometto II*. There is, for example, a notable reduction in the number of separate "numbers" in the opera (the so-called "numeri chiusi") from Rossini's earlier works, and a remarkable internal expansion in many of them. Rossini does not reject the musical forms he had almost single-handedly codified during the preceding decade: these remain the basis for all his Italian operas (and will continue to play a large role in his French works). Still, a comparison between the classical and elegant forms of *Tancredi* and the enormous, surprising structures of *Maometto II*, some of which stretch the concept of the "closed number" to the limits of comprehensibility, reveals the extent to which Rossini attempted to develop the technical means of his art. The first act, for example, consists of only five numbers:

1. a massive, multi-partite *Introduction* for the Venetian warriors, a council of war in which they decide to fight to the death rather than yield to Maometto's forces;
2. a brief, one-movement *Cavatina*: for

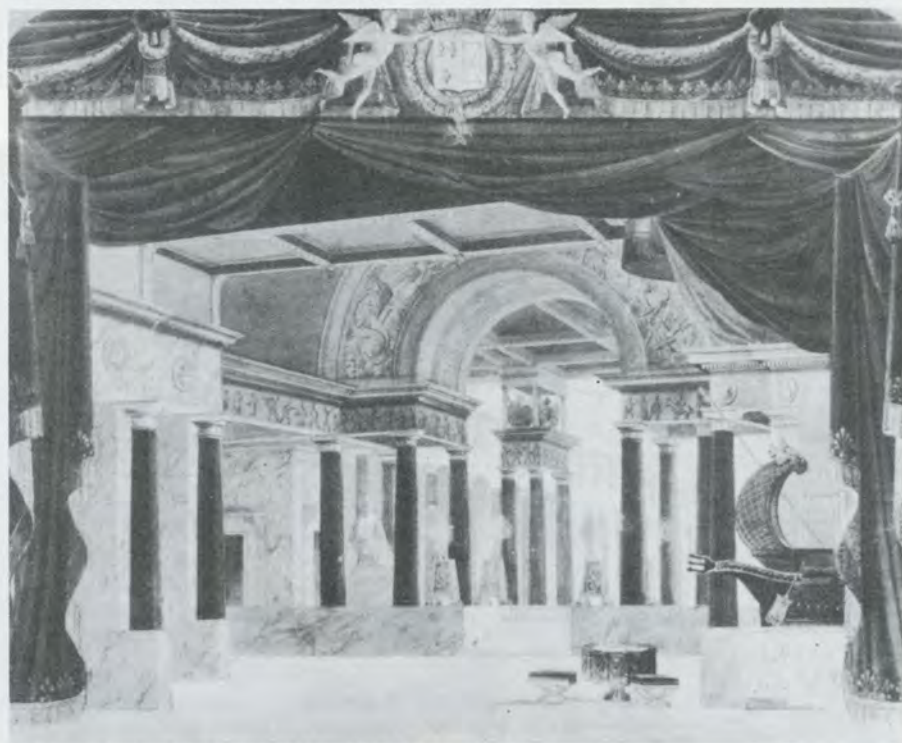
Anna, in which she sings of her fears for her father and of her hidden love for "Uberto";

3. a *Terzettone* (the precise and yet ironic name is Rossini's and means "a great big trio"), almost a half-hour in length, that focuses on the personal drama of

the three Venetian protagonists, during which the beginning of the Turkish siege tears apart the expected continuation of the number and compels internal scene changes, with inserted choruses and solos, before Paolo Erisso, Calbo, and Anna regroup to



Teatro San Carlo in Naples, site of many premieres of Rossini operas, including that of *Maometto II*.



Set design for Act I of *Le Siège de Corinthe* at the Paris Opera, 1826.

Nicola Benois, 1901-1988

One of the greatest theatrical designers of the century, Nicola Benois, passed away in Milan on March 30th during preparations for the San Francisco Opera staging of *Maometto II*. (A formal biography of the designer is featured elsewhere in

the magazine, together with profiles of all the artists and production staff involved in this production of the Rossini work.)

Sonja Frisell, *Maometto's* stage director, frequently collaborated with the celebrated designer and offered the following thoughts about him:

My memories of Nicola Benois go back to my student days at La Scala and I remember so well his unfailing gentleness and courtesy. No question ever seemed stupid to him and he was never too busy to spend some time answering questions or sharing his immense store of knowledge. Any time I felt lonely or confused in what was to me the chaotic madness of the Italian world, I knew I could go and knock at his door and be reassured with a warm, friendly welcome and understanding of my bewilderment, and emerge later, fully fortified.

As the years passed, I had the good fortune to work with him many times, particularly in my 1969 American debut in Chicago with his *Khovanshchina*, which San Francisco Opera audiences saw in 1984. I never ceased to marvel at his energy, child-like enthusiasm and vitality. Throughout his long life, he retained his love for, dedication to, and belief in the theater.

Towards the end of his life and just a few months before his death, he received Jenny Green, S.F. Opera's Costume Director, and myself, at his home in Milan, although he had just come out of the hospital and was incredibly frail. His interest and absorption in the work at hand was as alive as ever. He was prepared to give his whole attention to solving the many problems involved in staging *Maometto II*, and was only sorry that the opening of the Benois Museum in Leningrad would probably preclude his presence at the opera's first night in San Francisco. As it turned out, he will not be able to attend either, but we hope to keep his artistic spirit alive here, this year with *Maometto II* and, in the future, with *Khovanshchina*.



Act I of Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*, seen in a design by Nicola Benois.



Act II of Verdi's *Ernani*, staged by the San Francisco Opera in 1968, with sets designed by Nicola Benois.

complete the number;

4. a *Coro e Cavatina* for Maometto, which introduces us to the Turks and their magnificent leader;

5. the first-act *Finale*, in which Calbo and Paolo Erisso are captured, Anna discovers that "Uberto" is none other than Maometto, and the Act concludes with all the principal characters in emotional disarray.

The insistence on ensembles is noteworthy, and Rossini's concern for continuity is so great that even at the close of the Terzettone, he does not allow the music to pause: instead, a lengthy orchestral conclusion provides time for a scene change, and the music modulates to a new key for the entrance of Maometto.

The same concern for continuity is apparent in the second act. The first of its two principal scenes, in Maometto's pavilion, focuses on the two lovers. It consists of three numbers:

6. a *Chorus* of women, followers of Maometto, who try to convince Anna to accede to Maometto's wishes;

7. a *Duet* between Maometto and Anna, exploring their love and sorrow;

continued on p.48



Final scene of the Paris version of Maometto II, 1826.

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JUNE ANDERSON

Soprano **June Anderson** makes her San Francisco Opera debut as Anna Erisso in Rossini's *Maometto II*, a role she has also recorded. A noted bel canto specialist, Miss Anderson's most recent engagements have included the title role of Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda* at the Teatro La Fenice, Venice; *La Sonnambula* at the Rome Opera and at Milan's La Scala; her first *Armide* (Rossini) at the Aix-en-Provence Festival; and *Desdemona* in Rossini's *Otello* in Pesaro. Highlights of recent seasons included *Semiramide* at Covent Garden, *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Chicago, Vienna and Covent Garden, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* at La Scala, *I Puritani* in Paris, and concerts in Nice, Bologna and Paris, where she sang with Alfredo Kraus in a concert that was also televised and recorded. Following her San Francisco Opera engagement this year, the soprano will go to New York for a concert performance of *Beatrice di Tenda* and will then return to Europe for *La Sonnambula* in Paris and a new production of *Rigoletto* at Covent Garden. She will make her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1989 as Gilda in *Rigoletto*. Born and raised in New England, Miss Anderson attended Yale University where she graduated with a degree in French literature. She made her New York City Opera debut in 1978 as Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* and sang many roles with that company through 1982. She has appeared with leading orchestras throughout the United States and Europe. Additional recordings include *Mosè in Egitto*, *La Fille du Régiment*, *La Jolie Fille de Perth*, *Le Postillon de Longjumeau*, and a solo recital of Bellini arias.



MARILYN HORNE

The most celebrated Rossini interpreter of our day, internationally renowned mezzo-soprano **Marilyn Horne** returns to San Francisco Opera as Calbo in *Maometto Secondo*. The Pennsylvania native, who in 1982 became the first recipient of the Rossini Foundation's Golden Plaque honoring her as "the greatest singer in the world," last appeared in the War Memorial Opera House in concert during the 1987 Fall Season. San Francisco Opera is honored to be the company with which she made her first major operatic appearance, as Marie in *Wozzeck* (1960). Her subsequent Company credits include 13 roles, among them the title roles of *Daughter of the Regiment*, *Tancredi*, *La Cenerentola* and Handel's *Orlando*; the first Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff* of her career; and Adalgisa opposite the Norma of Joan Sutherland. It was as Adalgisa that Miss Horne made her stunning Metropolitan Opera debut in 1970, since which time she has triumphed in all of the world's major houses. She is Spring Opera Theater's most illustrious alumna, having portrayed Carmen (1961), Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* (1962) and the title role of *L'italiana in Algeri* (1964), three roles she has recorded complete and performed to critical plaudits at the Met and elsewhere. Her incredibly varied repertoire ranges from Thomas's *Mignon* and Massenet's *La Navarraise* to the "trouser roles" in which she is considered to have no peer today: Gluck's *Orfeo*, Vivaldi's *Orlando*, Bellini's *Romeo*, Handel's *Rinaldo* and *Orlando*, Neocle in Rossini's *Siege of Corinth* (the composer's reworking of *Maometto Secondo*) and *Arsace* in *Semiramide*, a role in which she scored a major triumph at the 1980 Aix-en-Provence Festival and repeated for Opening Night of San Francisco Opera's 1981 Fall Season. She sang *Arsace* at Carnegie Hall in 1983, as part of

a series of three Rossini operas presented as a showcase for Miss Horne, including *Tancredi* (the vehicle of her sensational 1977 Rome Opera debut) and *La Donna del Lago* (a role she later sang at Covent Garden). She returned to Carnegie Hall in 1985 to appear in *Orlando* and *Semele*, and was invited to appear in the historic concert marking the reopening of the newly renovated Carnegie Hall in 1986. A busy concert artist with more than 1,000 recitals to her credit, she was heard in two nationally televised "Live from Lincoln Center" concerts with Joan Sutherland and Luciano Pavarotti, and again with Leontyne Price (a program that resulted in a Grammy-winning disc). Another televised recital titled "Marilyn Horne's Great American Song Book" resulted in a recording (*Beautiful Dreamer*) issued by London Records. She was also seen on a live PBS telecast of the Met's *L'italiana in Algeri*. Her lengthy discography includes recordings for London, Deutsche Grammophon, RCA, Fonit-Cetra and CBS. Her autobiography, entitled *My Life, Marilyn Horne*, has been published by Atheneum. Among her numerous awards are the Handel Medallion, New York City's highest cultural award, and the "Commendatore al merito della Repubblica Italiana" awarded to her by President Pertini of Italy in 1983.



CHRIS MERRITT

Tenor **Chris Merritt** makes his San Francisco Opera debut as Paolo Erisso in *Maometto Secondo*. A graduate of Oklahoma City University, he has by now become one of the leading interpreters of the tenor bel canto repertoire, with particular affinity for the music of Rossini. In 1983 he appeared opposite Marilyn Horne in the Carnegie Hall performance of *Tancredi*, and in October of that year bowed with the Paris Opera as Aménophis in Rossini's *Moïse*. During the 1984-85 season, he made two auspicious debuts in Rossini performances with Marilyn Horne: at the Hamburg State Opera as Idreno in *Semiramide* (the role he sang the following season at Covent Garden) and at Covent Garden as Uberto in *La Donna del Lago*. His 1985-86 credits included debuts at La Scala in *Il Viaggio a Reims* and at Lyric Opera of Chicago as Percy in *Anna Bolena* opposite Joan Sutherland. Other portrayals that season included Contareno in *Bianca e Falliero*, again with Miss Horne, for the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, and concert appearances in Rossini's *Stabat Mater* with Orchestre Nationale de Paris, and in the Carnegie Hall Strauss Festival performances of *Daphne* and *Capriccio*. During the 1986-87 season Merritt opened the 50th Maggio Musicale in Florence in the title role of Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini*, performed Enée in *Les Troyens* and the Italian Singer in *Der Rosenkavalier* in Amsterdam, and sang Pirro in *Ermione* at the Rossini Festival with Montserrat Caballé and Marilyn Horne. Last season saw his debuts at Teatro San Carlo (Naples) in *Ermione*, at Teatro Regio (Parma) in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, as well as his return to the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in *Benvenuto Cellini* and to Florence as Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. He also opened the Rossini Festi-



SIMONE ALAIMO

val in a new production of that composer's *Otello*, appeared at the Vienna State Opera in *Il Viaggio a Reims* and sang the title role in *Robert le Diable* at Carnegie Hall. Assignments for this season include opening the season at Teatro alla Scala in *Guglielmo Tell* (singing the same role later in the season in Paris and Nice), and performances of *Tancredi* in Chicago and Los Angeles. Merritt's list of recordings includes Bellini's *I Puritani*, Donizetti's *Emilia di Liverpool*, and Rossini's *Ermione* and *Stabat Mater*; he will conclude his 1988-89 season with recordings of Handel's *Messiah*, Puccini's *La Bohème*, Gounod's *Faust*, Glinka's *Ivan Susanin*, and an album of operatic duets with soprano Cecilia Gasdia.

Bass-baritone **Simone Alaimo** makes his San Francisco Opera debut in the title role of *Maometto II*. Born in Italy, he completed his musical studies in Palermo and studied for two years at the Vocal Academy of La Scala in Milan under the tutelage of famed soprano Gina Cigna. After further studies of the bel canto repertoire, he made his debut in 1977 at the Fraschini Theater in Pavia, Italy. Alaimo is the winner of many international vocal competitions, including that of the first RAI Italian television Maria Callas Award, which launched his career in the major opera houses of Europe. His repertoire is highly varied, with roles ranging from the bel canto to the dramatic, and with a current emphasis on the pure baritone repertoire. He has sung Argante in *Rinaldo* at Reggio Emilia; the title role in Donizetti's *Torquato Tasso* in Savona; Dulcamara in *L'Elisir d'Amore* in Rome, Turin, Palermo and Firenze; the title role of *Maometto II* in a concert

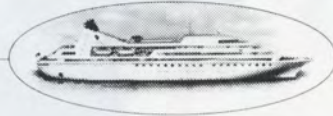


ROBERT TATE

performance in Paris; Murena in Donizetti's rarely performed *L'Esule di Roma* in Savona; Dandini in *La Cenerentola* at La Scala in Milan; and the title role of *Il Turco in Italia* in Rome and Genoa. Alaimo's recent engagements include Mustafà in *L'Italiana in Algeri* in Chicago, Lisbon, Strasbourg, Munich and at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; Asdrubale in *La Pietra del Paragone* in Bologna; the title role of Apolloni's *L'Ebreo* in Savona; *Lucrezia Borgia* in Barcelona and *Semiramide* in Buenos Aires. His recording credits include Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Il Turco in Italia* and *La Cenerentola*; Donizetti's *Le Convenienze ed Inconvenienze Teatrali*, *Torquato Tasso* and *L'Esule di Roma*; Cimarosa's *Astuzie Femminili* and *Gli Orazi e Curiazi*; and Verdi's *I Masnadieri*, in addition to a solo recital of Rossini arias. Future releases include recitals of the works of Verdi, Bellini and Donizetti, and a complete recording of Apolloni's *L'Ebreo*.

Tenor **Robert Tate** returns to San Francisco Opera as Condulmiero in *Maometto II*. Since his local debut in the nationally televised production of *Samson et Dalila* in 1980, he has appeared in over 20 productions with the Company. He attended the San Francisco Conservatory and after his 1979 Spring Opera Theater debut in *Death in Venice* took part in the world premieres of Harbison's *Winter's Tale* and Mechem's *Tartuffe*, both presented under the auspices of the American Opera Project. In 1985, Tate bowed at New York City Opera as Tonio in *La Fille du Régiment*, and has since performed Nanki-Poo in *The Mikado* and the title role in *Candide*. Dallas Opera audiences heard him in 1986 as Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem*

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Serail, and the following year he sang Elvino in *La Sonnambula* opposite Frederica von Stade. His European credits include Scaramuccio in *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Trieste and at the Spoleto Festival in Italy, and Belmonte in Buxton, England, as well as Ferrando in a Daniel Barenboim/Jean-Pierre Ponnelle collaboration of *Così fan tutte* with the Israel Philharmonic in Tel Aviv. He has appeared as Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* with Pamiro Opera, Sacramento Opera and Bear Valley Music Festival, Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* with Portland Opera, and Belfiore in Mozart's *La Finta Giardiniera* with San Francisco's Concert Opera Association, a role he will repeat with the Chicago Opera Theater in January. He will be presented in the Schwabacher Debut Recital series in November in San Francisco's Vorpall Gallery.

Tenor **Douglas Wunsch** sings four roles this season: Selimo in *Maometto II*, Edmondo in *Manon Lescaut*, the First Knight of the Holy Grail in *Parsifal* and Rodolfo in the Student/Family matinee performances of *La Bohème*. A native of Washington state, he is now in his second year as an Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center. Last season, Wunsch made his Company debut, appearing in *The Magic Flute*, *The Queen of Spades* and as Alfredo in the Student/Family performances of *La Traviata*. During the Spring of this year he sang Mendoza in the Opera Center Showcase productions of *Rosina*. Showcase credits from previous years include Robert in Hindemith's *There*
continued on p.45

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Maometto II

San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges the generous grant from the L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation to underwrite this production.

Opera in three acts by GIOACHINO ANTONIO ROSSINI
Libretto by CESARE DELLA VALLE

(Materials furnished by Fondazione Rossini, Pesaro, in cooperation with G. Ricordi & Co., S.p.A., Milan, Italy; Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes Company, sole agent. Special thanks to Philip Gossett, coordinating editor of the critical edition of the complete works of Rossini.)

American Premiere

Maometto II

(in Italian)

Conductor
Alberto Zedda

Stage Director
Sonja Frisell

Designer
Nicola Benois

Lighting Designer
Joan Arhelger

Chorus Director
Ian Robertson

Musical Preparation
Robert Morrison
Christopher Larkin
Richard Amner
Kathryn Cathcart

Prompter
Joseph De Rugeriis

Assistant Stage Director
Paula Williams

Stage Manager
Jamie Call

Scenery for this production acquired through the courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera Association

Costume designs interpreted by Walter Mahoney

Costumes executed by San Francisco Opera Costume Shop

First performance:
December 3, 1820

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, AT 8:00

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 AT 8:00

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25 AT 2:00

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30 AT 8:00

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6 AT 7:30

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9 AT 2:00

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Paolo Erisso, Chris Merritt*
governor of Negroponte

Condulmiero, Robert Tate
general of the Venetian army

Calbo, Marilyn Horne
general of the Venetian army

Anna, June Anderson*
Erisso's daughter

Maometto the Conqueror, Simone Alaimo*
Ottoman Emperor

Selimo, Douglas Wunsch
his minister

Turkish and Venetian soldiers and advisers, Venetian townspeople, Moslem women

*San Francisco Opera debut

TIME AND PLACE: Mid-15th century; the Venetian colony of Negroponte in Greece

ACT I *Scene 1:* A hall in the governor's palace

Scene 2: Anna's room in the palace

Scene 3: The city square

INTERMISSION

ACT II *Maometto's tent*

INTERMISSION

ACT III *The burial vaults of the church*

Supertitles for *Maometto II* provided by a generous and most appreciated gift from William and Eloise Rollnick.

Supertitles by Christopher Bergen, San Francisco Opera.

Latecomers will not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed.

The use of cameras and any kind of recording equipment is strictly forbidden.

The performance will last approximately three hours and forty minutes.

Maometto II/Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1—A council of war is in session at the Venetian governor's palace at Negroponte. The city is under siege by the Turkish army, which has already taken Constantinople, and Sultan Mehmed (Maometto) has demanded that the gates of the town be opened the next day. General Condulmiero proposes surrender, but the young general Calbo chooses to fight to the end. The other officers side with Calbo and swear to fight to the death for the Venetian cause.

Scene 2—The governor's daughter, Anna Erisso, is alone—torn between fear for her father's safety and distress over her recent love affair. Erisso enters with Calbo and proposes that, for her own protection, she and Calbo should get married in the church where her mother lies buried. Anna confesses her secret affection for a young man, Uberto, Lord of Mytilene, whom she met in Corinth during her father's absence. Erisso is astonished, for the real Uberto had been with him aboard the ship to Venice, and Anna is amazed to find she has been tricked by an impostor. Gunfire is heard; the men leave to join the battle and Anna goes to the church to pray.

Scene 3—In the square before the church, the women of Negroponte tell Anna that a traitor has opened the gates to the Turks. They all join in a brief prayer. Erisso and Calbo bring the news that Maometto has taken the walls but, fearing an ambush, has decided not to venture farther until daylight. As Erisso attempts to send his soldiers to the citadel, Anna and the women ask to take part in the defense of the city—to fight, rather than be abandoned to the Moslem invaders. Erisso refuses and gives his daughter a dagger with which to kill herself if she is taken by the Turks. The soldiers leave and Anna and the women seek refuge in the church. A band of Turkish soldiers appear, threatening destruction and slaughter, followed by Maometto and his troops. While planning the attack on the citadel, his instructions reveal a knowledge of the city which awakens his minister Selimo's curiosity. Maometto replies that he had traveled in Greece as a spy in the service of his father—to Argos, Negroponte, and (he sighs as he recalls it) to Corinth. They are interrupted by warriors who bring news that the Venetian fugitives outside the citadel have been captured; soon soldiers lead in Erisso and Calbo in chains. When Erisso discloses his identity, Maometto is temporarily confused. He asks Erisso whether he used to be governor of Corinth and is a father. When Erisso confirms it, Maometto offers to spare the prisoners' lives if Erisso will persuade his men to open the gates of the citadel, adding that Erisso will then be able to return to his children. Erisso turns to Calbo in his dilemma, but both remain steadfast in their refusal of these terms. Enraged, Maometto orders them to be taken away and tortured. As the women are brought out of the church, Anna kneels before the Conqueror, begging for her father's life, but

suddenly recognizes the man as her beloved "Uberto." She threatens to kill herself if he does not release her father and Calbo, whom she calls her "brother" in order to save his life. Maometto yields, releasing both, and Calbo is moved by Anna's concern for him, but her father spurns her in shame. Maometto promises Anna a life of luxury at his side if she is still faithful to him, and returns to the battle.

ACT II

The Turkish women dress Anna as befits Maometto's bride, while singing of the delights of love. Anna's attempt to escape is stopped by Maometto, who tells of his love and his wish to make her his queen. Anna spurns his offer and begins to weep, but Maometto sees her tears not as a sign of hatred but of love. Anna admits her love for him but swears to die rather than yield to him. In desperation, Maometto threatens her but they are distracted by the noise made by the Turkish troops who are sacking the city. The Sultan calls them to order for another assault on the citadel, which he declares he himself will lead. Anna, fearing for her safety in his absence, asks for a token of security and receives from him the imperial seal of authority—a gesture which Maometto describes as the ultimate proof of his love. When his forces are assembled, he exhorts them to new efforts and takes the standard himself to lead them. As the army marches off, Anna is inspired to what she describes as "a task of honor."

ACT III

Erisso and Calbo have taken refuge in the burial vaults of the church. Erisso laments the treachery of his daughter, but Calbo defends her. When Anna suddenly appears, Erisso rebuffs her until she swears fidelity to him on her mother's tomb. Reassured, he accepts from her Maometto's imperial seal and some Turkish clothing—items which will enable them to pass through the enemy ranks unrecognized. Anna herself is known and cannot endanger their lives by accompanying them. She begs her father to marry her to Calbo at the family tomb—as he previously wished. He complies and the three express their anguish, as father and husband bid Anna farewell, leaving her to an almost certain death. Now alone in the tombs, Anna hears the women praying in the church. Some of them come in and tell her that the Venetians, inspired by the appearance of Erisso and Calbo at the citadel, have put Maometto and his army to flight. They warn her that the Turks are now hunting for her, intent on revenge. Overjoyed, Anna refuses to leave with the women and prepares herself for death. The Turks enter the church and rush toward her, but her calm demeanor stops them in their tracks. The enraged Maometto enters and demands his seal. Anna reveals that she gave it to her father and Calbo, whom she now names as her husband instead of her "brother." Then, before the dumbfounded Sultan, she stabs herself and dies.

Maometto II

Photos taken in rehearsal by Marty Sohl



June Anderson, Simone Alaimo



June Anderson

(below) Simone Alaimo



Marilyn Horne

(below) Chris Merritt, June Anderson

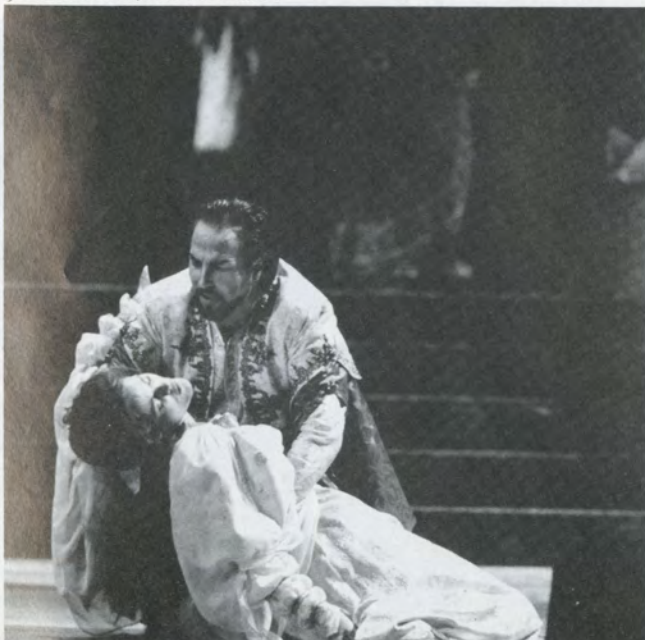




June Anderson



June Anderson, Simone Alaimo



Marilyn Horne



Chris Merritt, June Anderson



Simone Alaimo



Simone Alaimo, Douglas Wunsch, Men of the S.F. Opera Chorus

(below) June Anderson, Women of the S.F. Opera Chorus



(below) Robert Tate, Marilyn Horne





DOUGLAS WUNSCH

and *Back*, Charles in Hindemith's *The Long Christmas Dinner*, Albazar in Rossini's *The Turk in Italy*, Jean in Sauguet's *Le Plumet du Colonel* and Samuel in Rorem's *Three Sisters Who Are Not Sisters*. Wunsch's local credits include Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* with the Marin Opera Company, a role he repeated this spring with the Spokane Symphony. He has also performed with the Northwestern Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony Pops and the San Francisco Ballet. Last June, Wunsch appeared with Luciano Pavarotti in the elder tenor's San Francisco Civic Auditorium concert.

Italian maestro **Alberto Zedda** returns to San Francisco Opera to conduct the American premiere performances of Rossini's *Maometto II*. He made his Company debut last fall leading his own critical edition of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, a work he has conducted at London's Royal Opera, Covent Garden, the Vienna Staatsoper, and at numerous other operatic capitals. It was also the work with which he made his 1956 operatic debut at Milan's Associazione Lirico-Concertistica. In 1960 he taught conducting at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where he



ALBERTO ZEDDA

was permanent conductor of their orchestra, and from 1967 to 1969 regularly conducted the Italian repertoire at New York City Opera. His symphonic credits include concerts with all of the major Italian orchestras, including those of Santa Cecilia and La Scala, and other orchestras in Milan, Florence, Rome, Turin and Naples. He has conducted repeatedly in the great Italian opera houses, as well as for the companies of London, Barcelona, Prague, Berlin, Lisbon, Hamburg, Tel Aviv (Israel Philharmonic Orchestra) and Munich. An active musicologist, Zedda has supervised critical editions of various operas, oratorios and cantatas and is a member of the editorial committee of the Rossini Foundation at Pesaro. He is music director of the Festival Belcantistico in Martina Franca, and artistic consultant of the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro. Recent engagements include Bellini's *Il Pirata* and his own edition of Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* at Martina Franca; Rossini's *La Cenerentola* in Madrid, Stuttgart, Munich and Lausanne; *Falstaff*, *La Bohème*, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La Traviata* at the Vienna Staatsoper; *L'Elisir d'Amore* and *Anna Bolena* in Stuttgart; *Ermione* in Paris, *Adelaide di Borgogna* in Madrid, and *Il Turco in Italia* in Naples. Maestro Zedda's discography includes complete recordings of Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda*, Donizetti's *Rita*, Vivaldi's *Juditha Triumphans*, Auber's *Fra Diavolo*, Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Gazza Ladra* and *Adelaide di Borgogna*, in addition to recitals with Marilyn Horne, Agnes Baltsa, Francisco Araiza, Luciana Serra, Lucia Valentini-Terrani and Fiamma Izzo D'Amico.



SONJA FRISELL

In her eleventh season with San Francisco Opera, **Sonja Frisell** directs the production of Rossini's *Maometto II*. Her most recent Company assignment was the 1985 production of *Un Ballo in Maschera*, which she conceived and directed here in 1977 and revived in 1982. Her first San Francisco Opera assignment was the 1975 production of *Simon Boccanegra*, which she then directed in 1979 in Chicago and revived here in 1980. She has directed a dozen different productions here including *Aida*, *Norma*, *Don Carlo*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and, in 1984, the critically acclaimed *Khovanshchina*, also the vehicle of her 1969 American debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. She was on the staff of Milan's La Scala for 15 years; in 1968 she became staff producer (director) there and from 1972 through 1979 was director of production. Miss Frisell has directed at many major opera houses in Europe, Canada and the United States including the Paris Opera, Bregenz Festival, La Fenice in Venice, Teatro Regio in Torino, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Edmonton Opera, National Arts Centre Festival Opera in Ottawa, Manitoba Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Dallas Opera, Tulsa Opera, Miami Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Opera and Seattle Opera. Recent engagements have included *Rigoletto* in Seattle and *Otello* in Barcelona. Her production of *Il Trovatore* opened the 1987 season at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and her San Francisco Opera production of *Un Ballo in Maschera* was selected for a telecast by Luciano Pavarotti, who appeared in it with the prize-winning young singers of the Pavarotti Vocal Competition. Among her future engagements is a new production of *Aida* at the Metropolitan Opera.



NICOLA BENOIS

One of the most revered names in theatrical design in our century, **Nicola Benois** is responsible for the sets and costumes for *Maometto II*. He also designed the sets for *Ernani* and the costumes and sets for *Khovanshchina*, productions which were both seen here in 1984. A native of St. Petersburg, Benois began his studies under the supervision of his father, Alexandre, and made his debut with the set and costume designs for a production of *Khovanshchina* at La Scala in Milan in 1925. His work so impressed La Scala's

director, Arturo Toscanini, that Benois was engaged the following year for the now historic Scala production of *Boris Godunov*. In 1927 he became head of production at the newly formed Rome Opera, where he stayed for five years. He assumed the position of chief set and costume designer for La Scala in 1937, a post he held for over 30 years. During his long and distinguished career, Benois has created designs for more than 350 opera and ballet productions around the world. His work has been praised at the Salzburg Festival, the Vienna Staatsoper, the Paris Opera, the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, the Verona Arena, the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad and Bolshoi Opera and Ballet in Moscow, and the companies of Santiago, Buenos Aires, Hamburg, Munich, Dresden, Florence, Naples, Trieste, Venice, Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Stockholm, Geneva and Zurich. In this country, he has designed productions for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Metropolitan Opera and the Greater Miami Opera, where he designed a three-year Verdi/Shakespeare cycle that included *Macbeth*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. In addition to operatic projects, the recently deceased Benois has also designed extensively for theater and television and was an accomplished lighting designer, stage director, painter, illustrator and architect.



JOAN ARHELGER

San Francisco Opera Associate Lighting Designer **Joan Arhelger** is lighting designer for *Maometto II* and *Manon Lescaut*. Last fall, she was lighting designer for *Tosca* and *Fidelio*, lighting director for *The Barber of Seville*, and lighting supervisor for *The Queen of Spades*. Since 1983, when she joined the Company, she has been responsible for the lighting of *La Traviata*, *La Sonnambula*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Anna Bolena*, *Werther*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *The Medium* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*, in addition to serving as lighting supervisor for the entire 1986 Summer Season. Her opera credits in lighting design include productions for Wolf Trap Company, and the opera companies of Louisville, Fort Worth, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Omaha, Seattle, Anchorage, and repertory seasons with the Kansas City Lyric Opera and the Central City Opera. Her work has been seen locally in Bill Irwin's *In Regard of Flight* (featured on the PBS *Great Performances* series), and with numerous dance companies, including the Bay Area Dance Coalition's "Dancemakers '82" Festival in Herbst Theatre. A student of Gilbert Hemsley, Miss Arhelger served as assistant lighting designer for American presentations by the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, the Stuttgart Ballet, the Bolshoi Opera and the Berlin Opera. For five seasons, she was the resident lighting assistant for Washington Opera at the Kennedy Center.



Rose Goldstein, 1896-1988

When the curtain went up on the first San Francisco Opera season, in 1923, the costumes seen on stage were provided by Goldstein & Co. Rose Goldstein was there, along with her husband, Louis, who was the head of their theatrical costume company. They continued providing costumes to the San Francisco Opera for the next 50 years. Following the death of her husband in 1950, Rose Goldstein ran the business single-handed until her retirement in 1972. A friend to many artists and staff members, she was a well-known and liked presence throughout the house. Her passing truly marks the end of an era.

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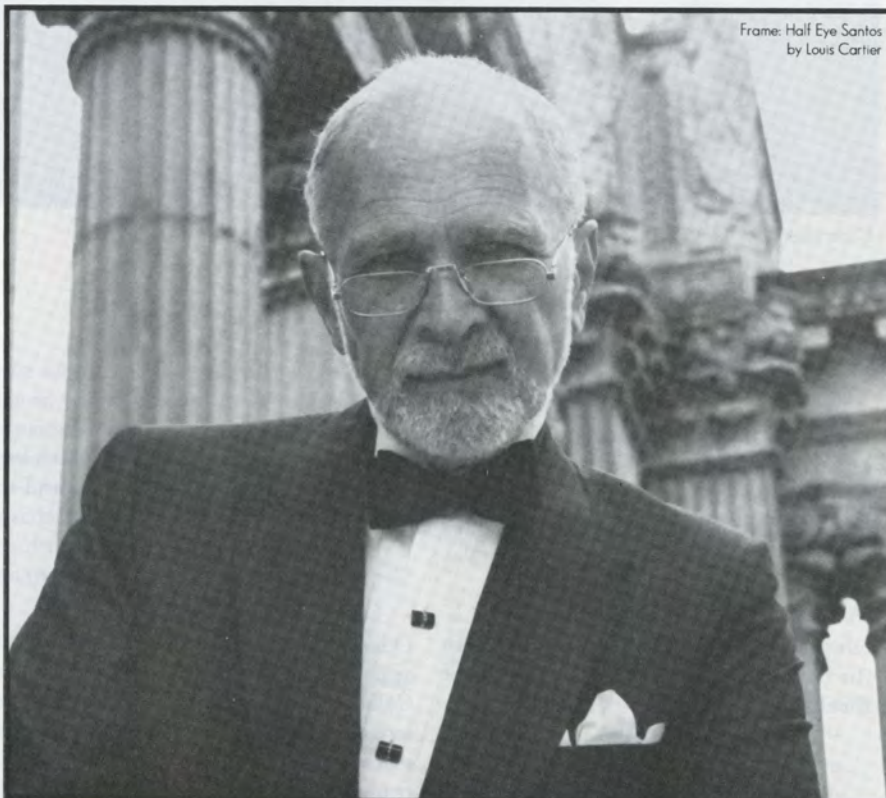


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8. an *Aria* for Maometto, with Anna, in which he turns aside from his personal world and assumes leadership of his forces for the assault.

Even though in these numbers Rossini's music is beautiful, it does not always maintain the level of dramatic intensity of the rest of the opera.

But the final scene of *Maometto II*, which takes place in the vaults beneath the church, is masterly. It also consists of three numbers:

9. an *Aria* for Calbo, in which he assures Paolo Erisso that Erisso's daughter will never dishonor their people;

10. a short *Trio* of farewell for Anna, Calbo, and Erisso;

11. the *Finale*, essentially a *gran scena* for Anna (a continuous series of solo passages, intermingled with choruses, dialogues, and ensembles), which begins with the prayers of Anna and the Venetian women, follows her changing emotions, and concludes with the precipitous entrance of Maometto and his followers and Anna's suicide.

Despite the obvious (and thoroughly appropriate) break for applause after Calbo's bravura aria, we are mostly struck by the continuity of this scene. Rossini places the lyrical sections within a rich framework of orchestral music and impassioned recitative. Certain motives recur several times during the course of the scene, such as the very beautiful idea

associated with the tomb of Anna's mother, a phrase already heard within the Terzettone in Act I. The orchestral postlude to the Trio, "In questi estremi istanti," bridges the emotional gap between the ecstatic conclusion of the vocal section and the profound silence that follows, with Anna left alone to face certain death. Rossini does not allow the final scene to conclude with either a "happy-ending" Rondò (found in some other Rossinian operas) nor a cabaletta of despair or revenge (favored by Bellini and Donizetti). Instead, he gives the dénouement strong musical expression without forcing it into a predetermined mold. After Anna's beautiful farewell to her mother's tomb ("Madre a te"), expressed in a florid vocal style filled with pathos, *Maometto II* concludes with dialogue for Maometto and Anna over an orchestral crescendo, her suicide, and the horrified reaction of the chorus and Maometto. There are no superfluous gestures here: everything leads inevitably to the tragic conclusion.

Rossini framed the action and music of *Maometto II*'s Introduction with two choruses of different character, the first uncertain and hesitant, the second decisive and martial: yet the music of the second chorus is a variation of the first. This same material develops into a symbol for the heroism of the Venetian people, as Rossini reuses its melodies and rhythms elsewhere in the opera. To cite two examples: the cabaletta of Calbo's aria, "E d'un trono alla speranza," is another variant of the principal theme of the Introduction, while the orchestral accompaniment to Anna's preparation for death in the finale, "Quella morte che s'avanza," utilizes melodic figuration already present throughout the Introduction. Until recently, Rossini was thought to have been indifferent about such matters before *Guillaume Tell*. We now know that our previous understanding was seriously inadequate.

The orchestra of *Maometto II* is large: strings, winds, brass (4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, and serpentone), harp, and many percussion instruments (the women's chorus at the beginning of the second act employs timpani, bass drum and cymbals, a triangle on stage, and small bells). But Rossini uses only those instruments appropriate at each moment, often notably reducing the scoring. In the prayer for women's chorus in the second

finale, for example, the orchestra consists of a flute, two clarinets, two horns, a bassoon, and the harp. Even in the largest ensemble, Rossini's instrumentation remains transparent.

A performance of *Maometto II* requires extraordinary singers, as do all of his Neapolitan operas. When we think of the "bel canto" operas of Bellini and Donizetti, florid singing is primarily the responsibility of the *prima donna*, and she tends to do most of her warbling after having gone mad. Rossini instead employs a highly florid style for every part. But this music must not be executed or heard as ornamental: it offers performers the possibility for expressive singing without "imitating" individual emotions. Throughout his entire life, Rossini was very clear on this matter: music was for him "ideal," not servile to a text. Yet, through sensitive performance, the music could take on diverse meanings while always maintaining its integrity.

Though one is likely to react with astonishment to the sheer number of notes the composer requires of his performers, it is important to resist the habit of thinking of *Maometto II* or other Rossini serious operas merely as "vehicles" for singers. Certainly the various roles Rossini prepared for his Neapolitan *prima donna* (and later first wife), Isabella Colbran, share certain common elements of vocal style: but, within these limits, Armida, Elena, Ermione, Desdemona, and Anna are as different from one another in character as are Verdi's Gilda, Violetta, and Leonora. The moment in which it was sufficient for modern audiences to react in astonishment to the rediscovery of voices capable of singing Rossini's florid melodies is gone. Now we must insist on the dramatic and musical integrity, the individuality of the characters, in each opera. Through Rossini's music we experience Anna's deep and tragic love, as well as her heroic martyrdom. Through Rossini's music we know of *Maometto's* glory, tenderness, fury, and despair.

Maometto II is a work in which Rossini brings together his preeminent gift for music of immediate appeal and vocal splendor with a considered and profound understanding of musical and dramatic structure. It is one of the composer's finest achievements. ■

Portions of this article appeared in the 1988 San Francisco Opera Guild Magazine.

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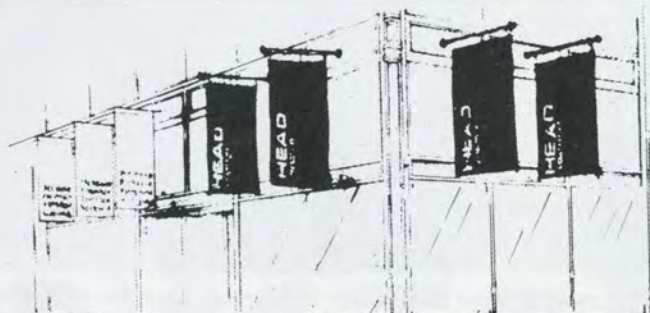
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Mehmed the Conqueror

TOPKAPI SARAY MUSEUM



Portrait of Mehmed the Conqueror (detail) made in the 15th century by Sinan Bek. ("Mehmed" is the modern Turkish version of the spelling of the Conqueror's name. He can also be found in various books under Mohamed, Muhammad, Mohammad, Mehmet, Muhamed, etc. The Italian version of the name is Maometto.)

By ROBERT J. DEL BONTÀ

There is a long list of operas which deal with Eastern or Oriental themes and characters, including those of Japanese geishas, Indian queens, and Turkish beys. The Turks and their Islamic brothers account for many of these characters,

continued on p.53

Robert J. Del Bontà is an art historian who specializes in the art of the Indian sub-continent, in addition to being an opera buff. He is a Research Associate of the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies at U.C. Berkeley and is a frequent lecturer and tour leader at the Society for Asian Art at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.



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Conqueror
continued from p.50

from farcical figures found in operas such as Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* and his *Il Turco in Italia* to a few figures that are more than just standard buffoons. Few of these Asian operas do more than allow for exotic costumes and sets, but some are based on actual historical characters, even if they do play around with historical facts. Two such operas are on the repertoire at the San Francisco Opera this fall: Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, dealing with the explorer Vasco da Gama, and Rossini's *Maometto II*, which includes the Turkish Sultan Mehmed II as perhaps not the most important figure in the opera, but the title role nonetheless.

But why Mehmed II? Mehmed II or better known in history as Mehmed the Conqueror was not just some obscure historical figure that Rossini and his librettist, the playwright Cesare della Valle, Duke of Ventignano, decided to pattern a drama around. He was the most powerful and fearful threat to western Europe since Attila the Hun. Mehmed II was not a man interested in raids like Attila, but one who was interested in conquest, a man whose obsession it was to rule Rome and who caused countless nightmares in Europe during the second half of the 15th century.

Mehmed [to use the accepted Turkish spelling of his name] was born on March 30, 1432. He was the son of the Ottoman Sultan Murad II and a slave woman, most likely a Christian. There are many fables which make her into a French princess and the like, but there is literally no information at all about her.

During Mehmed's youth, Murad II was ruling from his European capital Edirne and trying to solidify his control over Rumelia, the European side of the Sea of Marmara. He was primarily in a struggle with the Hungarians led by János Hunyadi. It was a fearful time for Christendom and the Pope was calling for a Crusade, but the West wanted a united church and the orthodox churches were not about to merge with Rome. In fact, most of the eastern church members preferred Ottoman domination to that of Rome, realizing that under the Ottomans they would pay their head-tax as non-Moslems and would be free to practice their own religions, whereas under Rome they would probably lose this freedom.



The siege of Constantinople by the Turks, as seen in the 1455 manuscript of the Voyage d'Outremer of Bertrandon de la Broquière.

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Murad II viewed war as a necessary evil. History credits him with being fair to his subjects, waging war only to ensure a unified empire for effective central administration. After an important victory over the Hungarians in 1444, he abdicated in favor of his son Mehmed and withdrew to Anatolia. Mehmed ruled for about a year and a half, but the impulsive boy seems to have had designs on Constantinople and his father took back the throne, ruling until his death in 1451.

Succession for the Ottomans had never been a neat and tidy process. Usually brothers claimed power for themselves, leading to draining civil wars. When Mehmed came to power, his only living brother was an infant, and to avoid conflicts, he quickly had him put to death. This was the beginning of the Law of Fratricide which functioned within the Ottoman dynasty for centuries, allowing the new Sultan to have all his brothers killed so that power struggles would not interfere with the ruling of the Empire.

In 1453, Mehmed got his wish, took Constantinople, and acquired the title of "the Conqueror." Later he made it the capital of the Empire and started a policy of transferring people from conquered countries to the city in order to repopulate it. Part of Mehmed's success was due to a system called *devshirme* or "child tribute" which the Turks had established in their conquered territories. This system of taking non-Moslem children and training them for service was the source of the janissaries, an elite military corps who owed their allegiance only to the Sultan. During Mehmed's reign this corps more than doubled in size, and some of its members became very important personages in the government under the Ottomans, proving that it was possible for slave boys to grow up and become Grand Viziers.

Backed by the janissaries, Mehmed started a series of campaigns which were to take up his whole life. Most of his efforts were directed towards the West in the guise of *jihads* (or holy wars) on the infidels. Some of his major adversaries included the Hungarians, Albanians, Serbs, Greeks, Italians, and various Turkish groups in the Asian parts of the Empire. If it had not been for all these Asian campaigns, perhaps the West would have known the Conqueror more intimately. Later, his great-grandson Suleyman the Magnificent (1496-1566) was

able to make good on many of Mehmed's threats, working within the system of government and warfare that Mehmed II had established.

As ruler of the new Byzantium, Mehmed took Greece in 1458, wresting various cities from the Palaeologi rulers, the family which had also ruled Constantinople until 1453. These conquests included the city of Corinth, an important fortress guarding the isthmus of the same name. Unlike the happenings in Rossini's *Le Siège de Corinthe*, the leader of the garrison of Corinth, Matthew Asanes, ultimately surrendered to Mehmed and there was no massacre at all. Like every ruler of that time, whether Christian or



Silver medallion of Mehmed II as a young man, attributed to Matteo de Pasti.

Moslem, Mehmed may have been cruel, ruthless and bloodthirsty; but all sieges did not end in massacres or slavery for the populace.

Shortly after subjugating much of Greece, Mehmed actually visited one of the most important and precious holdings of the Italians in Eastern Europe, the island of Negroponte (Euboea or Evvoia) in the Aegean Sea, or more specifically its wealthy city of Negroponte (Khalkis). Twelve years later he would return to conquer.

It would be boring to go into all of the Conqueror's victories, but they included campaigns along the entire southern coast of the Black Sea and into every part of the Balkan peninsula against such important adversaries as first János Hunyadi and later his son King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, the extremely cruel Vlad III Dracul of Walachia (known to us as Dracula), Uzun Hasan, the Turkish ruler

of Persia, and countless rulers of small principalities throughout the region.

The war which concerns us here is that with Venice which lasted from 1463 to 1479. Venice was the major Western European presence in the area. Relations with Mehmed had been cordial at the beginning and he even invited the Venetian Doge Francesco Foscari (one of the heroes of Verdi's opera *I Due Foscari*) to the circumcision ceremony of his sons. With Mehmed's conquests, his relations soured not only with the Venetians, but with the whole Christian world. By the beginning of the disastrous Venetian war with the Ottomans, the Western powers had finally rallied under the leadership of Pope Pius II who was ready to lead the Crusade against this vile adversary of Christendom. But Pius II died before the troops left Italy and with him the last solid attempt of a combined force against the Turks.

By the time Venice started fighting with Mehmed, it virtually had to wage its war alone. Neither Florence nor Genoa would help; there is ample evidence that even if they did not actually help the Turks against their adversary, they revelled in Venice's defeats. Rivalries among these three Italian city-states—along with Milan, the Papal States, and Naples under the King of Aragon—were really the main reason that Mehmed was able to solidify his holding on the entire Balkan peninsula: they were much too busy scheming against each other to deal seriously with the Islamic threat. Added to these rivalries, Hungary's preoccupation with a holy war on orthodox Bohemia and conflicts with the Austrian Holy Roman Emperor made Mehmed's success all too easy.

The fall of the city of Negroponte in 1470 was probably the greatest victory of his reign. At 38, Mehmed was approaching the height of his fame. Since the shock of the fall of Byzantium, no conquest of Mehmed's was considered as important and as much of a threat to the West as the fall of this important Venetian possession. News was received in the West as if Mehmed had marched on Rome itself.

The curious thing about the fall of Negroponte is that it probably was a battle that the Turks should not have won. The fortress was a very powerful one, abutting into the sea opposite the coast of Greece and surrounded on three sides by water. A heavily guarded bridge led to the



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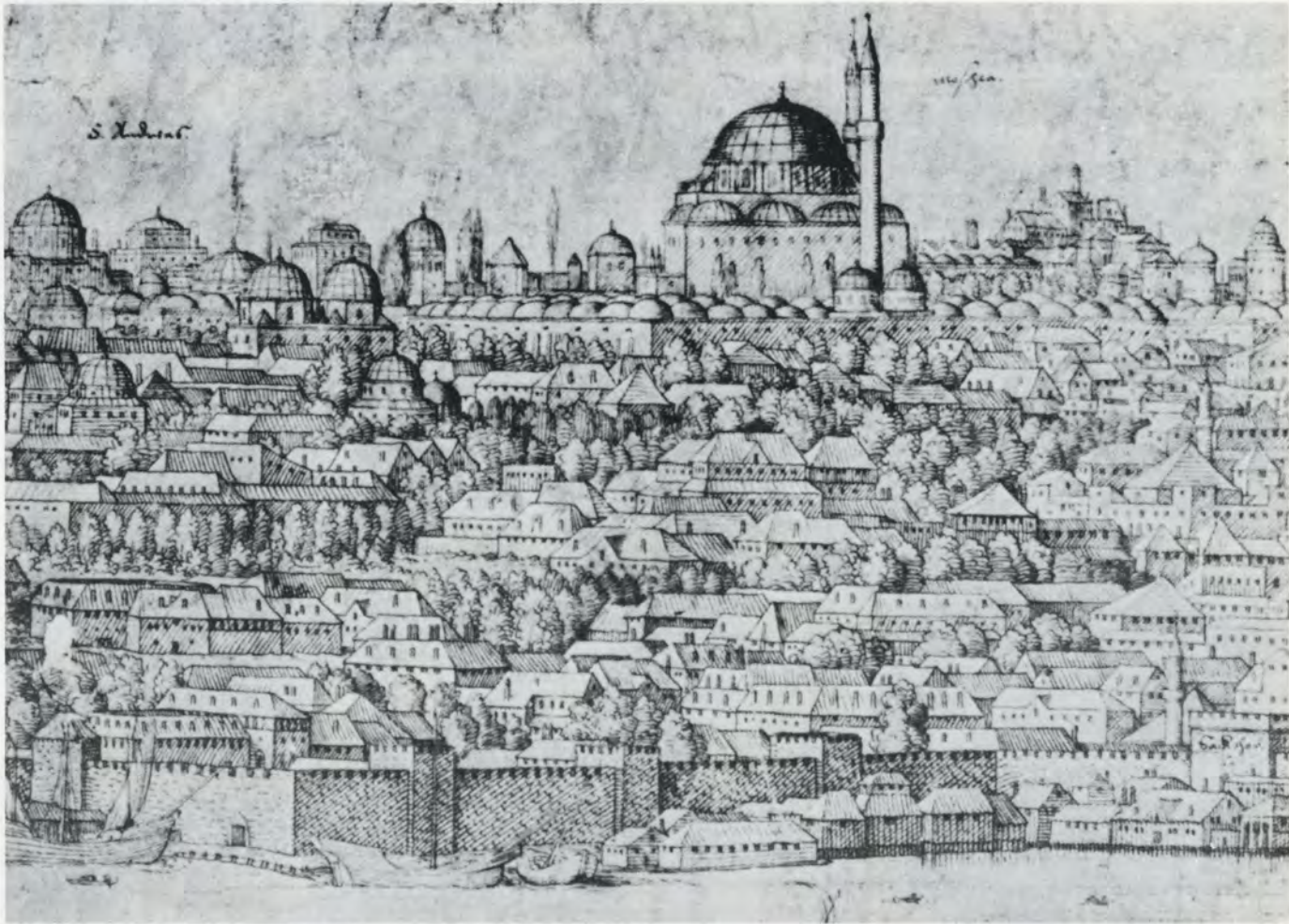
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Detail from a 16th-century engraving of Constantinople, made by M. Lorichs.

mainland and Mehmed's forces had built a bridge of boats to cross over the straits. The Turks attacked the city five times between June 25 and July 12 when it was defeated. We all know that at the time Venice was the major European sea power and may wonder where its navy was when it was needed? The fact is that a good portion of the fleet was within sight of the battle, but Niccolò da Canale, the fleet commander, refused to do anything until the entire fleet had assembled. After seeing the crescent flags raised on the walls of the conquered fort, they sailed away.

In history, as in the opera *Maometto II*, the fortress was under the command of Paolo Erizzo, member of a very important Venetian family. In 1452, one of his relatives had commanded the ship which was the first one sunk by Turkish cannons in the Bosphorus for failure to pay the toll and at about the same time, another committed the murder for which the

younger Foscari in Verdi's opera was accused.

Paolo Erizzo's chief officers were Alvise Calbo and Giovanni Badoer. Besides the impossibility of a love affair between Paolo's daughter and Mehmed, there is no mention of Paolo's daughter in any of the sources I have found, including first-hand accounts written by both an Italian and a Turk. One of the peculiarities of this battle, however, was the finding of large numbers of dead women who had manned the walls and fought in the streets. It is interesting that in the opera Anna claims to have met Mehmed in Corinth, which had been under Turkish control since 1458, and that he posed as "Uberto," the ruler of Mytilini. Mytilini was the capital of the island of Lesbos which had been taken by the Turks from the ruling house, the Gattilusio, in 1462. The last prince of Mytilini was killed a few years later. The ultimate untruth in the opera is the victory of Anna's father and

husband at the end. We know that Rossini gave the opera a happy ending for the Venice premiere with Anna singing the joyful aria "Tanti affetti." In our version she kills herself, but in reality very few of the Italians lived. Alvise Calbo was beheaded and Paolo Erizzo was sliced in half.

After the fall of Negroponte, the Venetians sued for peace a number of times, but they always asked for too much. When they finally came to an agreement in 1479, they were able to keep some of their holdings, but had to give up a great deal more including any claims on Negroponte.

Shortly before peace came about, Mehmed's entire energy was taken up with a war with Uzun Hasan, the Turkish ruler of Persia, and had the Western powers known that virtually the entire Ottoman army was in Asia, they could easily have taken the European sections of the kingdom. Western forces were in the



JEAN LASSALE

GENÈVE



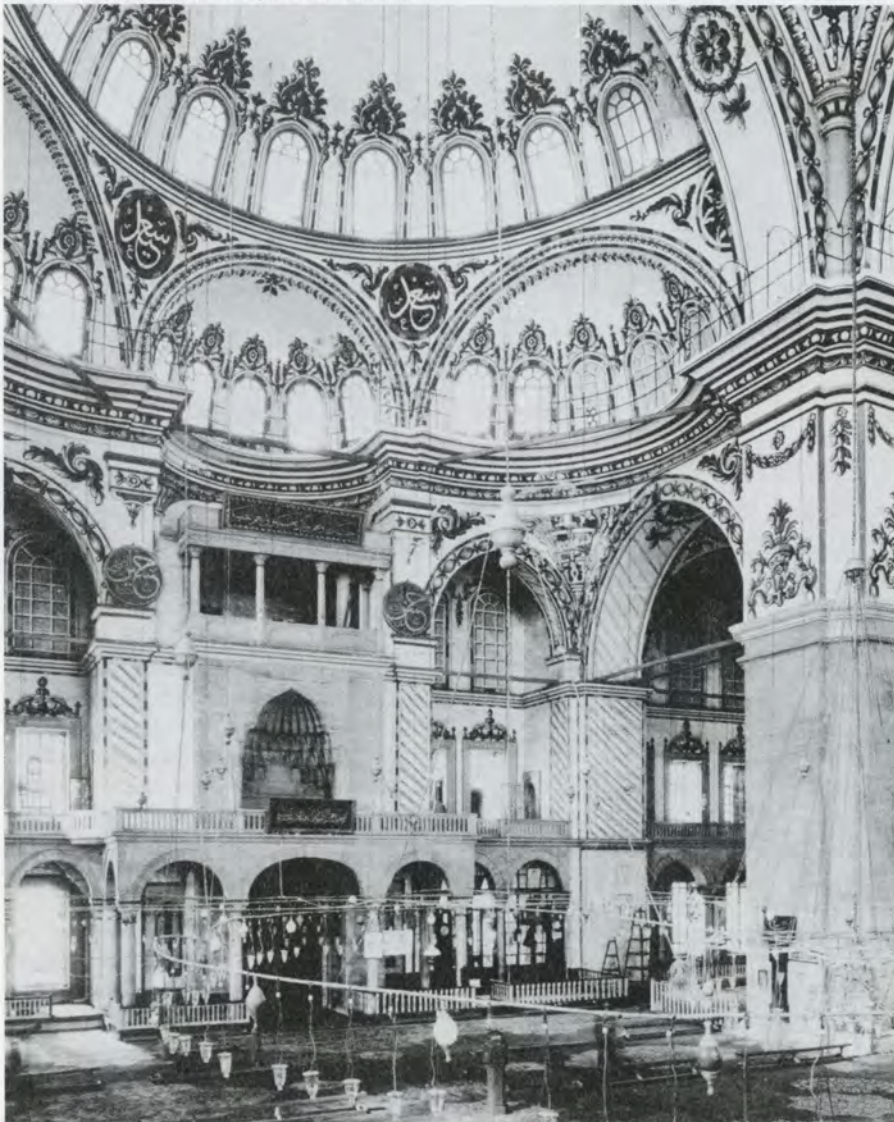
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Mosque of Mehmed the Conqueror in Istanbul.



Interior of Istanbul's Mosque of Mehmed the Conqueror.

area and a combined navy could have even taken Constantinople, but the death of the king of Cyprus distracted everyone's attention. The throne went to the king's widow Caterina Cornaro, the heroine of the Donizetti opera.

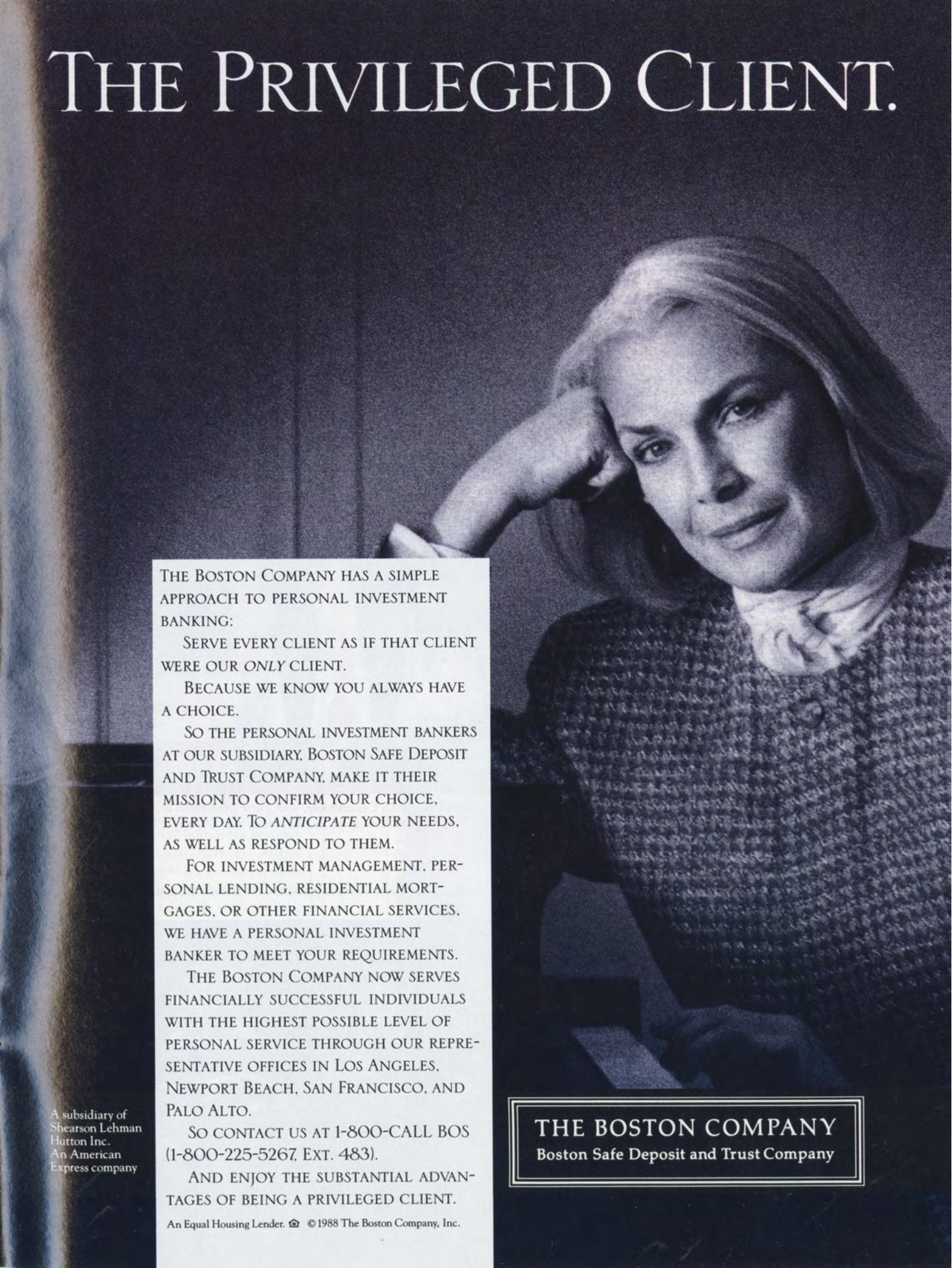
By the time Western forces assembled for an attack on the Turks, it was too late, Mehmed was back in Europe and even sending raiders into Austria, into Istria, and ultimately taking Otranto on the Italian peninsula itself. But his health had not been good. His problems with obesity and gout had taken their toll. Had Mehmed not died on May 3, 1481, at the age of 49, perhaps his dreams of taking Rome itself would have been realized.

Of all the figures in late Medieval history, Mehmed II is perhaps the most interesting. Some early sources try to make him out to be a Renaissance man interested in combining elements from the East and West into a perfect humanistic amalgam. Fluent in Turkish, Slavic, and Greek, he did have a series of Islamic and European teachers and advisers and was constantly acquiring books concerning Christianity and the West. But rather than trying to become the perfect Italian courtier, he wanted to find out more about his European enemies and what made them tick, and was most interested in tales of the infighting rampant in Europe.

He was also interested in books on machines of war. His cannons were the biggest and most powerful in the world. He had a group of European cannon foundries that could actually cast the huge cannons at the sites of the sieges themselves. In one siege the Turks used incendiary rockets for the first time, when rags soaked in oil and wax were shot over the walls of the besieged fortress. He built a large navy which he never used in battle, but merely for transporting the large number of troops he engaged.

The most notable thing about Ottoman conquests is the fact that although they took much of the Balkan peninsula and held it for centuries, the various national identities of the region were seldom lost. The Ottomans were not interested in making the conquered into Turks or even Moslems. After extracting the head-tax and the periodic child tribute to be raised for service and the military, the people were left alone to practice their religions and pursue their own cultures. As mentioned earlier, once in a while

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Part of the walls of Constantinople/Istanbul today with a view of the "Seven Towers Castle."

Mehmed would carry off entire populations to repopulate other regions, particularly the capital city which had lost large numbers of inhabitants due to plague. Many of the districts of Istanbul still bear the names of these relocated groups. Historians indicate that the people who were conquered and not moved seemed to be better off after the conquest, once under control of a large well-run centralized government.

Mehmed probably viewed himself as the new Alexander and since his ultimate goal was the conquest of Rome, possibly

saw himself as a sort of Alexander in reverse. His studies with western and eastern scholars on classical history makes this assessment likely, but more interesting is the fact that this is precisely how the western people of the time viewed him. Mehmed not only proclaimed himself "the Conqueror," but he was exactly that. After his problems in Asia were over, he was fully capable of making good on his threats. Were it not for his early death, the history of Europe after Mehmed II would have taken a completely different turn. ■

Company Profiles: Elena Servi Burgess

This on-going series of interviews introduces our readers to a cross-section of San Francisco Opera Company members who never get to take a curtain call, but whose activities are very important in the process of making opera happen.

It is easy to imagine having a conversation with Elena Servi Burgess, San Francisco Opera's Italian diction coach, without suspecting that her first language was Italian. Two things might tip one off.

Servi Burgess' love of Italy—and opera—is so strong that one or the other is likely to come up in any conversation lasting more than a few minutes. And when an Italian word or name—*risotto* or *Rigoletto*—passes her lips, her utterly unaccented English gives way to utterly unaccented (read: fully, beautifully enunciated) Italian, all without perturbing the melodic line of the sentence in the least. Only someone with keen powers of observation would pick up the other hint: the faintly pained expression that registers around Burgess' eyes when she hears "risotto" or "Rigoletto" rendered in flattened American phonemes.

In polite conversation (impolite conversation with her is unimaginable), that almost imperceptible shudder is Servi Burgess' only response to the mispronunciation of her mother tongue. On the job, however, not one underarticulated double consonant gets by.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm just one more of the pesky people around here telling singers what they're doing wrong," she says, in a faintly confessional tone. "When we'd come to breaks in musical rehearsals, Leontyne Price used to see me coming and say, 'OK, babe'—she always

called me something like that—'What did I do wrong this time?' But then, she wouldn't just listen to what I had to say and nod politely. She would listen and make the correction. In general, I try to be very velvet-glove and do what I'm paid to do in the kindest way possible." At the



Elena Servi Burgess.

MESSICK

War Memorial Opera House, there's universal assent that she does.

San Francisco Opera was among the first companies to hire a coach specifically and solely for Italian diction—and is still one of the few major companies in the

world to retain one. As Italian diction coach, Servi Burgess joined the staff for the 1976 season.

A UC Berkeley graduate with a 1958 undergraduate degree in French and a 1963 master's degree in Italian, Servi Burgess had taught Italian for a decade, both at San Francisco State and at Berkeley. Between travels, she was the Italian correspondent for the PBS "World Press" program produced at San Francisco's KQED. Upon her return from a two-year sojourn in Padua, where her late husband, novelist, playwright and UC Berkeley English professor Jackson Burgess had been director of the Education Abroad Program, she wrote to the opera company "on a fluke," offering her services as a diction coach.

A year later she received a letter from Willie Waters, former General Director Kurt Herbert Adler's artistic administrator, asking if she were still interested—which she was. "To my great surprise," she recalls, "when he walked into the room for my interview, Mr. Waters greeted me with 'Buon giorno. Venga, s'accomodi,' in perfect Italian. We spoke in Italian for a while, and then he asked me about opera. When he realized that I knew, and loved, the repertoire, he asked me if I could start that evening. So, a few hours later I appeared, Mr. Adler put the score of *La Forza del Destino* in my lap, and I started correcting the singers.



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Elena Servi Burgess at work during the Opera Center tour to Shanghai.

"I wasn't afraid of Mr. Adler at first," she continues. "That took a little while. He never gave compliments, and after every dress rehearsal, he used to come up to me and say, 'ElenAH, zee Italian ees TERRible,' and I would burst into tears. It was only when it dawned on me that he kept asking me back that I realized he must have liked my work. I miss him now."

Servi Burgess was born in Milan into a family of scientists. ("They say math and music go together," she remarks quizzically.) Because her father was Jewish ("non-practicing, but Mussolini didn't care about that"), the family moved to the U.S. in 1940. She was 4, and her sister, who was 8, had already been barred from attending school by the racial laws of 1938. After the war, the family moved back to Italy.

She and her sister were not allowed to speak English in the family home but, being young when they first emigrated, had no trouble learning English in school. "I know I don't have an accent," she remarks accurately, "and I'm now convinced that it is because puberty is the cutoff. Before puberty, certain muscles haven't formed or something, and you can pick up another language without an accent. But if you arrive even a day after . . . People who come here at 13 or 14 usually do have an accent."

Her parents, never convinced that they preferred life in America, moved

back and forth between the two countries with some regularity, a pattern that obtains in Servi Burgess' life to this day. She attended high school in Los Angeles and then found herself in Berkeley when her father took a position as a reliability engineer at Lockheed. By the time she was ready to begin her university education, she was a naturalized U.S. citizen and decided that she wanted to stay here.

In the period between her university degrees, Servi Burgess moved to Rome ("which was still livable in 1958"), where she worked for the De Laurentiis film studios, doing translation and public relations for the foreign press. She subsequently returned to the U.S. because she felt she had to; by the laws of the time, a naturalized U.S. citizen could not live in the country of his or her birth without forfeiting U.S. citizenship.

"Fortunately, I married a man who loved Italy, and Italian food, as much as I do," she continues. "We went back to Italy in 1968-69 for his Fulbright at the University of Catania, and then to Padua from 1972 to 1974. At first I feared Padua would be too provincial, but I came to love it so much—the university, the second oldest in Italy, makes it cosmopolitan, and it's close to Venice—that I recently bought an apartment there. That's where I want to be any time I'm not working for the opera."

Not that her American life is not

steeped in *italianità*. Beyond her language expertise is her skill in northern Italian cuisine. Her mother had to learn to cook for the first time when she came to this country, and Servi Burgess, too, is largely self-taught. "I'm convinced that the secret is in growing up with the right tastes in your mouth," she says with characteristic modesty. She found herself out of work at the opera in 1978-79, after asking Adler for a contract and refusing the one he offered her—at lesser pay than she had been getting. She filled that time teaching northern Italian cooking at the John A. Brown kitchenware store in Oakland.

Although Servi Burgess' work as a coach has many dimensions, in another sense it's all of a piece: training singers in the production of accurate, expressive Italian. In various ways she has learned that in many of the world's major opera houses, the trend is away from coaching singers' diction at all, usually based on the premise that it would be presumptuous to criticize the efforts of stars. As a result, the stars' responses to her work here vary widely.

While most Spanish artists are adept at Italian, there is, she reports, the occasional tendency to sing, say "Ba, ba, ba" instead of "Va, va, va." "When I point that out to Montserrat [Caballé]," she says, "she invariably responds with a charming [switching to a high, girlish soprano], 'Oh, Elena, you must always correct me.'"

No saga about operatic diction could skirt the issue of Joan Sutherland for very long, and Servi Burgess meets it head on. "Joan needs all the help she can get, in any language," she says. "And she knows it. And Richard Bonyngé is always on me to work as hard as I can with her. But her problems with diction have partly to do with the wonderful way her voice is placed. And she does put her whole heart into our sessions—although she often says she'd rather be knitting for her grandchildren.

"I was still very green when I coached Beverly Sills in *I Puritani*," she continues, "and I was star-struck. After I gave her some advice on a particularly difficult subjunctive form, she responded with a big hug, and, 'No one had even told me that before.' But come the performance, she sang it the wrong way anyway."

She now perceives letting bad diction go unremarked upon as simply not doing her job—and consequently finds any of a myriad of means to the desired end.

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Although her alert, active presence is required at all rehearsals of Italian operas, she does some of her most concentrated work at the first musical rehearsals. She takes copious notes on the work of each of the performers and then finds time, either in rehearsal breaks or in special coaching sessions arranged through the rehearsal department ("Christopher Hahn can work miracles"), to work out particular problems. She adds, however, that her favorite rehearsals are the *Sitzproben*, unstaged rehearsals with the cast and orchestra. "Then I can sit and listen to this music I love so much, and those beautiful voices, without being distracted by all that movement. And in those rehearsals it's easy to hear who's doing what wrong.

"I used to correct anyone about anything anytime. I'm not like that any more, but that in no way means I've given up. You do what you can—and, once they're on stage, they do what they will. Singers go through so much, and we non-performers often have to be reminded of that. Not that they don't remind us. I remember once making a comment to Marilyn Horne—whose Italian is wonderful, by the way—about a small point, and she told me in exasperation, 'There are so many things to think about.' I try to remember that, but I can't be so aware of it that it handcuffs me. It was also Marilyn Horne who, along with Joan Sutherland, provided me with one of the absolute high points of my opera-going life. It was at the 1982 opening night of *Norma*, and after working at all the staging rehearsals, knowing that it was going to be a wonderful production, I was literally moved to tears at the sound of those two voices and the sight of those two incredible artists at work.

"Usually singers see that I'm not trying to threaten them, and that I'm just there to make things better. Often they quickly perceive that when the words are pronounced correctly, they're easier to sing, too. Correct Italian makes a more beautiful sound—and it usually helps vocal production, too."

But Servi Burgess' work is by no means limited to the singers on the main stage. Her season begins in February, with private coaching of the Adler Fellows, most of whom know their roles and cover assignments for the upcoming season by that point. In April she turns her attention to the chorus. Then, before the musical rehearsals for the fall season



Elena Servi Burgess and soprano Susan Neves during a typical Italian coaching session.

begin, comes "the big parenthesis for Merola."

She sits in on most of the stagings for the opera or operas the 18 "Merolini" perform (*Madama Butterfly* last summer). But she also teaches a formal—well, not that formal—class in grammar, pronunciation, and conversation, followed most days by half-hour private sessions with the singers.

A less threatening teacher or coach would be hard to imagine. Her more theatrical, classroom voice rings with the embracing warmth of *The Golden Girls'* Betty White—and it bristles with keen intelligence. And the process is made the more inviting by her giving each student an Italian name, and rewarding good work with big, sincere, "Molto bene"s and "Ma bravo"s. The "kids" eat it up.

Private sessions with the Merolini, preparing their arias for the Grand Finals, find Servi Burgess at her most personable and most focused. Leroy Villanueva ("Luigi") is working on Ford's aria from



MESSICK

Falstaff, and Servi Burgess, impressed with his diction overall, hones in on the fine points. "Ford's beside himself with the idea of being cuckolded, and I think if you double the 'c' in *'corna'*, it will make it even more expressive. Close the 'le' that comes before it with a 'c.'" Turning to the *Rigoletto* quartet, in which Villanueva will sing the jester, she begins, "I want you to know what you're saying, so let's go through the story and the translation, word for word." Recounting the story, he speaks of Gilda. "JEEL-dah," Servi Burgess corrects firmly. "No more of this Jill-duh stuff."

Reveka Mavrovitis ("Laura") is wrestling with Dorabella's "*Smanie implacabili*," from *Così fan tutte*, among the most harrowing of mezzo arias and at least as treacherous textually—tongue-twisters and jawbreakers at every turn—as it is musically. Coach puts singer at ease by beginning the session with a comment on the whiteness of her recently washed Keds and the remark, "I'm glad to see

they're back." The first revelation comes as Servi Burgess explains that the sister is *addressing* the furies, enriching the mezzo's understanding of the tone and meaning of the aria as a whole.

The singer repeatedly stumbles over the fleet line: "*Chiudi quelle finestre*." When Servi Burgess counsels the singer to weight the line toward the syllable "*nes*," it immediately falls into place. Minutes later, pointing out that the two "l"s in "*all'Eumenidi*" "both fall on the same note" makes a line previously unsingable emerge with simple clarity.

It's the same lesson all over the house: correctly enunciated Italian is easier to sing. "It used to be that when I'd give singers particular pointers—and they'd reject them with a line something like, 'Oh, I couldn't possibly do that on that note,' or 'producing a certain tone,' or whatever—I'd defer to them. But, particularly through my work with the voice coach Dixon Titus here, I've learned that it's hardly ever the case, and that the right word sound usually opens up the right vocal sound. So now I usually reply, 'Let's try it again.'"

Servi Burgess manifests her delight in her work in countless ways, from her patient kindness, to her stamina through 14-hour fall season days, to her steady professional growth and gains in particularly musical understandings. The latest innovation she has in mind is a lexicon of "libretto Italian," a longterm project in which she is well underway. "The same kinds of expressions and constructions come up over and over again in Italian operas, so I think it would be a useful book. And particularly with the 'old,' poetic Italian, I think it would speed comprehension. I guess it must be a good idea, because every time I mention it to someone at the Opera House, their eyes go wide at the prospect."

For all its trials, her job has brought some delectable and unexpected perks, like a trip to Shanghai on the 1988 Western Opera Theater tour. Coaching Chinese singers in Italian lent both depth and universality to her teaching, and she recalls the experience with unmistakable emotion.

But, in the end, it's daily life at the War Memorial that gives her the greatest charge. "I get to spend my whole day listening to the music I love. And I get paid for it!"

—Timothy Pfaff

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Western Opera Theater 1988 Fall National Tour

September 23	Redding, CA
September 24	Napa, CA
September 25	Piedmont, CA
September 27	Victorville, CA
September 30	Chico, CA
October 1, 2, 3	Yreka, CA
October 4	Newport, OR
October 6	Olympia, WA
October 8	Lewiston, ID
October 10	Nyssa, OR
October 11	Caldwell, ID
October 13	Richland, WA
October 15	Spokane, WA
October 17	Missoula, MT
October 18	Havre, MT
October 20	Butte, MT
October 21	Helena, MT
October 22	Billings, MT
October 28	Green Bay, WI
October 29	Manitowoc, WI
October 30	Merrillville, IN
November 1	Stow, OH
November 3	Meadville, PA
November 4	Selinsgrove, PA
November 5	Altoona, PA
November 6	Pennington, NJ
November 9	Stonington, CT
November 11	Geneseo, NY
November 12	Stony Brook, NY
November 13	New York, NY
November 15	Huntington, WV
November 16	Fairmont, WV
November 19	Boca Raton, FL
November 21	Lakeland, FL
November 22	Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Most of the above performance dates will feature Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*.

Brown Bag Opera/Special Event

October 4—Pacific Musical Society,
San Francisco

Opera Center Benefit Event, "Front and Center"

October 23—Kimball's Restaurant,
San Francisco

Schwabacher Debut Recitals,

Vorpil Gallery, San Francisco

November 20—Robert Tate, tenor

December 11—Ann Panagulias,
soprano

For further information, please call the
Opera Center at (415) 565-6435.

1988 Opera Previews

Information on opera previews and lectures is carried in *San Francisco Opera Magazine* in order to enable patrons to plan attendance in advance. The following is a list of previews and lectures that are open to the public.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD INSIGHTS

Held in Herbst Theatre, Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., in San Francisco. All informal discussions begin at 6 p.m.; doors open at 5:30 p.m. Series subscription for Guild members is \$16; non-members \$20. Individual tickets may be purchased at the door for \$8. For further information, please call (415) 565-6432. Programs are subject to change.

Maometto II 9/12

With Philip Gossett, Rossini scholar, Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor of Music, University of Chicago; and James M. Kendrick, Chief Executive Officer, Boosey & Hawkes.

Marilyn Horne 9/26

Reflections on her life and career.

Parsifal—a technical view of the new production. 10/13

With Pet Halmen, designer; Nicolas Joël, director; Thomas J. Munn, lighting director; Jenny Green, costume director.

Anniversary Panel—Behind the scenes, the past 50 years. 11/9

With Matthew Farruggio, production supervisor; John Priest, technical director; Ivan Van Perre, master of properties (retired); Philip Eisenberg, assistant for artists.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD PREVIEWS

MARIN

Previews held at Park School Auditorium, 360 E. Bliethedale, Mill Valley; refresh-

ments served at 7:30 p.m., previews at 8 p.m. Series registration is \$25 for 6 previews (\$20 for students and seniors). Single tickets are \$5 (\$4 for students and seniors). For further information, please call (415) 453-4483.

L'Africaine 9/8

Michael Mitchell

Maometto II 9/15

Philip Gossett

The Rake's Progress 9/22

Albert Takazauckas

Parsifal 10/20

James Keolker

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk 10/27

Richard Taruskin

La Gioconda 11/17

William Huck

SOUTH PENINSULA

Previews held at the Palo Alto Senior Center, 450 Bryant, at 8 p.m. Series registration is \$22 (students \$11); single tickets are \$5 (students \$3). For further information, please call (415) 941-3890.

L'Africaine 9/7

Michael Mitchell

Maometto II 9/13

Philip Gossett

The Rake's Progress 9/20

Albert Takazauckas

Parsifal 10/18

James Keolker

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk 10/25

Richard Taruskin

La Gioconda 11/15

William Huck

SAN JOSE OPERA GUILD

Previews held at the Los Gatos History Club, 1234 Los Gatos Blvd., at 10 a.m. Series is open to the public at a cost of \$5 per lecture; \$2 for students and senior citizens (free of charge to San Jose Opera Guild members). For further information, please call (408) 741-1331.

L'Africaine 9/8

Michael Mitchell

Maometto II 9/13

Philip Gossett

The Rake's Progress 9/20

Albert Takazauckas

Parsifal 10/18

James Keolker

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk 10/25

Richard Taruskin

La Gioconda 11/15

William Huck

SOMOMA COUNTY CHAPTER

Previews held at various times and locations (see below). Series registration is \$22 for 6 previews (chapter member); \$25 non-member. Single tickets (member) \$5, non-member \$6, students \$3. For further information and reservations for receptions and luncheons, please call (707) 938-2432 or (707) 996-2590.

L'Africaine 9/6, 2 p.m.

Michael Mitchell 585 Denmark St., Sonoma

Maometto II 9/12, 2 p.m.

Philip Gossett 1000 Buckeye Rd., Kenwood

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The Rake's Progress 9/19, 7:30 p.m.
Albert Takazauckas 8904 Oakmont Dr.,
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Parsifal 10/17, 10:30 a.m.
James Keolker 1229 Los Robles Dr.,
Sonoma

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk 10/27, 10:30 a.m.
Richard Taruskin La Gare Restaurant
208 Wilson St., Railroad Square,
Santa Rosa

La Gioconda 11/14, 10:30 a.m.
William Huck Red Lion Inn
1 Red Lion Dr., Rohnert Park

JUNIOR LEAGUE OPERA PREVIEWS

All Junior League opera previews held in Herbst Theatre, Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco. Lectures begin at noon and there is no admission charge. For further information, please call (415) 346-9772.

L'Africaine 9/7
Michael Mitchell

Maometto II 9/14
Philip Gossett

The Rake's Progress 9/21
Albert Takazauckas

Parsifal 10/19
James Keolker

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk 10/26
Richard Taruskin

La Gioconda 11/16
William Huck

OPERA EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL PREVIEW SERIES

Previews of the operas of the 1988 season will be given by Michael Barclay, director of Opera Education International. Lectures will be presented in the auditorium of the Berkeley/Richmond Jewish Community Center, 1414 Walnut St. (at Rose) in Berkeley, at 7:45 p.m. Admission to the series of 10 opera previews is \$65; individual admission at the door is \$7.50. For further information, please call (415) 526-5244.

L'Africaine 9/1
The Rake's Progress 9/5
Maometto II 9/7
Der Fliegende Holländer 9/26
Così fan tutte 10/3
Manon Lescaut 10/10
Parsifal 10/17
Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk 10/24
La Bohème 10/31
La Gioconda 11/14

MERRITT COLLEGE OPERA LECTURE SERIES

Merritt College is offering an opera preview class, Introduction to Opera (Music 13A), with emphasis on the operas of the 1988 season, on Tuesday evenings at 6:30, beginning September 13. The enrollment fee is \$15. Classes will be held at the College, 12500 Campus Drive, Building R, Room 125, in Oakland. For further information, please call (415) 436-2410.

ROBERT GOODHUE'S FALL OPERA COURSE

Ten classes on San Francisco Opera's season are offered, and there is a choice of three series: Mondays from August 22 to November 21 at 6:30 p.m.; Thursdays from September 1 to November 17 at 6:30 p.m.; and Saturdays from September 10 to November 19 from 10 a.m. to 12 noon or from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Monday and Thursday sessions meet at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, 450 Powell, S.F. Saturday sessions are held at the Galleria Park Hotel, 191 Sutter, S.F. Cost for the series of 10 two-hour classes is \$70. For further information, please call (415) 956-1271.

ED BECKER'S PARSIFAL PREVIEW

A preview of San Francisco Opera's new production of *Parsifal* will be held from 7:00 to 10:40 p.m. on October 14 at 1 Kelton Court (Community Room) in North Oakland. Admission is \$10. For further information, please call (415) 532-9804.



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- Invitation to Opera-in-the-Park with chartered bus transportation and box lunch
- Preferred seating for all open dress rehearsals

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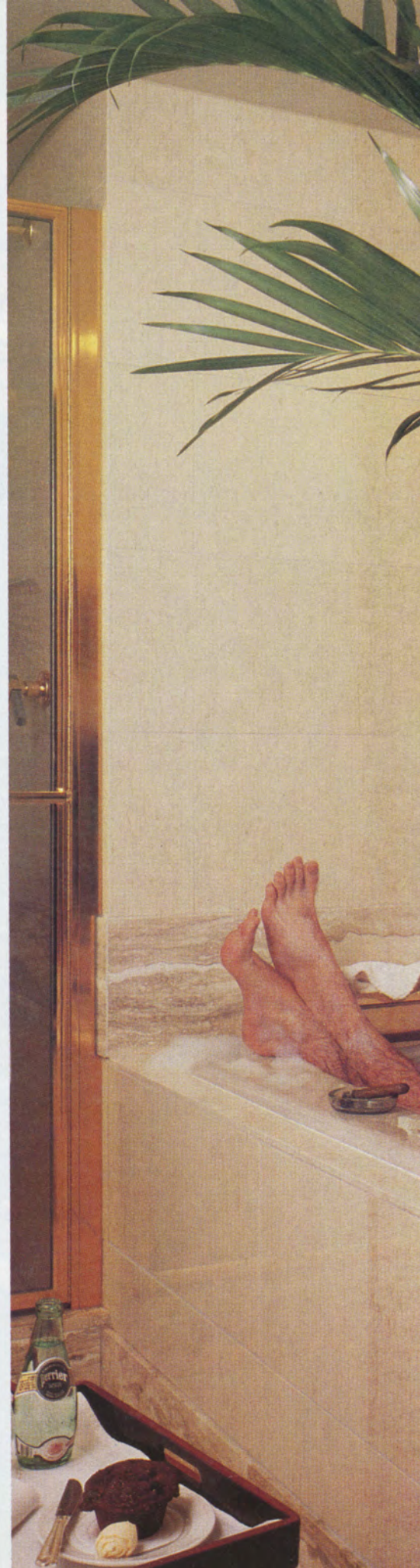
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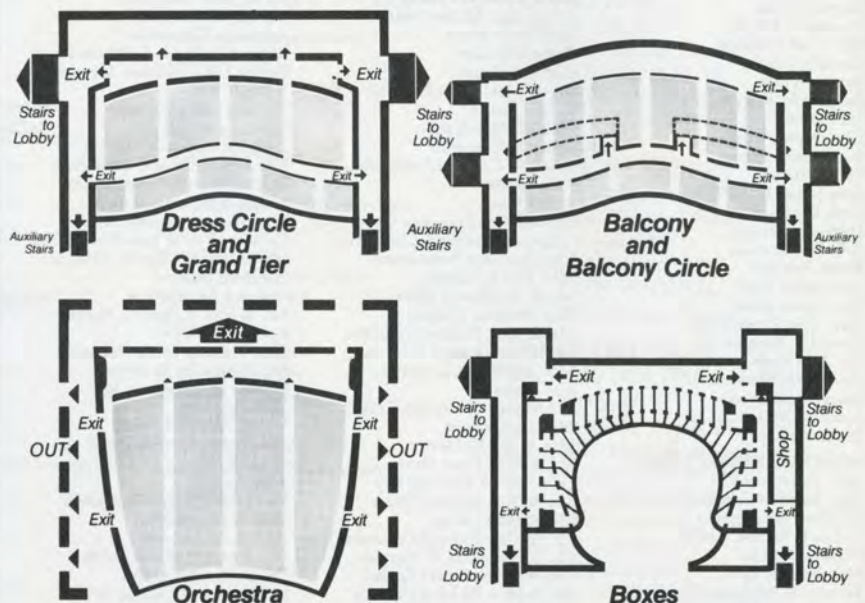
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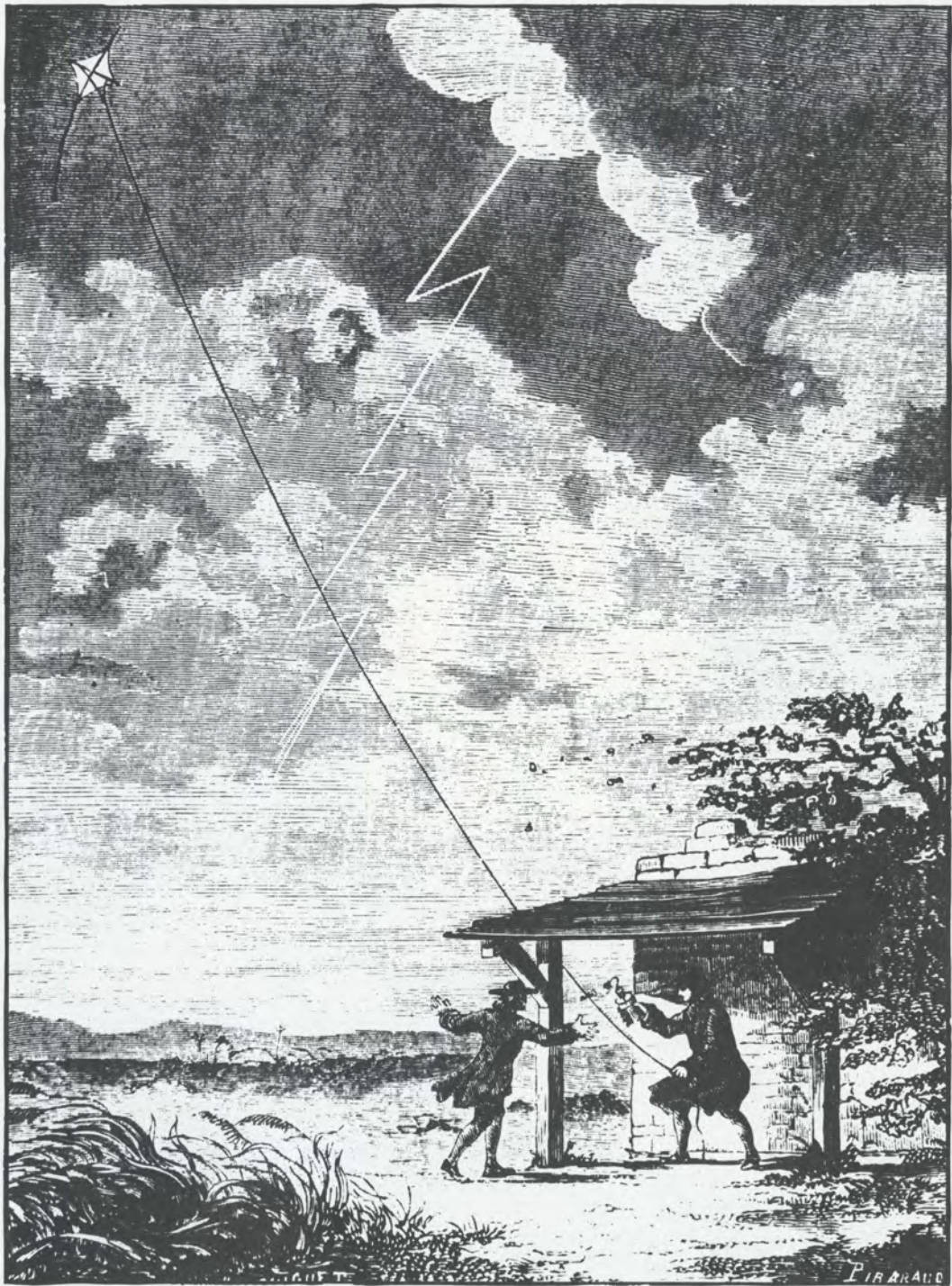
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