

OPERA •PROPS•

UW Opera Props News Spring 2012

DON GIOVANNI, Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Text by Lorenzo da Ponte

University Opera production directed by William Farlow

UW Chamber Orchestra conducted by James Smith



Opera's Don Juan Returns to Music Hall:

Lock Up Your Daughters!

Don Giovanni is arguably Mozart's best and most dramatically accomplished opera, with a succession of arias and ensembles of great beauty that perfectly characterize the people involved, in this classic tale of a young aristocrat who centers his life on heedless seduction of legions of women. Giovanni initiates all the action of the opera, and everyone else involved – from humble peasants to obsessed gentry – react in their individual ways, as he flaunts the conventions of society's established order. He's attractive – even likeable (in most productions) – but he's also deeply subversive to convention, and ultimately pays the price.

University Opera's production will feature Michael Roemer as the Don and Benjamin Schultz as the Commendatore with all other roles being shared: On Friday (March 16) and the following Tuesday, we'll hear **Lindsay Sessing, Shannon Prickett, Ariana Douglas, Daniel O'Dea, John Arnold, Ben Li** as, respectively, *Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, Zerlina, Don Ottavio, Leporello, Masetto*. On Sunday we'll hear **Cassie Glaeser, Chelsie Propst, Lydia Eiche, Alex Gmeinder, Yohan Kim, Erik Larson** in those respective roles.

Production staff includes costume designers **Sydney Krieger** and **Hyewon Park**, technical director **Greg Silver**, lighting designer **Steven M. Peterson**, set designer **Michele Fields**, and scenic artist **Liz Rathke**. Vocal coach is **David Sytkowski** and chorus master is **Susan Goeres**.

Friday, March 16 & Tuesday, March 20 7:30 PM

Sunday, March 18 3:00 PM

All performances are at MUSIC HALL

Tickets \$22 General Public, \$18 senior, \$10 UW-Madison Student

Tickets are available through the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office, 800 Langdon St.

Box Office Hours: M-F 11:30 – 5:30 PM, SAT 12-5:00 PM, Phone 608-265-2787

Or order online at: <http://uniontheater.wisc.edu/boxoffice.html>

Tickets are also available at the Vilas Hall Box Office M-F, 11:30 - 5:30 PM

Pre-Opera Dinner at the University Club on Friday, March 16 (information inside)

SEVILLE BY WAY OF VIENNA: MOZART'S *DON GIOVANNI* UNMASKED by John W. Barker

In recent years, opera lovers have learned to extend their attention and enthusiasm back through the literature of Baroque opera, thanks to variously staged productions now widely given. Nevertheless, for much of the operatic world, the "standard" repertoire of opera has long been considered – despite a nod to Gluck – to begin securely only with the operas of Mozart. And, for all the riches of that composer's lifelong theatrical output, the core of his contribution remains the three Italian works often called "the Da Ponte operas", after his collaborator, that rascally but colorful and clever librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749-1838). *Don Giovanni* was the second of those three works. The first, *Le nozze di Figaro*, created out of the then-scandalous play by Beaumarchais, had been presented first in Vienna in May of 1786. Later that year, in Prague, Mozart participated in a production which was so successful that he was invited to compose a new opera for Prague itself. Again Da Ponte agreed to provide the libretto.

The subject of the second collaboration, possibly suggested by Da Ponte himself, was based upon a long-standing story of the libertine Spanish nobleman that had been treated in a number of plays and operas. The most recent example, a one-act comedy with music by Giuseppe Gazzaniga and a libretto by Da Ponte's rival, Giovanni Bertati, was just then being presented in Venice (February, 1787). Having secured a copy of this libretto, Da Ponte had no qualms about appropriating a good deal of it. The earlier scenes in his libretto for Mozart are generally paraphrases (if improving ones) from the Bertati text. Da Ponte did add a great deal of his own along the way, to be sure; and it is understood that he consulted none other than the aged Casanova for some fine points on skirt-chasing.

Don Giovanni was first performed in Prague on October 29, 1787, with triumphant success. For a production in Vienna the following May, Mozart provided three new numbers. Two of these (Ottavio's "Dalla sua pace" and Elvira's "In quali eccessi"/"Mi tradi") have remained standard components of the working score. (Both will be included in our production.) For more than two hundred years this opera has never been out of circulation, if not always treated with respect or understanding. Among notable early productions was only the second one in the USA, given for the first time in New York City in 1826, by the traveling company of Manuel Garcia. In the audience (and trying to make a few fast bucks out of it on the side) was old Lorenzo Da Ponte himself, by then resettled in America.

Da Ponte's libretto is a subtle one. Don Giovanni may be the title role, but really he is not the central character at all. It has been observed that the plot consistently shows him as an amatory loser: this legendary womanizer is invariably foiled and, as the story progresses, never does make a score. His solos are among the briefest numbers in the opera. Some commentators have seen him as the philosophical lover on a relentless quest to find the ultimate woman, the ideal One, always to be disillusioned. But librettist and composer give us little evidence for that concept. The best one can say for this Don Juan is that at least he remains stubbornly, bravely, true to himself in the face of final judgment.

Rather than being about Don Giovanni himself, the opera actually is about his effects on others: their reactions are really what is in play throughout the work. Most important of these are three of his innamoratas, one from his past and the other two unachieved. They differ in social standing, and, above all, in their responses.

The peasant girl Zerlina is fascinated by the Don's attentions, both emotionally and for the social thrill of being courted by a nobleman. But she is sensible enough to recognize realities, and to accept the dull but honest fiancé of her own class as her best chance for a stable life, romantic or otherwise. By contrast, Donna Elvira is a woman entirely caught up in her emotions. She cannot get over the Don's romancing, however transitory. As long as he rejects her, she wants revenge; but, should he seem to return to her, she melts shamelessly, only to face renewed humiliation from his deception. Her only remaining recourse is to

flee the world into a nunnery. We recognize her folly, we recoil from her obsessiveness, but we cannot help feeling her pain.

Most complicated, however, is Donna Anna. Groomed as an aristocratic lady for a marriage within her class, and outraged by the Don's attempted assault upon her, she has nevertheless been profoundly shaken by the daring sensuality to which he has introduced her. She pursues her goal of avenging her father, but in the end one guesses she is sorry to see the Don gone. Above all, she is sorry enough at the prospect of marrying the Don's opposite, the stolid, earnest, utterly bland Don Ottavio, so that she puts off the wedding for what one guesses will be the first of numerous deferrals. Together with Ottavio, the other characters, all males, are variously on the sidelines. The Commendatore is killed off in the first scene, and returns at the end, only to have his awesome menace defied by the contemptuously unrepentant Don. Both of the fiancés are, of course, only foils to their ladies: Ottavio a piece of cardboard respectability, Masetto a good-hearted oaf.

Only Leporello, sometimes threatening to steal the show, offers masculine competition to the Don. Of course he originates from age-old stereotypes of the clever servant, and Da Ponte shows that Leporello has his own rascally side. He is the low-level Figaro: boorish, perhaps, but clever, with dry and ironic wit, a kind of Everyman with the ordinary fellow's realistic sense of life. And he's got one of the greatest of comic male solos in all opera (the "Catalogue" aria) – far ahead of anything the Don is given to sing. When the smoke clears and the survivors begin to go about pursuing the rest of their lives, he is the only one with a sensible plan: he will find a new and better job.

It used to be the custom to cut off the epilogic final scene, the sextet that replaces the traditional Baroque coro of moralizing intent. It shows us the characters attempting to deal with what they have been through. In the nineteenth century this was regarded as irrelevant, spoiling the ideal of the opera's subtitle, *Il dissoluto punito* ("The Debaucher Punished"). But Mozart was right. Going even beyond the profound humanity of his character portrayals in *Figaro*, he achieved in its successor, more than any other composer, a fusion of the seeming opposites of "serious" and "comic" opera. *Don Giovanni* hardly represents the traditional form of opera seria (which Mozart would honor one last time in his final opera, *La clemenza di Tito*), nor is it a simplistic opera buffa. He and Da Ponte called it a *dramma giocoso* ("jocose drama"), suggesting the mingling of silliness and scariness that is the reality of the human situation. That mix of tones, along with the vividness of character portrayal – in which Mozart is one of the greatest masters – and the stunning musical richness, make *Don Giovanni* one of the supreme experiences in all of opera. We look forward to what Bill Farlow and his cast make of it.

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University Opera Wish List:

We hear from the costume shop that there's an imminent need for a washing machine and dryer in fairly good condition. Do you happen to have extra versions of these machines that you'd like to put to work for opera? If so by all means call one of us, e.g. Dan Shea at 836-6911 or Peg Wallace at 233-1304.

Madison Opera brings Rossini's Cinderella to town

Rossini's rollicking take on the Cinderella story will be produced at Overture Hall with an all-star cast by Madison Opera, April 27 and 29. Angelina will be portrayed by Daniela Mack, well remembered for her part in last summer's Opera in the Park as well as her portrayal of Rossini's Italian Girl last winter for Milwaukee's Florentine Opera; appearing with her then was Daniel Belcher, who also will be in Madison Opera's cast as Dandini. Starring as Don Ramiro is UW alum Gregory Schmidt, and alum Jamie Van Eyck is one of the "bad sisters," Tisbe. John DeMain conducts.

Opera for the Young presents *Hansel and Gretel*

This season, Opera for the Young celebrates its 40th anniversary of bringing opera to children. Begun in 1970 by artists associated with UW, the relationship between the University and OFY remains strong. Often OFY provides one of the first professional experiences for UW trained artists. For their *Hansel and Gretel* tour, five UW alums are taking part in the production. Come see these performers take the next step in their careers. For a complete tour schedule, go to www.operafortheyoung.org

Candid Concert Opera presents *The Marriage of Figaro*

Candid Concert Opera will present two Madison performances of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* in April in their appealing "highlights" style with Codrut Birsan: Friday, April 27 at 7:00 pm at the Capitol Lakes Retirement Center; and Saturday, April 28 at 7:00 pm at Oakwood Village West. Check candidconcertopera.org

Fresco Opera Theatre's "Big Top Opera" show another hit

Some of us attended the October 1 matinee performance of Fresco Opera's "Big Top Opera" and found it extraordinarily entertaining – the vocal and circus elements were convincing: the strongman, bearded lady, lion-tamer et al. provided entertaining circus-style acts while singing with classic style and vocal beauty. We'll long remember Saira Frank's *Sonnambula* aria for the beauty and security of her vocalism, ending triumphantly on a high D while balancing on a narrow beam! Caitlin Cisler, Kassy Coleman, Melanie Cain and the whole troupe were a real treat. The circus atmosphere kept the young families entertained (while listening attentively to opera!) and was in no way disrespectful of the music or singers. We congratulate Melanie and Frank Cain for their well-judged productions, and recommend future shows of the Fresco Opera Theater! The excellent reviews are at frescooperatheatre.com where you can also find information on the next production, slated for September 7, 8, 9. Save those dates!

John Arnold and Jeffrey Sykes collaborate at house concert, March 25

Hear one of our fine UW baritones in Ravel and Vaughan Williams, with Jeffrey Sykes: for tickets, go to the Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society website. John had a notable success recently as the young Galileo for Madison Opera.

Opera Props News is published each semester for the members of UW Opera Props.

Editorial Committee: Charles Anderson, Kristine Bengtson, Helen Schmedeman, Dan Shea.
Opera Props website: uwooperaprops.org

A dining idea for Friday, March 16, opening night for *Don Giovanni*

You're invited to join our Opera Props group at the University Club for a social hour: cash bar and fellowship 5:00 - 5:45.

Then, from 5:45 - 7:10, we'll share a dinner served plated style (not buffet) in the usual main dining room, with coffee and water provided.

FRESH FIELD GREENS ("With balsamic vinaigrette, tomatoes, cucumber and shaved red onion, rolls and butter")

Choice 1: COQ AU VIN ("Spanish chicken stew with sweet onions, woodland mushrooms and red wine demi-glace served over Yukon Gold mashed potato topped with crispy fried onion nest, and accompanied by sautéed broccolini")

or

Choice 2: WILD MUSHROOM STRUDEL ("Wild seasonal mushrooms blended with spinach wrapped in flakey puff pastry, finished with a champagne-moutard sauce, and accompanied by Yukon Gold mashed potatoes and sautéed broccolini")

APPLE CRISP A LA MODE ("Granny Smith apple crisp served warm with vanilla ice cream").

This meal is **\$22 inclusive**, thus there are no tip/tax fees.

Our Program: Joining us to discuss *Don Giovanni* will be soprano Chelsie Probst, who will appear as Donna Elvira at Sunday's matinee performance.

Chelsie is a graduate student teaching assistant in Opera, with much involvement also in our early music program.

Following dinner, it's a short walk to Music Hall for the 7:30 curtain.

Please send your list of names of those attending, with check to *UW Opera Props*, by **March 10**, to: *Dan Shea, 3337 Conservancy Lane, Middleton 53562*.

Questions? Call Dan at (608) 836-6911 or email: dshea@chorus.net

The University Club is located at 803 State Street mall.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF OPERA PROPS

Dear Friend,

Last semester's University Opera production of *La Bohème* was a delight. I saw all three performances and admired each one: The orchestra was solid throughout in its support of the singers, and both casts were excellent. Most of those same singers will be involved in the upcoming *Don Giovanni* show, and it will be interesting to see how they adjust their vocal styles from Puccini verismo to Mozartian classical!

In fact the **Opera Workshop Scenes** program offered last November offered a fascinating collection of vocal styles: This semester's **Scenes program (April 25, 7:30 in Music Hall)** will similarly deal with *Tancredi, Norma, Gioconda, Marriage of Figaro, Arabella* as well as *The Pirates of Penzance*. What a privilege, to be able to hear this repertory via these fresh young voices!

In between, this year, we'll be able to hear (**April 20**) Verdi's great *Requiem* performed by the Choral Union and our Symphony Orchestra at the Overture Center, with our soloists Shannon Prickett, Prof. Julia Faulkner, Aldo Perrelli, and bass visitor Tony Dillon. Another rare treat in the offing!

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We know that University support for the Opera Program has been cut severely, in particular both of the program's Teaching Assistantships for the current year 2011-12 were to be eliminated – hobbling the possible recruitment of new singers for future productions. Opera Props asked Bill Farlow and Mimmi Fulmer what we could do to help plug the gap for the short term, and this led to two fund-raising concerts at Holy Wisdom Monastery: a marvelous way to introduce our singers to the community, and elegant events altogether. The John & Carolyn Peterson family foundation offered to support a TA-ship for this academic year, a most helpful boost to our program – many thanks to John for this timely assistance! This gift was of crucial help in putting together this year's program, and Opera Props together with an anonymous contributor was able to fund another TA position as well.

We now ask that you consider making a substantial contribution to the University Opera and its students: the needs are great and involve maintaining production values as well as student personnel. If you'd like to speak directly to Bill or Mimmi about ways to help, please feel free to do that via their telephone numbers listed below. Or, if you'd prefer to contribute via Opera Props, we'd be glad to hear from you via the form attached to this Newsletter listing the address and telephone number of our Vice-President Peg Wallace.

Sincerely,

–*Dan Shea*

William Farlow (608) 262-3142
Mimmi Fulmer (608) 263-1882

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