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# parterre BOX

The  
Underground

Queen

Opera

PARTERRE BOX

## Newsletter.

"The boss wants to throw you in jail,"  
snarled the burly security guard. I shud-  
dered, suddenly cold beneath my motorcycle  
jacket. Only moments ago, I was standing on  
line at the Met to buy standing room for  
Ariadne, and now I (continued on page 2)

# Debbie Does Naxos

by Giovanni Fucina

*Ariadne auf Naxos* (Met, 4/16) was to have been the capstone of Carol Vaness's *annus mirabilis*, but she was busy poaching Renée Fleming's *Desdemona*s (Verdi is so much easier on the back than Strauss), so Debbie Voigt (that's La Voigt to you) was pressed into service. And the usual Met squeeze-the-lemon-until-it's-dry stories hit the streets: on at least one occasion Voigt sang Chrysothemis after a day of rehearsing *Ariadne*. Why? Because if she doesn't the Met (read: Jimmy) will hire someone who will-- and for less money (no matter if they can't sing it). As it turned out, she came through with flying colors, but pleeez, Debbie, take it easy!

And she's the real thing, all right-- the one we've been waiting for, the Parsifal of dramatic sopranos. The tone is warm, rich, creamy, and, well, we might as well say it... voluptuous. And even, too, throughout a range of more than two octaves. Even the grunting (low C and beyond) Strauss assigned *Ariadne* early in the opera proper left her undaunted. And that phrase we all wait for toward the end of "Es gibt ein reich" (the big melisma on the word "befreien") eee-yow! -- even the hint of a ritard at the crest of the line! Voigt's rock-solid technique allows her to produce an almost physical sense of opening up at the climax. (Now, wipe that smirk off your face. As vivacious Albert Innaurato pointed out in his witty intermission feature on the subject of *Ariadne* (during the April 23 broadcast), Hofmansthal's text is riddled with double-entendres. And yes, so is Strauss's music. That phrase is meant to sound like a hole opening.)

\* Probably just as well. Did you hear how blown-out Fleming's voice sounded at the Tucker Gala? Ominous.

But anyway, La Deb (the nickname needs work. Ideas?) is an efficient actress, really funny in the prologue (despite this production's lack of that *sine qua non* of the Primadonna, the itty-bitty dog) and dignified and moving in the *seria* (despite Elijah Moshinsky's evident lack of interest in the last half-hour of the show-- more about that later)

## jail

sat, minding my own business, in Lincoln Center Plaza. One after another, a total of four security guards, one city policeman, and one Manager of something (no uniform, just an ill-fitting polyester suit) threatened me with arrest if I continued to distribute *Parterre Box*.

Now, let's keep in mind that my address is on every issue of *PB*. But no one wrote me a letter telling me to cease and desist. "They" sent these goons to tell me, "Get the fuck out of the plaza," and to call me a "faggot with a bad attitude." (Let me emphasize that the city cop was innocent of any of this verbal abuse. He merely told me I should cut it out. Fair enough).

Now, gentle readers, we have received lots of mail from those of you kind enough to praise our little journal, but not one letter of protest. And it's not like I was something really evil, like a ticket scaper or a child molester.

No, I won't distribute *PB* at the Met any more. Please, Met security force, don't throw me in de briar patch.



*PB* welcomes our new critic-- Fishbone. Logically, since his native language is Italian, his first review will be...

**Der Fliegende Holländer** (Met March 30) The Flying Dutchman gets down from his "vaisseau phantôme" and it's immediate queerness. His gloomy look, his mysterious countenance do nothing but evoke queer dreams of impossible, forever lost or never-found love. And Senta, what is she if not a metaphor for gay men's mythic quest for the unrealizable and unattainable-- love? Never satisfied with what is ready at hand, the Dutchman is on a perennial quest for the ideal.

Our Dutchman, in the world James Morris, was stupendous both vocally and dramatically. He has the right fach of voice for this role, and his vaguely mephistophelic aspect was not an indifferent help. He was efficiently supported by a sturdy and vigorous Jan-Hendrik Rootering (this basso has recently sung an incredible grab-bag at the Met: in a single week he has appeared as Daland, Don Basilio and Orest!

Paul Groves gave a polished, belcanto-like rendition of the Steersman's ballad. Unfortunately things were not so good with the two other high voices in the cast. Klaus König was an effortful, throaty and visually clumsy Erik, and Hildegard Behrens proved herself well past her prime, showing evident signs of an aging and fatiguing voice, with a worn-out top that didn't match her relatively powerful middle range.

Herman Michael, the conductor, gave an exciting and stirring reading of this score, always ready, however, to underline important specific passages and details. August Everding's production, now five years old, has lost none of its original charm, and was as impressive, intriguing and disquieting as ever.

**PB Competition #2: Call Me Magda!** Every opera queen is a diva deep inside. Unfortunately, not all divas can sing. But you can still be veristic. Send us your interpretation of the spoken monologue from Act III of *Adriana Lecouvreur* ("Giusto cielo! Che feci...") Audio cassettes and VHS videos are acceptable; include return postage if you want yours back. Open to everyone, regardless of age, sex, or vocal ability. Tapes must be received by June 1. Campiness counts; judges' whims are final. The winner will receive Magda Olivero's new *Adriana* CD; runners-up get a *Parterre Box* t-shirt. Send it to:

Call Me Magda (c/o Parterre Box)

**Eccomi, Cecilia Bartoli, pria di "Slimfast!"**

Delightful young mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli has signed her first TV commercial contract. An A&R man at Decca (who control virtually every aspect of the diva's life) explains, "We had to find a way to make Sissy a household name in her native Italy, where for some reason they insist opera singers actually sing opera. Our success with Kiri te Kanawa and Dmitri Hvorostovsky (who tread the boards as little as possible) proves the rest of the civilized world is easy to hoodwink."

One of the lucky few who heard La Bartoli's recent concert with the Met orchestra reports, "You could put her voice and Kathy Battle's voice in the navel of a flea and still have room for James Levine's heart."

Speaking of Jimmums, we hear he is recovering nicely from the freak accident he sustained while following Miss Battle onstage. It seems she stopped suddenly, and the maestro fractured his nose. (Our apologies to Jay Leno.)

Perhaps he was still in a state of shock from the tongue-lashing he received from his former favorite spinto The Divine Miss Millo. To paraphrase La Gran Scena's Sylvia Bills, "I won't tell you what she said, but it was *pretty scathing*." Brava, Aprile! You go on like this!

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And this is Teresa Stratas's year of years! Finally, a Komponist who is more than Cherubino in a bad mood! For the first time since Troyanos, we saw a genius triumphant over backstage schreierei. Stratas made up for a lightish voice (she took a few minutes to warm up, and had to yell a few lines in chest) with intense musicianship and an exact depiction (no, let's call it an exact reliving) of being "il fragile strumento, vassallo della man" ("I'm just a musical instrument Someone Else is playing.") To Stratas, music is indeed a holy art. Please, God, send us more like her.



This is the first time I heard Tracy Dahl (Zerbinetta), and, frankly, I was disappointed. She rattled out pitchless staccatti and blew all three money notes-- the E got away from her altogether. (She was really nifty on the broadcast, though-- maybe the 16th was just an off night). I will say this-- she's game. This production gives 2-girl enough schtick for Fiakermilli, Olympia, Sophie and the Queen of Shemakhan with some left over for Beauty and the Beast. Run! Jump! Twirl! Dance! I kept waiting for fire batons, and then, well, yeah... there they were. I assume it's not her fault if the production shies away from finding meaning in the text, but must Dahl be so audioanimatronic?

And I want to say thank you, Hermann Prey, to come to us to teach us the unique real of voice, musicianship and understanding of text in the role of Musiklehrer. He taught me quite

a bit about music just in the half-hour the prologue lasts. A pity he could not be drafted to sing Harlekin, since Mark Oswald's lumpish voice and Animal House wit were not taken in with pleasure. But he still has a voice, which is more than one can say for Philip Creech. Yes folks, that stringy-voiced eminence grise is back and worse than ever. How does he get work, and at the Met, yet? He must not only know where the bodies are buried, he must have drawn a map.

And the rest? Paul Groves sounds honeyed as always. Some Italian repertoire for him, please? And was that really Tony Lacitura doing the Tanzmeister? Is he on Prozac?

Arrgh, what an annoying production. La Stratas managed to dampen the brouhaha Moshinsky dreamt up to distract the audience from hearing the Komponist's aria (Imagine suggesting to a Met audience that music is a holy art that should be treated with respect!) otherwise, he hoked up the show and managed to miss all the jokes that are there. (Lesley Koenig staged this revival. Now it can be told-- all her lousy ideas for Adriana weren't even original lousy ideas.)

Most bewildering: why does Bacchus take the form of Vanderdecken? (Perhaps because, at the Met at least, Vanderdecken takes the form of Cloggart. What's next, Florida Tosca in Pélleas?) Why is the second comedians' quintet staged as a dopey, anachronistic parody of Act 2 Bohème? Why... oh, the hell with it. It's like being stuck in Eurodisney without even getting to go to Paris. There was a time Moshinsky had some interesting ideas-- his Ballo (scaffolding and all) wasn't half bad. Burn-out is a terrible thing.

That Man did a goodish job leading the band-- lots of detail. But then, there's only so much noise you can make with only forty guys in the pit. If he just rethought those slow-mo tempi everytime the action turns serious, and followed singers who are musical, instead of just

singers he's getting along with at the moment...

What the hell is Jessye Norman up to? That mondo-beyondo crypto-feminist collection of encore material she did in concert April 25 (I caught her performance the way it was meant to be seen-- on TV) proved exactly two things-- Norman's past her prime, and Elisabeth Schwartzkopf has lost her standing as the world's most mannered performer.

Musical and dramatico-political ideas jibed not at all-- why play Dalila calculating and then nab Samson's ecstatic high note? Maria Callas, Marian Anderson and Mae West, to name only three, succeeded with this aria by singing it as written (well, Mae took it down a half-step, but all of them had the good taste not to lunge for that Bb). Next time around, maybe La Jess will favor us with "O ma lyre immortelle" from *Sappho*. It comes equipped with its own money note, and it would suit her voice better, besides doing honor to a great poet and a great lesbian (and a great Lesbian).

Meanwhile, Norman's traversal of Barber's Cleopatra did nothing but confirm what we suspected all along-- the role is special material for Leontyne Price, and what the hell was Perichole doing here? The Maid of Orleans she's not.

But Jessye's Mad Lucy dress was a knockout. As for the wig... let's talk.

Back issues of *Parterre Box* are available.

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Available:

- #1: "I love my dead gay Wälsung"
- #2: "Sunny von Bülow"
- #3: "Valley of the Divas"
- #4: "A Boy and His Dive"
- #5: "I am Divine! I am Oblivion!"



## My Own Private Montparnasse

(the "lost" scene from *La bohème*)

**Colline:** So they bought that story about the English guy?

**Schaunard:** Yeah. Marcello and Rodolfo would die if they knew that "poisoning the parrot" really means...

**Colline:** Choking the chicken?

**Schaunard:** (laughing) He spread his wings, and then I stuffed his beak with...

**Colline:** Parsley! (they laugh uproariously).

**Schaunard:** And Musetta's wondering if Alcindoro's found another favorite singer.

**Colline:** Poor girl! Too bad she lacks your "forward placement."

**Schaunard:** Allora, it's almost time to meet our friend Benoit.

**Colline:** The rent? Already?

**Schaunard:** He said, if you would demonstrate your "rope tricks," we'd be paid up through the spring.

**Colline:** I don't know. What's in it for me?

**Schaunard:** Afterwards, I'll teach you a little game I learned in Marseilles. It's called "cacher la saucisse."

**Colline:** Oh, you nasty bohemian! I'm hard already. Andiam!

(They leave for Momus)

contributed by "Peter Hunter" and "Richard Breath," who have confirmed PB's opinion of the level of taste among Lone Star opera queens. Congrats, boys!

Thank you, Peter Allen.

Our first question today comes from San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Peter Hunter asks if the panel can identify the "up and coming" American baritone who enjoyed frequent homosex with his own brother before AIDS cut short his career?

Can the panelists name the soprano and conductor featured in the following steamy opera plot? She refused to continue with a performance until the maestro obliged her by placing his "enormousness" in her mouth. He balked at the idea, reminding her of his well-known gay inclinations. She told him to close his eyes and pretend she was F----- C----- . The opera resumed after a twenty-minute hiatus.

Which operatic superstar has been sending his frumpy wife out on stage-directing gigs so he can enjoy cavorting in his hotel suite with blonde chorus cuties?

Can any of you identify the noted American bass who quotes Nellie Melba's dictum that fresh semen keeps the voice young and supple? At the rate this basso is going, he'll still be singing at the age of 100, unless he drowns first!

Panel, can you name the boyish farmer's daughter who changed her name because everyone confused her with a male basketball coach? Hint: She burned herself out too soon and is left with no voice, no career, and a phony name!

Do the panelists believe Rodrigo (*Don Carlo*) is gay, or does it just seem that way because practically everyone who sings the role is?

Mr. Richard Breath of Dallas asks if you can name the powerful but hideous general manager of a west-of-the-Mississippi opera company whose primary interest in life was diving cute young hustlers to distant motels and then scaring the beejeezus out of them by prancing out of the bathroom wearing the skimpiest of bikini briefs?

Will someone please explain why so many operatic superstars commit so many sexual peccadillos while in residence in Houston, Dallas or San Antonio? Do they perhaps think

a) no one will notice? or

b) no one will talk about it long-distance to friends in New York?

I'm afraid that's all the time we have. We return you to Peter Allen in the control booth.

By the way, Peter-- wasn't that you doing voiceovers on that Falco Videopac?

The Texaco Opera Queens

# readers rant

Dear Parterre Box,

Where have you been all my life? But seriously,

Unfortunately, I have no new stories about Kuntleen Battle. However, I do have it from a reasonably reliable party that Ms. Warmth is, in fact, the illegitimate daughter of Al Jolson and Florence Foster Jenkins.

So, what's the word on Dmitri Hvorostovsky? I have a hunch his "Parterre Box" is rather impressive. I imagine it wouldn't be too difficult to find out. I mean, no one who records "Ochye tchornya" (or however it's spelled) can be exclusively heterosexual, can they? Personally, I find his voice to be somewhat wobbly, but who cares?

Re: Menotti's "Che mai fu alla Bambina Giovanna." Just for your information, you might be interested to know that the famous third act "Mah-Jongg" scene was performed in concert in Salzburg sometime in the mid-50's by Stella Roman, Nan Merriman, Giuseppe Campora and Nicola Moscona. No recordings have survived.

"Scott"

Dear Scott,

Hate to rain on your parade, but the "Mah-Jongg" scene is actually from Catalani's "Via Tramonta," which also includes the lovely soprano aria "Glorioso canto del cigno."

Dear Mr/Ms Box:

Yes, indeed, Dame Gwyneth has a "massive" voice and I too might have muttered "shit" had I been standing next to you because that is an excellent description of the quality of her voice. There are pig farmers in the midwest who can scream out and call in pigs from miles away with their "massive" voices. I would not want, however, to hear them at the Met.

My first experience with this dame was about 10 years ago when she hooted, howled, swooped and shrieked her way through Isolde without ever hitting a note on key. It was the most lamentably bad

performance I have ever heard at the Met and I have tried to avoid her performances ever since-- difficult since she is the only Brunnhilde performing in the Ring and, unfortunately, the only Kundry for next season's *Parsifal*. I'd like to ship her and Aprile Millo off to Opera heaven away from us all and, so as not to appear sexist, throw in Sherrill Milnes to accompany them.

Further to your comments in the issue, the hell with Debbie Voigt as Isolde in 2000, let's have Jessye Norman do it now. NOW! NOW! NOW!

P.S. - Bring back Battle (the purest, most perfect coloratura alive) and Jimmy Levine's conducting is still superb. Can't you get anything right?

"John"

Dear Ted:

No, I can't. For example, I deliberately left your letter in my breast pocket and then sent the shirt to the laundry... but it's still legible. Now, for your information, Jessye Norman has postponed her Isolde, due to the indisposition of Elizabeth Schwartzkopf, who was to repeat the cameo role she created in Furtwangler's recording. Don't be a stranger, darling.

Dear PB,

Hope you get a chuckle out of this one.

LEON LORRAINE (PUSHKIN) WOMAN'S  
La Reine Flammette (Leroux)  
7. "Tu sais... Je ne suis plus reine"  
Marguerite Carré (Pathé 0496, 1904 with  
the composer at the piano)

Translation: The Flaming Queen--"You know, I'm not a queen any more." (otherwise known as "de Nile aria.")

Dear Unknown Prince,

I am helpless with laughter. Who are you?

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