

MARIA STUARDA, Music by Gaetano Donizetti

Libretto by Giuseppe Bardari, based on Friedrich von Schiller's play *Maria Stuart*.

University Opera production directed by William Farlow

UW Chamber Orchestra conducted by James Smith



University Opera offers up an explosive “diva” opera

An epic power play ignites vocal fireworks in University Opera's latest premiere, Gaetano Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*. Sung in Italian with projected English surtitles, the work will be given three performances in Music Hall during April 23 - 27.

This rare *bel canto* opera has a turbulent history. Banned by the King of Naples just before its scheduled 1834 premiere, subsequent efforts to present the work as the composer intended fell short until the middle of the 20th century. A current revival in opera houses around the world has been facilitated by the 1987 discovery of the autograph score and Anders Wiklund's critical edition.

Donizetti, considered one of history's most prolific opera composers, offers what history could not: a fictional confrontation between Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stewart that moves from their mutual fear and suspicion to fury and insult with Elizabeth accusing Mary of treason and the murder of her husband, Darnley. This powerful scene is a famous vehicle for the two protagonists, but there are other great moments, e.g. the confessional scene between Mary and Talbot after she is sentenced to death and denies complicity in Darnley's death: here the music looks forward to Verdi's great soprano-baritone duets of *Rigoletto* and *Forza del destino*.

University Opera's production is generously supported by the Dara Elizabeth Welty Memorial Fund and is the final offering of the 2009-10 season. Director **William Farlow** is thrilled with the opportunity to stage *Maria Stuarda*, the fourth Donizetti opera he has directed for the program since he assumed his current post. “Bel canto opera – Bellini, Rossini and Donizetti – has been a favorite of mine since I was a teenager because of my exposure to performances by Callas, Sutherland, Caballé, Sills, Scotto and Gencer,” said Farlow. “It is especially gratifying to be able to present this work at this time of my career.”

The cast includes undergraduate and graduate students from the University's opera program. The title role is performed by **Emily Birsan** while the role of Queen Elizabeth is shared by **Celeste Fraser** (April 23 and April 27) and **Jennifer Grace Sams** (April 25). In addition to a sizeable ensemble, other roles are performed by **J. Adam Shelton** (Leicester), **John Arnold** (Talbot), **Justin Niehoff Smith** (Cecil) and **Megan Gryga** (Anna).

Production staff includes costume designers **Sydney Krieger** and **Hyewon Park**, technical director **Greg Silver**, lighting designer **Steven M. Peterson**, set designer **Angelina Paoli**, vocal coach **Bill Lutes** and chorus master **Susan Goeres**. The English surtitles are by **Christine Seitz** and funded by Opera Props.

Friday, April 23 & Tuesday, April 27

7:30 PM

Sunday, April 25

3:00 PM

All performances are at MUSIC HALL

Tickets \$20 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

For the April 23 performance, see invitation to pre-performance dinner (page 7).

CAST BIOGRAPHIES FOR *MARIA STUARDA*

John Arnold (Talbot), the young American singing actor, is forging a great career as an operatic performer and dramatic interpreter. His latest success was the title role in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with the University of Tennessee Opera Theatre. Other recent performances include Frank Murrant in Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, Germont in *La traviata* and Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*. He was a participant in the 2009 Des Moines Metro Opera Apprentice Artist Program and has been invited back for the 2010 season where he will cover the role of Olin Blich in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. He studies with Julia Faulkner.

Emily Birsan (Maria Stuarda), soprano, is pursuing an M.M. in opera under Julia Faulkner and is a distinguished Paul Collins Fellow. Emily's most recent performances include the title roles in *Alcina* and *Thaïs* with University Opera. Emily won an Encouragement Award at both the 2008 and 2009 Wisconsin District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and will be singing with the Des Moines Metro Opera Apprentice Artist Program this summer, covering the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*.

Celeste Fraser (Queen Elizabeth), a graduate of Western Washington University, is an M.M. candidate in opera studying with Julia Faulkner. Her recent performances include soprano soloist in Britten's *War Requiem* (UW-Madison Choral Union), Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Opera North), and Mimi in *La bohème* (La Musica Lirica, Italy). Accolades include a 2009 Wisconsin District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions Encouragement award, the Virginia Hunter Competition Scholarship, the Frances Jean Miller Scholarship and the 2008 Florentine Opera Recital Award at the Wisconsin District Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

Megan Gryga (Anna) studies with Mimmi Fulmer and is the first recipient of the Skillrud Scholarship. She has performed in *Alcina*, *Die Fledermaus* and *The Pirates of Penzance*, in which she sang the role of Mabel. She was recently awarded honorable mention in the young ARTS/NFAA competition and has placed both first and second at meetings of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). She has performed as a soloist with the Moraine Symphony Orchestra several times and was a soprano soloist with the UW-Madison Concert Choir in Bach's B-minor Mass. This summer, she will be attending OperaWorks in Los Angeles.

Jennifer Sams (Queen Elizabeth) is a second year D.M.A. student in voice performance, studying with James Doing. Ms. Sams holds degrees from Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory and the University of Tennessee. She has performed in Pesaro, Italy and as a soloist with AIMS in Graz, Austria. Currently, she is a voice area teaching assistant at UW-Madison, maintains a private studio and teaches at Academy of Sound in Oregon, WI. She is the section leader and soloist at Christ Presbyterian Church and is the director of the Wisconsin Art Song Project (WASP).

J. Adam Shelton (Leicester), tenor, is a native of Knoxville, Tennessee and alumnus of the University of Arizona. He is currently the Voice Excellence Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellow pursuing a D.M.A. at UW-Madison under Julia Faulkner. An acclaimed solo artist, he has held apprenticeships at La Musica Lirica and Des Moines Metro Opera. This summer, he will be returning to the Des Moines Metro Opera Apprentice Artist Program to sing Elder Gleaton in Floyd's *Susannah*. Other previous activities include the roles of Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, lyric tenor in Argento's *Postcard from Morocco* and the title role in Mascagni's *L'amico Fritz*.

Justin Niehoff Smith (Cecil) is a D.M.A. candidate in voice performance under the guidance of Paul Rowe. Originally from rural southeastern Washington State, he received a B.M. in voice performance from Washington State University in Pullman. Prior to arriving in Madison, Mr. Smith attended the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and was active in the Bay Area opera scene. He has won several awards as a solo artist and has numerous operatic roles to his credit. Previous University Opera roles include Baron Zeta in Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, Melisso in Handel's *Alcina* and Athanaël in Massenet's *Thaïs*.

MARY STUART: FROM BUBBLEHEAD TO MARTYR

By John W. Barker

Born of the Scottish King James V Stuart and his French wife (of the powerful Guise family) in 1542, she became "Mary Queen of Scots". Nine days after her birth, her father, defeated at the Battle of Solway Moss by forces of Henry VIII, died in despair. Her mother assumed the regency but sent Mary for safety to France, at whose pleasure-loving court she was raised as a Roman Catholic. In 1558 (the year of Elizabeth I's accession to the English throne), Mary was married at age sixteen to the Dauphin, heir to the French crown, who became King Francis II the following year. Thus made Queen of France, Mary also accepted Catholic promptings to claim the throne of England – as logical heir to her Catholic cousin, "Bloody Mary" Tudor, contesting the succession of the Protestant (and, by Catholic rules, illegitimate) Elizabeth. But the sickly Francis died two years later. In 1561 Mary was invited to return to Scotland, where she became its Queen, as well as claimant still to the English crown.

In the years of Mary's absence, English diplomacy had cleared occupying French troops from Scotland, and the work of reformer John Knox and others had converted that country substantially to Calvinist Protestantism. Determined to restore Catholicism to her realm, Mary faced stiff opposition, to which was added resentment over her personal behavior. Unlike her cousin Elizabeth, Mary had no sense of politics. Anxious for an heir, she made a terrible choice of a husband in the irresponsible Lord Darnley. She did bear him a son, the future James VI (and James I of England), but may have been culpable in Darnley's murder by her lover, Lord Bothwell, whom she soon married. Outrage over this and accumulated resentments led to a rebellion that forced her abdication in favor of her little son. Then, escaping her captors, she sought refuge in – of all places – the kingdom of her bitter rival, Elizabeth.

Held in varying forms of imprisonment, Mary became the pawn of plots to overthrow Elizabeth and establish Mary as the Catholic redeemer. She

was kept under close scrutiny by Elizabeth's wary ministers: interpretations vary, but it seems clear that, to one degree or another, she foolishly allowed herself to become involved in some of the conspiracies. Elizabeth was genuinely reluctant to take decisive steps against her dangerous cousin but, prodded by her advisors, succumbed to the inevitable. Tried for treason and convicted, Mary was executed (on February 8, 1587), in a frightfully botched beheading. Her death was the signal for Philip II of Spain to launch his Invincible Armada, which failed to invade England and destroy Elizabeth in 1588.

There is no denying that, under the pressures of harsh imprisonment, Mary matured and faced her final ordeals with a genuine dignity and grace that some might take to excuse so much of her folly. Over the years, her story has been transformed in a succession of melodramatizations. In Catholic lands she became revered as a martyr for The Faith. (Ironically, the Roman Church, which canonized Thomas Becket quickly after his martyrdom, and canonized Sir Thomas More in 1935, seems to have made no effort to give Mary sainthood – perhaps for lack of a strong Scottish Catholic lobby at the Vatican.) A fashion grew in 17th-century Italy for poetry in her honor. One such, imagining Mary's final speech on the scaffold, was memorably set by Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674). In 1690, Giovanni Francesco Savaro published *La Maria Stuarda*, apparently the first play on her story. Many other such plays were produced, culminating in two particularly important examples: *Maria Stuarda* (1778) by the great Italian poet and dramatist, Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), and *Maria Stuart* (1800) by Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805); followed further by the string of three tragedies by Algernon Swinburne (1837-1909), *Chastelard* (1865), *Bothwell* (1874), and *Mary Stuart* (1881).

Nor were operatic treatments slow to emerge. Some twenty-three operas can be traced between 1813 and 1977, the latest of them being *Mary, Queen of Scots* by Thea Musgrave (b.1928). Few of these

have endured over the years. The one famous example, of course, is Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* (1834), though the only other composer of note to contribute was Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870), with his opera of the same title (1821).

Those two operas actually present interesting contrasts, beyond the fact that Donizetti's is now popular in many productions and recordings, while Mercadante's is neglected, with only excerpts from it just recorded. The authorship of Mercadante's libretto has been disputed, but it is essentially the one used for the first of the Mary operas, *Maria Stuarda regina di Scozia* (1813), composed by Pietro Casella (1769?-1843). Though not explicitly stated, it was apparently based on Alfieri's drama, which gives a highly fictionalized treatment of Mary's troubled days as Queen of Scotland (as does Musgrave's opera, ending with the flight to England). By contrast, Donizetti (1797-1848) and his librettist based their drama on Schiller's play.

Schiller geared his dramas to display heroes or heroines who fought heroically for liberty and truth, who sought moral freedom and superiority to tyrannical restraint. In consequence, he grossly misrepresented his historical

characters to serve his idealistic purposes, as in *Don Carlos* (1787), the *Wallenstein* trilogy (1798-99), and *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1801). Likewise so in *Maria Stuart*, in which the protagonist achieves a moral triumph over her adversary, Elizabeth, in a personal confrontation that never occurred.

Though torpedoed by censorship at its Naples premiere and long neglected thereafter, Donizetti's opera has emerged in recent decades to become one of his most popular, as singers like Joan Sutherland, Beverly Sills, and Montserrat Caballé have placed its title character among their primary roles – and especially in the juxtaposition with the composer's *Anna Bolena* (1830) and *Roberto Devereux* (1837) dubbed "the Tudor trilogy".

Dramatization (particularly that of Schiller and Donizetti), plus a great deal of literary fiction, has sentimentalized the imprudent and fumbling Mary into a tragic heroine, remembered now mainly for her sad end. That she was an incompetent queen and a foolish woman in a brutal and religiously factionalized age might be kept in mind, even as we enjoy the romanticization of her story so powerfully achieved in Donizetti's vivid opera.

On the story and music of Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*

The story of this opera is constructed from some of the powerful folklore that arose out of the religious struggles of the sixteenth century. After the death of Henry VIII and Elizabeth's ascent to the throne, the recurring question of competing claims by her Catholic cousin Mary were an abiding concern (see the third paragraph of Prof. Barker's essay above).

At the start of the opera Mary has fled from Scotland to England and been imprisoned in Fotheringay Castle by Elizabeth, who is the main focus of events in **Scene 1**. The action begins at Westminster Castle where courtiers await the Queen, discussing rumors that she will be united with the crown prince of France. Elizabeth enters and, in her graceful cavatina 'Ah, quando all'ara scorgemi,' ponders the conflicts between her duty to England and her love for the Earl of Leicester. When Leicester enters, she appoints him her emissary to France and is surprised by his reluctance to accept. After she leaves, Leicester speaks with Talbot about a letter from Mary asking for their help; he admires the beauty of her portrait

('Ah, rimiro il bel sembiante') and longs to free her. The Queen returns and demands to see the letter he holds; reading it, she realizes that Mary has designs both on her throne and the man whom she currently favors. In their duet, Leicester persuades Elizabeth to visit Mary at Fotheringay ('Era d'amor l'immagine' and 'Sul crin la rivale').

Scene 2 finds Mary at Fotheringay Castle with her companion Anna, recalling her happy youth at the French Court ('O nube! che lieve per l'aria ti aggiri'). Then the Queen's hunting party approaches, with Mary expressing her dread at meeting her. Leicester arrives first, urging Mary to be submissive to Elizabeth: he will then ask her for Mary's hand in marriage. Elizabeth appears filled with apprehension about Leicester's motives, and the confrontation begins with "one of those moments of frozen drama that are peculiar to opera, a sextet in the composer's best vein, with Elizabeth expressing her reaction to her first sight of Mary: 'E sempre la stessa, superba, orgoglio-

sa' ('Unchanged she remains, proud and haughty')." [Kobbe]

Mary kneels before her cousin and asks for forgiveness, only to hear Elizabeth accuse her of treachery and the murder of her husband, Darnley. In fury, Mary responds by insulting the Queen, whom she calls the "Figlia impura di Bolena" and "bastarda," after which Elizabeth condemns her rival to death.

The first scene of **Act 2** finds Elizabeth at Windsor Castle waiting to sign Mary's death warrant: 'Quella vita a me funesta.' With Leicester and

Cecil she then sings a "fine trio of mutual recrimination" and orders Leicester to witness the execution. Later at Fotheringay, Mary hears of the sentence from Cecil and refuses the services of an Anglican priest. There follows the great confession-scene with Talbot, who reveals that he is in fact a priest. Mary poignantly remembers her murdered husband Darnley, but as she clears her conscience ('Quando di luce rosea') she denies all complicity in his death. Mary then goes to her death, with Leicester looking on. Cecil announces Mary's death and asserts that, with her death, peace has returned to England.

Listen to the music of Maria Stuarda, by going to www.uwoperaprops.org/news.html and click on the various links there: You can hear up to 10 versions of the Elizabeth-Mary Act 2 confrontation duet!

Candid Concert Opera offers Madison a different way to enjoy opera

You may have heard about, or even attended, two interesting concert performances of *Così fan tutte* presented last December in Madison. The singers were members or recent alumni of UW's opera program, and their accompanist was pianist and baritone Codrut Birsan. The organization has acquired a name, Candid Concert Opera, and is planning four performances of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* during May with several singers from our cast for *Maria Stuarda*: Emily Birsan, Adam Shelton, John Arnold. Also appearing are baritone Brian Leeper as Dulcamara and Codrut Birsan as Music Director and Accompanist.

Performances will be given in Madison on May 8 (4:00 at St Paul Lutheran Church) and May 15 (7:00 at Capitol Lakes Retirement Community); also on May 9 (4:00 at West Koshkonong Lutheran Church in Stoughton), and May 13 (7:30 at UW-Whitewater's Light Recital Hall). For further information, call Codrut at (920)257-7491 or use Barsanco@yahoo.com.

Master Class Planned with Bass-baritone Dean Peterson

Well known bass-baritone Dean Peterson will perform as Daland in Madison Opera's *Flying Dutchman* (April 9, 11) and in excerpts from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* with the Madison Symphony Orchestra and Chorus (April 16, 17, 18). Arrangements have been made for Mr. Peterson to conduct a master class at the UW School of Music on April 14, 4:30 in Morphy Hall; for further information check www.music.wisc.edu/calendar or telephone (608) 263-1900.

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: uwoperaprops.org

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF OPERA PROPS

Dear Friend,

The two operas scheduled by our University Opera program this season demand great talent and hard work, and last semester's *Thais* performances were a major triumph. We hope you were able to attend and hear for yourself how our students and staff were able to bring this opera to life. The vocal performances especially were thrilling!

Now our forces are engaged in rehearsals for the challenging *bel canto* opera *Maria Stuarda* and we are optimistic that the results will provide more thrills: be sure to join us for one of the three performances during April 23 - 27. We especially recommend opening night, when you can opt for some fellowship and fine dining at the University Club before the performance. One of our star singers, Jennifer Sams, will be there to give insights and background to Donizetti's classic opera. Consider joining us!

The OPERA PROPS BOARD

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Last semester we heard from Bill Farlow and Mimmi Fulmer that University support for the Opera program was being severely cut in several ways for the coming academic years 2010-12. In particular, the program's two Teaching Assistantships were both to be eliminated, and these cuts would among other things impact recruitment of new singers to our program. We asked what Opera Props could do to help plug the gap, at least for the short term and with our limited resources, and Bill and Mimmi suggested that we attempt to fund a TA-ship for at least the next few years, at \$15,000 per year.

Our Board decided last month to provide this support, for at least two years, from our meager resources (an investment account of only about \$65,000, built up over many years), and then to attempt to find new funds to rebuild our account. Ideally, this effort would allow us to continue to support the Opera program at a higher level than previously, since the program's needs will continue to remain high.

Please consider making a substantial contribution to the University Opera and its students during 2010, 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 that lists the address and telephone number of our Vice-President Peg Wallace.

In a period of severely declining resources for the University, arts programs are being impacted especially hard. Your support is needed and greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

-Dan Shea

William Farlow (608) 262-3142

Mimmi Fulmer (608) 263-1882

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for their abiding support of the University Opera!

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(If we have inadvertently omitted your name, or if you would like to have a different form of your name used, please let a Board member know.)

While Opera Props is glad to receive gifts of any size in support of the University Opera, that program has needs far beyond what our members ordinarily contribute. Please feel free also to discuss special gifts or bequests with Opera Director Bill Smith or Associate Director Mimmi Fulmer.

A FEW UPCOMING MADISON EVENTS FEATURING VOCAL MUSIC

Friday, Apr. 9 (8:00 pm) and Sunday, Apr. 11 (2:30 pm): Madison Opera, Wagner – *The Flying Dutchman* (the cast includes Julia Faulkner and Greg Schmidt). Overture Hall.

Saturday, Apr. 10 (8:00 pm) and Saturday, Apr. 24 (8:00 pm): Madison Bach Musicians, *Brandenburg Concertos 4, 5 & 6*. Apr. 10 at Trinity Lutheran Church; Apr. 24 at First Congregational Church.

Saturday, Apr. 10 2010 (8:00 pm): Concert Choir, Beverly Taylor, conductor. *Choral Fantasy* by Beethoven. Mills Hall.

April 16, 17, 18. Madison Symphony Orchestra. Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff, and excerpts from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, with bass-baritone Dean Peterson and the Madison Symphony Chorus.

Friday, Apr. 23 (7:30 pm), Sunday, Apr. 25 (3:00 pm) and Tuesday, Apr. 27 (7:30 pm): University Opera, Donizetti – *Maria Stuarda*. Music Hall.

Sunday, Apr. 25 (7:30 pm): Mimmi Fulmer, soprano; Christopher Taylor, piano. Mills Hall.

Saturday, May 1 (8:00 pm) and Sunday, May 2 (7:30 pm): Choral Union, Beverly Taylor, conductor; with Chamber Orchestra, James Smith, conductor. *Missa Solemnis* by Beethoven. Mills Hall.

Some events to watch for this summer:

July 10-17: The Madison Early Music Festival, "England: Merry & Musical before Elizabeth."
All series concerts and lectures take place on the UW–Madison campus in the Mosse Humanities Building. Please visit the Concerts page at www.madisonearlymusic.org for more information.

Friday, July 9 (8:00): Preceding the Madison EMF events, a special performance by The King's Noyse will be presented at Wartmann Prairie, Edgerton. For tickets and information, call (608)884-4408.

Saturday, July 17 (8:00): "Opera in the Park" presented by Madison Opera. Garner Park.

July 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, Aug 1. Madison Savoyards. *HMS Pinafore*, by Gilbert & Sullivan. Music Hall.

For more information about UW-Madison School of Music events, visit the website at www.music.wisc.edu/calendar. From the drop-down menu 'Show Events In,' select 'student recitals' to find the latest scheduling information on student recitals.

Presently scheduled are two events in Morphy Hall: April 16 (3:30) Jesse Hoffmeister, tenor; and April 21 (3:30) Karen Bishop, soprano.

Also see the Opera Props website at: uwoperaprops.org

Chicago Opera Theater Excursion: John Barker is leading a bus trip to the Chicago Opera Theater for a matinee performance of Francesco Cavalli's *Giasone* on **Sunday, May 2**.

Enroll by April 12 through UW-Madison Continuing Studies at (608) 263-6670 (program #3768).

Cost \$125, includes ticket to performance and round trip chartered bus; dinner on your own at Navy Pier.

For information about membership in UW Opera Props, or to make an additional contribution, please contact Peg Wallace at (608) 233-1304, or write to her via pwallace@wisc.edu or at 2220 Chamberlain Ave., Madison WI 53726.