

# OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2007

## Otello

OONY will present  
Rossini's Otello  
at Carnegie Hall  
on January 17 at 7:30 pm

Gioacchino Rossini, born in 1792 in the small town of Pesaro on the Adriatic coast south of Ravenna, was only in his mid-teens when he heard singing which was to influence his later artistry. In 1807 he heard one of the last castrati, and the Spanish-born soprano, Isabella Colbran, the artist who created Desdemona in *Otello* and other of his Neapolitan operas (and became his wife). Of the castrato tradition Rossini later wrote that he was influenced by "the purity, the miraculous flexibility of those voices, and above all, by their profoundly penetrating accent." (*New Grove Opera*) The bel canto, lyrical line which came to characterize his later work, and of which Colbran was an exponent, may stem from this early experience.

Rossini was a prodigy and already had 13 operas produced, in Venice, Rome, Bologna, Ferrara, and at La Scala when at age 23 he was contracted by Domenico Barbaja, the impresario in charge of the royal theaters in Naples, then the most important European center for opera. Barbaja, whose support of Rossini became essential to his development, was a Milanese, who, according to Stendhal, "by gambling, and more especially, by holding the bank at faro and by running a gaming

house, had amassed a fortune worth several millions." (He combined the management of La Scala with the operation of the gaming tables which attracted contractors to the French army during the Napoleonic wars with money to lose. With his fortune and knowledge of opera he was invited to Naples in 1811.)

When he learned of Rossini's triumphs in northern Italy, Barbaja realized that here was a coming figure in the world of music and sought him out in Bologna. "Rossini, who was used to dealing with the seediest of fourth-rate *impresari* in a perpetual state of flagrant bankruptcy, was astonished to find himself sought out by a millionaire who, in all probability, would count it beneath his dignity to embezzle the customary twenty *sequins* out of his salary." The terms of his employment were generous, 12,000 francs a year and a share of the gaming table take at the opera. It was a five-year contract which required the young man to produce two operas a year.

The San Carlo opera house was then the largest in Europe; there was also an active secondary theater, La Fonda, and Barbaja had attracted a cadre of virtuoso singers. Naples had a thriving operatic culture which appreciated

the work of Paisiello, Mayr, and Spontini, names barely resonant today, but then the orthodoxy. Rossini's arrival from the north was greeted with some suspicion. Herbert Weinstock observes that Paisiello considered Rossini a "licentious" composer who paid little attention to the rules of his art.

The first opera the energetic northerner presented at San Carlo was *Elisabetta Regina d'Inghilterra* in 1815, with Isabella Colbran in the title role. She had been engaged by Barbaja at the outset of his management and became his mistress. Stendhal described her as having "beauty in the queenly tradition, noble features which, on the stage, radiated majesty, an eye like that of a Circassian maiden, darting fire; and to crown it all, a true and deep instinct for tragedy. Off-stage she possessed about as much dignity as the average milliner's assistant, but the moment she stepped onto the boards, her brow encircled with a royal diadem, she inspired involuntary respect, even among those who a minute or two earlier, had been chatting intimately with her in the foyer of the theater." She was said to have a range of three octaves, from G to E. Her influence on Rossini—who became her lover with no rupture in his professional relations with Barbaja (Colbran and Rossini later married)—led to his composition of seven *opera seria*, including *La Donna del Lago* (presented by OONY in 2003), *Elisabetta*, *Otello*, and ending with *Semiramide* in 1823. Most commentators consider her to have been one of the greatest singing actresses of the century and a crucial inspiration to Rossini for his serious operas.

*Elisabetta* was a great success, and Barbaja scheduled *Otello* to follow in November 1816. Rossini

## Ramon Vargas



Ramon Vargas, to sing the title role.

Ramon Vargas is one of the leading tenors of our time and one of the most sought-after worldwide. The third of nine children, he began singing as a soloist in the Boys' Choir of the Basilica of Guadalupe in his native Mexico City. He later pursued musical studies at the Cardinal Miranda Institute of Music and Arts. In 1982, he won the Carlo Morelli National Vocal Competition.

Vargas made his debut in the opera house in Mexico City in

Puccini's *Il Tabarro*. Mexican conductor Eduardo Mata gave him his first important role, as Fenton in Verdi's *Falstaff*, and in 1984 as Don Ottavio in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. In 1986, Vargas won the Enrico Caruso Tenor Competition in Milan, and moved to Austria where he completed his vocal studies at the school of the Vienna State Opera, under the guidance of Leo Muller.

Ramon Vargas has worked in opera houses around the world, including La Scala (*La Traviata*, *Falstaff*, *Rigoletto*), Vienna State Opera (*Maria Stuarda*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Roberto Devereux*, *La Bohème*), Royal Opera House Covent Garden (*La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *La Bohème*), Paris Opéra-Bastille (*Rigoletto*, *Traviata*), the Met (*Rigoletto*, *Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Cenerentola*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Bohème*, *Faust*), San Francisco Opera (*Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*), Buenos Aires Teatro Colón (*La Favorita*), the Arena of Verona (*Barbiere*, *Rigoletto*), Madrid Teatro Real (*Werther*), and others.

Vargas's career in the United States is similar to others in that he replaced a "name" singer who cancelled: in 1993 Vargas made his Metropolitan Opera debut in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, replacing Luciano Pavarotti. His repertoire consists of the great lyric—and lately lighter dramatic—tenor roles. He has collaborated with James Levine, Riccardo Muti, Valery Gergiev, Seiji Ozawa, Myung-Whun Chung and other eminent conductors.

In addition to his operatic appearances, he is an accomplished concert singer, with an extensive repertoire ranging from Italian classical songs to romantic German lieder and melodies by French, Spanish and Mexican composers from the 19th and 20th centuries. In 2000, British "Opera Now" declared him "Artist of the Year." On January 27, 2001, the 100th anniversary of the death of Verdi, Vargas sang in Verdi's *Requiem* at the memorial concert at La Scala in Milan.

Ramon Vargas makes his Opera Orchestra debut in *Otello*.

**Adrienne Fischier**

had been enjoying the brilliant social life of Naples, sometimes playing the piano and singing at literary and musical gatherings in the Palazzo Berio, presided over by the cultivated Marchese Francesco Mario Berio. In the course of these occasions Berio evidently proposed that he write the book for an *opera seria* based on the Othello story. The delivery of the words was not the impediment to timely completion of the work, Rossini's dilatoriness was. Barbaja wrote the Superintendent of the royal theaters to complain of "the irregular and incompatible conduct which Signor Maestro Rossini has maintained for the space of eight months. Notwithstanding the most friendly admonitions, and infinite instances of civility extended to him with singular regard, he has yet shown himself ungrateful and devoid of expres-

sions of thanks, making light of my concerns. A proof of this was his declaration that upon the word of honor, he guaranteed the production of *Otello* for the 10th of October; then he put off the date until the end of said month, and following my strongest remonstrances, promised that it would be ready for production for the 10th of the present month of November. All these vague and inconclusive declarations show beyond doubt that there can be no question of hoping that he will fulfill his intention, since at the present time, and according to what I learn from the copyist, he has composed no more than the simple vocal line of a romance, and of an introductory duet. Even if he had in his mind the entire chromatic hemisphere, he would no longer have time to scatter his harmonic distribution of notes over the words of the worthy

Marchese Berio." [Quotes by Jeremy Commons in the booklet to the *Opera Rara* recording, as are other quotes in this article.]

In later life Rossini recalled that he "composed the overture to *Otello* in a small chamber in the Palazzo Barbaja, where the most bold and most ferocious of all impresarios had forcibly shut me up with nothing more than a plate of maccheroni, and the threat that he would not let me out, live as long as I liked, until I had written the last note." It is evident that he took about three weeks to complete the work, and the premiere of *Otello* took place on December 5, 1816.

*Otello* was a resounding success at the premiere. The critic of the *Giornale delle due Sicilie* in Naples wrote:

"Signor Rossini has succeeded in making us savor all the true

# Ruxandra Donose



Ruxandra Donose, who will sing Desdemona.

Romanian mezzo-soprano Ruxandra Donose was born into a family of musicians, and appeared on the concert stage in her childhood as a pianist. A graduate of the Music University of Bucharest (the class of Georgeta Stoleriu), she studied in Weimar with Lore Fisher (lied-oratorio) and in Vienna with Renata Scotto (opera). She has been awarded a number of national and international prizes: Laureate of the ARD International Vocal Competition in Munich (1990) and Washington, D.C. (1991) among them.

Donose was a soloist in the opera houses of Constanta-Romania (1989-1991) and Basel-Switzerland (1991-1992). She made her Vienna Staatsoper debut in 1992 as Varvara in *Katya Kabanova*. Since that debut she has maintained a close relationship with the Staatsoper and Volksoper, returning every season (1992-1998) for roles including Pierotto in a new production of *Linda di Chamounix*, Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Niklausse, Dorabella in *Così Fan Tutte*, Hänsel

in *Hänsel und Gretel*, Antigone in Enescu's *Oedipe*, and the title role in *Carmen*.

In Europe, during the 1997-1998 season, Donose debuted with the Royal Opera Covent Garden as Sesto in a new staging of *Giulio Cesare*, and was immediately re-engaged for performances as Annio in a new production of *La Clemenza di Tito*, as well as for performances as Niklausse. Her debut at the Opéra National de Paris was as Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and she debuted with both the Glyndebourne Festival and Strasbourg's Opéra National du Rhin as Sesto in *La Clemenza di Tito*.

The mezzo-soprano appeared with Deutsche Oper Berlin as Charlotte in a new production of *Werther*, and returned for performances as Idamante in *Idomeneo*. She made her debut with Madrid's Teatro Real as Cherubino in a new production.

Audiences at the Salzburg Easter Festival first heard Ruxandra Donose in 1998 as Fyodor in *Boris Gudonov*, conducted by Claudio Abbado. The same year she made her debut with the Dresden Staatsoper as Cherubino, and later sang the title role of *La Cenerentola*, and Cherubino for Dresden. She appeared with the Finnish National Opera as Giovanna Seymour in *Anna Bolena*. Her debut in Italy was at Venice's Teatro la Fenice as Speranza and Proserpina in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*. She made her Salzburg Festival debut as Isaura in Rossini's *Tancredi*. Her first performances of Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* were with the Orchestra of the RAI in Torino, and she sang her first performances of the title role in *La Grande-Duchesse de Gerolstein* with the Opéra Comique of Denmark.

Ruxandra Donose made her American debut in 1996 as Niklausse with the San Francisco Opera in a new production of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* opposite Samuel Ramey and Jerry Hadley. She was immediately re-engaged for performances of the title role in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, and returned later to sing Sesto in *Giulio Cesare*. Her debut role with the Metropolitan Opera was Cherubino, a role she repeated in her debut in Japan with the Saito Kinen Festival under the baton of Seiji Ozawa.

The mezzo began the 2004-2005 season with her return to Royal Opera House Covent Garden for performances as Charlotte in a new production of *Werther*, led by Anthony Pappano. Audiences in London saw her again when she sang Marguerite in a concert performance of *La Damnation de Faust* with the London Philharmonia led by Charles Dutoit. Donose returned to the Metropolitan Opera as Nicklausse in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, and appeared with the Atlanta Symphony in performances and a recording of Mozart's *Requiem* under the direction of Donald Runnicles. Her season concluded with her return to the Glyndebourne Festival where she appeared in *La Cenerentola* in performances led by Vladimir Jurowski. In 2006 Ms. Donose had another busy season, whose highlights included her participation in the "Tuscan Sun Festival Cortona" with Dmitri Hvorostovsky and Anna Netrebko. For the summer festival in Salzburg, which presented every one of the Mozart operas, Donose sang Ramiro in *La Finta Giardiniera*.

Ruxandra Donose makes her Opera Orchestra debut in *Otello*.

A. F.

beauty of Italian music, a rapid and natural declamation, the vehement and animated pathos of the obligatory recitatives, and a touching cantabile filled with melody, in

the midst of which there are frequently delicious passages which form the prodigy of art, and with which music gives to the emotion of the soul an expression more pas-

sionate and more tender than that formulated by nature itself.

"The greatest praise, however, that we could bestow upon this latest production of Signor Rossini

consists in noting his supreme ability to link all the pomp of Italian song with the tragic force the subject required. We shall single out under this heading the finale of the first act, the terzetto in the second act together with the following theme for Signora Colbran, and the whole of the third act, in which the inimitable actress inspires in all souls the sweetest feelings of melancholy and the strongest agitations of terror. Signora Colbran, grand in the so-called bravura pieces, and extremely happy in

passages in the form of arpeggios and rapid runs, has no rivals in tragic and declamatory music, and in the difficult talent of expression. We have seen her for several years singing on our stages, sustaining with marked valor the most diverse characters, and always evoking universal applause."

The score requires three tenors, and Colbran was matched by three of the finest of the day. Stendhal wrote of the "magnificent stature" of Andrea Nozzari who sang *Otello*, "which conveys so stir-

ringly an impression of grandeur tinged with melancholy." Giovanni Davide, who sang Rodrigo, possessed the highest voice, a *tenore di grazie*, with a light and agile voice, considered without peer over the course of a long career. Giuseppe Ciccimarra, who was the Iago, was described as having a beautiful low tenor voice.

Commons is among commentators who point out that in *Otello* and other of his Naples *opera seria* Rossini's innovations changed the course of opera. In the 18th century *opera seria* usually was conceived to honor a ruler. A villain might die, but the form was for a happy ending, usually showing the ruler as just and beneficent. *Otello* presented a dramatic story of people involved in a terrible emotional predicament and ended with a murder and a suicide on stage, not an off-stage event as classical decorum had prescribed. The explicit violence was shocking to some of the public at the time but set the pattern for the romantic, tragic operas of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini. The focus is on the suffering and death of the heroine—Rossini in his third act gave Colbran as Desdemona one of his greatest scenes, the Willow Song and Prayer which preceded (as they do in Verdi) the arrival of the murderous Otello. The romantic sensibility had overcome the classical in *opera seria*.

Rossini's innovative romantic opera proved to be popular throughout Europe and the United States until Verdi's music drama displaced it from the repertoire in the 1880s. It vanished until the bel canto revival of the 1950s. Berio's libretto has been mocked as an amateurish travesty of Shakespeare by commentators—always quoting Byron who wrote after a Venice performance in 1818: "They have been crucifying *Othello* into an opera...Music good...Scenery, dresses and music very good." Recent research has shown that Berio used French plays loosely based on the Shakespeare story. It

## Robert McPherson



Robert McPherson, to sing Iago.

Tenor Robert McPherson was hailed for his "honesty, clarity and sweet lyricism" in his signature role, Almoviva in *The Barber of Seville*, in his Opera Memphis debut, a role he has reprised with Greensboro Opera. A recognized interpreter of Rossini's work, his performances include Don Ramiro (*La Cenerentola*), Lindoro (*L'Italiana in Algeri*) and Don Narcisco (*Il Turco in Italia*).

McPherson's versatility and range has led to success in a variety of roles, including Ferrando (*Così Fan Tutte*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*) Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Tom Rakewell (*The Rake's Progress*), Sam (*Susannah*), Curley (*Of Mice and Men*), Romeo (*Romeo et Juliette*), Edgardo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) and the Duke (*Rigoletto*).

In addition to Memphis, he has performed with Pacific Opera Victoria, Opera San José, Tacoma Opera, Eugene Opera and Spokane Opera. In 2001 he made his Dallas Opera debut as Arturo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. McPherson made his European debut in Avignon as Rodrigo in Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*.

Equally adept in concert repertoire, he made his professional debut with the Seattle Symphony at the age of twenty-three, and has since performed Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *Magnificat*, Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, and the Shepherd in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. He has sung with the Mexico City Philharmonic, Santa Fe Symphony, American Sinfonietta, Masterworks Chorale of San Mateo, New West Symphony, Northwest Chamber Orchestra, and the Carmel Bach Festival in such works as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Mozart's *Requiem* and *Coronation Mass*, and Haydn's *Creation*.

A world finalist in the 5th Pavarotti International Vocal Competition, he was also a winner in the 1998 Ellen Faull Gordon Vocal Competition, and the 1997 Metropolitan Opera National Council's Northwest Regional Auditions. McPherson is a native of Seattle. He makes his Opera Orchestra of New York debut with this appearance.

A.F.

is a mistake, however understandable, to expect a Shakespearean tragedy in this genre; simplification was inevitable. The mere outline of the tale remains: the moor who marries the well-born daughter of a Venetian, the seeds of jealousy planted by a disgruntled lieutenant resulting in a murder and a suicide; the names are the same, Desdemona, Othello, Iago. There are pointed differences: the handkerchief is replaced by an unsigned love note, there is no Cassio, and the buffoonish Rodrigo of Shakespeare is here the son of the Doge, very much the straight man to whom Desdemona is betrothed when the moor attracts her.

The librettist set the action entirely in Venice and during the course of a single day, the classical unities of time and place thus observed. Otello (tenor), commander of the Venetian fleet, is greeted by the Doge (tenor), Rodrigo (tenor), Iago (tenor), and Desdemona's father, Elmiro (bass) and the populace at pierside. He is granted citizenship in Venice for his military exploits—Iago reveals his disdain in asides as the Doge greets the hero. The scene changes to a room in Elmiro's house where Desdemona confides her feelings about Otello to her maidservant, Emilia (both mezzo-sopranos); after they leave Iago enters with Rodrigo, the latter concerned that he is losing the promised hand of Desdemona. That scene opens up to a magnificent room in the house where a crowd of well wishers has gathered to celebrate, as they expect, the betrothal of Desdemona and Rodrigo. To the fury of her father, Desdemona reveals that she has been secretly married to Otello. The moor arrives to take her off, to the consternation of all.

In the second act, Rodrigo is unrelenting in his anger and frustration at losing Desdemona. After a scene in which Desdemona again confides in Emilia, lamenting her defiance of her father and his anger, the stage is taken over by Iago and Rodrigo and later Otello. Iago produces an unsigned love

## Maria Zifchak



Maria Zifchak, who will sing Emilia.

American mezzo-soprano Maria Zifchak first appeared with Opera Orchestra as Urbain in a highly acclaimed presentation of *Les Huguenots* several seasons ago at Carnegie Hall. She is now a regular at the Met and other American and international houses in signature roles for her fach: Suzuki, Dorabella, Meg Page, Mercedes in *Carmen*, and Flora in *La Traviata*. Zifchak sang Suzuki in the Met's new production of *Madama Butterfly* to open the 2006/2007 Season.

Zifchak's appearances at the Caramoor Festival in their Mozart and bel canto presentations, and in Wagnerian parts with James Levine and the Boston Symphony

Orchestra, confirm her importance as a concert opera artist. Other concert appearances by Zifchak have included a Flower Maiden in *Parsifal* with the Salzburg Festival, Ritta in Herold's *Zampa* with L'Opera Français of New York, *Messiah*, *Elijah*, and the Mozart *Requiem* with the Oratorio Society of New York in Carnegie Hall, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the National Chorale at Avery Fisher Hall.

Maria Zifchak is from Bethel Park, Pa., and received her Masters in Music from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. In her galley years, she apprenticed for three seasons with the Pittsburgh Opera Center, was a winner of the 1998 Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions, and subsequently joined the Merola Program in San Francisco. She is the recipient of several awards, among them Opera Index for 1999.

The Metropolitan has claimed Zifchak for many appearances in recent seasons. She sang Dorabella in *Così Fan Tutte*, Second Lady in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Magdalene in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, in addition to Suzuki. Her debut role at the Met was as Kate Pinkerton, in an earlier production of *Madama Butterfly*. She repeats Magdalene for the Met this spring.

A.F.

letter from Desdemona which he seized. Otello accepts it immediately as proof of his wife's infidelity and Rodrigo is also seized with jealousy and outrage (The letter was in fact written by Desdemona and meant for Otello.) The third act is set in a garden, and all agree that it is one of the jewels of the bel canto repertory, and, indeed, of opera. Emilia attends the apprehensive Desdemona. Through a window a gondolier is heard, with verses by Dante about the doomed lovers, Paolo and Francesca—this original touch is thought to be Rossini's inspiration rather than Berio's. As in Shakespeare, Desdemona sings the melancholy Willow Song which

she learned as a child. Otello enters to exact his revenge, which he does by stabbing his wife. (Smothering was probably considered too savage for the Naples audience, already startled by the onstage violent murder.)

Whatever the merits of Berio's libretto—we note the omission of a love duet between Otello and Desdemona, the minor development given to Iago's role, Otello's abrupt response to the love letter purported to be another—much of the music is "brilliantly effective and memorable" (Commons)

"Rossini's creative genius was sparked by many stimuli—by the subject matter and words of the libretto he was setting, by the vocal

## Kenneth Tarver



Kenneth Tarver, to sing *Rodrigo*.

A graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy, Oberlin College Conservatory of Music and Yale University School of Music,

American tenor Kenneth Tarver was a winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and is a former member of the Metropolitan Opera's Young Artists' Program. Tarver was also a member of the Staatstheater Stuttgart ensemble.

He has sung principal tenor roles for the Festival d'Art Lyrique d'Aix en Provence, the Edinburgh Festival, the Staatsoper Berlin, the Hamburgische Staatsoper, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam, the Milano Giuseppe Verdi Symphony Orchestra, the Semperoper Dresden, the Gran Teatre del Liceu, the Royal Opera Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera, the Bayerische Staatsoper, the Wiener Staatsoper and the Deutsche Oper Berlin.

Tarver's repertoire encompasses the operatic roles of Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Berlioz, as well as concert repertoire from Bach to Stravinsky. He has performed and recorded with Kent Nagano, Riccardo Chailly, Bernard Haitink and Sir Colin Davis, most notably in the double Grammy-awarded discs of Berlioz's *Les Troyens*.

In 2006, among his many engagements, Tarver appeared with Deutsche Oper Berlin in *Don Pasquale* and *Gianni Schicchi*; he sang with Bayerische Staatsoper München in *Così Fan Tutte* and *Falstaff*. He made an appearance at the Tanglewood Festival under Maestro James Levine in the *Mozart Requiem*.

Kenneth Tarver makes his Opera Orchestra debut as *Rodrigo*.  
**A.F.**

qualities of the individual singers for whom he was composing, and by his own irrepressible facility in conjuring up effervescent and sparkling melodies. In *Otello* all these sources of inspiration came

together. Stendhal spoke of the 'fiery urgency' of the score, and described it as 'almost overpowering' in its torrential impetuosity. He also recalled that 'volcanic', was the term which was popular

in the San Carlo theatre. Simply in terms of sheer melodic exuberance, *Otello* is one of the most remarkable and engaging of all Rossini's operas."

**Peter Judd**

## Daniel Mobbs



Daniel Mobbs, who will sing *Elmiro*.

Daniel Mobbs is a native of Louisville, Kentucky; his distinguished awards include first place in both the College Division of the MacAllister Awards and the Mario Lanza Scholarship. He was the winner of a Sullivan Foundation Award, and also the recipient of a

grant from the Puccini Foundation. He is a graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts.

The American baritone has won praise on both sides of the Atlantic for his fine singing and lively stage portrayals; this performance marks his fourth appearance under Maestro Queler's baton. In addition to his performances at Caramoor in *I Puritani* and *Tancredi*, his 2005-06 season included returns to New York City Opera as Lord Sydney in *Il Viaggio à Reims*, Opera Grand Rapids as Ping in *Turandot*, and Carnegie Hall as Frederick in *Lakmé* with Opera Orchestra of New York. OONY audiences enjoyed Mobbs as Jake Wallace in the presentation of *La Fanciulla del West*; a few seasons ago he appeared in *Der Freischütz*, as well. He sang Taddeo to Vivica Genaux's Isabella in *L'Italiana in Algeri* with Anchorage Opera in the 2005/2006 season.

Mobbs has enjoyed a long relationship with the Caramoor International Music Festival, and in recent seasons has been seen as Lycomedes in Handel's *Deidamia*, in the American premiere of Donizetti's *Elisabetta*, as Ernesto in *Il Pirata*, Elmiro in Rossini's *Otello*, Lodovico in Verdi's *Otello*, and in recitals entitled "Shakespeare's Songs of Love Death, Heaven and Hell."

Daniel Mobbs sang Figaro in *Barbiere* with New York City Opera, Kentucky Opera, Arizona Opera, the Spier Festival in South Africa, and Baltimore Opera (here he also sang Dandini in *Cenerentola*). He has sung *Bohème* with Arizona, Knoxville, Idaho, Cincinnati, with Opera Grand Rapids, and this season with City Opera. He appeared as Adonis in John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* for Der Vlaamse Oper in Antwerp.

**A.F.**

# OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK

## OPERA ORCHESTRA NEWSLETTER

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## OONY Guild News

With Rossini's *Otello* and *L'Arlesiana* of Ciléa still ahead, I hope that this will again inspire a spurt of new Opera Guild memberships, as well as renewals. The OONY Guild provides important and valued support to Maestro Queler in her devotion to neglected and infrequently performed masterworks.

For our next two operalogues, we are fortunate in having two stimulating presenters. *Otello* features Mary Jane Philips-Matz, the illustrious author of many musical biographies, and *L'Arlesiana* will once again give us the pleasure of having our Maestro, Eve Queler, offer her insightful comments.

Our operalogues, held in glittering venues, are another advantage offered to members in addition to, depending on membership category, invitations to the annual Guild dinner, ticket priority and passes to dress rehearsals.

Please consider joining the Guild or renewing—the ongoing help provided to OONY is vital. An application form for your convenience is provided below.

I look forward to greeting and welcoming you to our Guild events.

Sincerely,

**Louis M. Ruffalo**

President, Opera Orchestra Guild

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# L'Arlesiana

OONY will present  
Cil a's L'Arlesiana  
at Carnegie Hall  
on February 21 at 7:30 pm

Although the best known moment in Francesco Cil a's *L'Arlesiana* is the perennial tenor encore, the "Lamento di Federico," the opera has a great deal to offer besides this plangent melody, which Caruso sang at the premiere in 1897, at Milan's Teatro Lirico, and then for the rest of his career.

This was the third opera of Cil a, who was born in Palmi, Italy in 1866, studied at the Naples Conservatory, and wrote eight operas, with varying success. His best known work, *Adriana Lecouvreur*, still turns up in the international repertory when a compelling prima donna determines to take it on.

*L'Arlesiana* began as a short story by Alphonse Daudet, who later adapted it as a play. Bizet's incidental music for that production is still popular. The opera's libretto was devised from the play by Leopoldo Marengo.

The first act is set in a farmyard in Provence. Baldassarre, an elderly shepherd, is telling L'Innocente, the simpleminded son of the farm's owner, Rosa Mamai, the story of a fight

between a courageous goat and a fierce wolf, which ends in the goat's death at sunrise. This tale (which is based on a short story by Daudet), is referred to later in the opera in the "Lamento di Federico."

Rosa Mamai is deeply concerned about her older son, Federico, who is in love with a girl from Arles, whom he has met at a fair. This eponymous character has no name other than L'Arlesiana, and never appears in the opera. Rosa Mamai's goddaughter, Vivetta, has long been in love with Federico, and is dismayed to learn of his infatuation with L'Arlesiana. Rosa has sent her brother, Marco, to make inquiries about the unknown woman.

Federico returns to the farm, determined to marry his newfound love, and when Marco appears with a positive report on her, Rosa is compelled to consent to the marriage. However, while the family's friends are inside toasting the happy plans, Rosa is called outside by Metifio, a stableman. He reveals that he has been L'Arlesiana's lover, but was

rejected when the more affluent Federico appeared. He gives Rosa letters that verify his claims. She hands the letters to Federico, who is heartbroken to learn of the deception of the woman he loves.

The second act is set in the Camargue region, on the banks of a pond. Rosa and Vivetta are searching for Federico, who had left home in despair over L'Arlesiana's treachery. Rosa urges Vivetta to try to lure Federico away from his obsession, but the demure girl cannot accede to such a suggestion. Baldassarre and L'Innocente enter and find Federico, who has been hiding from the women. In a gentle aria, the old man urges Federico to try to find forgetfulness in hard work.

When Baldassarre leaves, Federico bitterly rereads the letters from L'Arlesiana left by Metifio. L'Innocente sleepily repeats a line from the elderly shepherd's story of the goat and the wolf. This introduces the well loved "Lamento di Federico." Vivetta returns and tells Federico that she loves him, but Federico cannot return her love. When her sobs bring Rosa back on

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# Giuseppe Filianoti



*Giuseppe Filianoti, to sing Federico.*

Giuseppe Filianoti was born in Reggio Calabria, Italy. The tenor studied singing and music in his local conservatory, and took an arts degree at Messina University. In 1996 he was invited to participate in a master class held by Alfredo Kraus, and in 1998 he made his debut at the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, in the title role of Donizetti's *Dom Sébastien*.

Filianoti won the international competitions Operalia-Domingo and Francisco Viñas, and in 2003 was awarded the Franco Abbiati Prize by the Italian critics as the best singer, in *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Palermo. Filianoti was then engaged for *Faust* in Rome, *Capriccio* in Cagliari and *Moïse et Pharaon* at the Scala in Milan.

Other important appearances included *Tancredi* (Rossini Opera Festival, under Gianluigi Gelmetti and Pier Luigi Pizzi), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Teatro Regio di Torino), *La Traviata* (Maggio Musicale Fiorentino under Zubin Mehta, Covent Garden, Teatro Filarmonico di Verona, Opernhaus in Zürich, Opéra de Montecarlo in a Japanese tour under Richard Bonyngé, La Fenice in Venice, Staatsoper in Vienna, Teatro Real in Madrid), *L'Assedio di Corinto* (Rossini Opera Festival), *Lucrezia Borgia* (Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Bilbao Opera House, Teatro alla Scala in Milan), *Un Giorno di Regno* (Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Teatro alla Scala), *Il Flauto Magico* (Teatro dell'Opera in Rome under Gianluigi Gelmetti and Pier Luigi Pizzi, Maggio

Musicale Fiorentino under Myung-Whum Chung), Rossini's *Stabat Mater* (Teatro San Carlo in Naples), *Falstaff* (Teatro Comunale di Bologna under Daniele Gatti and Pier Luigi Pizzi, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino under Zubin Mehta), *Gianni Schicchi* (Teatro dell'Opera in Rome under Gianluigi Gelmetti), *La Favorita* (Teatro Comunale di Bologna and Las Palmas Opera House), *Rigoletto* (Teatro alla Scala, Liceu in Barcelona), *Faust* (Las Palmas Opera House, Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, Deutsche Oper in Berlin), *L'Elisir d'Amore* (Opéra de Montecarlo, Liceu in Barcelona), and *Don Giovanni* (Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino under Zubin Mehta). For the Teatro Lirico di Cagliari he sang the roles of Flamand in *Capriccio* (under Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos and Luca Ronconi), Tamino in *Il Flauto Magico* (under Gérard Korsten and Stephen Medcalf) and Alfredo in *La Traviata* (under Paolo Arrivabeni and Richard Eyre).

Among his recent performances were *Moïse et Pharaon* (under Riccardo Muti), at the opening of the 2003-2004 season at the Teatro alla Scala, where he later appeared in *Falstaff* and *Gianni Schicchi*, and *L'Elisir d'Amore* at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo. In October, at the opening of the 2004-2005 season of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, he sang in a concert performance of *Idomeneo*, under Myung Whun Chung.

Subsequent engagements have included: Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* at the Albert Hall BBC in London, *Lucia di Lammermoor* at his debut at the Metropolitan, *Rigoletto* at the Lausanne Opera House, *Werther* at the Las Palmas Opera House, *Rondine* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, *Dom Sébastien* at Covent Garden and *Don Giovanni* at Maggio Musicale Fiorentino under Zubin Mehta.

Giuseppe Filianoti makes his Opera Orchestra of New York debut in this performance.

**Adrienne Fischier**

## Latonia Moore



*Latonia Moore, who will sing Vivetta.*

American soprano Latonia Moore performed her first Elvira in Verdi's *Ernani* in Vienna last summer, and she sang Nedda in a gala concert for La Monnaie, Brussels. In the spring she returned to Dresden for Liu, and debuted with the Cincinnati Symphony in the Mahler 2nd, conducted by their music director Paavo Järvi, as well as with the Philadelphia Pops for concerts of *Porgy & Bess*. She returned to the Semperoper in Dresden as Mimi in fall 2005 and performed her first Verdi *Requiem* in her Italian debut for the Teatro Verdi, Trieste under Maestro Daniel Oren, as well as the roles of Liu and Mimi in Trieste, also under Maestro Oren, in early 2006.

A native of Houston, Texas, Moore won the Maria Callas Award as Debut Artist of the Season with the Dallas Opera in 2004-05. Last spring she performed a recital in Sarasota, Florida, and she was a soloist in a gala orchestral concert with the Seattle Symphony. She also appeared in a Richard Tucker Gala on Long Island, and performed the Mahler 4th Symphony and Berg lieder at the Festival de Pâques de Deauville, France in 2004, which was recorded for television. She was the soprano soloist in the Mahler 2nd Symphony in Washington with the National Symphony, and she had a triumphant debut as Mimi with the Semperoper, Dresden, last spring. She was invited back for three productions, including her first Butterfly, Liu, and Mimi again.

In 2004, Moore was the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, where she was also the soprano lead in Puccini's *Edgar*. Moore has won many awards, including: a Richard Tucker Foundation Grant (2005), first prize at the Marseilles Competition and the Public Recognition Prize (2003), the Kammeroper Prize as well as the Overall Second Prize in the International Belvedere Competition in Vienna (2003), First Prize and the Public's Prize in the

International Competizione dell'Opera Dresden, and was the First Prize Winner in the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation Competition in New York (2002), the 2001 Liederkrantz Voice Competition, and a 2000 winner of the Metropolitan Opera's National Auditions.

She has performed Despina for the Opera Company of Philadelphia and recorded the Mahler Second Symphony for Deutsche Grammophon. Other recent roles have included the title role in *Lucrezia Borgia* and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. In the orchestral repertoire Moore has performed the Mozart *Coronation Mass* and Mendelssohn's Symphony #2 as well as the Mahler 2nd with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Fall of 2006 opened with her debut at New York City Opera as Micaela. In 2007 she returns to Dresden for *Madama Butterfly* and debuts with Palm Beach Opera, also as Butterfly. She will give her Vidda Award New York recital debut under the auspices of Opera Orchestra of New York. Moore will perform Micaela and Liu for the Opera in Bilbao, and a debut with the Hamburgische Staatsoper is also scheduled for a future season.

Latonia Moore is making her Opera Orchestra of New York debut this season.

A. F.

Remaining tickets for  
Latonia Moore's  
Vidda Award Recital  
on May 3 at 8 pm  
at Weil Hall  
are available from  
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### *Continued from Page 8*

the scene, the mother decides that her son's suffering leaves her no choice but to accept his marriage to L'Arlesiana. Touched by her sacrifice, he declares that he will abandon the woman who has infatuated him and will marry Vivetta.

The third act opens with festivities for the marriage of Federico and Vivetta, who sing a lyrical duet. Metifio comes demanding the return of his letters, but Baldassarre had already given them to Metifio's father. Metifio did not know this because he had

just spent two nights in Arles—he is planning to abduct L'Arlesiana. Federico overhears this declaration and his jealousy is inflamed. In a dramatic quartet, Vivetta pleads with him to stand by her, Baldassarre warns him not to throw away his life for a worthless woman, and Metifio repeats his boasts.

Federico attempts to attack Metifio, but is stopped by Baldassarre and Rosa, who dashes in. When the others leave, Rosa sings a poignant aria, "Esser madre e un inferno," lamenting

## Marianne Cornetti



Marianne Cornetti, who will sing Rosa Mamai.

American mezzo-soprano Marianne Cornetti has performed with opera companies all over the world, including Japan and China.

Cornetti, 43, has been singing professionally for 16 years. She made her opera debut in the Pittsburgh Opera's production of *Elektra* in 1989, after attending the Manhattan School of Music.

She went on to earn a degree in vocal performance from Duquesne. Cornetti undertook additional graduate studies at the Ezio Pinza Council for American Singers of Opera in Oderzo, Italy. She began her professional career singing supporting roles in such theaters as the Metropolitan Opera,

Pittsburgh Opera Center, and at Wolf Trap.

Cornetti has emerged as a "Verdi" voice. In the last few seasons she has made international debuts at major theaters including Teatro alla Scala in Milan; Vienna State Opera; Teatro Carlo Felice, Genova; Teatro dell'Opera di Roma; Teatro Bellini; and Arena di Verona. A dramatic mezzo-soprano, she has won acclaim as Amneris, Azucena, Eboli, and Principessa di Bouillon in *Adriana Lecouvreur*. She recently sang Azucena for San Diego Opera.

Marianne Cornetti makes her Opera Orchestra of New York debut in *L'Arlesiana*.

A. F.

the pain of being mother to a troubled son. *L'Innocente* enters, seemingly having recovered his senses. Rosa sends him to bed, and a tender orchestral lullaby follows.

Federico wanders in in a state of delirium: he repeats some lines

from the shepherd's tale of the goat and the wolf. He is haunted by the vision of *L'Arlesiana* being carried off by Metifio. As his mother and Vivetta try to stop him, he climbs to the top of the barn and throws himself down to his death.

This turbulent, perhaps lurid tale, is richly clad in melodic inspiration and orchestral invention. Ciléa commands our involvement all through this emotionally heightened journey.

Herb Frank

## Weston Hurt



Weston Hurt, to sing Metifio.

American baritone Weston Hurt, a graduate of the Juilliard Opera Center, has already performed with several opera companies and orchestras in the United

States, and the autumn of 2006 marked his debut with the New York City Opera in the role of Frank in Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt*. His opera repertoire includes Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, Peter in *Hansel und Gretel*, Riccardo in *I Puritani*, the Count in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, both Don Giovanni and Masetto in *Don Giovanni*, Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Rossini's Figaro, Papageno, and Junius in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, among others.

Hurt's artistry has been recognized in many notable vocal competitions: he received 1st place and the People's Choice Award from the Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition and 1st Prize from the George London Foundation, both in the 2004-2005 season. Additional competition winnings include 1st Place in the 2003

Oratorio Society of New Competition, as well as awards from the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation International Competition, the Liederkranz Foundation, Metropolitan Opera National Council, Opera Index, Inc., the Palm Beach Opera Competition, and two career grants conferred by the Santa Fe Opera. He was also a finalist for the Sara Tucker Career Grant and was named a winner in the 1996 Dallas Opera Guild Career Development Grant Competition.

Hurt makes his Carnegie Hall performance debut with Opera Orchestra in this appearance. However, he took part in previous OONY presentations when he covered two roles in last year's repertoire: Manfredo in *L'Amore dei Tre Re* and Frederic in *Lakmé*.

A. F.

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Hall), and sang in some classic Broadway musicals, including "The King and I," in which she played Anna many times on Broadway and on tour, the original productions of "South Pacific," "Brigadoon" and others.

Remaining tickets for  
**L'Arlesiana**  
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## Artist on Board

Quite appropriately, Leigh Allen Raben, a long-standing member of the Opera Orchestra board, first met Eve Queler when she sat next to her on a flight from Milan to New York. Since Eve was studying a score, Leigh, a lyric soprano, opened a conversation that has continued for some 34 years.

The multi-talented Ms. Raben studied voice with Anton Coppola and Joseph de Luigi, acting with Sanford Meisner at NYC's Neighborhood Playhouse, music at San Mateo College in California, and art history at Columbia and SUNY Albany.

She made her recital debut at Carnegie Recital Hall (now Weill



From 1976 to 1981, Leigh was Assistant to the General Manager at the Boston Ballet. Then, using her other training, she became the Curatorial Coordinator at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, from '82 to '91. From '91 to 2001 she assisted John Moriarity, Music Director of the New England Conservatory Opera Department.

Along with all these responsibilities, Ms. Raben has been a

dynamic and indispensable OONY board member, helping Maestro Queler with the myriad details of the Carnegie Hall performances and serving as a persuasive liaison with such artists as Bergonzi, Caballé, Verrett, Gedda, Domingo, Kraus and many others.

An affectionate friend of the Maestro, Leigh has accompanied her to her conducting appearances in London, Barcelona, Livorno, Brno, Prague, Sydney, Budapest, Rome, Israel, Hong Kong, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia. Her reports on some of these experiences have appeared in the pages of this Newsletter, revealing yet another talent of this accomplished and magnetic board member.

**H. F.**

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