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The Little Prince Lands in Lexington

On April 14, a magical voyager from Asteroid B-612 lands at the Lexington Opera House in UK Opera Theatre's production of a new opera by Rachel Portman based on the timeless children's classic, *The Little Prince*, by the French aviator/philosopher Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The author of the novella had taken refuge in New York to escape the German occupation of France during World War II, and the poignant story reflects his anguish at a world shattered by man's inhumanity to man. As the opera opens, a Pilot forced down by a sandstorm in the north African desert is diverted from his plight by the sudden appearance of a little boy with golden curls and a sweet voice – the Little Prince – who asks, "If you please . . . draw me a sheep." The Pilot (based on Saint-Exupéry himself, during his pre-War years as a mail pilot flying between France and northern Africa) is intrigued by this unusual introduction, and gradually draws out the story of the Prince's extra-terrestrial origin and the purpose for his tour of the galaxies: to learn the meaning of life and the true nature of love.

Composer Portman (who won an Academy Award for her music in the film *Emma* in 1996) calls *The Little*



Jamie Tennant is the Little Prince in UK Opera Theatre's production of the Rachel Portman opera.

LOS Photo by Pat Trotter

Prince "an extraordinarily beautiful and evocative tale of wisdom and innocence . . . [Saint-Exupéry's] universal message that adults lose sight of the important things in life as they lose the ability to see clearly the essence of things."

UKOT stage director Jim Rodgers (recently retired from UK's Department of Theatre) believes that Saint-Exupéry wrote the story not exclusively for children, but "for the child within all adults". He further noted that one reviewer has characterized the book as

(Continued on page 3)

BRavo!

Hooray for Hollywood!

Annual Prelude Party is Fast Approaching

LOS photo by Pat Trotter



Former Lexington Mayor, Pam Miller, clearly enjoyed her job as wine pourer during the 2004 Prelude Party.

The idea of wining and dining guests at a fundraiser evolved from a meeting between LOS members and Roger Leasor, president of Liquor Barn.

Conditions look favorable for a vintage Prelude to "It's a Grand Night for Singing" as the Lexington Opera Society's fundraiser approaches its fourth year. Exciting auction items, celebrity wine-pourers, and a theme with great popular appeal set the stage for the best Prelude yet. "Hooray for Hollywood," on May 14 at the Downtown Arts Center, will feature songs from musicals made especially for the Big Screen. Students from UK Opera Theatre will perform an array of well-known hits sure to please music lovers. "We have never featured Hollywood shows before and we wanted to do something a bit different from what we have done in the past," said Everett McCorvey, director of UK Opera Theatre.

The 2004 Prelude drew 275 guests and raised nearly \$40,000 to support

UKOT's growing programs. Tickets are \$100 and LOS hopes to draw a sell-out crowd this year. "My vision is to see that the Prelude becomes the hottest ticket in town," said LOS President Dr. Michael Morrill. "And because opera and wine go so well together, I would like to see this become the premier wine event in the Bluegrass."

George Privett, this year's Prelude Chairman, was LOS President when Prelude was conceived four years ago. He hopes that the event soon reaches a level that "raises \$100,000 and has people buzzing and waiting anxiously for their invitations."

The idea of wining and dining guests at a fundraiser evolved from a meeting between LOS members and Roger Leasor, president of Liquor Barn. In addition to pledging \$10,000 in annual sponsorship, Leasor suggested that his team help LOS organize a fundraiser that included wine tasting. It seemed like a natural pairing, considering the long and storied opera-wine connection. Many of the best-known operas contain scenes in which wine enlivens the festivities, among them *Otello*, *La Boheme*, and *Faust*.

The first Prelude was a learning experience, Privett recalled. It featured a reverse raffle for a \$5,000 grand prize and a \$1,000 second

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Little Prince cont'd

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"as fine a masquerade of children's literature as was ever created".

Rodgers grew up in a family of dancers (his mother and his sister), and his deep awareness of stage movement prompted him to invite choreographer Laurie Fields (Director, Dancer's Studio) to serve as the Associate Director for the production. Each one of the singers (except the Pilot) is mirrored by a dancer; Rodgers explained that the singers convey the spirit of Saint-Exupéry's fable while the dancers provide a continual flow of visual images to accompany Portman's music, as do the author's charming drawings in the original book.

Michael Turay is the Pilot, Jamie Tennant sings the role of the Little Prince, McKinzie Applegate dances the role, and Olivia Long appears as the Prince's lovely but demanding Rose. Animals from the desert teach

the Prince about life on Earth: a Desert Fox (Mary Jo Nelson) shows him the meaning of freedom, and a Snake (Nathan Munson) effects his return to his tiny asteroid. Other figures – the King, the Drunkard, the Vain Man, the Lamplighter and the Geographer – people the planets visited by the Prince before his arrival on Earth. Appropriately for an opera designed to appeal to 'children of all ages', *The Little Prince* features a children's chorus of 16 voices, prepared by Courtney Turay (see story page 6), plus 10 young dance students and 9 adult dancers from Fields' dance studio. In recent years, UKOT has rented many of its production elements from Virginia Opera and other companies, but *The Little Prince* features a new set created by Scott Sherman (technical director for Actors' Guild) and new costumes by Marie Henderson. Tedrin Blair Lindsay is the Musical Director.

UK Opera Theatre's production of *The Little Prince* will be the first staging of this new work by a university opera program, a realization of UKOT Director Everett McCorvey's commitment to staging works by American composers. The work was commissioned in 2003 by Houston Grand Opera, in conjunction with four other regional opera companies.

There will be four evening performances (7:30 p.m.) of *The Little Prince* (April 14, 16, 21, and 23) at the Lexington Opera House. Tickets are available from the Singletary Center Box Office (257-4929; or www.uky.edu/SCFA).

He further noted that one reviewer has characterized the book "as fine a masquerade of children's literature as was ever created".



LOS Photo by Pat Trotter

Michael Turay is The Pilot in the UKOT production of *The Little Prince*.

Bravo Reception—A Sneak Preview

Bravo Society members joined Lexington Opera Society board members for an afternoon reception at the "K-House" (home of the UK Opera Theatre) to catch a preview of the upcoming production of *The Little Prince* and learn more about the "town and gown" partnership between LOS and UKOT.



The reception was a good opportunity for Bravo Committee members to become acquainted and discuss their favorite operas.



Dr. Everett McCorvey told the crowd that it took 100 people working behind the scenes to present the recent production of *Madama Butterfly*. "We could not have done it without volunteers" said UKOT's director.



The music preview for *the Little Prince* had a profound effect on the audience.



A delicious spread was laid out for the reception by Bravo Committee members.

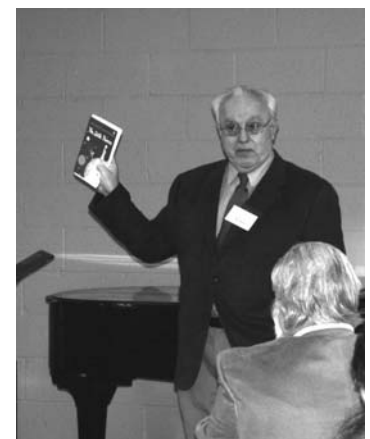
Community support for the UK Opera program contributes to its success .



LOS President, Dr. Michael Morrill shared some ideas for LOS support of UKOT's programs



Michael Turay (*The Pilot*) and Jamie Tennant (*The Little Prince*) performed segments of the opera for Bravo Committee and LOS Board members during the reception.



Jim Rodgers, director of UKOT's production of *The Little Prince* discussed his decision to make it an opera-ballet.

Prelude party cont'd

LOS photo by Pat Trotter



Mary Powell hands Prelude organizer, Dr. George Privett, his silent auction number.

(Continued from page 2)

prize. "The Board Members put in a lot of hard work, and we heard many people say they would have paid \$75 for the evening without the raffle."

In year two, LOS omitted the raffle and 250 guests came anyway. Last year's Prelude included the addition of celebrity wine-pourers, and LOS board member Pam Miller suggested that former mayors (including herself) and current mayor Teresa Isaac do the honors. The event was a big hit, thanks in part to the decorating skills of Deborah Drury, who has volunteered to serve again as consultant.

This year's Prelude decor will capture the glamour and elegance of Hollywood in its heyday. Well-known horse breeders will pour the wine. And so far, board members have received commitments for an array of auction items, from an Isaac Duncan III sculpture to 'getaway' weeks at vacation homes to fabulous wines donated by Liquor Barn.

While Prelude remains a focus for LOS fundraising each year, both Privett and

Morrill point out that the event is intended to help publicize "It's a Grand Night for Singing" in particular and UK Opera Theatre's programs in general.

"I believe that Prelude helps to raise the community awareness of UKOT simply because 'Grand Night' itself helps to raise the awareness," Morrill said. "There are still some folks in this area who have not been bitten by the opera bug yet and may not attend a full-length opera. However, they will come out for Grand Night because its reputation speaks for itself. And once we get them in their seats, folks will realize the talent that abounds at UKOT and throughout this city."

Jacqueline Beasley

***Mark your calendars
now....***

***UKOT Production of
"The Little Prince"
Lexington Opera House
April 14, 16, 21 and 23***

***2005 Prelude Party
Wine Tasting, Silent Auction
and Entertainment
Downtown Arts Center
May 14 at 7 PM***

***Grand Night for Singing
Singletary Center
June 11, 12 & 13***

Children's Chorus Essential to *Little Prince*

Walking into the rehearsal room at the K-House at night, you might wonder if you are in the right place for the *Little Prince* rehearsal. Buzzing all around are tiny dancers in pink ballet costumes and a separate group of people all under 4 feet tall standing along the back wall. Rachel Portman's opera, *The Little Prince*, relies on the voices of children to convey the heart of the story. The children's chorus, directed by Children's Chorus Director, Courtney Turay, has more to say in this timeless tale than any single character. It is the chorus that sings the most important words in the opera: "eyes are blind, look only with the heart".

The 16 children, ages 8 – 12, who make up the children's chorus for the UK production were selected at local auditions conducted by Courtney Turay, *Little Prince* stage director Jim Rodgers, chorus assistant Mary Joy Nelson, and music director Tedrin Blair Lindsay over the winter months. Each aspiring vocalist prepared one musical piece for the audition and was also asked to do some vocal exercises. Most of these young singers have some vocal performance background. Several have sung in the Lexington Singers Children's Chorus and two, Will Handshoe and Hanna Fister, appeared in UKOT's production of *Street Scene*, but for the majority of them *The Little Prince* is their first opera. "The music is hard," says Courtney Turay as she listens to them rehearse a passage. "They are really doing very well."

Not unlike vocal coaching for any singer in an



Courtney Turay and members of the children's chorus (from left, Daniel Baumgardner, Miranda Holm-Hudson, Elijah Hack, Grace Bixler and Caroline Blake) during a typical Monday night rehearsal at the 1st Presbyterian Church.

opera, Turay stresses the importance of enunciation and diction and reminds the children to look out at the audience as they sing so their voices project outward from the stage. Jim Rodgers asks them to think about what their words are saying and to whom they are directed. During the rehearsal for one scene in act two, he reminded the choristers, "You are echoing what the fox just said to the Little Prince – it's your job to help the fox give the message". Singing and acting at the same time is a new experience for some of the chorus

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Half notes.....

Cincinnati Opera presents their 2005 Summer Festival featuring such noted singers as Ruth Ann Swenson, Denyce Graves and Angela M. Brown. The schedule is:

La Boheme

June 16, 18 and 24

The Barber of Seville

June 23 and 25

Margaret Garner

July 14, 16 and 22

Rigoletto

July 21 and 23

For Information (513) 241-2742

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Children's chorus cont'd

It is the chorus that sings what are perhaps the most important words in the opera "eyes are blind, look only with the heart".



Rehearsing scenes from *The Little Prince* are chorus members Hanna Fister (l), Ashtin Morgan and Elijah Hack (rear)

(Continued from page 6) members, made all the more difficult because they are rehearsing in a room where the walls of the set are marked off only by tape placed strategically on the floor. They have to use their imaginations, and so do the

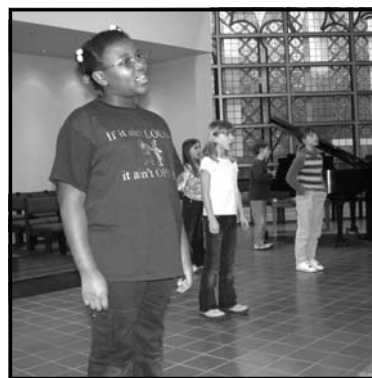
seasoned performers, because they are not rehearsing on the stage with the set in place. Mary Joy Nelson, who plays the role of the fox, said "when they learn their harmonies and then have to learn their staging, it seems the music goes out the window. You have to make sure they can keep it all together." At rehearsal Courtney reminds them "your singing has to be magnificent, and your acting has to be magnificent."

When asked "what is the best thing

about being in the opera?" the chorus members gleefully shout "singing!" Asked about the hardest part, they all agree that memorizing the difficult music and lyrics is "really lots of work". For some, making new friends is another bonus for being part of an opera production.

The magic of *The Little Prince* is sure to have a lasting effect on these 16 children, especially as they learn and sing the important lessons the play teaches us all.

Pat Trotter



Julia McCorvey and her fellow choristers sing "It's a man-made day in a heaven-made night" as they practice their staging.

Photos for this article by Pat Trotter

Keeneland in the Winners Circle for Children

The Keeneland Association has graciously awarded a \$10,000 grant to support the Lexington Opera Society's school outreach program. The grant will bring the production of the children's opera, "Little Red's Most Unusual Day," to 20 or more schools across the Commonwealth which otherwise would not be able to af-

ford to bring the production to their community. The opera, based on the story of Little Red Riding Hood, includes music by great operatic composers in a familiar context. Previous children's operas sponsored by LOS have included *The Three Little Pigs* and *The Billy Goats Gruff*.



LOS Tote Bag and other logo items are available at Joseph Beth Booksellers and at all UK Opera Theatre performances!

All proceeds benefit the Lexington Opera Society and the UK Opera Theatre



Our newest sponsor!

Pat Gerhard, owner of Third Street Stuff and Coffee, has signed on as our new "Coffee Sponsor"!

Third Street Stuff and Coffee will be serving up its delicious coffees at LOS-sponsored events such as our "Prelude to Grand Night" (May 14, 2005 Downtown Arts Center) fundraiser and the MET Auditions in October.

Pat will also provide coffees for our performers 'behind the scenes' at the Singletary Center at all three performances of *Grand Night for Singing* in June (June 11 & 12 /7:30 PM and June 13/2PM).

*Congratulations
to
Marilyn Duncan
Winner of the DVD
Player and DVD of the
UKOT performance of
Madama Butterfly*



Opera! Make it Personal

Volunteer to help with upcoming productions and for other activities of the Bravo Committee.

Email Bravo president Linde Couch-
lindecouch@alltel.net

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