Valley of the Divas

"Yes, Mother, I'm doing my voice exercises!"

"Jimmy Levine is no fag, and I'm the gal who can prove it!"

"I'm Kathy Battle and I don't need anybody!"

www.parterre.com

PAR
TERRE
Box

QUEER
OPERA
**We hear that...**

The following items courtesy of "La Cieca":

What very dignified American diva has held up release of a major Wagner recording until she can loop three notes into the finale of Act 2?

What musical superstar is up to his old tricks again, performing La Sonnambula (his favorite piece) all over Europe? And what red-headed board member is leading a movement to dump him?

What world-famous soprano's refusal to attend rehearsals led to a piano dress with no prima donna? Insiders said it should have been called La Scarpette Rosse. (Please note–this singer was not fired for her unprofessional behavior!)

What gay-themed opera has been quietly dropped from the Met's 1994-95 schedule following protests from several wealthy and prudish patrons?

In the wake of the Kathy Battle scandal, what easily identifiable artist was overheard vowing to sing every single role where the music is sweet enough and Poulenc plays this season?

**awakening scene**

Channel 13's showing last month of Aristide Maillol's Tales of the Cumaean Sibyl at the Guggenheim Museum featured one of the few lasting innovations of the 1970's: the discography of Just a Princess then, but I remember how forthy the Princess used to set one up for the night's perilous journey from box to bar to baths.

But now, those of us who recall Leontyne's (you know who you are) are finding it harder and harder to hit the ground rolling when the alarm goes off at 11 PM. But you can take Alton if you try Ruth Shetterly's plan: program your CB player to wake you with one of the following:

Nessun dormi, of course, sung by Franco Corelli, who else? Any recording will do, but try to find a pirate of a live New Jersey performance. If Franco doesn't wake you, the public will.

Swite Brautschi (the big aria from Die Aegyptische Helena -- look for it on the Leonie Rysanek recital on NRR) The party favors Helen took when she was twelve years younger, the night goes on as long as there is wine, she binges on wine. Where can I get some? B-major ecstasy, as Leonie makes a vacation of it.

Bolero from Les Vesper Sicilienne (on Angel's "Beverly Hills Sings Verdi") Bev bubbled through this bit-buster at a tempo of 103. So you can quit whining and get dressed.

Act 1 finale from Norma (on the Zia Stratis recording) She's just so damn meaty and sexy. Where can I get one? S-maj foolery, they say.

I could have danced all night (Birgit Nilsson on a... Broadway! This one will clear your sinuses in a hurry.) You'll find her voice from Sweden: "Sleep, sheep, I shouldn't sleep tonight, all the chews in the crown!"

**Diploma of the Carmelites**

Metropolitan Opera (2/28)

The Met's Salute to Queer Opera (see also Death in Venice and The Heiress of the Regency) peaked in the fourth and best scene of John Dexter's production of Poulenc's tale of sisterly love. Although his 1973 death was a missed (especially Mignon Dunn) four out of five of the principals were good-to-excellent. If only the Met wouldn't. 800 when they do Bohème.

Kent Nagano's way with the score was persuasive; I found it rather richer than his recent recording of Poulenc. For one thing, he followed Poulenc's explicit instructions on vocal leading (Blanche = Thais, Constance = Zerlina, Lidoin = Desdemona, Marie = Amme, etc. -- Crosby & Kundry). But the opportunities were transparent, never covered. She can't do worse than try.

Bolero from Les Vesper Sicilienne (on Angel's "Beverly Hills Sings Verdi") Bev bubbled through this bit-buster at a tempo of 103. So you can quit whining and get dressed.

The men in the cast covered themselves with fame: when Constance was the best she didn't play the role. male voice in a show, you know why? The sex is the best. But the total loss among the women was Florence Quivar: her heavy voice and blazing stage presence reduced Mother Murphy to an also-ran. But then, Mignon spoiled me for all time (she will never be matched with this voice, as in Die Amme, either). I can't understand why the Met has assigned this part again, after making her sing the part of a lifetime. Doesn't anyone else in the world know the music?

Following Régine Crespin's blazing opening scene of Mme. de Croissy has to be no fun at all, but Helga Dernesch look on the part with dignity and distinction. (as a late-in-the-game replacement for Christa Ludwig) was pleasantly surprised at her voice, not so much her presence. That's a shock. True, she ran out of voice during the death scene. But what else does she do? All she lacked was a certain warmth and femininity (Crespin was stern; Dernesch was sly.) But I look forward to her Klytamestra and Zia Principessa.

Sister Constance can work one's way into anyone's way of thinking-- remember Sœur Betsy du Bavigation du Christ? But the sonorities were transparent, never covered. She can't do worse than try.

Who else can be so wildly miscast as Teresa Stratas and still be seen as a valued performer? (Crespin, Price, Sutherland, Gobbi) The latter is too...nervous. But her reading of "Salve Regina" was a memorable one of its kind. (I mean, Valery.) True, she was assigned to a part that I've always felt was a bit overdone, but her voice has a beauty that is quite undeniable. Keep an eye on her.

Who else can be so wildly miscast as Teresa Stratas and still be seen as a valued performer? (Crespin, Price, Sutherland, Gobbi) The latter is too...nervous. But her reading of "Salve Regina" was a memorable one of its kind. (I mean, Valery.) True, she was assigned to a part that I've always felt was a bit overdone, but her voice has a beauty that is quite undeniable. Keep an eye on her.

(As they say at 007, "Please turn over quietly")

www.parterre.com
I confess I have not been a fan of Dawn Upshaw—her voice as an instrument is on the ordinary side, and there was a time a couple of years ago when she was being promoted as ruthless-ly as Cecilia Bartoli is now.

But this performance turned me around. She is an artist in the Stratas mold—intelligent, committed, unafraid of giving. Moreover, she has everything the part of Blanche de la Force requires—musicianship, superb diction, charm and fragility. She never pushed her voice, and yet every note, every syllable, every gesture. You are a fool, a winner if you miss this performance, or her Komponist later this year.

Moreover, she has everything committed, unafraid of giving. Her voice as Blanche is a lady (the soprano is a Southerner, and it shows), and that even at her best, her repertoire was virtually iden-tical to Battle's and whose decorum was very lavish indeed. And no one had a problem with that.

HMV records (8'way #72d) refuses to let PARTERRE BOX post its flyer on its Classical bulletin board. We won't shop there again, and we hope you won't either. The selection at Tower is better anyway.

Voce is hardly threadbare (how many 50-year-olds can make that claim?) Better to call it "broken in," like a favorite pair of slippers. And she means every note, every syllable, every gesture. You are a fool if you miss this performance, or her Komponist later this year.

The Italian Street Song (Eleanor Stever on VAI video) You should have as much fun dancing as La Steber does singing. The archetypal diva/broad outtings even Sills: her bang-on high C is the aural equivalent of a line of cocaine on a silver mirror.

and if you're still drowsy...

The Testosterone Kid is joined by Renata Tebaldi for a demonstration of why operas these days leaves me cold. Should Stephen Spielberg ever want to recreate the sounds of dinosaurs fucking, he should sample this duet.

So open those eyes, baby, and may your evening end as noisily as it began!