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Parterre Box
the underground queer opera newsletter
Carol Vaness has decided to beat the new season rush by beginning her season early. Butterfly at Sybil's Barn is definitely out. And we were so looking forward to seeing the strapping six-foot as the delicate Cio-Cio-San! Obviously that old debil back problem is kicking up again. Or maybe 41-year-old (ahem!) Carol is finding change-of-life just as difficult as change-of-fach.

Speaking of the Studerbaker, Deutsche Gramophon's damage control experts did not get the fix in soon enough on Covent Garden's Aida. The critics' reaction to La Studer's crash-and-burn was brutal! Even worse than that notorious Vienna Trovatore. (At least Londoners are polite enough not to boo— or were they just asleep as usual?) Later performances at the House of Vegetables featured New York's own Sharon Sweet and Michael Sylvester. Can you imagine crossing the Atlantic to hear that? Can you imagine crossing 66th Street?

Anyway, it bodes (as in Hannelore) ill for next season's new Met Lohengrin. Perhaps Studer's pallid and wimpy Elsa will be worth sitting through for Placido Domingo's swan knight and an exciting Ortrud (Gwyneth Jones? Eva Marton? Anyone will do, so long as it not Hildegarde ("Call me Jeff") Behrens.)

And, honestly, would you buy a used car from Joseph Volpe?
Lake George's second title was a much more interesting and intriguing one, Rossini's LA DONNA DEL LAGO, or better, unfortunately, THE LADY OF THE LAKE. This masterpiece of supreme beauty, rarely heard in the States though a repertory one in Italy, was marred by a totally inappropriate and fastidious staging: all the audience could see was nothing more than a black room with some chairs. I understand that Lake George Festival does not have huge funds at its disposal: however in many other cases (as in their Boheme itself) lack of money and imagination. Things were much better on the musical side. Though probably only one of the singers was a real Rossini specialist worthy of appearing in specialized festivals such as the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, the whole cast offered some fine singing. Mezzo-soprano Manhua Zhan, the Lady of the Lake of the title, had a somewhat too light a voice for the lowest role Rossini ever wrote for his wife, diva Isabella Colbran. Her performance was rather unimpressive all through the opera, to redeem herself only at the very end with Elena's final rondo "Tanti affetti", sung with sufficient agility. The other female lead of this opera is a trousers role, much lower in range than Elena's. Melanie Sonnemberg's mezzo-soprano, though darker than Zhan's, doesn't have much of the authentic contralto sound and the difference between a somehow forced chest register and soprano-like upper range was too noticeable. However, she unveiled an impressive propensity towards the coloratura singing. Once in a while, the "boys" of the opera turned out to be the first of the class. Brad Williams' light and limpid tenor showed an amazing easiness in the extremely high range, and if his coloratura were more neat and precise he could become a worthy successor to Rockwell Blake's roles. Tenor Charles Workman has all it needs to secure himself Chris Merritt's parts: an striking range (the role of Rodrigo calls for the tenor to precipitate from the very high C above the staff to the very low A flat below the staff) and satisfactory coloratura. Moreover, being good-looking and sexy won't do him any harm.
You know, I heard Eleanor had broken a tooth singing Tosca at the Met. Not long after I saw her on 57th St. We spoke. So I said: "Eleanor, I heard you broke a tooth singing Tosca at the Met! I told you that role is too heavy for you!"

(Eleanor Steber:)

I saw Milanov one time in E. 57th St. just after I started singing Tosca at the Met and she came over to me and said: "Eleanor I hear your broke a tooth singing Tosca the other night. Now, you know I told you that role was too heavy for you!"

Of course, the problem was I was singing her roles: Donna Anna and Tosca!

[Steber here smiled sweetly; new teeth.]
Dear Parterre Box,

Recently a friend from Chicago passed along his copy of your opera reviews, and I found it very interesting. It is too bad that you have had to limit yourself to that which you have seen or is available on commercial (pirated or otherwise) recordings.

My problem is that I go back to selling records while a student at Northwestern University shortly after WWII, then a short stint selling Columbia records on the "road," and after a hiatus of several years (during which I first Callas in Lucia in Florence in '53,) also Geiseking, among others, I returned to Chicago and opened and managed the first mid-west office for Angel Records, during which time Lyric Opera started up with ALL THOSE STARS. Until '79, my operagoing was restricted to San Francisco Opera. I say 1979 because that was the year in which I went to San Diego with friends, one of whom is a great admirer of Carlo Bergonzi. And since it was a Verdi festival of sorts, we took in a concert and Traviata. The tenor was forgettable, but the soprano was something very special. In fact, I was bowled over.

To have a beautiful Violetta with a great figure was all great, of course, but to have one who could sing and act! And I have seen quite a few sopranos over the years, so I tend to be a bit jaded. But here was the real thing! And so, I have been following Diana Soviero's career ever since, and whenever possible, I go to see her perform. That means I have recently returned from my fourth trip to Montreal to see her in two of the following: Adriana Lecouvreur, Tosca, Madama Butterfly and Carmen. For my money she is the best I have yet seen in any of these roles. You mentioned the broadcast to Adriana with Freni and Studer. She gave it the old college try, but "no." Not when I have seen Scotto and Soviero. And Scotto was still in good voice here in '77, I believe it was.

Soviero, for whatever reason, has just not had the big hype that lesser singers like Vanes and Studer are getting. They must be putting out a lot of money for self-promotion. And now Vaness is suing Breslin!

I have now heard her in San Diego, Costa Mesa, San Francisco, Houston, Miami, the Met, Ravinia, Montreal and Covent Garden. And as soon as I find out when she will be singing in Berlin and Hamburg, I intend to add these cities to my belt. I am always open to new voices, but for now, it is Soviero (besides being a great singing-actress, she's a warm and wonderful person. Not since Callas in Florence and Chicago (I won't count the final tour with di Stefano).

Maybe our paths will cross at the Met this coming year. Soviero will be there and so will I for a couple of Butterfiles (there won't be a dry eye in the house when the curtain falls.

D.F.
Because she has no recording contracts or big maestros backing her, Diana is something of a cult figure to her fans. She's a survivor, that's for sure. Most people aren't aware of this but she has sung in just about every major opera house in the world. In addition to the performances I mentioned above, she has sung at Covent Garden (Nedda in 1989 and Cio-Cio-San in 1993), the Bastille Opera (Manon Lescaut in 1991 and Cio-Cio-San in 1993, both new productions), Munich, Hamburg (she is scheduled to return here in the 1994-95 season as Tosca), Vienna (Liu in 1983 and Cio-Cio-San in 1991), La Scala (Nedda in 1987, with Jose Carreras singing his first Canio), Geneva (Margherita in Bolto's <i> Rihanna</i>), Rome (Massenet's Manon in 1983--tumultuous ovations were reported), Florence (Suor Angelica in 1988), Madrid (Suor Angelica in 1987, telecast throughout Spain), Toulouse (Marguerite in Gounod's <i>Faust</i> in 1983, telecast throughout France), Santiago (Manon Lescaut in 1992, telecast throughout Chile), Mexico City (Liu this summer, opposite Eva Marton's Turandot), and many more. She is scheduled to make her debut with the Berlin State Opera during the 1994-95 season as Cio-Cio-San. Other roles in her active repertoire include Adriana Lecouvreur and Musetta.

Although Diana has a 22 performance contract with the Met next season (tied with Vaness for the busiest sopranos on the Met roster), I do wish Levine and Volpe would come up with some more adventurous repertoire for her. She and Richard Leech love working together—they'd be a marvelous pair in a new production of Massenet's Werther. I think Diana would be fabulous in a lot of roles she has not undertaken to date: Vitellia in <i>La Clemenza di Tito</i>, Maddalena in Andrea Chenier, Alice Ford in Falstaff, Elie in La Voix Humaine and Melisande. Most of all, I would love for the Met to pull their beautiful <i>Francesca da Rimini</i> production out of the mothballs and revive it with Diana, Domingo and Milnes in the lead roles. One can only hope.

I love to discuss great singers with others who enjoy them. Above all, I want expression from a singer. Technique and training are important, but I look first for style and characterization, both of which are shamefully lacking from most of today's performances. Congratulations to you on your wonderful new publication and good luck. I look forward to hearing from you.
Kean

YOU

never

broadcast

in

Italy

will

t...

1957

Re Lear

(Verdi):

Warren,

Albanese,

Barbieri,

Bjorling,

Tozzi

1959

Macbeth:

Warren,

Callas,

Tucker,

Tozzi

1963

The Argo.

tants (Beethoven):

Nilsson,

Vickers,

Berry,

Macurdy

1965

Don Quichotte:

Treigle,

Berganza,

Gramm

Nabucco:

MacNeil,

Souliotis,

Siepi

Rienzi:

McCracken,

Rysanek,

Ludwig

La Juive:

L. Price,

Tucker,

Siepi

Marie Antoinette

(Puccini):

Tebaldi,

Gedda

Macbeth:

Fischer-Dieskau,

Souliotis,

Tucker,

Tozzi

Aegyp.

tische Helena:

Rysanek,

King,

Bec

Mefistofele:

Ghiarov,

Corelli,

Ofivero

1967

Werther:

Callas,

Gedda

1969

Lucrezia Borgia:

Caballe,

Kraus,

Verrett,

Milnes

La Gioconda:

L. Price,

Cossotto,

Corelli,

Milnes,

Siepi

Buddha (Wagner):

McCracken,

Rysanek,

Berry

1970

Les Huguenots:

Sutherland,

Caballe,

Corelli,

Ghiaurov,

Horne,

Milnes,

Tozzi

Semiramide:

Sutherland,

Horne,

Bottazzo,

Corelli

L'Africana:

Caballe,

Corelli,

Milnes

1971

Adrian

Leeouvreur:

Domingo,

Olivero,

Domingo

Semiramide:

Caballe,

Verrett,

Alva,

Tozzi

1972

Risurreuione:

Scotto,

Domingo

I L'Africaine:

Bumbry,

Domingo,

Cappuccilli

1973

Iris:

Scotto,

Domingo,

Milnes,

Siepi

L'Africaine:

Scotto,

Domingo

1974

Hamlet:

Milnes,

Sills

1975

Hamlet:

MacNeil,

Scotto

L'Amore del Tro Re:

Freni,

Domingo,

Milnes,

Ghiaurov

1977

Marie Antoinette:

Tebaldi,

Gedda

1980

Attila:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

1982

Macbeth:

Milnes

1984

Semiramide:

Sutherland,

Corelli,

Milnes

1987

La Piccola Marat:

Domingo,

Freni,

Ghiaurov

Semiramide:

Scotto,

Domingo

1990

Semiramide:

Scotto,

Domingo

1993

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

1997

Semiramide:

Scotto,

Domingo

1999

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2001

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2003

Semiramide:

Scotto,

Domingo

2005

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2007

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2009

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2011

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2013

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2015

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2017

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2019

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2021

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2023

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2025

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2027

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2029

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2031

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2033

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2035

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2037

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2039

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2041

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2043

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2045

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2047

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2049

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2051

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2053

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2055

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2057

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2059

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2061

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2063

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2065

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2067

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2069

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2071

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2073

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2075

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2077

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2079

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2081

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2083

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2085

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2087

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2089

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2091

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2093

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2095

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2097

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2099

Shylock:

Ramey,

Sutherland,

Pavarotti,

Milnes

2001