

Rigoletto

1990

Saturday, September 15, 1990 8:00 PM
Thursday, September 20, 1990 8:00 PM
Tuesday, September 25, 1990 8:00 PM
Sunday, September 30, 1990 2:00 PM
Friday, October 5, 1990 8:00 PM
Wednesday, October 10, 1990 7:30 PM
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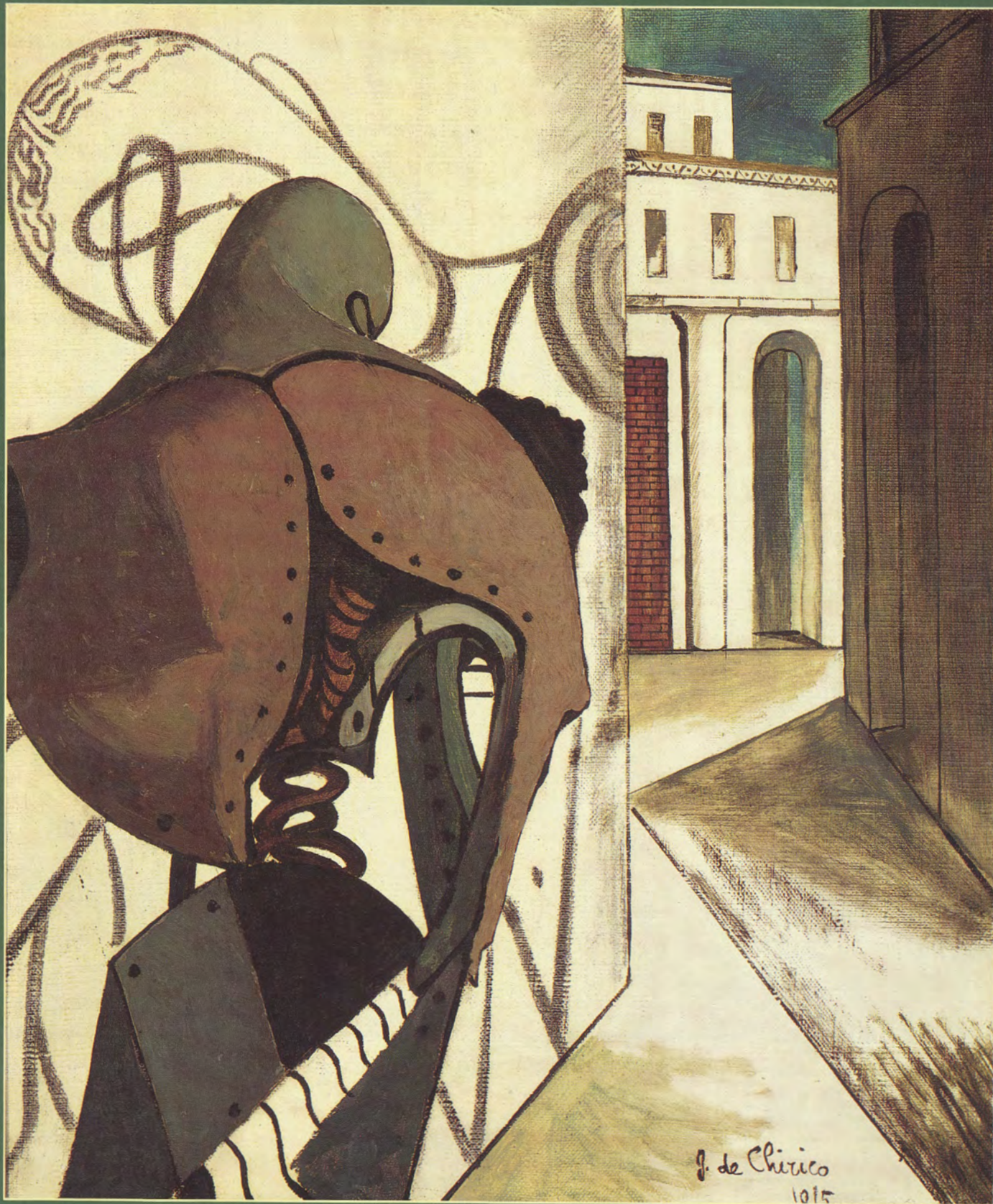
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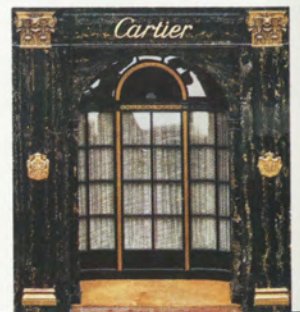


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San Francisco Opera

Lotfi Mansouri, *General Director*

Rigoletto

1990 SEASON
Vol. 68, No. 5

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Chirico, Giorgio de, 1888-1978
Vexations of the Thinker, 1915

Oil on canvas, 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x15 in.

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SOHL

From the President and the Chairman of the Board

Welcome to the 68th Fall Season of San Francisco Opera. Our first season of opera in the 1990s offers much that is new, including a new president of the Opera Association Board of Directors. Both of us have served on the board for a number of years, and it is most exciting to be involved as this great Company reassesses its past and prepares for a promising future.

We on the board are not always highly visible to our audiences. What appears on our stage, however, is; and this year, there is an unusually high number of productions new to San Francisco Opera audiences: seven of our eleven fall season productions have not been seen here before. The economics of opera production being what they are, we could never have such an abundance of new productions without some very creative planning on the part of our administration. Opera is the most labor-intensive, and therefore expensive, of all the performing arts; no American opera company could possibly afford to build seven new productions in one year in today's fiscal climate.

We have built three new productions in our San Francisco Opera shops this year, which in itself is an impressive

figure, and two of them have been made possible through deeply appreciated donations. Our new production of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* was underwritten by a generous grant from the L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, and San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges the generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Gorham B. Knowles and The Edward E. Hills Fund to underwrite our new *Die Fledermaus*.

Opera companies can save considerable amounts of money by creating a new production together, and that is what we have done with Berg's *Wozzeck*, in tandem with the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto. For helping us cover our end of the costs of this joint venture, San Francisco Opera extends its heartfelt gratitude to the Paul L. and Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation.

Even our own productions that we revive do not come free; the costs in refurbishing a production are surprisingly high, and San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges a generous gift from Maria Manetti Farrow to underwrite our revival of *Pagliacci*. Our other revived productions owe their original creation to the generosity of previous donations: *Rigoletto* was made possible by

a gift from James D. Robertson, *Khovanshchina* by a gift from the L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, and *Un Ballo in Maschera* by a gift from an anonymous friend of San Francisco Opera. To all of the benefactors whose generosity made this bright new season possible, our deepest and warmest thanks!

In addition, we 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. The continued support of Mayor Art Agnos and Chief Administrative Officer Rudolf Nothenberg has been extremely gratifying. And of course, we extend our appreciation to the San Francisco Opera Guild and the War Memorial Board of Trustees for their ongoing support.

With the continuing support of the above-mentioned individuals, foundations, corporations and governmental agencies, we anticipate an exciting operatic experience as we explore the treasures of our repertoire in the 1990s.

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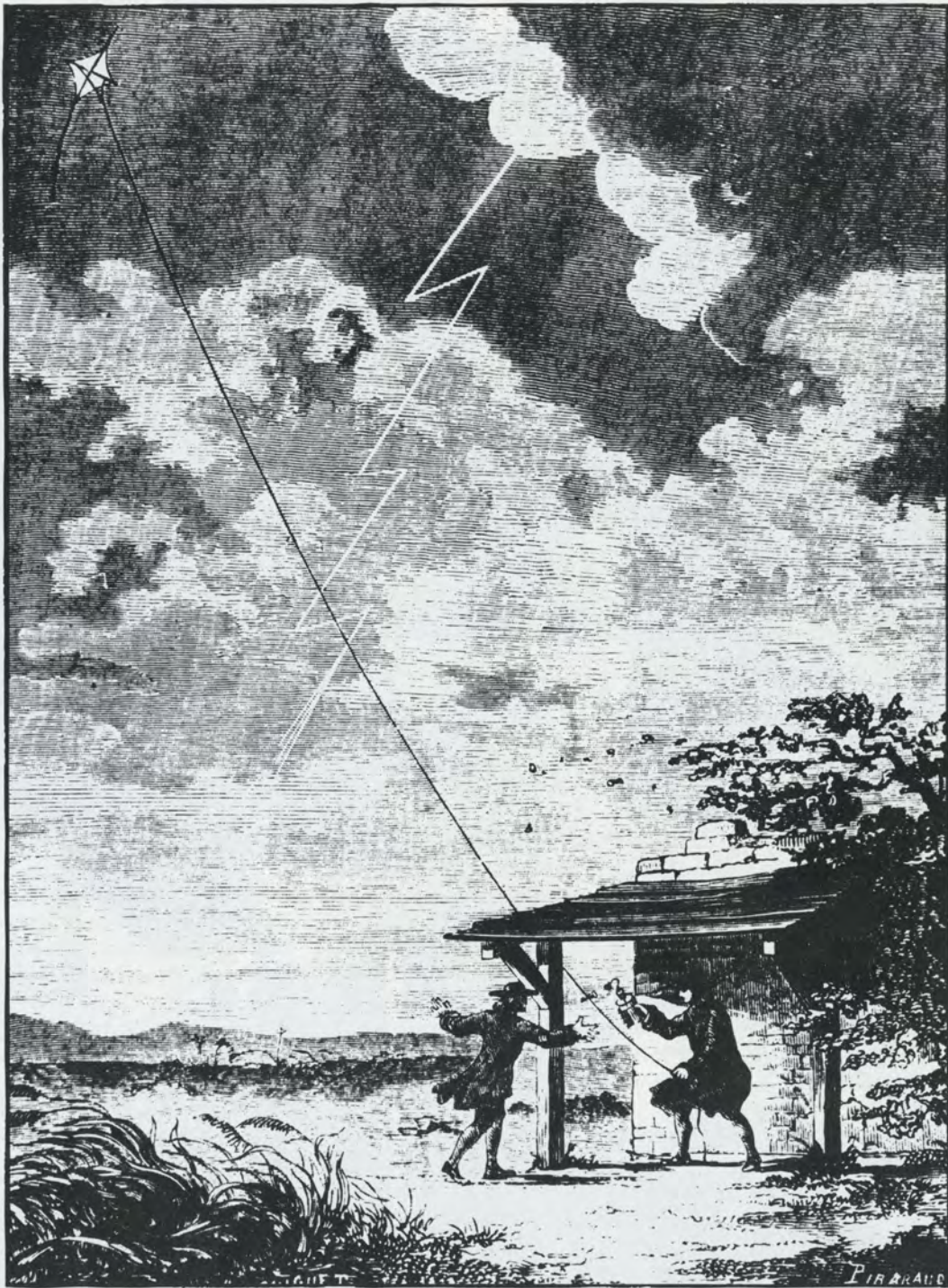


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General Director's Message

Another fall season is upon us, and once again I take delight in welcoming you back to San Francisco Opera. There are many new elements to this fall season, many more than usual, and our regular subscribers as well as our new audience members will find themselves on an adventurous exploration of new repertoire, new productions of familiar repertoire, and exciting debuts by a number of artists.

To begin with, an amazing seven of our eleven productions are new to San Francisco. Three of them represent Company premieres: Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (previously staged by Spring Opera, but never before a part of our regular fall season), Mas-

senet's *Don Quichotte* and Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland*. Another opera receiving a new production, *Suor Angelica*, hasn't been performed in the War Memorial Opera House since 1952, while *Capriccio*, also new, has been part of only one previous fall season, in 1963. *Khovanshchina* has also been seen only once before, when the current production was unveiled in 1984.

The number of artists joining us for the first time this season is also impressive—so much so that it would be impossible to list everyone here: five conductors, two directors, five designers and nearly 20 singers will be making their San Francisco Opera debuts this fall,

while several returning artists will be undertaking new roles for the first time.

In short, there are many wonderful discoveries to be made this season, and I am extremely pleased that you will be here to make them along with us. The art form we call opera is nearly 400 years young, and it grows fresher, more vital and exciting every year. San Francisco Opera welcomes you as together we celebrate the liveliest of the performing arts.

San Francisco Opera

Lotfi Mansouri, *General Director*

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1990 Season

Opening Night Friday, September 7, 7:30 <i>New Production</i> Suor Angelica Mitchell, Obratsova, Begg, Petersen, Keen, Williams, Racette, Randell*, Jepson*, Fortuna, Guo*, Claycomb*, Mills, Mavrovitis* Santi*/Copley/Perdziola*/Munn and Pagliacci Mims*; Atlantov**, Manuguerra, G. Quilico, Gordon Santi/Calábria/Ponnelle/Munn <i>San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges a generous gift from Maria Manetti Farrow to underwrite the revival of this production of Pagliacci.</i>	(CANCELLED)	Tuesday, Sept. 18, 8:00 Wozzeck Berg	(CANCELLED)	Wednesday, October 3, 7:30 Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart
	Puccini	Wednesday, September 19, 7:30 Suor Angelica and Pagliacci Leoncavallo	Puccini	Friday, October 5, 8:00 Rigoletto Verdi
		Thursday, September 20, 8:00 Rigoletto Verdi		Sunday, October 7, 2:00 Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart
		Friday, September 21, 8:00† Wozzeck Berg		Tuesday, October 9, 8:00 Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart
		Saturday, September 22, 8:00 Suor Angelica and Pagliacci Leoncavallo		Wednesday, October 10, 7:30 Rigoletto Verdi
		Sunday, September 23, 2:00 Wozzeck Berg		Thursday, October 11, 8:00 <i>San Francisco Opera Premiere</i> Don Quichotte Massenet Ciesinski, Mills, Cowdrick; Ramey, Tremont, Petersen, Wilborn*, Travis Rudel/Roubaud**/Morgan/Arhelger <i>This production is owned by the Lyric Opera of Chicago.</i>
Saturday, Sept. 8, 8 p.m. <i>New production, co-produced with the Canadian Opera Company</i> Wozzeck Forst, Golden; Monk, Ellsworth, Kale**, Vogel, De Haan, Travis, Ledbetter, Frank Layer/Mansouri/Levine/Whitfield <i>San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges a generous grant from the Paul L. and Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation to underwrite this production.</i>	(CANCELLED)	Tuesday, September 25, 8:00 Rigoletto Verdi		Friday, October 12, 7:30 Rigoletto Verdi
	Berg	Wednesday, September 26, 7:30 Wozzeck Berg		Saturday, October 13, 8:00 Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart
		Thursday, September 27, 7:30 <i>New Production</i> Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart Patterson, Parrish, Fortuna, Guo; Moll, Streit*, Magnusson*, Hoffmann*, Li, Graber Michael*/Wadsworth*/Lynch*/Long*/ Arhelger <i>San Francisco Opera gratefully acknowledges a generous grant from the L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation to underwrite this production.</i>		Sunday, October 14, 2:00 Don Quichotte Massenet
Wednesday, Sept. 12, 7:30 Suor Angelica and Pagliacci	(CANCELLED)	Friday, September 28, 8:00 Suor Angelica and Pagliacci Leoncavallo		Tuesday, October 16, 8:00 Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart
	Puccini	Saturday, September 29, 2:00 Wozzeck Berg		Thursday, October 18, 7:30 Don Quichotte Massenet
Friday, Sept. 14, 8:00 Wozzeck	(CANCELLED)	Sunday, September 30, 2:00 Rigoletto Verdi		Friday, October 19, 8:00 Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart
	Berg	Tuesday, October 2, 8:00 Suor Angelica and Pagliacci (Tonio: Timothy Noble)		Saturday, October 20, 8:00 Don Quichotte Massenet
Saturday, September 15, 8:00 Rigoletto Swenson, Powell**, Petersen, Fortuna, Mills; Fondary, Leech* Langan, Skinner, Estep, Villanueva, Ledbetter, Graber* Fiore/Asagaroff/Ponnelle/Munn <i>This production was originally made possible by a gift from James D. Robertson.</i>				Sunday, October 21, 2:00 <i>Production new to San Francisco Co-produced with the Royal Opera, Covent Garden</i> Capriccio R. Strauss Te Kanawa, Schwarz, Grist; Olsen*, Shimell, Hagegård, Braun, Sénéchal, Estep, Travis Barlow**/Cox/Pagano/Versace**/ Caniparoli/Munn <i>Sets from Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels</i>
Sunday, September 16, 2:00 Suor Angelica and Pagliacci		†ADDED PERFORMANCE		
	Puccini			
	Leoncavallo			

Tuesday, October 30, 8:00
Capriccio R. Strauss

Wednesday, October 31, 7:30
Un Ballo in Maschera Verdi

Friday, November 2, 8:00
Capriccio R. Strauss

Saturday, November 3, 8:00
Un Ballo in Maschera Verdi

Sunday, November 4, 2:00
New Production
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.
 Holleque* (November 4, 8, 10, 16),
 Gustafson (November 24, 25, 27, 30),
 Kilduff, TBA; Lopez-Yañez*,
 Hagegård (November 4, 8, 25, 27),
 Baerg (November 10, 16, 24, 30), Nolen,
 Adams*, Rideout, TBA
 Rudel (November 4, 8, 10, 16)/
 Summers (November 24, 25, 27, 30)/
 Mansouri/Skalicki/Bosquet*/
 Tomasson*/Munn
*San Francisco Opera gratefully
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 and Mrs. Gorham B. Knowles and The
 Edward E. Hills Fund to underwrite this
 production.*

Tuesday, November 6, 8:00
Un Ballo in Maschera Verdi

Wednesday, November 7, 8:00
Capriccio R. Strauss

Thursday, November 8, 7:30
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.

Friday, November 9, 8:00
Un Ballo in Maschera Verdi

Saturday, November 10, 1:00
Family Matinee
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.
 Racette, Williams, Keen/Estep, McNeil,
 Villanueva, Travis, Rideout
 Summers*/Mansouri/Skalicki/Bosquet/
 Tomasson/Munn
*San Francisco Opera gratefully
 acknowledges a generous gift from the
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 Matinee performance.*

Saturday, November 10, 8:00
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.

Sunday, November 11, 2:00
Capriccio R. Strauss

Wednesday, November 14, 7:30
Un Ballo in Maschera Verdi

Friday, November 16, 8:00
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.

Saturday, November 17, 8:00
Khovanshchina Mussorgsky
 Zajick, Fortuna; Ghiaurov, Myers,
 Treleven*, Howell, Noble, S. Cole,
 Ledbetter, Skinner, Villanueva
 Simonov*/Frisell/Benois/Carvajal/Munn
*This production was originally made
 possible by a gift from the L.J. and Mary
 C. Skaggs Foundation.*

Sunday, November 18, 2:00
Un Ballo in Maschera Verdi

Tuesday, November 20, 8:00
Khovanshchina Mussorgsky

Friday, November 23, 8:00
San Francisco Opera Premiere
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi
 von Stade, Graham*, Bower*,
 Cowdrick, Williams, Mills; Hampson*,
 V. Cole, Lewis, Patterson, Cox, Estep,
 Rayam*, West*, Wilborn, Petersen
 Bernardi/Hampe/Pagano/Munn
*This production is owned by the
 Cologne Opera.*

Saturday, November 24, 1:00
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.

Saturday, November 24, 8:00
Khovanshchina Mussorgsky

Sunday, November 25, 1:00
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

Sunday, November 25, 8:00
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.

Tuesday, November 27, 8:00
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.

Wednesday, November 28, 7:30
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

Thursday, November 29, 8:00
Khovanshchina Mussorgsky

Friday, November 30, 7:30
Die Fledermaus J. Strauss, Jr.

Saturday, December 1, 1:00
Rigoletto Verdi
 Hong*, Keen, Petersen, Fortuna, Mills;
 Pons, Li, Doss*, Skinner, Estep,
 Villanueva, Ledbetter, Graber
 Fiore/Asagaroff/Ponnel/Munn

Saturday, December 1, 8:00
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

Sunday, December 2, 2:00
Khovanshchina Mussorgsky

Tuesday, December 4, 8:00
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

Wednesday, December 5, 7:30
Khovanshchina Mussorgsky

Thursday, December 6, 7:30
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

Friday, December 7, 7:30
Rigoletto Verdi
 (Same cast as December 1)

Saturday, December 8, 8:00
Khovanshchina Mussorgsky

Sunday, December 9, 1:00
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria Monteverdi

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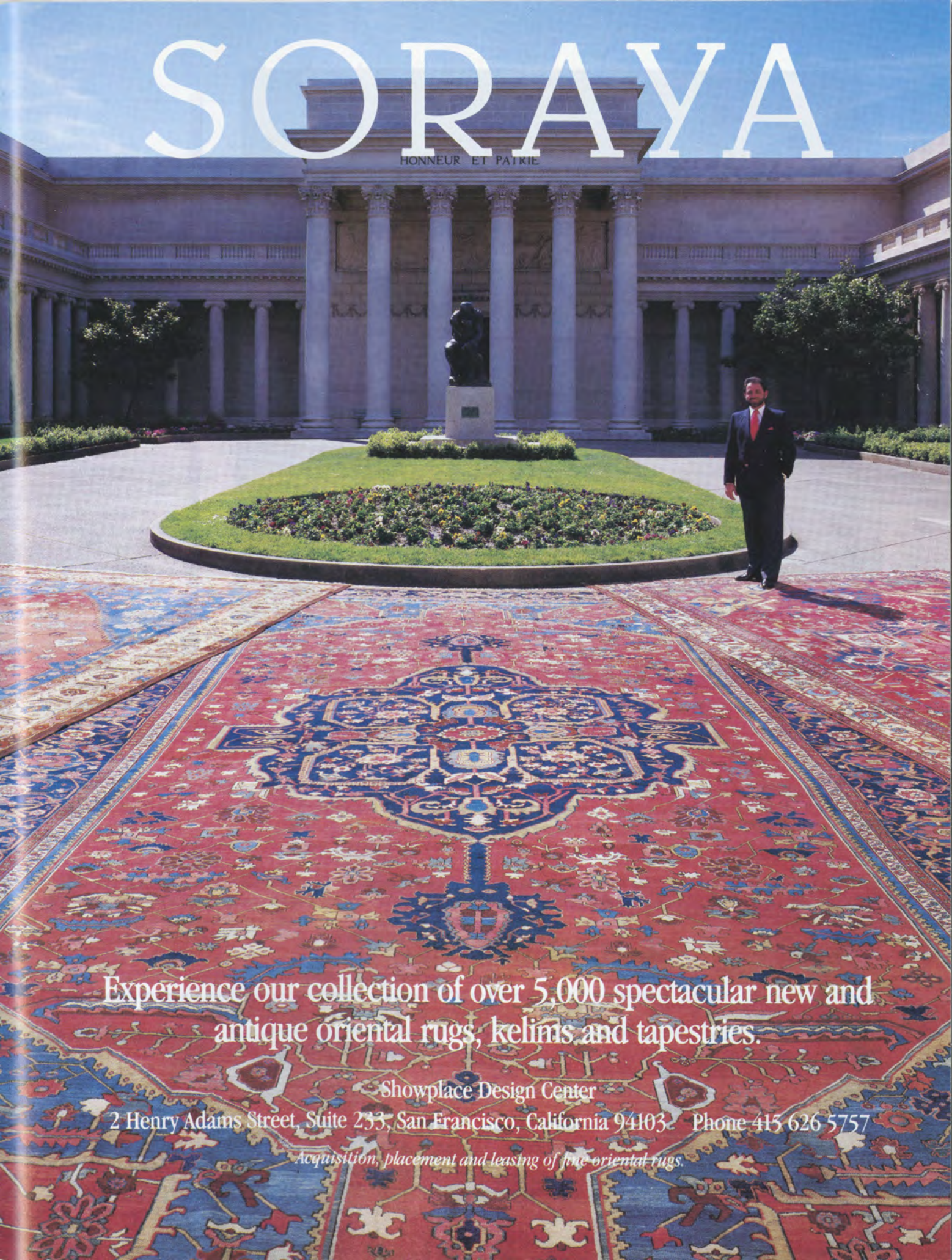
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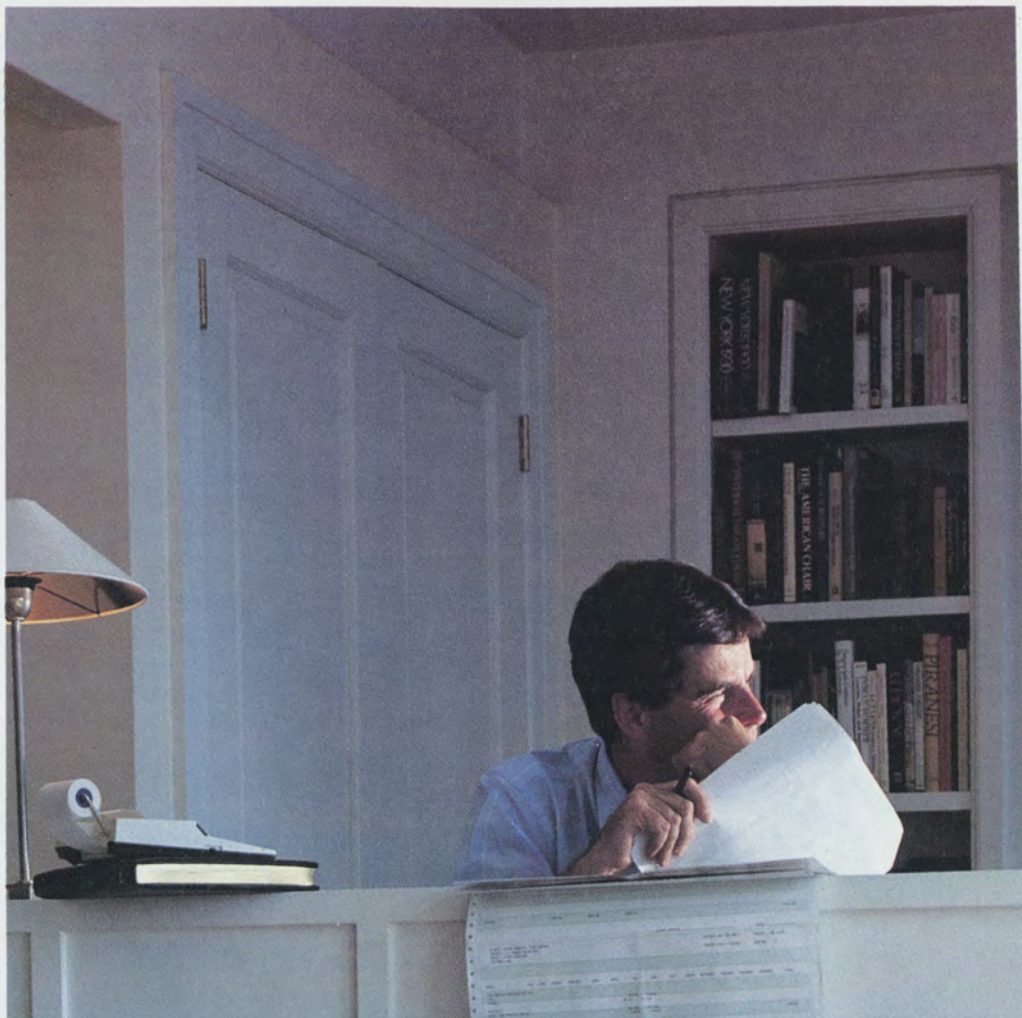


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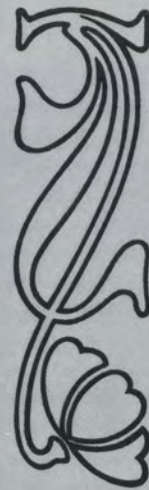
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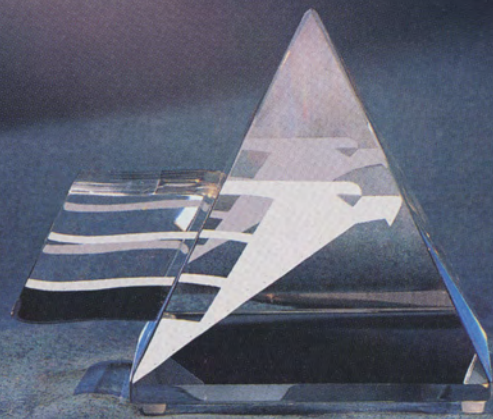
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RIGOLETTO



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Burnt Into Music

By STEPHANIE VON BUCHAU

It is the reflexive verb, *s'amuser*, that gives the title of Victor Hugo's play, *Le Roi s'amuse*, its cruel, cynical tone. The idea of a callous, libertine king "amusing himself" with the wives and daughters of his subjects is hateful enough to boil the blood of even the most committed royalist.

The same, insouciant verb does not exist in Italian. The nearest equivalent is *divertirsi*, which has a lighter, less consequential ring. This could be one of the reasons why Giuseppe Verdi's sixteenth opera, based on Hugo's play, is called *Rigoletto* instead of *Il re si diverte*. Yet there are other, even more cogent reasons for the renaming of the piece. Understanding the etymology of *Rigoletto's* title is central to understanding the work itself.

First of all, the title of Hugo's play indicates that the king is its protagonist; Verdi's title names the jester as the leading character. This subtle switch in emphasis hints at the kind of response the composer

Stephanie von Buchau has been writing about opera since 1962. She is the San Francisco correspondent of Opera News.



(Opposite page) The Jean-Pierre Ponnelle production of Rigoletto was first seen here in 1973, at which time Giacomo Aragall portrayed the Duke of Mantua.

(This page) Garbis Boyagian as Rigoletto in the summer of 1981.



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wished us to have to his first certifiable masterpiece (*pace*, lovers of *Nabucco*, *Ernani* and *Macbeth*). The title also tells us about the terrible, sometimes absurd conditions under which Verdi labored in the mid-*ottocento*.

It is common knowledge that the parent-child relationship occupied a central position in the composer's psyche. *Rigoletto* is neither the first nor last of Verdi's operas to address his filial obsession; *Nabucco*, *Luisa Miller*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Don Carlos* and *Aida* are some others. Yet, though Triboulet, the nasty, manipulative jester of Hugo's play has, as a redeeming characteristic, a tender love for his daughter Blanche, that relationship does not dominate *Le Roi s'amuse* the way *Rigoletto*'s obsessive passion for Gilda dominates Verdi's opera.

Hugo was interested as much in making a political statement about François I, a real historical personage, as he was in demonstrating that evil begets evil. The tender feelings of Triboulet for Blanche are secondary to Hugo's didactic purpose, here set out in the preface to the published edition of his 1832 play:

"Triboulet is deformed; Triboulet is sick; Triboulet is court jester—a triple misfortune that makes him evil. Triboulet hates the king because he is a king; the nobles because they are nobles; his fellow men in general because they have no humps on their backs. His sole pastime is to set the nobles against the king . . . The king he depraves, corrupts and brutalizes; he urges him on to tyranny, vice and ignorance; he unleashes him against all the highborn families, pointing out to him the wife to seduce, the sister to carry off, the daughter to dishonor. In the hands of Triboulet, the king is nothing but an all-powerful puppet who destroys the lives of all those among whom his jester sets him."

In *Le Roi s'amuse*, during the speech which becomes the aria "Cortigiani, vil razza dannata" in the opera, Triboulet actually names the great families of France, declaring, "Your mothers gave themselves to their lackeys. You are all bastards!" Needless to say, that line stopped the show; Hugo's play succeeded so brilliantly that the authorities banned it for 50 years after its opening night.

Still, Verdi did not choose *Le Roi s'amuse* for its republican sentiments. True, *Rigoletto* urges the Duke (his demotion will be explained shortly) to abduct Count Ceprano's wife, and he makes fun of the grieving Montereone—

with disastrous consequences—but he always remains a more sympathetic, appealing creation than Hugo's Iago-like Triboulet.

Psychoanalyzing artists and their work, especially when they are no longer around to defend themselves, is a fruitless activity. For instance, everybody "knows" that the loss of his two young children from his tragic first marriage turned the already taciturn Verdi into a prematurely dark, pessimistic personality—one reflected in the gloomy, tragic nature of his greatest operas. Then what explains *Falstaff*, that miraculous soufflé, the aged composer's final work which he wrote, so he said, "to please myself"?

Still, whatever its motivation—besides the tragic deaths of his only children,

Rigoletto-Gilda duos may be one of the reasons that some listeners find Verdi "sexless." True, he is not a raw sensualist like his transalpine contemporaries, Wagner and Gounod, but his sensibility is merely fixed on something besides erotic love. As a consequence of this obsession, Hugo's harsh, satirical play becomes a tender, tragic story of a misunderstood, mistreated freak of nature who, though he is his own worst enemy, commands only pity, empathy and understanding from the composer. It would be satisfying to report that—having decided that the focus of the jester's story is compassion rather than retribution—Verdi named his new opera after its pathetic protagonist. But he didn't. He called it, with what seemed like perfect



San Francisco Opera, *Rigoletto* 1935: (L. to r.) Ezio Pinza (*Sparafucile*), Eva Gruninger (*Maddalena*) and Tito Schipa (*Duke*).

Verdi also had a troubled relationship with his parents—there is no doubt that the composer had a "thing" about fathers and their children—particularly fathers and daughters. It is the pigment that colors his entire oeuvre, and it calls forth his most passionate music. The great "love duets" in Verdi's operas are not those between consenting adults—*Otello* and *Desdemona*; *Riccardo* and *Amelia*; *Elisabetta* and *Carlos*. They are those between fathers and daughters, or surrogate daughters if you wish to include *La Traviata*.

The lasting, insinuating power of the *Boccanegra*-*Maria*, *Amonasro*-*Aida*,

logic at the time, *La Maledizione* (*The Curse*). This title, of course, gets us even further from Hugo's concept of the king amusing himself. On the next step, from *La Maledizione* to *Rigoletto*, hangs a complicated tale.

After the triumph of *Nabucco* at La Scala in 1842, Verdi's career rose in tandem with Italy's resurgence of patriotic nationalism, called the *Risorgimento*. The great chorus from that opera, "Va, pensiero," is still regarded by many Italians as their unofficial national anthem. *Nabucco* was followed by *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata* (*The Lombards at the First Crusade*), which stirred

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equally fervent nationalistic feelings, especially in the north. Choruses, situations, even symbolic representations of the hated Austrian oppressors were seen in *Ernani*, *Attila*, *Macbeth* and *La Battaglia di Legnano* during the 1840s. Even the seemingly innocent slogan "Viva VERDI," scrawled in public places, had a revolutionary subtext; it was an acronym for "Long Live Vittorio Emmanuele, Re d'Italia," the nationalists' cry for unification of the peninsula under one king.

This was the exciting period that the composer referred to as his "galley slave years," when he churned out one score after another, 15 operas and/or revisions between *Nabucco* of 1842 and *Rigoletto* of 1851. Not all these works were patriotic, nationalistic epics, either. *Luisa Miller* (1849), despite its political subtext, is a classic Verdian father-daughter conflict, while *Stiffelio* (1850) is the most undeservedly ignored of Verdi's middle-period operas. Its libretto about a Protestant minister struggling to forgive his wife's infidelity is certainly strange, but its revision as *Aroldo* doesn't help and lacks the dramatic unity of the original.

Months before the November 1850 premiere of *Stiffelio* in Trieste, Verdi received a commission from the Fenice Theater in Venice for a new opera to be presented during the following carnival season. The 1848 revolutionary convulsion had expelled the hated Austrians from the Veneto province for 15 months, during which no opera had been presented due to the general public confusion. With the Austrians firmly back in the saddle by July 1849, opera performances resumed at the Fenice under strict military censorship. This was nothing new to Verdi as the entire Italian peninsula was divided into nasty little states, each with its own form of artistic torture for unwary composers and dramatists.

After passing on two plays—*Kean* by the elder Dumas and *El Trovador* by Gutiérrez (which he set two years later as *Il Trovatore*)—Verdi settled on Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse* for Venice. Perhaps "settled" is not the right word. Seldom has a composer been so enthusiastic—with so much cause, given the final result—about a literary property. Verdi wrote to Francesco Maria Piave, who also provided libretti for *Ernani*, *I Due Foscari*, *Macbeth*, *Il Corsaro*, *La Traviata*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and *La Forza del Destino*, as well as both *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo*:

"I have in mind a subject that would be one of the greatest creations of the modern theater—if the police would only allow it. Who knows? They

allowed *Ernani*; they might even allow us to do this—at least there are no conspiracies in it . . . The subject is grand, immense, and there is a character in it who is one of the greatest creations that the theater of all countries and all times can boast. The subject is *Le Roi s'amuse* and the character I'm speaking about is Triboulet . . ."

To his publisher, Ricordi, he added, "Triboulet is a creation worthy of Shakespeare," the highest ranking in Verdi's literary pantheon. Piave was told to "run about the city [Venice] and find someone of influence to get us permission to do *Le Roi s'amuse*," which he apparently did, though without sufficient vigor to prevent an attack by the Central Director of Public Order, i.e. the top cop, one Carlo Martello, who may have been a mouthpiece of the Austrian Military Governor, but was also an Italian and an admirer of Verdi's music.

Martello's official letter to the Fenice, returning the submitted libretto, begins, "His Excellency, the Military Governor Cavalier de Gorzkowski, has commanded me to inform [you] that he deplores that the poet Piave and the celebrated Maestro Verdi should not have chosen another field in which to display their talents, in preference to the revolting immorality and obscene triviality of the libretto entitled *La Maledizione* . . ."

Since the piece we know as *Rigoletto* is essentially the same as the piece called *La Maledizione*, one can assume that it wasn't obscenity, immorality or triviality that stuck in the Austrian's craw, so much as the fact that Hugo's François I was a real king and the entire libretto displayed royalty in the worst possible light. The most offensive scene in the play—which did not make the final cut in the libretto—shows the abducted Blanche confronting the King. Realizing that she has been duped—he is not a poor student—she flees into an adjoining chamber and then locks the door behind her. It is, conveniently, the King's bedchamber, and François produces the key, opens the door and goes in . . . laughing!

This scene must have had the same powerful shock effect on a nineteenth-century audience that the late Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's San Francisco Opera production has today when, in act two, the ducal chamber is dominated by a huge four-poster bed hung with brocade curtains. The giggling courtiers dump the bound and gagged Gilda into the bed; the Duke follows her behind the curtains; and poor *Rigoletto* has to sing "Cortigiani, vil razza dannata" while his daughter,

(Below) San Francisco Opera, *Rigoletto* 1941: Irra Petina as Maddalena; Jan Peerce as the Duke.

(Bottom) San Francisco Opera, *Rigoletto* 1936: Backstage post-performance group—(L. to r.) Company general director Gaetano Merola, Lawrence Tibbett (*Rigoletto*), stage director Armando Agnini, Josephine Tuminia (*Gilda*), conductor Gennaro Papi, and Charles Kullman (*Duke of Mantua*).

MORTON



MORTON



unbeknownst to him, is being ravished in the same room. Ponnelle was criticized for his indelicacy, when in fact he was simply finding a way to circumvent Austrian censorship visited over a century ago on the composer.

Martello suggested that some changes to the libretto might get it past the gimlet eye of the Military Governor, including transforming the offending monarch into an impeccably-behaved duke. Verdi's response to the management of Fenice fairly crackles with outrage; it is also, given the circumstances, rather funny:

"This Duke is a nullity. He *must* be a libertine; otherwise there is no reason why Triboulet would be afraid to let his daughter out of concealment . . . I don't understand why the sack has been taken out. What does the sack matter to the police? *Are they afraid it will not be [theatrically] effective?* [Italics mine] Finally, I note you have avoided making Triboulet ugly and hunchbacked! A hunchback who sings? Why not? Will it be effective? I don't know, but I repeat, neither does the person who suggests these changes . . . In sum, a powerful and original drama has been turned into something trivial and dead."

The sarcasm apparently worked, for soon Piave and Guglielmo Brenna, secretary of La Fenice, were in Busseto, where a memo was signed in late 1850, just four months before *Rigoletto's* premiere. This compromise included a locale change from the court of France to an independent duchy in Italy; the names of all the characters had to be changed; the scene with a key omitted; and Verdi himself was to decide how to handle the sack. According to Spike Hughes, Martello himself suggested the name "Rigoletto" (from the French verb, *rigoler*, "to make fun"). The name also became the title of the opera, since the Catholic censor thought "The Curse" was sacrilegious. A small point, one might think, considering that the censor was willing to swallow several seductions, a suicide and the principal villain getting off scot-free—but then nobody ever said that censorship was rational.

The duchy chosen was Mantua, where the Gonzaga dukes reigned from 1328 to 1708; Verdi's Duke is said to be the infamous Vincenzo Gonzaga, patron of Monteverdi, though his name is never mentioned. Hughes, in *Famous Verdi Operas*, makes an unconvincing argument on the supposition that Martello chose the city, too, as a subtle slap in the face of his Austrian masters. No other



MORTON

San Francisco Opera, *Rigoletto* 1943:
George London as Monterone.

prominent Verdians take up the matter, so it probably wasn't important to the composer, who got virtually everything he wanted with a minimum of compromise. He is supposed to have said, "They'll never believe we had a policeman for a collaborator," though some sources credit the remark to Piave. In any case, the libretto was now ready for music, as Piave put it, "safe and sound without fractures or amputations."

Verdi completed the score just in time for the premiere of March 11th, 1851. Rehearsals were conducted as privately as possible, as the composer hated letting his "effects" be known in advance. Legend has it that the tenor was not given the music to "La donna è mobile" until the day of the dress rehearsal because the composer didn't want to hear his tunes played by organ grinders *before* the first night. Felice Varesi, the first Macbeth, created the part of Rigoletto. The Duke was sung by a newcomer, tenor Raffaele Mirate, while Gilda went to Teresina Brambilla when the composer couldn't secure the services of Teresa De Giuli-Borsi, the dramatic soprano from *La Battaglia di Legnano*. The first performance was a public triumph,

but critics were slow to warm to the work.

In Italy it was called "archaic" and "Mozartian," this latter apparently a prime insult in the mid-*ottocento*. Charles Osborne, in *The Complete Operas of Verdi*, agrees that the work is Mozartian in the sense that Verdi's concern, "like Mozart's, is with characterization and with a dialogue of one human being with another . . . [Verdi] has Mozart's sense of dramatic movement and interplay of character."

When *Rigoletto* reached London in 1853, British critics attacked it for being "full of plagiarisms and faults . . . odd modulations perpetually wrenched out of the vain hope of disguising the intrinsic meagerness of the ideas." One of them huffed, "In aiming at simplicity, Sig. Verdi has hit frivolity." Hughes puts such criticisms in perspective by noting that, "Where the paying public was so enthralled by the drama that it did not notice Verdi's innovations, the critics were so obsessed by the innovations that they did not notice the drama."

The censors kept whacking away at *Rigoletto*, too, with both the Papal States (Rome) and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Naples) performing the music with new texts as *Viscardello* (1852), *Clara di Perth* (1853) and *Lionello* (1858)—answers for a "Jeopardy" quiz on rare Verdi operas. Through all the censorial vicissitudes, Verdi retained his composure and his faith in his first masterpiece. During a rehearsal at the Fenice, he told Varesi that he never expected to write anything better than "Bella figlia dell'amore," and in a letter to Antonio Somma, later the librettist of *Un Ballo in Maschera*, he described *Rigoletto* as "the best subject as regards theatrical effect that I've ever set to music. It has powerful situations, variety, excitement, pathos." To Cesare De Sanctis, he put it simply: "It is my best opera."

Musicians have always prized *Rigoletto*. It was the first opera chosen to appear in *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, a complete critical edition of the maestro's music being published jointly by The University of Chicago Press and G. Ricordi & Co. Ralph Vaughan Williams considered *Rigoletto* to be Verdi's finest achievement, and Rossini, who had been assessing his countryman coolly for many years, remarked that, after hearing *Rigoletto*, he at last could recognize Verdi's genius. Bernard Shaw, as usual, has the last word. Although he appreciated Victor Hugo's play more than we might today, Shaw found that Verdi's *Rigoletto* was a "character" "burnt into music." ■

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ARTIST PROFILES



RUTH ANN SWENSON

Soprano **Ruth Ann Swenson** appears this season as Gilda in *Rigoletto*. A 1983 and '84 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, she made her Company debut as Despina in the 1983 season production of *Così fan tutte*, and has returned here for a variety of roles including Dorinda in *Orlando*, Aennchen in *Der Freischütz*, Nannetta in *Falstaff*, Inès in *L'Africaine*, and Juliette in *Roméo et Juliette*. In 1988 she appeared as Norina in the Geneva production of *Don Pasquale* and made her Paris debut as Euridice opposite Marilyn Horne in Gluck's *Orfeo*. She made her Lyric Opera of Chicago debut as Nannetta, her Washington Opera debut as Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and returned to Canadian Opera to sing her first Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. Miss Swenson made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1988 as Adina in *L'Elisir d'Amore* and has returned in subsequent summers to sing the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* opposite Alfredo Kraus, as well as Gilda in *Rigoletto*. Recent engagements have included opening the Washington Opera season in the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Ilia in *Idomeneo* for the Hamburg Staatsoper and her Dallas Opera debut as Norina in *Don Pasquale*. Upcoming performances include Virginia Poe in Dominick Argento's *The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe* for Chicago Lyric Opera, Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Opera Bastille in Paris, Amina in *La Sonnambula* for Lausanne and Nancy Operas, and Constanze in Michael Hampe's production of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Cologne. In January of 1991, she makes her debut with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta.



CLAIRE POWELL

British mezzo-soprano **Claire Powell** makes her United States opera debut with San Francisco Opera as Maddalena in *Rigoletto*. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music and the London Opera Centre and made her Royal Opera, Covent Garden debut as Olga in *Eugene Onegin*. She has since appeared at the Royal Opera as Nicklausse in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, the Gymnast in *Lulu*, Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*, Eboli in *Don Carlos* and as Maddalena. She has also sung at Glyndebourne and with all of the major British opera companies. Outside the United Kingdom, she has sung Barbara in *Katya Kabanova* and Nicklausse at the Paris Opera; Ulrica in *Un Ballo in Maschera* at the Frankfurt Opera; Idamante in *Idomeneo* at the Rome Opera; Eboli in Liège; Orlofsky in Brussels; the title role of *Orfeo* in Madrid; and Marina in *Boris Godunov*, Paulina in *The Queen of Spades*, Eboli in *Don Carlos*, and the title role of *Carmen* for the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto. Miss Powell is also a popular concert soloist and has appeared in *Oedipus Rex* in Barcelona; *The Damnation of Faust*, *The Death of Cleopatra* and Handel's *Belshazzar* at the Cuenca Festival; and *El Amor Brujo*, Handel's *Messiah* and the Verdi Requiem in London. Recent engagements include *Medea* and *Rigoletto* in London, *Don Carlos* in Munich, *Carmen* in Toronto, *Pelléas et Melisande* and *The Queen of Spades* in Madrid, and the Bruckner *Te Deum* at the Cuenca Festival. Later this season she is scheduled for *Carmen* and *Don Carlos* at the Hamburg Staatsoper, *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Dido and Aeneas* in Madrid, *Samson et Dalila* at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and *Falstaff* (Mistress Quickly) in Paris.

RIGOLETTO



DONNA PETERSEN

In her 22nd season with San Francisco Opera, mezzo-soprano **Donna Petersen** appears this fall as the Sister Monitor in *Suor Angelica* and as Giovanna in *Rigoletto*. Among her more than 30 roles with the Company are the Innkeeper in *Boris Godunov*, Sister Mathilde in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Mother Goose in *The Rake's Progress*, Marcellina in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mrs. Ill in *The Visit of the Old Lady*, Mrs. Sedley in *Peter Grimes*, Grimgerde in *Die Walküre* (a role she has performed in seven different San Francisco Opera stagings), Mary in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, Filipjevna in *Eugene Onegin*, the Governess in *The Queen of Spades*, and Ada Hawkes in the 1976 world premiere of Andrew Imbrie's *Angle of Repose*. Miss Petersen has toured extensively with Western Opera Theater, has sung numerous seasons with Spring Opera Theater and appeared with the San Diego Opera and the Guild Opera of Los Angeles. In 1974 she made her highly successful debut as Mrs. Sedley in *Peter Grimes* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, a role she repeated there in 1977. She also appeared in Chicago as Mrs. Benson in *Lakmé* in 1983. Concert engagements include performances with the San Francisco Symphony, Oakland Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Honolulu Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico City, as well as 25 concerts in Australia, and additional concerts in Europe. Miss Petersen, who recently celebrated 20 years as head of the Voice Department at Mills College, is a Knight of the Royal Order of Dannebrog, presented to her by Queen Margrethe II of Denmark in 1976.

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MARIA FORTUNA

Soprano **Maria Fortuna**, who made her San Francisco Opera debut last fall in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, sings the First Alms Sister in *Suor Angelica*, Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto*, a Member of the Quartet in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Emma in *Khovanshchina*. She was a 1989 member of the Merola Opera Program and is currently an Adler Fellow with the Opera Center. She received her Bachelor of Music degree from the Eastman School of Music, where she studied with Marcia Baldwin and Jan DeGaetani. The Niagara Falls native received her Master of Music Degree from the Curtis Institute of Music, where she began her studies with her present teacher, Marlena Malas. Roles she has performed include Pamina in *The Magic Flute*, Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress*, *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, *Il Segreto di Susanna*, Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, and the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. She made her debut with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis as the Mermaid in Weber's *Oberon*, and sang with Arkansas Opera Theatre in Argento's *Postcard from Morocco*. Miss Fortuna has been a soloist with Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra in Bruckner's *Te Deum* and Verdi's *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*. Recent appearances include Anna in *Nabucco* and the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with Long Beach Opera, and The Young Lady in the Opera Center's 1990 production of Reimann's *The Ghost Sonata*.



MARY MILLS

Currently an Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, soprano **Mary Mills** appears in five roles this season: the First Lay Sister in *Suor Angelica*, a Page in *Rigoletto*, Pedro in *Don Quichotte*, Ida in *Die Fledermaus*, and La Fortuna in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. A member of the 1989 Merola Opera Program, she made her Company debut last fall in *Lulu*, and was most recently seen here this summer during the *Ring* cycle as Wellgunde in *Das Rheingold* and *Götterdämmerung*. The Dallas native received her undergraduate degree from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and her Master of Music degree from the Yale School of Music. She continued her operatic training at the Banff School of Fine Arts Program in Alberta, Canada, the Mozarteum Summer Academy in Salzburg, the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, the Central City Opera Studio Program, and the Houston Grand Opera Studio. She made her professional debut as Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro* with Houston Grand Opera, and also appeared in their productions of *Show Boat* and *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. Miss Mills was a 1989 National Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and received the Dr. Letha M. Wayne award at the S.F. Regional Finals of the S.F. Opera Center Auditions.



ALAIN FONDARY

French baritone **Alain Fondary**, who made his United States debut with San Francisco Opera in 1987 as Scarpia in *Tosca*, returns to the Company this fall in the title role of *Rigoletto* and as Renato in *Un Ballo in Maschera*. A specialist in the Italian and French repertoire, he made his professional debut as Tonio in *Pagliacci*. In 1984, he bowed at the Paris Opera in Verdi's *Jerusalem*, subsequently appearing there as Amonasro in *Aida*. During the 1984-85 season, he sang Renato in Toulouse, Jack Rance in *La Fanciulla del West* in Ravenna, Hérode in Massenet's *Hérodiade* in Liège, the title role of *Simon Boccanegra* in Orange, and repeated his acclaimed portrayal of Jack Rance for his Royal Opera, Covent Garden debut that same season. Fondary made his debut at Milan's La Scala in 1985 as Amonasro, a role he repeated there twice in 1986. 1987-88 engagements include *La Fanciulla del West* at Torre del Lago, *Samson et Dalila* in Liège, *Falstaff* at Avignon, *Hérodiade* at Orange, and Rodrigo in *Don Carlo* and the title role of *Nabucco* at the Paris Opera. Performances during the 1988-89 season included *Samson et Dalila* in Bregenz and Chicago, *Tosca* in Dallas, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Aida* and *La Gioconda* at the Metropolitan Opera, *Otello* and *Nabucco* in Marseilles, *Aida* in Strasbourg, *Thaïs* at the Opéra-Comique in Paris, and *The Tales of Hoffmann* and *Nabucco* in Munich. Additional recent highlights include *Rigoletto* in Paris, *Tosca* in Venice and Salzburg, *Il Trovatore* in Toulouse, and *Nabucco* and *Don Carlo* in Orange. Future assignments include *Rigoletto* and *La Fanciulla del West* at the Met, *Samson et Dalila* in Vienna and Paris, *Tosca* in Barcelona, Palermo and Vienna, and *Thaïs* and *Falstaff* in Toulouse.



RICHARD LEECH

American tenor **Richard Leech**, in his debut assignment with San Francisco Opera, portrays the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, a role in which he was recently acclaimed in his debut at the Vienna State Opera. He came to international attention in 1987, when he made his European debut at the Berlin Opera as Raoul in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut last year as Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, the role which also introduced him to the New York City Opera in 1984, the Hollywood Bowl in 1985, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1987. Additional appearances in the U.S. include *Rigoletto*, *Faust*, *La Bohème* and *The Tales of Hoffmann* with Pittsburgh Opera; *Hoffmann* and his first *Roméo et Juliette* with the Cincinnati Opera; *Rigoletto*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Hoffmann* with the Baltimore Opera; *Madama Butterfly* with Washington Opera; and *Faust* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* with the San Diego Opera. Recent engagements in Europe include a return to the Berlin Opera for *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, additional performances of *Les Huguenots*, and a debut at the Florence Opera in *Madama Butterfly*. Highlights of his 1989-90 season include Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust* in Minnesota, *Mefistofele* in Pittsburgh, a debut at the Orange Festival in *Faust*, and his debut at Milan's La Scala in *Madama Butterfly*. Leech is a popular guest artist with many of America's prominent orchestras, and has most recently performed in the Verdi Requiem with the Dallas Symphony on the occasion of the inauguration of the orchestra's new hall, Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the National Symphony, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Atlanta Symphony. Born in California but raised in Binghamton, New York, he was winner of the 1988 Richard Tucker Music Foundation Award and credits his career to a long and continued association with the Tri-Cities Opera of Binghamton.



KEVIN J. LANGAN

In his 11th consecutive season with San Francisco Opera, American bass **Kevin J. Langan** portrays Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*. He has appeared here in over 200 performances of more than 25 different productions beginning with the PBS telecast production of *Samson et Dalila* in 1980, through performances of Timur in *Turandot* (1982), Colline in *La Bohème* (1983, 1986, 1988), Ramfis in *Aida* (1984, 1989), Henry VIII in *Anna Bolena* (1984), Zoroastro in Handel's *Orlando* (1985), Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* (1987), and Astolfo in *Orlando Furioso* (1989). His performances this past season include his Metropolitan Opera debut as Colline in *La Bohème*, a debut with the Cincinnati May Festival as Rocco in *Fidelio*, Méphistophélès in *Faust* at Opera Colorado, the King of Scotland in Handel's *Ariodante* with the Opera Company of Philadelphia, and Giove in Santa Fe Opera's new production of Cavalli's *La Calisto*. Additional highlights of recent seasons include the Grand Inquisitor in *Don Carlos* in Geneva; Sarastro, and his first King Philip II in *Don Carlos* with the Canadian Opera Company; a debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago in *Falstaff*; Colline in *La Bohème* and Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at San Diego Opera; and Leporello in *Don Giovanni* with Greater Miami Opera. Langan's orchestral appearances have included Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* with the Chicago Symphony, Mahler's *Das Klagende Lied* with the Pittsburgh Symphony, and 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. Upcoming engagements include Sparafucile at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Sarastro with Washington Opera and Houston Grand Opera, Osmin in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and Ashby in *La Fanciulla del West* at Santa Fe Opera.

Continued on page 46



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Libretto by FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE, after the play *Le Roi s'amuse* by VICTOR HUGO

Rigoletto

(in Italian)

Conductor

John Fiore
Ian Robertson (Dec. 1, 7)

Production

Jean-Pierre Ponnelle

Stage Director

Grischa Asagaroff

Set Designer

Jean-Pierre Ponnelle

Costume Designer

Martin Schlumpf

Lighting Designer

Thomas J. Munn

Chorus Director

Ian Robertson

Musical Preparation

Christopher Larkin
Kathryn Cathcart
Susanna Lemberskaya
Susan Miller Hult
Ian Robertson

Prompter

Jonathan Khuner

Assistant Stage Director

Sandra Bernhard*

Stage Manager

Jamie Call

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First performance:
Venice, March 11, 1851

First San Francisco Opera performance:
October 8, 1923

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 AT 8:00
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20 AT 8:00
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25 AT 8:00
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30 AT 2:00
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5 AT 8:00
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10 AT 7:30
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12 AT 7:30
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1 AT 1:00
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7 AT 7:30

CAST

(in order of appearance)

	Sept. 15, 20, 25, 30; Oct. 5, 10, 12	Dec. 1, 7
<i>Rigoletto</i>	Alain Fondary	Juan Pons
<i>Gilda</i>	Ruth Ann Swenson	Hei-Kyung Hong*
<i>The Duke of Mantua</i>	Richard Leech*	Hong-Shen Li
<i>Borsa</i>	Craig Estep	Gary Rideout
<i>Countess Ceprano</i>	Maria Fortuna	Maria Fortuna
<i>Marullo</i>	LeRoy Villanueva	LeRoy Villanueva
<i>Count Ceprano</i>	Victor Ledbetter	Victor Ledbetter
<i>Monterone</i>	Philip Skinner	Philip Skinner
<i>Sparafucile</i>	Kevin J. Langan	Mark S. Doss*
<i>Maddalena</i>	Claire Powell**	Catherine Keen
<i>Giovanna</i>	Donna Petersen	Donna Petersen
<i>A page</i>	Mary Mills	Mary Mills
<i>An usher</i>	Micah Graber*	Micah Graber

Courtiers, nobles, soldiers

**United States opera debut
*San Francisco Opera debut

TIME AND PLACE: 16th century; Mantua and vicinity

ACT I Scene 1: The Duke's palace
Scene 2: A street
Scene 3: Rigoletto's house

INTERMISSION

ACT II The Duke's bedchamber

INTERMISSION

ACT III Sparafucile's inn

Supertitles by Jerry Sherk, 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 hours.

Rigoletto/Synopsis

During the prelude, Rigoletto kneels over the dead body of his daughter, Gilda. As the action begins, the events leading to her death flash through his mind as in a terrible nightmare.

ACT I

Scene 1—The Duke of Mantua surveys his court to choose a woman with whom to pass the night and selects the Countess Ceprano. She is flattered but nervous; her husband is present. This leads to an impasse. Marullo enters with news for the courtiers that Rigoletto, the jester, has a mistress in town. The Duke then discusses his dilemma with Rigoletto, who suggests the following alternatives for Ceprano: prison, exile or beheading. Ceprano and the courtiers are outraged and swear vengeance on Rigoletto. Monterone, an old nobleman, comes to denounce the Duke and his dissolute court. With the Duke's consent, Rigoletto mocks the old man and dishonors his daughter before his very eyes. Monterone curses both Rigoletto and the Duke for laughing at a father's grief. Rigoletto suddenly fears for the safety of his own daughter, whom he has kept carefully hidden from the court.

Scene 2—Later that evening, Rigoletto is accosted by the hired assassin, Sparafucile, who offers his services. Rigoletto spurns his offer and then reflects on their encounter. He sees Sparafucile as his alter ego: one kills with a sword, the other with words. Monterone's curse continues to haunt him.

Scene 3—Rigoletto returns home and greets his daughter, Gilda, declaring that she means the world to him. She reciprocates his feelings but questions why he has kept her concealed at home. He fears the courtiers and warns the nurse to guard Gilda carefully. Hearing a noise in the street, he goes out to investigate. The Duke, disguised as a student, enters and is astonished to discover that the girl he had seen in church is Rigoletto's daughter. He and Gilda declare their love. Then, fearing Rigoletto's return, he leaves. Left alone, Gilda rhapsodizes on the student's name, Gualtier Maldè, while outside the courtiers gather to kidnap the woman they believe

to be Rigoletto's mistress. To exact their revenge on the jester, they will present the girl to the Duke. Rigoletto returns to find the courtiers near his house, but they fool him into thinking they have come to abduct the Countess Ceprano, who lives next door. Too late, Rigoletto discovers the trick.

ACT II

Following the abduction, the courtiers have locked Gilda in a secluded room in the Duke's palace. The Duke, unaware of what has occurred, laments the fact that when he returned to Gilda's house he found it deserted. The courtiers describe how they stole Rigoletto's mistress for the Duke, and they bring her to him. When Rigoletto enters, a remark from the page alerts him to Gilda's whereabouts. He rages at his tormentors, but is soon reduced to begging them for pity. When Rigoletto discovers Gilda in the Duke's bed, the courtiers leave her alone with her father. She explains how she met the Duke, whom she had taken to be a student, at church. Rigoletto comforts her. Monterone, on the way to his beheading, laments that no one has yet struck down his daughter's seducer. Rigoletto promises to do so. Gilda begs mercy for the Duke.

ACT III

Rigoletto has brought Gilda to Sparafucile's inn to show her the real nature of the man she loves. The Duke, incognito, flirts with Sparafucile's sister, Maddalena, using the same words he spoke earlier to Gilda. She laments his faithlessness, but still continues to love him. Rigoletto sends her home and hires Sparafucile to kill the Duke. Maddalena urges her brother to spare him, and he agrees, provided another victim can be found as a substitute so that he can keep his pact with Rigoletto. Gilda, unable to follow her father's orders, returns and, overhearing the conversation, presents herself as the victim. Rigoletto returns to collect his victim and is given a body. Hearing the Duke's voice in the distance, he quickly uncovers the wraps and finds the dying Gilda. Monterone's curse has been fulfilled.



Philip Skinner as Monterone, Richard Leech as the Duke of Mantua, and Alain Fondary as Rigoletto, with a group of men of the San Francisco Opera Chorus.

Rigoletto

Photos taken in rehearsal
by Marty Sohl



Alain Fondary



Richard Leech



Maria Fortuna, Richard Leech



Alain Fondary

Craig Estep, Richard Leech



LeRoy Villanueva (right) and men of the San Francisco Opera Chorus, including Donald Matthews (left)





Claire Powell



Ruth Ann Swenson



Alain Fondary, Ruth Ann Swenson



Donna Petersen



Kevin J. Langan



Alain Fondary, Ruth Ann Swenson





Ruth Ann Swenson



Richard Leech, Ruth Ann Swenson



Ruth Ann Swenson

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PHILIP SKINNER

Continued from page 37

Langan, a member of the Merola Opera Program in 1979 and 1980, made his 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 Margaret Harshaw, and is the recipient of numerous grants and awards.

Bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** sings Monterone in *Rigoletto*, Count Horn (Samuele) in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and Varsonofiev in *Khovanshchina*. He made his San Francisco Opera debut as Quinault in the 1985 production of *Adriana Lecouvreur*, and has since appeared here in over 15 different operas in such roles as Ferrando in *Il Trovatore*, Méphistophélès in the student/family performances of *Faust*, Colline in the family performance of *La Bohème*, Parsi Rustomji in *Satyagraha* and, last fall, Montano in *Otello*, the Bonze in *Madama Butterfly*, and the One-Armed Man in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. He participated in the 1985 Merola Opera Program and went on to tour with Western Opera Theater in the title role of *Don Giovanni*. He was appointed an Adler Fellow in 1986, and appeared in the Opera Center's Showcase performances of Hindemith's *There and Back* and *The Long Christmas Dinner*, and in 1987 he portrayed the Colonel in the Showcase production of *Le Plumet du Colonel*. A graduate of Northwestern University, Skinner received his master's degree from Indiana University, where he performed in several productions. He has sung with Kentucky Opera, Edmonton Opera, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Columbus Symphony, San Jose Symphony, Sacramento Symphony, Savan-



VICTOR LEDBETTER

nah Symphony and at the Spoleto and San Antonio festivals. In 1988 he sang Don Basilio in *The Barber of Seville* with the New York City Opera National Company, Ferrando in *Il Trovatore* with Kentucky and Nashville operas, and appeared with the Atlanta Opera. Last year, he made his Carnegie Hall debut in the Verdi Requiem and his Hollywood Bowl debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Additional debuts include the Canadian Opera Company, Arkansas Opera Theater, and the San Francisco Symphony. Recent engagements include a Schwabacher Debut Recital, his Honolulu Symphony debut in Handel's *Messiah*, the four villains in *The Tales of Hoffmann* with Baton Rouge Opera, and a debut with Seattle Opera in *War and Peace*.

Baritone **Victor Ledbetter** sings five roles for the Company this fall: the Second Workman in *Wozzeck*, Count Ceprano in *Rigoletto*, a Servant in *Capriccio*, *Christian (Silvano)* in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, and Kuzka in *Khovanshchina*. A 1988-89 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, he made his Company debut in the 1987 season as Baron Douphol in the family performances of *La Traviata*, and as Paris in *Roméo et Juliette*. He returned the following year as an Esquire in *Parsifal* and as Marcello in the student/family performances of *La Bohème*, and appeared here last fall as Ford in the Family Performance of *Falstaff*, a Trojan Man in *Idomeneo*, and the One-Eyed Man in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. For the Opera Center's 1988 Showcase series, he sang Count Almaviva in the West Coast premiere of Hiram Titus's *Rosina*, and was seen here as Mr. Kaltenbach in Glass' *Satyagraha*. A participant in the 1986 Merola Opera Program,



LEROY VILLANUEVA

he sang Marcello at Villa Montalvo, repeating the role on Western Opera Theater's 1986-87 tour which included performances in China. In April of 1988, Ledbetter returned to Shanghai as Scarpia in China's first *Tosca*, and for a joint concert with the Shanghai Opera and Conservatory. He was a Schwabacher Debut recitalist last year, and has performed with the Vancouver Opera in *The Cunning Little Vixen* and the San Diego Opera in *Don Pasquale*. Ledbetter's recent engagements include Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* for the Dublin Grand Opera, and Valentin in *Faust* for the Cincinnati Opera. Future assignments include Falke in *Die Fledermaus* for San Diego Opera, and Alfio in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the Washington Opera.

A 1989-90 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, baritone **LeRoy Villanueva** appears this fall as Marullo in *Rigoletto*, a Servant in *Capriccio*, Dr. Falke in the family performance of *Die Fledermaus*, and Streshnev in *Khovanshchina*. He made his Company debut last year as Prince Arjuna in Glass' *Satyagraha*, sang Polidarte in the Opera Center's production of Handel's *Giustino*, and appeared in four roles during the 1989 fall season. He was a member of the Merola Opera Program in 1988, performing Taddeo in *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, and he won the Schwabacher Memorial First Prize Award at the Program's Grand Finals. He sang Sharpless in Western Opera Theater's 1988-89 tour of *Madama Butterfly*, and completed a trip to Japan with the Opera Center Singers. Earlier this year he traveled with the Opera Center Singers to China where he appeared as Dr. Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* at the Shanghai Music Festival. In 1987 he took



CRAIG ESTEP

part in Italy's Festa Musicale Stiana, where he performed in Antonio Sacchini's *Amor Soldato*, and in the world premiere of Delia Robotti's *La Pentola*. Additional credits include a joint performance with Ned Rorem in the composer's *War Scenes*, a solo role in the West Coast premiere of Harbison's *Flight into Egypt* at the Ojai Festival, and appearances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and the S.F. Symphony Pops Series. He was a Schwabacher Debut Recitalist this year, and most recently performed Director Hummel in the Opera Center's production of Reimann's *The Ghost Sonata*. A native of Southern California, Villanueva is a national winner of the Metropolitan Opera Auditions, first place winner of the National Opera Association Auditions, and the recipient of a 1988 Robert M. Jacobson Study Grant, funded by the Astral Foundation, and bestowed by the Richard Tucker Music Foundation. He is scheduled to make his debut next year at Carnegie Recital Hall.

A 1990 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, tenor **Craig Estep** appears as Borsa in *Rigoletto*, the Italian Tenor in *Capriccio*, Alfred in the family performance of *Die Fledermaus*, and Anfimono in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. He made his Company debut last fall as Dr. Caius in the family performance of *Falstaff*, and also appeared in *Madama Butterfly* and *Lohengrin*. A 1987 and 1988 Merola Opera Program participant, Estep sang in *Madame Butterfly* on Western Opera Theater's national tour and in Japan with the Center's Pacific Rim Exchange Program. He has also toured in Western Opera Theater's production of *Don Pasquale*. The tenor traveled to Shanghai in 1988 to sing Spoletta in the first production of *Tosca* ever seen in China. Last year, he appeared in the Opera Center's Showcase production of



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MICAH GRABER

Handel's *Giustino*, and was a soloist in the San Francisco Symphony Pops Series. Recent engagements include his Canadian debut with the Calgary Opera as Tonio in *La Fille du Régiment*, Hal in the world premiere of Gordon Getty's *Plump Jack* with Marin Opera, and Arkenholz in the Opera Center's Showcase production of Reimann's *The Ghost Sonata*. The North Carolina native has a master's degree in vocal performance and has sung with the North Carolina Opera, Connecticut Grand Opera and the Charleston Opera.

Bass **Micah Graber** sings four roles in his first appearance with the Company: an Usher in *Rigoletto*, a Member of the Quartet in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, a Servant in *Capriccio*, and the Second Strelets in *Khovanshchina*. A 1990 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, he was a 1989 Merola Opera Program participant and portrayed Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* and Zuniga in *Carmen*, the latter a role he repeated during the 1989-90 Western Opera Theater national tour. He recently appeared as Falstaff in the Merola Opera Program's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and was a soloist in the San Francisco Symphony Pops Series under the baton of Victor Borge. Graber holds a bachelor's degree in vocal performance/opera from Bowling Green State University, where he performed nine operatic roles and was named Outstanding Vocalist in 1988. A former apprentice with Des Moines Metro Opera in 1986 and Santa Fe Opera in 1987, he has appeared with the Ohio Light Opera as Old Adam in *Ruddigore*, Massakroff in *The Chocolate Soldier*, and Matteo in *Fra Diavolo*, and recently made his debut with Toledo Opera in *The Magic Flute* and *Madame Butterfly*. Graber will make his debut with Skylight Opera next year as Osmin in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.



JOHN FIORE

In his fifth consecutive season with San Francisco Opera, **John Fiore** is on the podium for *Rigoletto*. He was a member of the Company's music staff from 1983 to 1987, and made his War Memorial conducting debut in 1986 with the student matinee performances of *Faust*. Subsequent engagements here have been the family performances of *La Traviata* (1987), as well as the main cast performances of *La Bohème* (1988), and *Madama Butterfly* last fall. Born in New York, the musician was raised in Seattle, where at the age of 14 he had the opportunity of becoming a coach and rehearsal pianist for Seattle Opera's annual *Ring* cycle, an engagement that continued for six years. While studying at the Eastman School of Music, he joined the music staff of the Santa Fe Opera, where he specialized in the music of Richard Strauss between 1981 and 1984. After hearing Fiore in Santa Fe, Edo de Waart brought him to San Francisco to assist him on the *Ring* (1983-85). He was an assistant conductor at the Lyric Opera of Chicago (Fall 1983) and the Metropolitan Opera (Spring 1984), where he continues to work. He has worked with a variety of conductors such as Leonard Bernstein, James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Andrew Davis, James Conlon and Marek Janowski, and from 1986 to 1988 was assistant to Daniel Barenboim at the Bayreuth Festival. Engagements from recent seasons have included the student matinee performances of *Così fan tutte* and the evening performances of *La Traviata* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago; his Chicago Symphony Orchestra debut in a Young Conductors concert with Maestro Bernstein; his conducting debut at Santa Fe Opera with *La Traviata*; *Die Fledermaus* with Sarasota Opera; a concert with the Maggio Musicale of Florence featuring the music of Richard Strauss; and *Un Ballo in Maschera* for the Canadian Opera Company. Recent conducting assignments



GRISCHA ASAGAROFF

include his Cologne Opera debut with *Manon Lescaut*, a return to the Chicago Lyric Opera for *Die Fledermaus*, Handel's *Messiah* with the Seattle Symphony, a special opera evening with Mirella Freni, Peter Dvorský and the Boston Symphony, and concerts with the Minnesota Orchestra and the Denver Symphony. Upcoming engagements include *Rigoletto* in Chicago, *Turandot* in Sydney, Australia, *La Traviata* in Santa Fe, and concerts with the Minnesota Orchestra, Jerusalem Symphony, Tokyo Philharmonic, and Osaka Philharmonic.

Returning for his eighth season with the San Francisco Opera, German director **Grischa Asagaroff** directs Verdi's *Rigoletto*, a production he staged here in 1981. While studying theater science, music and art history at the University of Munich, he served as stage manager and second assistant at the Bavarian State Opera, where he worked on over 70 different operas from all periods with such directors as Rudolf Hartmann, Günther Rennert, Otto Schenk, August Everding and Jean-Pierre Ponnelle. From 1971 to 1979 he was first assistant and director for the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf. His first assignment with the San Francisco Opera was assisting Ponnelle on the 1977 production of *Idomeneo* and he served director Nikolaus Lehnhoff in a similar capacity for *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and for *Salome* during the 1982 Fall Season. Other assignments for the Company include the staging of *Manon Lescaut* (1983, 1988), and directing Ponnelle's productions of *La Cenerentola* (1982), and *Otello* (1983, 1989), as well as *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1989). From 1979 to 1986 he was principal stage director at the Zurich Opera as well as the director of the opera studio, and is currently principal stage director and artistic administrator at the Vienna State Opera. Asagaroff's own productions include *Don Pasquale* in London, *La Cenerentola* in

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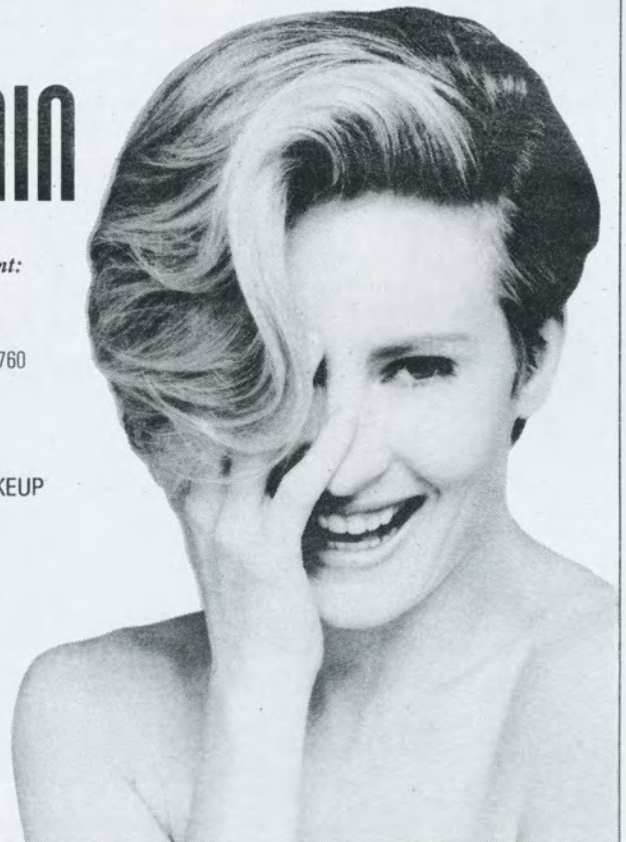
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JEAN-PIERRE PONNELLE

One of the world's most noted and discussed directors and designers, the late **Jean-Pierre Ponnelle** conceived the productions of *Pagliacci* (1976, 1980, 1986) and *Rigoletto* (1973, 1981, 1984), and designed the sets and costumes for *Pagliacci* and the sets for *Rigoletto*. He studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, his native city, and in 1952 created the scenery for the world premiere of *Boulevard Solitude*, Hans Werner Henze's first opera. During the 1950s, he designed for the principal German theaters, both opera and drama, and made his design debut at the Vienna State Opera, the Rome Opera, the Opéra-Comique in Paris and San Francisco where his American debut was marked by productions of Orff's *Carmina Burana* and *The Wise Maiden* in 1958. He returned to San Francisco in 1959 for the American premiere of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. The first American project both designed and directed by Ponnelle was San Francisco Opera's *La Cenerentola*, seen here for the first time in 1969 and revived in 1974 and '82. Other Ponnelle San Francisco productions include *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Così fan tutte*, *Lear*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Otello*, *Falstaff*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *Tosca*, *Turandot*, *La Bohème*, *Il Prigioniero*, *Idomeneo* and *Carmen*. For the Zurich Opera, he mounted a highly acclaimed Monteverdi cycle and also staged a

Mozart cycle: *Mitridate*, *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. Other successes in past years include Wagner's *Liebesverbot* (Munich), *Così fan tutte*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* (Paris), *Parsifal* (Cologne), *Fidelio* (Berlin), *Aida* (Covent Garden), *La Clemenza di Tito* (Metropolitan Opera), *Tristan und Isolde* (Bayreuth), *Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci* (Vienna), and *Lulu* (1985 Munich Opera Festival). Ponnelle's production of the world premiere of Reimann's *The Trojan Women* at Munich in July of 1986 received wide critical and popular acclaim. Television viewers have been privileged to see many of his productions including *Idomeneo* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* from the Met, *The Magic Flute* from the Salzburg Festival, as well as filmed versions of *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmina Burana*, *Rigoletto*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Cenerentola*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *La Clemenza di Tito*, and the three extant Monteverdi operas.



THOMAS J. MUNN

Lighting Director and Design Consultant for San Francisco Opera, **Thomas J. Munn** created the lighting for *Suor Angelica/Pagliacci*, *Rigoletto*, *Capriccio*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Khovanshchina*, and *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. In his 15th season with the Company, he has lighted over 130 productions for here and most recently created the lighting and special effects for this summer's Ring cycle. He also 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 films. 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 credits 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*. His most notable achievement as a lighting consultant is the new Muziektheater in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

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Lauritz Melchior



Beniamino Gigli

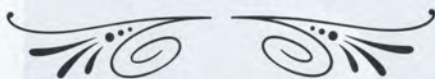


Robert Weede



Trio of Memories

By JOHN ARDOIN



The year 1873 has been described as "Annus mirabilis," and with good reason: some three dozen important opera singers were born during it including Enrico Caruso and Feodor Chaliapin. Though 1890 did not produce such a bumper crop of artists, it nonetheless gave the world a pair of operatic giants—Beniamino Gigli and Lauritz Melchior. Miraculously, they were born on the same day—March 20—at opposite ends of Europe.

This season, opera companies worldwide are celebrating the 100th birthday of this pair of magnificent and quite different tenors. Together with their centennials, the San Francisco Opera is remembering as well the 50th anniversary of the debut with the Company of the highly-regarded American baritone Robert Weede.

When, for whatever reason, you bracket together such diverse singers as Gigli, Melchior and Weede, there is a perverse temptation to start searching for a thread that might have weaved its way through their careers. San Francisco Opera certainly provides a common ground, for all three figured prominently in the Company's annals, as they did in those of the Metropolitan Opera.

But once such artistic affiliations are exhausted, the search comes to a halt. And yet, if you think of Gigli and Weede

as extremes in terms of their repertory, then Melchior becomes the missing link that brings the three together. He shared with Gigli the roles of Turiddu and Radames, and with Weede those of Count di Luna and Germont père. Having begun his career in Denmark as a baritone, he is probably the only artist to have sung both the roles of Silvio and Canio in *Pagliacci*.

Melchior was a giant exception in every way—his voice, his size, his appetite for food and living, his staying power, his repertory. When he died, just two days short of his 83rd birthday in 1973, it was like the falling of a mighty sequoia. It has been said that no artist is indispensable. And it is true that after Gigli we had Giuseppe di Stefano and Luciano Pavarotti, and after Weede there was Sherrill Milnes.

But who was there after Melchior? Ask any opera fan who was the foremost Wagnerian soprano of the century and names start flying: Frida Leider, Kirsten Flagstad, Helen Traubel, Martha Mödl, Astrid Varnay, Birgit Nilsson. Those with longer memories might add Lillian Nordica and Johanna Gadski.

But ask the same question in terms of tenors and one name resounds back—Lauritz Melchior. Following Melchior's retirement, the operatic world has lacked a true Siegfried, as noble a Lohengrin and as tormented a Tannhäuser.

What caused so phenomenal a comet as

Melchior to soar into the sky and dazzle three generations with its brilliance? The question is answered in part by the shape his career took. As I have pointed out, he began as a baritone, and after four years of this repertory he took off a year to retool his voice for sterner musical metal. This decision reinforces the theory that the finest Wagnerian tenors (as was the case with Jean de Reszke before him and Ramon Vinay after him, both of whom began as baritones) are basically of a lower, darker voice with a secure extension up to a good top B flat.

Melchior re-emerged as a tenor in 1918, making his debut as Tannhäuser (also the role of his San Francisco debut on November 26, 1934). By the mid-1920s, he had firmly established his preeminence in the dramatic tenor repertory. Though America knew him only in Wagner, with the exception of an Otello in San Francisco during his debut season, his repertory in Europe was much broader, and included operas by Meyerbeer and Saint-Saëns.

It is worth recounting the statistics of his career at this point, for they are as illuminating as they are staggering. He sang 106 Lohengrins, 81 Parsifals, 144 Tannhäusers, 223 Tristans, 183 Siegmunds, 128 young Siegfrieds and 107 old Siegfrieds. The total performances for his Wagner appearances alone (and he sang all of these parts but Parsifal in San Francisco) come to nearly 1,000. Then there were his appearances as Radames, Otello, Canio, John of Leyden, Florestan, Samson, Turiddu, as well as over 2,000

John Ardoin is music critic of the Dallas Morning News and author of Callas at Juilliard—The Master Classes (Alfred A. Knopf, New York) and the soon-to-be published Furtwängler. (Thames and Hudson).

Lauritz
Melchior

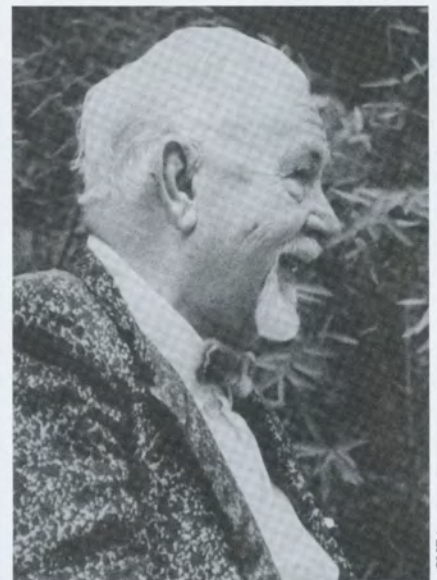


MORTON



MORTON

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SHEA

(Clockwise from top left) Lauritz Melchior as Florestan in *Fidelio* in 1939.

During a break between the acts of *Otello* (1934), Melchior pauses for a group portrait with members of the "San Francisco Boy Choir."

In 1972, a year before his death, Melchior led the San Francisco Opera Orchestra in Stern Grove during the Company's fiftieth anniversary celebrations. The photo was taken just before he mounted the podium.

Julius Huehn as Kurwenal and Lauritz Melchior as Tristan in the Company's 1939 presentation of *Tristan und Isolde*.

Melchior as Tristan at the San Francisco Opera in 1936.

(Center) Late in life, "the great Dane" poses for a portrait in full regalia.



MORTON

concerts, 300 recordings, five films and innumerable radio and television appearances.

He celebrated his 70th birthday by performing the first act of *Die Walküre* in concert in Copenhagen with that big, burnished sound virtually intact. You don't sing his kind of repertory that much and for that long and remain as healthy vocally as did Melchior without a firm foundation and a remarkable self-awareness.

To be honest, his acting was never a match for the splendor of his singing. But while he was only an honest stage figure, he was usually an illuminating musician. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he sang with a suavity and bel canto beauty that redefined one's idea of a *Heldentenor*.

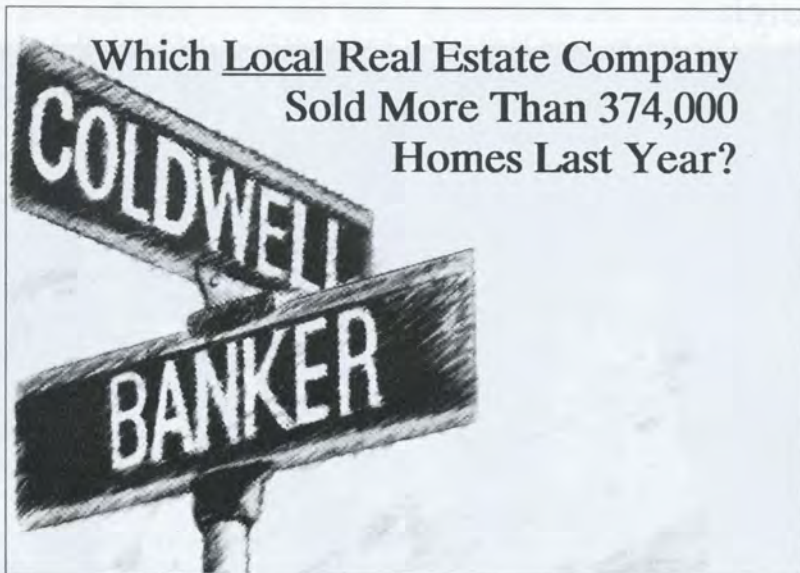
Though in later years there were times when he tended to go through his roles almost by rote, the splendor of that sound never left him. But his later indifference to musical details and his dislike of rehearsing led to a much publicized break with the Metropolitan Opera at the outset of the Bing era. But by then the legend, like Siegfried's sword, had been forged, and the memory of the tensile strength of his singing and the actuality of its glint on records still set standards today.

I can never think of Melchior the singer without recalling with awe Melchior the man. There was a disarming, childlike sincerity about him. He had a great love of fun and people, and an equal gusto for eating, hunting and life in general. He always gave fully and readily of himself whatever the role he was playing onstage or off.

No singer was more honored than this great Dane. He loved to wear all his decorations on formal occasions. It was a collection from crowned heads throughout the world that was said to have been the despair of Hermann Göring, who put great stock in such things. But though the world gave him a lot, he gave back even more. We shall never see his like again.

In contrast, Gigli, with his angelic, honey-coated voice, was a tenor first, last and always, after a brief stint as a boy soprano. He looked like the standard joke of a tenor as well—short, plump and entirely unromantic. His operatic appearances were concerts in costume, filled with semaphoric gestures (in *La Gioconda's* "Cielo e mar" his hands went up on "cielo" and down on "mar"). But like Melchior, he, too, set standards that still persist. And few tenors have matched the ardor and elegance of his singing, and the savvy use he made of his resources.

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Beniamino
Gigli



(Far left) Beniamino Gigli in the title role of Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* posing for the photographer and (top) later, in action, during the opera's "Un dì all'azzurro spazio."

(Above) In Flotow's *Martha*, Beniamino Gigli, as Lionel, talks to Salvatore Baccaloni (Sir Tristan). A perturbed Mafalda Favero (Lady Harriet) stands by.

(Left) Gigli as Don Alvaro in *La Forza del Destino*.

ALL PHOTOS TAKEN DURING SAN FRANCISCO OPERA'S 1938 SEASON BY MORTON STUDIOS.

son of a poor cobbler in Rome, he was called into military service before he could begin seriously training his voice. But an officer, so impressed by the young Gigli's singing, arranged for him to take vocal lessons while still in uniform. A turning point came in 1914 when he entered and won a voice competition in Parma. He was contestant No. 75, and the report of the jury still exists:

"Age: 24. Appearance: handsome. Intensity of voice: strong, a tenor, *lirico-spinto*. Timbre: sympathetic, warm. Intonation: optimum. Interpretation: warm, expressive, very effective." His grade was nine points out of a possible 10, and at the bottom was penned this comment: "At last we have found *The Tenor!*" That verdict was both perceptive and prophetic.

He became one of the few truly lyric tenors who was equally at home in such *spinto* roles as Radames, Canio and Andrea Chénier. He also made films, hundreds of records (including seven complete operas now all available on CD) and toured extensively in concert. He beat Melchior to the Met by six years, but there was a fabled time, seven seasons to be exact, when you could hear both men at the old house on 39th and Broadway, sometimes on successive evenings.

Gigli made his operatic debut in 1914 in *La Gioconda*, and was still performing with grace and beauty forty years later. He came to the Met in 1919, when Caruso reigned as king of that theater, and San Francisco first heard him on September 27, 1923, as Andrea Chénier, during the company's inaugural season. Between his debut and the season of 1938, San Francisco got the best of Gigli—Faust (in Boito's *Mefistofele*), Romeo, the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Rodolfo, Mario Cavaradossi, Des Grieux in the Massenet setting of *Manon*, Alfredo, Wilhelm Meister, Edgardo, Lionel in *Martha* and Don Alvaro.

Though he was hailed as Caruso's successor, no two tenors could have been more unlike in sound and approach. The Caruso analogy was not a comparison Gigli welcomed. "That name was beginning to haunt me," he once wrote. "I did not want to live in its shadow." And he didn't; Gigli went his own way, resisting the temptation to ape his legendary countryman.

The eminent Italian vocal authority, Rodolfo Celletti, has commented that "The desire to imitate Caruso caused irreparable damage to other tenors of the day . . . Young Gigli was more clever; he limited himself to imitating Caruso's

expressive sob, but did not modify his method of singing in the least." In the process he became an adornment at the Met until he quarreled with its general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza in 1932 over a proposed cut in salary necessitated by the tightness of money after the crash of the New York stock market.

When Gigli left the Met, he was offered a unique contract by the Italian government. He was to sing 80 performances a year in any of Italy's theaters he chose. As critic David Hamilton has noted, "That government was, of course, the Fascists, and Gigli seems to have become its unashamed, if unofficial troubadour. His comment on Toscanini, written without evident embarrassment in the 1950s, gives one pause: 'His political sympathies were alien to me, and I could never understand the way in which he allowed them to regulate his life. To me, Italy was Italy, no matter what the regime.'" It was a case of "My country, right or wrong." After the war Gigli was sharply criticized for his collaboration, which included films made in wartime Nazi Germany. But he did not pay nearly as dear a price as Germaine Lubin, for example, in France. Her political sympathies destroyed her career.

Gigli was eventually forgiven his

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transgressions. I would imagine the thought of an Italy without a Gigli was inconceivable. At the time of his death in Rome in 1957, his family sent a memorial card to his friends that contained a line from *Andrea Chénier*: "Con la mia voce ho cantato la patria" ("With my voice I sang my country"). No singer ever had a more fitting epitaph, for Gigli's voice had been the very soul of Italy in good times and in bad.

Robert Weede never achieved the sort of indelible place in opera earned by Melchior and Gigli, but rather was highly valued as that sort of gifted, dependable artist who forms the backbone of any operatic company. Ironically, his greatest fame came not as Rigoletto, Amonasro, Figaro, di Luna, Scarpia or the Toreador in *Carmen*, but as the Broadway star of Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*. He appeared in this show 884 times, and later starred in the musical *Milk and Honey*, which he performed nearly as many times.

I said at the outset that parallels between Melchior, Gigli and Weede were hard to come by, but certainly one exists in the remarkable vocal longevity of the three men. Weede's first role at the Met was Tonio in *Pagliacci* in 1937. Thirty years later he was still performing the same part with reportedly the same vigor and ease.

His start in music was certainly more unusual and less predictable than that of Melchior and Gigli. Weede began in vaudeville houses and was discovered by the colorful impresario Roxy Rothafel. Roxy engaged him as a soloist at New York's Radio City Theater, and Weede spent five years there, often teamed with another aspiring opera singer, Jan Peerce.

Though he became a prominent part of seasons in all of America's leading opera houses, it was San Francisco that became in effect his operatic home. The association began with his debut on October 28, 1940 as Rigoletto, and continued through 1964 and performances as Tonio in *Pagliacci*. In between came leading baritone roles in *Aida*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Carmen*, *L'Amore dei Tre Re*, *La Fanciulla del West*, *Il Trovatore*, *Tosca*, *Andrea Chénier*, *Il Tabarro*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *La Forza del Destino*, *Faust* and *La Traviata*.

Weede was also a popular favorite on American radio, appearing regularly on the *Celanese Hour*, the *Standard Hour* and the *Mutual Opera Concert*. For NBC he created the role of Bob in the world premiere of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*, the first opera written especially for radio. He made few commercial recordings in comparison with Melchior and Gigli, and only

San Francisco Opera



Robert
Weede

(Left) Robert Weede's debut with the San Francisco Opera took place in 1940, fifty years ago, in the title role of Rigoletto. He is shown in a photo taken from the wings during the performance, with Lily Pons, who portrayed Gilda.

(Below, left) Robert Weede during a Merola Opera Program master class in the summer of 1963.

(Below, right) The Macbeth couple: Robert Weede in the title role with Inge Borkh as Lady Macbeth. San Francisco Opera, 1955.

(Bottom) Robert Weede as Tonio in Pagliacci in 1959, and as the Elder Germont in La Traviata in 1960.

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JEANETTE

excerpts from the time spent on Broadway are currently available.

But if you come across any of his out-of-print operatic discs you will be struck by the security and strength of his singing. His was a handsome, free-ranging voice used with extraordinary intelligence, passion and superior sense of how

to give texture to a musical line through the vivid use of words. His diction in Italian and French operas remains idiomatic and exemplary.

Born in Maryland, Weede became a Californian by choice and had an eight-acre home in Clayton Valley. He taught voice at the American Conservatory

Theater, and through the years his students included John Alexander, Earl Wrightson and Richard Torigi. At his demise in 1972 at the age of 69, his family requested that he be remembered with contributions to the Merola Memorial Fund. Even in death, his closeness with the San Francisco Opera continued. ■



Söderström and Friends

By STEPHANIE SALTER

In a charmless and barn-like rehearsal room of the San Francisco Opera House, Elisabeth Söderström interrupts her own master class. She has remembered another story.

"I was in the elevator of a 26-story skyscraper in Chicago once, standing like this," she says, her chin tilted confidently upward, elbows bent slightly at the waist and hands folded together. "At the 10th floor a gentleman looked at me."

Suddenly, Söderström becomes the gentleman, looking at the lady in the elevator. In a deep voice "he" asks her, "You're a singer, aren't you?"

Instantly, Söderström reappears, looking at the gentleman, fluffing her hair flirtatiously and fairly trilling, "Why, yes, I am. You recognize me?"

"No," the gentleman dismisses her with a shrug. "I just knew by the way you hold your hands."

The five young Adler Fellows of the S.F. Opera Center, who are taking her master class, laugh along with Söderström as she walks back toward her chair. But, just before she sits, she turns back to them, flips the tail of her knitted poncho triumphantly and adds:

"By the 20th floor the gentleman *knew* my name."

After more than four decades on the operatic stage, two irrefutable things can be said of Elisabeth Söderström: She possesses a treasure trove of knowledge about music and theater and she can communicate all that she knows as well

as any singer—or actress—who ever walked into the glow of the footlights.

"I mean, I've been on stage for 43 years," said the woman who has sung Sophie, Octavian and the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*. "I've tried everything!"

As the students in her master classes at the San Francisco Opera Center discovered earlier this year, "Try everything," is the first of Söderström's Ten Commandments.

The other nine are, "See First Commandment."

While this adventurous spirit has propelled her through an enviably wide-ranging and diverse career, allowing her to build a repertoire of more than 60 roles, it also has made Söderström a natural to teach the tools of her trade.

That is, "Now that I've decided to give out my secrets," she said. "It took me a very long time to decide to give out my secrets."

Stephanie Salter is a San Francisco Examiner opinion columnist, opera lover and sometime supernumerary.

This revelation, like so many from the Swedish soprano, was accompanied by a good-natured wink. Candid, clever and perceptive, Söderström is frequently the target of her own deprecating humor. Speaking of the six young Opera Center singers with whom she gave a Herbst Theater recital this past spring, she confessed, "I've said to myself that it is almost suicide to stand up next to these beautiful young voices and fresh faces. But there is such a give and take in doing this and I think it is interesting for the audience to compare."

Giving the audience something to do besides enjoy her lovely voice has been a top priority for Elisabeth Söderström since she made her operatic debut in 1947. Known throughout the world of opera as a consummate singing actress, Söderström readily admits, "My first love was acting. I've never been a perfect singer because I've always been too emotional—I always find it so difficult when I've died on-stage to get up for the curtain call—but I think the idea of perfect singing is one of the problems with young singers: They are afraid to sing one ugly note."

Or, as she once explained to a Los Angeles critic:

"There should be an intensity when people listen to music, since listening is valuable only when it is active. For me, it is more important to communicate than to sing a pretty note."

Not that Mistress Söderström would



(Opposite) Elisabeth Söderström faces Patricia Racette and Catherine Keen during her 1990 master class for the San Francisco Opera Center.

(Left) Tenor Hong-Shen Li and Elisabeth Söderström during the master class, with Mark Haffner at the piano.

allow any of her young charges to give the technical aspect of their performance the back of their hand. Working with Hong-Shen Li on Strauss' "Allerseelen," for example, Söderström wanted to convince the young tenor that his pianissimo was just a bit too soft for the recital stage.

First she hunched over pretending to be an old woman with a faulty hearing aid. Then, after chuckles all around, she grew serious. Folding her right hand into a fist and cradling it in her left, she said, "The note must have—what is it called in English, when you eat the peach and inside is ... ? The note must have a kernel. You can sing it as softly as you want but you must keep the kernel."

Watching the Opera Center singers go through their paces, Söderström's fine-boned and beautiful face seemed never to stop moving. Always, it seemed, she wore a look of anticipation, caught somewhere between girlish hope and woman-of-the-world know-better.

Throughout Catherine Keen's first attempt at Octavian in the Act III trio of *Rosenkavalier*, Söderström's chin rose and fell with wave-like rhythm as she rode Strauss' score and Keen's poignant but initially timid exploration of it. After their Octavian—Marschallin duet, Söderström rubbed Keen's shoulder in team-like affection, joked with her as the Marschallin about their stormy relationship and finished up the pep talk with a little primer for all the female singers on

dressing for the concert stage.

"You know, all the ladies in the audience always want to see your front and back and sides before you start singing," she said. "They must see your dress—all of it—so, sometime, early in the evening, you must find a way to turn around for them."

With Craig Estep, Söderström's intelligent and sometimes piercing eyes missed nothing as the young tenor felt for his emotional equilibrium in Duparc's "L'Invitation au Voyage."

Trying to coax a little more thought and a little less raw energy from him, she gently chided, "I have only one life, I must spend it in a nice way, mmmm?"

As for Maria Fortuna, "Well, Maria is trying to get rid of the 'Happy Doll Bending Her Knees' problem," Söderström explained as the young Adler Fellow approached the piano. "That is why we are going to prop her up here."

Trusting in her teacher's expertise, Fortuna stood flush against the rehearsal piano, both arms extended and resting on the instrument's rim. The effect, throughout her rendition of Strauss' "Beim Schlafengehen," was nearly miraculous. The small change in stance seemed to transform Fortuna from a slightly self-conscious young soprano into a sophisticated and supremely confident diva.

In other words, no more Happy Doll Bending Her Knees.

"It is refreshing to find they want to learn from what you've experienced,"

said Söderström, after her students finished rehearsal. "Very often you say exactly the same thing that their teachers have told them but, because you have been on stage, they say, 'Ah, it's good to hear it from you,'"

The suggestion that Söderström try her hand at master classes, "first came several years ago from Lotfi Mansouri, in Geneva I think, during a production of *Eugene Onegin*," After that, Söderström shared her secrets for "one or two days" in London at the English National Opera then, suddenly, "I had 19 patients" at the Swedish Academy.

Besides the obvious volume of her repertoire, Söderström's dedication to experimentation and her unflinching acceptance of the realities of time combine to make her an even better teacher than many singers of equal experience. A most convincing authority, she is the sort that actually practices what she preaches.

Long-respected for her commitment to rarely-performed works, Söderström has been game for just about anything in the musical world. Asked to sing at her daughter's wedding, she selected Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water." Two years ago in Los Angeles she teamed up with André Previn and the L.A. Philharmonic for Benjamin Britten's 1936 cycle for soprano and orchestra, *Our Hunting Fathers*. And once, in Helsinki, in a concert that was beamed live to 50 countries, she sang a Sibelius song cycle—all in Finnish.



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Elisabeth Söderström with Catherine Keen.

"I learned it (phonetically), of course," said Söderström of that performance. "So, standing on the stage I realized, 'I am the only person here who doesn't understand what I'm singing.'"

According to Catherine Keen, that particular anecdote is more an example of Söderström's characteristic humility than an accurate portrait of an artist who takes her lyrics very seriously.

"One of the most significant things we learned from her was the importance of the text, of understanding what you are singing," said Keen. "She would sing in Swedish and we wouldn't know a damn word but she could convey the story, the emotion, the subtext of the song because she feels the words she is singing."

For Keen, Söderström's customary self-deprecation was refreshing but, ultimately, unacceptable.

"She was so quick to put herself down in front of us, especially apologizing for her voice, that it was hard for me to take," Keen said. "One day I even started to cry because it hurt me so much. She didn't understand that the technical element of her voice wasn't what we were hearing when she sang. It was all the wonderful things that make her who she is, all those years of experience, that deep understanding."

"We all fell in love with her on the spot. She's so down-to-earth, like a farm girl who got this wonderful gift. Yet she is a real performer, not just an entertainer, and the music just seemed to flow out of her. You know by listening to her that she has *lived*."

Her professional prowess notwithstanding, the manner in which Söd-

erström has conducted her private life was not lost on the Opera Center students either.

"She is a woman who really got to have it all," Keen said. "A career, a great marriage and three children. It's very encouraging to see that it can be done. I certainly hope to have the same kind of life. Most of us want to have something outside of our music."

When Elisabeth Söderström advised students like Keen and Estep and Fortuna to, "Try anything," she is not asking them to do anything she hasn't done—and survived. That, as much as any advice, carries a great deal of weight with these young people.

"I think the most important thing she taught us is that you've got to learn to laugh at yourself," Keen said. "Not that you shouldn't take what you do seriously, or that you don't have to pay attention to detail, just that you can't take *yourself* too seriously."

Common wisdom holds that the most lasting and effective way to teach is to do it by example, to follow the philosophy one espouses, to live a life based on the values and advice one so freely offers to others. Nowhere has Elisabeth Söderström turned in a more convincing performance than in this role.

"I'm really not a teacher with specific methods," Söderström insists. "I just suggest. And, while I may repeat myself, I never, ever run out of ideas."

Or captivating stories about opera, acting, the virtues of experimentation and how one gentleman in a Chicago elevator learned the name of Elisabeth Söderström. ■

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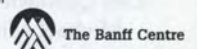
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1990 Opera Previews

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 current previews and lectures that are open to the public.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD INSIGHTS

Renowned artists and personalities (to be announced) from the world of opera share their insights and experiences during informal interviews.

Held in Herbst Theatre, Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., in San Francisco. All 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.

Die Entführung aus dem Serail 9/24
Capriccio 10/8
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria 11/22

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 \$36 for 7 previews (\$30 for students and seniors). Single tickets are \$6 (\$5 for students and seniors). For further information, please call (415) 388-6789.

Rigoletto and Un Ballo in Maschera 9/12
 George Martin
Die Entführung aus dem Serail 9/26
 James Keolker
Don Quichotte 10/10
 Michael Mitchell
Capriccio 10/17
 James Keolker
Khovanshchina 11/14
 Richard Taruskin
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria 11/19
 William Mahrt

SOUTH PENINSULA

Previews held at the Palo Alto Senior Center, 450 Bryant, at 8 p.m. Series registration is \$30 (students \$15); single tickets are \$5 (students \$4). For further information, please call (415) 948-8717.

Rigoletto and Un Ballo in Maschera 9/11
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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 for San Jose Opera Guild members). For further information, please call (408) 354-7525.

Rigoletto and Un Ballo in Maschera 9/11
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SONOMA COUNTY CHAPTER

Previews held at various times and locations (see below). Series registration is \$40 for 6 previews (chapter member); \$48 non-member. Single tickets \$8. Extra cost of luncheons \$10; dinner \$24. For further information and reservations for luncheons and dinner, please call (707) 935-1957 or (707) 996-2590.

Rigoletto and Un Ballo in Maschera 9/10, 2 p.m.
 700 Denmark St., Sonoma
 George Martin
Die Entführung aus dem Serail 9/24 2 p.m.
 1229 Los Robles Dr., Sonoma
 James Keolker
Don Quichotte 10/8, 10:30 a.m. lecture,
 Michael Mitchell lunch following
 La Provence,
 141 Stony Circle,
 Santa Rosa
Khovanshchina 11/12, 6:15 p.m. lecture,
 Richard Taruskin dinner following
 Sts. Peter & Paul
 Russian Orthodox Church,
 3395 Stony Point Rd.,
 Santa Rosa

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria 11/9, 10:30 a.m. lecture
 lunch following
 William Mahrt Villa Restaurant
 3901 Montgomery Dr.,
 Santa Rosa

JUNIOR LEAGUE OPERA PREVIEW

Previews held in Herbst Theatre, Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., in San Francisco. Previews begin at noon, and there is no admission charge. For further information, please call (415) 626-0609.

Rigoletto and Un Ballo in Maschera 9/12
 George Martin
Die Entführung aus dem Serail 9/26
 James Keolker
Don Quichotte 10/10
 Michael Mitchell
Khovanshchina 11/14
 Richard Taruskin
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria 11/21
 William Mahrt

EAST BAY CHAPTER

The Chapter will present a preview of *Rigoletto and Un Ballo in Maschera*, by George Martin, on Thursday, September 13 at 7:30 p.m. at the Faculty Club, University of California, Berkeley. The lecture will be preceded by a no-host dinner at the Club. For further information and reservations, please call (415) 523-2307.

OPERA EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL PREVIEW SERIES

Previews of the operas of the 1990 season will be given by Michael Barclay, director of Opera Education International. Lectures will be presented at the Pacific Jewish Theatre, 820 Heinz Ave., in Berkeley, at 7:30 p.m. Admission to the series of 9 previews is \$65; individual admission at the door is \$8. For further information, please call (415) 526-5244.

Rigoletto 9/10
Die Entführung aus dem Serail 9/24
Don Quichotte 10/1
Capriccio 10/15
Un Ballo in Maschera 10/22
Die Fledermaus 10/29
Khovanshchina 11/12
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria 11/19

**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 1990 fall season, on Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m., beginning August 21 and ending in December. 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.

**ROBERT GOODHUE'S
FALL OPERA COURSE**

Eight previews on San Francisco Opera's season; offered on Mondays at 6:30 p.m. Sessions are held at the First Congregational Church, Post at Mason, in San Francisco. Admission is \$12 per class. For further information, please call (415) 956-1271.

<i>Rigoletto</i>	9/10
<i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i>	9/24
<i>Don Quichotte</i>	10/8
<i>Capriccio</i>	10/15
<i>Un Ballo in Maschera</i>	10/22
<i>Die Fledermaus</i>	10/29
<i>Khovanshchina</i>	11/12
<i>Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria</i>	11/19

**SAN FRANCISCO CITY COLLEGE
OPERA PREVIEWS**

City College of San Francisco is offering an opera preview class, Music 27B, featuring San Francisco Opera's 1990 fall season, on Thursday evenings from 7 to 10 p.m., beginning August 23 and ending December 13. The course is free of charge and there are no prerequisites to enroll. Classes are held at the College, 50 Phelan Ave., Creative Arts Building, Room A-135, in San Francisco. For further information, please call (415) 239-3641.



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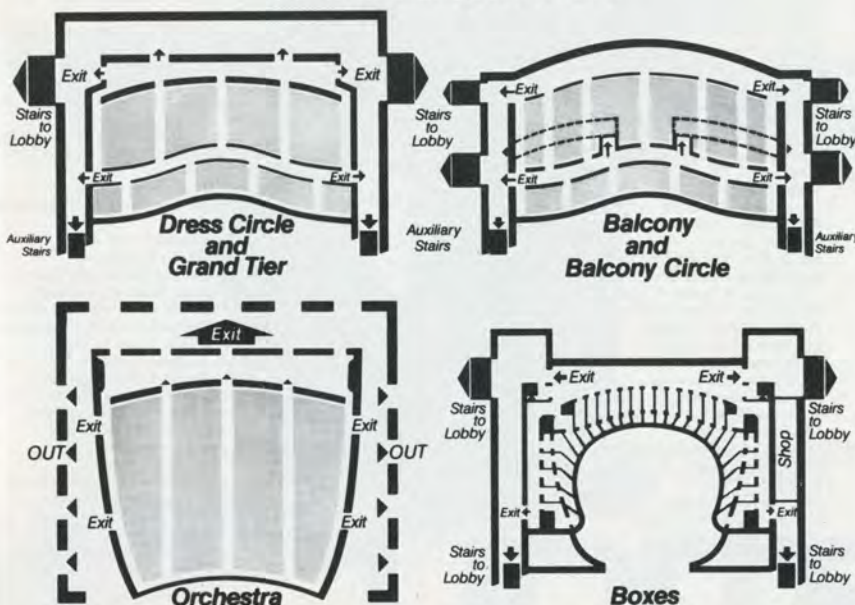
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*Premium Vodka
Imported from Russia*

STOLICHNAYA
Crisall

*From the
Crisall Distillery
in Moscow
comes the rarest and
finest Russian Vodka.
Stolichnaya Crisall
for the ultimate in smoothness.
100% grain neutral spirits
distilled & bottled by
Sejuzplodoimport, Moscow
760 mL (25.4 fl. oz.)
40% alc. by volume
(80 proof)*

Introducing a class of vodka you never knew existed.