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The Impresario (or Artists Are Like That): A Guest Artist Recital

Peter Collins

Jeff Carney

Carol Chapman

Jane Munson-Berg

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Arkansas State National Association of Teachers of Singing

in conjunction with

OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
Bernice Young Jones School of Fine Arts
Division of Music

present

The Impresario (or Artists Are Like That)

music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

written by Jane Munson-Berg and Carol Chapman

directed by Jane Munson-Berg

Friday, February 25, 2000

7:00p.m.

W. Francis McBeth Recital Hall
Mabee Fine Arts Center

Introducing the Program By James Parsons

“An exotick and irrational entertainment.” That is how Samuel Johnson, with characteristic wit, defined “opera” in his history-making 1755 A Dictionary of the English Language (history making, of course, because it was the first published dictionary of the English language). What gives on pause today is that Johnson was writing only 157 years into the art form’s 400-year history. What would he have written had he been working a century or two later? Many people like to muse about what Mozart’s music would be like had he lived past the age of 36. The answer to that parlor-game question seems easy enough; the question I like to ponder is how Johnson might pigeon-hole opera were he alive in 1999. I dare say the words “exotick” and “irrational” might be replaced with less genteel ones had the great man of letters been privy to some of the truly outrageous shenanigans that have taken place in the world of opera in the years following his celebrated dictionary.

Outrageous, however, only if one is not a singer. Verdi warms us up to what I have in mind here when he was asked to name the three most important things in an opera. His instantaneous and oh-so diplomatic reply? “Voice, voice, voice.”

Perhaps I should tell the story in the right order. For most people an opera is “a story told in music.” That story is written by a librettist or word smith and once completed the composer is called in to set the story to music. Sets are designed and built; costumes are thought up to flatter the enviable figures that singers sometimes have but, more times than not, wish they had (the performers this evening are exceptionally exceptional in every regard); rehearsals are scheduled; and everything follows a kind of artistic flow chart set in motion by that well-worn phrase: “the composer’s intentions.” Historically speaking, this scenario has been more or less true except for the final clause: more times than not the composer’s “intentions” have counted for precious little. Yes, the idea of those inestimable intentions frequently have been given all manner of lip service but when the going got rough—let us say the music failed to compliment a star singer’s voice or didn’t do enough to show off his or her vocal agility and special talents—and the intentions of the composer were flung right out the proverbial window.

If this version of the story strikes you as hard to believe, it is only because the present century has taken undeniably Herculean steps to do a better job of protecting composers than was the case in past eras. Indeed, the artistic climate that prevails nowadays might best be described as a “museum culture.” Everything has been restored to its supposedly “authentic” state, a state predicated on getting things as close as possible to “how they were.” Yet the “how it was” was never as clinical or antiseptically detached as the current museum culture sometimes insists. To begin with, during opera’s first three centuries the one overriding demand was that a composition be new. In the attempt to satisfy that there typically was little concern with anyone’s intentions. What worked stayed, what didn’t was thrown out. What was applauded one night might be beefed up the next in order to garner even more applause (and ticket sales). What prompted bored coughs or—heaven forbid!—boos either was retailored or given the boot. In short, opera was an industry whose bottom line was infinite practicality.

Needless to say, singers sometimes abused the boundless practicality that provided opera with its life’s blood. To be sure, there are tales aplenty about how a prima donna or primo uomo bullied a composer into giving her or him what they wanted. Not only this, there was an entire sub-genre of opera designed to allow singers to engage in one vocal self-satisfied moment after another: the pasticcio. Akin to the modern day musical review, the pasticcio featured a nonstop array of show-stopping numbers, a kind of tuneful embarrassment of riches with little concern for dramatic continuity. Then too, if an opera was revived at a later date or put on in a town other than the one of its premiere, the process called for special tailoring in order to make it “fit” the new cast of singers. Arias that didn’t mesh with a singer’s voice were altered or totally recomposed. If the original composer was not available or not in favor of such changes a singer would hire another composer to make the adjustments. Failing that they might simply reach into a trunk and haul out a beguiling “suitcase aria,” one especially composed for them by a compliant composer or else otherwise vocally favorable and with singers never dared leave home without. Such pezzetti di baule, as they are known in Italy, might relate to the rest of the opera’s story line in only the most fleeting of ways. In short, tonight’s performance afford an extraordinarily rare opportunity to experience opera more “like it was” than many a production steeped in the rigors of so-called authenticity. As Verdi might have put it, long live “voice, voice, voice.”

The Setting

New York City, Roberto's Lincoln Center Apartment, 2000

Cast

(In Order of Appearance)

Peter (pianist)

Peter Collins

Roberto Bellissimo
(internationally famous Italian tenor)

Jeff Carney

Monique Peau de Soie
(a beautiful and famous French Soprano)

Carol Chapman

Jessica Devine
(an equally beautiful and famous American soprano)

Jane Munson-Berg

This event is made possible in part by a grant from the Discretionary Fund of the
National Association of Teachers of Singing, Inc.

Jane Munson-Berg
Soprano

Soprano Jane Munson-Berg has received acclaim for her "brilliant soprano" singing a wide variety of opera and concert literature both in the U. S. and Europe, including performances with the Alte Oper Frankfurt, Munich's Residenz Theatre, European Opera Genval, Tulsa Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Des Moines Metro Opera, Springfield Regional Opera, Mississippi Opera, Baton Rouge Opera, Sarasota Opera, and New York's Center for Contemporary Opera. She has been a soloist with the Orchestra of the Belgian Radio and Television, Baton Rouge Symphony, Florida Symphony Orchestra, North Carolina Symphony, Brazos Valley Symphony and the Springfield Symphony. A Metropolitan Opera Regional Finalist she was also awarded the Anna Casey Mackey Award for Outstanding Apprentice at the prestigious Santa Fe Opera. In May 1996 Ms. Munson-Berg appeared as featured guest soloist at New York's Carnegie Hall with the Evangel College Concert Choir.

Last year the soprano sang the leading role of Violetta in Verdi's La Traviata with the Springfield Regional Opera, and appeared as soprano soloist with the Springfield Symphony in Poulenc's Gloria. In November 1997 Ms. Munson-Berg sang a Bel Canto Concert in Wiltz Luxembourg, home of the international Luxembourg Festival; in February she sang a Mozart program with the Chamber Orchestra of the Ozarks, including the solo motet Exsultate, Jubilate. This season's appearances include concerts with the Arkansas Symphony (Beethoven Ninth Symphony), the Springfield Symphony (Beethoven Ninth Symphony, and A Cole Porter Celebration), and the Fort Smith Symphony (Messiah). In October the soprano sang Nedda in the SRO production of I Pagliacci. Next season Ms. Munson-Berg will sing Messiah with the Baton Rouge Symphony, Beethoven Ninth Symphony with the Fort Smith Symphony followed by the Mahler Eight Symphony with the Springfield Symphony.

Ms. Munson-Berg received the Master of Music Degree from the Manhattan School of Music and completed Professional Studies at the Hochschule fuer Musik in Munich, Germany, where she studied Opera and Art Song. In addition to her full performing schedule the soprano teaches voice and related studies at Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri. She and her husband, Dr. Robert Berg, have a son David.

Carol Cherry Chapman
Soprano

Versatile soprano Carol Cherry Chapman has performed frequently as an oratorio soloist and recitalist. Solo performances include Haydn's Mass in Time of War and Handel's Messiah with the Masterworks Chorale and Orchestra, Bach's Cantata 51: Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen at the Bach at the Sem Chamber Music Concert. Further, she has sung Handel's Messiah in Kansas City. Her performance in Handel's Judas Maccabeus with the Bach Society of St. Louis was described as "...exquisite...hit the mark...a stellar performance".

Her performances in recital have emphasized the French melodies of Debussy, Fauré, and Poulenc. Studies in this genre have been with renowned artists Bernard Kruysen, Noel Le and Anne-Marie Rhodde through the Institute for Advance Vocal Studies, Paris, France with performance at the Salle Cortot and Paris Conservatory. She also has extensive experience in opera, including the roles of Rosalinda in Die Fledermaus, the mother in Amahl and the Night Visitors, Pamina in The Magic Flute and Elvira in Rossini's The Italian Girl in Algiers. In addition, Ms. Chapman appeared in several performances with the Opera Theater of St. Louis in Puccini's Madama Butterfly.

Originally from New Jersey where she began early music training, Ms. Chapman's serious vocal study began in St. Louis, Missouri with French native Madame Maria Stephanidas. She went on to receive a B. S. degree in Vocal Performance from William Jewell College where she studied with tenor Dean Wilder. Later, she earned a Master of Music degree in Voice performance from Webster University in St. Louis where she taught as a graduate assistant under the tutelage of Carole Gaspar. Other teachers include Edward Zambara of the Julliard School of Music and Mary Henderson of the University of Cincinnati. Post-graduate studies continue with Inci Bashar of the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Currently, Ms. Chapman teaches voice at Southwest Missouri State University, Webster University in St. Louis, and Evangel University. She has also been on the voice faculty at William Jewell College in Kansas City. Ms. Chapman is married to Greg Chapman, and has a daughter, Patricia.