

The Dangerous Liaisons

1994-1995

Saturday, September 10, 1994 8:00 PM

Thursday, September 15, 1994 8:00 PM

Sunday, September 18, 1994 2:00 PM

Wednesday, September 21, 1994 7:30 PM

Friday, September 23, 1994 8:00 PM

Tuesday, September 27, 1994 8:00 PM

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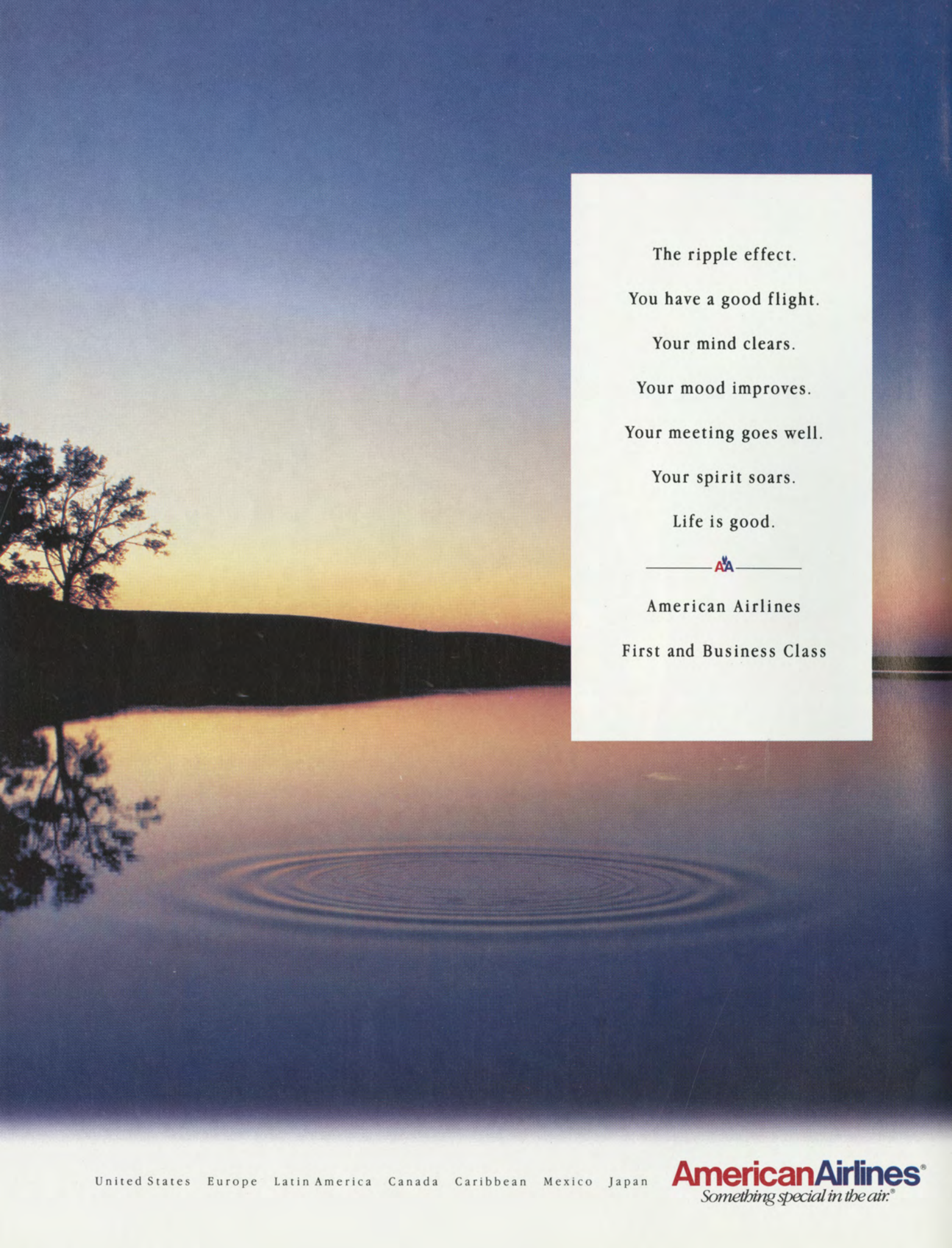
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1994 SEASON

THE DANGEROUS LIAISONS



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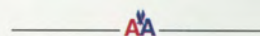
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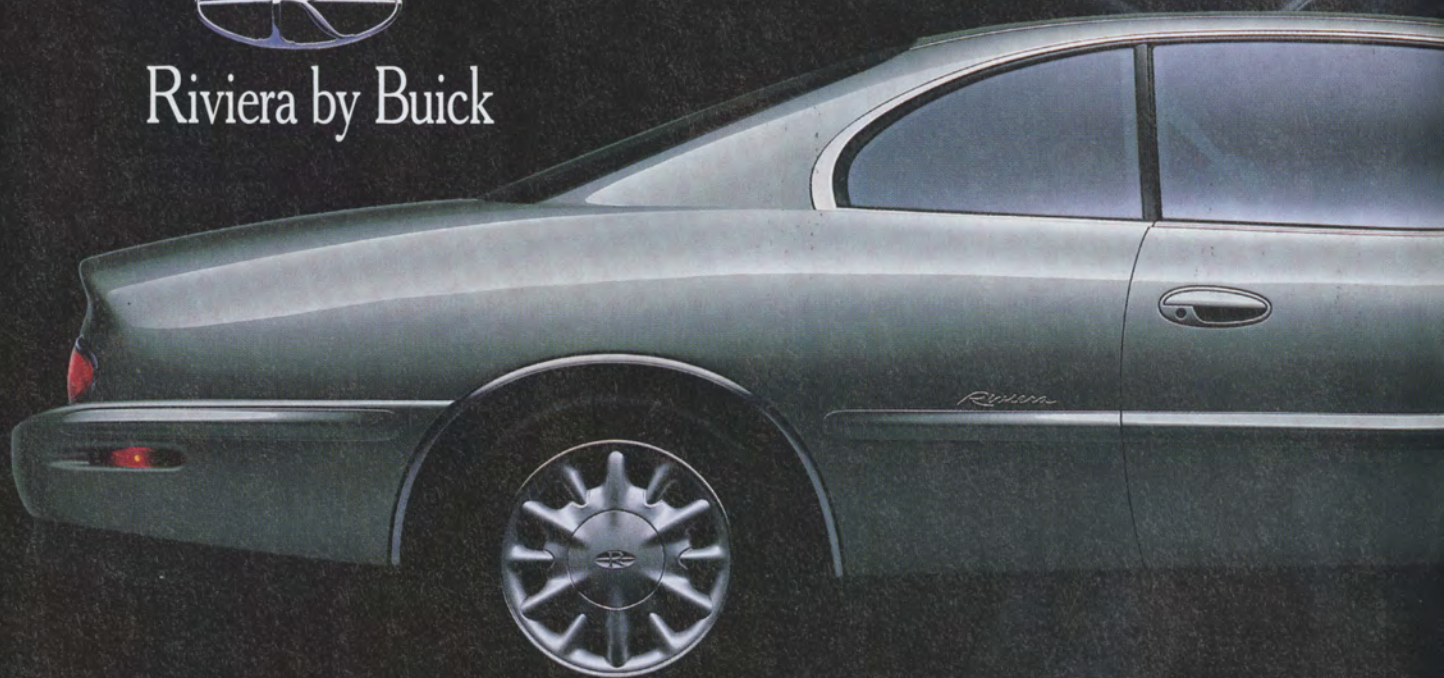
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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA MAGAZINE

The Dangerous Liaisons

1994 Season
Vol. 72, No. 2

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Conversations with composer Conrad Susa and librettist Philip Littell reveal glimpses of how the new opera was created.
- 48 **Different Liaisons** by David Littlejohn
The Laclos novel has through the years inspired several other works of art. The author observes the play and the three celluloid versions.

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Fragonard, Jean Honoré (1732-1806)
Le Verrou (The Bolt)
Oil on canvas, 103 x 155 in.

Réunion des Musées Nationaux
Musée du Louvre, Paris
Giraudon photo

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FROM THE PRESIDENT AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

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On behalf of the Board of Directors, welcome to San Francisco Opera's exciting 1994 Fall Season—one that is particularly noteworthy for the Company both artistically (as you will read in our General Director's letter) and financially. Due to a remarkable team effort—highlighted by the success of a special Board campaign led by Finance Chairman William W. Godward, the reduction of expenses and increased income delivered by the Company's administrative staff, and a strong increase in individual giving—the Opera ended the 1993 performance year with a surplus of \$1.3 million. Still, there is much to do to eliminate the remaining deficit in the Opera's general fund. Our '93 success bodes well for the Company's future.

Positive news like this is due in great part to the generosity of the Opera's many benefactors, and it is a tremendous pleasure to acknowledge and thank them for their part in underwriting productions for the Fall Season. We must extend a special thank you to Lexus for its ongoing support, and particularly for sponsoring the 1994 *Lexus Summer Concerts*, which took San Francisco Opera to several Bay Area stages. And we gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contributions made by San Francisco Opera Guild, as well as the efforts of BRAVO! CLUB.

This year, our gifted resident designer, Gerard Howland, has created spectacular new sets for seven productions—significantly reducing our on-stage production costs without compromising the Company's high artistic standards. Support for the Resident Designer project affects the new productions of *Macbeth*, *The Dangerous Liaisons*, *Il Trovatore*, *Otello*, *Tannhäuser*, *Hérodiade* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and has been provided by the Columbia Foundation, Mrs. Sheldon G. Cooper, Mr. and Mrs. Reid W. Dennis, The L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, and Mr. and Mrs. Marshall I. Wais.

The 1994 Fall Season opens with *Macbeth*, a production made possible by gifts from San Francisco Opera Guild and anonymous friends of San Francisco Opera. The world premiere of *The Dangerous Liaisons* has been made possible by gifts from the California Arts Council, the estate of Gilbert L. Gasch, the National Endowment for the Arts, Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Opera for a New America, and Mrs. Paul L. Wattis. The new production of *Il Trovatore* has been underwritten by gifts from the Franklin/Templeton Group of Funds and Mr. and Mrs. John R. Hamilton. The Company premiere of Rossini's *Otello* has been made possible by Sun Microsystems, Inc. Our *Tannhäuser* has been made possible by a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Evert B. Person. The Company's first production of *The Fiery Angel* has been made possible by a gift from The Edward Meade Smith Trust. *Mefistofele* has been made possible by The Bernard Osher Foundation. And the new *Lucia di Lammermoor* has been made possible by gifts from The Herman J. Miller and Edward J. Clarke Foundation, and from an anonymous friend in honor of William W. Godward.

We are always delighted to see new names appear on our roster of production sponsors, and look forward to enlarging that list with the names of more individuals, corporations and foundations who wish to enjoy the benefits and tremendous satisfaction of joining this special group.

Additionally, we gratefully acknowledge government funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Grants for the Arts program of the San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. Our sincere gratitude also goes out to Mayor Frank Jordan and Chief Administrative Officer Rudolf Nothenberg for their invaluable support; and to the War Memorial Board of Trustees, for their ongoing support and assistance.

Reid W. Dennis
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MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR

LIEBERMAN



Welcome to the 1994 Fall Season at San Francisco Opera—our Company's 72nd consecutive season, and one that continues a rich operatic tradition that is recognized internationally. Nowhere in this country will you find a comparable treasury of great operas and new productions within a single season—and I am proud to say that this has become one of our hallmarks. Think of it, within the three-month period from September 9 to December 11, San Francisco Opera will present 67 performances of nine operas, including the world premiere of a major American opera, three Company premieres, and seven spectacular, new productions.

Our roster of singers features many of today's most exciting stars—including the much anticipated return of Plácido Domingo, who will sing his first Jean (John the Baptist) in the Company premiere of *Hérodiade*. Several artists will appear in important national and local debuts, and seven fine conductors will take the podium, headed by Donald Runnicles, now in his third season as the Opera's music director.

This past summer, audiences throughout the Bay Area had the unusual opportunity of hearing our marvelous Opera Orchestra, Chorus and guest soloists in several concerts at regional outdoor theaters—these were the acclaimed *Lexus Summer Concerts*. Under the baton of Maestro Runnicles, the ensembles also performed with the immensely gifted Adler Fellows from the San Francisco Opera Center in the exciting North American premiere of Michael Tippett's *King Priam* in four sold-out performances. Popular and critical praise for these summer productions was phenomenal, and confirms the reputation our orchestra, chorus and Opera Center have earned for being among the world's finest.

In 1992, San Francisco Opera commissioned *The Dangerous Liaisons*—with music by Conrad Susa, libretto by Philip Littell, and direction by Colin Graham—as part of our Pacific Visions program. This season's world premiere of the opera is a real "dream come true" for this Company. We recognize that the introduction of new and unusual operas to the repertoire is vital to this great art form, and we are proud to be pro-active in our commitment to bringing new work to the stage.

In that same light, the 1994 Fall Season also features an astounding first for this or any other company—seven new productions with sets designed by one artist. The difficult economic trials we experienced here and throughout California over the past several years created this innovative approach to producing opera. And through the very capable hands and imagination of Resident Designer Gerard Howland, you will see a new vision of grand opera—one that serves each individual production brilliantly.

From Verdi and Wagner to Prokofiev and Susa, this season will be a fantastic journey through the full range of human emotions and dramas—all presented with the high standards of excellence that have made San Francisco Opera one of the world's most respected opera companies. On behalf of our wonderful team at the Opera, I want to express special thanks to you—our loyal audience—for your ongoing and invaluable support in making all of this possible. Enjoy the season.

Lotfi Mansouri
General Director

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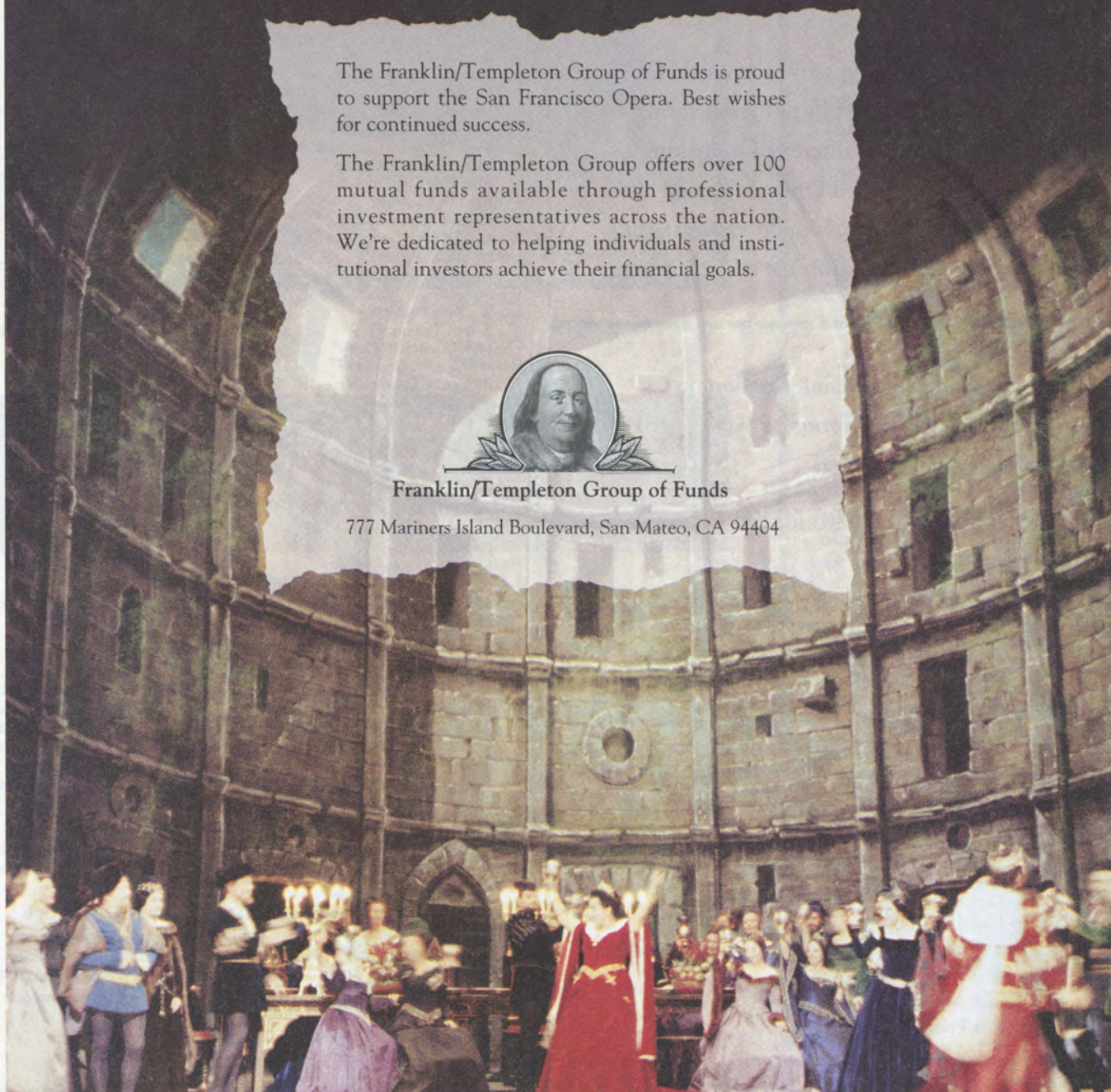
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Kristin Clayton*†	Manhua Gao	Aprile Millo	Ruth Ann Swenson	Dolora Zajick
Larissa Diadkova*	Cecilia Gasdia	Mary Mills	Stefania Toczyska	
Pamela Dillard*	Galina Gorchakova*	Carol Neblett	Julia Varady*	
Fabio Armiliato*	Joseph Frank	Kevin Langan	James Morris	Wolfgang Schmidt*
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LARRY MERKLE

Like all operas, Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons* has a colorful, intricate second self, a ghost opera about its own creation, very different from any other. It is a story of composer and librettist plunging so deeply into the lives and times of the characters in the Pierre Choderlos de Laclos novel of 1782 that the words and music seemed to come to them unbidden, emerging as if from the characters themselves. That is how Susa was describing the creation of America's newest opera a month ago, with only the usual tag ends remaining to be finished.

All the photos for this article were taken on the first day of rehearsals for *The Dangerous Liaisons*, at which stage director Colin Graham talked to the entire cast. Seated in the front row (left to right) are: Renée Fleming, Thomas Hampson, Johanna Meier, Judith Forst, David Hobson, Mary Mills, Frederica von Stade, and San Francisco Opera musical administrator Clifford Granna.

CREATION, CHRONICLED

By ROBERT COMMANDAY

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Renée Fleming and Thomas Hampson

"I spent a lot of time getting to know the people," Susa said. "After thoroughly assimilating the script, knowing it practically by heart, I would improvise at the piano, for instance, as if I were at the party in the opening scene, where they're playing cards. I pretended I was the usual pianist that they called in. I knew them all.

"Valmont (the central male character and the grand seducer) and I went out together on some of these escapades. Because there's a serious side to me, I knew Volanges (the protective mother of the vulnerable Cécile, fresh out of the convent). I would get certain expressions from them from time to time, as if one would be saying to me, 'Did I hear that!?' or 'He's having a bad day.' It's the way a player in a

nightclub sometimes relates to the guests.

"The people in the opera, all the people, have a public and a private voice even to themselves. So they're constantly moving from one level of evasion to another, keeping up appearances, either in public or in their own minds. And I had to find a style that was sufficiently lubricated to slide around as they were veering off from one level to another. I had to keep after them.

"I spent a lot of time getting inside their skins and into their private moments, locating their different temperatures, while keeping their cross-purposes to myself." In a sense, Susa believes he developed in himself an uncritical alter-ego for each person because, he explained, he discovered he was developing a lot of opinions that were



impeding his understanding of "these people."

The librettist, Philip Littell, who was given three months to think about his task, and three months to produce the script, also immersed himself in the people of the book but not "as consciously as Susa," he said, "not as deeply. Ease is always a sign for me." Littell did invite and experience a similar "live" relationship with his subjects. "I had to fall in love with all these characters," he explained. "I made a list of the characters who were not turning me on and that list got shorter each day."

Susa studied the Laclos book, of course, also the play and all three films of it, partly to neutralize the effect of any one source. At Lotfi Mansouri's suggestion, he and Lit-

tell viewed the film, *Que la fête commence*, about the period of Philip's regency between the two Kings Louis, and they also studied Will and Ariel Durant's books on the Enlightenment.

"Sometimes a source appeared by accident," Susa remarked, "the way PBS showed Richardson's novel *Clarissa* and I realized that this was the novel Madame Merteuil, the powerful central woman, had read. In that novel, women end up badly in a man's world. They have no power and men own them. In *The Dangerous Liaisons*, we have three wealthy widows who are victims, but Merteuil is going to pursue her pleasures without falling into the clutches of a man.

"I wanted to understand the social context in France, the postal system, the sanitation of the time, all of it, to know how all these liaisons were possible, what they smelled and tasted like, what the people ate — so I could move into that world as one of their contemporaries. I learned to live by candlelight, in semi-darkness, or I sometimes used amber lights in the house.

"The libretto and the structure came rapidly, setting up the way I wanted it. But the creation of the music required a leap and a change in my style and my approach to writing. By the time I inhabited the sensibilities of the libretto, the characters, the times, I had to make a lot of changes in the way I usually write the music. This was based on that evasive nature of each character. There's not a mystical bone in any of their bodies. They don't psychologize. The minute they have a thought, they act upon it. It makes these people very immediate. That required changes for me."

The music that came out for them, apparently very readily, was different from any Susa had written before. "It struck me as so unfamiliar that it took months to reconcile myself to what I had written," he said, still wondering over it. "I know that I had done what needed to be done, but the syntax, the simplicity of it, alarmed me. I was constantly playing it for people and asking them if anything was happening. It was wildly unfamiliar. I was grateful for what was being created and I learned that placing yourself at its service (rather than resisting it) gets you farther.

"I'm shameless. I have no stylistic self-consciousness. If I need to go into a conventional perfect or half-cadence, I do it. I see my role as a scribe and I have learned not to be critical of the material as it is 'given.' Later I try to edit it into a unity — as a

friendly editor. I try to treat my music as if it were by somebody else. It's the only way I can achieve a deep commitment to the project, by not questioning it.

"My personality is such that all the past is available to me without contradicting me." Susa contrasted himself with his friend John Corigliano, who composed the opera *Ghosts of Versailles*. "It struck me that Corigliano tries to create something like a new Mozart aria which is also vaguely reminiscent of a pre-existing one. Whereas my approach is that I am a classical composer and write whatever I wish.

"I had to create an imaginary composer, one who is Gluck's contemporary but whose music interested Mozart a great deal — so Mozart stole from 'me.' I wanted to incorporate some of the music and gestures from the era but without writing a neo-classic score." Susa composes at the piano with pencil and paper and no computer or other electronic aids, singing the lines while he works. "Fortunately, Philip gives very good syllables," he noted. "It wasn't necessary to make accommodations for much of his rhythms." Littell, it turns out, is a singer himself, who grew up in a musical family and although "musically illiterate," boasts the "craftiness of the illiterate."

The personal immersion and listening to "voices" aside, the practical matter of building Susa's fourth opera from scratch apparently went swimmingly from the outset.

Littell began the project by asking Susa, "What do you want from me in this libretto? What makes an opera work?" Susa responded, "We must create great parts. We have to have important scenes that singers will sing. The rest takes care of itself." "So we had to pick crucial moments for each character," Susa explained. "That determined the structure. The play has its own leisurely design, and the novel brings in a theme we cannot deal with but that is all-important for the understanding of the story. All of our women went to school in a convent. Merteuil had discovered — and Cécile discovers — that this does not prepare you for living in this world. Tourvel learns this also but she retreats back to the convent. The world does not prepare women for what goes on in this life. Merteuil ends with that note but it can't end there. No. She says, 'I'm hungry.' Curtain.

"Philip and I went back from the end to see how much time we had in which to tell the story. We took the main events, and

they formed the structure. If we were short of time, we would compress a scene." There was one major change in Littell's original libretto — "a conflation of two scenes at the end to run in alternation, as if simultaneously. These are the death scenes, of Madame Tourvel, with the women gathered around her, and of Valmont, surrounded by men at the site of the duel. These scenes were originally separate. Playing them together is one thing opera can do."

"I had to do very little re-writing," Littell remarked. "I recognized it was my job to deliver something fairly well finished." Basically, once the words were in the music, there were no more changes. Littell found the going more difficult in the first act and it was there that he found the usual roles reversed. He, the librettist, was asking for cuts, while the composer and the opera company were asking for more material.

Susa considered the original novel's distinctive form as a series of letters ideal for a libretto structure, and exciting. As for the epistolary precedents in opera, the

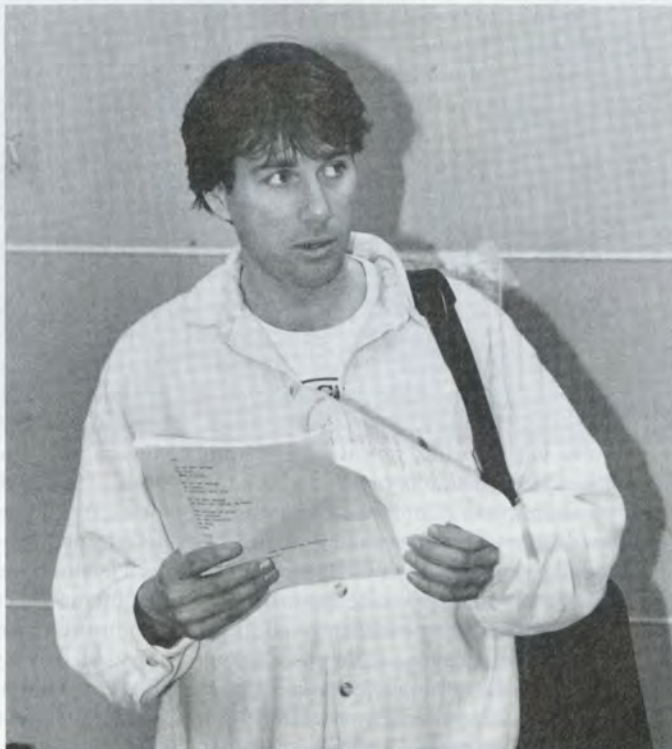
reduce each of these letters to one sentence?" "You mean," he said, "Lah-da-da-dah," doing one. Then I asked, 'Do you think several letters could be combined into a lyric?' 'Oh yes,' he answered and created a lyric on the spot. 'You've forgotten that the scene takes place in the dark,' I said. 'Ah . . . voilà . . . la-dah-dah-dah-dah.' And he made the changes that made it work. We practically romped through it. As Philip was writing the libretto, I was noting how singable it was, also where it presented difficulties and needed to be changed. As it turned out, very little needed to be changed."

Littell credited Susa's being an "ideal audience" as a partial explanation for his own fluency in writing the libretto: "He has the ability to give unconditional approval and encouragement and that's really an important facet of our work." He added that it was like "knowing that whatever came out of me would be treated with the delight that would be given a drawing produced by a gifted three-year-old."

With the cast selected even before the music was written, Susa naturally was able to talk with the principals about their voices and parts. Renée Fleming told him, "I love to sing pianissimo on high notes . . . but I like to sing forte, too." "Tom Hampson said some good things about his part," Susa recalled, "but there was one sentence he thought did not feel well. It was a sentence I had meant to go back and fix and didn't: 'Not one resistance I have overcome in any of the crowds of women that I won.' It was fixable and he showed me how to fix it."

Littell also had performer help, but from a different source. Actors from San Diego Globe Theater's Young Globe Company read the lines for him and Susa, and that was immensely useful, but of course musical needs of some of those lines dictated changes in them later.

Susa sees this opera's contemporary connection and the timeliness of its characters in the light of his view that "most people today still don't think about their motives or the consequences of their actions." "That's what makes the work so interesting," he said. "It begins as a comedy, temporarily becomes a romance, then becomes a tragedy. The comedy sustains but becomes quite dark. An example is the aria in which Valmont breaks off his affair with Madame Tourvel [the words earlier having been dictated to him by Merteuil] — 'It is not my fault' — (a refrain, ending



LARRY WERKLE

David Hobson and (opposite) Thomas Hampson and Frederica von Stade

several famous letter arias and duets, he simply shrugged and said, "I just had to pretend it had never been done. After all, when this opera's 'composer' was writing, Tchaikovsky hadn't been born yet and Mozart was a tiny little boy.

"At one point I said to Philip as we sat at my kitchen table, 'Do you think we could

with) . . . 'If you think this is not good advice, that's not my fault.'

"Humor basically comes from a particular point of view and can't come about from people who don't have any. Tourvel has none and that becomes funny in itself. Valmont has been working on Tourvel for a long time when we first run into her. The thing that intrigues Valmont about her is her deep commitment. Humor is the basis of the relationship between Merteuil and Valmont. She says, 'Will that nun [Tourvel] satisfy you?' He answers, 'Wait till I've had her before you run her down.' The humorous effect is achieved musically, in the timing."

Susa kept returning to the people who became so large in his world as he brought them to life, or, from his point of view, who composed themselves in his music. "Rosemonde [Valmont's old aunt, sung by Johanna Meier] sees the whole thing and is unable to prevent it. At the end, she's ruined along with everyone else. Philip loved that character, modeled it after his own grandmother."

"For her, I was starting to write the fifth of the four last songs and I said to Philip, 'I have such a nice idea for a tune here. Could you come up with some more words?' He immediately wrote one verse [for the aria, "I have an old heart"]. It was fantastic. 'How did you do that?' 'I just asked her if she had anything more to say.' "

"They sort of dictated to me," Littell acknowledged. He said he solved his most difficult problem of getting them started at the outset by "locking the characters in a room [the opening tea and card party scene] and making them work it out. We set the tasks and they did the work; it's a tribute to the novel."

"For me, the opera deepens the character of Danceny," said Susa. "His vulnerability and his eroticism — we get to experience that. Merteuil deepens because we get to see her alone with herself and she likes who she is. At the end, we see in this that she has a great capacity to suffer. Act II opens with her recovering from a bad dream that she instinctively understands has told her Valmont has fallen in love. He is behaving irrationally and out of his own, and her, control. He's come under the influence of a woman — Tourvel — who is irrational. She is so angry and betrayed by this that her sense of pain and betrayal drives the thing to its tragic conclusion."

"The ending is critical because it's different from the play and the films, but



LARRY MERKLE

closer to the book. Merteuil survives. She is Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well*. He comes back from the war and becomes a thief after being disgraced in the service. They say his occupation is gone and he says that the thing that I am shall make me live. The thing about Merteuil is that the thing *she* is makes her live. I've come to really respect and admire her tremendously. But she won't let you love her, and that almost scares Frederica von Stade."

Susa pointed out that early in the opera in the sextet soliloquies, the main sentiment that comes across from the characters' individual expressions of their hopes is "Can love be fear?" At the end of the play,

we discover that love isn't enough. That's the hard message in this show.

"At the very end, Merteuil says, 'It is not enough to love. That I knew.' That knowledge has given her the advantage over everyone else but then she says, 'It is not enough to learn; I learned that too. It is not enough to know the things we know, the things we know are useless in the disaster we call life.'

"And that's by way of comfort."

Robert P. Commanday, music and dance critic of the San Francisco Chronicle for 30 years before his retirement in 1993, is now in his third career in fine arts consulting, public speaking, and writing.

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Music by CONRAD SUSA

Libretto by PHILIP LITTELL

Opera in two acts; based on the novel by PIERRE CHODERLOS DE LACLOS

(By arrangement with E.C. Schirmer Music Company, Inc., a division of ECS Publishing, Boston, MA.)

Commissioned by San Francisco Opera

The Dangerous Liaisons

(in English)

Conductor

Donald Runnicles

Production

Colin Graham*

Designer

Gerard Howland

Lighting Designer

Thomas J. Munn

Assistant to Maestro Runnicles

Peter Grunberg

Musical Preparation

Bryndon Hassman

Adelle Eslinger *

Prompter

Kathleen Kelly

Special musical assistance

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 AT 8:00

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18 AT 2:00

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21 AT 7:30

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23 AT 8:00

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27 AT 8:00

CAST (in order of appearance)

Marquise de Merteuil, a wealthy widow Frederica von Stade

Vicomte de Valmont, a notorious rake Thomas Hampson

Madame de Tourvel, wife of a magistrate Renée Fleming

Madame de Volanges, a widow, Merteuil's cousin Judith Forst

Madame de Rosemonde, Valmont's aunt Johanna Meier*

Cécile de Volanges Mary Mills

Chevalier de Danceny David Hobson**

Josephine, Cécile's maid Laura Claycomb

Emilie, a whore Elizabeth Bishop*†

Monsieur Bertrand, an attorney James Scott Sikon*

Victoire, Merteuil's maid Pamela Dillard*

Azolan, Valmont's valet Hector Vásquez

Julie, Tourvel's maid Kristin Clayton*†

Father Anselm George Weiss

Duel Second No.1 Matthew Lord*

Duel Second No.2 Gregory Cross*

Maids Man-Hua Gao, Mika Shigematsu†

Footmen Alfredo Portilla*†, Earle Patriarcot

*San Francisco Opera debut

** United States debut

† 1994 Adler Fellow

ACT I, Scene 1 Mme Rosemonde's château outside Paris

Scene 2 Different bedrooms at different times

Scene 3 A wood on Rosemonde's estate

INTERMISSION

ACT II, Scene 1 Merteuil's bedroom in Paris

Scene 2 Valmont's bedroom

Scene 3 Merteuil's pleasure pavilion

Scene 4 A convent; the park at Vincennes

Scene 5 Merteuil's world

Supertitles are from the original libretto

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 two hours and forty-five minutes.

NOTE: the performances of September 21, 23 and 27 are being taped for a future telecast.

Lighting will be slightly augmented.

The Dangerous Liaisons/Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1 — Salon of Mme Rosemonde's château outside Paris. A sudden rainstorm has forced Madame de Rosemonde and her guests to move their picnic indoors. The Chevalier de Danceny is giving a harp lesson to Cécile de Volanges. (The two young people are secretly in love, though Cécile is engaged to an absent older man, Gercourt). Meanwhile, Rosemonde plays cards with her guests, Madame de Volanges (Cécile's mother), the beautiful and devout Madame de Tourvel, and Rosemonde's nephew Valmont, a handsome and notorious rake. Madame de Merteuil cynically surveys the room, detecting the budding romance of Cécile and Danceny, and noting that Valmont eyes Tourvel as his next conquest. Merteuil and Volanges warn Tourvel of Valmont's reputation, while Tourvel, having fallen prey to Valmont's charm, defends him.

While Cécile and Danceny entertain the other guests with a song, Merteuil schemes with Valmont. Seeking revenge on her ex-lover Gercourt for his defection, she asks Valmont to woo and conquer Cécile, so that Gercourt will be presented with a "ruined bride." (Danceny, she fears, is too young and ineffectual to be counted on to accomplish this task before the wedding.) Valmont at first declares that he is too busy with his attempted conquest of Tourvel, but at last agrees to the plot, with the assurance that Merteuil's renewed sexual favors will be his reward.

To provide an obstacle for Cécile and Danceny, Merteuil warns Cécile's mother that Danceny has been hiding love letters in the girl's harp. Finding the evidence, Volanges demands that Danceny depart. In the ensuing turmoil, Valmont persuades Cécile to give him the key to her room, on the pretext of allowing him to deliver letters from Danceny.

Scene 2 — Merteuil writes to Valmont, describing how she became the kind of woman she is, maintaining a spotless reputation while enjoying love affairs with many men (among whom, she neglects to add, young Danceny is now to be counted). Cécile, meanwhile, writes to Merteuil, confiding that Valmont has seduced her. Merteuil gives her worldly counsel, advising her to enjoy her new-found womanhood. Tourvel's growing feelings for Valmont cause her to struggle with her faith and her conscience. Valmont, in the midst of one of his sexual escapades with Emilie, a whore, writes to Merteuil about his exploits. In their separate rooms, Valmont, Merteuil, and Tourvel give voice to the conflicting desires that burn within them.

Scene 3 — In a wood on Mme de Rosemonde's estate, Rosemonde and Volanges discuss the fact that Valmont is due to visit again, and that Tourvel, in turn, has decided to leave. Rosemonde fears her nephew has put Tourvel in great emotional danger. Encountering Valmont, Tourvel rebukes him for breaking his promise not to threaten her honor any further, and flees from his protestations of love. Cécile and Danceny have an awkward meeting, their relationship strained by their continuing secret affairs — Danceny with Merteuil, Cécile with Valmont. Valmont struggles angrily with his own realization that, for all his cynicism, he is genuinely falling in love with Tourvel, "this woman who cannot lie." Tourvel at last is conquered by his love and yields to it.

ACT II

Scene 1 — Merteuil awakens from a troubled dream with the premonition that Valmont has gone too far in his relationship with Tourvel. Angrily she writes to him, dictating the words he must use to break off the affair.

Scene 2 — Valmont follows Merteuil's instructions and cruelly rejects Tourvel. Emotionally shattered, she retires to a convent.

Scene 3 — In a love-tryst with young Danceny, Merteuil upbraids him for writing her indiscreet letters; the young man is infatuated. Valmont enters and discovers the amorous pair. He grows furious when he realizes that Merteuil has no intention of keeping her part of their bargain. Merteuil and Valmont now declare war. Merteuil reveals to Danceny that Cécile has miscarried Valmont's child. Danceny challenges Valmont to a duel.

Scene 4 — Alternately: the convent, where Tourvel lies ill, and the park at Vincennes, the scene of the duel. Volanges, Cécile and Rosemonde are caring for Tourvel, who passes in and out of delirium. Danceny mortally wounds Valmont, who in his last moments bequeaths to the young man a box of Merteuil's letters, asking him to publish them in revenge for her ruthless scheming. With her last breath, Tourvel likewise entrusts a box of letters to Volanges and Rosemonde.

Scene 5 — As the letters circulate and word of the scandal spreads, society comments on the moral lessons to be learned from their contents. Merteuil emerges from the tumult to tell of her public humiliation, and her subsequent misfortunes, including smallpox and bankruptcy. She cannot avoid betraying the regret of her true feelings for Valmont. She has lost everything, yet, defiantly, she survives.

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The performance of September 23rd is sponsored by British Airways

The performance of September 27th is designated in honor of Mr. and Mrs. David M. Chamberlain's membership in the Triple Gold Circle

The Dangerous Liaisons Supernumeraries

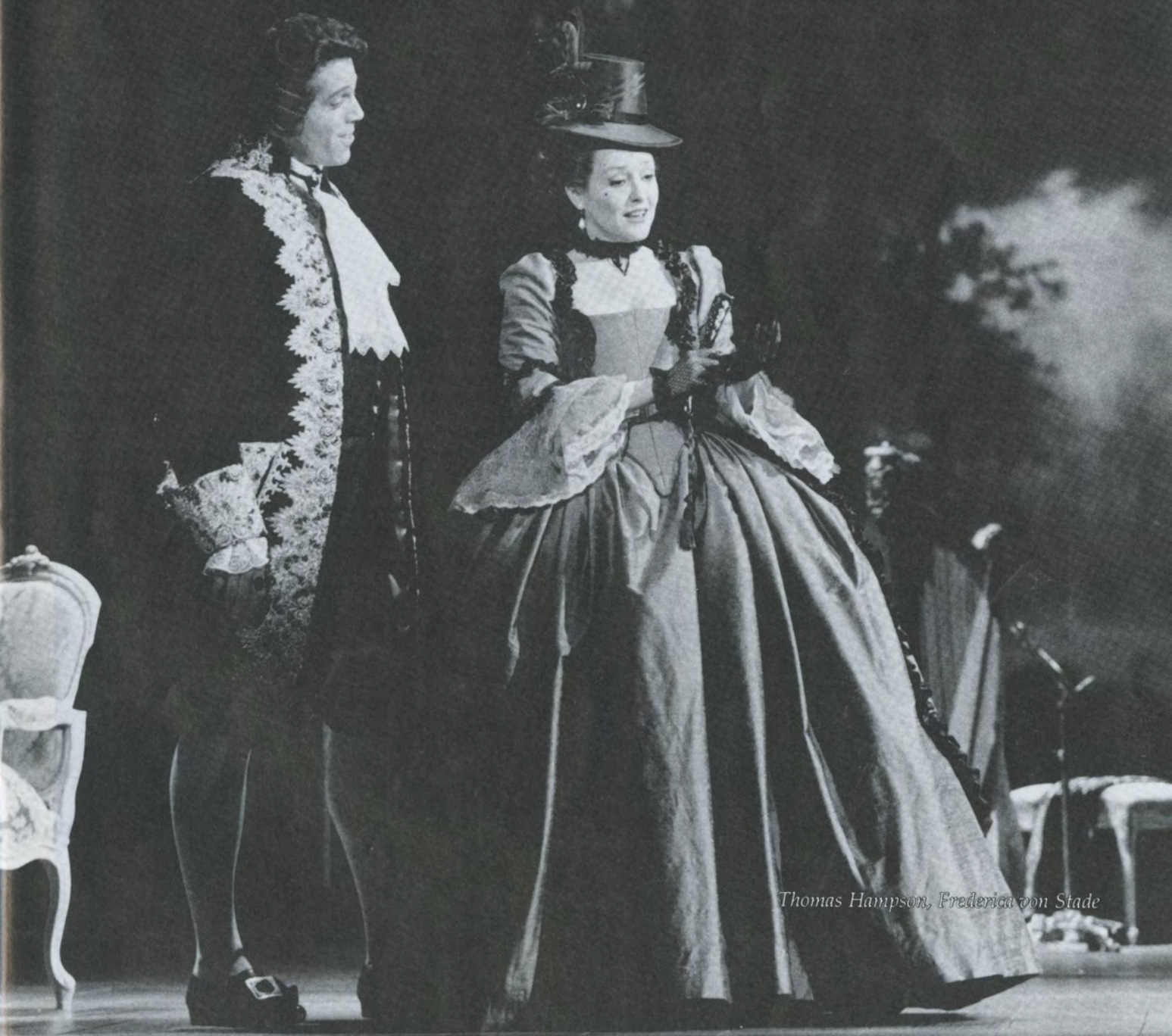
David J. Clark
Nikolaje De Vrsac
Doug Del Paggio
Milko N. Encinas
Tom Giuliano

Rick Gydesen
Steve Moulds
Thomas F. Newman
Barry Nielsen
Oliver Pollard

Bill Roehl
William Ruff
Louis Schilling
Michael Strickland
Dan Wilson

The Dangerous Liaisons

Photos taken in rehearsal
by Marty Sohl



Thomas Hampson, Frederica von Stade



Renée Fleming, Thomas Hampson



Thomas Hampson, Elizabeth Bishop

Frederica von Stade



Thomas Hampson, Renée Fleming



Frederica von Stade, David Hobson

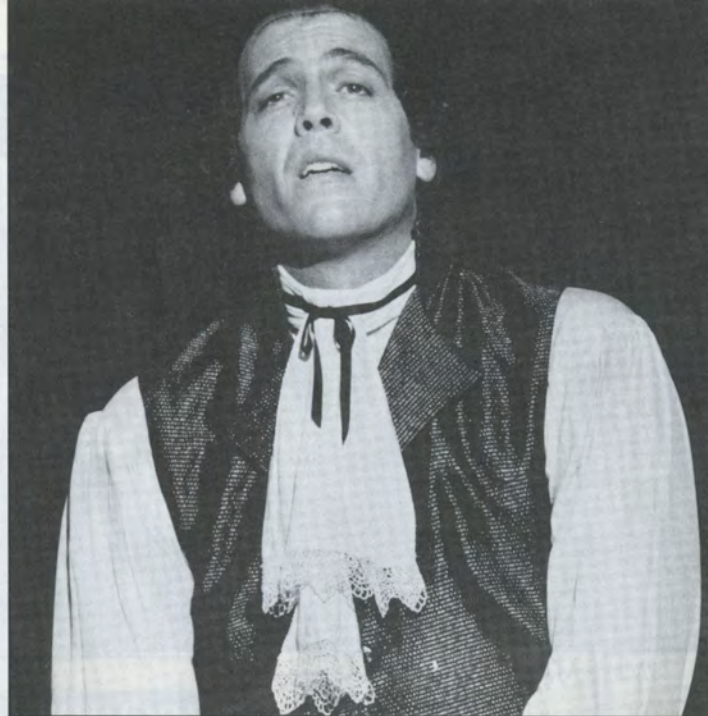


Johanna Meier





Mary Mills, David Hobson



Thomas Hampson



Renée Fleming

Thomas Hampson, Frederica von Stade, David Hobson



*Hector Vásquez,
James Scott Sikon,
Thomas Hampson,
David Hobson*



*Judith Forst,
Renée Fleming*



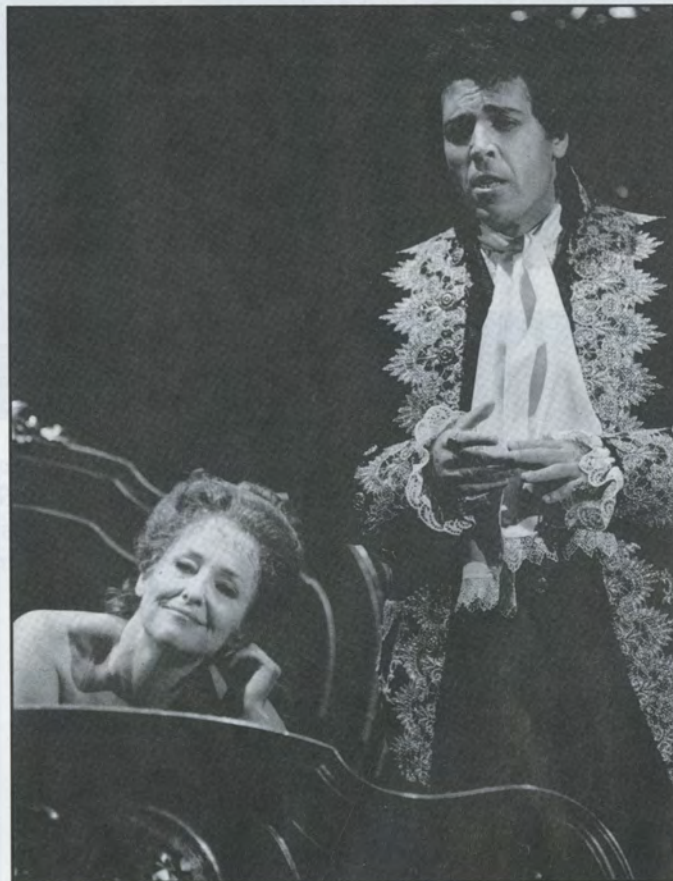


Mary Mills



Judith Forst

Johanna Meier, Judith Forst



Frederica von Stade, Thomas Hampson

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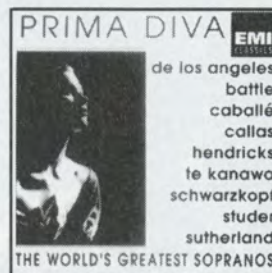
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L.A. OPERA

1994-95 SEASON

SEPT. 9, 11, 16, 18M, 21, 24, 28, 1994

FAUST

Charles Gounod
New Production
Foster: Corsaro, Colavecchia,
Brown, Dana, Hickey
Villarreal, Silvasti, Tumanian, Gilfry,
Guzman, Howe, Fitzpatrick

SEPTEMBER 10, 13, 17M, 20, 23, 1994

ELEKTRA

Richard Strauss
Behr: Pountney, West, Bury, Dana
Zschau, Voss, Rysanek, Mack,
Bernstein, Lebherz, Gallup, Ebberts,
Leighton, Howe, Nikkel, Guzman,
Roderer, Burzynski, Rashkovsky, Tash,
Curtisinger, Wallace

SEPT. 27, 30, OCT. 2, 5, 8M, 11, 14, 1994

DON GIOVANNI

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Foster: Miller, Stone, Israel, Dana, Hickey
Kozlowska, Rasmussen, Allen (9/27,
30; 10/2, 5, 8m) / Gilfry (10/11, 14),
Randle, Plishka, Atkins, Lebherz

PHOTO: JUNE ANDERSON

OCT. 29, NOV. 2, 5M, 8, 12, 1994

XERXES

George Frideric Handel
Brydon: Wadsworth, Lynch,
Pakledinaz, Kaczorowski
Hunt, Bradley, Waters, Rasmussen,
Asawa, Atkins, Opalach

FEBRUARY 4, 7, 10, 12, 1995

PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE

Claude Debussy
Salonen: Sellars, Tsypin, Ramicova, Ingalls
Groop, Le Roux, White, Cox, Wallis,
Le Roi, Atkins, Fitzpatrick
In association with the Los Angeles
Philharmonic

MARCH 18M, 21, 23, 26, 29, APRIL 1M, 1995

DON PASQUALE

Gaetano Donizetti
Pidó: Lawless, Ponnelle, Pyant
Çako, Desderi (3/18m-29)/
Gallup (4/1m), Fedderly,
Gilfry, Walker

MAY 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 20M, 23, 1995

OTELLO

Giuseppe Verdi
Behr: Friedrich, Harlan,
Schneider-Siemssen, Skalicki
Anderson, Domingo
(5/6, 9, 12, 15, 18)/
Bogachov (5/20m, 23),
Yurisch, Rasmussen,
Fedderly, Lebherz, Ebberts,
Bernstein, Fitzpatrick

JUNE 7, 8, 9, 10M, 10E, 11, 13,
14, 15, 16, 17M, 17E, 18M, 1995

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Donald C. Runnicles, *Music Director*

Opening Night New Production

Macbeth Verdi
Jones, Waite*†; Morris, Lloyd, Li,
Guggenheim, Del Campo*†, Wilde,
Patton†
Runnicles; Mansouri/Howland/
Pizzi/Whitfield
*This production is made possible by generous
gifts from San Francisco Opera Guild and
anonymous friends of San Francisco Opera.*
Sept. 9, 13, 16, 20, 24, 29, Oct. 2

World Premiere

The Dangerous Liaisons Susa/Littell
Von Stade, Fleming, Mills, Meier*,
Forst, Claycomb, Bishop*†, Clayton*†,
Dillard*, Gao, Shigematsu†;
Hampson, Hobson**, Vasquez, Sikon*,
Lord*, Cross*, Portilla*†, Patriarco†
Runnicles; Graham*/Howland/Munn
*This production is made possible by generous
gifts from the California Arts Council, the
estate of Gilbert L. Gasch, the National
Endowment for the Arts, the Lila Wallace -
Reader's Digest Opera for a New America,
and Mrs. Paul L. Wattis.*
Sept. 10, 15, 18, 21, 23, 27

New Production

Il Trovatore Verdi
Millo/Varady*, Zajick/Toczyska,
Bishop†; Armiliato*/O'Neill,
Gavanelli/Chernov, Wells/Skinner,
Guggenheim, Sumegit†, Portillat†
Oren/Robertson; Copley/Howland/
Munn
*This production is made possible by generous
gifts from the Franklin/ Templeton Group of
Funds and Mr. and Mrs. John R. Hamilton.*
Sept. 17, 22, 25, 28, Oct. 1, 6, 11
Dec. 1, 4, 7, 10

New Production

San Francisco Opera Premiere
Otello Rossini
Gasdia, Shigematsu†; Merritt, Estep,
Ford*, Langan, Cross, Li, Portillat†
Summers; Feldman/Howland/Brown/
Munn
*This production is made possible by a generous
gift from Sun Microsystems, Inc.*
Oct. 4, 9, 13, 18, 22, 25, 28

*Support for the Resident Designer project
has been provided by the Columbia
Foundation, Mrs. Sheldon G. Cooper, Mr.
and Mrs. Reid W. Dennis, The L.J. and
Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, and Mr. and
Mrs. Marshall I. Wais.*

New Production

Tannhäuser Wagner
Voigt, Keen, Dillard; Schmidt*,
Hynninen, von Halem*, Sumegit†,
Guggenheim, Rideout, Wilde
Runnicles; Mansouri/Smuin/Howland/
Mahoney/Munn
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gift from Mr. and Mrs. Evert B. Person.*
Oct. 12, 15, 20, 23, 26, 29, Nov. 2

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Clayton, Filimonova*, Waitet†, Gao,
Bishop†, Dillard, Shigematsu†;
Leiferkus, Hanedanyan, Pluzhnikov*,
Minzhilkiev*, Lord, Wilde, Sumegit†,
Del Campot†, Patriarco†, Condy
Gergiev; Freeman*/Roger*/Munn
Produced in association with the Royal
Opera House, Covent Garden, London,
and the Kirov Opera, St. Petersburg.
*Production is made possible, in part, by
contributions from The Friends of Covent
Garden and the British Council.*
*The San Francisco Opera production is made
possible by a generous gift from The Edward
Meade Smith Trust.*
Oct. 19, 21, 27, 30, Nov. 1, 5, 9

New Production

San Francisco Opera Premiere
Hérodiade Massenet
Zajick, Fleming, Clayton†;
Domingo/Keyes*(11/23, 25), Pons,
Cox, Vasquez, Del Campot†, Portillat†
Gergiev/Ethuin* (11/23, 25);
Mansouri/Howland/Walek/Munn
Nov. 8, 12, 15, 18, 20, 23, 25

Mefistofele

Boito

Millo/Racette, Neblett, Christin,
Bishop†; Ramey, Margison, Frank,
Cross
Pappano; Carsen/McClintock/
Morgan/Levine/Munn
Co-production with the Grand Théâtre
de Genève. Co-owned with the Lyric
Opera of Chicago.
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gift from The Bernard Osher Foundation.*
Nov. 13, 16, 21, 27, 30, Dec. 3, 6, 9

New Production

Lucia di Lammermoor Donizetti
Swenson, Shigematsu†; Giordani,
Servile**, Miles, Lord, Portillat†
Santi; Bernhard/Howland/Toms/Munn
*This production is made possible by generous
gifts from The Herman J. Miller and Edward J.
Clarke Foundation and from an anonymous
friend in honor of William W. Godward.*
Nov. 19, 22, 26, 29, Dec. 2, 8, 11

* San Francisco Opera debut

** U.S. opera debut

† 1994 Adler Fellow

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Performance Highlights

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Having received productions in Los Angeles, London, New York, and Chicago, Tony Kushner's two-part epic *Angels in America* is now returning to heaven—that is, “a city much like San Francisco,” as one of the play's eponymous spirits describes it. Following in the footsteps of David Esbjornson, Oskar Eustis, and George C. Wolfe, Mark Wing-Davey is slated to shape this mammoth work for the **American Conservatory Theater**. Anyone who saw the British director's work with Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest*, with its interweaving storylines and fantastic aspects (including vampires, talking dogs, and the appearance of St. Stephen, an angel himself), can adjudge Wing-Davey as up to the job. Previews of *Millennium Approaches*, the play's first part, begin on September 27 at the Marines Memorial Theater, with an opening date of October 12, and marathon ticket packages, complete with a break for dinner, will be available once the second half, *Perestroika*, previews on October 5. Performances continue through January 22. Incidentally, the production is something of a homecoming for *Angels*, which had its first performance at the Eureka Theater back in 1991.

“Celebrate the Blomstedt Decade” is the theme of the **San Francisco Symphony's** 1994-95 season, commemorating Herbert Blomstedt's final season as music director. Blomstedt's relationship with the SFS will not end, however, as he assumes the post of Conductor Laureate in the fall of 1995. Meanwhile, there is plenty of Blomstedt to celebrate, as the conductor mans the podium in seven different September concerts. These include a stint with cellist **Yo-Yo Ma** playing Danielpour and Tchaikovsky from September 14-17; Mahler's Symphony No. 8 on September 21, 23, 24, and 25; and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, along with works by Martin and Honegger, on September 29, 30, and October 1. Blomstedt is joined for the Symphony's opening gala on September 7 by pianist Van Cliburn, who performs Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1. The program is repeated the next evening, and—with **Eduardus Halim** on piano—on September 9 (at Flint) and 10 (at Concord Pavilion) as well. Non-Blomstedt events include the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields performing Berlioz, Mozart, and Dvořák under the baton of Sir Neville Marriner on September 26.

—Robert Simonson

Angelic overtures: Hear works by Tchaikovsky (above) at the San Francisco Symphony; (below) *Angels in America* returns to San Francisco, at the American Conservatory Theater



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PROFILES



Conrad Susa, composer of *The Dangerous Liaisons*, is the award-winning creator of a large catalog of musical works for the theatrical stage and the concert hall. His first opera, *Transformations*, with a libretto by the composer (based on the poetry of Anne Sexton), was performed during San Francisco Opera's 1980 Spring Opera Theater season at the Palace of Fine Arts Theatre, and his third operatic work, *The Love of Don Perlimplin*, was presented as San Francisco Opera Center's 1985 Showcase production. A graduate of the Juilliard School, where

he studied with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti, Susa also studied at Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie-Mellon University) with Nicolai Lopatnikoff. He has received numerous commissions to write incidental music for organizations including the Old Globe Theatre, American Shakespeare Festival, Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson Theatre and American Conservatory Theater. His scores for television include the PBS specials, *I Never Sang for My Father*, *All My Sons*, *Painting Churches*, *The Good Doctor* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and the Esso Theater productions of *Don Juan in Hell* and *Calvary*. A native of Pennsylvania, he has served as composer-in-residence at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego and City Schools of Nashville. He was also musical director of the APA-Phoenix Repertory Company in New York and the American Shakespeare Festival, and since 1989, has served on the composition faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. The revised version of his opera, *Black River*, received its premiere at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis in June. His church opera, *The Wise Women*, another collaboration with librettist Philip Littell, was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists and performed in Dallas earlier this year. Susa and Littell are now at work on a song cycle.



Philip Littell, librettist for *The Dangerous Liaisons*, is an actor, director, singer, songwriter and author with a wide variety of productions and awards to his credit. A native of New York and a resident of Los Angeles, Littell recently completed a new translation of Molière's *Les femmes savantes* which was performed at the Theatrum Botanicum in Los Angeles. He is a frequent performer in cabaret with his partner, pianist and composer Eliot Douglass. They have also written a musical, *The Night Market*, and *No Miracle: A Consolation*, an

AIDS meditation in 40 songs which will be performed this November at Highways in Santa Monica. In 1991, he devised, directed and appeared in *Songs of the Closet* at Highways, a production with sets by Ian Falconer. He also co-created *Plato's Symposium*, which won the 1986 L.A. Weekly award for best production, *The Ballad of the Sleeping Heart* for the Padua Hills Play Festival, and *Kiss the Glass*, a cabaret musical with sets by Falconer. Winner of the 1988 Drama-Logue award for the title role in *Kingfish* at Los Angeles Theatre Center, Littell also directed James Carroll Pickett's *Queen of Angels*, and has written the libretto for *The Wise Women*, a choral Christmas play with music by Conrad Susa. That new work was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists and received its premiere in Dallas this year. Littell is a great-grandson of Walter Damrosch.

THE DANGEROUS LIAISONS



As she enters the third decade of an extraordinary career, mezzo-soprano **Frederica von Stade**, Marquise de Merteuil in *The Dangerous Liaisons*, continues to be one of the world's most beloved and admired artists. A veteran of the world's great opera houses, her versatility and interest in a broad spectrum of musical styles and dramatic characterizations continues to astound her audience. She excels as the heroines of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and *Il*

Barbiere di Siviglia, is an excellent stylist in French repertoire and is one of the favorite interpreters of the great "trouser roles" — from Strauss's Octavian and Composer to Mozart's Idamante and Cherubino. Now a Bay Area resident, Miss von Stade made her San Francisco Opera debut as Sextus in the 1971 Spring Opera production of *Titus (La Clemenza di Tito)* and has since returned on numerous occasions, most recently in 1993 as Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* during the Celebration of Strauss, and again as Sextus during the Fall Season. Since her 1970 Metropolitan Opera debut, she has sung nearly all of her great roles there, as well as San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and many other leading American theaters. Her career in Europe is no less spectacular, with new productions mounted for her regularly at La Scala, London's Covent Garden, Vienna State Opera and the Paris Opera. Miss von Stade's numerous recordings have garnered five Grammy nominations, two Grand Prix du Disc awards, the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis, Italy's Premio della Critica Discografica and "Best of the Year" citations by Stereo Review, Opera News and other publications. She is also familiar to audiences through numerous international television specials, including "Christmas with Flicka," "Flicka and Friends," and "Carnegie Hall Christmas."



Soprano **Renée Fleming** returns to San Francisco Opera as Madame de Tourvel in the world premiere of *The Dangerous Liaisons* and as Salomé in Massenet's *Hérodiade*. San Francisco Opera audiences last saw her in 1991 when she made her Company debut as the Countess Almaviva in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, a role in which she just opened Glyndebourne Festival's new theater. A young soprano with an ever-increasing number of invitations from the great opera houses of the

world, Miss Fleming has performed on the stages of the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Vienna State Opera, the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, the Bastille Opera in Paris, Houston Grand Opera, and the Chicago Lyric Opera. Brought up in Rochester, N.Y., Miss Fleming was a winner of the 1988 Metropolitan Opera National Auditions. Following her 1991 Metropolitan Opera debut as the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, she appeared there as Rosina in the world premiere of John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, and most recently in her first performances as Desdemona in *Otello*. She also recently performed and recorded the Alban Berg *Lulu* and *Wozzeck* Suites with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and James Levine, and appeared in a European tour of *Così fan tutte* under the baton of Sir Georg Solti, an endeavor which likewise yielded a recording. The soprano has sung frequently with the Chicago and Houston Symphonies in such works as the Requiem Masses by Fauré, Mozart and Brahms, and the Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*. Miss Fleming made her New York recital debut in 1993 in Alice Tully Hall as part of Lincoln Center's "Great Performers" series. Other recent highlights include Floyd's *Susannah* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, subject of a recent nationwide broadcast, and Rossini's *Armida* at the Pesaro Rossini Festival, subject of a soon-to-be-released recording.



Soprano **Mary Mills**, a former (1990-91) Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, returns to the War Memorial Opera House stage as Cécile de Volanges in the world premiere of *The Dangerous Liaisons*. She made her professional debut as Barbarina in *Le Nozze de Figaro* at the Houston Grand Opera and made her San Francisco Opera debut in 1989 in *Lulu*. A winner of the 1989 Metropolitan Opera auditions, she became an Adler Fellow in 1990 and appeared in the San Francisco

Opera productions of *Suor Angelica*, *Rigoletto*, *Don Quichotte*, and *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. She has also portrayed roles in the San Francisco Opera productions of *Le Nozze de Figaro*, *War and Peace*, *Christophe Colomb* and *Don Carlo*. Miss Mills made her European debut in a new production opening the 1992-93 Grand Théâtre de Genève season, and has since made appearances at the Wexford Festival in Ireland, at the Bregenz Festival and at De Vlaamse Opera in Antwerp. A native of Dallas, Miss Mills graduated from the University of Cincinnati College — Conservatory of Music and received a Master of Music degree from Yale University. More recently, she has sung to acclaim at the Marin Opera in the title roles of Dvořák's *Rusalka* and Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, and made her Washington Opera debut in the title role of Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen*.



Canadian mezzo-soprano **Judith Forst** returns to the San Francisco Opera as Madame de Volanges in the world premiere of *Dangerous Liaisons*. Her previous appearances with the Company took place in 1974 (Flowermaiden in *Parsifal* and Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*), 1979, 1986 and 1992 (Preziosilla in *La Forza del Destino*), 1980 (Suzuki), 1981 (Valencienne in *The Merry Widow*), 1984 (Giovanna Seymour in *Anna Bolena*), 1990 (Marie in *Wozzeck*) and 1991 (Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*).

Miss Forst's extensive repertoire includes Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier*, the title roles of *Carmen* and *La Cenerentola*, Charlotte in *Werther*, Musetta in *La Bohème*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Giulietta in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Adalgisa in *Norma*, and Kostelníčka in *Jenůfa*. She was offered a Metropolitan Opera contract following her audition in the national semifinals and she went on to perform at the Met for several seasons in a number of major roles. Her most recent portrayal there was the role of Mother Marie in this season's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. A renowned concert artist and recitalist, Miss Forst is also one of Canada's most widely respected performers and as such was the subject of CBC television portraits in 1987 and 1990. Her disc of operatic arias was released in 1988. She has recently been inducted into The Order of Canada.



Dramatic soprano **Johanna Meier** makes her San Francisco Opera debut in the role of Madame de Rosemonde in *The Dangerous Liaisons*. She has appeared in many of the world's great theaters and concert halls in a variety of repertoire that includes the major Strauss and Wagner roles as well as the heroines of Verdi and Puccini, and was the first American soprano to appear in the title role of *Tristan und Isolde* at the Bayreuth Festival — in the celebrated, filmed Jean-Pierre Ponnelle

production. Other prominent engagements have included Senta in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*, the title role of *Fidelio* and *Isolde* for Vienna State Opera, both in Vienna and on tour in Japan. Additional European appearances have included those at the English National Opera (*Isolde*), Teatro Comunale in Florence, Hamburg State Opera, Bavarian State Opera as well as houses in Bologna, Venice, Barcelona, Marseille and Paris. A native of South Dakota, Miss Meier made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1979 in *Ariadne auf Naxos* and has also been heard at the Lyric Opera of Chicago (*Fidelio* and *Ariadne*), Seattle Opera (*Sieglinde* in *Die Walküre*), Dallas Opera (*Turandot*, *Brünnhilde* in *Götterdämmerung*), as well as the companies of Cincinnati, New Orleans, Miami, Pittsburgh and Baltimore. She has appeared several times at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and is a frequent guest at the Canadian Opera Company and L'Opéra de Montréal. The soprano graduated from Manhattan School of Music and made her debut as the Countess in a New York City Opera production of *Capriccio*. Her performance of the title role of *Vanessa* was telecast nationwide from the Spoleto Festival U.S.A.



A 1994 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, mezzo-soprano **Elizabeth Bishop** makes her San Francisco Opera mainstage debut as Emilie in *The Dangerous Liaisons* and will also sing in productions of *The Fiery Angel* and *Mefistofele*. In 1993, she made her Metropolitan Opera debut in a production of *Death in Venice*, and will return to the Met in 1995 to appear in *The Ghosts of Versailles*. This summer, Miss Bishop received critical acclaim for her portrayal

of Helen in Opera Center's Showcase production of Tippet's *King Priam*. She participated in the 1992 and 1993 Merola Opera Programs, during which she sang Meg Page in *Falstaff* and Ida in *Die Fledermaus*, and portrayed Prince Orlofsky and Ida in Western Opera Theater's national tour of the latter. A native of Greenville, South Carolina, the young mezzo earned a master of music degree from The Juilliard School in 1991 and completed a two-year apprenticeship program as a Juilliard Opera Center Young Artist. While there, she took part in performance demonstrations of *The Ghosts of Versailles*, *Medea* and *The Rape of Lucretia*. Since 1992, Miss Bishop has been featured annually in San Francisco Symphony Pops Concerts.



Mezzo-soprano **Pamela Dillard** returns to the Company's main stage following her 1993 participation in San Francisco Opera Center's Merola Opera Program. As a Merola Opera Program member, she sang the role of Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*. Miss Dillard made her professional operatic debut in 1992 in a leading role in Boston Lyric Opera's production of Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars*. She returned to Boston Lyric in 1993 to sing the role of Ursula in *Beatrice and Benedict*, staged by

Colin Graham. She has also appeared with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, most recently as Meg Page in *Falstaff*. In addition, she has many concert and recital engagements to her credit, including performances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa, the St. Louis Symphony under Andrew Litton, and the Boston Pops. A native of Atlanta, Miss Dillard graduated from Newcomb College of Tulane University, and earned a Master of Music degree from the Opera Institute of Boston University. She is a recipient of several prestigious awards, including the 1994 Richard Gaddes Fund Award, the 1993 Richard Strauss Opera Study Award from the San Francisco Opera Center, and was a winner of the 1994 Metropolitan Opera Auditions. The mezzo-soprano recently recorded a CD of spirituals and art songs by African-American women composers.



Lyric soprano **Kristin Clayton**, a 1994 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, makes her mainstage debut in *The Dangerous Liaisons* and will also appear in productions of *The Fiery Angel* and *Hérodiade*. This past summer, she received accolades for her performance as Andromache in Opera Center's Showcase '94 production of Tippet's *King Priam*. In March of this year, the soprano completed a tour of Guam, Saipan and Pohnpei as part of Opera Center's Pacific Rim Cultural

Exchange Program. As a participant in the 1993 Merola Opera Program, she sang the role of Rosalinda in *Die Fledermaus* — the part she also portrayed on Western Opera Theater's 1993 national tour — and was awarded the Jean Donnell Memorial Award at the 1993 Merola Opera Grand Finals concert. Miss Clayton has also performed with Wolftrap Opera, singing Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* and the First Lady in *Die Zauberflöte*. A native of Atlanta, she received her master of music degree from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where she performed in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Carmen*, *Die Fledermaus* and *Zaide*. In February of 1995, she will make her debut with the Marin Symphony Orchestra as Mimi in a concert version of *La Bohème*.



Soprano **Laura Claycomb**, a San Francisco Opera Center Adler Fellow from 1991 to 1993, returns to the stage of the War Memorial following a recent appearance as Juliet in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* at Geneva and her New York City Opera debut as Kathie in *The Student Prince*. In addition, she returns as the winner of the Silver Medal at the 1994 Moscow Tchaikovsky Competition. This fall, she will be heard as Cécile's Maid in *The Dangerous Liaisons*, while last year, she made several

appearances here, including the title role of the student presentation of *La Fille du Régiment*. A native of Dallas, Miss Claycomb received her bachelor's degree in vocal performance and foreign languages from Southern Methodist University. She was a member of the 1989 Merola Opera Program and made her Company debut in 1990 as The Novice in *Suor Angelica*. Her performances on the Opera House stage include Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte*, Frasquita in *Carmen*, Xenia in *Boris Godunov*, Giannetta in *L'Elisir d'Amore* and Duchess Medina Sidonia in Milhaud's *Christophe Colomb*. Miss Claycomb toured Japan in 1991 as Frasquita in Opera Center's production of *Carmen*, and received critical acclaim as Dalinda in the 1992 Showcase production of Handel's *Ariodante*. Future plans include the title role of *Figlia del Reggimento* in Turin and Rezia in Haydn's *L'Incontro Improvviso* at Nice.



A 1992 and 1993 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, **Man-Hua Gao** performs roles in *The Dangerous Liaisons* and *The Fiery Angel*, as well as the title role in student matinee performances of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. A native of the People's Republic of China, she received her training at the Shanghai Conservatory and the Boston University School of Music. In 1984 she won first place in the Beijing National Voice Competition, competing against singers from all 29 provinces. She was also

a prizewinner at the International Belvedere Competition in Vienna, which led to performances all across China and tours to Hungary, Canada, Japan, Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong. As a participant in the 1990 Merola Opera Program, Miss Gao sang the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, repeated the role on Western Opera Theater's national tour and the next year won the Schwabacher Family Award at the Merola Opera Program's Grand Finals. She made her San Francisco Opera debut in 1993 as Cleone in *Ermione*, and in the same season was heard as Ginevra in the Showcase production of *Ariodante* and Adina in student matinee performances of *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Miss Gao has been a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center and a guest soloist at Carnegie Hall. Heard in *Der Rosenkavalier* with Hawaii Opera Theater, she returns there next year as Madame Goldentrill in *The Impresario*.



Mezzo-soprano **Mika Shigematsu**, a 1993-94 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, sings the role of Emilia in *Otello*, A Nun in *The Fiery Angel* and Alisa in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. A native of Osaka, Japan, she made her San Francisco Opera mainstage debut in *Der Rosenkavalier* during the 1993 Celebration of Strauss and was heard during the 1993 Fall Season as Enrichetta in *I Puritani*. For the recent Boston Lyric Opera production of the Malibran version of that work, she sang

the leading role of Elvira, which she will repeat during that company's 1995 tour of Japan. Miss Shigematsu will also return to Boston in 1995 to sing Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. As a participant in the 1991 and 1992 Merola Opera Programs, she was awarded the Poetz Memorial Award at two consecutive Grand Finals concerts. The mezzo recently made her European recital debut in Geneva, where she performed to a sold-out audience of 1,800, and this past summer, she sang Arsamene in *Xerxes* at the Carmel Bach Festival. Future engagements include a recital at Opéra de Lyon, the title role of *La Cenerentola* at Opera Colorado, and productions of *Così fan tutte* and *Manon Lescaut* at the Paris Opera.



American baritone **Thomas Hampson** returns to San Francisco Opera, where he made his Company debut in the 1990 Fall Season production of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* and where he recently performed at three of the Company's 1994 "Lexus Summer Concerts" — in Stanford, Berkeley and at the War Memorial Opera House. A native of Spokane, whose international career encompasses the world of opera, concert, Lieder, and recordings, Hampson made his acclaimed Metropolitan Opera

debut in 1986 as the Count in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and followed that with debuts in Munich (1986) and Vienna (1987) as Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*. Renowned for his portrayal of the title role of *Don Giovanni*, he first undertook the part in Zurich in a 1987 Ponnelle production, returning to sing the role at the Met in 1990-91. In 1991, Hampson took part in Metropolitan Opera's Silver Anniversary opening night gala, and performed Copland's *Old American Songs* to inaugurate the New York Philharmonic season. During 1992, the baritone returned to the Met for *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and for an all-star televised tribute to the Rossini Bicentennial at Avery Fisher Hall. The same season, *Musical America* named Hampson its Singer of the Year, while in 1993 the International Classical Music Awards recognized his achievements by naming him Male Singer of the Year. A leading recitalist on the world's stages, Hampson regularly dedicates portions of his programs to well-known and rare American music, while continuing his commitment to the masterworks of the European Lieder tradition. One of today's most prolific recording artists, the baritone's award-winning discography ranges from Bach to Mahler, Schubert to Stephen Foster, and Mozart to Cole Porter.



Australian tenor **David Hobson** is making his U.S. debut in the role of the Chevalier de Danceny in *The Dangerous Liaisons*. His operatic career began with the Victoria State Opera in Melbourne in 1987, in their Young Artist Program, where he performed several leading roles in opera and musical comedy. The next year, he made his debut at The Australian Opera in Sydney, and won the Dame Joan Sutherland Scholarship Award. From 1989 through 1993, he was a resident artist with The Aus-

tralian Opera, where his roles included Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, Lindoro in *L'Italiana in Algeri*, Piquillo in *La Pêrichole*, Don Ramiro in *La Cenerentola*, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and Orpheus in Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*. In addition to his operatic appearances, Hobson is also a composer whose works include a musical theater version of *Macbeth*, and he has also been active in the areas of rock and jazz, appearing frequently on television and in recordings. Video credits include The Australian Opera's productions of *The Gondoliers*, *Don Giovanni* and *La Bohème*. The latter, featuring Hobson in the role of Rodolfo, is also available on CD and was the subject of a recent nationwide PBS telecast. Last year, Hobson was named Australian Operatic Performer of the Year, and he received the Sydney Critics' Circle Award. Future Australian Opera engagements include Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, and the Architect in the world premiere of Alan John's *The Eighth Wonder*, an opera about the Sydney Opera House.



American baritone **James Scott Sikon** makes his San Francisco Opera debut in *The Dangerous Liaisons*. The singer recently appeared in two world premieres: Houston Grand Opera's *The Dracula Diary*, in current release on CD, and Peter Maxwell Davies's *The Number 11 Bus* at the Vienna Volksoper. Other recent engagements include *Rigoletto* with San Diego Opera, and *Turandot* with the Colorado Opera Festival. An alumnus of the Houston Opera Studio, Sikon has also appeared with the New

York City Opera National Company, the Florentine Opera of Milwaukee, and the opera companies of St. Louis and Omaha. Future engagements include returns to the Houston Grand Opera, San Diego Opera, and the Colorado Opera Festival.



American baritone **Hector Vásquez** sings the role of Azolan in *The Dangerous Liaisons* and Vitellius in *Hérodiade*. A native of California, he was San Francisco Opera Center's Adler Fellow in 1991-92 and made his San Francisco Opera debut in the 1991 production of *War and Peace*. He has returned numerous times to sing in Company productions of *Tosca*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Andrea Chénier*, *I Vespri Siciliani* (substituting in one performance for an ailing colleague in the leading role of Monforte),

Capriccio, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and, most recently, in the 1993 production of *Die Meistersinger*. During the past year, he performed on the Schwabacher Debut Recital series, sang the title role in the Opera San Jose production of *Rigoletto* and appeared as Brander in *The Damnation of Faust* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Simon Rattle. As a member of the 1989 and 1990 Merola Opera Programs, he sang in productions of *Carmen* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* and performed on Western Opera Theater tours of these productions. Vásquez has just completed performing the title role of *Don Giovanni* at the San Luis Obispo Mozart Festival and the Mendocino Music Festival and will make his Metropolitan Opera debut next season as Beaumarchais in *The Ghosts of Versailles*.



American tenor **Matthew Lord** is in his San Francisco Opera debut season, during which he will appear in productions of *The Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Fiery Angel* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Member of the prestigious Juilliard Opera Center for two consecutive seasons, he was heard there as Judge Danforth in Robert Ward's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Crucible* and the title role in Vaughan Williams's *Hugh The Drover*. As a guest artist at the Juilliard Opera Center, Lord also appeared as

Nerone in Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. He also portrayed the title role in Opera Delaware's world premiere of Conrad Cummings's *Tonkin*, and was the Steersman in *Der Fliegende Holländer* with Dallas Opera. In other recent seasons, the California native was featured in leading roles with San Francisco Opera Center's Western Opera Theater, the Monadnock Music Festival (NH), Chicago Opera Theatre, and Opera Theater of St. Louis. His concert appearances include an engagement with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in performances of Hannibal Peterson's *African Portrait* and with the Juilliard Orchestra in performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at Avery Fisher Hall.



Young American tenor **Gregory Cross**, in his San Francisco Opera debut season, will be heard as the Duel Second in *The Dangerous Liaisons*, the Doge in *Otello* and Nereo in *Mefistofele*. His career has already taken him to many important performing arts centers of the world, such as the Festival Baroque de Versailles, where he made his European debut during the 1992-93 season as Renaud in Gluck's *Armide*. Also in 1992, he was heard as Count Almaviva in a telecast performance of *Il*

Barbiere di Siviglia at the Nancy Opera in a new production staged by Ruggero Raimondi. At greater Miami Opera, he performed Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* last year, while this year, he traveled to London for the role of Iopas in *Les Troyens*, conducted by Sir Colin Davis. A large portion of his career so far has been taken up with oratorio and concert performances, and the Colorado native has performed with many leading orchestras and conductors throughout the U.S. and Canada. His debut recording, made with the Montreal Symphony under Charles Dutoit, features him and baritone Gino Quilico in the duet from Bizet's *Pearl Fishers*.



A 1994 Adler Fellow with the San Francisco Opera Center, tenor **Alfredo Portilla** hails from Mexico City, where he began performing at age 11 in an experimental film of *Oliver Twist*. Since 1990, he has been a member of the Bellas Artes opera company, where his roles included the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Alfredo in *La Traviata*, Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore* and several others. He has also appeared with a large number of Mexican symphony orchestras,

and at most important festivals there. In 1992, Portilla was selected by the San Francisco Opera Center from auditions around the Asia/Pacific region to participate in the first-ever Pacific Voices program. As participant in the 1993 Merola Opera Program, he sang the role of Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*, repeating the portrayal on Western Opera Theater's 1993 national tour. At MOP's Grand Finals, he was awarded the prestigious Florence Bruce Award. This year's activities include the role of Paris in Opera Center's Showcase production of Tippet's *King Priam*, and the part of Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with New Jersey Opera.



American baritone **Earle Patriarco**, an Opera Center Adler Fellow since 1993, performs the roles of the Footman in *The Dangerous Liaisons* and the Doctor in *The Fiery Angel*. Following his San Francisco Opera mainstage debut in the 1992 staging of *Boris Godunov*, he appeared in productions of *Andrea Chénier*, *La Forza del Destino* and *Christophe Colomb*. He was heard in *La Traviata* during the 1991 Merola Opera Program and returned in 1992 to portray Marcello in *La Bohème*, a role he repeated

on Western Opera Theater's national tour and again during Opera Center's 1993 tour of Japan. In July of this year, he portrayed Hector in the Center's North American premiere of Tippet's *King Priam*. A native of Southern California, Patriarco recently made his European operatic debut as Marcello at the Stuttgart Staatstheater, and has also performed with West Coast Opera, Los Angeles Concert Opera, Marin Opera, San Francisco Symphony Pops and the 1991 Mozart Festival in Lugano, Switzerland. Upcoming engagements include his 1995 debut with Boston Lyric Opera as Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.



San Francisco Opera's music director since 1992, **Donald Runnicles** is widely considered one of the finest opera conductors active today, with a distinguished series of international triumphs to his credit. Born in Edinburgh, the Scottish musician started his professional career in Germany, where he rose from répétiteur in Mannheim in 1980 to General Music Director of Städtische Bühnen in Freiburg in 1989. During this period, he assisted at the Bayreuth Wagner Festival, and started conducting in guest appearances across Europe. His European credits also include highly praised engagements with the Vienna State Opera, where he has led productions of Wagner's *Ring*, *Manon Lescaut* and *Tosca*, Zurich Opera, Royal Opera at Copenhagen, Netherlands Opera and the Vienna Volksoper. In Great Britain, his opera debut took place at the Glyndebourne Festival in 1991 (*Don Giovanni*), while in 1992 he made his native city debut with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra at the prestigious Edinburgh Festival, where he returned to lead the opening concert this summer. His North American debut was in 1988, when he led the Metropolitan Opera's *Lulu* on five hours' notice, while his San Francisco Opera debut occurred in 1990 with highly acclaimed performances of two cycles of Wagner's *Ring*. Recent highlights include the opening performance of the Bayreuth Festival (new production of *Tannhäuser*), debut with the Munich Opera (*Don Giovanni*) and symphonic debuts with the London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Israel Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony and Chicago Symphony. His list of credits with San Francisco Opera includes *Guillaume Tell*, *Boris Godunov*, *Fidelio*, *Don Carlo*, *Salome*, *Capriccio*, *Turandot*, *Die Meistersinger* and *La Clemenza di Tito*. In July of this year, he led the North American premiere of Tippett's *King Priam*, and this fall he will be on the podium for *Macbeth*, *Tannhäuser* and the world premiere of Conrad Susa/Philip Littell's *The Dangerous Liaisons*.



Internationally renowned stage director **Colin Graham** returns to the stage of the War Memorial for his San Francisco Opera debut in the world premiere of *The Dangerous Liaisons*. Now a U.S. citizen, he was born in Sussex, England, where he worked extensively in all branches of legitimate and music theater. During his long association with the operas of Benjamin Britten, he directed all but two of that composer's stage works and, since 1957, staged all Britten world premieres except *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His own production of that opera, however, was the one that introduced him to S.F. Opera audiences in 1972, at which time he toured the United States with The English Opera Group, Britten's own company, of which he was artistic director. By now, Graham has staged over 300 productions worldwide, including 47 world premieres, one of the highlights being the acclaimed production of John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, presented by the Metropolitan Opera in 1991. He recently ended a long association with the English National Opera, for which he was Director of Productions. Involved with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis since 1978, he has created many innovative productions there and became that company's Artistic Director in 1985. The artist has a deep love and knowledge of the Japanese classical theater, and he commissioned Minoru Miki's kabuki operas, *An Actor's Revenge* and *Joruri*, both of which he also directed. His several libretti include the latter.

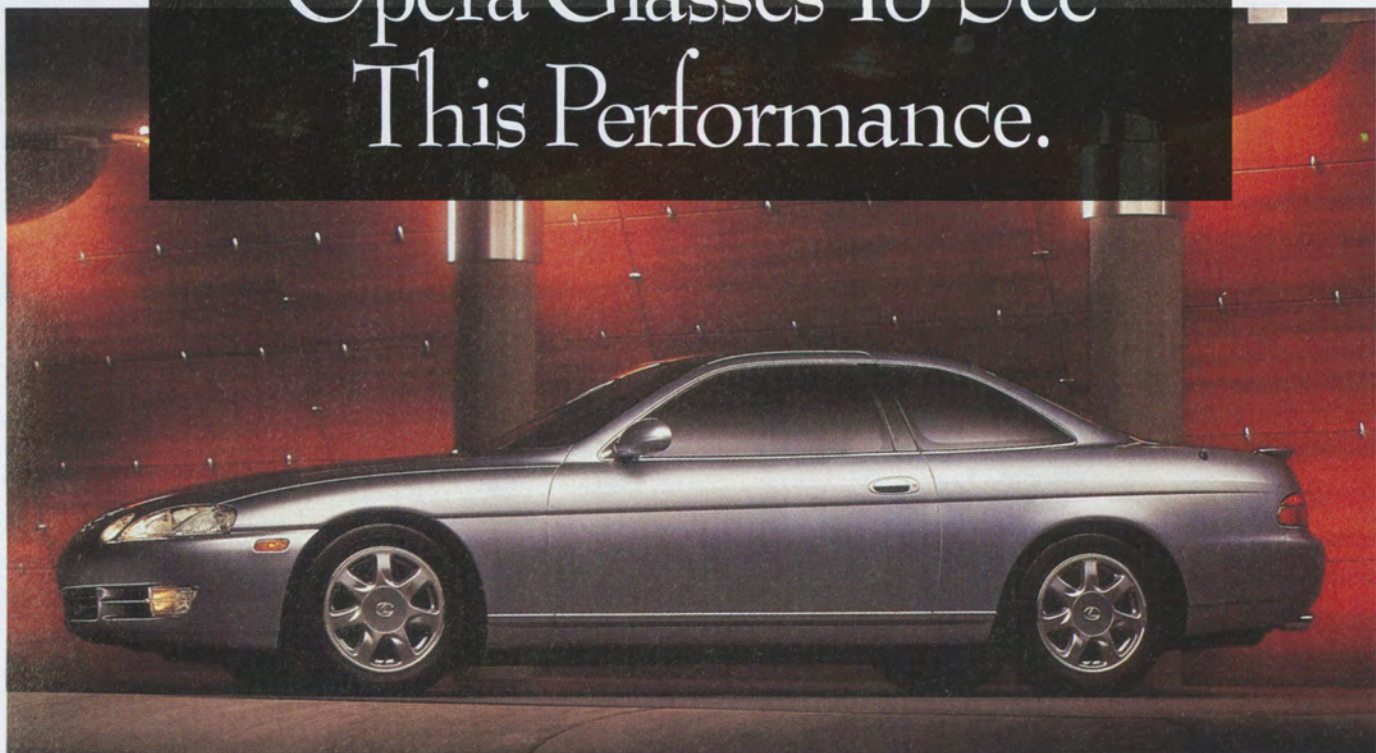


Set designer for all seven new productions of San Francisco Opera's 1994 season, **Gerard Howland** was introduced to our audiences with sets for the 1992 production of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, an occasion that marked his U.S. opera debut. The artist studied at the English National Opera Design School and then served as Associate Designer for the Royal Academy and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Among his theater designs are *Tom Jones* and *The Way of the World* for the Royal Academy, *Henry IV* (Parts I and II), *The Winter's Tale*, *Hyde Park*, *Divine Gossip* and *Scenes from a Marriage* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and *Major Barbara* for the Chichester Festival. He has also designed several plays and musicals for London's West End, as well as for television and film throughout Europe. In Germany, Howland created sets for *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La Bohème*, *Jenůfa*, *The Makropulos Case*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *La Traviata*, *Cardillac* and *Mahagonny*; also *Uncle Vanya*, *The Father*, *Andorra*, and *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. His operatic assignments in England include *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* for the English National Opera, *Ruddigore* and *The Gondoliers* for Sadler's Wells Opera, *Tosca* for Opera North, and *Ariodante* for the Buxton Festival. Since moving to the Bay Area in 1989, the native of England has designed several productions for the American Conservatory Theatre, the South Coast Repertory Theatre, Disney Studios and *La Bohème* for the Los Angeles Opera. Howland has won a number of awards, including the most recent one, the Drama Desk Award.



Lighting Director and Design Consultant for San Francisco Opera since 1976, **Thomas J. Munn** created the lighting for *The Dangerous Liaisons*, *Il Trovatore*, *Tannhäuser*, *The Fiery Angel*, *Hérodiade*, *Mefistofele* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. He has designed the lighting and special effects for over 153 productions for the Company, including the highly acclaimed presentations of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. As scenic adviser, he has designed scenery for SFO productions of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *Roberto Devereux*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Billy Budd*, *Nabucco*, *Don Giovanni* and *Christophe Colomb*. In addition to his work for the San Francisco Opera, Munn has designed scenery and lighting for Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional theater, ballet, industrials and films. His television and video credits include San Francisco Opera productions of *La Gioconda* (for which he received an Emmy Award), *Samson et Dalila*, *Aida*, *L'Africaine*, *La Bohème*, *Orlando Furioso*, *Mefistofele*, *Capriccio* and *Turandot*. Credits for other companies include work for the Houston Grand Opera, Washington Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera and the Netherlands Opera, scenery and lighting for Hartford Ballet's *Nutcracker* and Ballet Arizona's production of *Coppélia*. He is currently working on a new *Nutcracker* for the Atlanta Ballet.

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DIFFERENT LIAISONS

By David Littlejohn

In its original form, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is a novel written entirely in letters: 176 of them¹, written by 13 different correspondents — elegant, cynical, sentimental, passionate (or mock-sentimental, mock-passionate), deceptive, obtuse, pious, diabolical, joking, erotic, desperate letters, depending on who is writing to whom, and when.

With a few exceptions, these are unusually wordy epistles by any modern standard, not only in their length — even characters who profess to be rushed or fatigued always manage to dash off several-page letters, sometimes two or three a day — but also in their intricate 18th-century French syntax and mannerisms.

One reason for the popularity of the letter-novel, despite these apparent obstacles, in the early days of the form was that readers could pretend to believe they were reading an actual account of human experience — a sermon lifted from life — and thus a book more worthy of their time than some writer's narcissistic and probably immoral imaginings. As novelists grew more reputable, and less concerned about offering documentary proof that their fictional narratives were "true," the form tended to die out — only to be revived in our time through modern variations such as Helene Hanff's *44 Charing Cross Road* (1971), insofar as it is fiction; Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983); and Nick Bantock's *Griffin and Sabine* trilogy (1991-93), in which the reader gets to see the very letters and postcards the protagonists write.

Among the hundreds of epistolary novels of the 18th century, English as well as French, Pierre-Ambroise-François Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* of 1782 enjoyed an exceptional success: both a *succès de scandale* — because of its joint heroes' cruel and cavalier attitude towards sex and other people, and because it was presumed to be a *roman à clef*, with detectible originals — and a success in normal bookseller's terms. It went through 15 editions in a year, and at least 35 more before the death in 1803 of its

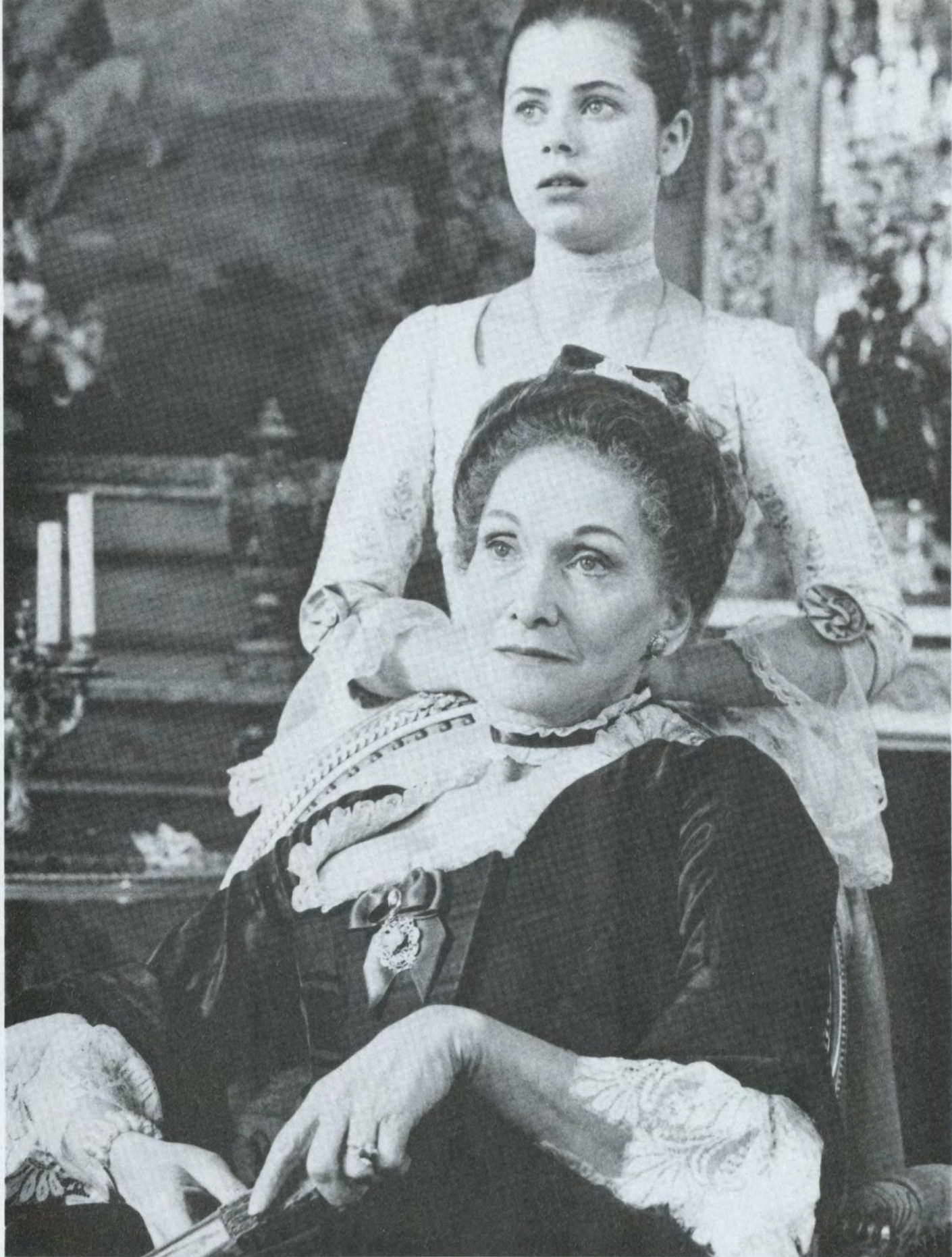
¹ The last letter in the book is numbered 175; but there's an extra, unnumbered one tucked in after number 42.



WARNER BROS.



Michelle Pfeiffer as Madame de Tourvel and Mildred Natwick as Madame de Rosemonde in the 1988 film, *Dangerous Liaisons*



ORION/KOMAREK

Fairuza Balk (standing) as Cécile de Volanges and Sian Phillips as Madame de Volanges in the 1989 film version of Les Liasons Dangereuses, titled Valmont

author, a career artillery officer who had managed to escape the guillotine (though not two prison terms) through all the radical upheavals in France between 1782 and 1803.

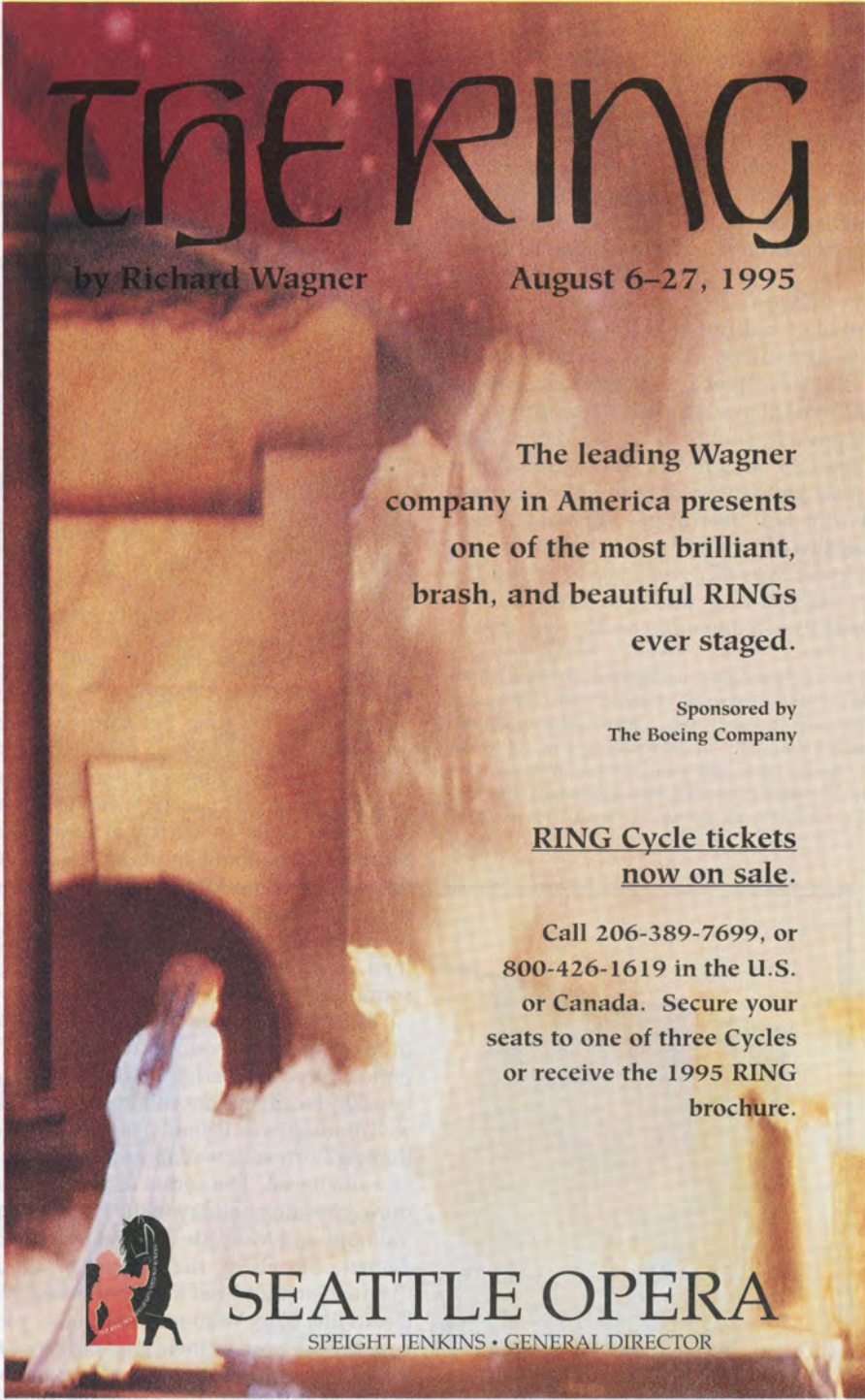
An apparently devoted husband and father, Laclos wrote only this one book. (He wrote it, I admit, when he was not yet a devoted husband and father.) Whatever claims may be made for Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* or Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, this is probably the best, and certainly the most enduring novel of 18th century France. It is hard to think of another work of literature at once so consummately crafted, and crafted of such vile materials.

Despite a century of official disfavor, including a public banning in 1824, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* has endured where the novels of once more prestigious French writers have not. For one thing, along with *Le Diable au corps* and *L'Histoire d'O*, it is one of the few "classic" French novels foreign language students struggle through in the hope of obtaining erotic titillation, perhaps even clues to sexual behavior. But although it is fundamentally about sex (sex-as-power, actually) it is also about a great many other things. Many of the secret pleasures (or pleasurable shivers of disgust) the reader experiences appear to derive so specifically from the letters of which it is composed — notably our backstager's glee in always knowing more of the truth than any single character knows — that it is difficult to understand why anyone would even try to transpose it to another medium.

There is one fundamental obstacle in translating *Les Liaisons dangereuses* for the stage or screen. A playwright or screenwriter, in order to create dramatic, affecting human scenes, is obliged to come up with motives for bringing people together. Laclos, in order to give his leading characters excuses for writing to one another so frequently and at such length, was obliged to keep them apart.

This is not 100% true. Certain characters — notably the (originally) shy youngsters, Cécile and Danceny, and Valmont during his mock-virtuous pursuit of Mme. de Tourvel — write one another letters even when they are in the same house. They do this because they cannot bring themselves to, or are not permitted to say aloud the things they want to communicate.

But it is generally true. The two most important characters and correspondents exchange a total of 55 letters. (Valmont writes to Merteuil more often than she writes to him, in part because she enjoys tormenting him by failing to respond.) But



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they are present in the same place only once in the five months during which the novel takes place.

Clearly, this would never work on stage or screen: 13 people (six of them are essentially spear-carriers) sitting at their various desks, scribbling away? Two brazen sexual manipulators and former lovers, now puppet-masters from hell, who never meet face to face, who trade endearments (more often insults) only by the post?

What has tempted so many playwrights and screenwriters, directors and actors to

try to transform this collection of formal 18th-century French letters, written in so many disparate styles, into a coherent, well-orchestrated single stage action? Two things, I believe: the delicious evil of Laclos's perfectly entangled plot, which can be equally compelling in any medium ("a battle of the sexes so ruthless yet so fascinating," film critic Gary Arnold has called it, "that it may be next to impossible to mess up"); and the challenge of realizing in flesh and blood the ultimate decadence and duplicity of the Marquise de Merteuil

and the Vicomte de Valmont.

Although much has been made of the recent theatrical and film adaptations of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Christopher Hampton was not the first to get the idea of presenting all this well-mannered sexual intrigue on the stage. Theatrical versions were offered in Paris in 1834 (this one included songs), 1907, 1908, 1935, and 1952. In an avant-garde German theater piece by Heiner Müller (1981), simultaneously set before the French Revolution and after World War III, two characters play all of Laclos's roles. Anna Kisselgoff, of the *New York Times*, was pleased by Christian Holder's ballet based on the novel, set to Mozart's chamber music and produced by American Ballet Theatre in 1993.

In 1959, Roger Vadim, free from his own *liaison dangereuse* with Brigitte Bardot, co-wrote and directed a black-and-white film version of Laclos's novel, with Jeanne Moreau and Gérard Philipe as the scheming couple. This time Valmont and Merteuil were a couple indeed, married to each other for 11 years, languorous and jaded as only French actors in a 1959 movie can be, and desperately in search of new kicks. Moreau sulks about in short, sexy black dresses and an ocelot coat. Philipe is handsome but dead behind the eyes. Both of them smoke endless cigarettes (Philipe died at 36, before the year was out) to a soundtrack of Thelonious Monk jazz.

What I find remarkable about Vadim's modern-dress version (despite a few period-piece *gaucheries*: Vadim's vision of late-50s decadence doesn't hold up as well as Antonioni's or Fellini's) is how much of the original text he was able to use, credibly and unaltered. The seductions take place during a skiing holiday in the French Alps. Valmont and Mme. de Tourvel (played by Annette Stroyberg, the director's wife at the time) enjoy a brief idyll on the beach at Deauville. The Valmonts entertain, plot, and declare war in their chic Paris apartment. But again and again, these people talk to one another — or write one another letters — in lines quoted directly from Laclos that sound totally believable in these post-World War II settings. For his final, triumphant seduction of Mme. de Tourvel, Philipe's Valmont follows her moodily around her apartment, looking for all the world like some burnt-out, world-weary Parisian existentialist of the '50s who *really will* kill himself if she continues to resist — something I have believed of no other Valmont, including Laclos's. And at the same time, we hear, in voice-over, the letter he later writes to his wife (taken from Laclos's Letter 125) in

which he proudly describes every flicker and nuance of his own acting job — including his frustrating inability to fake tears. In cross-cuts, we see Moreau in New York, reading his letter.

This is only one of the many ways in which Vadim and his co-creators found a modern, cinematic means of recreating the intimate reading experience of the 1782 novel — while changing remarkably little of its basic intrigue, and retaining many of its actual lines.

One poignant, evil sequence in the novel occurs in Letters 141 and 142. In the first, the marquise "dictates" to Valmont the cool, cruel lines with which he is to break off with Mme. de Tourvel: "One grows weary of everything, my angel, it is a law of Nature; it is not my fault . . . Today, a woman I love madly insists that I sacrifice you to her. It is not my fault . . . Farewell, my angel, I took you with pleasure, I abandon you without regret . . . So goes the world. It is not my fault." In the second letter, Valmont writes back that he has in fact copied out these lines and mailed them to Mme. de Tourvel.

In Vadim's film, Philipe/Valmont confesses to his wife — who realizes that he has, against their secret compact, fallen in love with La Tourvel — that he cannot bring himself to break with her face to face; not even over the phone. Well then, she proposes: why not send her a telegram? To make things easy, Moreau/Merteuil picks up the phone and dictates the telegram for him: "On s'ennuie de tout, mon Ange, c'est un loi de nature. Stop. . . Je t'ai prise avec plaisir, je te quitte sans regret. Stop. Adieu. Stop. Ainsi va le monde, ce n'est pas ma faute. Stop. Valmont."

Christopher Hampton discovered Laclos's novel as an undergraduate at Oxford in the 1960s. By the time he turned it into a play in 1985, he had already made a considerable career out of his stage and television adaptations of European classics. He persuaded Howard Davies to direct his version of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Hampton retained the French title) at the big new London home of the Royal Shakespeare Company — only to find his work displaced by another French adaptation, a new musical called *Les Misérables*. So he and Davies opened it instead, for a 23-performance run, at "The Other Place," the little secondary theater at RSC/Stratford. For the opulent decors they had originally imagined, they substituted an inexpensive, simple, symbolic set, all in off-white tones, with bed linen and underwear draped and scattered about before a backdrop of tall screens.

The play was rapturously received, and transferred to London. It won the Olivier Award as the best London play of the year. Like *Les Misérables*, it was moved to a commercial West End theater, where it ran until 1989. It played in Paris (with an ending closer to the original's), Tokyo, and Jerusalem. A 1987 New York run — with the original Stratford/London leads, Lindsay Duncan and Alan Rickman — was also very favorably reviewed. But declining box office receipts persuaded the U.S. producers to close the show after 20 weeks, rather than invest in a new, American cast. Once the Broadway run ended, the producers granted regional repertory companies permission to mount the play; a dozen separate productions (including one in Los Angeles starring Vanessa Redgrave and Frank Langella) were staged in the U.S. and Canada in 1988-89; there have been at least a dozen more since. The RSC sent it on an eight months' world tour in 1990-91.

Pompous littérateurs foolishly protest that you don't get everything from Hampton's play you get from Laclos's novel. Of course you don't. But Hampton's dramatic condensation is remarkably clever. The novel contains about 175,000 words; the play (including stage directions) perhaps 25,000. In place of Laclos's

176 separate monologues, Hampton gives us 18 vivid scenes — into which he incorporates many of the most memorable episodes described in the letters. He also sets lines from one letter against those from the letter responding to it, creating a deft repartée not unlike that of Restoration comedy or Marivaux.

What are most obviously missing in the play are the *politesse*, the elaborate forms of rhetoric (whether of sentimentality or insult); most of the cynical philosophizing; the conventional protestations of piety by Mme. de Tourvel; and the immature love-exchanges of Cécile and Danceny. Some secondary tales and affairs are dropped. In place of the dire fate Laclos metes out to Mme. de Merteuil at the end (she is left bankrupt by a lawsuit, booed out of society, and loses her looks to smallpox), Hampton let her go free. In fact, he allows her to have the last word, as she sits at a card table at her Paris mansion — his play opens the same way — with Mmes. de Volanges and Rosemonde:

This has been a terrible few weeks. But time passes so quickly. A new year tomorrow and more than half-way through the eighties already... I suggest our best course is to continue with the game.

At this point, the stage directions call for "the unmistakable silhouette of the guillotine" to appear on the back wall, which prompted many reviewers to write as if the French Revolution was caused by the indecent intrigues of a few decadent aristocrats. The "mid-eighties" reference was then taken as a cue to transfer Laclos's moral lessons somewhat simplistically to the Thatcher/Reagan era.

Wiser critics, and eventually the playwright himself, admitted that this heavy-handed message-mongering was an error, that this wasn't at all what Laclos was getting at; it is not present in later RSC productions or in Hampton's screenplay, which also preserves Mme. de Merteuil's disgrace.² One danger of adapting such a dense, leisurely, discursive text into 18 snappy scenes is that the adapter will seek out the more obviously clever or nasty or "meaningful" moments, and lose the exquisite joys of an attenuated seduction.

² There is internal evidence that Laclos intended to set his action in the 1760s. Even so, he did write, in 1783, "In every society, women are slaves... [and] there is no escape from slavery but by a great revolution." I read this less as a prophecy of the political future than as his attempt at a defense, or at least justification, of Mme. de Merteuil — who does seem, in the end, the one true moral monster in the book.

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Laclos's novel includes a wealth of such moments — notably the famous *double-entendre* letter, number 48, which Valmont writes to Mme. de Tourvel (for Merteuil's delectation) on Emilie's bare backside: "Indeed, the position I am in as I write you makes me understand more than ever the irresistible power of love; I can scarcely preserve sufficient control of myself to put my ideas in some order." A 1993 version of Philip Littell's opera libretto expanded this idea to the point of an onstage copulation.

Although almost everything in Hampton's play comes from Laclos's novel, letters must be reduced to paragraphs, paragraphs to lines, lines to words; a seduction to which Valmont willingly devotes three months, and the reader perhaps six hours, must be concluded in an hour; every irony is sharpened; what was in the book as slow and pulsing as life — until the violently condensed conclusion — becomes on the stage as prancing and brisk as a minuet. In compensation, if you are fortunate enough to see a production as suave as the original, you will get the distinct and indisputable advantage of real people — people like us, except with greater charm and skill — incarnating these literary conceits, and making even a drastically reduced version of Laclos's immoral, immortal story hit you in the face with its power.

Partly because it earned a reported \$90 million and three Academy Awards, and has therefore been seen recently by a great many people (including, I presume, opera-lovers; four of its scenes take place during operas), I won't try to describe in detail Stephen Frears's 1988 film version, called *Dangerous Liaisons*. In any case, Christopher Hampton adapted the screenplay from his own stage play, and although he and Frears had to cut out a great many words, the film follows fairly closely the story and sequence of the play.

Volumes have been written about the performances of Glenn Close, John Malkovich, Michelle Pfeiffer, and their colleagues. Like most reviewers, I was immensely impressed by Close's studied, frigid, hieratic interpretation of the Marquise, and by Pfeiffer's finely nuanced reading of Tourvel's gradual downfall (a good translation of her slowly melting sequence of letters to Valmont). John Malkovich, on the other hand, seemed to me all wrong as Valmont — an ugly American trying to force himself into the mind, skin, and costumes of an 18th-century French aristocrat by sheer force of will. But I would rather concentrate on the work of the writer and director.

Re-viewing the videotape of *Dangerous Liaisons* with Hampton's play open before me, I was struck by what I discovered. The play is virtually all there on the screen — which is not surprising, considering that Hampton had only three weeks to write his film adaptation. But, as he had performed radical surgery on the novel when turning it into a play, so does he again when turning play into film. On page after page, scenes are reduced to as few lines as one can possibly use and still make sense. In the play, three or four letters are condensed into a dialogue by making use of all their best lines. In the film, even this spare dialogue is often reduced to a pregnant exchange of unfinished sentences — the missing portions conveyed by expressive faces seen in extreme close-up, crossed glances in a mirror-lined hall, golden or powdery-rose light coming in through French windows.

The longest and most eloquent letter in Laclos's novel is number 81, in which Mme. de Merteuil begins by pointing out to Valmont, because of the cruelly unequal terms society offers them, how much harder sexual liaisons are for women to manage than for men, and therefore how much more clever and self-controlled a woman has to be to succeed. She then proceeds to tell him (and us) the story of her life, on the theme: "I was born to avenge my sex and to dominate yours." In the novel, this key confession takes more than 4,000 words. In the play, with a few perfunctory interruptions from Valmont, it takes about 850. In the film, it takes just over 400 — and at that it is probably the longest speech in the work. (In the opera, it is transformed into Frederica von Stade's aria at the start of the four-bedroom/five-letter scene, with a text of 323 words; but then of course she has Conrad Susa's music as well.)

The Czech-born director Milos Forman had announced his plans to film *Les Lays* (as the Hollywood trade papers took to calling it) in the summer of 1987. But Forman's more meticulous, methodical methods of casting and film-making meant that his version — entitled, for no clear reason, *Valmont* — took a year longer than Stephen Frears's to reach the world's screens. In a season of pre-release interviews, Forman (best-known, in this context, for *Amadeus*, his gaudy, giddy, non-historical, and highly personal version of the life of Mozart) admitted that he was not trying to film Laclos's novel so much as his own vaguely-remembered vision of what he had thought *Les Liaisons dangereuses* was about, when he first read

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Milos Forman, on the set while directing the *Valmont* film, talks to Colin Firth, who played the title role.

it as a schoolboy.

The Frears production cost half as much as the Forman, although it is hard to tell where the extra \$15 million was spent: Frears's chateaux, parks, salons, costumes, and furniture — visual counterparts to 18th century prose — look every bit as authentic and opulent as Forman's. Glenn Close and John Malkovich obviously cost more than Annette Bening and Colin Firth. Some of his economies, no doubt, came from Frears's decision not to spend money on the sort of generic period crowd scenes in which Forman likes to indulge.

The inadequacy of Forman's cast, and the director's odd conception of their roles (Cécile and Danceny are played by *real* American children, which makes the sex scenes they're in look just creepy) destroys any chance this film had of evoking or doing justice to the original. But Forman, and his writer Jean Claude Carrière, never intended to do justice to the original, as the director admitted in a *New York Times* interview of Nov. 13, 1989. They ignore the book's language and tone, and allow their characters to talk in a kind of coarse modern slang. They invent new episodes that clumsily pervert a very carefully perverted intrigue. Mme. de Merteuil, naked on a bed, petulantly whines "I want more!"

to her ex-lover-to-be — who never even appears in the novel. A dreadful new encounter is staged between Cécile, costumed as a whore, and poor Danceny in an luridly decorated *maison d'amour*. Cécile does *not* enter a convent; instead, pregnant by Valmont, she marries old Gercourt in the royal chapel at Versailles, where ancient Mme. de Rosemonde winks at her knowingly, and Danceny flirts with new girlfriends. Valmont does die (in an off-screen duel), but Mme. de Tourvel survives to place flowers on his grave.

In 1959, the French Société des Gens de Lettres lodged a formal lawsuit against Roger Vadim for messing around with Laclos's classic novel. They were wrong to object: classic novels ought to be messed around with (as long as the result makes some kind of sense), and I believe that Vadim, Moreau, and Philippe enhanced the stature of the original by demonstrating its malleability and its endurance over time. For all its radical surgery and objectification, I think Christopher Hampton's play also demonstrates the durable, diabolical potency of Laclos's central characters and their terrible plot; so, to a lesser degree, does his screenplay.

The Susa/Littell collaboration was not the first opera based on Choderlos de

Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, nor will it be the last. In 1974, the Opéra du Rhin in Strasbourg produced Claude Trey's opera on the subject, in which five performers read and sang extracts from the letters of Valmont, Merteuil, Tourvel, Cécile, and Danceny, seconded by five different musical instruments. For its 1996-97 season, the Flemish Opera in Antwerp has commissioned yet another version, by composer Piet Swerts and librettist Dirk van der Gruysse.

The opera that works best, like the more successful stage and screen adaptations, will be the one that finds resources within its own medium to fill up the void of all the missing words. It will offer the auditor a uniquely musical-dramatic experience, in a large public auditorium, that approaches the awesome private experience of the reader — who becomes more an unwilling co-conspirator with the Marquise and the Vicomte, the more pleasure he (or she) takes in reading their letters.

David Littlejohn is a critic, novelist, and professor of journalism at the University of California in Berkeley. His latest book, *The Ultimate Art: Essays Around and About Opera*, (University of California Press, 1992) is made up of essays that originally appeared in this magazine.

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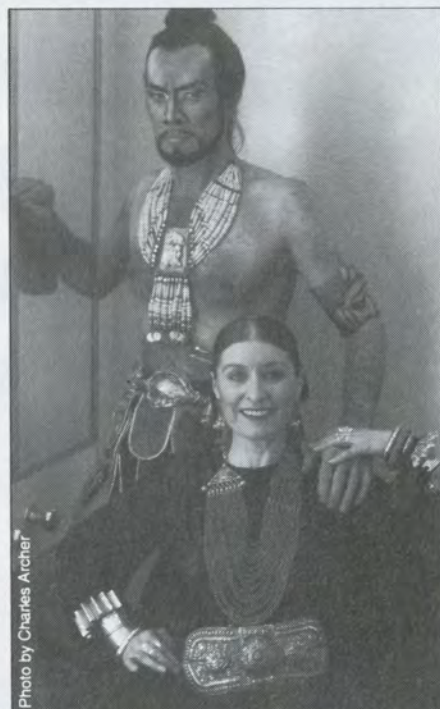


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In order to increase the enjoyment of opera for hearing-impaired members of the audience, the War Memorial Opera House is equipped with a Sennheiser Listening System. Headphones and induction devices (adaptable to hearing aids) are available in the coat checkroom at the south end of the main lobby. There is no charge, but an ID deposit, such as a driver's license or major credit card, is required.

OPERA HOUSE TOURS

Sponsored by the San Francisco Opera Guild, house and backstage tours of the War Memorial Opera House will be conducted every half hour from 10 a.m. to 12 noon on weekdays and on Saturday; and every 15 minutes from 10 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Sundays on the following dates:

Tuesday, October 4
Sunday, October 9
Wednesday, October 19
Sunday, November 6
Saturday, November 19
Friday, November 25
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Tickets for Guild members, \$2; non-members, \$5. Reservations required. Information: (415) 565-6433.

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. . . and park in the Performing Arts Garage, remember that you can avoid some of the congestion by using the Gough Street entrance to the facility (between Fulton and Grove).

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER TOURS

Tours of the San Francisco Performing Arts Center include the Opera House, Davies Symphony Hall and Herbst Theatre and take place as follows: Mondays, every half-hour between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Special tours of Davies Hall only may be scheduled on Wednesdays and Saturdays by request. All tours leave from the Grove Street entrance of Davies Symphony Hall. There are no tours on holidays. General \$3; Seniors and students, \$2.

Information: (415) 552-8338.

Special service for San Francisco Opera patrons: Many operagoers who live in the northern section of San Francisco are regular patrons of the Municipal Railway special "Opera Bus." This bus is added to Muni's north-bound 47 line following all evening performances of the Opera and all Sunday matinees. Look for the "47 Special" after each performance in the bus zone at Van Ness Avenue and Grove Street — across Van Ness from the Opera House. Its route is: North on Van Ness to Chestnut, left to Divisadero and left to Union. It continues on Union over Russian Hill to Columbus, then left to Powell — then right to the end of the line at North Point.

Food Service. The Opera House lower lounge is open one and one-half hours prior to curtain time for hot buffet service. Patrons arriving before the front doors open will be admitted at the carriage entrance. Refreshments are served in the box tier on the mezzanine floor, the grand tier and dress circle levels during all performances.

Emergency Telephone. The telephone number (415) 431-4370 may be used by patrons for emergencies only during performances. Before the performance, patrons anticipating possible emergencies should leave their seat number at the nurse's station in the lower lounge, where the emergency telephone is located.

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

Ticket Information. San Francisco Opera's Ticket and Patron Services Center, 199 Grove at Van Ness, open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Opera House Box Office: open 2 hours before each performance through the first intermission on performance days only. Phone charge: (415) 864-3330, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday (VISA, American Express, MasterCard). Tickets are also available on

a limited basis through BASS and STBS outlets.

Make a valued contribution to San Francisco Opera. You can make an important contribution to San Francisco Opera by returning any tickets you cannot use to the Box Office for resale. These ticket returns are of great value to S.F. Opera and to other patrons who may be unable to obtain tickets to sold-out performances. If you are unable to use your tickets or exchange them for another performance of the same opera, you may make a full-value, tax-deductible contribution of your tickets. To make a donation, simply return your tickets to the Box Office or call (415) 864-3330, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. You may also call (415) 565-6485 from 6 p.m. to 10 minutes before curtain. Unfortunately, we are unable to apply the donations towards membership benefits.

Taxi Service. Patrons needing a cab at the end of the performance should reserve one with the doorman at the taxi entrance before the end of the last intermission.

For **Lost and Found** information, inquire at checkroom No.3 or call (415) 621-6600, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., Monday through Friday.

Wheelchair accessible restrooms are located in the lower lounge. Wheelchair accessible public telephones including "TDD" are located in the northeast corner of the lobby.

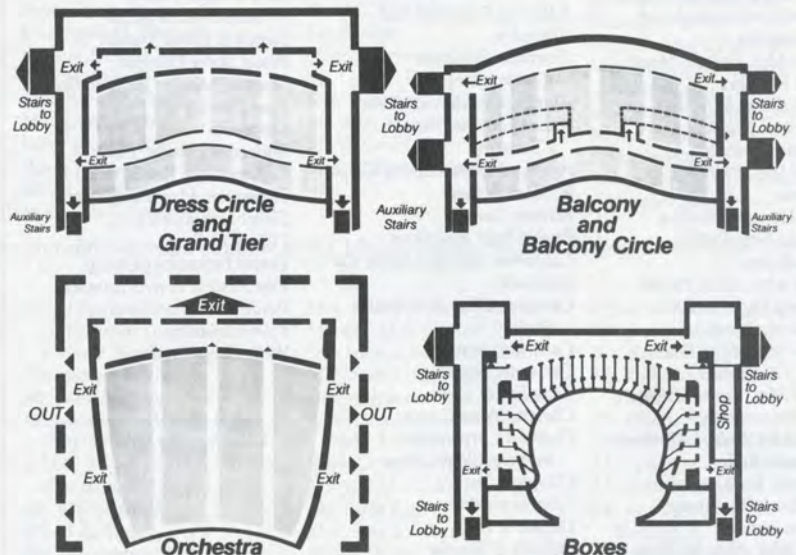
For the safety and comfort of our audience, all large parcels, backpacks, luggage, etc., must be checked at Opera House cloak-rooms.

Opera glasses are available in the lobby.

No cameras, tape recorders or cellular phones are permitted in the Opera House. Children of any age attending a performance must have a ticket.

Management reserves the right to remove any patron creating a disturbance.

San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center War Memorial Opera House



Patrons, Attention Please! Fire Notice: There are sufficient exits in this building to accommodate the entire audience. The exit indicated by the lighted "EXIT" sign nearest your seat is the shortest route to the street. (Refer to Diagrams.) In case of fire please do not run—walk through that exit.

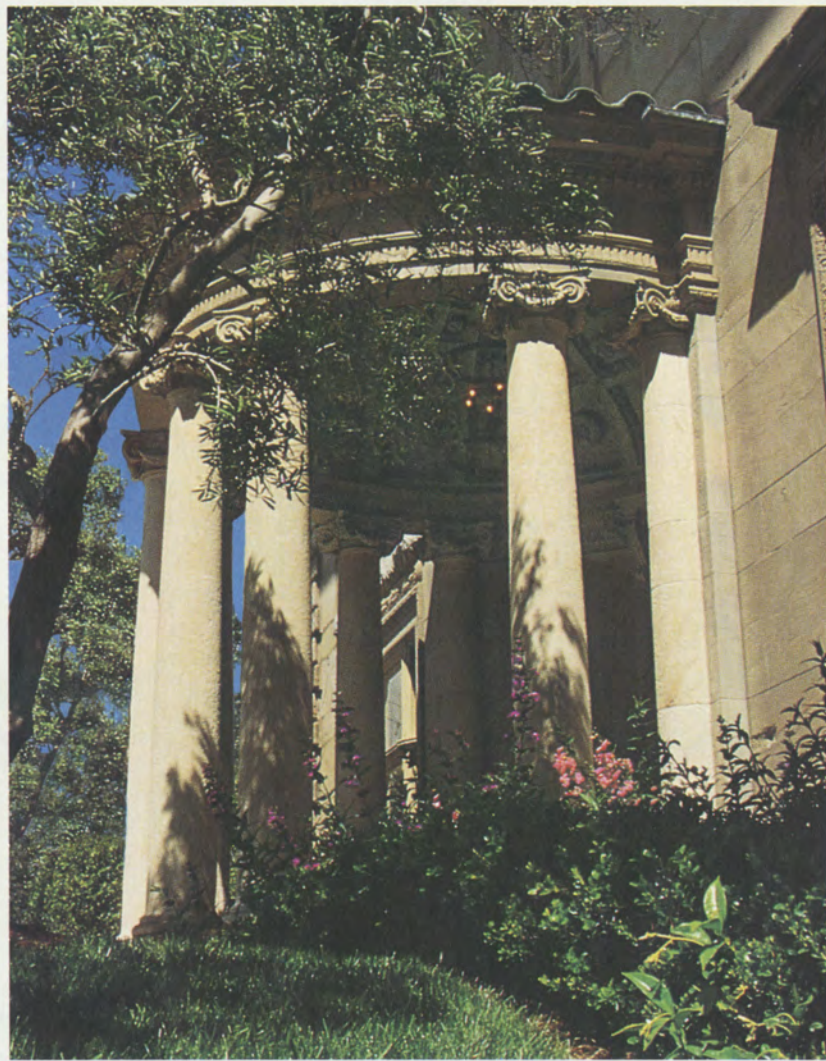


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(Noah's Flood)

A Chester Miracle Play set to music by Benjamin Britten

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A Children's Hymn to the United Nations

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June 9, 1995 • 8 pm

June 10, 1995 • 2 & 8 pm

**St. Anne's Anglican Church
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*presented in association with
the Canadian Opera Company*

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June 12 & 13, 1995 • 8 pm

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*presented by
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June 23, 1995 • 8 pm

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**First Congregational Church
432 Mason Street at Post**

*presented by
the San Francisco Opera*

San Francisco Opera Box Office

(415) 864-3330

Tickets: \$20 – Children *\$6 (12 years of age and under) *\$8 San Francisco

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Billetterie du San Francisco Opera
(415) 864-3330

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