



The Fourth Opera League Seminar on Puccini's *Tosca* and *La Rondine*, plus a Tribute to Soprano Dorothy Kirsten

By Anne Kokawa Prokopovych

The final Opera League seminar of the 2007-2008 season will be on Saturday morning, May 10, from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm, in the 5th floor salon of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at the Music Center. Opera League Seminars are opportunities for newcomers as well as seasoned fans to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of featured operas. This seminar will offer a fresh look at two Puccini favorites that will be performed by the Los Angeles Opera, *Tosca* and *La Rondine* (The Swallow). You will also hear special personal insights about a legendary American soprano, Dorothy Kirsten.

Dr. Michael Hackett, Professor of Theater at UCLA, will present historical and dramatic aspects of Puccini's *Tosca*. This opera, based on a play by Victorien Sardou, is set in an exact historical time and place in order to concentrate our attention on the personal dramas of the characters. History, politics and ideals serve as background and pretext, but the real motivations are strictly personal. The opera features the ultimate triangle of passion: the opera diva Floria Tosca, her lover Cavadarossi, and the villainous Baron Scarpia.

In addition to his pedagogic career, Prof. Hackett has directed for the Royal Opera (Covent Garden), the Royal Theatre at The Hague, the Centrum Sztuki School and Dramatyczny Theatre in Warsaw, the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, the Los Angeles Opera (children's series), the L.A. Theatre Works, and the Getty Museum. He is also consulting for the Los Angeles Opera to develop educational programs for Richard Wagner's Ring cycle that will begin next season.



Dorothy Kirsten

Seminar moderator Allan Edmiston will continue with a segment highlighting some historic recordings of Puccini's *La Rondine*. This opera's lighthearted music belies its story of emptiness and tragedy. The opera's heroine, the courtesan Magda, yearns for ideal love and a lasting relationship that will challenge her comfortable, yet stagnant existence in the increasingly outdated lifestyle of a courtesan.

The seminar will conclude with a tribute to American lyric soprano, Dorothy Kirsten, who lived in Los

Angeles during her later years. Ms. Kirsten sang leading roles at the Metropolitan Opera for 30 years and was particularly renowned for her performances of Puccini heroines, including Floria Tosca and Magda. At the height of her career, in the 1950's and 60's, her appeal extended beyond the opera house to musical theater and film, including 'The Great Caruso' with Mario Lanza and 'Mr. Music' with Bing Crosby.

Seminar moderator Allan Edmiston will lead a discussion with Michael Hackett and special guest, Victoria Hillebrand, who was a close friend and personal assistant to Ms. Kirsten for many years. With this seminar the Opera League continues with one of its most important stated goals of making exemplary opera-related educational opportunities available to its members and to the community. We hope that you will mark your calendar and plan to join us. The invitation for this May 10 seminar is on page 5.

a word from our president

Keeping you apprised of where the League is going is essential. The word "transparency" is bantered around a lot in political circles. Before you raise a skeptical eyebrow, let me assure you that our context is to keep you informed and to have a dialogue with you.

In the last issue I mentioned that we were exploring ways to reach out to the Latino community. We have identified two ways to go forward. First is to nurture our association with Hispanics for LA Opera. Clearly we have some common objectives and want to develop closer ties. A link to their website (through our website, operaleague.org) will inform you of their events. We encourage our members to participate in their events and of course we extend the same invitation to their members to come to our seminars, musicales, gatherings and so forth.

Secondly, a task force has been created to research ways for more Opera League outreach in underserved areas of the community. It will be headed by Vice President



Dorothy Wait, President

Judy Lieb together with directors Alma Guzman, Steve Kohn, Carlos Rodriguez and Dale Ross.

Stacy Brightman, LA Opera's Director of Community Programs, local artist Suzanna Guzman, and Sister Jennie of the Puente Learning Center in east Los Angeles will provide guidance to the task force.

We slowly are becoming informed of the vast network of people who care very much about bringing the arts, including opera, to the southern California areas that has not been included in the past.

Please let us know through our e-mail or phone line if you have any suggestions to help us in our endeavor.

Warm regards,
Dorothy Wait



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Editor	Edward Lieb
Printer	Licher Direct Mail
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Member Profile: Audre Slater

Many attributes come to mind in describing Audre Slater—warm, generous, dynamic, hard-worker. But you may not know that these also apply: a self-described "hustler," "difficult to refuse when she asks," "exceptional fund-raiser," and "sales woman."

Audre has been a most generous benefactor to the Opera League., either personally or through the organization that she founded (and heads) *The Los Angeles Philanthropic Committee for the Arts*. She has been, simply put, an amazing friend.

Some of her contributions include bringing in new members (13 this year so far), underwriting the artists at the Hemmings event for several years, helping to secure the venue for this year's Hemmings event.

She has been active in philanthropy for many years, and, no doubt, her degree in economics prepared her for community involvement. She has been President of the *Los Angeles Philharmonic Business and Professional Committee*, and she currently serves on the boards of the *Long Beach Opera*, *Music Angelica*, and the *Odyssey Theater*.

One of the major accomplishments of the *Committee for the Arts* has been to build a music library for LA Opera at the Music Center. This group also provides many of the musical scores and CDs for use by our chorus and young singers.

Thank you, Audre!



Audre Slater
Photo: Audre Slater

Backstage Magic

By Charles Stern

The lights go down. The curtain goes up. Time stops. The opera magicians have done it again! You've been transported to another place and another time. We all know there are no more willing suspenders of disbelief than opera lovers! Part of the excitement is letting ourselves be mesmerized, even while knowing that there is a great deal of wizardry going on backstage to lure us into operatic make-believe.

Since 2004, LA Opera has provided rare opportunities for opera lovers who are members of the Opera League of Los Angeles to learn more about how an opera production is actually put together. Members of the LA Opera staff who are directly involved in stage production have explained how they wield their many skills in bringing an opera production to life.

This year, the tradition continues on the evening of April 10, 2008, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

This presentation of "Backstage Magic" will feature LA Opera's Jeff Kleeman, Technical Director, and Rupert Hemmings, Production Director, explaining LA Opera's backstage work "From Design to Production."

A wine-and-hors d'oeuvres reception is scheduled for 7:00 p.m., with the presentation following at 7:30 p.m.

Jill Michnick, LA Opera's Assistant Director of Development, Special Events, says that "Backstage Magic 2008" is the company's way of saying "Thank You" to the Opera League members for their support.

Special invitations have been sent to all Regular and higher category Opera League members. Student members have also been invited. The announcement of Backstage Opera 2008 is a good opportunity for you to review your membership status. It's not too late to join the League or upgrade your membership!

Celebrating America Musicale

By Anne Russell Sullivan

For our last musicale of this season, the Opera League will be featuring American music in a program titled Celebrating America! It will be held on Saturday, May 24 at 2 pm at a home in Pomona (just outside Claremont). As you can see we have attempted to hold the musicales in geographically diverse locations to make them accessible to as many members as possible. Orange County held one last season, so they will be at the top of the schedule in the fall.

Once again the talented Victoria Kirsch will be planning the program and accompanying the artists. We will be hearing selections from American Opera and American songs. Light picnic fare (such as hot dogs and apple pie) will be served.

Be looking for our "E-blast" shortly before the event where we will have more details about the artists and program.

Make your reservations soon, as space

is limited. The address of this Musicale and directions will be sent to you with your confirmation (see the "Invitation" page).



Photo: Anne Russell Sullivan

Three "deceivers" at our last musicale, "Deception in Opera"

calendar

April

Opera Talk at Julienne's

Monday, April 7, 7 pm
 2649 Mission Street, San Marino
 \$10 for program and beverage, an extra \$10 for the for the "Light Supper Box"
 Reservations are required
 626.441.2299, ext. 15 or email julie@juilienne.biz

Backstage Magic

Thursday, April 10, 7 pm
 Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Grand Hall
 RSVP required

May

Opera Talk at Julienne's

Monday, May 5, 7 pm
 2649 Mission Street, San Marino
 \$10 for program and beverage, an extra \$10 for the for the "Light Supper Box"
 Reservations are required
 626.441.2299, ext. 15 or email julie@juilienne.biz

The Fourth Opera League Seminar

Tosca, La Rondine, and a tribute to Dorothy Kirsten
Saturday, May 10, 9:20 am
 Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 5th floor
 Reservations are required (see the "Invitations" page)

Cast Dinner

Sunday, May 11, 5:30 pm
 Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th floor
 Contact Monica Gutierrez-Roper
 monylamony@yahoo.com

Spring Musicale

Saturday, May 24, 2 pm
 Pomona (near Claremont)
 (see the "Invitations" page)

June

Opera Talk at Julienne's

Monday, June 2, 7 pm
 2649 Mission Street, San Marino
 \$10 for program and beverage, an extra \$10 for the for the "Light Supper Box"
 Reservations are required
 626.441.2299, ext. 15 or email julie@juilienne.biz

Cast Dinner

Tuesday, June 3, 6 pm
 Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 4th floor
 Contact Monica Gutierrez-Roper
 monylamony@yahoo.com

Tosca and La Rondine Gatherings

Please contact the person in charge for more information and to make a reservation.

Antelope Valley

Tosca and La Rondine
 Sunday May 4, 2-4:30 pm
 43422 25th St. W., Lancaster
 Dr. Harald Krueger 661.728.0671

Beverly Hills

Tosca and La Rondine
 Sunday, May 18, 10 am
 10430 Wilshire Blvd. Westwood
 Millicent Gappell 310.836.4676
 Anne Russell Sullivan 323.697.9733

Claremont

Tosca
 May 18, 2-5 pm.
 530 W. 11th Street, Claremont
 Patricia O'Donnell 909.447.5038

Tosca and La Rondine Gatherings, continued

Hollywood/Hancock Park

Tosca and La Rondine
 Sunday, April 20, 2 pm
 441 S. Lucerne Blvd., Los Angeles
 Mike and Claudia Margolis
 323.935.3366

Orange County

Tosca and La Rondine
 Sunday, May 4, 2-5 pm
 5305 Camino de Bryant,
 Yorba Linda
 Claire Chambless 714.533.4186

San Fernando Valley

Tosca and La Rondine
 Sunday, May 18, 3-5:30 pm
 4830 Brandenburg Place, Tarzana
 Jackie Johns 818.980.5743

San Gabriel Valley

Tosca and La Rondine
 Thursday, May 15 7-9:30 pm
 5278 La Canada Blvd., La Canada
 Michael Sholer 818.502.1988

South Bay

La Rondine
 Sunday, May 18, 2 pm
 Please call for location.
 Bob Lerner 310.543.4544

Ventura County

Tosca and La Rondine
 Sunday, May 4, 2-5 pm
 2114 Portola Lane, Westlake Village
 Ann Randall 805.444.6021

Westside

Tosca and La Rondine
 Monday, May 12, 7:15 pm
 585 Almar Ave. Pacific Palisades
 Monika Whitaker 310.826.4743
 Chuck and Alice Bragg
 310.454.9622

invitations

Please note that this is the **ONLY** invitation you will receive for these events.

Opera League Seminar *Tosca and La Rondine*

Saturday, May 10, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm
At the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion,
5th floor salon

135 North Grand Avenue (Enter under the outside stairs on Grand, then take the elevator to the 5th floor)

Dr. Michael Hackett will present historical and dramatic aspects of Puccini's *Tosca*.

Dr. Allan Edmiston will present some historic recordings of Puccini's *La Rondine*.

Michael and Allan will talk with special guest, Victoria Hillebrand, about the life and career of American lyric soprano, Dorothy Kirsten.

Tickets at the door: \$35 (or a voucher for Members)
 Your mailed reservations must be received by May 4.

Tickets for the Seminar

___ x Member (or voucher) @ \$25..... \$ _____
 ___ x Non-member @ \$35..... \$ _____
 ___ x Student member @ \$10..... \$ _____
 Total..... \$ _____

Spring Musicale "Celebrating America"

Saturday, May 24, 2 pm

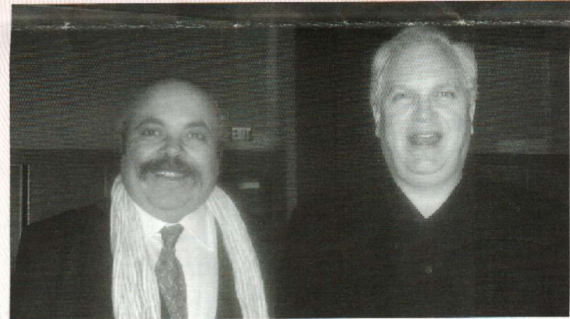
At a home in Pomona, (near Claremont)

You will receive directions to this musicale in your self-addressed stamped envelope.

Your mailed reservations must be received by May 19.

Tickets for the Musicale

___ x Member (or voucher) @ \$35..... \$ _____
 ___ x Non-member @ \$45..... \$ _____
 ___ x Student member @ \$10..... \$ _____
 Total..... \$ _____



Photos: Nina Hiaro

Fred Plotkin (left) and Dr. Michael Hackett at our previous "Seminar"

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Maestros Plácido Domingo and James Conlon awarded honorary memberships in the Opera League plus the Domingo-Thornton artists at the Insider Preview.

Photos: Edward Lieb

behind the scenes

What Would Wotan Do?

By Bob Bernard

Somewhat paraphrased, I heard one of our congressional representatives ask a similar (rhetorical) question when addressing a current socio-political state of affairs.

Of course, the Opera League's major concern is not over a political issue, but, rather, a cultural one. We have an abiding curiosity as to what LA Opera's production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* will be like.

We do know what Wotan would do — or at least what one particular Wotan would do — because John Tomlinson, Covent Garden's most recent Wotan, in the 9/26/07 issue of the Telegraph Media Group's online publication, stated that, if he were to direct *The Ring*, "It would go in the direction of straight theatre...Scenically, my production would be simple and clear, very Shakespearean in feel."

But, just as Wotan's will is subverted in *Die Walküre*, we should not expect anything on the order of Mr. Tomlinson's preferences to prevail because, from what we know of LAO's Stage Director Achim Freyer's prior work, we can expect something much more of an expressionistic design. Michael Hackett, Professor of Theater at UCLA, in preparation for a talk at the Goethe Institute, shared some of his thoughts on Mr. Freyer's work with us:

"It is difficult to characterize Achim Freyer as an opera designer and director because he draws from more than one tradition. His manipulation of stage space reminds me variously of a Baroque cabinet of wonders, an eighteenth toy theater, a platform on which Freudian and Jungian dreams are staged, and one of Joseph

Cornell's boxes. His aesthetic sense of the pictorial is both firmly rooted in the Renaissance and reflective of Post-Modern concepts of the artist."

Taking, just for one example, Prof. Hackett's reference to Joseph Cornell's

boxes, it is seen how we can find certain characteristics of Mr. Cornell's work in the two productions already done by Mr. Freyer for LAO. Mr. Cornell was an artist whose most characteristic art works were boxed assemblages, and, right along with this trait, was Mr. Cornell's predilection for collecting (and placing in his boxes) art objects he found on his travels.

In the 2002 LAO production of the *Bach Mass in B minor*, Mr. Freyer's basic design was, indeed, a box. Where Cornell would typically front his boxes with glass, Freyer used a dense scrim, and the actors would enter and exit at the rear vertical edges of this box. The actors used in this production were drawn from the Freyer-Ensemble, a diversified group of actors, acrobats, musicians, singers, dancers and stage designers, founded in 1988.

Back in 2002, Tony Opiela, an actor and founding member of this Ensemble, shared with us an insight into one of Mr. Freyer's goals when putting together a new production. As Tony put it, "Mr. Freyer wishes for a production to divide the audience. He wishes to provoke a mixed reaction from those viewing his creation." The *Bach* most definitely



Freyer's production of *La Damnation de Faust*.

Photo: Robert Millard for LAO

succeeded in this regard: the volume of mail (both pro and con) received at that time exceeded by far the response to any prior production of LAO.

As a further aside, this production of the *Bach* also perplexed an assemblage of Germany's art critics. Back in 2002, five different articles from German newspapers reviewing the original production of the *Bach Mass in B minor* at the Schwetzingen Festival were translated, analyzed and compared. A point of commonality was duly noted: each critic, in turn, after commenting on the difficulty in detecting correlation between the various sections of the *Mass* and what was actually staged, nevertheless asserted that one particular staged scene was transparently obvious in its correlation to the music — and each critic (independently, of course) declared a different staged scene to be the "obvious" one!

Freyer's production of Berlioz' *La Damnation de Faust* in 2003, while looking not at all "boxy", still reminded us of one of Joseph Cornell's traits: the penchant to use locally-collected art work in the finished product. The substantial influence of Mexican art forms was often in the forefront.

Continued on page 8

also a collector. He arrived here last week on a trip to his departing flight from LAX required the use of a super-sized Chevy Suburban SUV to hold all of the Mexican art that he had purchased for his personal collection.

This production was a feast for both the ears and the eyes, and we look forward to the time when LA Opera will release the DVD of it.

With the past as prologue, we can look forward to a cultural ride comparable to any ever experienced by the Valkyries. As Prof. Hackett sums it up:

“This I do know—that he is a major theatrical artist of sensitivity and keen intuition. What will appear on

have Mr. Freyer in Los Angeles, and he is guaranteed to astonish us.”

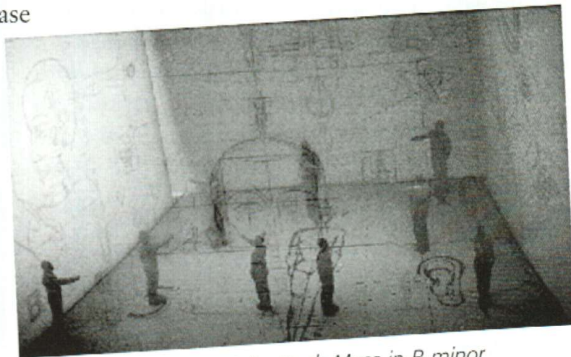


Photo: Ken Howard for LAO

LA Opera production of the Bach Mass in B minor



135 North Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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INVITATIONS ARE INCLUDED!

★ Seminar – May 10

★ Musicales – May 24

See p. 5 for more information

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