

Aida

1989

Saturday, October 21, 1989 8:00 PM
Thursday, October 26, 1989 8:00 PM
Sunday, October 29, 1989 2:00 PM
Wednesday, November 1, 1989 7:30 PM
Saturday, November 4, 1989 8:00 PM
Tuesday, November 7, 1989 8:00 PM
Sunday, November 12, 1989 2:00 PM
Tuesday, November 14, 1989 7:30 PM

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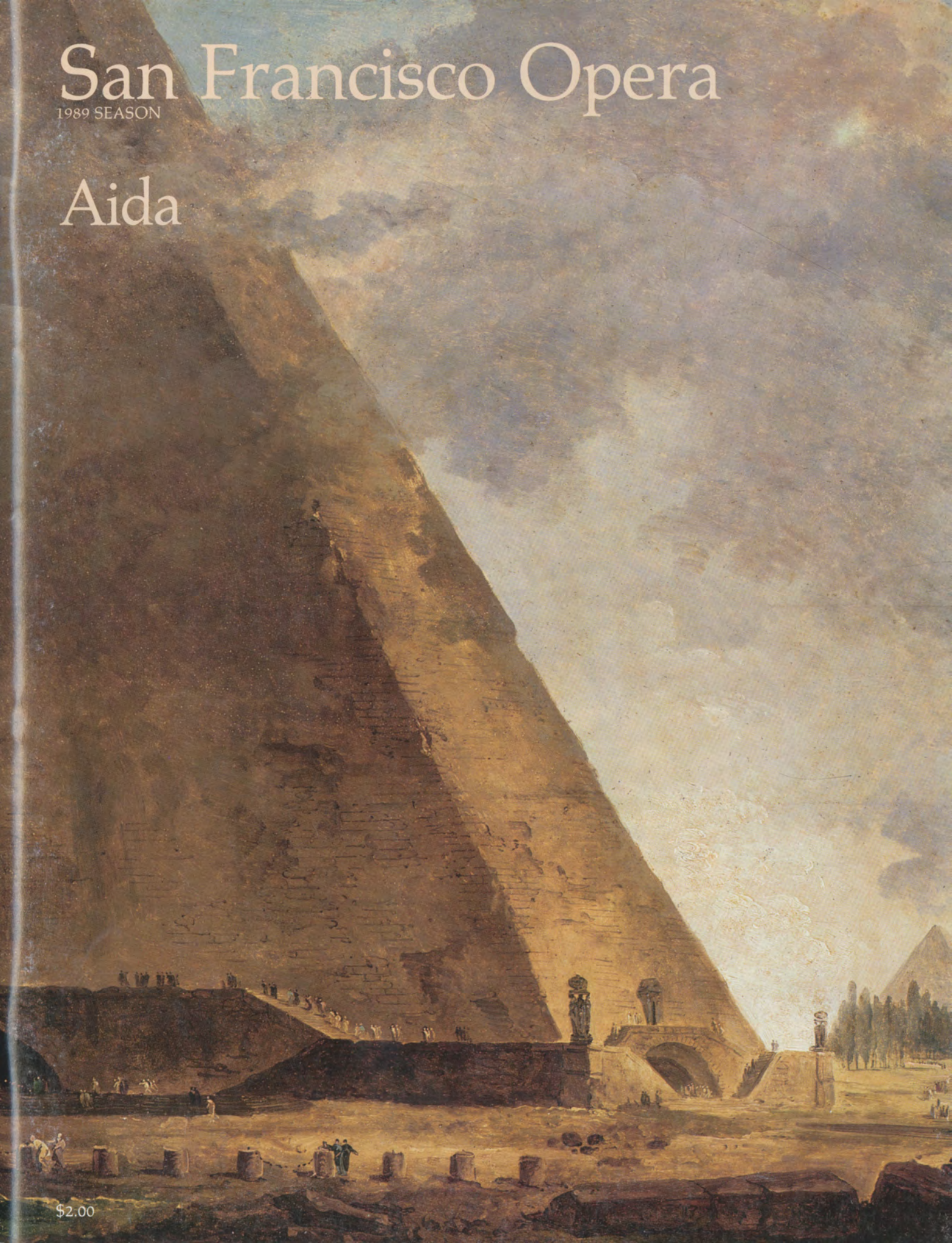
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San Francisco Opera

1989 SEASON

Aida

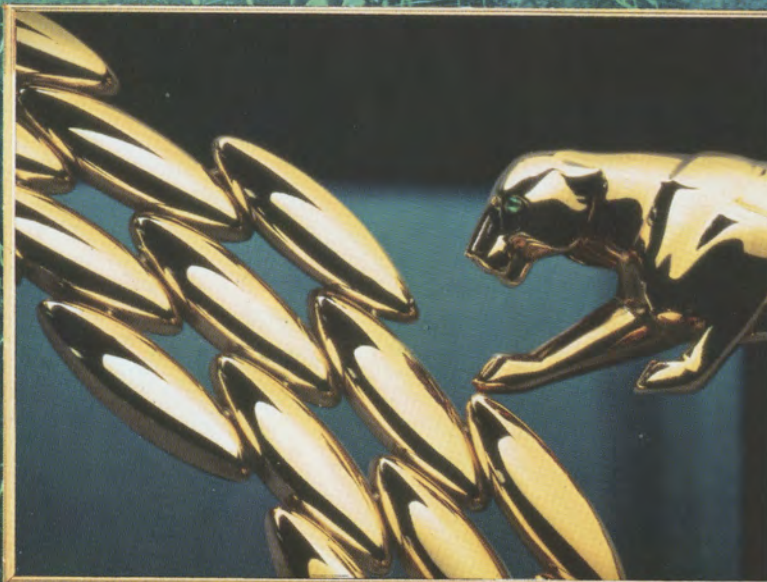


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San Francisco Opera

Lotfi Mansouri, *General Director*

Sir John Pritchard, *Music Director*

Aida

1989 SEASON

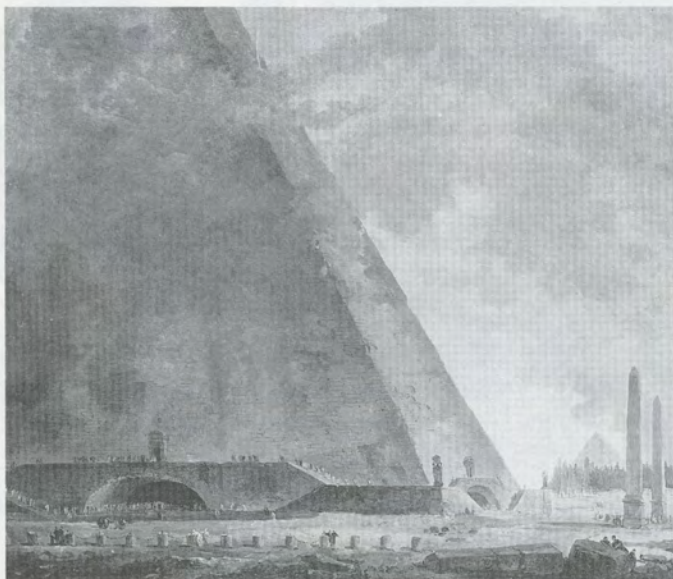
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COVER

Hubert Robert, 1733-1808 *Pyramids*, ca. 1760
Oil on panel; 24 x 28½ in.

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton,
Massachusetts.

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Editor: Koraljka Lockhart
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ISSN 0892-7189

Editorial offices: San Francisco Opera,
War Memorial Opera House,
San Francisco, CA 94102
Telephone: (415) 861-4008

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA MAGAZINE is published by THEATER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

Michel Pisani, *President*
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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA MAGAZINE, 110 Gough Street, Suite 402, San Francisco, CA 94102
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From the Chairman of the Board and the President

We are pleased to welcome you to the 67th annual season of the San Francisco Opera, a season distinguished by no fewer than four new productions as well as ventures into new repertoire. Our own General Director Lotfi Mansouri will lead us on the first of these journeys of discovery, when he directs the Company's first presentation of the complete three-act version of Berg's *Lulu*. Boito's *Mefistofele* has not been seen in the Opera House for 26 years; this year, it returns in a new production that is our first cooperative effort with the renowned Grand Théâtre de Genève. Mozart's *Idomeneo* returns to the Company in a new production created by the team of John Copley, director; Michael Stennett, costume designer (*Julius Caesar*, *Orlando*) and John Conklin, set designer (Wagner's *Ring* cycle). With *Orlando Furioso*, San Francisco Opera adds not only a new opera but also a new composer to its list, as we present our first work ever by Antonio Vivaldi. Pier Luigi Pizzi, responsible for the gripping 1986 *Macbeth*, returns to stage this baroque opera. Our gratitude goes to the Paul L. and Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation for underwriting our new *Lulu*; the L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation for *Idomeneo*; and Geoffrey Chambers Hughes who underwrote *Orlando Furioso* in memory of his grandfather, John William Hughes.

The return of productions seen in previous seasons is always a source of pleasure. Two of these, *Falstaff* and *Otello*, represent the heritage of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, whose productions in the past contributed greatly to our Company's international stature. We are grateful to the L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, the original underwriters of our *Falstaff*, and the San Francisco Opera Guild who made possible this season's revival. Two of our 1989 operas, *Aida* and *Lohengrin*, owe their existence to an anonymous friend of the San Francisco Opera, while *Die Frau ohne Schatten* was originally underwritten by Cynthia Wood, who is also making this year's staging possible. Last, but far from least, *Madama Butterfly* re-joins our repertoire in a production made possible some years ago by the San Francisco Opera Guild.

It is a privilege to be able to acknowledge our governmental funding sources, including the National Endowment for the Arts and the California Arts Council. We also extend our appreciation to the Grants for the Arts of the San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, Mayor Art Agnos and Chief Administrative Officer Rudolf Nothenberg, whose support has always been gratifying.

As in previous years, we extend our appreciation to the San Francisco Opera

Guild and the War Memorial Board of Trustees for their ongoing support.

In the past, we have pointed out that ticket sales cover only slightly more than half of our expenses; this is no less true now than it has ever been. With the ongoing support of the individuals, foundations, corporations and government agencies already mentioned, and your own interest and financial support, we anticipate continued success and growth for our Company.

Reid W. Dennis, Chairman
Tully M. Friedman, President

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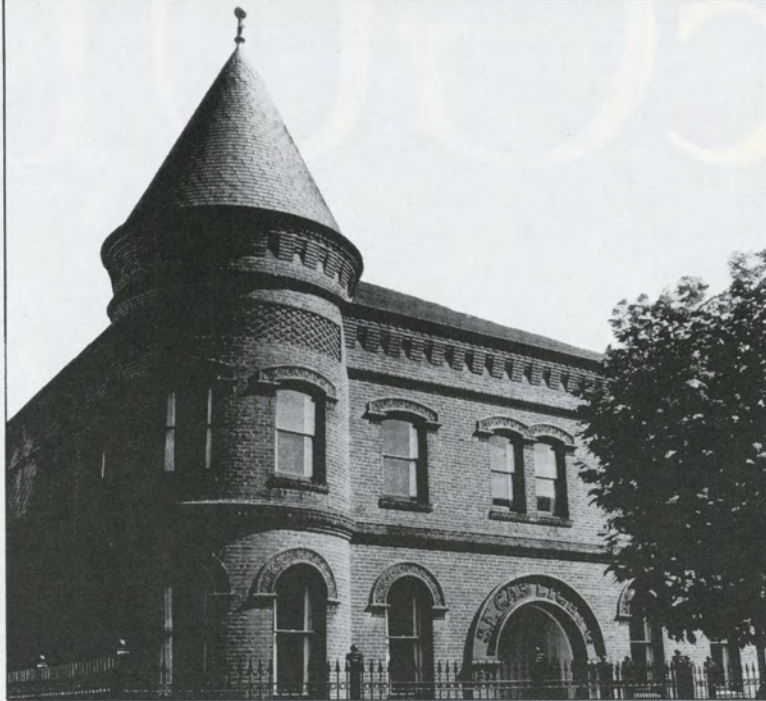
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General Director's Message

The current San Francisco Opera season is special for many reasons. The repertoire spans the gamut of operatic creativity from Antonio Vivaldi to Alban Berg, with four of the works being given in exciting new productions. There is one aspect of our 67th season, however, that I find particularly heartening. One of my dreams for the Company is for the outstanding young talent of the San Francisco Opera Center to form an ensemble that will become our core company of singers, around whom we can build our repertoire and secure the highest possible artistic standards from production to production, season to season. A glance at this year's roster will show how quickly this ideal is already starting to become a reality. Two of the title roles in our fall operas belong to two brilliant young sopranos who have come through the Center's numerous training programs: Ann Panagulias as Lulu, and Nikki Li Hartlieb as Madama Butterfly. But they will not be carrying the Center's torch

alone on the Opera House stage; virtually every production is populated with alumni who have made our Opera Center the envy of every American opera company. These are the young artists we have watched together from their first appearances at Stern Grove or the Merola Opera Program Grand Finals, through their development into full-fledged artists who would be a credit to any major opera company. With such a firm artistic foundation, and with the added excitement of numerous international stars, our 1989 season should be a pleasure to follow, and a portent of wonderful developments as San Francisco Opera grows toward the 21st century. I am delighted that you will be with us as we open the next exciting chapter in the history of the San Francisco Opera.

San Francisco Opera

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Continued on page 13



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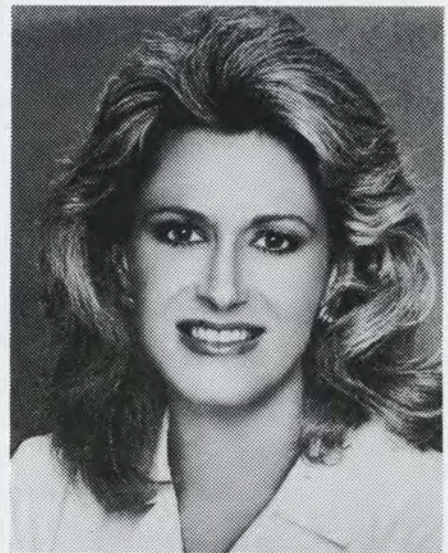
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1989 Season

Opening Night

Friday, September 8, 7:30
Falstaff Verdi
 Lorengar, Horne, Swenson, Cowdrick;
 Stewart, De Haan, Raftery, Frank,
 Pittsinger, Sénéchal*
 Kord/Calábria/Ponnelle/Ponnelle/Munn
*Production originally made possible by a
 grant from the L.J. & Mary C. Skaggs
 Foundation; Revival made possible by a
 generous gift from the San Francisco Opera
 Guild.*

Saturday, September 9, 8:00
New Production
Lulu Berg
 Panagulias, Lear, Harris*, Cook, Swift*,
 Mills*; Braun, McCauley, Hotter,
 Myers*, Cowan*, Rideout*, Travis,
 Villanueva, Petersen, Irmiter, Reinhardt
 Mauceri/Mansouri/Schneider-Siemssen/
 Mackie*/Whitfield*
*San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges
 a generous grant from the Paul L. & Phyllis
 C. Wattis Foundation to underwrite this
 production.*

Tuesday, September 12, 8:00
Lulu Berg

Wednesday, September 13, 7:30
Falstaff Verdi

Friday, September 15, 8:00
Lulu Berg

Saturday, September 16, 8:00
 Co-production with the Grand Théâtre
 de Genève
Mefistofele Boito
 Beňáčková, Christin, Manhart; O'Neill,
 Ramey, Harper, Wunsch
 Arena/Carsen*/Levine*/Poulin**/Munn
*Production made possible, in part, by Mr. &
 Mrs. John C. McGuire and by Mr. &
 Mrs. Thomas Tilton.*

Sunday, September 17, 2:00
Falstaff Verdi

Sunday, September 17, 7:30
Family Performance
Falstaff Verdi
 Racette*, Williams, Keen, Spence; Noble,
 Boutet*, Ledbetter, Rideout, Travis,
 Estep*
 Robertson/Calábria/Ponnelle/Ponnelle/
 Munn

Tuesday, September 19, 8:00
Mefistofele Boito

Wednesday, September 20, 7:30
Lulu Berg

Thursday, September 21, 8:00
Falstaff Verdi

Friday, September 22, 8:00
Mefistofele Boito

Saturday, September 23, 1:00
Lulu Berg

Saturday, September 23, 8:00
Falstaff Verdi

Sunday, September 24, 2:00
Mefistofele Boito

Tuesday, September 26, 7:30
Falstaff Verdi

Thursday, September 28, 8:00
Mefistofele Boito

Friday, September 29, 8:00
Falstaff Verdi

Saturday, September 30, 8:00
Otello Verdi
 Ricciarelli, Keen; Mauro, Ellis, De Haan,
 Pittsinger, Schwisow, Skinner,
 Villanueva
 Kord/Asagaroff/Ponnelle/Ponnelle/
 Arhelger

Sunday, October 1, 2:00
Lulu Berg

Tuesday, October 3, 8:00
Otello Verdi

Wednesday, October 4, 7:30
Mefistofele Boito

Friday, October 6, 8:00
Otello Verdi

Saturday, October 7, 8:00
New Production
Idomeneo Mozart
 Mattila*, Gustafson, Racette, Spence;
 Ochman, Blochwitz**, Lewis, Outland*,
 Cox*, Li*, Ledbetter
 Pritchard/Copley/Conklin/Stennett/
 Munn

*San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges
 a generous grant from the L.J. & Mary C.
 Skaggs Foundation for partial underwriting
 of this production.*

Sunday, October 8, 2:00
Mefistofele Boito

Tuesday, October 10, 7:30
Mefistofele Boito

Wednesday, October 11, 8:00
Idomeneo Mozart

Thursday, October 12, 7:30
Otello Verdi

Saturday, October 14, 2:00
Idomeneo Mozart

Sunday, October 15, 2:00
Otello Verdi

Tuesday, October 17, 8:00
Idomeneo Mozart

Friday, October 20, 8:00
Otello Verdi

Saturday, October 21, 8:00
Aida Verdi
 Sweet*, Zajick, Racette; Popov, Noble,
 Langan, Pittsinger, Li
 Kellogg*/Donnell/Schmidt/Casey/
 Tippet*/Munn
*This production was originally made possible
 by a gift from an anonymous donor.*

Sunday, October 22, 2:00
Idomeneo Mozart

Tuesday, October 24, 7:30
Otello Verdi

Wednesday, October 25, 7:30
Idomeneo Mozart

Thursday, October 26, 8:00
Aida Verdi

Friday, October 27, 8:00
Idomeneo Mozart

Saturday, October 28, 8:00
Madama Butterfly Puccini
 Hartlieb, Redmon*, Spence; Polozov,
 Laperrière*, Perry, Villanueva, Skinner,
 Travis, Estep
 Pritchard/Farruggio/Businger/Munn
*This production was originally made possible
 by a grant from the San Francisco Opera
 Guild.*

Sunday, October 29, 2:00
Aida Verdi

| | | | | | |
|---|---------|--|---------|--|---------|
| Tuesday, October 31, 8:00 Madama Butterfly | Puccini | Friday, November 24, 8:00 Orlando Furioso | Vivaldi | Thursday, December 7, 7:30 Die Frau ohne Schatten | Strauss |
| Wednesday, November 1, 7:30 Aida | Verdi | Saturday, November 25, 7:30 Die Frau ohne Schatten | Strauss | Friday, December 8, 7:30 Lohengrin | Wagner |
| Friday, November 3, 7:30 Madama Butterfly | Puccini | Johnson, Jones, Silja, Racette, Spence, Fortuna*, Parks*, Friedman, Mizell*; Muff**, Johns, Pederson, Duykers, Ledbetter, Skinner, Schwisow, Villanueva, Irmiter, Travis Dohnányi/Asagaroff/Zimmermann/ Skalicky*/Munn | | Saturday, December 9, 1:00 Madama Butterfly (Same cast as December 3) | Puccini |
| Saturday, November 4, 8:00 Aida | Verdi | <i>This production was originally made possible by Cynthia Wood who has also underwritten the 1989 revival.</i> | | Saturday, December 9, 8:00 Orlando Furioso | Vivaldi |
| Sunday, November 5, 2:00 Madama Butterfly | Puccini | Sunday, November 26, 1:30 Lohengrin | Wagner | Sunday, December 10, 1:30 Die Frau ohne Schatten | Strauss |
| Tuesday, November 7, 8:00 Aida | Verdi | | | **United States opera debut *San Francisco Opera debut | |
| Friday, November 10, 7:30 Madama Butterfly | Puccini | Tuesday, November 28, 7:30 Die Frau ohne Schatten | Strauss | | |
| Saturday, November 11, 7:30 Lohengrin Häggander*, Randová; Frey*, Leiferkus**, Vogel*, Baerg*, Estep, Li, Ledbetter, Irmiter Mackerras/Robertson (December 8)/Weber/Montresor/Munn <i>This production was originally made possible by a gift from an anonymous donor.</i> | Wagner | Wednesday, November 29, 7:30 Lohengrin | Wagner | All performances are in the original language with English Supertitles. Supertitles for <i>Falstaff</i> , <i>Lulu</i> , <i>Mefistofele</i> , <i>Idomeneo</i> , <i>Aida</i> , <i>Madama Butterfly</i> and <i>Die Frau ohne Schatten</i> provided by a generous and most appreciated gift from William and Eloise Rollnick. <i>Otello</i> supertitles underwritten through a generous grant from Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc. Supertitles for <i>Lohengrin</i> and <i>Orlando Furioso</i> provided through a grant from The Stanley S. Langendorf Foundation. | |
| Sunday, November 12, 2:00 Aida | Verdi | Thursday, November 30, 7:30 Orlando Furioso | Vivaldi | Repertoire, casts and dates subject to change. | |
| Tuesday, November 14, 8:00 Aida | Verdi | Friday, December 1, 7:30 Die Frau ohne Schatten | Strauss | Box Office and telephone sales: (415) 864-3330. | |
| Wednesday, November 15, 8:00 Madama Butterfly | Puccini | Saturday, December 2, 7:30 Lohengrin | Wagner | | |
| Friday, November 17, 7:30 Lohengrin | Wagner | Sunday, December 3, 1:00 Madama Butterfly Gauci*, Manhart, Spence; Aragall, Schexnayder*, Li, Villanueva, Skinner, Travis, Estep Pritchard/Farruggio/Businger/Munn | Puccini | | |
| Saturday, November 18, 8:00 Madama Butterfly <i>This performance made possible by a generous grant from Shaklee Corporation.</i> | Puccini | Sunday, December 3, 8:00 Orlando Furioso | Vivaldi | | |
| Sunday, November 19, 2:00 <i>New Production</i> Orlando Furioso | Vivaldi | Monday, December 4, 7:30 Die Frau ohne Schatten | Strauss | | |
| Horne, Patterson, Kuhlmann, Walker; Matteuzzi*, Gall, Langan Pritchard/Pizzi/Pizzi/Munn <i>San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges a generous gift from Geoffrey Chambers Hughes to underwrite this production. His gift is made in memory of his grandfather, John William Hughes.</i> | | Wednesday, December 6, 8:00 Orlando Furioso | Vivaldi | | |
| Tuesday, November 21, 7:30 Lohengrin | Wagner | | | | |

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The San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum (formerly the Archives for the Performing Arts) invites you to an exhibit of photographs taken over several years by noted Bay Area photographer Ira Nowinski. In addition to the primary subject, Maestro Kurt Herbert Adler, the exhibit will also salute San Francisco Opera Center's Adler Fellows, the young singers who are about to embark on careers on the world's opera stages. The exhibit is located in the War Memorial Opera House Museum (box level, south side) and is open to the public during Opera House performance hours, September 8 through December 10, 1989.



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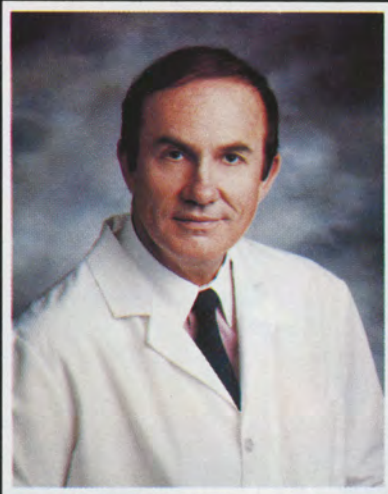
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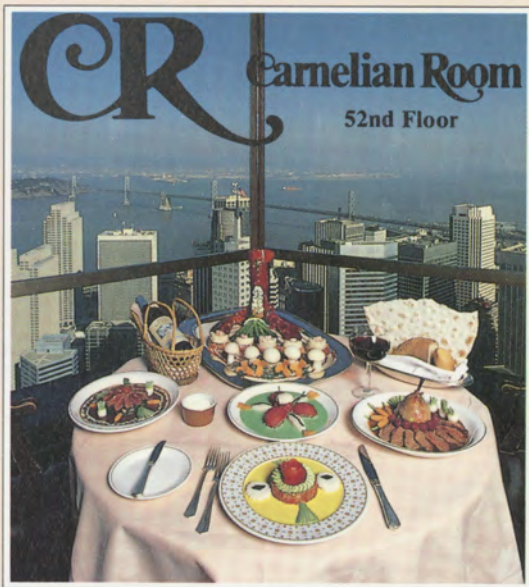
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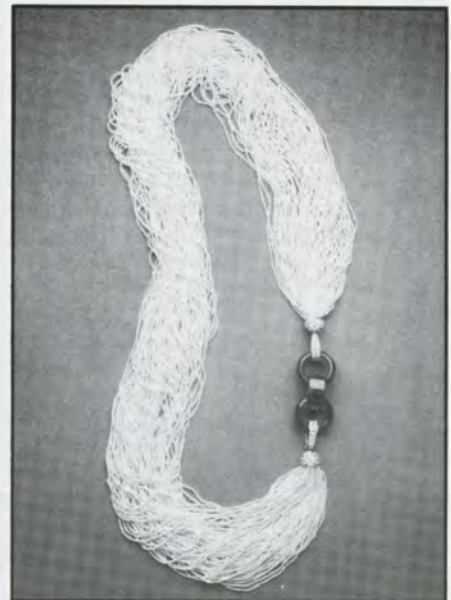
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Aida: Intimate and Grand

By JOHN ARDOIN

There is something dangerous about the familiar. And what could be more familiar than Verdi's *Aida*. The chief danger lies in taking it for granted. We have heard so many tenors (from professionals to waiters in Italian restaurants) bawl out "Celeste Aida," and so many of us have graduated to the militant blare of the opera's Grand March, that we tend to hear *Aida* rather than really listen to it.

This is a shame, for underneath its well-known, grandiose musical façade, there lies quite a remarkable musical mechanism. It was a watershed in the progress of opera, a high ground of humanism between the artificiality of Meyerbeer and the complex, psychological structures erected by Wagner. It is the most intimate of grand operas, and in terms of Verdi's output, a very individual work.

It is not difficult to pinpoint its individuality, and the very qualities that make it different have frequently been used to denigrate its score. We have often been told that *Aida* lacks the raw vigor of *Nabucco* or *Il Trovatore* on the one hand,

John Ardoin is music critic of the Dallas Morning News, whose most recent book is Callas at Juilliard, the Masterclasses (Alfred Knopf, New York).

Aida's Triumphant Scene in 1981, the year the current production of the Verdi opera was unveiled.

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San Francisco Opera's first interpreter of the role of *Aida* was Claudia Muzio, who sang the part in 1925, returning for additional performances in 1926 and 1933. This photo, taken in 1933, shows her seated at the stairs during the Triumphal Scene, right under Louis D'Angelo (King of Egypt) and Kathryn Meisle, who portrayed Amneris.

and the character development and deep insights of *Don Carlo* and *Otello* on the other.

What we are not told often enough is how *Aida* surpasses so many other operas by Verdi in its unified structuring, its remarkable use of orchestral colors and the way in which the composer perfectly matches a character with just the right musical gesture. Familiarity has bred something worse than contempt; it has bred, if not indifference to the score's felicities, a degree of deafness.

Today, *Aida* has become such a part of the fabric of operatic life that it is hard for many of us to realize how controversial it was at the time it was written. There was an outcry among the critics who attended the Cairo premiere in 1871 and the Italian premiere in Milan the next year that accused Verdi of trading his Italian heritage for "Germanisms," a euphemism of the time for "Wagnerianisms."

These barbs could be traced back to Verdi's expanded, polyphonic use of the orchestra and a flirtation with leitmotifs (the employing of a recurring theme to trigger an emotion or announce a principal character). These accusations dis-

tressed Verdi more than any others. "A fine thing," he wrote his friend and publisher Giulio Ricordi, "after thirty-five years to end up as an imitator."

But as is so often the case, the audiences had the last word, and they responded fervently to the pageantry and pomp of the new opera, even if they did not at first grasp all its subtleties. There was at least one exception, and an amusing one, that affords an insight into the gruff, peasant character of Verdi. A music lover from Reggio wrote the composer that he had twice traveled to Parma to hear *Aida*, and he felt that were it not for the magnificent scenery, no audience would be able to endure the interminable length of the opera. Since hearing *Aida*, the expenses he had incurred had preyed on his mind like a terrifying specter, and he felt he was justified in asking the composer to provide him with recompensation. He enclosed a bill for 31.80 lire, the amount he had spent on two railroad trips, two opera seats and two "disgustingly bad dinners" at the train station. Verdi instructed his publisher to send the man 27.80 lire, having deducted the costs of the dinners, for, as Verdi put it, "he

could perfectly well have eaten at home."

Verdi also added, "Naturally, he must send you a receipt, as well as a written understanding promising not to attend another new opera of mine, so that he won't again expose himself to the danger of being pursued by specters or involve me in further travel expenses." The money was paid, and a receipt and the understanding received.

Many myths have grown up around *Aida*, a not surprising fact considering its immense popularity, that for long were taken as fact. Legend has it that the opera was written for the opening of the Suez Canal. Wrong. By the time Verdi received the first synopsis of *Aida*'s plot, written by his librettist for *Don Carlo*, Camille du Locle, the Canal had been in operation for several months.

Aida was not even written for the inauguration of the Cairo Opera House, as one often reads, for that house had been inaugurated with *Rigoletto* two weeks before the Canal was open. Closer to the truth is that the Khedive of Egypt wanted something spectacular to mark his country's newly acquired international prestige, and he wished it to be by Verdi,



In S.F. Opera's 1935 staging of *Aida*, Elisabeth Rethberg interpreted the title role (left), with Coe Glade as Amneris.

MORTON



though he stipulated that a work by Charles Gounod or Richard Wagner would be acceptable if Verdi refused the commission.

Du Locle came into the picture because he had been assiduously trying to link himself again with Verdi after the success of *Don Carlo*, and was continually suggesting ideas for new operas. Attempting to put Du Locle off, Verdi complained about the difficulties of working in Paris, even noting that Rossini was defeated in

William Tell by the "fatal atmosphere" that existed at the opera there.

"I'm no composer for Paris," Verdi told Du Locle. "I don't know whether or not I lack the talent, but certainly my ideas about art are very different from those of your country. I believe in inspiration; you

The 1937 staging of *Aida* at the War Memorial brought together (l. to r.) Giovanni Martinelli as Radames, Gina Cigna as Aida and Bruna Castagna as Amneris.

MORTON

believe in construction." Even this did not put Du Locle off. He continued to bombard Verdi with material, offering among other things librettos based on *Froufrou* by Meilhac and Halévy (one could easily imagine how Verdi received that flippancy), Molière's *Tartuffe* and, at Verdi's suggestion, a play by the contemporary Spanish writer Lopez de Ayala.

Along with the Ayala treatment, he sent Verdi a four-page synopsis of an opera set in ancient Egypt. At last intrigued, the old lion of Busseto expressed interest in the Egyptian plot and inquired whose idea it was. Du Locle responded that his synopsis had been based on a tale by the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, who had printed a limited edition of his story. A copy had gone to the Khedive, who had bestowed on Mariette the title of Bey, suggesting that it would make a splendid plot for an opera. The Khedive agreed, and asked Mariette to see if Verdi might be interested. Mariette in turn enlisted Du Locle's help.

But even though Verdi's keen theatrical sense was aroused, it is a wonder that *Aida* was written at all, for the older Verdi grew, the less willing he was to compose





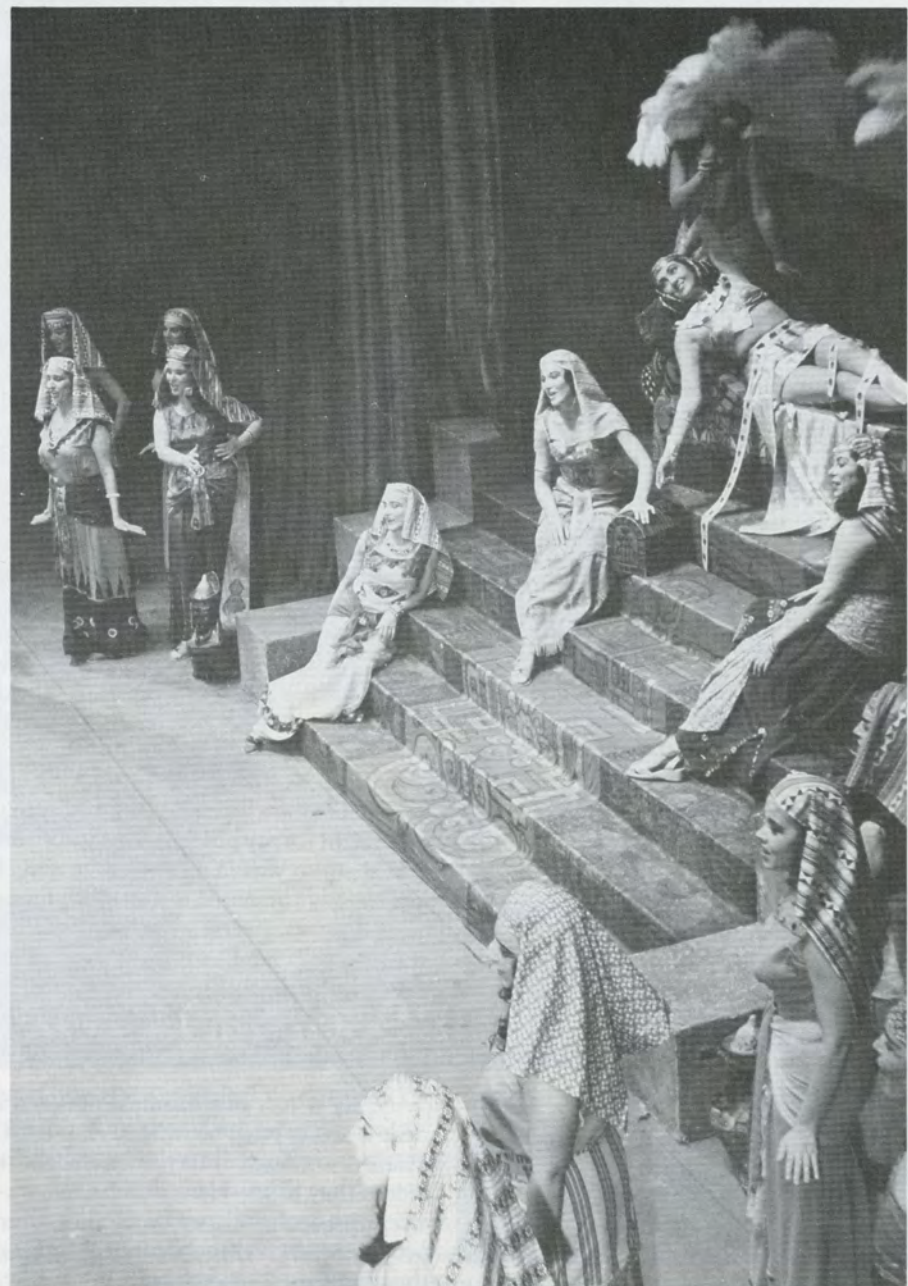
San Francisco Opera's 1944 *Aida* featured Stella Roman (left) as the Ethiopian princess, with Margaret Harshaw as Amneris. STROHMEYER

music. Between 1839 and 1859, he had poured out operas at the rate of one a year. After the premiere of *Un Ballo in Maschera*, however, this prodigious flow began to ebb. Three years separate *Ballo from La Forza del Destino* and another five intervene between *Forza* and *Don Carlo*.

Though only in his mid-50s, he had begun to speak of himself as an old man and only a farmer; he begrudged anything

that took him away from his beloved country home Sant'Agata. But the possibilities of what he might achieve with "the Egyptian idea" magnetized his imagination, and eventually he agreed to compose *Aida*. "If anyone had told me two years ago 'You will write for Cairo,' " Verdi wrote his friend, the lawyer Giuseppe Piroli, "I would have treated him like a fool, but now I see that I am the fool."

Du Locle provided a draft of the libretto in French, and Verdi engaged Antonio Ghislanzoni, a baritone turned poet, to recast the verses in Italian. From



STROHMEYER

Blanche Thebom was San Francisco Opera's Amneris in 1947, 1949, 1952 and 1957. She is seen here in a photo taken from the wings in 1949, reclining while being cooled by slave-operated flabellums.



Part of the American wing of San Francisco Opera interpreters of the role of Amonasro in *Aida* includes (l. to r.) Nelson Eddy (1935), Robert Merrill (1957), Robert Weede (1940, '42, '47, '49, '50, '59, '60) and Leonard Warren (1944, '47 and '55).

his extensive correspondence with Ghislanzoni, one feels that Verdi did not have the highest regard for his collaborator,

but he realized how useful the poet was, for he was entirely pliant to Verdi's wishes and will.

There is a fascinating exchange of letters dealing with the opera's final scene, in which Radames and Aida are entombed together. "I should like to avoid the conventional death scene, and not have words like 'My senses fail me; I go before you; Wait for me; She is dead, but I still live,' and so on. I want something sweet, ethereal, quite a short duet, a farewell to life." He actually gives Ghislanzoni the words for the duet "O terra addio; addio valle di pianti." [Farewell, earth; farewell, valley of tears.]

Later he writes, "I received your verses. They are beautiful, but they aren't quite right for my purpose. And since you sent them so late, in order to save time, I had already composed music to the monstrous verses ("versi mostruosi") that I sent you." And so Verdi's words remained, so right and, as Charles Osborne characterizes them, so "simple, sincere, and, in their context, extremely moving."

This is just one example of Verdi's clear vision of what he wanted *Aida* to be. There are enough others to fill a book, as indeed they have—Hans Busch's remarkable history of the creation of *Aida*, over 600 pages of correspondence concerning the work as it progressed, plus such important documents as Verdi's annotated libretto and his elaborate staging

instructions.

The correspondence begins in 1868, and the second letter in the volume is a previously unknown and telling note from Verdi to Paul Draneht, the general manager of the Cairo Opera, dated August 9, 1869, in which the composer declines to write a hymn to mark the opening of the Cairo Opera House. "It is not my custom to compose occasional pieces," Verdi informs him. Thus, interest in Verdi and a new work had already arisen before the subject of *Aida* had been broached.

Though Verdi did not attend the premiere in Cairo, he kept close tabs on what was happening while he stayed in Italy to prepare the Scala premiere two months later. In several letters to Giovanni Bottesini, a double-bass virtuoso and the conductor of *Aida*'s first performance, he shows intense interest in how his opera is faring. "I am grateful to you for giving me news of the first rehearsals . . . Please tell me the whole truth, since I am an old soldier with a chest of armor, and have no fear of bullets.

"I have made a change in the *stretta* of the duet of the two women in the second act. The original *stretta* always seemed somewhat ordinary to me. The one I have redone is not, and it ends well, if, when returning to the motive of the scene in act one [the prayer at the end of "Ritorna vincitor"], Pozzoni [Aida] sings it slowly while walking offstage. Send me news of

continued on p. 48



The *Aida* ballet sequence of San Francisco Opera's 1961 production, given on tour in Los Angeles only, featured Jocelyn Vollmar and Kent Stowell.



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ARTIST PROFILES



SHARON SWEET

Soprano **Sharon Sweet** makes her United States opera debut in the title role of *Aida*. In the space of only a few seasons, she has made highly acclaimed debuts at major opera houses in Europe. Born in New York state, she attended the Curtis Institute of Music, and in 1986 joined the ensemble of the Deutsche Oper Berlin where her performances included Leonora in *Il Trovatore* and Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*. She made her debut at the Paris Opera in 1987 as Elisabeth de Valois in *Don Carlos*, appearing that same year in *Il Trovatore* at the Hamburg State Opera and in *Tannhäuser* at the Cologne Opera. She made her debut at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich in 1988, singing her first stage performances of the title role of *Aida*. That same year she made her Vienna State Opera debut in a major revival of *Tannhäuser* conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli and sang her first performances (in concert) of the title role of *Norma* at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels under John Pritchard. Other recent highlights of her schedule include the title role of Desdemona in *Otello* in Braunschweig, her first performances of the title role of *Maria Stuarda* in Berlin, Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* under Zubin Mehta in Munich, and an appearance at the Salzburg Festival in Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* under Helmut Rilling. Miss Sweet has received special praise for her performances of the Verdi Requiem, and has recorded this work under Carlo Maria Giulini. She has also recorded Mahler's Eighth Symphony led by Lorin Maazel and Florent Schmitt's *Psalm 47* under Marek Janowski. She will be heard on soon-to-be-released recordings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony under the baton of Kurt Masur, and as Donna Anna in a complete recording of *Don Giovanni* under Neville Marriner. Future engagements include her Metropolitan Opera debut next spring as Leonora in *Il Trova-*



DOLORA ZAJICK

tore and her Italian debut at the Verona Arena as *Aida*. She will also return to the Bavarian State Opera in Munich in *Aida* and *Don Carlos*, and will be heard in several major roles at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. The soprano will also sing in performances of *Il Trovatore*, *Aida*, *Lohengrin* (her first Elsa) and *Tannhäuser* at the Vienna State Opera, *Otello* in Munich and Hamburg, and *Un Ballo in Maschera* (her first Amelia) in Munich. In 1991 she will sing the title role of *Aida* in Dallas, and in 1992 will make her debut at the Houston Grand Opera in *Il Trovatore*, and will make her initial appearance at the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Amelia in *Un Ballo in Maschera*.

Dramatic mezzo-soprano **Dolora Zajick** returns to San Francisco Opera as Amneris in *Aida*, a role she recently sang to critical acclaim at the opening of the Metropolitan Opera's current season and which will be seen on a "Live from the Met" telecast. She has also been applauded in the role at the Houston Grand Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and in Italy at the Rome Caracalla Festival and the Verona Arena. A Merola Opera Program participant in 1983, and an Adler Fellow with the Opera Center in 1984 and '85, she made her Company debut as the High Priestess in *Aida* during the 1984 Summer Season, and has sung a number of roles here, most notably Azucena in *Il Trovatore* in the summer of 1986. She made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Azucena last year, performing the role in an international telecast. The same part recently served as her debut at the Bilbao Opera in Spain and with the Vienna State Opera. She also recently appeared as soloist in Verdi's Requiem with the American Symphony at Carnegie Hall and in the same work in London, in a televised concert led by John Pritchard; in Mahler's Second Symphony under the baton of Lorin

AIDA



PATRICIA RACETTE

Maazel at the Paris Opera; and in Rossini's *Stabat Mater* conducted by James Conlon at the Cincinnati May Festival. Miss Zajick's young career already has two discs to her credit: a full-length recording of *La Forza del Destino* and the Verdi Requiem, both under the baton of Riccardo Muti. A native of Reno, she graduated from the University of Nevada with a Master of Music degree and moved to New York to continue her studies at the Manhattan School of Music. Among her numerous awards are a Bronze Medal at the Seventh International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 1982, and the 1986 Richard Tucker Award, the first mezzo-soprano so honored. Future engagements include a return to the Met and to Covent Garden as Azucena, and the title role of Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orleans* with the Opera Orchestra of New York.

Soprano **Patricia Racette** makes her San Francisco Opera debut as Mistress Ford in the Family Performance of *Falstaff*, and performs the High Priestess in *Aida*, a Cretan Maiden in *Idomeneo* and the Voice of the Falcon in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. A member of the Merola Opera Program in 1988 and currently an Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, she sang the title role of *Madame Butterfly* on Western Opera Theater's 1988-89 national tour, and recently traveled to Japan with the Center's Pacific Rim Exchange program. A native of New Hampshire, she received a Bachelor of Music degree in Voice from North Texas State University, where she sang the title role of *Suor Angelica*, Diana in *Orpheus in the Underworld* and Laura in *Luisa Miller*. She also sang the title role of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* at the Metro Opera Works in Fort Worth, and appeared throughout Texas in oratorio. Miss Racette was a National Finalist in the 1988



VLADIMIR POPOV

Metropolitan Opera National Auditions, First Place winner in the New York region of the 1988 San Francisco Opera Center Auditions, and received the Mr. & Mrs. Bernhardt N. Poetz Memorial Award at the 1988 Grand Finals. She recently appeared as Anastasio in the 1989 Opera Center Showcase production of Handel's *Giustino*.

Russian-born tenor **Vladimir Popov**, who made his San Francisco Opera debut in 1986 as Macduff in *Macbeth*, returns to sing Radames in *Aida*, a role he has performed at the Metropolitan Opera, in Edmonton, Vancouver, Pittsburgh and in Lyons, France. Acclaimed as an exponent of the dramatic tenor repertoire, he made his highly successful American debut in the 1982-83 season as Dick Johnson in *La Fanciulla del West* in Portland and Seattle, followed by performances of *The Queen of Spades* in Philadelphia which were telecast nationally. In 1984 Popov made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Lensky in *Eugene Onegin* and has returned to the Met each subsequent season. His roles there have included Gabriele Adorno in *Simon Boccanegra*, Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, Don José in *Carmen*, Prince Khovansky in *Khovanshchina*, Dimitri in *Boris Godunov*, and Calaf in *Turandot*. In 1985 he made his European debut as Cavaradossi with the Netherlands Opera, and made his Italian debut in 1986 at the Arena di Verona in *La Fanciulla del West*. The following year he made his debut in Houston in *Turandot*, and his Miami Opera debut in *Tosca* which he also sang in Philadelphia. Recent engagements include his Opera Colorado debut as Don José in *Carmen*, a debut at Milan's La Scala in Rimsky Korsakov's *The Legend of the Tsar Saltan*, Dimitri in *Boris Godunov* at Covent Garden, and a new production of *The Queen of Spades* at the Washington Opera. This season, Popov will return to the Met as Calaf in *Turandot*, and will make his Vienna State Opera debut as Prince



TIMOTHY NOBLE

Golitsyn in *Khovanshchina*, performances which will be recorded under the baton of Claudio Abbado. Additional future assignments include Gherman in *The Queen of Spades* at La Scala, his first performances of Samson in *Samson et Dalila* with the Houston Grand Opera, his first assumption of the title role of *Andrea Chénier* at the Metropolitan Opera, and his first Canio in *Pagliacci* for L'Opéra de Montréal.

American baritone **Timothy Noble** returns to San Francisco Opera for two roles: the title role in the Family Performance of *Falstaff*, a role he has also sung at Houston Grand Opera and with the Netherlands Opera; and Amonasro in *Aida*. He made his Spring Opera Theater debut in 1981 as Agamemnon in John Eaton's *The Cry of Clytaemnestra*, the role he created for the work's world premiere with the Brooklyn Philharmonia. He made his Company debut as the Duke of Albany in San Francisco Opera's 1981 American premiere production of Reimann's *Lear* (repeating the assignment in 1985) and has since sung ten roles with the Company, including Count Tomsky in *The Queen of Spades*, the title role of *Macbeth*, and Shaklovity in *Khovanshchina*, the vehicle of his 1988 Metropolitan Opera debut. The Indiana native created roles in the premieres of two additional Eaton operas: Robespierre in *Danton and Robespierre* and Prospero in *The Tempest* with Santa Fe Opera. He made his 1982 European debut as Miller in *Luisa Miller* at the Grand Théâtre de Nancy in France, and has returned to Europe for appearances with Frankfurt Opera, the Vienna Festival and the Opéra-Comique in Paris. He made his Glyndebourne Festival debut in the title role of *Simon Boccanegra* in 1986, a part he also performed in concert in 1988 under Solti in Frankfurt and Stuttgart, and made his Italian debut last year in *Stiffelio* at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. He returned to Glyndebourne last



KEVIN J. LANGAN

season as the elder Germont in *La Traviata*. Noble has also sung in numerous oratorio performances and has appeared in concert with the orchestras of Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Cincinnati and Atlanta, among others. Future engagements include Michele in *Il Tabarro* at the Met, and Giorgio Germont in *La Traviata* with Opera Pacific and at Michigan Opera Theatre. Next year, to celebrate the centennial of the Woodstock Opera House in Woodstock, Illinois, he will make his directorial debut and sing the role of Tonio in a new production of *Pagliacci*.

American bass **Kevin J. Langan**, who this year celebrates his 10th consecutive season with San Francisco Opera, sings Ramfis in *Aida* and Astolfo in *Orlando Furioso*. His return this year will mark his 200th performance with the Company over the past decade. A member of the 1979 and 1980 Merola Opera Program, he has appeared here in over 25 different productions beginning with his debut in the 1980 telecast production of *Samson et Dalila*, through performances of Timur in *Turandot* (1982), Colline in *La Bohème* (1983, 1986, 1988), Ramfis in *Aida* (1984), Henry VIII in *Anna Bolena* (1984), Zoroastro in Handel's *Orlando* (1985), and Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* (1987). His performances this past season have included Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel* and the Grand Inquisitor in *Don Carlos* in Geneva, Switzerland, and his first King Philip II in *Don Carlos* with the Canadian Opera Company, where he has sung Pimen in *Boris Godunov*, Méphistophélès in *Faust*, and Seneca in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. He recently made his Lyric Opera of Chicago debut in the Ponnelle production of *Falstaff*, and also appeared as Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with San Diego Opera, Padre Guardiano in *La Forza del Destino* with Washington Opera, Sarastro with the Canadian Opera Company, Colline with the Opera Company of

San Francisco Opera



DAVID PITTSINGER

Boston, Giove in Cavalli's *La Calisto* with Santa Fe Opera, Rocco in Beethoven's original version of *Leonore* at the Carra-moor Festival, and Ramfis in the world tour of the International Opera Festival of Canada's production of *Aida*. Langan's engagements this season include his Metropolitan Opera debut as Colline, a return to the Opera Company of Philadelphia as the King of Scotland in Handel's *Ariodante*, Colline with San Diego Opera, Rocco in *Fidelio* at the Cincinnati May Festival, return engagements to Opera Colorado as Méphistophélès in *Faust*, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*, and his Los Angeles Music Center Opera debut as Antinoo in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*. His orchestral engagements have included concert versions of *Fidelio* with the Orange County Pacific Symphony, *Boris Godunov* with the St. Louis Symphony, and *Guillaume Tell* with the Opera Orchestra of New York. He has also appeared with the Chicago Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the National Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic, and with the Oakland Symphony. Langan made his American recital debut at Carnegie Recital Hall in 1984, presenting a similar program to the one that marked his recital debut in London at Wigmore Hall in 1979. He received his training at Indiana University School of Music with soprano Margaret Harshaw, and is the recipient of numerous grants and awards.

American bass **David Pittsinger** returns to San Francisco Opera as Pistola in *Falstaff*, Lodovico in *Otello* and the King of Egypt in *Aida*. He made his Company debut in four roles during the 1987 season and, after making his European debut as the Count in *Der Ferne Klang* with the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, returned last season as a Monk and Street Singer in *La Gioconda*. He participated in the 1986 Merola Opera Program and portrayed Colline in *La Bohème* on West-

continued on p.45

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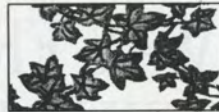
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Aida

This revival of *Aida* has been made possible by a generous gift from Mr. & Mrs. G. William Jamieson.

The production was originally made possible by a gift from an anonymous donor.

Opera in three acts by GIUSEPPE VERDI

Libretto by ANTONIO GHISLANZONI

Aida

(in Italian)

Conductor

Cal Stewart Kellogg*

Stage Director

Bruce Donnell

Set Designer

Douglas Schmidt

Costume Designer

Lawrence Casey

Lighting Designer

Thomas J. Munn

Chorus Director

Ian Robertson

Choreographer

Clark Tippet*

Musical Preparation

Robert Morrison

Scott Gilmore

Christopher Larkin

Prompter

Jonathan Khuner

Assistant Stage Directors

Laurie Feldman

Paula Williams

Stage Manager

Jamie Call

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First performance:

Cairo, December 24, 1871

First San Francisco Opera performance:

October 3, 1925

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21 AT 8:00

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26 AT 8:00

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29 AT 2:00

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1 AT 7:30

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4 AT 8:00

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7 AT 8:00

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 12 AT 2:00

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14 AT 7:30

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Ramfis Kevin J. Langan

Radames Vladimir Popov

Amneris Dolora Zajick

Aida Sharon Sweet**

The King of Egypt David Pittsinger

A messenger Hong-Shen Li

A priestess Patricia Racette

Amonasro Timothy Noble

Solo Dancers Ann Marie DeAngelo*

Julian Montaner

*Priests, priestesses, soldiers, ministers, officials,
Ethiopian prisoners, Egyptian populace*

Corps de ballet

**U.S. opera debut

*San Francisco Opera debut

TIME AND PLACE: Epoch of the Pharaohs; Memphis and Thebes

ACT I *Scene 1:* The King's palace at Memphis
Scene 2: The Temple of Fthà
Scene 3: Amneris's apartment in the palace,
Thebes
Scene 4: A public square in Thebes

INTERMISSION

ACT II The banks of the Nile, outside
the Temple of Isis

INTERMISSION

ACT III *Scene 1:* The judgment hall
Scene 2: A tomb below the Temple

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

Supertitles by Jerry Sherk and Francesca Zambello,
San Francisco Opera.

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

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

The performance will last approximately three and one-half hours.

Aida/Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1—In the royal place at Memphis, Radames, a young captain of the guard, learns from the high priest, Ramfis, that Ethiopia has again attacked and invaded Egypt's southern border and that a new army commander has been selected by the goddess, Isis. Alone, Radames hopes he is the chosen one, envisioning a glorious victory so he can free his beloved Aida, the Ethiopian slave of Amneris, the King's daughter. Amneris, who loves Radames herself, comes in and questions him shrewdly; her suspicion that he loves her slave increases when Aida enters. The King has urgently called his court together to hear a messenger report that the Ethiopian army, led by King Amonasro, is marching on Thebes. The Egyptian King announces Radames's appointment as Egyptian commander and leads the assemblage in a battle hymn. "Return victorious!" cries Amneris, echoed by the people, and alone Aida repeats the words, appalled that her beloved is going off to battle her father, her family and her people—for Aida is in fact the princess of Ethiopia. Torn by conflicting loyalties, she begs the gods for mercy.

Scene 2—In the Temple of Fthà, Radames is dressed in the sacred armor during a solemn ceremony of consecration to the service of his country. The fate of Egypt is in his hands.

Scene 3—Radames has beaten the Ethiopians, and on the morning of his triumphal return Amneris is groomed by her ladies-in-waiting and distracted from her romantic daydreaming by a group of court musicians and dancers. At Aida's approach she dismisses her attendants, hoping to confirm her impression that Aida loves Radames. To test her, she claims Radames has died in battle, then says he lives. Certain from Aida's reactions that this mere slave is her rival for Radames's love, Amneris threatens her and leaves for the festivities as Aida follows in despair, reiterating her prayer.

Scene 4—At the gate of Thebes, the people welcome the returning army bringing captured golden idols and treasures; triumphal dances are performed. Radames is borne in to be crowned with a wreath by Amneris. Ethiopian captives, too, are led in, among them Aida's father, King Amonasro, who remains unrecognized. In an aside he warns her not to betray his rank, then pleads for his fellow prisoners' lives. Ramfis and the priests urge death for the captives, but Radames intercedes, supported by the pleas of the

prisoners and the populace. Since the commander is the hero of the hour, the King releases all but Amonasro and Aida, then presents Radames with the hand of Amneris, dashing Aida's and Radames's dreams of happiness together.

ACT II

On a moonlit bank of the Nile, Ramfis leads Amneris into the Temple of Isis for prenuptial prayers. Aida arrives for a secret meeting with Radames; overcome with nostalgia, she laments her conquered homeland. Startled out of her reverie by Amonasro, she learns that her father is plotting a new attack and proposes that Aida trick Radames into revealing the route of the Egyptian army. Horrified at the proposal, Aida nevertheless succumbs to her father's demands. Amonasro hides as Radames appears, ardent with promises to make Aida his bride after his coming victory in the renewed war. She suggests instead that they run off together, asking what route his army will take. No sooner has he answered than Amonasro steps out, triumphantly revealing his identity as King of Ethiopia. Amneris, leaving the temple, overhears the betrayal and denounces Radames. Amonasro lunges at her with a dagger, but Radames shields her and surrenders himself to Ramfis as the two Ethiopians escape.

ACT III

Scene 1—In a temple of judgment Amneris determines to save Radames. When he is led in, she offers to spare his life if he will renounce Aida. This he says he will never do. Enraged, Amneris sends him on to his doom but immediately repents, listening in despair as the priests three times demand that he defend himself. Three times he is silent. They condemn him, and when they file past, Amneris pleads with them to let him live. When they refuse, she curses them.

Scene 2—Radames, buried alive in a vault beneath the temple, turns his last thoughts to Aida, who, physically and emotionally spent by the ordeal of her escape and the capture and death of her father, now appears to him, having hidden in the crypt earlier that day to share his fate. Radames tries vainly to dislodge the stone that locks them in. Bidding farewell to earth, the lovers greet eternity while above them in the temple the repentant Amneris prays for Radames's soul.

Aida

Photos taken in rehearsal by Marty Sohl





Dolora Zajick



Kevin Langan



David Pittsinger

(below) Vladimir Popov, Sharon Sweet





Sharon Sweet



Timothy Noble

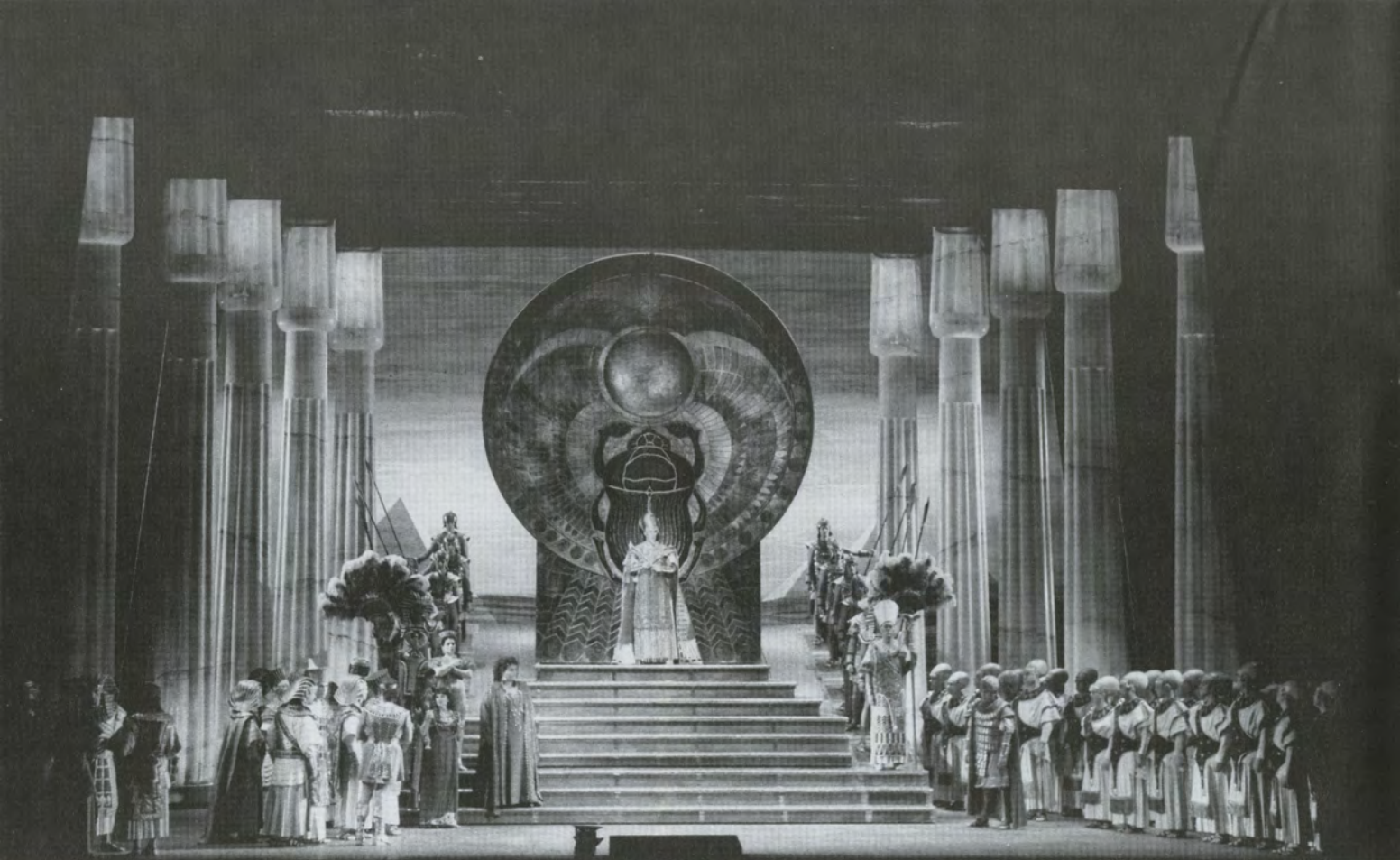
(below) David Pittsinger, Dolora Zajick, Vladimir Popov



Vladimir Popov

(below) Dolora Zajick, Members of the S.F. Opera Chorus





Act I, Throne Room of the King's Palace at Memphis

(below) Act I, Temple of Fthà Scene





HONG-SHEN LI

ern Opera Theater's 1986-87 tour as well as in WOT's historic exchange with the People's Republic of China. In this country, he has appeared at Wolf Trap, with Pittsburgh Opera, Anchorage Opera and Dayton Opera, and recently sang his first Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Long Beach. He also made his Canadian debut in Toronto as Colline. Last February, Pittsinger made his Paris debut in Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* with the Radio France Orchestra, and was immediately re-engaged for upcoming seasons as Cecil in *Maria Stuarda* and Assur in *Semiramide*. Other future engagements include Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* in Nantes (France), his first Timur in *Turandot* with Opera Pacific, Fiesco in *Simon Boccanegra* in Brussels and Mozart's Figaro with L'Opéra de Nice. In 1991, he will sing Gremin in *Eugene Onegin* in Pittsburgh, in addition to the title role of *Don Giovanni* for the Lyons Opera and L'Opéra de Nice.

Currently an Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, tenor **Hong-Shen Li** makes his Company debut singing four roles: a Trojan Man in *Idomeneo*, a Messenger in *Aida*, Goro in *Madama Butterfly*, and a Noble of Brabant in *Lohengrin*. A native of Beijing, China, he received his initial musical training while studying under a five-year Highest Fellowship Scholarship at the Central Conservatory there and performing with the Art Ensemble of Beijing. He was a member of the American Opera Center at the Juilliard School of Music, where he appeared as Benedict in Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*. As a member of the 1987 Merola Opera Program, he performed the role of Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi*, and returned to the Merola Program in 1988 to sing Lindoro in *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. During Western Opera Theater's 1988-89 tour he portrayed Goro in *Madame Butterfly* and, with the Opera Center Singers, sang Count Almaviva in the 1989 *Barber of Seville*.



ANN MARIE DeANGELO

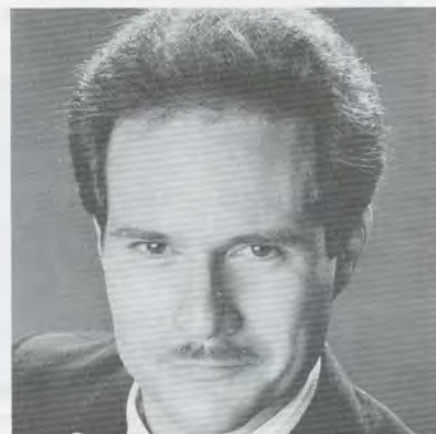
Ann Marie DeAngelo appears as a Solo Dancer in *Aida*. She spent 10 years with the Joffrey Ballet, performing leading roles in works by Ashton, Arpino, Balanchine, Cranko, DeMille, Joffrey and Tharp. She has toured the United States with "Stars of the American Ballet," and Australia with "Stars of the World Ballet," and danced with Mexico's Ballet Nacional in *Coppélia*, *Giselle*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*. In Brazil she appeared with the Ballet de Rio de Janeiro in the *Nutcracker*, in Cuba with the Nacional Ballet de Cuba in *Coppélia*, and spent one season with the Frankfurt Ballet. She began choreographing in 1980, and created *Le Papillon* for the Nacional Ballet de Cuba and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Since then, she has choreographed *Next Time* for Martine van Hamel's New Amsterdam Ballet, *In Kazmidity* for Joffrey II and the Ballet Trockadero, *Work #6* for the Contemporary Ballet, *Midler Medley* and *I'm Here* for the Des Moines Ballet, and *Concerto for Elvis* for the Long Beach Ballet. In 1984, at the urging of Alicia Alonso, Miss DeAngelo founded Ballet D'Angelo. The company made its debut at the 9th International Ballet Festival in Havana, Cuba, and has performed three of Miss DeAngelo's full-length works: *Zeitgeist I*, *Zeitgeist II*, and *The Last of the Best*, works that have also been seen in 25 major European cities. Television credits include dancing and choreographing for the Canadian Ballet Company's *Pavlova*, the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, and PBS's *Sesame Street*.

Dancer **Julian Montaner**, who made his San Francisco Opera debut last fall as the Jester in *La Gioconda*, appears this year as a Solo Dancer in *Aida*. The native of San Francisco, a Silver Medalist in Jackson, Mississippi's 1979 International Competition, was featured in the 1980 MGM film *Fame*, and danced with the Joffrey Ballet from 1980 to 1983, performing leading roles in *Vivandiere* and *Les Patineurs*, among others. A member of the San



JULIAN MONTANER

Francisco Ballet for five seasons, he performed in a wide variety of works for that company including George Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Tarantella*, Helgi Tomasson's *Contredanses* and *Menuetto*, in addition to William Forsythe's *New Sleep*, James Kudelka's *Dreams of Harmony*, and Jiri Kylian's *Forgotten Land*. Montaner was highly praised for his performance of Chinese Tea in the Lew Christensen/Tomasson production of the *Nutcracker*, led the Third Regiment in Balanchine's *Stars and Stripes*, and danced featured roles in Val Caniparoli's *Narcisse* and Michael Smuin's *Romeo and Juliet*. He also performed leading roles in three ballets which were telecast by KQED: the Jester in *Cinderella*, the Day-tripper in *Tribute to the Beatles*, and the Little Clown in *Jinx*. Montaner has been a Soloist with the San Francisco Ballet since 1985.



CAL STEWART KELLOGG

Cal Stewart Kellogg makes his San Francisco Opera debut conducting performances of *Aida*. Born in Long Beach, California, he received diplomas in bassoon, composition and conducting from the Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome, and went on to study conducting with his teacher, Franco Ferrara, at the St. Cecilia Academy, receiving a post-graduate degree with highest honors. He made his operatic debut in 1976, conducting Nino Rota's *Aladino e la Lampada Magica* at the



BRUCE DONNELL

Rome Opera, and was invited to lead *Il Matrimonio Segreto* for the Florence May Festival. He made his debut with the New York City Opera in 1978 with Menotti's *The Saint of Bleeker Street*, a production which was broadcast on the "Live From Lincoln Center" series. He made two important debuts in 1984: *Madama Butterfly* at the Teatro Regio in Parma, Italy, and the double bill of Menotti's *The Telephone* and *The Medium* with the Washington Opera at the Edinburgh International Festival in Scotland. During the 1987-88 season, his engagements included *La Traviata* at the Edmonton Opera, *Roméo et Juliette*, *L'Amico Fritz* and *The Consul* at the Washington Opera, and a highly-acclaimed *Rape of Lucretia* at Wolf Trap. Recent engagements include *Don Carlos* for the Canadian Opera Company, *Un Ballo in Maschera* with Calgary Opera, *La Forza del Destino* in Washington, and *L'Elisir d'Amore* with the Teatro Comunale in Genoa. Kellogg's orchestral engagements have included concerts with the Baltimore Symphony, the New World Symphony, the symphony orchestras of Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Antwerp, the Israel Sinfonietta at Beer Sheeva, and the opera orchestras of La Fenice in Venice, San Carlo in Naples, and Rome's St. Cecilia Academy.

Bruce Donnell returns to San Francisco Opera to direct *Aida*, a production he staged for the Company during the 1984 Summer Season. A resident stage director at the Metropolitan Opera since 1975, he studied at Bayreuth before joining the staff of the Merola Opera Program in 1966. He served as assistant to Herbert Graf for productions at the Verona Arena and the festivals of Salzburg and Hellbrunn. Based in Geneva from 1972 to 1975, he also worked with Lotfi Mansouri during that period, collaborating on productions that included *Faust* in Palermo and *Falstaff* in Tehran. He was an assistant director with S.F. Opera during the 1974 season, working with such directors as



DOUGLAS SCHMIDT

Jean-Pierre Ponnelle and August Everding. He joined the production staff at Santa Fe Opera in 1977, and in 1978 he staged the John Dexter production of *La Forza del Destino* at the Paris Opera. His Metropolitan Opera assignments have included revivals of *Arabella*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Fidelio*, *Don Giovanni*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Aida*. He staged the Met production of *Der Rosenkavalier* that opened the 1983-84 season and was telecast nationally. Other television credits include Met productions of *Hansel and Gretel*, which won a 1982 Emmy Award for Best Daytime Classical Program, and the acclaimed 1982 production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Joan Sutherland and Alfredo Kraus that was telecast in 1983. Engagements in 1984 included *I Vespri Siciliani* for the Netherlands Opera and *Hansel and Gretel* for San Diego, while in 1985 he directed *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* at the Met, and *Die Liebe der Danae* for Santa Fe Opera. That same year he made his debut at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires with *Der Rosenkavalier*, and created a new production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* for that theater in 1986. He directed a new production of *Madama Butterfly* to open the 1987 Santa Fe Opera season, and returned there to open their 1988 season with *Die Fledermaus*. Donnell's recent engagements include *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Billy Budd* at the Met and *Un Ballo in Maschera* in Houston. Future assignments include *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *La Gioconda* at the Met, and a new production of *La Fanciulla del West* in Santa Fe.

Douglas Schmidt designed the sets for *Aida*, first seen here in 1981 and again during the 1984 Summer Season. Spring Opera audiences will remember his sets for Hans Werner Henze's *Elegy for Young Lovers* in 1978, and his designs for the Company's world premiere of Imbrie's *Angle of Repose* in 1976 and *Samson et Dalila* in 1980 (and 1983). He has long been associated with the New York Shakespeare Festival, New York City Opera, and



LAWRENCE CASEY

television station WNET. His work for the theater includes award-winning designs for Gorky's *Enemies* for the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, where he was resident designer from 1969 until the company disbanded in 1973. He also designed sets for the New York Shakespeare Festival production of *The Threepenny Opera*; Andrei Serban's *Agamemnon*, which earned him a Joseph Maharam Distinguished Design Award in 1977; and the Chelsea Theater Company's production of *The Crazy Locomotive*, for which he won an Obie. On Broadway, Schmidt won Drama Desk Awards for his scenic contributions to the Andrews Sisters musical *Over Here* and Ira Levin's *Veronica's Room*. For television, he created the designs for PBS productions of *Antigone*, *Enemies*, *The Time of Your Life*, *Wings*, and *The Skin of Our Teeth*. He designed the original production of *Grease*, one of the longest-running musicals in Broadway history, as well as the multi-million dollar spectacle *Frankenstein*, which closed on opening night. He designed the sets for *Porgy and Bess*, a production which originated at Radio City Music Hall and which was presented by San Francisco Opera last summer. This year, he provided the set designs for a new play, *Truffles in the Soup*, for the Seattle Repertory Theatre, and the settings for the world premiere production of Stewart Copeland's *Holy Blood and Crescent Moon* for the Cleveland Opera. He is currently working on *Gold-diggers*, a new musical to be presented on Broadway next spring.

American designer **Lawrence Casey** created the costumes for *Aida*, a production first seen here during the 1981 Fall Season and repeated for the 1984 Summer Season. His association with San Francisco Opera goes back to 1973, when he assisted Jane Greenwood on the Company's first production of *La Favorita*. The following year he worked with Beni Montresor on the costumes for *The Daughter of the Regiment*, and in 1976 won

San Francisco Opera



CLARK TIPPET

praise for the costume designs for the world premiere of Imbrie's *Angle of Repose*. For 1981 Spring Opera Theater he received acclaim for costume designs of John Eaton's *The Cry of Clytaemnestra* and Monteverdi's *Il Ballo delle Ingrate*. He has designed for numerous regional theaters, including the Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota, the American Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, Connecticut, and the McCarter Theatre in Princeton. His designs for the dance group Crowsnest have been seen on PBS as well as at New York's Public Theater. He designed the costumes for an Obie-winning Off-Broadway adaptation of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, and provided the costume designs for the Obie-winning production of Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All*.

Currently a Principal Dancer with the American Ballet Theatre, Clark Tippet makes his San Francisco Opera debut with the dances for *Aida*. The native of Kansas joined ABT in 1972, became a Soloist in 1975, and was promoted to Principal Dancer in 1976. In addition to creating the second male lead in Twyla Tharp's *Push Comes to Shove*, and the leading male role of Oedipus in Glen Tetley's *Sphinx*, his ABT repertory included Albrecht in *Giselle*, the Nutcracker-Prince in *The Nutcracker*, the Prince in *The Sleeping Beauty*, Prince Siegfried in *Swan Lake*, and leading roles in *The Leaves are Fading* and *Voluntaries*. Tippet choreographed his first ballet, *Enough Said*, for the 1986 Choreographers' Workshop, and was given its world premiere by ABT in 1987. He has also created four new ballets for the ABT: *Bruch Violin Concerto No. 1*, in which he also danced one of the leading male roles, *S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A.* (The Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America), *Rigaudon* and *Some Assembly Required*.

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THOMAS J. MUNN

Thomas J. Munn is lighting designer for *Falstaff*, *Mefistofele*, *Idomeneo*, *Aida*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Lohengrin*, *Orlando Furioso* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Last fall, he was responsible for *L'Africaine*, *Parsifal*, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *La Bohème* and *La Gioconda*. In his 14th year with the Company, he has lighted over 100 productions for San Francisco Opera, including the lighting and special effects for all four operas of the 1985 Ring Festival. He serves as scenic adviser for the Company, and has designed scenery for *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *Roberto Devereux*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Billy Budd* and *Nabucco*. In addition to his numerous design credits for the War Memorial stage, Munn has designed scenery and lighting for Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional theater, ballet, industrials and film. His television credits include San Francisco Opera productions of *La Gioconda* (for which he received a 1979 Emmy Award), *Samson et Dalila*, *Aida*, *L'Africaine* and *La Bohème*. Recent projects include lighting and projection designs for *Madama Butterfly* for the Netherlands Opera; scenery and lighting for Hartford Ballet's production of *Coppélia* and *The Nutcracker*; and lighting designs for the Hartford Opera and Pittsburgh Opera productions of *Hansel and Gretel*. As a consultant on numerous lighting projects, his most notable achievement in this area is the new Muziektheater in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, for which he was the American lighting consultant.

Intimate and Grand

continued from p. 32

the final duet as soon as you have had two or three orchestral rehearsals. Tell me of the actual effect of this piece. Reading the score, you will realize that I have given this duet the greatest care; but . . . it may be that the effect does not correspond to my wishes."

An illuminating letter went to Ricordi as Verdi readied for the Italian premiere: "This Amneris is driven by the devil, has a powerful voice, is very emotional and very, very dramatic. We must not make a mistake on this role. A mediocre Amneris means a ruined opera. The voice alone, no matter how beautiful . . . is not enough for that role. I care little about so-called polished singing."

For La Scala, Verdi had re-thought the opening of the opera and composed a full-scale overture (in the style of the one for *La Forza del Destino*) to replace the simpler, short prelude he had originally written. He had the Scala orchestra try it out and later wrote Ghislanzoni, "There is no overture for *Aida*. Perhaps you heard that at one of the rehearsals . . . I had the orchestra play a piece that had the air of an overture . . . but the excellence of the orchestra merely served to illustrate better the silliness of that supposed overture." The *Aida* overture was not

heard in public until 1940, when Arturo Toscanini first performed it on one of his NBC Symphony concerts.

During the preparation period, Verdi was also sending very specific instructions to conductor Franco Faccio, who led the Italian premiere of *Aida*. After spelling out the exact number of choristers he required, Verdi adds "Both for the chorus of the priests and that of the slaves choose the freshest and most beautiful voices. Use everyone else for the chorus of the populace . . . Be sure to arrange the members of the orchestra in proportion too. If you have 12 violins, have 12 second with eight violas and celli. In this way you will have not a shrill, noisy sound, but one that is robust and full."

Ricordi came in for his share of letters as well. From Verdi, a month before the premiere: "You were wrong to show *Aida* to outsiders. Early judgments are worth nothing and do no one any good I want absolutely no publicity. Good or bad, let the audience decide the first evening.

Leontyne Price sang her first Aida anywhere at the San Francisco Opera in 1957, returning to the role here in 1959, 1963, 1981 and 1984. This photo was taken in 1963.



PETERS

Don't worry; either *Aida* will be successful, and there will be no need of publicity; or it will not be and these premature judgments will add to the fiasco."

Months after the premiere, he again wrote Ricordi, "As for the question of glory, let's not talk about it, for the love of heaven. You see how I have been treated by the press this year, when I went to so much trouble, spent so much money, and worked so hard! Stupid criticisms, and even more stupid eulogies. Not one noble, artistic idea; not one that perceived my intentions; always absurdities and nonsense, and beneath it all a certain spiteful attitude against me, as if I had committed a crime by writing *Aida* and having it performed well . . .

"Let's not talk any more about this *Aida*, which, if it has given me a tidy sum of money, has also caused me infinite annoyance and terrible artistic disillusion! Would that I had never written it, or never published it! If, after the first performances, it had remained in my briefcase, and if I had given it only under my direction . . . it would have not been so vulnerable to the wickedness of the curious . . . Financial speculation would have lost something, but art would have gained immensely."

These are words of a man of intense integrity, an "absolutely free man," as Busch puts it, "the peasant of Roncole, a station to which he was born and in which he wished to die." It is these very qualities of strength and honesty that are at the roots of *Aida*, that give it vivid expression and the clarity of design and purpose that has kept it so vital and so alive for over a century.

"You know as well as I do," Verdi commented to Ricordi in 1883, during the void between the *Messa da Requiem* and *Otello*, "there are those with good eyesight, and they like clear, sharp, natural colors. There are others, who have a bit of a cataract and like faded and dirty colors. I am aware of the latest trends, and I do not approve of following trends . . . but I would like them to be always accompanied by a bit of judgment and good sense. Therefore, neither the past nor the future . . . For now, let the torrent rush over the banks; the dikes will be built later."

Aida, like *Otello* that followed it, was one of those mighty 19th-century works that caused the river of music to swell and its banks to be flooded. If nothing else, this in itself is a measure of its importance. ■

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Illustrations, centering on subjects reflected in the current San Francisco Opera production of *Aida*, are taken from the 1809 Napoleonic Edition of the *Monuments of Egypt*. Courtesy, Malcolm Mosher.

Aida: Fact and Fiction

By MALCOLM MOSHER

A question that has often been raised is whether there is any factual basis for the opera *Aida*. The characters, of course, are entirely fictitious, but most of the color of the opera—geographical references, settings of the different acts, names, deities, and mythological references are soundly based on ancient Egyptian material. Even the principal event that provides the *modus operandi* for the entire opera, an Egyptian-Ethiopian conflict, is derived from historical evidence. It would indeed be surprising if this were not true, for the original *programma*, upon which the opera was based, was written by Auguste Mariette, the great French archaeologist who is respectfully acknowledged as the "Father of Egyptology."

The primary event that provides the impetus for *Aida* is a series of military skirmishes between Egypt and Ethiopia. In Act I, we learn immediately from Ramfis that the Ethiopians are rumored to be threatening Thebes and the Nile Valley, an invasion confirmed a short time later by the messenger before the King. A previous battle, however, is evident from the fact that Aida has already been taken captive and is now a slave to the pharaoh's daughter, Amneris. The conclusion of Act I and much of Act II evolve around preparations to march against the invaders and the triumphal return of Radames, with Ethiopian prisoners. In Act III, we learn from the Ethiopian king, Amonasro, that his army is prepared to resume the war, and then from Radames that they have again invaded Egyptian territory. Finally,

Malcolm Mosher is currently completing a PhD in Egyptology from UC Berkeley and is a software designer for Tandem Computers.

it is the unwitting revelation of the route by which the Egyptian army will march that leads to the demise of Aida and Radames in the final act.

The Ethiopia of *Aida*, however, does not correspond to the modern country of that name, but to the ancient Greek designation for the area between a series

tian gold, had come under the control of Egypt as early as 2000 B.C. Kush, however, was not fully conquered until five centuries later, after which it remained in the firm possession of Egypt for roughly 600 years. Nubian slaves were common in Egypt, although one nomadic tribe had been brought north to serve as police, not as slaves. As the result of such a long occupation, the native African cultures in Nubia were slowly "Egyptianized," to such an extent that they retained an Egyptian-styled culture for more than six centuries after the departure of the occupying forces. After regaining self-rule, these new local kings ruled with Egyptian trappings, wrote with an Egyptian script, revered Egyptian deities, particularly the great Egyptian god Amon, and were buried in pyramids.

While the decline of Egypt had been underway for some time, it was not until about 950 B.C. that they lost control of Nubia. At the same time, the structure of the Egyptian state itself began to fall apart, eventually evolving to a series of feudal fiefdoms, loosely unified under Libyan pharaohs, not native Egyptians.

In the middle of the 8th century B.C., a powerful king ascended the throne in Nubia and, with his capital centered at the city of Napata near the 4th cataract, he began to extend his kingdom northward, acquiring first Thebes (modern Luxor) and eventually most of Egypt, thereby establishing the foundation of the 25th Dynasty in Egypt, the "Ethiopian Dynasty." These kings ruled over a unified Egypt and Nubia approximately 70 years.

The final king of this dynasty, however, made the irreparable error of taking arms against Assyria, the powerful Mesopotamian state that was at the zenith of its



One of the rams on the avenue leading to the Temple of Khonsu at Karnak, site of the ruins of ancient Thebes.

of steep rapids (cataracts), in the Nile, below Aswan and above Meroe, commonly called Nubia. The Egyptians had their own designations for this area: Wawat, between the 1st and 3rd cataracts, and Kush, from the 3rd to the 5th.

Wawat, the primary source of Eryp-

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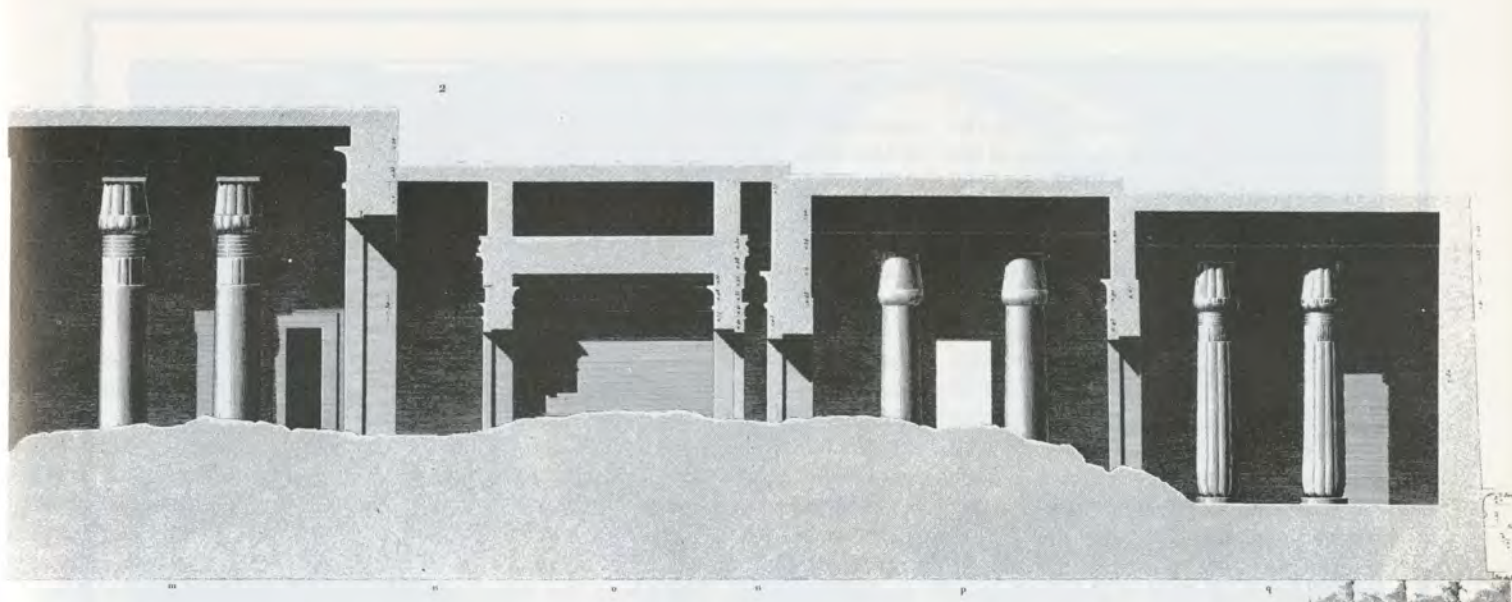


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Several types of old Egyptian columns, reminiscent of those in S.F. Opera's *Aida*, as they appeared during excavations of the Temple of Luxor (ancient Thebes).

power. This led to an invasion of Egypt by the Assyrians, who defeated the Egyptian armies and drove the Ethiopian king back into Nubia. Several years later, a native Egyptian, Psamtik I, reunited Egypt and inaugurated the 26th Dynasty (680 B.C.).

Historical documents provide us with little information about the interaction between Egypt and Nubia during the long reign of Psamtik I, but there is no sign of animosity. Upon the accession of the third king of this dynasty, however, a conflict is clearly evident, for that king, Psamtik II, sent his army into Nubia, at least as far as the border of the Napatan kingdom and possibly to Napata itself. The reason is unclear, but it is quite possible that the Ethiopian king had either attacked Egyptian territory or was about to, perhaps to regain the domain of his 25th Dynasty predecessors.

It is precisely this period that forms the background for the opera *Aida*. From the historical background above, we can postulate that *Aida* was captured in an initial skirmish. Faced with a subsequent Ethiopian attack, Radames led his army south to victory (Act II). Finally, following a fresh threat, he intended to march on the Kushite capital itself, by way of the "Gorges of Napata"—fiction, yes, but derived from historical events. Additionally, Amonasro is an authentic name of a Nubian king who built a pyramid at Meroe, below the 5th cataract.

With respect to the Gorges of Napata, there are none, nor are there any impenetrable forests, where according to Mariette's sketch, the Egyptian army

could be overwhelmed. Yet the name given for the gorges correctly associates us with the Ethiopian capital. This is the one descriptive detail where Mariette allowed himself some romantic fancy.

There are also several romantic and poetic descriptions of Ethiopia in the opera, all uttered by *Aida*, first in her Act III aria "O patria mia" and throughout her subsequent duet with Radames. Here we are told of virgin forests, green hills, cool valleys, and soft breezes. This description is somewhat incompatible with the central part of modern Sudan. The region is essentially an arid desert, with only the narrow plain along the Nile capable of bearing any significant foliage. Yet, the desert wadis are filled with acacia, perhaps justifying *Aida's* claim of "perfumed shores." Mariette, however, is not responsible for this description and these words are more likely pastoral reflections on Italy, not Kush.

The opening act of *Aida* is appropriately set in Memphis, located a little to the south of modern Cairo. This city was the main administrative capital throughout pharaonic Egypt and the regular residence of the king. Here too was the principal cult center of the god Ptah, rendered in Verdi's libretto as Fthà. Just as he had changed the original name of the heroine from Aita to *Aida*, for the sound of a stronger consonant, so too he modified the sound of this god's name for one that would be more audible in the theater.

In the stage directions of the libretto, the name Fthà is used interchangeably with that of Vulcan and for good reasons.

Ptah was the patron deity of craftsmen, like the Greek Hephaistos and his Roman counterpart Vulcan. Indeed, the title of the High Priest of Ptah was "Greatest of the Master Craftsmen." It is therefore entirely fitting that a sacred sword be presented to Radames in the temple of Ptah. Thus, Radames would march forth as a predestined hero with the sacred arms crafted by Ptah, just as Achilles did with the arms created for him by Hephaistos, and Aeneas by Vulcan.

While there were a number of different creation myths in ancient Egypt, perhaps the most remarkable one identifies Ptah as the original creator, derived from his capacity as a craftsman. According to this myth, which can be dated to some time prior to 2,200 B.C., he created himself by means of placing the thought in his heart, followed by the pronunciation of that thought with his teeth. Thus through heart and teeth—thought and word—he created himself, the other gods, and all living things.

This concept of Ptah as the supreme creator is closely echoed in the hymn sung to Fthà by the priests and priestesses in the consecration scene of Act I, scene 2. Here we hear that Fthà is the

spirit that animates the world,
who from nothing did fashion
the earth, sea and sky . . .

Power, who of his own spirit is both
his own father and son . . .

Thebes, the setting of Act II, was the southern capital of Egypt and the site of a number of magnificent temples. Here

also, in the mountain ranges along the west bank of the Nile, is the Valley of the Kings, along with the nearby Valley of the Queens and the tombs of the Theban aristocracy. Undoubtedly, the most famous description of this city is found in Homer's *Iliad*: "Thebes of the Hundred Gates, through each of which two hundred soldiers sally forth to war with horses and chariots." This account of Thebes has often been quoted or paraphrased in literature over the last 2000 years, and made its way into *Aida* as well, for the messenger informs the King that through the city's 100 gates the soldiers are ready to march forth.

There is, however, little justification for this colorful description, for the city does not appear to have ever been fortified with walls. Interestingly, between the 15th and 18th centuries, many intrepid European travelers sailed right past the ruins of the city in search of remains that would fit this misleading description, and it was not until the early 18th century that one adventurer finally identified Thebes. While the city itself was not fortified with a hundred-gate wall, it contained many temples, each having one or more colossal gateways (pylons) that provided access to enclosed courtyards. It was perhaps these pylons that gave rise to the legend found in Homer.

Of all the temples of the ancient world, none is more spectacular and imposing than that of Karnak, the sanctuary of Amon at Thebes. It is entirely fitting that Mariette and Verdi placed the triumphal procession of Act II in front of this temple, for this was indeed the scene of numerous triumphal processions by New Kingdom pharaohs, of whom Rameses II is perhaps the most well known today. The walls and pylons abound with hieroglyphic inscriptions recounting the military exploits of these kings and the booty they brought back to enrich their god.

While Amon, politically the most important deity of ancient Egypt, is not directly invoked in the opera, his presence is nevertheless felt in several ways. His temple forms the backdrop of the triumphal procession. Secondly, most Egyptian names tend to be formed from divine names, and Amon's name figures prominently in the names of two principal characters, Amonasro and Amneris. We have seen above that Amonasro was an authentic name of a Nubian king. The

same is true of Amneris, a shortened form of the name Amenirdis. With this name we have a curious twist of irony, for two important women were known by the same name, each the daughter of a king, but of Nubian kings, not Egyptian. Both held the highest priestly office attainable by a woman, Divine Adoratrix of Amon at Thebes. Amenirdis II was appointed to this office during the final years of the Ethiopian Dynasty and continued well into the beginning of the 26th Dynasty.

Finally, Amon's presence is indirectly felt by Ramfis and his priestly colleagues. In the opera, these men represent the general priestly class in ancient Egypt, for they serve Fthà, Isis, and Amon. Yet, they exert a political influence that closely parallels the power exerted by the historical High Priest of Amon and his colleagues.

During the Old Kingdom (2700-2200 B.C.), this god was little more than a minor Theban deity. His status, however, changed considerably during the Middle Kingdom (1990-1785 B.C.) when two successive Theban families, forming the 11th and 12th Dynasties, ruled over Egypt and promoted their patron deity. Yet, even at this time, the power of Amon and his clergy was still more or less equal to that of the other principal gods.

Following some 200 subsequent years of foreign occupation, a powerful new Theban family drove out the invaders and reunited Egypt under native rule (c. 1550 B.C.). Thus began the New Kingdom, with Egypt's power at its zenith, ruling an empire that stretched into modern Sudan to the south, Iraq to the east, and southern Turkey to the north. These kings honored their patron god Amon by expanding the Karnak temple on a grand scale and enriching its coffers with enormous wealth.

Just as the temple increased in size and wealth, so too did the office of the high priest who controlled it. Eventually, the power of this priest equaled that of the king himself and it was only a matter of time before one priest would attempt to seize the throne. While the initial attempt failed, a later high priest did succeed, launching the 21st dynasty. From this point on, down to the historical period forming the background of *Aida*, this office was one of strategic political and religious importance, with the king residing in the north and relying upon the high priest to maintain loyalty in the south.

Hence, he served like a governor as well as the chief cleric of the Amon cult.

This is indeed the type of power exerted by Ramfis and his colleagues. In the first act, they more or less serve as counsellors to the King. While their demand for the death of the Nubian prisoners in Act II is overruled by the King, it is these priests who preside over the trial of Radames and determine his fate.

In the opera, it is an oracle that determines who shall lead the army against the Ethiopians. Perhaps the most famous oracle of the ancient world was that of Amon at the Siwa Oasis, east of the Nile delta. After seizing Egypt, Alexander the Great visited it before embarking on his conquest of Asia. What was revealed to him and the manner of the revelation has remained shrouded in mystery, although it is universally held that it marked a turning point in his ambitions. In fact, very little is known about the nature of this oracle.

On the other hand, we know quite a bit about the oracle of Amon at Karnak. The sacred boat of the god would be carried out on the shoulders of the priests, with an image of the god seated in the boat. A question would then be asked. If the god responded affirmatively, the boat would surge forward on the shoulders of the priests. But, if the response was negative, it would pull backward. It does not require much imagination to assess the power of the Amon priesthood in such matters and it is fitting that Ramfis, in the opera, is the one to whom the oracle "divulges" the name of Radames as commander of the Egyptian army.

Before leaving the priests in the opera, it is interesting to note that Verdi was responsible for most of their characterization in *Aida*, not Mariette. Above all, we see them as self-serving and self-righteous, similar to the clergy in *Don Carlos*. As the intermediaries between divinity and mortals, the priests in both operas claim to speak with divine authority. Thus, in Act I, while all others cry out with martial vengeance against the Ethiopians, the priests remind them that only the gods determine their fate. During the triumphal procession, while all others variously shout acclaim to the King, Radames, or the army, the priests alone attribute victory to the gods. Later in the same act, while all others ask for mercy on the Ethiopian prisoners, they alone



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demand death, claiming that the gods demand vengeance. Finally, in the last act, they condemn Radames, claiming that this is the will of Fthà.

One of the oldest gods of ancient Egypt was the sun god Ra (Re). With the advent of Amon, many of Ra's attributes were absorbed by the later god. Like Amon, Ra is never mentioned in the opera, but his presence nevertheless survives in the names of two other principal characters: Radames and Ramfis. While the name Radames is not historically attested in surviving documents, it represents good Egyptian form (literally "Ra-gives-birth") and was doubtless modeled after the great warrior Rameses. The name Ramfis is also unattested, but it too represents good Egyptian form ("Ra-is-content").

The final deity, who is significant in the opera, is the goddess Isis. It is her oracle that determines who shall lead the army against the Ethiopians. She is heralded by priests and populace as the defender of Egypt's soil in the triumphal procession. Finally, her temple forms the backdrop of Act III, where Ramfis counsels Amneris to spend the night in prayer, for, as a goddess of love, Isis has the power to deliver the affection of Radames.

This too is generally an accurate description of the cult of Isis, not in Egypt during the 26th Dynasty, but during the latter Hellenistic and Roman worlds. It does not mean, however, that she was unimportant in Egypt, for she was venerated almost from the dawn of Egyptian civilization, although not with the characteristics attributed to her in the opera. Her strongest role in Egyptian mythology was as the sister and wife of Osiris, the god of the dead, and mother of Horus, the god embodied in the living pharaoh. While many aspects of the cult of Isis and Osiris were passed on into Christianity, one is particularly noteworthy. Isis conceived Horus, not through physical impregnation by Osiris, for that god, according to the myth, had died. Rather, his reincarnated spirit entered her and she conceived, much like the later Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit.

During the Hellenistic age, the cult of Isis was transformed from a national Egyptian goddess, with no particularly exceptional characteristics, to a universal Great Mother goddess, bearing attributes entirely in harmony with those of the goddess in *Aida*. Her cult dominated the Mediterranean during the Roman Empire

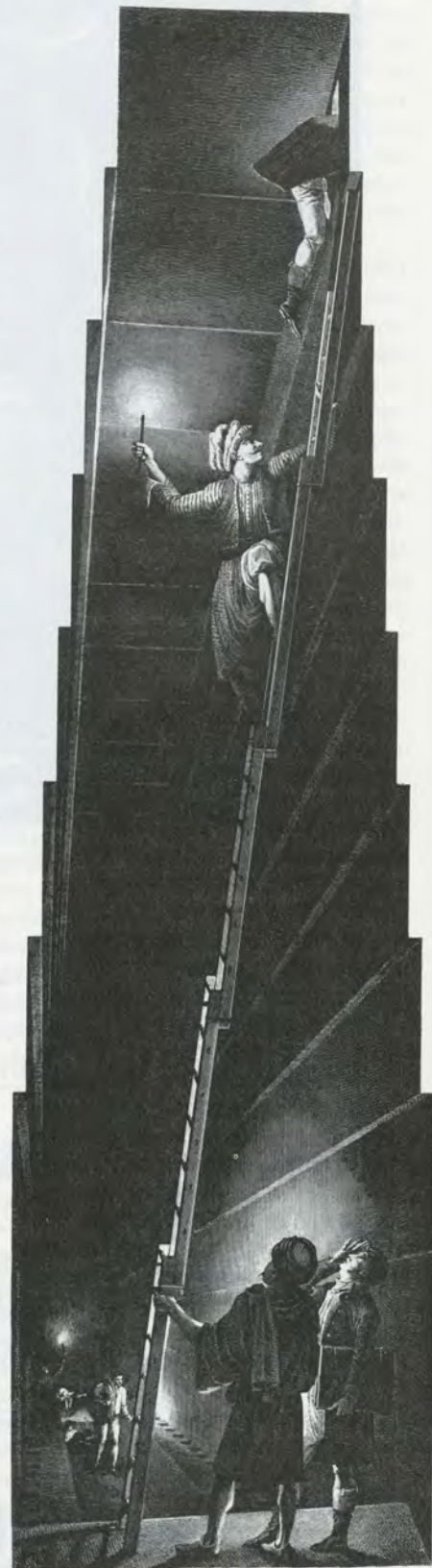
and she was revered even as far north as modern France. Indeed, it was not until the latter part of the 3rd century A.D. that her cult was surpassed in popularity by Christianity.

The fourth and final act consists of two scenes, the judgment and the death. Both scenes share a common and distinctive feature, a subterranean chamber. While the chamber of the initial scene, the judgment hall, is not actually seen on stage, our attention is drawn to it because we observe the priests and Radames descend into it, and, with Amneris, we hear the trial from above. There is no archaeological evidence, however, to suggest that underground chambers were used for any other purpose than storage or burial.

On the other hand, by placing the judgment hall in such a gloomy setting, the outcome is cleverly foreshadowed, with Radames being subsequently entombed in a dank subterranean chamber. Death permeates the entire act, and from this mood Mariette masterfully introduced one of the most profound mortuary concepts of Egyptian civilization, the final judgment of the deceased before Osiris, King of the Dead and Ruler of Eternity. According to this belief, the deceased would descend into the underworld to the Hall of Twin Truths, where he would be judged before Osiris and his college of deities. In the opera, the underground judgment hall metaphorically represents the hall of Osiris. While Ramfis and the priests represent secular judges, they also symbolize Osiris and the other gods.

A pictorial illustration of the judgment of the deceased by the gods was a standard feature in the Book of the Dead papyri. We see the deceased being justified by having his heart, the seat of his conscience, weighed on a balance against the feather of truth. In the accompanying text, the deceased states that he has done no wrongdoing. If the heart and the feather balance on the scale after this, the deceased shall live among the gods for eternity. Otherwise he is destroyed by a terrifying monster, part lion, part crocodile, and part hippopotamus. Radames is also asked to justify himself and the consequence of his failure to do so is equally terrifying: to be buried alive.

No evidence exists that anyone had ever been buried alive in ancient Egypt, for punishment or otherwise, and this aspect of the opera is completely un-



The grand gallery in the tomb of Khufu in the Great Pyramid at Memphis.

Egyptian. Yet, for dramatic reasons, it is quite convenient, allowing Radames and Aida to die together, reflecting on their past, present, and future. Verdi certainly made the most of it.

Perhaps the reason why Mariette chose this setting was that his discovery of the Serapeum was still vivid in his memory. This fabled tomb had been described by classical Greek writers and Mariette had found it untouched for the previous 1,700 years. It consists of a series of enormous underground galleries carved deep into bedrock below the desert at Sakkara. These galleries, some of which stretch up to a mile in length, contain numerous burial niches within which Apis bulls were laid to rest for millennia. While many burials had been plundered in ancient time, Mariette discovered one hidden gallery containing an untouched burial for an Apis bull that had died during the reign of Rameses II, almost 3,000 years earlier. The footprints of the last workers were still visible in a thin layer of sand on the floor. Walking alone through these long silent corridors, with only the light of his own torch had left a profound impression on Mariette and may well have contributed to his idea for the conclusion of the tale. As the Apis bull was sacred to Ptah, it is therefore not surprising that Radames and Aida are buried below the temple of Verdi's counterpart, Fthà.

One final observation deserves comment. As Radames and Aida are dying, they sing a short passage that epitomizes Egyptian mortuary beliefs: "For us the gate of the sky opens and our eternal souls fly to the light of eternal day." For an Egyptian, the ultimate funerary hope was that, after death, the soul would fly forth from the tomb, in any form it desired, passing through celestial gates to join the sun god on his daily journey across the heavens. This notion is expressed in numerous ways throughout the many spells in the Book of the Dead. What is particularly surprising is that this notion was not expressed in Mariette's *programma*, nor does it survive in any of the correspondence between Verdi and Mariette. But then, Verdi was adamant that *Aida* be as historically accurate as possible and perhaps this final detail should be attributed to his quest for fidelity. In analyzing the opera from a historical perspective, one could say that Verdi and Mariette achieved this goal admirably. ■

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Camera Makes S.F. Opera Debut

"The technical aspects of opera are often non-standard," says San Francisco Opera Sound Designer and Consultant Roger Gans. "We're constantly adapting standard equipment for non-standard uses, usually pushing the equipment to the limit in the process."

Gans's work recently got a welcome boost with a major gift from the Ampex Corporation, one of the world's leading professional television equipment companies. The Redwood City-based firm, which supplies television recording equipment, video processing systems, and professional-quality videotape for television stations, networks, and production companies throughout the world, celebrated the opening of the Company's 67th season with the gift of a state-of-the-art Ampex CVC-30 video camera. In use since the final dress rehearsal of this season's *Lulu*, the camera and its accessories, valued at more than \$44,000, already have helped bring the Company's video archives out of the Dark Ages.

The camera's 700 lines of resolution increase the Company's capacity to make high-quality archive videotapes of its productions. The CVC-30's ability to record a sharp, true color image at virtually any light level is particularly valuable for documenting opera productions, many of which, for obvious theatrical reasons, use low light levels. Until now, the problem has been that *mezzanotte* on stage has tended to translate to "mezzo-



The object of several Opera staff members' affections, poised for action in the Opera House.

tone" on videotape. "It used to be that production teams reviving an opera we had done before would often take one look at a murky, low-lit videotape and decide, 'We're wasting our time,'" Gans explains.

No more.

The Ampex gift was the result of persistent solicitation by San Francisco Opera Board Member John Basler, a retired executive with Pacific Telesis. After learning that Ampex was providing equipment for London's Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Basler was seized with the idea of securing comparable equip-

ment for the company he helps direct.

David Jensen, Ampex's Director of Corporate Communications, comments that although Ampex supports the cultural arts through its intensive involvements with television entertainment systems, its gift to the Company is exceptional. (The firm's usual form of support is supplying equipment of the highest quality, but not at no cost to the recipient.) "Even though San Francisco lies a little out of our geographic area, the Opera Company does serve mid-peninsula audiences and is, in any case, one of the world's foremost companies. We wanted to help it

preserve its productions. Unless they are captured on video with equipment like ours, productions as special as *Lulu* would simply disappear after the final curtain fell."

Ampex is the only American firm that could have presented the Opera with this much-appreciated video camera system. In making this gift to the Company, Ampex follows in the steps of its peninsula neighbor, Hewlett-Packard, which, since 1983, has donated nearly \$200,000 worth of high-quality electronics equipment, including the CAD system that allows the Company's technical department to draft floor plans and scenic ground plans on a computer. Yet another manifestation of corporate participation in the Company's artistic endeavors is the recently announced gift, from the Grundig Corporation, of special audio systems, VCRs and video monitors for office applications, and two decks capable of converting foreign videotapes, that is, making them compatible with American video specifications.

The Ampex video system is far more than a spiffy way to document the Company's productions for posterity. In fact, production videotapes are integral to day-to-day operations. In addition to their use in the revival of productions, they are invaluable documents for other companies who borrow San Francisco Opera productions.

The need for a better camera became clear last season, when the Company prepared for the television taping of its season-opening *L'Africaine*. "We did a scratch tape with our old camera for Brian Large, the television director," Gans recalls, "and their response to the tape we made confirmed what we already knew, that our equipment was not up to par. The good thing for us was that, when Brian speaks, everyone listens."

The Ampex camera system is essentially the same one mobile news teams use. Gans sees its compactness—it is about one-quarter the size of top-of-the-line studio cameras—as a virtue, not a limitation. "We wouldn't have space for anything larger," he says. "It would be overkill."

At least until now, the Company has been able to videotape only the final dress rehearsals of its productions. Gans and Chris Wood, S.F. Opera's Head Soundman, tape from Box N, the camera mounted on the box's front rail and their equipment taking up the remainder of the

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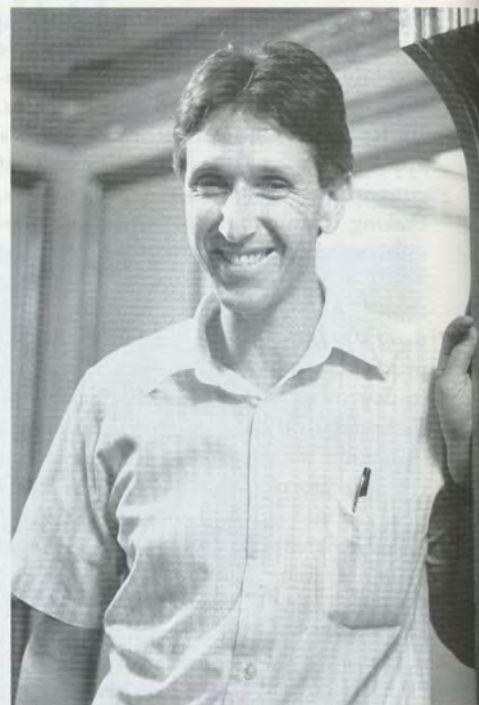
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space—which, of course, is unavailable during performances. Down the line, Gans envisions mounting of the camera on the rail above Box N with a remote hook-up to the sound booth, from which it could be operated unobtrusively during live performances as well.

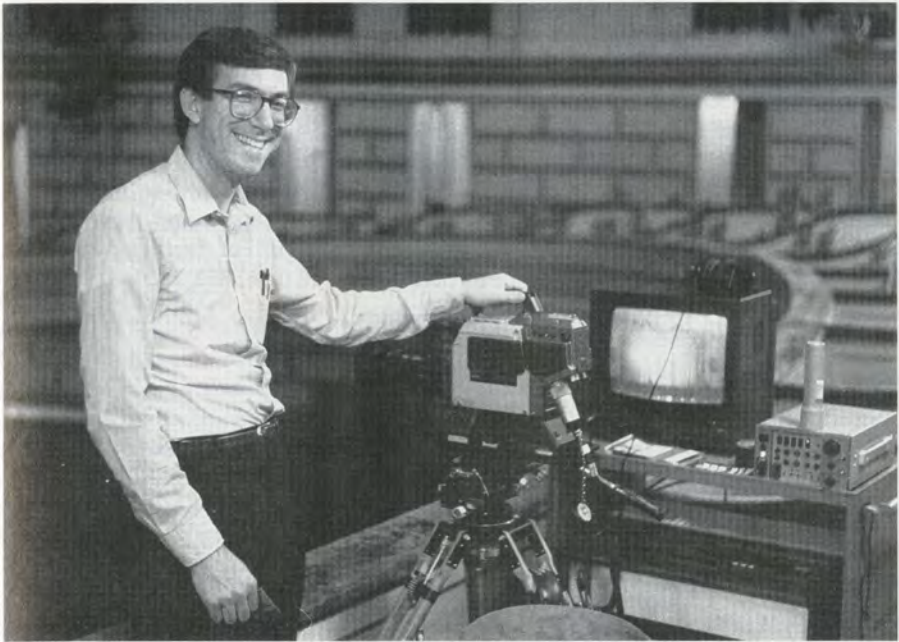
Another whole range of possibilities comes into play if the new camera could be mounted in a permanent location, out of view of the audience, and operated by means of a remote hook-up. "One of the great things about the Ampex gift was its camera control unit. With it, and some minor adjustments we have to make, we have the potential to operate the camera



San Francisco Opera's Sound Designer and Consultant Roger Gans.

remotely, from the sound booth back stage. What we have at the moment is human, hands-on, pan and tilt. But that could all be done with a control and monitor in the sound booth, and then we could be getting good color images of actual performances. We talked to Ampex's technical people about it, and they thought it was a great idea."

Another limitation of the Company's current video equipment is that it can take only single-perspective, full-frame images, minus the dramatic close-ups and moving shots that the televised-opera audience has come to expect. Beyond relieving visual monotony, those added features could help the Company docu-



Head Soundman Chris Wood in the Opera House center box during a rehearsal break.

ment particularly telling details in its archive tapes. "What we still need," Gans continues, "is a pan, zoom, and tilt mechanism, a sophisticated motor on which the camera can be mounted. That would improve the quality of our archive tapes immeasurably."

Predictably, the virtues of the new Ampex camera system ("Our lighting director, Tom Munn, is raving about it," Gans says) have shed some light on the inadequacies of other parts of the Company's recording equipment. "Our audio recorder is 10 years old," Gans explains, "and what we've already learned is that it's simply not up to the quality of the camera. Compared to the camera's 700 lines of resolution, our sound recorder has only 200.

"We're in a constant state of improving and upgrading our equipment. What we're continually trying to do is get as close as we can to making the images, and fulfilling the directions, that the composers 100 years ago and more had in mind. We're getting closer all the time.

"We're looking forward to an ongoing relationship with Ampex. We have offered our facility as a 'beta test site' for their product-development efforts. Opera productions provide a never-ending series of challenges for people on the production end of the media, and we would like to play a part in Ampex's development of new products. We're encouraging them to

bring new models here for testing. While they're evolving, expanding the limits of what their equipment can do, we could be getting even better images. It makes sense, and seems mutually advantageous, for us to be in on their design and development efforts."

Gans sees the potential for video to aid other aspects of opera production as open-ended and exciting. "People are beginning to see the potential of some of the technology developed for leisure

consumption at home to be used for other applications in the office. The VCR can be much more than something to escape to after work, but, rather, something to use creatively at work. The Opera House is a big building, and, eventually, the distribution of an array of VCR monitors throughout it could be a very good thing. The more this equipment appears in departments other than ours, the more helpful it will become.

"Take the costume shop, for example. It seems to me that video offers costumers the opportunity to see how a dress looks under light—something that, in the past, they couldn't know until the dress rehearsals. And existing technology offers the Company's other designers and builders similar opportunities. It's my experience that when people learn about this equipment, they think up creative uses for it. Then, when you consider the advantages that come from product development, things really open up. Anyone who has ever attended a dress rehearsal knows how many eyes are trained on every single detail of what's happening on stage. Just think of the advantages of something like instant replay, for one set or another of those eyes, while the performance is going on otherwise uninterrupted.

"We've come a long way," Gans concludes, "and this new Ampex camera represents a particularly exciting step forward. But we still have a long way to go."

—Mary Necchi



Chris Wood and Roger Gans in the act of adjusting the new camera.

1989 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. There is no charge for Guild members. Individual tickets may be purchased at the door for \$5. For further information, please call (415) 565-6432. Programs are subject to change.

- Orlando Furioso* 10/9
With Sir John Pritchard, Music Director, and Clifford Cranna, Musical Administrator, San Francisco Opera.
- Emerging American Singers* 10/23
Sarah Billingham, Artistic Administrator, San Francisco Opera, interviews singers from the cast of *Aida*: Sharon Sweet, Dolora Zajick, and Timothy Noble.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD PREVIEW MARIN

Previews held at United Methodist Church, 410 Sycamore Ave., Mill Valley; refreshments 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) 435-1141.

- Idomeneo* 10/5
Sandor Salgo
- Lohengrin* 11/9
Michael Mitchell
- Orlando Furioso* 11/16
Eleanor Selfridge-Field
- Die Frau ohne Schatten* 11/20
George Martin

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 or (415) 326-1971.

- Idomeneo* 10/3
Sandor Salgo
- Lohengrin* 11/7
Michael Mitchell
- Orlando Furioso* 11/14
Eleanor Selfridge-Field
- Die Frau ohne Schatten* 11/21
George Martin

SAN JOSE OPERA GUILD

Previews held at the Los Gatos History Club, 123 Los Gatos Blvd., at 10 a.m. Series is open to the public at a cost of \$5 per lecture (free of charge to San Jose Opera Guild members). For further information, please call (408) 354-7525.

- Idomeneo* 10/3
Sandor Salgo
- Lohengrin* 11/7
Michael Mitchell
- Orlando Furioso* 11/14
Eleanor Selfridge-Field
- Die Frau ohne Schatten* 11/21
George Martin

SONOMA 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 luncheons and dinner, please call (707) 938-2432 or (707) 996-2590.

- Idomeneo* 10/2, 7:30 p.m.
Sandor Salgo 2652 Nob Hill Dr., Santa Rosa
- Lohengrin* 11/6, 7:30 p.m.
Michael Mitchell 1000 Buckeye Rd., Kenwood
- Orlando Furioso* 11/13, 6:00 p.m. (dinner)
Eleanor Selfridge-Field 7:30 p.m. (lecture)
Oakmont Chalet, 7025 Oakmont Dr., Santa Rosa
- Die Frau ohne Schatten* 11/20, 10:30 a.m.
George Martin 1229 Los Robles Dr., Sonoma

JUNIOR LEAGUE OPERA PREVIEW

Previews held in the Green Room (GR) or the Herbst Theatre (HT), Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco. Lectures begin at noon and there is no admission charge. For further information, please call (415) 852-2220.

- Idomeneo* 10/4 (GR)
Sandor Salgo
- Lohengrin* 11/8 (GR)
Michael Mitchell
- Orlando Furioso* 11/15 (HT)
Eleanor Selfridge-Field
- Die Frau ohne Schatten* 11/22 (HT)
George Martin

EAST BAY CHAPTER

The Chapter will present a preview of *Lohengrin*, with famed tenor Jess Thomas, on Wednesday, Nov. 8 at 7:30 p.m. at the Faculty Club, University of California, Berkeley. Dinner is at 6 p.m. For further information and dinner reservations, please call (415) 465-7646.

OPERA EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL PREVIEW SERIES

Previews of the operas of the 1989 season will be given by Michael Barclay, director of Opera Education International. Lectures will be presented in the auditorium of the Cetus Corp., 1400—53rd St., in Emeryville, at 7:30 p.m. Admission to the series of 10 previews is \$65; individual admission at the door is \$8. For further information, please call (415) 526-5244.

- Aida* 10/16
- Madama Butterfly* 10/23
- Lohengrin* 11/6
- Orlando Furioso* 11/13
- Die Frau ohne Schatten* 11/20

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A free lecture entitled "Die Frau ohne Schatten: Richard Strauss' New Age Opera" will be given by Michael Barclay on November 9 at 7:30 p.m. at the Kensington Library, 61 Arlington Ave., Kensington. For further information, please call (415) 524-3043.

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 1989 season, on Tuesday evenings at 6:30 p.m., beginning August 29 and ending December 19. 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) 436-2430.

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Ten classes on San Francisco Opera's season are offered, and there is a choice of three series: Mondays from August 21 to November 20 at 6:30 p.m.; Thursdays from August 31 to November 16 at 6:30 p.m.; and Saturdays from September 9 to November 18 from 10 a.m. to noon or from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Sessions are held at the Galleria Park Hotel, 191 Sutter, S.F. Cost for the series of 10 two-hour classes is \$80; individual previews are \$10. For further information, please call (415) 956-1271.

Lulu AT THE BERKELEY REP

Running concurrently with San Francisco Opera's new production of *Lulu* is the Berkeley Repertory Theatre's adaptation of Frank Wedekind's drama. Directed by Berkeley Rep's Artistic Director, Sharon Ott, this rarely-staged play is scheduled to run at the Theatre, 2025 Addison St., through October 14. Performances are Tuesday through Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., with additional matinees on three Thursdays and three Saturdays. Tickets are priced between \$18 and \$24. Student, senior and group discounts are available, and each Tuesday and Friday at noon a limited number of half-price tickets will be sold at the Box Office for cash-only purchase. For further information and reservations, please call (415) 845-4700.

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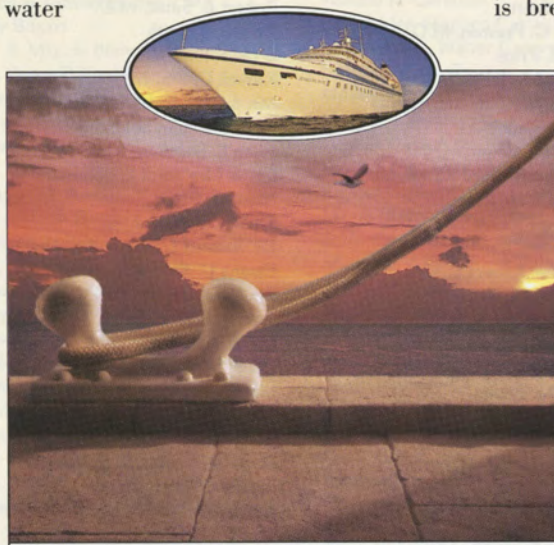
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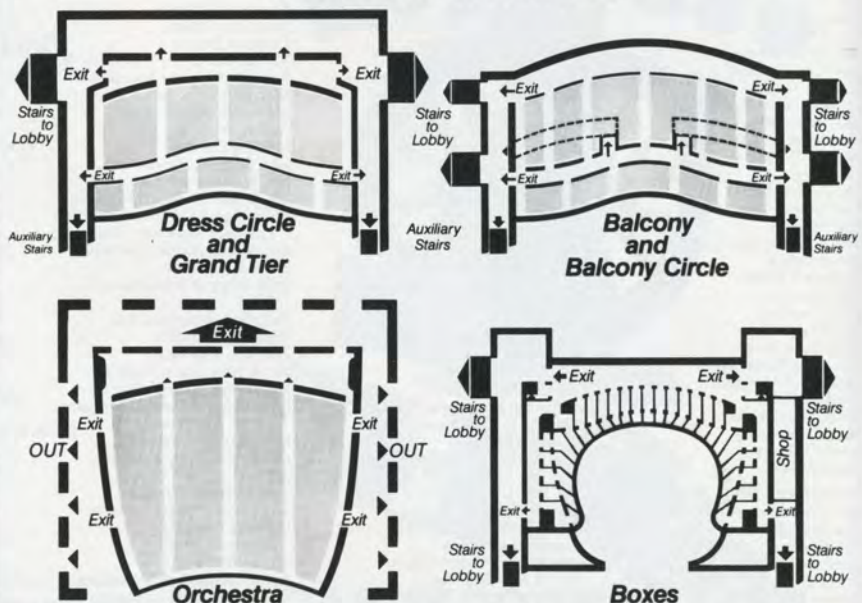
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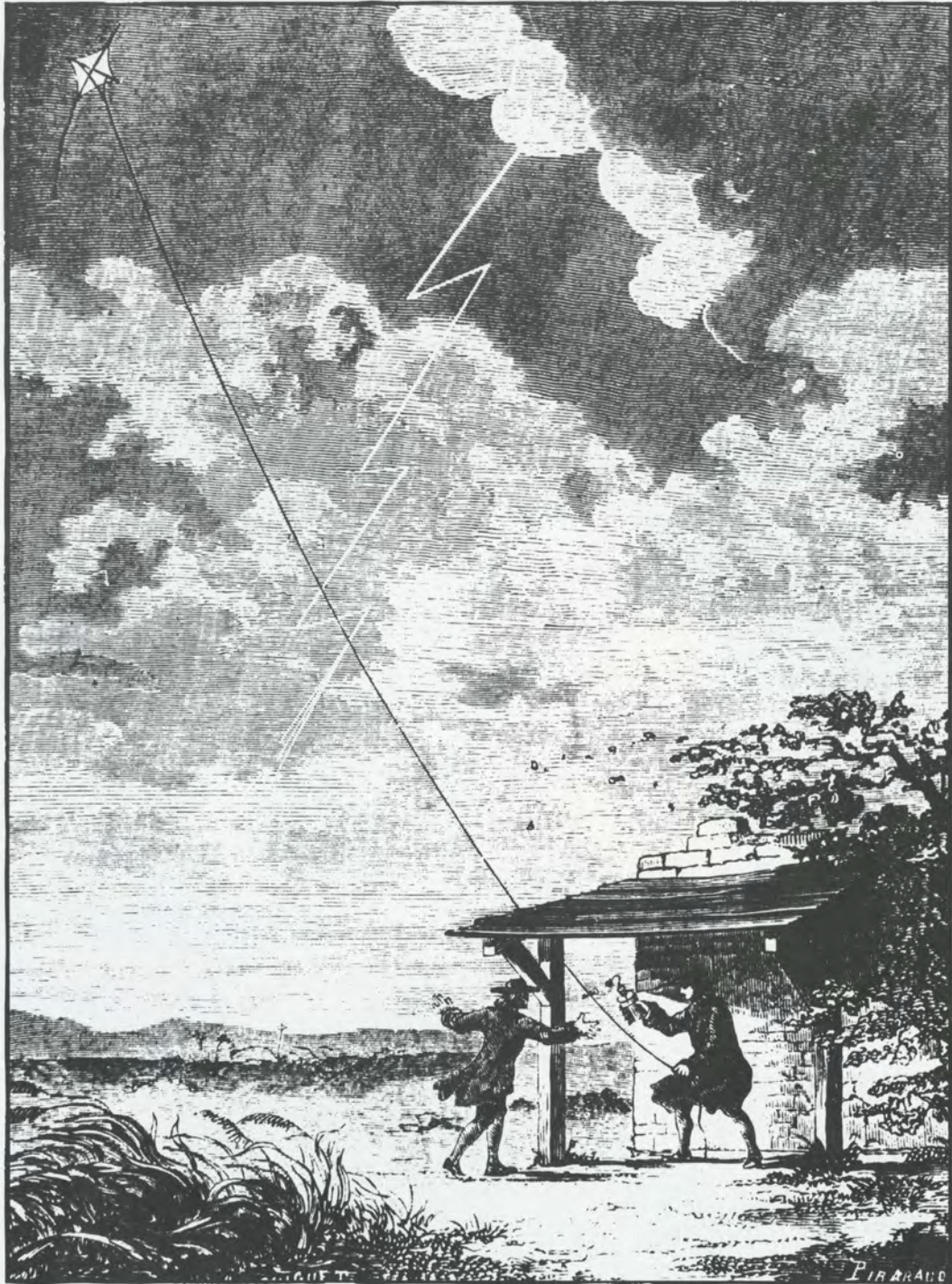
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October 29, 1989.

The title role of this afternoon's performance of *Aida* will be sung by Alessandra Marc.

American soprano **Alessandra Marc** is making her unexpected San Francisco Opera debut as *Aida* this afternoon, replacing her ailing colleague Sharon Sweet. Only two weeks ago, she was on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera in her first appearance there, performing the same part to tumultuous acclaim. Born in West Berlin and currently residing outside of Washington, D.C., Miss Marc has in the period of a few short years risen to international prominence. She was highly acclaimed for her performance as Lisabetta in Giordano's *La Cena Delle Beppe* at the Wexford Festival, and received sensational reviews as Marie in Strauss' *Friedenstag* at Santa Fe Opera last year. The 1988-89 season also saw her singing four new roles in four debuts: her first staged *Aida* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago; Leonora in *La Forza del Destino* with Greater Miami Opera; Madame Lidoine in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* with Houston Grand Opera; and the title role of *Ariadne auf Naxos* with the Washington Concert Opera. She has appeared as Ismene (Elettra) in Richard Strauss' version of *Idomeneo* at the Mostly Mozart Festival; as Mariana in Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot* and in the title role of Wagner's adaptation of Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis* at the Waterloo Festival; and performed in Verdi's Requiem and a concert staging of *Aida* with the Ensemble Instrumental de Grenoble. In recent seasons she has sung the Verdi Requiem with Sir Georg Solti at the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, with Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony, and with Christian Badea and the Columbus Symphony. She has also appeared as soloist with the symphony orchestras of Seattle, Cincinnati and Toronto, and in recital at Washington's Kennedy Center and Pasadena's Ambassador Auditorium.

