


Parterre Box

the underground queer opera newsletter

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remembering when
opera was queer and
dangerous and
exciting and making
it that way again.

RANT OF THE MONTH

Dear "Box,"

While watching the recent broadcast of *Elektra* from the Met, I was once again struck by how mediocre it was. Now, this letter is not intended to be a review of the production; the broadcast was merely a catalyst for me to put a few bottled frustrations into print. However, for those of you who may have missed the MET's recent televised debacle, a short, opinionated overview may be of interest.

To start with, I thought Deborah Voigt sounded magnificent; once again giving a visceral, sharing performance. I haven't seen such a powerful and well sung *Chrysothemis* since Rysanek. As usual, her physical size did not bother me once. When someone sings that well and is that graceful (à la Caballé), she could look like the side of a barn and I wouldn't care. Also, James King, though past his prime, showed all the grace and power one would expect from such a seasoned and gifted performer.

Then there was the rest of the cast. For one, it quite interesting how much better you could hear Mme. Behrens on video than in the house. Her voice sounded about three times larger than it is in the house — modern recording techniques and clever microphone placement can do wonders. And I would really like to know how many performances they had to splice together to get what came off as a barely passable performance out of her. I went to a few of those performances last year, and her voice never did speak on every note (and when it did, I was usually sorry). Then there was Brigitte Fassbaender. I could be wrong, but I don't believe she actually sang a single note of the score. As far as I could tell, she screamed the entire thing — I hardly think Richard Strauss would have approved.

As for the production values, with puke green and piss yellow sets and costumes, I don't think the MET could have produced an uglier production if it tried. I understand that *Elektra* isn't a pretty story, but come on! Am I wrong, or is it not possible to give a dark, bleak reading of a work without actually being unflattering to the singers, or so rough on the audience members' eyes? They managed to do it for Nilsson.

Now, perhaps I am being too hard on the performers — after all, they seemed to be trying. Given what they had to work with, they made a valiant effort. I suppose I really have no right to criticize — after all, I'm not singing anywhere at

the moment. But, as I said earlier, this isn't a review — it's a rant. Though I have many, my number one frustration with the MET is that I had always looked to the MET to be the standard-bearer for Grand Opera, yet, more often than not, I am disappointed with so many really mediocre productions.

I guess the fault really lies in my deluded perception of the house. I have always operated under the assumption that it has, for instance, access to the world's greatest singers. Instead, the powers that be constantly use people like Behrens — a reasonably talented singing actress, who has never figured out how to use her voice. It has also been my understanding that they are supposed to be able to attract the world's best stage directors and designers, but they choose to use people like Moshinsky (and we all know what his productions are like — his recent *Otello*, for one).

However, production values and artistic design are subjective matters of taste and politics, and best handled by those who know more about them than I. I am a singer, and my biggest concern facing opera today is the decline of real voices. (I know that this seems a departure from the topic, but it really is related — at least in my mind.) This trend toward hiring singers who record well and making them stars has to stop. Most of the glamorous new "opera stars" today can't actually sing opera in a large house (some can't seem to get through a role on stage, period). The ones who can often don't get hired because his voice is "too loud" or she's "not attractive enough" (read "doesn't record well" or "won't look good on a CD cover"). If this trend continues, real opera singers will become obsolete — the new "stars" will just stand on stage while lip-synching to their own recordings!

To me, the thing that makes opera more special than any other art form is its immediacy and its excitement — that it is live and will be gone when the curtain closes; as Adriana Lecouvreur says, *un soffio è la mia voce, che al nuovo di morrà*. It is an art form to be shared with a live audience, not a cold microphone. That's not to say that artists should not be recorded for posterity and future enjoyment — I, for one, would be lost without my recordings of Nilsson, Callas, Corelli, etc. But I believe that the point should be to preserve great voices, a historic performance, or a legendary interpretation, not simply to record anything, just for the sake of selling a recording. One should be a veteran of the stage first; once proven as such, he may have the opportunity to record anything he wishes. For example, I have no problem with Pavarotti recording *Otello*. Personally, I would never buy it. But he has certainly more than

proven his worth and abilities onstage and is entitled record anything he wants.

As a young singer, perhaps I'm not living in today's world. I mean, I might change my tune if I were offered a lot of money to record something I could never sing otherwise. But to build an entire career on that is to have a recording career, not an opera career. Opera is more than just being able to sing the notes of an operatic score — it is the whole audio-visual-visceral experience.

Certainly there must be people out there who agree with me. Opera is not something for Yuppies to use as background music at dinner parties. It's not supposed to be "pretty." Everything else aside, it is still drama; but it is drama whose energy must carry in large spaces and over orchestras which always outnumber the singers, no matter the size of the house. Its intent is to make a person feel — and the only way that can happen is for the singer to also be able to feel and share all of his energy. I remember Brenda Lewis (a great MET artist, and one of my mentors in college) was often asked how one could dramatically justify, in effect, singing a play. Her response was that "opera is about strong emotion" — emotion so strong, in fact, that it cannot be expressed in any way other than singing. Mere speech would only scratch the surface of what you need to convey. "Yes," she would say, "the words are important, but not as important as the intent behind them. You must sing from your guts, your crotch, your soul."

This can, of course, translate to a very varietal style of singing, and, taken to the extreme, would not be suitable for all voices or all kinds of singing. But even the basic notion of singing from your center seems to be completely foreign to singers and teachers these days. Even the lightest *Baroque* or *bel canto* opera needs to be sung — the idea that early music or Mozart should be sung squarely and off the body is sheer and utter nonsense. Unfortunately, this has become an accepted and, in fact, sought after technique which has made a lot of beautiful and potentially exciting music dull and lifeless. (This season's *Figaro* at the MET is a prime example.) More importantly, the media hype around so many singers of this variety has caused an erosion of taste. Audiences and listeners have slowly become conditioned to accept mediocrity in singing as the standard. It has gotten to the point where a truly feeling artist seems out of place and apparently will even frighten people, especially those who do the hiring.

There seems to be a prevailing idea now that avoiding controversy in opera is a good thing. You never seem to hear about riots in opera houses any more. Even "boo-ing" and hissing at a bad performance seldom happens anymore. Audiences have become more complacent, in part due to a "television mentality." But the artists also need to take some of the blame. Singers need to keep their audiences on the edge of their seats.

As singers, we need to keep our audience's emotions all stirred up. We all seem to understand this intellectually, but we will usually translate it into an acting thing rather than a vocalism. This is really only half of the formula. The connection that so often does not get made is actually very simple: the place where truth in acting comes from is the same place that true voices come from — they cannot be separated. The crux of the matter is feeling; if we are not completely open, then neither will our voices be entirely open, therefore we are powerless to affect our audiences. Many singers have figured out how to fake it, but I believe it is much more effective to be honest.

This rampant problem in the singing world really is not the fault of the singer. Most singers are not given this information, or, if they are, they are not properly shown how to use and develop it. This is the fault of teachers and, in particular, conservatories and universities where emphasis seems to be on anything but learning to sing. I have never run into anyone who said he learned to sing in a conservatory. One, because most really good teachers will not teach in that setting due to the politics involved, and, two, because emphasis tends to be on "how much" rather than "how well."

As a former student, I know that I never had time to unlearn bad habits and develop new correct ones because I constantly had to learn new repertoire for juries, recitals, operas, etc. I never got to add repertoire when I was ready to add it. I was told what to learn and by what date. Some call this "discipline." I call it tyranny. Above all, an artist needs to be flexible and do what is right for him in his own time. Take that away, and you lose part of the creativity that makes an artist special. Of course, singers who are destined to be puppets thrive in this atmosphere (and will get along well with most of today's conductors and directors), but the real artists tend to get weeded out, or learn to curb their individuality in the hope that they still might get to work on their craft — the "some is better than none" theory.

I say enough is enough. It's up to those of us who see this happening to do our part in trying to change this reality. It distresses me to realize how much damage this trend could do and has done to this remarkable art form. With houses getting bigger and bigger and audiences (and voices) getting smaller and smaller, real opera will become more of a museum piece than it already is. We can really only do what we do best, and hope that we can change people's minds, but it seems an uphill battle. Someone along the way seems to have decided that the way to bring in larger audiences is by using tremendous hype to "create" stars. That's fine and plausible. However, they need to be making stars out of the right singers — people who can hold up to their recordings; a singer needs to sound as good or better in the house. They need to stop choosing people based on marketability (e.g., Bartoli, Banti, etc.) and, instead, look for real artists (e.g., Deborah Voigt).

Again, this means that young singers need to be given the correct information. To any singers out there — I urge you to be true to yourself. Don't do things with your voice that feel wrong, just because someone told you to do it. Please don't leave yourself out of the process, we need your

individuality. We need the new life the real you will bring to a role (or even to the chorus!). I know this sounds like spiritual psycho-babble, but trust me that the journey you take to know yourself and discover your own center is greater than any vocal placement exercises you could ever do. Not only will you find that the voice will fall right in line, but you will also discover that there is a greater artist inside you than you ever realized. This is the only thing that can save the face of opera, now and forever.

This is a field about singers, yet run largely by non-singers and/or non-musicians. This is insanity. After all, the *raison d'être* of opera is the singer. Without good singers, the art is lost. It's time for the singer to be brought back into the equation. Wouldn't this be an ideal world if singing were left to the singers, and all other interested parties actually listened to and supported what we thought and felt? Ahhh...Nirvana.

Thanks for letting me vent.

Signed,
Dis-enchanted April

BACK TO THE FUTURE

"*Torniamo all'antico; sarà un progresso*" ("Let's go back to the past; it will be a step forward"), said Giuseppe Verdi in reaction to new trends in Italian opera composition in the late 19th century. He might have said the same about the even worse situation in opera performance today. Let's take a look at a few "new" recordings that might have found shelf space at Bussetto:

Surely the prize of the year is Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in a kinescope of a guest performance by the Bayreuth Festival at the Osaka World's Fair. This is probably the most famous and arguably the greatest of Wieland's shows: a thousand and one light cues bathing a sparsely-furnished stage and those oppressive phallic towers looming far upstage.

From stills of this production you'd think it was statuesque, gloomy, and rather cold. (I did.) No. It's fluid, graceful, passionate — (shall I say it?) Italianate. But that was to be expected — remember how Wieland's *Ring* gods traded their horned helmets for togas? (In his program notes, he compared Brünhilde and Wotan to Antigone and Creon) So, oddly enough, *Isolde* and *Brangäne* end up moving like *Francesca* and *Biancafiore*.

How they look is the second shocker: Wieland pioneered the use of "Star Trek" clothes in opera. These sheath-like garments are of no particular period. True, a quarter of a century later, we see the '60s influence: Birgit Nilsson's Jackie Kennedy flip is amusing (but flattering, too). In an effort to suggest (psychological more than physical) nudity, Wieland dressed his principles

in leather.

Even with a mediocre cast, this document would be worth twice its price (I paid \$75 for a very poor quality pirate of this performance a decade ago). But Bayreuth could at that time boast a dream cast.

Is it possible we will ever see again an artist the quality of Birgit Nilsson? Here she is at her vocal peak, balancing her legendary laser top with a warmer, more pliable middle, and (surprise!) a gritty chest register — a testimony to her insistence on balancing German with Italian repertoire. By this time, the diva had sung over 100 *Isoldes*, but every phrase sounds newly-minted: "*Nimmermehr! Nicht heut noch morgen!*" as angular as anything in *Erwartung*; "*Er sah mir in die Augen*" limpid as spring water. She finds the key to keeping Act II lively in a dozen variations on sheer bliss — as if the *Liebestrank* were laced with really good acid. I had never thought La Nilsson so graceful or agile: she's happy and peppy and bursting with love. And what a delicious dessert is her *Liebestod*: a perfectly-judged final course, not a separate meal.

"He gives her class and she gives him sex," said Katherine Hepburn referring to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. When we speak of Nilsson and her partner Wolfgang Windgassen, we might paraphrase that expression, "he gives her *kunst* and she gives him *stimme*." The German tenor combined an un-glamorous voice with world-class musicianship and expressiveness; his partnership with Nilsson ranks with Caruso/Farrar and Melchior/Flagstad as one of the century's greatest. He rarely sounded better than he does here — the voice is uncommonly fresh

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and full of vitality, even in the uncut Act III. Under Wieland's tutelage, he broods as she rejoices, Night to her Day.

Legendary Hans Hotter contributes the most impressive Marke I've ever heard. The low tessitura of the role suits his sometimes problematic voice and his monolithic characterization is simply overwhelming. Supporting roles are in capable hands; a hearty "brava" to Herte Töpfer for her involved reading of Brangäne, a role that severely tries, but never overwhelms, her mezzo.

Pierre Boulez leads the fastest *Tristan* you've ever heard; he makes Böhm sound like a stick-in-the-mud. If the result is more passionate than poetic, that's surely preferable to James Levine's *tempo di molasses*. I cannot recommend this release highly enough. Buy it now or I'll never speak to you again. [Legato Classics, LCV 005]

BRIEFLY: The most famous opera video of all time, the Callas/Gobbi/Zeffirelli/Covent Garden *Tosca*, Act II, has finally been released commercially by EMI in clean sound and picture. Warning for the uninitiated: this performance will trouble you — the torture, rape and murder are too real for comfort. So don't watch it just before bedtime. Included is an odd Callas concert at the House of Veggies in 1962 on what looks like a set for Hollywood Palace ("Hello, I'm Maria Callas. Let's have a big hand for my guests Liberace and Alan King..."). She's in her Jackie-clone look and so-so voice for arias from *Don Carlos* and *Carmen*. But

it's nice to have as a bonus to the Puccini. This video is a steal at under \$25. [EMI Classics PM 807]

Two CD releases on Gala highlight lesser-known aspects of La Divina's art: GL 323 presents her celebrated rehearsal with Rescigno and the Dallas Civic Opera Orchestra. Listen to Maria teach the boys in the band how *rubato* works; thrill to the best high E-flat she ever sang. GL 320 offers La Callas' Alpha (well, Beta) and Omega — a mesmerizing Kundry in Italian (immaculately Wagnerian), and a recently rediscovered few minutes of Callas singing Ah, perfido! in 1976 (just a year before her death). No, the voice isn't a wreck. With no one listening except her own cassette deck, Maria sings as well as she had in 1960. In its own way, this performance is even more heart-breaking than that last concert tour with diStefano. The voice is still there, the art is still there, but the nerve is gone.

Each of these CDs is available for under \$5.00. Living in the past may be dangerous, but sometimes it's the only way.

— Giovanni Fucina



Adores the minuet, the Ballets Russes; crepes Suzette



Goes for rock and roll; a hot dog makes her lose control

THE MONTREAL THING

Welcome Enzo Bordello, PB's new critic-at-large!

With a wind chill factor near the freezing mark, Montreal in April is no substitute for Paris in the springtime. Nevertheless, the French ambiance of this historical Quebec city lent a touch of idiomatic correctness to the local opera company's presentation of Bizet's *Carmen*, featuring Diana Soviero in her first performances of the title role. Although encountering La Soviero as La Carmencita made a compelling reason for visiting Montreal, the real surprise of this Canadian excursion was my chance attendance at a joint recital by Aprile Millo and Louis Quilico.

Billed as an all-Verdi concert, the program presented by Millo and Quilico resulted in one of the most laughable musical fiascos I have ever witnessed. My partner had wisely chosen to spend the evening at "Le Campus," one of Montreal's famous gay clubs (renowned for its all-nude male dancers), and I regret not having done likewise.

Quilico could at least plead advanced age as the cause of his wobbly barking and cracked high notes, but what excuse can Millo continue to offer for her increasingly obvious vocal problems? Beginning with *Tacea la notte from Verdi's Il trovatore*, Millo's singing was marred by choppy phrasing, shaky intonation and appalling lunges at high notes. After a chilly reception from the audience, Millo returned to the stage of the Salle Pleyel with Quilico and their pianist (Quilico's wife) trailing sheepishly behind her.

Millo announced that she was not feeling well but the real source of her vocal distress was the poorly tuned piano. However, she would sing what she could of her scheduled numbers (in actuality, only "Ritorna vincitor" was edited from the program.) When the audience began to mutter in astonishment, Millo defensively remarked that we could hardly be disappointed since she was sharing the evening with "a great baritone." Well, April, with all due respect, there was nothing wrong with the piano and disappointment is to be expected since the baritone ceased to

be "great" years ago (if ever).

Millo and Quilico mumbled and stuttered their way through the Aida-Amonasro portion of the Nile Scene, then returned for individual numbers. Millo offered the worst rendition of *Rusalka's Song to the Moon* I have ever heard, full of goopy *portamenti*, mannered inflections and absurd Delsarte poses. While she performed the aria in dubious Czech, the delivery was pure prosciutto. That all-purpose *grandezza* Millo relies on to vogue every role in her repertoire will simply not do for the fairy-tale creature Rusalka. Inexplicably she ended the aria with a clenched fist raised in a ridiculous "Guerrai" gesture more suitable for *Norma* (an opera Millo has been threatening to add to her resume in future seasons). And by the way, what happened to consistency? After all, the evening's fare was advertised as all-Verdi.

For her single encore, Millo sang *L'etra notte* from Boito's *Mefistofele*, dedicating her performance to the memory of Claudia Muzio. Millo then admonished those audience members unfamiliar with the Duse of Song to "go out and buy some of her CDs. You're in for a treat." Millo was her own treat, however, falling to her knees at the earliest melodramatic opportunity, crawling around the stage in black cocktail dress, pearls and six-inch heels, resembling hysterical Madeline Kahn in *What's Up Doc?*. To quote Anna Russell, "I'm not making this up, you know!"

Quilico capped the evening's hilarity by foolishly tackling "Largo al factotum." Walking with the aid of a cane, Quilico became totally lost in the patter section of the aria, then began to ad-lib several "la, la, la's" until he could figure out what went wrong. Hoping to salvage this gruesome evening, Quilico touched the high note, got overly confident, tried to swell it — and cracked atrociously. The audience winced in horror, then supplied polite applause for their embarrassed compatriot.

The party is over for Millo. After years of exciting but erratic work from this self-proclaimed vestal of Italian opera, Millo apparently hit rock bottom with the recent *Lombardi* crisis at the Met and this recital only confirmed that her career is in shambles. If Millo had dared to present such a concert to a New York audience, she would be forced to take up a new career as a

Bette Midler impersonator. The tragedy of Millo's situation is that she began to believe her own hype and subsequently tried to fill the vacant shoes of Tebaldi and Milanov with ego, not substance. At best, she was a respectable "B" soprano who recalled such lesser lights as Stella, Tucci and Cruz-Romo -- and even they were more consistent from night to night than Millo.

It was interesting the following evening to compare Millo's accomplishments with those of the lesser-known but infinitely more gifted Soviero. Soviero is at least ten years older than Millo but sounds younger, fresher and technically more poised than her fellow Italo-American colleague. Of course, Soviero is a lyric soprano and has never pretended to be anything else. Millo pushed her voice beyond its lirico-spinto compass in a premature effort to fill out the heavier Verdi assignments.

Soviero has emerged as the cult diva of the 90's and the reasons are not hard to fathom. Her career is highly reminiscent of the late Dorothy Kirsten's. Both artists were born in New Jersey. Both polished their craft at the New York City Opera before moving on to the Met (Soviero's internship there was considerably longer than Kirsten's). Both made Puccini the core of their repertoire, with frequent *Traviata*'s and assorted French and verismo operas to round out their professional profile. Both are esteemed by the *conoscenti* for the depth of their characterizations (even if Kirsten stubbornly maintained an often inappropriate image of glamour, e.g., her too-too coiffure for the decidedly unglamorous Minnie in *La fanciulla del West*). Both were viewed as "useful" rather than essential sopranos by the impresarios of their respective eras.

Not unexpectedly, Soviero's *Carmen* was a highly distinguished piece of work. The soprano was announced as performing with a severe case of bronchitis, but her ailment was noticeable only in an understandable reduction of volume. Like all truly imaginative artists, Soviero made a virtue of her handicap, spinning delicate piannissimi to seduce and deceive the various men in Carmen's life. In general, Soviero was an uncommonly elegant gypsy with a refreshing touch of the romantic about her. Her dancing was remarkable for its uninhibited gusto (rare in this role) and her reading of the Card Scene was al-

most Pif-like in its simplicity. In addition to her interpretative assets, Soviero was a highly attractive stage figure, stunningly gowned for the last act in a dress of burgundy velvet with black lace accents.

Antonio Barasorda, scheduled for a Metropolitan Opera debut this fall, was a burly Don Jose in both sound and appearance. The tenor's interpretation was unrelentingly forceful and ultimately provincial; I seriously doubt he will make much of an impression at the Met. Gaetan Laperriere was a handsome Escamillo, refined in voice and bearing, while Lyne Fortin's Micaela revealed an engaging presence and formidable technique (*diminuendo* and *mesa di voce* were put to expressive use in her aria); both artists were appreciably at home in their native French tongue. Alfredo Silipigni's conducting was routine, lacking both tension and forward drive.

Uzan's production strove for profundity at the expense of the local color that Bizet so carefully crafted into his score. By cutting such episodes as the children's chorus and the last act procession, Uzan robbed the work of its fascinating contrasts. Given his Parisian upbringing, Uzan produced an oddly Germanic concept, stark, sober and heavy in its choices. The action of the opera was played out in a single unit setting, the interior of a bulking, with the ever-present chorus dressed in black and ringed around the playing area. The production seemed to owe something to Peter Brook's deconstructionist staging seen in New York over a decade ago. It wasn't my idea of *Carmen* but at least everyone approached the production with commitment and energy. Hopefully, there will be opportunities to enjoy Soviero's *Carmen* in a more traditional context and when she is in better health.

— Enzo Bordello

PB welcomes your comments,
suggestions, and cries of ecstasy!

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UNMASKING THE BALL:

Notes for an Imaginary Production

Antefatto

Richard Warwick, governor of a large southern state is running for re-election. In four years, he's balanced the budget, built up the infrastructure, trimmed the bureaucracy and transformed the state capitol into a Mecca for the performing arts.

So why is he such a tough sell for re-election?

For one thing he's not so discreet as he used to be about his bisexuality. Not since he hired that very young, very queer boy Oscar as his secretary. (Oscar's typing is weak, but he came with a sterling recommendation from the Man 2 Man escort service.)

Warwick's spin doctor, René Ankarstrom has been working overtime trying to convince the media that Warwick's one-night-stands constitute "a deep and abiding devotion to education and opportunity for inner-city youth."

Mrs. Ankarstrom (Amelia)'s selfless devotion to the state's welfare has led to her appointment as "first lady pro-tem," hostessing many a public function for bachelor Warwick.

ACT ONE - scene one -- Warwick's office: a room full of men in gray suits.

Oscar and Warwick are in workout gear (they've just come from the gym)

Warwick takes the "list of traitors" from René, crumples it, and tosses it into the wastebasket (2 points!)

The judge is an elderly fundamentalist with a white, blow-dried pompadour.

Oscar vogues "Volta la terra." Between verses he looks in his desk...finds fliers for Ulrica...distributes them.

During "Ogni cura," Oscar disappears for a moment, returns with sailor caps for himself and Warwick...They improvise a hornpipe for "alle tre!"

Scene 2 -- a loft.

Ulrica is "channelling." Some of her followers are operating camcorders and portable cassettes. Others are writing checks.

Warwick points out to Silvano a letter on the floor ("Did you drop this?"); it contains a check.

Amelia; driver (young kid, ponytail) talks to Ulrica. He recognizes Warwick and winks.

Amelia in dark glasses, trenchcoat.

Sam, tom and the others in an assortment of ill-fitting "sailor" outfits (sweaters, pea-coats, etc.)

Warwick asks Ulrica to tell his fortune -- insulted, she turns away. He grabs a

microphone from her and sings "Di' tu se fedele" as a lounge act. 2nd verse: Oscar and 2 other young guys improvise "backup singer" choreography. Sam, Tom, etc. find this revolting & make "faggot" indications (bent wrist, etc.)

"E scherzo..." Warwick mocks Ulrica by imitating her "channelling" contortions.

Silvano brings in reporters with video cameras and lights. Warwick photographed handing check to Ulrica, shaking hands and embracing Ankarstrom. Warwick and Oscar talking to press as curtain falls.

ACT TWO

The outskirts of the city -- deserted streets and an empty lot near the house of detention.

A young kid carrying a gun runs across the stage. A man and a woman near a broken streetlight smoking crack. They scatter as they see headlights of a car approaching.

Amelia steps out of a limo and convinces the chauffeur to drive away. She reaches into her bag, pulls out a Bible, holds it to her breast, and prays.

She turns on a flashlight and looks around the empty lot.

After the love duet, more headlights sweep the stage. René steps out of a cab -- indicates he wants it to wait. Amelia puts on her sunglasses and scarf.

"Odi tu, come fremono cupl..." René is trying to hail another cab -- finally one stops offstage right -- Warwick leaves.

Sam, Tom, their followers and reporters with TV lights stop Amelia and René. In the scuffle, Amelia loses her sunglasses. The TV lights are on full. Flashbulbs go off. René shoves Amelia into the cab, gets in and slams the door.

ACT THREE

René's office. Several large television screens, a fax machine.

He enters and switches on monitors, all tuned to news stations -- shots of Warwick with Ulrica, Oscar; "bootlegged" footage of Amelia and Warwick. He never looks at Amelia, immediately begins typing at his computer as he berates her.

Amelia turns off a "master switch," blacking out all the monitors except one, freeze-framed on her face. She sings "Morrò, ma prima ingrazia" silhouetted against the screen.

On the intro to "Eri tu," René turns the monitors back on. He points to Warwick's face on the largest monitor.

"O dolcezza perdute": the monitors show Amelia in tears (as she was filmed in Act 2)

"Dunque l'onta...": René unlocks his desk drawer, pulls out a revolver, places it on the desk.

The three men unclip their ID badges and toss them in a bowl. Amelia draws one.

It's dawn when Oscar enters in leather jacket, obviously still high from the night before. He "channel surfs" René's video monitor's until he finds MTV, and dances along as he sings "Di che fulger..."

Amelia reaches for the telephone, but René grabs her hand as the curtain falls.

Scene 2 -- Warwick's dressing room.... A weight bench, a huge signed poster of a Streisand concert, a life-size cardboard cut-out of Maria Callas, five or six assorted costumes lying here and there.

Warwick is changing into an all-black outfit.

Oscar enters and hands him a note. Warwick kisses him, grabs a quick feel of his butt. Oscar squeals, grabs a hanging bag with his costume and runs out.

The Ball (an AIDS benefit). Rainbow colored decorations and various banners.

Among the guests are men in drag, and a man and a woman dressed, respectively, as an orange tree and Anita Bryant.

Sam, Tom and Ankarstrom in "security guard" uniforms, mirrored shades, holsters.

Oscar in drag as a "soubrette." During "Saper vorreste" he indicates one man after another in the crowd, unmasking them. At least once Ankarstrom reaches for his holster, but Oscar treats it as a joke.

Amelia (in white 18th century ballgown and powdered wig) and Warwick (all in black, with a large red ribbon on his shoulder) dance together, a spotlight on them, as guests watch admiringly.

The lights dim as the guests dance. Warwick and Amelia sneak to a corner of the floor. We see the flash of René's gun going off, then total darkness.

"Ah morte! Infamia!" Spotlights sweeping the crowd. Confusion. When the lights come back up, we see police handcuffing Sam and Tom, René on the floor disarmed, doctors attending Warwick. Oscar, in shock, pulls off his wig.

On the chorus "Cor si grande," Amelia kneels, weeping and praying. The medics clear a path through the crowd and carry Warwick away on a gurney, as police drag off the conspirators.

"Notte d'orror" -- The media go into a feeding frenzy. Oscar protects Amelia from the glare of the TV lights as flashbulbs illuminate a banner reading "GAY RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!."

Curtain.

-- James Jorden



Don your tiara and dash on up to the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College for La Gran Scena's triumphant return to New York (11/26-27, 12/2-3). The troupe's subtlest vocal (and comic) effects should take on a new bloom in this intimate venue. Besides the ever-astonishing Vera Galupe-Borszkh, this year's roster includes up-and-coming *falcon* Mlle. della Vacca-Broune, essaying her first Amneris. (P.S. the show is outrageous enough for your tackiest girlfriend, but clean enough for your grandmother. How do they do it?) Call 212-772-4448 for tix.

Heads will roll! That still young soprano (who was such a mainstay of the Met's Italian wing in the 1980s), has "withdrawn" from a new Met production next year, to be replaced by an under-appreciated diva ten years her senior!

Faggots Unite! Parterre Box is leading a boycott of this year's *Barbiere* at the Met. These performances are fill-ins for the cancelled revival of *Death in Venice*, the only time in recent years the Met has pulled such a switch. (The Britten was still on the schedule as late as last winter when subscriptions for '94-'95 went on sale.) Whether the big bad Volpe's story about low ticket sales is true or not. (I don't believe a word of it), the Met is depriving its audience of a beautiful and highly-accessible gay work. Let Crawford, Volpe and Levine know how you feel, and if you see that Spanish hairdresser, lay him out to filth!

