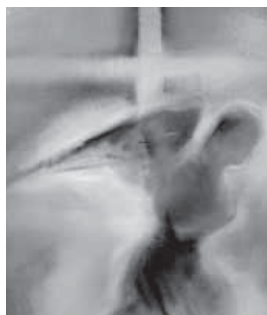
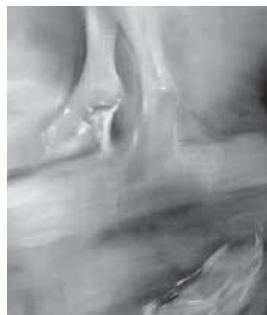


2007 Opera Insider

PELHAM PEARCE, GENERAL DIRECTOR

> > >



2007 Opera Insider written by Dr. Erin Hackel

Sponsored in honor of Jane Sprague, a lifetime opera enthusiast, and by the Thomas W. Bean Foundation

Central City Opera Box Office

303.292.6700

www.centralcityopera.org



S p o n s o r s

The annual family matinees are now called The Nina Kelly Family Matinees in honor of Central City Opera's good friend, Nina Kelly.

Our thanks to the foundations and corporations who so generously support Central City Opera's education and community programs:

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> 2007 Opera Insider

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What IS opera, anyway?

FIRST! Opera is all about telling a story. Take some interesting people, add in a little adventure, some love, or even some hate; put it all in an interesting place, and maybe an interesting time.

SECOND! Opera is about drama. Take the story you've chosen, and put the words into dialogue for actors to say. Tell the story in a creative way, and add in some heroes, heroines, or queens and kings. Maybe a monster—or four. Bring out the conflict in the story so everyone in the audience can feel it. Put your actors in costumes and makeup, and put them on a stage with some great scenery so they can get into their characters.

THIRD! Opera is about music. Write some fantastic music for your play. Instead of having the actors speak, have them sing...everything! When they get really happy or mad, have them sing high and loud! When they are trying to express an important emotion, let them sing something longer to show off a little. Add in an orchestra to accompany them and to help set the mood of your show.

FOURTH! Opera is about spectacle. Add in a little razzle-dazzle! How about a parade? Of elephants! Or an earthquake, or a dragon! Have lots of capable people backstage to help you manage all of that. The sky (and your budget) is the limit! Add all four of these things together and you've got...

A N O P E R A !



Opera Audience Etiquette *through the ages*

EVERYONE KNOWS that when you go to the opera, you're supposed to sit quietly and listen carefully, right? That might be true now (more on that in a minute), but it certainly hasn't always been the case! When opera first started to become popular, hundreds of years ago, the audiences came mainly to socialize, not to listen. They would chat, visit with other audience members, even cook and eat their dinners while the opera was going on!

This lack of focus didn't stop with the audience, either. About three hundred years ago, George Friedrich Handel was conducting an opera performance. He had hired not one, but TWO famous *prime donne* (leading ladies) to sing in this opera. The audience started fighting over which *prima donna* they liked best, hissing and yelling when their least favorite came on stage, and shouting with joy when the one they liked best started to sing. The audience got so worked up, they started fighting in the aisles during the show, while the two leading ladies started to fight on stage, pulling each other's hair!

About one hundred years later, another famous singer named Cafarelli, was notorious for chatting with the audience during operas, mocking other singers during the show, and sometimes leaving the theater before the opera had ended! He was even arrested and imprisoned for "disturbing the other performers!" They let him out of jail and back into the opera company because the audiences loved his mischievous behavior so much.

In the early 19th century, Italian operas would include an *aria di sorbetto* (sorbet aria, yum!) where vendors would walk around and sell ice cream to audience members. The clinking of spoons made this aria almost impossible to hear; it was usually given to a pretty unimportant singer.

It wasn't until the late 1800s that the idea of being quiet during concerts and operas started to become popular, and the rules regarding behavior became pretty strict. Here's what Emily Post said about

going to the opera in 1922:

Excepting a religious ceremonial, there is no occasion where greater dignity of manner is required of ladies and gentlemen both, than in occupying a box at the opera... A gentleman must always be in full dress, tail coat, white waistcoat, white tie and white gloves...

Wow! Pretty fancy stuff. Nowadays, we're probably somewhere in between early opera audiences, and later ones. Here are some of TODAY's opera etiquette expectations:

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO BEHAVE AT THE OPERA?

Dress– Lots of people still like to dress up to go to the opera, although you probably can leave your white tie and gloves at home. You are going to be up pretty high in the mountains, though, so make sure you bring your jacket, just in case.

Punctuality– It's important to be on time for the opera. You don't want to disturb people by climbing over their knees to get to your seat, and if you come late, it's too dark to read through your program. No fun! Besides, the ushers close the doors when the opera begins, so if you are late, you have to hang around in the lobby until intermission, missing all of the first act action.

During the performance– Nope, there's no socializing with your neighbor, OR with the singers anymore! Turn off anything that rings or beeps, save your candy-unwrapping for intermission, and no chatting (or singing along!).

Applause– Here's your time to make a little noise, finally! The audience will usually applaud after the overture, at the end of each act, and sometimes if one of the singers sings a really spectacular aria. Show your appreciation by clapping with gusto, and shouting *Bravo!* (for a man), and *Brava!* (for a woman).

Enjoy yourself!

When it was built, the Central City Opera House was the largest opera house west of the Mississippi. It is considered to have perfect acoustics. Cool.



In the 1880s, miners showed their appreciation by throwing gold coins on the stage at the end of a performance.

Happy Birthday, Central City Opera!

ABOUT 130 YEARS AGO, Central City didn't have much entertainment, but it did have a lot of miners, who had made a lot of money in "the richest square mile on earth." These miners happened to have a great love of music, so they decided to raise some money and build themselves an opera house. Some men would even put in a full day of work at the mines, then come straight away to help out building the new opera house. It was a beautiful new building, complete with "eight sets of scenery, two hot air furnaces, and a chandelier with 100 kerosene lamps." For a couple of years after its construction, Central City's Opera House had performances by Buffalo Bill and P.T. Barnum's Circus on its stage as well as operas and traveling acting troupes; then the mining boom moved to other parts of Colorado, and it fell into disuse and disrepair.

In 1929, a group of preservationists decided to bring the old opera house back to life. They helped organize an extensive preservation, and in the summer of 1932, the Central City Opera House was reopened with the very famous screen actress Lillian Gish performing in the title role of *Camille*. This play is based on the same story as one of the operas being performed this summer: *La Traviata*. (Coincidence? I think not.) This play marked the beginning of the annual summer festivals we still have today. Plays and operas were both in the festivals for many years, but now we don't see plays performed here, only operas. Central City Opera has had many wonderful singers and actors cross its stage, including some that were, or later became, famous!

In the 1980s and 1990s, more renovation was

done in the building; new lighting, new plush seating to replace the old wooden seats (much more comfy!), new restrooms and dressing rooms and the *flume* was fixed (did you know a stream runs under the opera house? In the old days when the dressing rooms were under the stage, actors and singers had to stand on chairs and benches when the stream was running high). The ceiling collapsed in 1984 during a performance of Rossini's *Cinderella* (don't worry, no one was hurt)! When it was restored, the artists saw that there were clouds painted on it that had been covered up by years of gaslight and cigar smoke. (There's no smoking in the building today, folks; leave those cigars at home!) Today, the building is designated a National Historic Landmark, and Central City Opera is the fifth-oldest opera company in the United States.

People still come from all over the United States and other countries to see and hear operas in this beautiful old opera house. And Central City Opera has become so much more than just an opera house! Today, the company focuses not just on bringing world-renowned singers to perform here, they also are committed to giving performance opportunities to up and coming artists as part of the Bonfils-Stanton Artists Training Program. They are also dedicated to historic preservation (and happen to be the largest historic property holder in Colorado) as well as sending out opera programs into the community and schools throughout the year.

*So let's see...1932-2007...is...75 years! Central City Opera is 75 years old.
Happy Birthday!*



Meet Someone On stage



Emily Pulley, Soprano

Met's new production of *Magic Flute*, mainly because we had to wear this dark blue paint to hide our faces and also had cone-shaped hoods that made us sweat like crazy, which of course made the make-up basically melt off and run down our bodies. I'm probably still washing it off.

Q: *Where do the singers go when they are not on stage?*

A: Usually we'll go to our dressing rooms, but sometimes we'll watch from **the wings** or hang out in the artist lounge area and gab. And when we have really long breaks, we might get together and play games. The three ladies in *Magic Flute* would often play Scrabble between scenes, and **the valkyries** would get quite a poker game going after our scene while waiting for **curtain calls**.

Q: *What happens if you catch a cold and can't sing in a show? Is catching a cold scary for a singer?*

A: It's SO frustrating to get sick! I was ill for the entire summer during Central City's *Don Giovanni*, and I developed TWO sinus infections during the course of my **gig** this past fall in Atlanta. Even though I made it through all my performances, I felt like I was walking on eggshells vocally. Usually you don't get paid if you don't sing, so getting a cold can indeed be scary in many different ways, especially if you don't have an **understudy** (or in the opera world, **cover**). You have to make the decision on whether or not you think you can still perform without doing damage to your voice, the production, or your reputation, and very often you feel like you're letting the company and your colleagues down. And people wonder why singers have a reputation for being neurotic....

Q: *Can you give us a timeline of what you typically do the day of an opera?*

A: I try to sleep as late as I can, and then I'll usually

Q: *Emily, you are a singer. What kind of voice part do you have? What kinds of characters does your voice part get to play?*

A: I am a **lyric soprano**, or as I like to call it, a "middle of the road soprano," so there's quite a bit of variety in the music I sing. I've played everything from a swooning romantic to a hollering valkyrie, and I'm equally happy in corsets or armor.

Q: *What was the best costume you ever got to wear? What was the worst?*

A: I've been very lucky with costumes. One of my favorites is the red velvet dress that Musetta wears in the Met's production of *La Boheme*, even though it does weigh close to thirty pounds (or at least that's what the director tells the guys who have to pick me up and carry me). The trickiest costume I've ever worn was a HUGE hoop skirt in *Mourning Becomes Electra* at New York City Opera. If you leaned forward even slightly, you would almost definitely trip on it. But it was pretty, so I didn't mind too much—and it probably even improved my posture! The only costume I truly dreaded wearing was the one for First Lady in the

do some sort of physical activity to get my body warmed up, as I find that it's a great deal easier to feel vocally warmed up once you've gotten your blood circulating. Then I'll try to do things that can keep me occupied but not wear me out physically or vocally, very often watching movies or reading, and I'll try to eat a "non-rebellious" meal a couple of hours before I have to sing. It's a careful balance between being responsible and prepared and being obsessive and overly cautious.

Q: *What is it like on stage during an opera?*

A: When everything is going well, it's the best of all possible worlds because I'm doing what I love to do with people I love and hopefully connecting with the audience and letting them experience all the emotions along with me. Of course, it can be really frustrating and frightening when things aren't going so well, but even then it's an opportunity to try to overcome obstacles and find out what you're capable of doing under stressful circumstances. Either way, I feel completely engaged on every level, and every performance can be a learning experience and a chance to grow.

And THAT'S what its like to be an opera singer!



WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

Lyric soprano - the soprano is the highest female voice, but there are lots of different types of sopranos. The lyric soprano often plays the romantic lead. She has a strong, clear voice that has to make a lot of noise both high and low in her range.

The wings - the area right off stage. You have to stand in just the right place so the audience can't see you there.

The valkyries - sing a famous battle cry in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. They are fantastic warrior goddesses!

Curtain call - the bows at the end of the opera.

Gig - a singing job. Singers like to have lots of gigs lined up!

Cover/Understudy - someone who learns your whole part, gets a costume, and is ready to go on just in case you get sick. Some understudies have become famous for going on at the last minute and singing really, really well.

> > > LA TRAVIATA

The plot sickens...

ACT 1

IT'S MARCH, AND WE'RE IN PARIS...our leading lady, Violetta, has been sick with quite a bad cough. (See section entitled: *Consumption... Yuck*) Violetta moves with a fast crowd. She doesn't have the best reputation, and seems to attract all the wrong men...except at this swanky party. Nice, huh? We're all here to celebrate Vi's return to the party scene. It looks like Alfredo is still really into Vi. He's a really nice guy, don't you think? Great voice; totally her type. Listen...he's telling her that he likes her! I can't believe it! Oh no, she's turning him down...everyone is leaving. She looks so sad...maybe she'll change her mind in:

ACT 2, SCENE 1

Delightful! We're at a beautiful country home, and it must be summer. It is a really nice day today...Wow, Vi and Al have been living here for three months. I guess she changed her mind! They are SO in love. Hmm...looks like their prolonged vacation has caused some money troubles...Al is off to Paris to try to solve them, great! But wait...is that Al's DAD coming? Papa Germont? This can't be good...he's telling Vi that her fast reputation is ruining Al's good image! OMG, she's going to leave him even though she loves him! Boo! When Al comes back, he's going to be mighty mad at his dad. He'll probably go look for her in:

ACT 2, SCENE 2

We're back on the party scene in Paris, this time at Vi's friend Flora's house. It looks like Vi is really trying to forget Al, just like Papa Germont asked; she's brought another date named Baron Douphol. Whups, here comes Al! I don't think he's too happy about Vi's new date; he's challenging him to a game of cards. OMG, he's so mad at Vi for bringing the new guy that he has TOTALLY insulted her by



throwing the money he won at her! Everyone at this party knows he's saying she is all about the money, and not about love! Ouch! Even Al's dad thinks that is bad form. Boo, Al!

ACT 3

Hmmm...we appear to be in someone's bedroom. Someone is very sick! Oh, no, it's Vi! Her illness is back, and it's really bad...she's dying. She's reading a letter from Al's dad, saying that Al is on his way-he still loves her! Al makes it in time, thank goodness; OMG, Vi is getting up! She feels better! She says she doesn't feel any pain any more! Wow, her voice REALLY sounds fantastic! She...she...oh no, she's dead. Wow. That was really sad.

CAST

Violetta: Jennifer Casey Cabot

Alfredo: Chad Shelton

Germont: Grant Youngblood



By Giuseppe Verdi

Conductor: Martin André

Director: Justin Way

Performed in Italian with
English supertitles.

Performance Dates:

June 30, July 6, 8, 11, 14, 18, 21, 29

August 2, 4, 10, 12, 16

Family Matinee August 7

Consumption... Yuck



IN THE STORY OF *LA TRAVIATA*, our heroine, Violetta, has an illness called consumption, or tuberculosis. This is usually a pretty serious disease of the lungs. If you think it sounds bad, you're right! Diseases like consumption were very common in previous centuries, before modern medicine came around. It was called consumption

because it seemed to consume its victims from within. Other names for it included scrofula, the white plague (because its victims were so pale), and wasting disease.

SYMPTOMS OF CONSUMPTION: Prolonged painful coughing, coughing up blood, chest pain, fever, chills, night sweats, weight loss, pale skin, and extreme exhaustion.

TRANSMISSION OF CONSUMPTION: Consumption is spread when an infected person coughs, speaks, sneezes, or spits. People didn't know how it spread when this story was written, so they didn't know not to kiss or share a hanky. Look out, Alfredo!

TREATMENT OF CONSUMPTION: Today, consumption is treated with a few courses of antibiotics, like penicillin. Sadly for Violetta, she was born a little too early (penicillin wasn't discovered until 1928).

The REAL Lady of the Camellias

ONE DAY, BACK IN 1852, OUR FRIEND GIUSEPPE VERDI went to a new, very popular play called *La Dame aux camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias). This play was based on a book written by Alexandre Dumas, fils (son of Alexandre Dumas who authored *The Three Musketeers* and other famous novels) about his one-time girlfriend, **Marie Duplessis**. Verdi thought the play was so wonderful, he wrote an opera based on the same story called *La Traviata*; he just changed the names a little—Marie became Violetta!

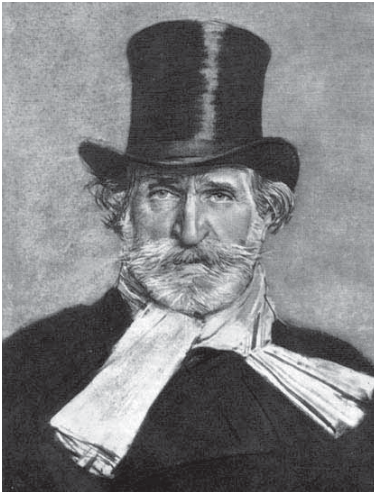
Who was **Marie Duplessis**? Marie was born *Rose Alphonsine Plessis* in 1824 in Normandy, France. She moved to Paris at 15, and worked in a dress shop. By all accounts she was an extremely attractive young woman and determined to become a French society lady. She learned to read, write, and kept up with current events so she could converse fluently

on all topics. She changed her name to sound more “noble,” and started hanging out with a very fast crowd including Swedish and French nobility!

She died of consumption at the young age of 23; she was so popular, her funeral was a hugely lavish event, attended by some very important people of the time. Very sad.

Dumas' story about Marie is so popular even today, that it has been made into at least 11 films, including *Moulin Rouge!*





INTERESTING FACT:

Verdi became a symbol for the wish of Italian people to be united under one king: V(ittorio) E(manuele) R(e) D(') I(talia), or Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy. VIVA VERDI!

Meet Giuseppe Verdi

GIUSEPPE VERDI WAS BORN IN 1813 IN ITALY. Exactly WHERE is no longer certain, and even Verdi himself wasn't sure!

By age 7, Verdi was the official organist at his local church, and at 14 he was teaching music at a music school. However, when he applied to the prestigious Milan Conservatory to study music, they rejected him! Verdi had to go study with a lesser-known *maestro* (teacher) instead.

Verdi started to have some musical successes and decided to get married in 1836. He had a son and a daughter, but by 1840, his son, daughter and wife were all dead! Very sad.

Verdi's first big success came with an opera called *Nabucco*. He then had several years of composing operas that weren't so successful; Verdi called these his "galley years." Like working in a slave galley, get it?

Verdi finally found his stride around 1851, when he premiered his new opera *Rigoletto*. He followed this very successful show with another called *Il Trovatore*, and sealed his reputation as a master with *La Traviata*.

Folklore has it that *La Traviata* had a troublesome opening night. The Rough Guide to Opera says: "The first performance of *La Traviata* in Venice in March, 1853 was a complete disaster. The tenor had a terrible cold and kept croaking all over the place.

All in all, the audience thought Verdi's tragic opera was the funniest thing they'd heard in years. Salvini-Donatelli, the soprano playing the consumptive Violetta, was so hefty and healthy-looking that every time she sang, the audience burst into gales of laughter. It was not a good sign." Some people don't believe that it was a failure at all, though; people who actually saw the show said that Verdi himself had to take lots of curtain calls DURING the first act! No matter what the truth is, fourteen months later it was definitely a BIG HIT!

All in all, Verdi wrote 26 operas! He was very popular and successful during his lifetime, which isn't all that common for composers. His last opera, *Falstaff*, is still hugely popular, and he wrote it when he was 80 years old!

Verdi suffered a fatal stroke in 1901. He was such a beloved figure by then that the streets outside the place he was staying were covered with straw to muffle the sound of passing horses and carriages. He died a few days later, had a funeral without music, and was buried next to his wife. One month later, a great public funeral procession was held; both caskets were moved to the *Casa di Riposa*. On that occasion, people lined the streets singing in chorus, honoring the great composer.

WORD SEARCH



Violetta

Verdi

consumption

flowergirls

libretto

LiBai

Cinderella

Massenet

Bassoon

Verismo

stagemanager

Menotti

director

soprano

finale

conductor

L A T R A V I A T A

WHAT DID YOU THINK?

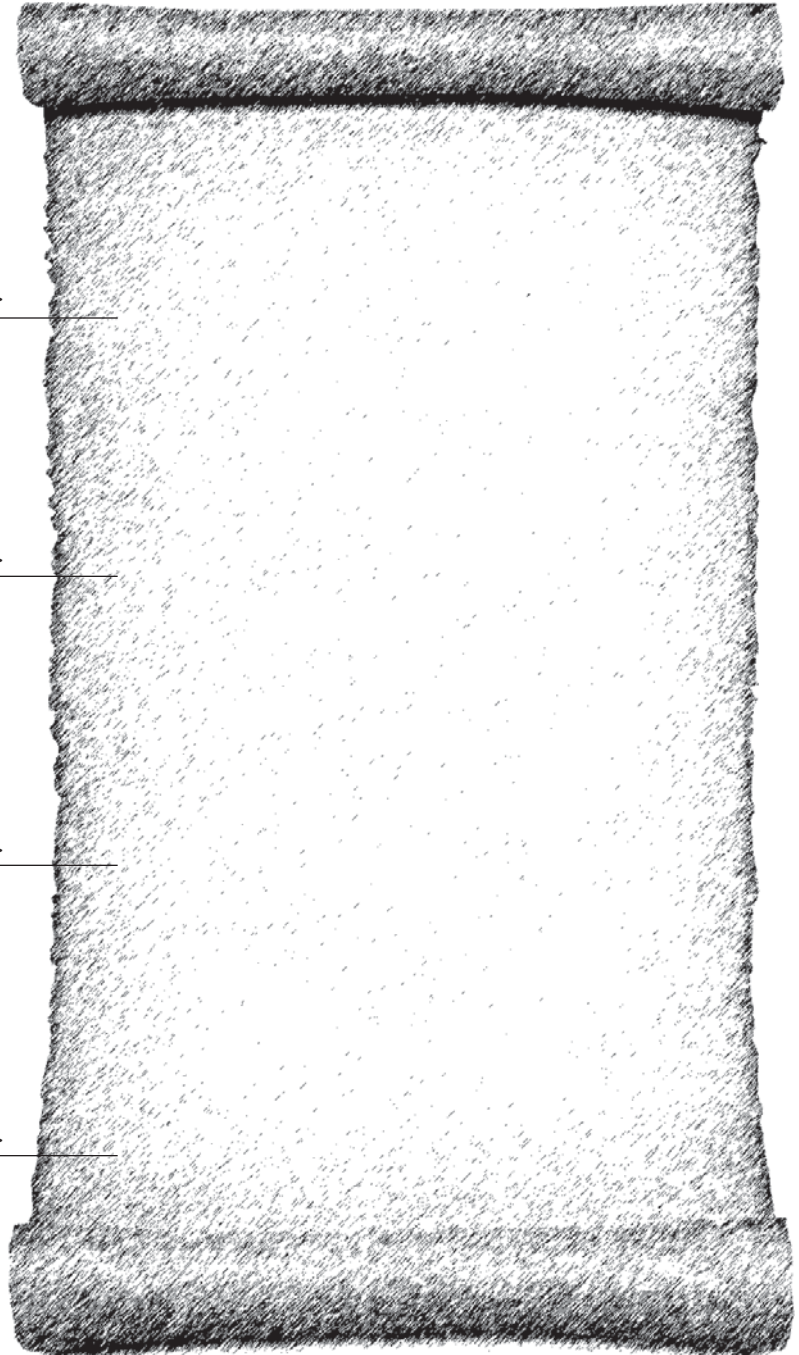
It's your turn! Once you've seen La Traviata,
FILL IN THE POLL ON THE SCROLL:

Who was your favorite singer, and WHY? >

Who had the BEST costume? >

Who had the WORST costume? >

What was your favorite scene? WHY? >



Meet Someone Under the Stage



Kim Peoria, Bassoonist

AND ORCHESTRA MANAGER

at the beginning of the season. Eventually it warms up to be quite stuffy later in the summer. It's hard to hear the singing on stage when you are sitting way back under the stage. The only musicians who can see any part of the stage are those string players at the very front of the pit. They seem to enjoy being able to watch the action onstage. The rest of us have no idea of what is happening on stage unless we attend the final **piano dress rehearsal**, which a lot of the orchestra musicians do.

Q: Kim, you work under the stage with the orchestra. What exactly do you do there?

A: I have played second **bassoon** every summer since 1992 and I have also acted as Orchestra Manager since 1999. As Orchestra Manager I am responsible for orchestra payroll, orchestra attendance, orchestra scheduling and orchestra auditions. I am also the liason between what goes on in the **orchestra pit** and stage management and stage hands backstage. I check the pit set up before each and every rehearsal and performance, because usually each opera of the summer uses a different instrumentation. I stay in close contact with stage management and the conductor and let them know when an orchestra member has called in sick or broken an ankle or was in an automobile accident on the way to work or is stuck in traffic.

Q: What is it like under the stage?

A: It is not at all glamorous. It is very cramped and can be quite loud, depending on where you sit in the pit. I get to sit in front of the trumpets and trombones and consequently I always have ear plugs in my bassoon case for those very loud dramatic opera moments. The pit is quite chilly

Q: Do you have to be aware of what is happening on stage and back stage to do your job? If so, how do you keep track?

A: Yes, there are definitely times when the orchestra must follow a **sight cue** from on stage or a **vocal cue** from on stage or off stage. Since most of us cannot see a thing we must rely on watching the conductor, who gives us everything we need. In an early opera, like Mozart, the **harpsichord** player will usually have a video monitor in the pit, which allows him to see the action on stage and then he can play the harpsichord **recitatives** along with the action on stage.

Q: What do the orchestra members wear to perform? What does the conductor wear?

A: The orchestra ladies wear all black for all performances. The orchestra men wear tuxedos for all opening night performances and then all black for the rest of the performances. We are really not seen very much by the audience and wearing all black is kind of a tradition for pit performances. **Conductors** wear whatever they feel is suitable. For an opening night they may wear white tie and tails (formal wear). For other evening performances they would typically wear a tuxedo (black tie without tails) or a business suit. For matinees

our conductors have worn everything from tuxedos to white shirts with open collars.

Q: *How much does the orchestra rehearse before an opera? Do they always rehearse in the pit?*

A: The orchestra gets only 3 rehearsals by itself for each opera, then one **sitzprobe** (orchestra with singers but no staging, costumes or sets), and then 2 dress rehearsals. So the orchestra gets 6 rehearsals of 3 hours each and then we open the show. The orchestra almost always rehearses in the pit, but there have been times when we have had to use a different rehearsal space because of scheduling difficulties with something on stage, like a lighting rehearsal or another of the **technical rehearsals** so important to the quality of the performances. We will have to find another rehearsal space at least once in 2007, since doing 4 operas for the first time brings many more scheduling conflicts than is typical.

Q: *What is the best part about being under the stage?*

A: It is really a treat to be smack dab in the middle of some of the most glorious music ever written, night after night. I often think we have the best seats in the house, even though we can't see a thing on stage, because we in the orchestra can hear the inner workings of the music. You don't often get that feeling of being intimate with the music if you see only one performance.

Q: *What is the worst?*

It's cold in the beginning of the summer, it's hot later in the summer, it's always cramped and usually loud, and you can't see what's happening on stage. It's also very hard to hear the singing on stage.

And THAT'S what it's like to play in the orchestra pit!

WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

Orchestra - a group of instrumentalists who accompany the singers in the opera.

Bassoon - Kim's instrument. The bassoon is a large woodwind with a low, deep sound.

Orchestra Pit - the space under the stage where the orchestra sits.

Dress Rehearsal - one of the last rehearsals before the show opens, where the singers get to wear their costumes. The Piano Dress Rehearsal is accompanied only with a piano; the orchestra members don't have to play that day.

Sight cue/Vocal cue - an action on stage that is a signal for something else to happen.

Harpsichord - a keyboard instrument that preceded the piano. The harpsichord sometimes plays all alone to accompany recitatives.

Recitative - a style of singing that is meant to be more like dialogue; it moves the plot along. Mozart composed a lot of recitative.

Conductor - the leader of the orchestra; he/she is the one waving the baton around.

Technical Rehearsal - rehearsals that help the backstage crew figure out scene changes, lighting issues, special effects, etc. They can last a VERY long time.

THE FLOWER GIRLS

A CENTRAL CITY OPERA TRADITION



OPENING NIGHT at Central City Opera is very exciting. Everyone has worked for months preparing for this moment: production staff, management, singers, orchestra, and...the Flower Girls. The Flower Girls have been part of Central City Opera's opening night festivities for 75 years!

Several pages ago, we learned that the Central City Opera House was restored and rescued in the year 1932, when the play *Camille* was set to be the first summer show. Rehearsals were being held in a home

in Denver, and were attended by two very excited young neighborhood girls named Nancy Kountz and Elaine Oakes. On opening night, these young ladies passed out small bouquets of flowers during intermission, which the audience tossed on stage at the end of the performance. Ever since then, there have been groups of young women who keep the tradition of being a part of opening night every summer.

Some girls who are asked to be Flower Girls represent families who support the opera. Others are from families that have played major roles in Colorado history. At the beginning of the opening night festivities, that season's Flower Girls descend the garden staircase outside the opera house. This procession is the oldest debutante presentation in Colorado! They then go out into Eureka Street, and dance the Yellow Rose Waltz, usually with their fathers. (Don't worry, they stop all the traffic.) A dynamite blast marks the official opening of the summer season.

The tradition of the Flower Girls helping to launch the Central City Opera summer festival season is now 75 years old!



When Things Go HORRIBLY WRONG

Real life opera horror stories



Three stories from an orchestra member:

- The orchestra parking lot used to be where the Foundry Rehearsal Center is now. To access the lot you had to cross a rickety bridge that went over the creek. The lot was never very well lit and one night, sure enough, one of the orchestra members fell off the bridge and into the creek, right before that evening's performance.

- During one performance a sword came into the pit and crushed a very expensive violin of one of the first violinists. Fortunately the musician wasn't hurt but the instrument needed extensive repairs.

- For one of the productions there were helium-filled balloons as props. During one of the performances a balloon decided to escape and float casually up into the fly space. A few days later it had lost enough helium to sink back toward the stage during a different opera. It actually rose and sank several times, in full sight of everyone, until the conductor speared it with his baton.

Kim Peoria, bassoonist

Two Singers' stories:

- One of the longest nights I experienced onstage was when I actually lost my voice during a performance of Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* at Wolf Trap Opera. Since I didn't have an understudy, and the show had to continue, I ended up singing the remainder of my part down an octave in a dusky baritone voice. The role of Caesar was being sung by a mezzo-soprano, so it was probably a bit odd to have Cleopatra singing considerably lower than her boyfriend. Then again, it's opera, so anything goes, I suppose.

Emily Pulley, soprano

- We had reached the end of a community program we were performing that included several excerpts from different operas with just a piano to accompany us. The Laundry Scene from Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* seemed to be going quite well...until the piano player abruptly stopped playing, and then...left the stage completely! There we were, three opera singers performing a cappella, with no accompaniment at all! Apparently, the piano player's music had gotten out of order, and she didn't have the music she needed to continue the scene. We kept going, trying our best not to laugh nervously at the eerie silence that was created without any piano part. We were just about to give up the farce, and own up to the audience that something had gone horribly wrong, when the pianist returned to the stage with a flourish and started playing again (she had found the music!). We were, of course, perfectly on pitch.

Sarah Barber and Erin Hackel, CCO Ensemble singers

A Director's story:

- In my recent production of *Cendrillon*, during the finale of the show there was to be a glitterpaper drop from the fly rail, covering the stage in beautiful silver as all ended happily. On the opening night in Boston, the man pulling the ropes dropped the glitter at the wrong time! He mistakenly pulled the rope for the finale during the Prince's very pensive scene in Act II. Not only that, but instead of glitter gently and beautifully trickling to the stage, it all came charging down like an avalanche! The following scene, with no time to sweep the stage, was the ballroom scene and the entire cast and dancers had to wade around in an inch of glitterpaper that was all over the stage. When the finale finally came, there was hardly any glitterpaper left above the stage so for the big moment just a few trickles came down, much to my disappointment.

Marc Astafan, director of Cinderella

> > > POET LI BAI

Poetry and Passion

THIS IS A WORLD PREMIERE OF A
NEW, ONE-ACT OPERA IN CHINESE
WITH ENGLISH SUPERTITLES

HERE ARE THE CHARACTERS:

Li Bai- *bass*, a poet

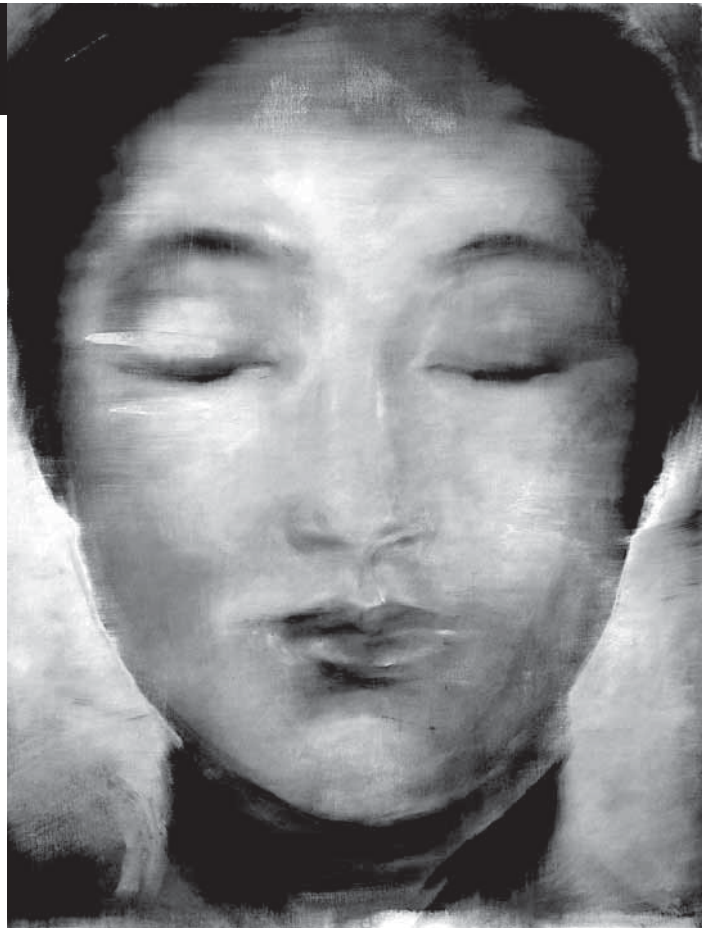
Wine- *a tenor*, representing wine,
something Li Bai loves

Moon- *a soprano*, representing the moon,
something else Li Bai loves

WE'RE IN CHINA, during the Tang dynasty (around
the year 800—that's a very long time ago!)

IT'S A QUIET, MOONLIT NIGHT, and we see Li
Bai, the poet, on his houseboat. He seems to be
under the influence of Wine, and feeling lone-
some, he sings about his loneliness to the Moon.
The Moon thinks his poetry is so beautiful she
decides to come down from the sky and meet Li
Bai for herself. Li Bai is ecstatic, and praises her
highly. The Moon reminds Li Bai that earthly life
is full of pitfalls (like Wine!) and invites him up
to heaven.

WINE WANTS TO COME TOO, but Moon thinks
that is a terrible idea. The whole process is
interrupted by the announcement of Li Bai's
royal pardon. (*See the section called Who is this Li
Bai, anyway?*) Li Bai is so delighted at the thought



of his freedom, he does a triumphant dance and
falls down, much to Moon's disgust. Wine thinks
Moon is a bit lacking in human warmth, and
says so.

LI BAI, down on the ground, is now questioning his
own shortcomings. Moon tells him again that if
he can just get rid of Wine, he can join her up in
the heavens. Wine reminds them that the poet
cannot be separated from him; they go together,
causing Li Bai to rage against the rules disallow-
ing Wine in the heavens!

JUST THEN, dawn arrives, and Moon starts to move
away. Li Bai tries to hang onto her sleeve, but it
just gets longer and longer. He eventually falls
into the lake, trying to follow her.

The End



CAST

Li Bai: Hao Jiang Tian

Moon: Ying Huang

Wine: Chi Liming

Poetry: Jiang Qihu



By Guo Wenjing

Conductor: Ed Spanjaard

Director: Lin Zhaohua

Chorus: University of Denver Lamont School of Music

Chorus Master: Catherine Sailer

Performed in Chinese with
English supertitles.

Performance Dates:

July 7, 13, 15, 20, 26, 28

Who is this Li Bai, anyway?

LI BAI (OR LI PO), SOMETIMES CALLED THE **POET IMMORTAL**, is considered to be one of the two best poets in Chinese history. He lived over 1,300 years ago, during the Tang Dynasty, and 1,100 of his poems are still around today. Li Bai is known for poetry full of beautiful images, and also for his great love of wine! Li Bai used **anthropomorphism**: giving human traits to objects, like the characters Moon and Wine in the opera.

Li Bai was a well-known poet during his lifetime, and would gather inspiration for his poetry from travelling around China, visiting townships and the spectacular countryside. He managed to get on the Emperor's bad side, and was exiled for life, confined to a houseboat. He received an unexpected royal pardon three years later.

Traditional folk knowledge says that Li Bai drowned in a river in the year 762, trying to reach the reflection of the moon.

Li Bai's poems are famous for their sense of spontaneity and effortlessness. Legend has it that Li Bai wrote much like W.A. Mozart composed—quickly, and without error.



Li Po Chanting a Poem, *ink on paper*
by Liang K'ai
(13th century)

DRINKING ALONE WITH THE MOON

by Li Bai

From a pot of wine among the flowers

I drank alone. There was no one with me –

Till, raising my cup, I asked the bright moon

To bring me my shadow and make us three.

Alas, the moon was unable to drink

And my shadow tagged me vacantly;

But still for a while I had these friends

To cheer me through the end of spring...

I sang. The moon encouraged me.

I danced. My shadow tumbled after.

As long as I knew, we were
boon companions.

And then I was drunk, and
we lost one another.

...Shall goodwill ever be secure?

I watch the long road of the River of Stars.

Translated to English by Bynner

Meet Guo Wenjing



Composer of Poet Li Bai

- Guo Wenjing was born in 1956 in Chongqing, in the Sichuan province of China.
- Chongqing is an ancient city, and Guo Wenjing was very influenced by the city's cultural and folk history.
- He was one of only **100** students admitted to Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music. There were **17,000** applicants!
- He has composed two chamber operas called *Wolf Cub Village* and *Night Banquet*. One opera reviewer in Paris called *Wolf Cub Village* a "masterpiece of madness." Cool.
- Guo doesn't just compose operas. He has written for traditional Western chamber groups, like piano and percussion ensembles, and also for Chinese ensembles, with traditional Chinese instruments. His work entitled *Drama* is for three percussionists who also speak and sing, and he recently wrote a work called *Journeys* for soprano and orchestra. Guo has also composed scores for 20 movies.
- Guo currently teaches in the composition department at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. He was recently honored as one of the Top 100 Living Artists of China, and his music has been played in festivals around the world.
- *Poet Li Bai* is his newest opera, and this is its world premiere!



The Sichuan province in China

INTERESTING FACT:

In Chinese, and some other languages, the last name or "family" name comes before the first, or "given" name, i.e., Guo Wenjing would be Mr. Wenjing Guo in English.

Meet a Librettist, Diana Liao



Librettist of Poet Li Bai

INTERESTING FACT:

The composer Gustav Mahler used four of Li Bai's poems in his famous work *Das Lied von der Erde* (*The Songs of the Earth*).

Q: *Diana, you wrote the libretto for Poet Li Bai. What is a libretto?*

A: A libretto is the text of an opera, where the lyrics (words of songs) and information about the setting (a houseboat, on the river), timing (evening, moonlit night), the ambience (mysterious, stark) and unspoken emotions (lost, sad) are indicated. A libretto to an opera is like a screenplay to a movie. “Libretto” originally is an Italian word, like so many words in opera and in music, meaning “a small book.” One who writes the libretto is called the “librettist.”

Q: *How did you become a librettist?*

A: By accident, actually. I have always liked the music within words, so one day I just sat down and put a story together with melodious words and hoped someday someone would like it enough to set it to music, bring in singers to sing and act out the parts on stage, have someone make special costumes and add fantastic lighting—in short, to make it into an opera.

Q: *Which comes first, the libretto or the music?*

A: A question asked by many people! Most of the time, the libretto comes first, so that the composer (the one who sets it to music) will know what kind of music will match the emotions/actions behind the words. When the music comes first, which happens sometimes, then the words that are fitted into the music are called lyrics. In the case of *Poet Li Bai*, the libretto was written first, then revised many times in consultation with the composer. When the libretto in Chinese has changed, the corresponding parts in the English version will have to change also. The librettist always listens to the opinions of the composer, for he is the one, ultimately, to make something beautiful out of both the words and the music. It sounds complicated, but I assure you it is very gratifying because it's like finding the right colors and shapes in a painting.

Q: *The original libretto was written in English, and then translated to Chinese. Why start with English, and why then the language change?*

A: It so happened that I was in Jamaica and thinking in English when I wrote the first words of *Poet Li Bai*. I was also thinking of my non-Chinese

audience who might want to get to know this fabulous poet so famous already among Chinese-speaking communities since the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–907). The composer, Mr. Guo Wenjing, a world-class musician as well as a scholar, prefers to set the music to Chinese lyrics, which are naturally closer to the original poems written in Chinese. In this case, the original English version will become subtitles when the opera is sung in Chinese. It can also serve as an independent English Singing Version if one day another composer prefers to set it to English. A little extra effort certainly goes a long way!

Q: *Chinese and English seem like very different languages. What are the challenges of working between the two?*

A: True, Chinese and English are poles apart, but human emotions are largely the same. My co-librettist/translator and I spent a lot of time hammering out the exact shades of meaning behind our ideas into two different media. We fight and argue, of course, but we also meet each other halfway most of the time. I think the same things happen even when we are speaking the same language, right?

Q: *What kinds of things do you have to think about when you write words for singers?*

A: There are special and specific considerations when the words are meant to be sung instead of just spoken. First and foremost they have to be easy on the vocal chords, which means round words like “Mama,” “sky,” “beautiful” will travel further down the hall than “Mother,” “heaven,” or “pretty.” Remember, opera singers do not use microphones and each word has to reach the person sitting in the last row of the theater. Then the important words have to receive their prominent places in a sentence, and a sentence is better short than long, the language has to fit the personality of the characters, the tension of drama has to build up with the help of the rhythm and color of the words as well as the music so that in the end, the singers can sing with ease and conviction the roles they try to portray,



and the audience can follow the story line as well as the musical development with interest and enjoyment.

Q: *What were the challenges of writing the libretto for Poet Li Bai?*

A: Although Li Bai the poet was a real person, there were no live recordings of his voice, no movies depicting his life story, no picture even of what he really looked like. That’s because he lived in the Tang Dynasty some 1,200 years ago in ancient China (A.D. 701-757). From his many poems, and from history books and legends on his life as a person, I had to piece together my version of his life story, giving him a voice and a personality as close to the real Li Bai as possible. Imagination played a big part. This is what one calls “poetic license,” meaning artists have the right to add their imagination to what they believe is the real thing. To get closer to the person I was imagining, I took a long trip by train and by boat to retrace the mountains and rivers where Li Bai once roamed, scouting for sources of inspiration that once filled Li Bai with expansive joy, even during his worst moments. I also read books and books about him, re-read his many poems which I had been reading since a child, discussed his greatness and idiosyncrasies (his own quiriness) as a poet and as an ordinary man with anyone who was interested or half-interested. In short, I tried to bring him alive first in my heart, then on paper, then through music, then through a singer who will act out the Li Bai of my understanding and imagination. Hopefully, after seeing the opera the audience will know who Li Bai was, how he lived, what he thought, how he felt, what he wanted...Better still, let the opera gently prompt us to ask ourselves how we live, what we think, how we feel, what we really want.

> > > CINDERELLA

As Told by Her Fairy Godmother

ACT I

WELL, HERE WE ARE, THEN! Right outside Madame de la Haltière's home. Who is Mme. de la Haltière, you ask? Why, that's Cinderella's stepmother, of course. Goodness! It looks as if she's marshaled the troops tonight; everyone is scurrying about like little mice getting those two...unfortunate...girls ready for the Prince's ball. Really, all they need is a good haircut and a nice smile, and they'd be nearly presentable! Oh look, there's Cinderella; I've heard that her stepmother is not allowing her to attend the ball. You know, it's always really irritated me that Mme. doesn't like her; she's adorable! Well, she can be moody, but a really nice girl, truly! Hmm...it looks as if Cinderella's father isn't going to get to say goodnight to her; his new wife really keeps him on the move. What?! You didn't think her dad was in the picture anymore, did you? Well, you'd be wrong; there he is. Poor lamb, Cindy's falling asleep right next to the fire. Excuse me, will you? I'm going to slip in and make sure she gets to that party tonight. Don't worry! I'll let her know that these glass slippers will keep her from being recognized. Oh! And the whole midnight thing...right, thanks.

ACT II

Never thought we'd get to the royal palace! All that fancy carriage traffic. Oh my, there's the Prince. He looks VERY handsome, no? Hmm...he does seem a bit moody, though. Look at him pouting! Well, I suppose it's because his father is forcing him to marry one of these silly looking girls they're parading in front of him. Where IS Cindy? I told her not to dilly-dally at the mall... Here she is at last! Oh, she IS creating quite an uproar. She looks lovely, don't you think? The Prince seems to think so as well; look at the two of them, singing their little hearts out! Drat! Is it already midnight?! Run, Cindy!



Oh, dear...she's lost a shoe!

ACT III, Scene 1

Well, she barely made it, didn't she? Here we are, back at her stepmother's home. My, it looks as if dad and stepmom don't agree about what just transpired! She thinks the Prince rejected Cindy!? I might have to charm up a new pair of glasses for that woman. Oh good, Cindy and her dad are having a chat, so nice. He says they are going to move back to the country? That should be very satisfactory! Oh, dear, Cindy's having a bit of a drama-queen moment. She wants to die. Teenagers! I'll have to step in, I see.

ACT III, Scene 2

What do you think of my fancy, magical wonderland? Nice, I know. I've created it especially for Cindy and her Prince. Here they come.

continued on page 26

CAST

Cinderella: Leah Wool

The Prince: Vale Rideout

Fairy Godmother: Heather Buck

Pandolfe: Patrick Carfizzi, Philip Cokorinos

Madame de la Haltière: Maria Zifchak



Performance Dates:

July 14, 17, 20, 22, 26, 28

August 1, 3, 8, 11, 17, 19

Family Matinee August 14

By Jules Massenet

Conductor: John Baril

Director: Marc Astafan

Performed in French with
English supertitles.

ACT IV, Scene 1

Well, here we are in the countryside, delightful! Really, the brisk air is wonderful for the joints. We've been here a few months, now...no, no, of course they can't see me! What kind of fairy do you think I am? Cindy's been thinking a great deal about her Prince, but her father has just about convinced her it was all a dream. Rubbish! Oh dear, here comes Mme. de la Haltière and those two bumbling girls. Oh, the slipper! They're all to come and try on the slipper so the Prince can find his Princess! Wonderful idea, clever Prince! Let's see if I can't get this wrapped up in time for supper.

ACT IV, Scene 2

Yes, yes, I agree, I've done a wonderful job here. No, he didn't recognize her right away, but once I gave her a little push forward...well, let's just say she's going to make a wonderful Princess. I DO love a happy ending!



19th century engraving of Gustave Doré's Cendrillon



COSTUME SKETCHES

Meet Jules Massenet

Composer of Cinderella



- Jules Massenet was born May 12, 1842 in Montaud, France. He was the youngest of 12 children, and took piano lessons from his mother, an accomplished musician, starting at age 6.
- Jules attempted the entrance exam at the Paris Conservatory at age 9, but failed! (Sound like someone else we've already met? Mr. Verdi, perhaps?) He tried again two years later, and was successful. Shortly thereafter, he won a very prestigious prize for composition called the **Prix de Rome**.
- In 1865, he toured Italy, and met the composer Franz Liszt, who introduced him to Louise-Constance de Gressy, nicknamed Ninon. It was love at first sight! They married in 1866, and moved to Paris. In 1868, Juliette, their only child, was born.

- Massenet premiered his first opera, *La Grand' Tante*, in 1867 at the Opéra Comique in Paris. It was the first of 26 operas he would compose.
- Massenet was one of the most popular composers of French opera during the late 19th century. He pleased the public by giving them just what they wanted: beautiful, sweet melodies. Some of his peers disliked him for that very reason.
- He was also a well-liked and important music composition teacher; many of his students went on to their own successful careers as composers. Among them: Claude Debussy and Ernest Chausson.
- Today, Massenet's operas are not as popular as they once were. The only two that are being performed frequently are *Manon* and *Werther*.
- Massenet died of cancer on August 13, 1912.

Jules Massenet, as painted by his daughter, Juliette



Cinderella—The story Didn't start with Disney, you know

MOST OF US have probably seen the Disney cartoon version of *Cinderella*, right? The one with the tone-deaf stepsisters and the sassy little mice? What you might not know is that the *Cinderella* story we know best is only one version of a folk tale that started in China over 1,200 years ago.

The first known version of *Cinderella* is recorded in a Chinese book from 860 AD called *Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*. The Chinese Cinderella, named Ye Xian, was known far and wide for her tiny feet! Many other versions of the oppressed stepdaughter who finds herself freed by a Prince floated around for a long time until an Italian man named Giambattista Basile recorded a version in his book, *The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for Little Ones*. Charles Perrault also recorded his take on the folk tale in 1697. It is this version that has become the most popular in Western culture today, and is the basis for both the Massenet opera being performed here this summer and the Disney cartoon.

Other versions of Cinderella became popular in other countries. In Germany, the Brothers Grimm wrote a story where birds living over Cinderella's mother's grave help her, instead of a fairy godmother. At the end when the stepsisters try on the slipper, one of them cuts off her toe to make it fit! Yuck.

The famous *glass* slipper is only in Perrault's story (glass was very valuable in 17th century France, when Perrault was alive); in other stories it is gold, or replaced completely with a bracelet, ring, or anklet. In some countries, a tree that tosses down Cinderella's necessary garments from its branches replaces the fairy godmother. Sometimes the fairy godmother is completely omitted, as in Rossini's opera, *Cenerentola*.

The story of Cinderella has been retold in many modern forms: musical theater, opera, film, television, even on ice! Its theme of unjust oppression leading to spectacular reward has remained popular for over a thousand years.



CINDERELLA HAS A DIFFERENT NAME
ALMOST EVERYWHERE YOU GO!
HERE'S WHAT THEY CALL HER IN
SOME OTHER LANGUAGES:

| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| Dutch: | Assepoester |
| Croatian: | Pepeljuga |
| Czech: | Popelka |
| Finnish: | Tuhkimo |
| French: | Cendrillon |
| German: | Aschenputtel |
| Hungarian: | Hamupipoke |
| Icelandic: | Öskubuska |
| Italian: | Cenerentola |
| Norwegian: | Askepott |
| Polish: | Kopciuszek |
| Portuguese: | Cinderela |
| Spanish: | La Cenicienta |
| Turkish: | Külkedisi |

C I N D E R E L L A

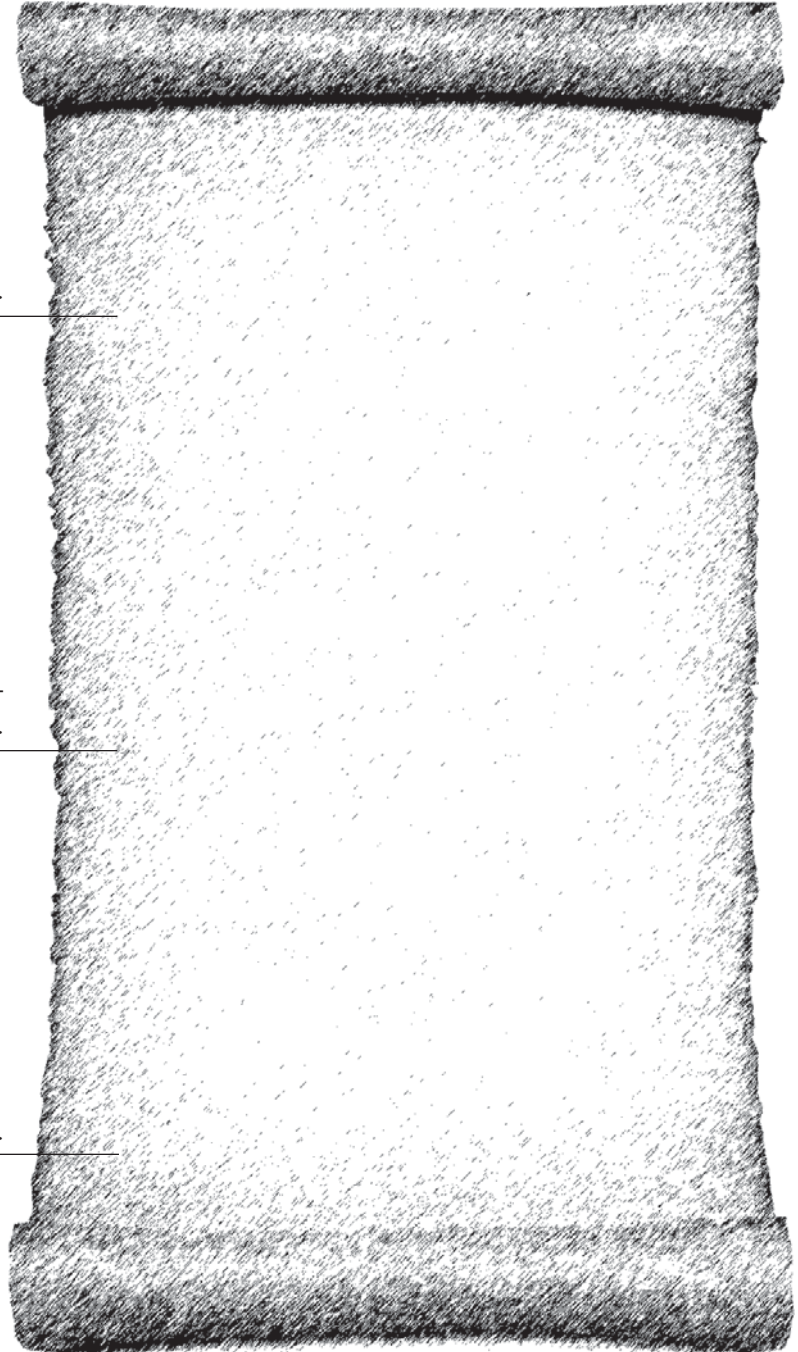
WHAT DID YOU THINK?

It's your turn! Once you've seen Cinderella,
FILL IN THE POLL ON THE SCROLL:

Who was your favorite singer, and WHY? >

How was the story DIFFERENT
than you expected? >

What was your favorite part of the opera? >



> THE SAINT OF BLEECKER STREET

Miracles and Angels

ACT I

A TENEMENT ON BLEECKER STREET. A group of people are clustered around Annina's bedroom door. She is believed to have religious visions; they wonder if she can heal the sick. A priest carries her out, and she has a vision of the Crucifixion and, apparently, is in great pain. Her brother, Michele arrives and makes everyone leave, as he does not believe in his sister's visions.

A little later, Annina's friend Carmela confesses that she is in love and won't become a nun with Annina; Annina is very happy for her friend and tells her about a beautiful vision she had of heaven for all her neighbors. Maria Corona comes to warn Annina that Michele does not want Annina to be in the planned procession. She also thanks Annina for healing her son; he had not been able to speak before Annina touched him during one of her visions. Michele arrives and tries to convince Annina that her visions are only figments of her imagination but she is certain they are not. The procession starts, and Michele is restrained by a group of men as Annina is carried off. His girlfriend, Desideria comes to rescue him.

ACT II

It is Carmela's wedding day. Everyone is invited except Desideria, who is unwelcome because of her relationship with Michele. Desideria is angry because of people's double standard. Michele is invited, but because Desideria is a woman, she is not. Desideria wants to go in to the wedding, but Michele won't let her, as he is afraid of how it will affect his beloved sister. Desideria accuses Michele of loving his sister more than her, and Michele stabs her and runs away. Annina prays over the woman, but Desideria dies.



ACT III

Annina has arranged to meet Michele in a subway station. When he arrives, Annina asks him to give himself up to the police; he refuses. Annina tells him that her voices have told her that she will die very soon, and she is determined to take the veil immediately. Michele tries to convince her otherwise, but when he is unsuccessful he runs away.

Annina waits in her apartment, very ill, for word on whether or not she will be allowed to become a nun. Carmela gives Annina her white wedding dress to wear; permission is granted, and the ceremony begins. Michele bursts in to try to stop her, but she doesn't hear him. As the ceremony ends, she falls down, dead.

The End

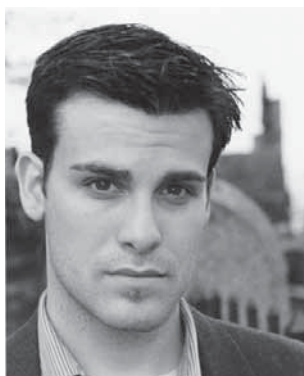
CAST

Annina: Maria Kanyova

Michele: Derek Taylor

Maria Corona: Christine Brandes

Desideria: Kirsten Chavez



By Gian Carlo Menotti

Conductor: Hal France

Director: Catherine Malfitano

Performed in English with
English supertitles.

Performance Dates:

July 21, 25, 27, 31

August 3, 5, 8, 11, 15, 18

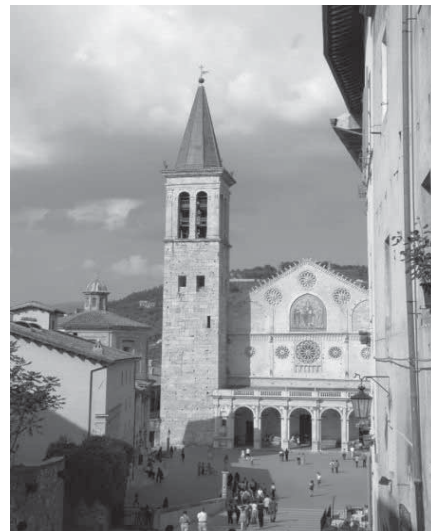


INTERESTING FACT:

Annina, the lead character in The Saint of Bleecker Street, has stigmata: marks or sores that correspond to Christ's wounds from being crucified.

Meet Gian Carlo Menotti

- Gian Carlo Menotti was born on July 7, 1911 in Cadegliano-Viconago, Italy. He started writing songs when he was 7, and wrote his first opera at age 11. Our composers this season certainly started young!
- After his father died, he and his mother moved to America, where he enrolled at the Curtis Institute. There, he met fellow composers Leonard Bernstein and Samuel Barber. Menotti later wrote the **libretti** (Italian for “texts”) for two of Barber’s operas: *Vanessa* and *A Hand of Bridge*.
- After his first successful attempt at opera, *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, NBC commissioned him to write an opera for radio, the first commission ever given of that kind. The opera was called *The Old Maid and the Thief*.
- His first full-length opera, *The Consul*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Music and the New York Drama Circle Critics’ Award for Musical Play of the Year.
- In 1954, Menotti’s well-loved Christmas opera, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* premiered on television. It continues to have hundreds of live performances every year.
- Menotti is known as a masterful story-teller, and a wonderful composer for singers. He also has a strong grasp on what a child can sing and understand, as shown in the role of Amahl, sung by a young boy.
- *The Saint of Bleecker Street* premiered in 1954, and quickly became known as one of Menotti’s best compositions. The opening moments of the opera are thought to be some of the most powerful music he ever composed.
- Menotti founded the extremely popular *Festival of Two Worlds* in Spoleto, Italy, with a sister program in Charleston, South Carolina. These festivals showcase an array of music, dance and opera in a yearly summer festival.
- Gian Carlo Menotti died on January 31st, 2007. He was 95 years old!



Spoleto Cathedral

Wow... That was Intense!

Verismo Opera

THREE OF THE FOUR OPERA COMPOSERS this season have, at times, been labeled as **verismo** composers. In fact, some label *La Traviata* as a very early example of this type of opera, and some label *The Saint of Bleeker Street* as a late example. What on earth *is* verismo opera, anyway?

Verismo is an Italian term, meaning “realism,” or “truth.” The word was first applied to a style of writing, especially the writing of an Italian author named Giovanni Verga. Verga wrote about his home in Sicily, but he didn’t write about happy things, no sir! Verga became a famous author by writing about the brutal existence of the lower classes in Italian society. Most of his stories are shocking in their ugly, honest portrayal of rural life in 19th century Sicily.

Opera composers soon began adapting the idea of truth in opera storytelling; in fact, one of the first verismo operas, *Cavalleria rusticana*, is based on one of Verga’s stories. In general, a verismo opera is one that contains the following elements:

- The characters are often from the lower levels of society: poor workers, farmers, the generally unlucky.
- The story is as realistic as possible, even if it gets uncomfortable.
- The characters have strong emotions that often lead to violence, even murder!
- The music is often continuous, rather than being divided into easily excerpted “numbers.”

Here’s an example of Verga’s writing; the original *verismo*. This is from a story called *Nedda*. In this passage he is describing Nedda:

“It would have taken quite a vivid imagination to think that her hands, condemned to a daily round of scratching a living from the ice, or the burning ground, or through brambles and rocks, or that those feet, accustomed to walking bare in the snow or over rocks burned by the sun, lacerated by the thorns and hardened by the rocks, could ever have been beautiful. It was impossible to say the age of this human being; poverty had crushed her from the time she was a baby with all the trials that deform and harden the body, the soul, and the mind.”

Here is the exact same passage in the original Italian. Can you recognize any words?

“L’immaginazione più vivace non avrebbe potuto figurarsi che quelle mani costrette ad un’aspra fatica di tutti i giorni, a raspar fra il gelo, o la terra bruciante, o i rovi e i crepacci, che quei piedi abituati ad andar nudi nella neve e sulle rocce infuocate dal sole, a lacerarsi sulle spine, o ad indurirsi sui sassi, avrebbero potuto esser belli. Nessuno avrebbe potuto dire quanti anni avesse cotesta creatura umana; la miseria l’aveva schiacciata da bambina con tutti gli stenti che deformano e induriscono il corpo, l’anima e l’intelligenza.”

Meet a Director



Catherine Malfitano

DIRECTOR OF THE SAINT OF BLEECKER STREET

after all. It is a great joy for me to work with singers in this new way. I love to help them discover more of their acting gifts, without disturbing their needs on the singing front.

Q: A director is, in some ways, responsible for the success of a production. Is that a different kind of pressure than singing a leading role?

A: Most certainly YES! A director is responsible for so many aspects of a production, but its success really depends on the contributions of everyone involved. It is important that the director inspires everyone to give their best. A successful director is like a successful coach of a basketball team. The mission is to create a glorious team effort, an ensemble experience, where the whole is definitely more important than any one of its many parts.

Q: This season, you are directing Menotti's The Saint of Blecker Street. What kinds of things can we expect to see onstage?

A: Miracles, of course! I do not want to give anything away, beforehand.

Q: The Saint of Blecker Street has some dark themes, like jealousy and murder. How do you make those things come alive and seem real for your audience?

A: Well, the themes of jealousy and murder are common to many opera plots. So is the theme of love. In this opera alone, we have many forms of love. There is the love between close girlfriends from childhood, love between sister

Q: Catherine, you are an opera singer, but now you also direct operas. What does an opera director do?

*A: An opera director is a story-teller and a bit of a magician too! Using the music, the **libretto**, the singer-actors, the sets, costumes, and lights, the director leads everyone on a journey of magic, fun, and emotional depth so that an exciting and entertaining performance becomes the result. Creating a riveting evening of opera is largely a collaborative effort, between the artists on stage, backstage, and in the orchestra pit. But the director is the one who shapes the way the story will be told.*

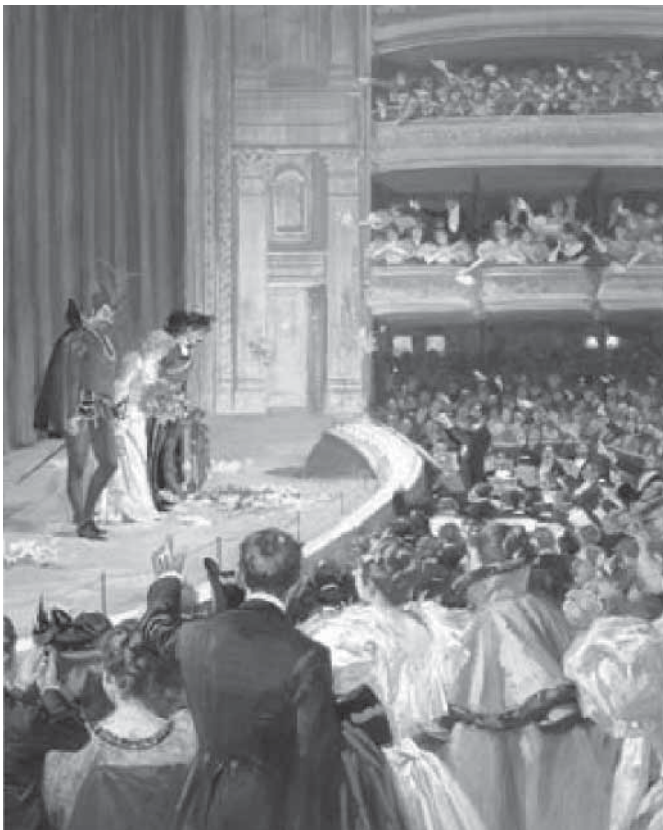
Q: How does your experience as an opera singer affect your directing?

A: I have been fortunate to work with all of the greatest opera directors in my 35 years of singing to date! It has been a privilege to learn from so many masters. Being a singer also gives me a depth of understanding for the singers I now direct. I understand intimately what is and is not possible to ask of my singers. I have been there,

and brother, love between husband and wife-to-be, love between two unmarried adults, love between one young girl and God, and the love of a whole neighborhood for this young girl they call a “saint.” This opera’s dark themes will come to life through the contrast with its many other moments of joyfulness and celebration. The idea is to be truthful, no matter what emotion or situation is being played. If we believe in what we are doing, the audience will too.

Q: *Does the director of an opera attend every rehearsal?*

A: Absolutely, the director is present at every rehearsal, even if it means a 10 hour day! I also think a director should be present at all **musical rehearsals** with the conductor. The collaboration between director and **conductor** is terribly important. The more unified their outlook is on the opera, the more everyone enjoys the whole process of rehearsals. Such harmonious rehearsals create great satisfaction and happiness in the performances, for all concerned.



WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

Libretto - The words, or text of an opera, without the music. It means “little book” In Italian.

Musical rehearsals - Rehearsals without any staging or movement. These are just to work on the music, sometimes with just a piano accompanying, sometimes with the whole orchestra.

Conductor - The leader of the orchestra. The conductor will work with the singers before the show goes into production, and is very important for giving cues to both singers and players during rehearsals and shows.

Words you should know before you go see the show

IN THE OPERA SCORE...

The **libretto** contains all of the words of an opera. Italian for “little book,” a libretto is usually shorter than the script for a play because it takes longer to sing lines than to say them, and because music is also a very important part of telling the story of an opera. The person who writes the words for an opera is often a playwright or poet and is called a **librettist**.

The **composer** writes the music for the opera. All of the music, both vocal (for singers) and orchestral (for instrumentalists) is written in the **score** with separate lines for each instrument and each singer’s vocal part. The score, as a piece of music, reflects the mood, events and emotions of the characters in the story.

Characters are the people in the story. Singers perform the parts of the characters, also called **roles**.

A **synopsis** is a short written summary of the story.

The **overture** is a piece of music played by the orchestra to begin the opera. It usually, but not always, contains some of the musical themes from the opera and sets the mood for what the audience is about to see.

Recitative, pronounced re-chi-ta-TEEV, is sung dialogue that propels the action of the story. The singing is generally faster with a rhythm more like regular speech.

An **aria** is an extended musical passage sung as a solo (by one person). It is often very lyrical and accompanied by the orchestra, conveying the emotions of the character at a particular point in the story. The action usually stops while an aria is sung.

A **duet** is an extended musical passage for two singers, a **trio** is sung by three singers, a **quartet** is a piece for four singers, and so on.

An **ensemble** is an extended musical passage for four or more singers. Very often each performer in an ensemble is singing different words and different musical lines.

Choral scenes usually feature the principal and secondary cast members with the chorus. The sheer number of voices on stage is usually reserved for moments of high drama and spectacle. Dancers might also be featured in a big choral scene.

The **finale** is the last number in an act. It usually involves many singers and is very dramatic.

Supertitles or **surtitles** are the translation of the words of an opera projected above the stage at the same time the character(s) on stage sing them. When an opera is in a different language, this helps people understand what is going on. Even if an opera is

performed in English, supertitles are often used to help the audience follow the story.

ON STAGE AND IN THE PIT...

The **Music Director** is responsible for the interpretation of the score. The Music Director is also usually the **conductor**, who is responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor stands at the front of the orchestra pit and uses a **baton** (a short white stick) and his/her arms and body to interpret the music, cue singers and instrumentalists and keep the beat so everybody stays together. **Maestro** (**maestra** for a woman) is the Italian word for conductor (literally “master”) and is a term of great respect.

Soprano is the highest female voice. She is often the heroine of the opera and frequently, she is in love with the tenor. A star soprano is often referred to as the “Prima Donna.”

Mezzo-soprano, or just **mezzo**, is the second highest, or middle, female voice. The mezzo sound is typically darker and warmer than the soprano. The mezzo usually plays the older female character (like the mother), a bad guy (like a witch), a seductress, or a young man or boy. When the mezzo plays a male character, she will be dressed in men’s clothes; thus, it is called a pants or **trouser role**. This convention became popular in the 17th century as a woman’s voice is stronger than a boy’s voice.

Alto, also called **contralto**, is the lowest female voice. The alto often plays an old woman, who can either be wise and good or an old witch.

The **tenor** is the highest male voice and is usually the hero of the opera and generally in love with the soprano.

Baritone is the next lowest, or middle, male voice. The baritone is often a villain but can sometimes be a hero who sacrifices himself for the tenor and/or soprano. In a comedy, the baritone is usually the one pulling all kinds of pranks. The baritone is often in love with the soprano but usually loses her to the tenor.

The **bass** has the lowest male voice. He very often plays a wise old man or sometimes a comic character (**basso buffa**). **Basso profundo** describes the lowest bass voice.

Supernumeraries or “**supers**,” appear on stage in costume in non-singing and non-speaking roles.

The **orchestra** is the group of instrumentalists who accompany the singers. They play under the stage in the orchestra pit where they will be less likely to overpower the singers and detract from the physical action on stage. Even though the orchestra is not on stage, the instrumentalists are equal

partners with the singers in performing an opera.

The **chorus** is a group of singers who function as a unit on stage. Choruses can be for mixed voices, men only, women only, or children. They are usually featured in crowd scenes where they can represent townspeople, soldiers, pilgrims, etc.

Dancers are often included in an opera. They are usually part of large crowd scenes but can be featured in solo roles as well. Many operas include a short ballet.

BACKSTAGE AND BEHIND THE SCENES...

Where do you start if you want to put on a production of an opera? Usually the General Director, Artistic Director or Music Director will pick the repertoire, or what operas will be performed. The performance is conceived by the **Production Team**, which consists of the Music Director/Conductor, Stage Director, Choreographer, Scene Designer, Costume Designer, Props Master, Lighting Designer and Technical Director. These people meet frequently to trade ideas and work together to ensure a cohesive interpretation of the piece from a visual, dramatic and musical standpoint.

The **Stage Director** (sometimes simply called the director) is responsible for the overall look or concept of the production. The director determines how the opera will be interpreted and tells everyone on stage when and where to move, creating “stage pictures” that enhance the story.

The **Choreographer** designs movement for the dancers and sometimes for chorus and other characters.

The **Costume Designer** designs and creates the clothes singers wear to reflect aspects of the character played by the singer and their significance in the story.

The **Scene Designer** creates the visual background and set pieces for the opera. He or she creates a small scale model of the set and detailed blueprints which serve as the “instructions” for building the set. He or she also works closely with the props master on hand props, furniture and set decoration.

The **Lighting Designer** creates a lighting plan that emphasizes the drama of the moment. Lighting design is an important visual element that contributes to the ambience of the stage setting and affects the appearance of people, costumes and props on stage.

The **Technical Director** supervises everyone who is implementing the concepts of the designers. He or she works with carpenters, painters, electricians, sound designers and stagehands and oversees the building of sets and props and hanging of lights.

The **Stage Manager** coordinates the visual elements of a show during the performance. He or she is responsible for calling all the cues in the performance for the cast and crew. This means the stage manager warns the cast and crew when acts are about to begin

and end, tells the conductor when to start, cues cast members for entrances, and follows hundreds of detailed notes in the score to tell the crew when to change lighting, scenery, sound effects, and raise or lower the curtain.

The **Crew** (stagehands and props master) works behind the scenes and is responsible for setting up and running all of the equipment for a performance, including changing sets, placing and maintaining props, operating the lights, opening and closing the curtains, operating trap doors, sound effects, and assisting performers with costumes and makeup.

OTHER OPERA TERMS...

Bel canto, literally “beautiful singing,” describes the musical style of an opera that is lyrical and often very flowery.

Bravo, literally “brave” or “courageous,” is a form of applause when shouted by members of the audience at the end of an especially pleasing performance. Strictly speaking, bravo is for a single man, **brava** for a single woman and **bravi** for more than one performer.

Cadenza is a brilliant passage in an aria often improvised by the singer, usually in such a way as to best display his or her vocal talents. Cadenzas are virtuosic and rhythmically free.

Coloratura describes a voice that possesses unusual flexibility, able to sing many notes quickly over a wide range. This term is most often used to describe female voices, i.e. coloratura soprano or mezzo, but occasionally men will have this same ability.

The **Concertmaster** or **Concertmistress** is the first violinist who leads the orchestra in tuning at the beginning of each act and coordinates the strings section, deciding on the bowing so that all the bows move in unison.

Diva, literally “goddess,” refers to an important female opera star. The masculine form is **divo**.

Leitmotiv, “light-mo-teef,” is a short musical phrase associated with a particular character or event. These repeated musical themes can signal the entrance of a character, foreshadow an event, or help reveal what a character is feeling or thinking.

The **prima donna** is the leading female singer, or “first lady,” in an opera. Because of the way opera stars have behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding way. **Div**a can have the same connotation.

Tempo refers to how fast or slow the music is performed. The conductor reads the composer’s markings and sets the speed of the music.

An **understudy** is someone who learns a major role in an opera in case the lead singer can’t perform for some reason. This is also called a **cover**, i.e. Miss Trill is covering the role of Buttercup.

Take advantage of the many

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

during the Summer Festival

Opera Notes

Free previews before every performance at 1:50 p.m. or 7:15 p.m. in Williams Stables

Opera à la Carte

Staged opera scenes performed by members of the Bonfils-Stanton Artists Training Program on select dates at 1:15 p.m. in Williams Stables. \$8 for tickets (\$5 for season subscribers)

The Face on the Barroom Floor

Cabaret opera performed by members of the Bonfils-Stanton Artists Training Program on select dates at 1:15 p.m. \$8 for tickets (\$5 for season subscribers)

Salon Recitals

Solo recitals by members of the renowned Bonfils-Stanton Artists Training Program on select Saturdays and Sundays at 11:45a.m. in the Teller House, includes lunch \$25 for lunch and performance

Family Matinees

Members of the Bonfils-Stanton Artists Training Program perform all of the roles in full mainstage productions

La Traviata – Tuesday, August 7 at 2:30 p.m.

Cinderella – Tuesday, August 14 at 2:30 p.m.

\$7 for children, \$12 for adults (must be accompanied by at least one child age 6 or older)

Take a Child to the Opera

Enhance your Family Matinee experience! Enjoy lunch with opera singers before the performance and additional fun activities unique to Central City \$24 for children, \$29 for accompanying adults

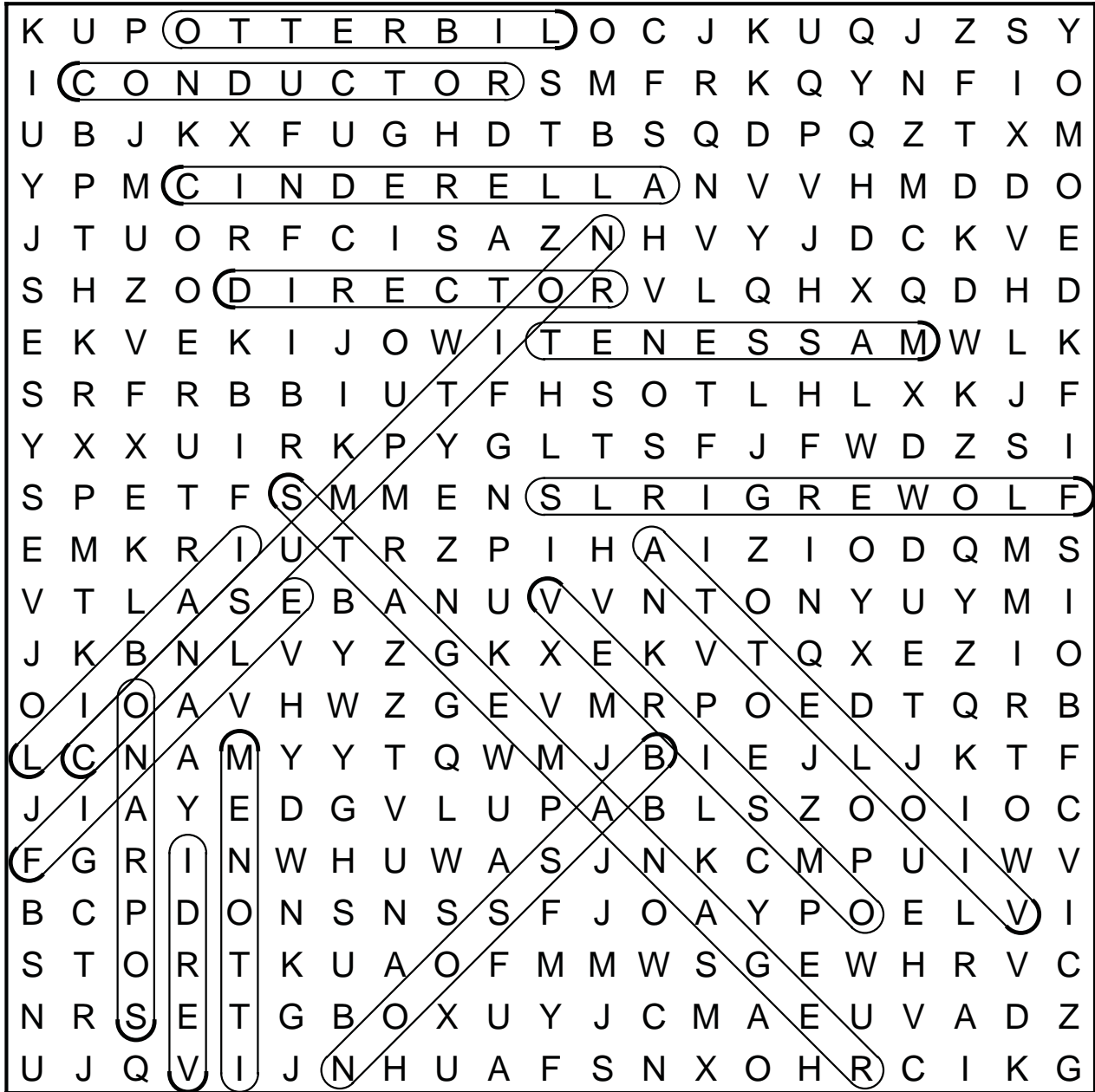
Sponsored by the Central City Opera House Association Guild.

Opera Adventure for students

July 15-29

In collaboration with Central City Opera, the Colorado Springs Conservatory offers a two-week intensive that includes immersion studies in drama, opera and musical theater. Students ages 14-19 are in residence for 10 days at Fountain Valley School (south of Colorado Springs) and then move to Central City where they will attend all four operas, participate in coachings and classes, and perform their own scenes for a public audience in Williams Stables. For further information, call the Colorado Springs Conservatory at 719-577-4556 or the Central City Opera Education department at 303-292-6500.

WORD SEARCH KEY
(Word Search on page 12)



- | | | | |
|----------|---------|--------------|-------------|
| Violetta | Verdi | consumption | flowergirls |
| libretto | LiBai | Cinderella | Massenet |
| Bassoon | Verismo | stagemanager | Menotti |
| director | soprano | finale | conductor |

Resources and Acknowledgements

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THE SAINT OF BLEECKER STREET

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CENTRAL CITY HISTORY AND MISCELLANY

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