



Special points of interest:

- Michael Walsh
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- Spring Workshop Report
- Phyllis Jenness remembers

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Summer 2005

4th Annual Prelude A Smash Hit

Lexington Opera Society's fourth annual fund raiser, "Prelude to *It's a Grand Night for Singing*," on May 14 at the Downtown Arts Center, was a huge success. Over 250 people enjoyed a gala evening of star-studded excitement as guests dressed for the Oscars arrived on the red carpet and were greeted by paparazzi, guest media hosts -- TV18's Dia Davidson and Bill Meck -- and LOS board members. Prelude's glittering evening included guest wine pourers from the thoroughbred industry, including Anita Madden (Hamburg Place Farm), Arnold Kirkpatrick (equine author and investment advisor), Nick Nicholson (President of Keeneland), Robert and Blythe Clay (Three Chimneys Farm), Lucy Young Hamilton and Bill Hamilton (Overbrook Farm), Cheryl Schloss (Castle Rock Stud), Walt Robertson (Fasig-Tipton auctioneer) and Geoffrey Russell (Director of Sales, Keeneland).

Other celebrities present and enjoying the evening were actor Steve Zahn, Arianne deKwiatkowski of Calumet Farm, UK basketball star Cliff Hagan and his wife Martha, Past Mayor Pam Miller, Past Vice Mayor Isabel Yates and sadly departing UK Chancellor and great friend of UK Opera, Mike Neitzel.

The Downtown Arts Center was all dressed up in the style of Hollywood musicals and Oscars Awards ceremonies, thanks to the creative design of Deborah Drury, props from Corman's Marketplace, Bryant's Rent-All, and Liquor Barn, and floral donations from florists E. Stephen Hein and Howard Doyle. Annette's Catering and Liquor Barn provided tasty hors d'oeuvres plus Annette's innovative cheesecake bar and huge apple pies. Wine tasting included selections of 12 moderately priced locally available reds and whites selected by LOS President, Mi-

chael Morrill and Liquor Barn's Michael Sorg. The celebrity wine pourers were joined by expert staff from Liquor Barn who described the qualities of each wine. LOS's President Elect, Dr. Ray Garman, presided over the sampling of a few of his favorite brews for the beer lovers in the crowd.

A fabulous silent auction of over 100 items featured many different wines, Champagne, original works of art, tickets to arts and sporting events, sports memorabilia, gift certificates, bridles worn by Skip Away and Winning Colors, gift baskets, cigars, services and books, just to mention a few. Lexington area merchants and individuals were very generous in their donations of items and services. Linde Couch, Becky Eblen, and Jo Ann Gillaspay headed up the Silent Auction Committee, and Jo Ann provided invaluable computer support, assuring efficient check-in, auction procedures, tabulations and check-out.

After the guests retired to the Black Box Theatre with its wonderful set, Dia Davidson and Bill Meck started off the evening with welcomes and introductions. Fasig Tipton's auctioneer, Walt Robertson, provided for a fast paced exciting auction of twelve great items, including an Isaac Duncan metal sculpture (donated by the sculptor), a ride for three in a vintage bi-plane (donated by Dr. Ray Garman), a private opera concert with Lillian Roberts and Tedrin Blair Lindsay, a trip to the Lyric Opera in Chicago for the opening night of *Carmen* with Denyce Graves (donated by Bluegrass Airport), a Cincinnati Reds Home Plate autographed by Johnny Bench (from Dr. Michael Morrill), an oriental rug from Lexington Furniture, a French antique coaching lamp from Jayne Thompson

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BRAVO!

Phyllis Jenness Remembers Reminisces of Opera in Lexington

... the organizers thought, 'If you do an opera well, everyone will love opera.'



With recent successes like *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Coronation of Poppea*, *Madama Butterfly* and *The Little Prince*, it's hard to imagine a time when there was little or no opera in Lexington. The following article is based on a presentation by Phyllis Jenness at a holiday gathering of the LOS board in 2001, titled "The Secret History of OCK (Opera of Central Kentucky)". Dr. Jenness, a long-time voice teacher at the University of Kentucky, is one of the original founders of OCK, known today as the Lexington Opera Society. We offer her reflections as the first in a series of articles that will take a look at the history and development of opera in Central Kentucky.

"One hundred years ago there was the Opera House in Lexington, but no opera. Most of the presentations there were of the vaudeville type. When I came to Lexington in 1954, the only performances of opera in town were done at UK in the Guignol Theatre, where an opera was done one summer and a musical the next. At one point, Bizet's *Carmen* was produced with James King singing the role of Don Jose, his first appearance as a tenor. King had come to UK in 1950 as a baritone. During 1954-55, he consulted with various instructors and was told he was actually a

tenor. After a difficult year of transition, he was officially a tenor.

"There were three attempts to create a community opera company before Opera of Central Kentucky (OCK). One of these attempts in the early 1960's was a production of '*Hansel and Gretel*.' Later there was another '*Hansel and Gretel*,' plus a performance of '*Down in the Valley*.' Each time, the organizers thought, 'If you do an opera well, everyone will love opera.' However, no matter how assiduously everyone worked, it was not that simple, and all three attempts failed. Then in the mid-1980's, two events portended something different for opera in Lexington. First, Diana Davidson Pierce returned to Lexington. She was a graduate of Lafayette High School and Oberlin College, a mezzo-soprano who had a substantial career in opera and possessed a real interest in community opera. Her husband, Steven, also a singer, had just started law school at UK, so they settled here in Lexington. Second, Mayor Scotty Baesler promoted a cultural initiative in Lexington and a cultural consultant was hired in 1986 to evaluate the 'arts scene'. One of the consultant's conclusions, among others, was that opera was not a high priority in Lexington. She recommended that UK join with members of the community to form a 'town and gown' opera company, but this recommended union did not come to fruition.

"However, in 1989, a group of people in the community started Opera of Lexington, Inc., headed by Diana Davidson Pierce. I suggested the name 'Community Opera of Lexington', thus creating the acronym 'cool.' (This idea didn't fly.) Within a year, the name was changed to Opera of Central Kentucky. In the spring of 1989, there was an opera gala at the Lexington Opera House to acquaint the community with opera and to raise money. Diana's idea was to have a regional opera company where all casting could be done with voices in the region, rather than bringing in singers for the leading roles as Kentucky Opera does. Ten to fifteen singers formed the core of this group. They got off to a very

(Continued on page 4)

Prelude party cont'd

After the guests retired to the Black Box Theatre with its wonderful set, Dia Davidson and Bill Meck started off the evening with welcomes and introductions.

Antiques, a Tempur-Pedic mattress, a box at Keeneland from Dr. Marina Yarbrogarrett and a \$1000 Window Treatment from Blind Basics. The highlight of the auction was a complete Vintage Wine Cellar of 56 bottles of wine plus a wine cooler donated by Liquor Barn which brought \$7,200. Bidding on all of these items was brisk and generous.

A perfect evening was topped off with wonderful entertainment by members of the cast of "It's a Grand Night for Singing" and gave a taste of what was to come. Songs were rendered by Johnnie Dean, Roger Leasor, Jennifer Parr, Everett and Alicia McCorvey, Janet Corum and Jan Sullivan with musical direction and accompaniment by Tedrin Blair Lindsay. The outstanding entertainment ended much too quickly and left everyone ready to hear more at "Grand Night."

While the guests were waiting to collect their winning bids, they were treated to complimentary photographs of themselves by photographers B. J. Privett and Chris Privett taken on the red carpet as they arrived earlier in the evening. "Prelude 2005" raised over \$35,000 for the evening to benefit UK Opera Theatre! Our hats are off to all the celebrity guests, LOS Prelude Committee members, Bravo volunteers, sponsors, donors, and guests who made this evening possible. Particular thanks go to Sheila Ferrell, Roger Leasor and the staff of Liquor Barn, the LOS Season Sponsor as well as donor of most of the wine items auctioned. We also give special thanks to Deborah Drury for her design, Bryant's Rent-All for providing all the rental items, Walt Robertson (the auctioneer), all of the celebrity wine pourers, the cast members of "It's a Grand Night for Singing," and the staff of the Downtown Arts Center.

Anita Madden (right) and Lucy Young were among the celebrity wine-pourers at this year's Prelude.



Photos on this page provided by Brian Tremain



Bill Meck and Dia Davidson of WLEX-TV



Newly elected president of LOS, Ray Garman

Series to feature Martina Arroyo

Ann Scott Mason and Ralph Mason Vocal Arts Series

This fall UK Opera Theatre kicks off the first full season of the Ann Scott Mason and Ralph Mason Vocal Arts series with a three day series of lectures by renowned Metropolitan Opera star, Martina Arroyo.

Ms. Arroyo will present a series of "role preparation" lectures for UK opera students. She will be followed by John Wustman who will present a three day master class on "The Art of Schubert" for singers and pianists. Next in the series will be Kevin Murphy (coach and assistant conductor for the Metropolitan Opera) and Diana Soviero who will conduct master classes in conjunction with the Metropolitan National Council Auditions in November. These lectures/workshops are open to the public. Check the LOS website for further details as they become available.

www.lexingtonopera.com

Opera remembrances cont'd

promising start with a production of Rossini's *Cinderella* in the spring of 1990, and the air was filled with optimism. In 1989, the first Opera Workshop was offered, and the series continues to this day.

"In 1990, Diana and UK Theatre Professor Jim Rodgers wrote 'The XYZ's of Opera' which was presented in the schools. Presentations called 'Informances' were given to various clubs and groups. The idea was to use the short programs (fifteen to twenty minutes) to publicize opera. In 1990 or 1991, fund raising began with 'Buffet Buffo' at the home of Clifton Smith. In 1991, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* was produced, but money was just not coming in as we had hoped. In December, 1991, the first full-orchestra performance of Gian Carlo Menotti's Christmas opera, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, with a young boy, Luke Gutgesell, in the title role was produced at the Lexington Opera House. Diana played the role of Amahl's mother.

Diana's idea was to have a regional opera company where all casting could be done with voices in the region,

"The financial difficulties continued. In October of 1992, the famous operatic 'twins', *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci* were produced at the Singletary Center for the Arts. The sets were skimpy and the orchestra could only be paid half their salaries

at the time of the performance. Big trouble! By 1993, things were pretty much in limbo, although Informances and 'XYZ's' continued. Then, in the spring of 1994, Diana moved to Florida.

"Enter Mary Agnes Melton! Mary Agnes was generous with her money and devoted to the cause and she, by God, wasn't going to give it up. Mary Agnes asked me to take over as Artistic Director at a time when there was literally no money, no staff, no place to perform, no nuthin'. It took some thought to consider taking her offer when there was nothing to direct, but I decided to give it a go. There were philosophical differences to be dealt with. Some people felt that if the operas could not be done on a relatively grand scale, it would be better to do nothing. Others, including Mary Agnes and I, felt we ought to do what we could.

"In May of 1995, Joseph Baber's *Samson and the Witch* and Menotti's *The Telephone* were performed at St. Michael's Episcopal Church. In the Fall of 1995, Gregory Turay sang a benefit concert. Then in December of that year, *Amahl* in its present form (without orchestra) was produced at Wesley Methodist Church. It was given there again in 1996, and in following years at Calvary Baptist Church, First Presbyterian Church, and the main branch of the Lexington Public Library. In April of 1996, Menotti's *The Medium* was performed at Singletary Cen-

ter with a dinner on stage before the performance and dessert and coffee afterward in the rehearsal hall. The production was modest but successful. There were plans for a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*, but destiny did not mean for it to happen. There were problems with dropouts, fire laws, etc.



Mary Agnes Melton

Photo by Brian Tremain

"In 1998, Dr. Everett McCorvey (Director of UK Opera Theatre and a member of the OCK Board of Directors) suggested a 'town and gown' merger, and in 1999 he submitted a formal proposal to OCK which began a new (and very successful) chapter of opera in Lexington."

Phyllis' comments have given us an overview of the development of opera in Central Kentucky up to the late nineteen-nineties. We'll continue the story in a future edition of *Bravo*.

Story prepared by Sylvia Davis

Your Fall Newsletter

Future editions of the Lexington Opera Society "Bravo" newsletter will be sent via an email web link to those for whom we have an email address. Others will continue to receive a printed copy through the mail. If you do not wish to receive BRAVO via an email message please contact

jqillaspy@insightbb.com

Walsh First Vocal Arts Series Guest Speaker

The University of Kentucky Vocal Arts Series brought renowned critic/screenwriter/novelist Michael Walsh to Lexington as its first guest speaker. Mr. Walsh's wide range of credits include, as an author: *As Time Goes By*, *Exchange Alley*, *And All the Saints*, *Who's Afraid of Classical Music*, *Who's Afraid of Opera* and *Andrew Lloyd Webber: His Life and Works*. With TIME Contributor Richard Schickel, he co-authored *Carnegie Hall: The First One Hundred Years*. On March 9, Walsh lectured in four UK classes in journalism, music, and creative writing as well as two sessions that were open to the public. The on-going program is funded by an endowment from Ann Scott Mason and Ralph Mason, long-time supporters of UK Opera Theatre.

Walsh opened his public session remarks by stating emphatically that he advocates a synthesis of the arts with market forces. The attitude that art and commerce are incompatible is false, he believes - "failure should not be the default mode of the arts." The distinguished critic believes that the concept of "art for art's sake" encourages mediocrity, because "The purpose of art is to connect heart-to-heart by illuminating the human condition and its emotional entanglements." He highly praised the writings of Charles Dickens and Herman Melville, the works of Beethoven, and the movie *Million Dollar Baby* as examples of great art that is also commercially successful.

Walsh, whose career includes both academic and working professional tracks, explained that he wanted to make people look at the world in a different way. He was sometimes intentionally provocative, as when he asked if anything good can come out of group thinking in the creative arts. For example, he questioned whether writing conferences, which he described as a hothouse environment, help or harm their participants. Are grants sometimes just an enabling culture? According to Walsh, a writer finds his calling more truly in solitude, where he develops his own voice and his own craft, than in a group situation. He advised students, "Find the thing you'd do for free, and that's the thing you'll make the most money at". Being a subsidized writer most likely ruins the product, and art bubbles to the surface through exposure to readers, collectors, and audiences, not through academic and institutional incubation.

Mr. Walsh encouraged a dialogue by asking how we are best going to serve our own art forms in America, citing Russia and Japan as countries whose state subsidies did not really help raise the

quality of their arts. And he ended his lecture by posing some provocative questions for the audience to take with them. Would it be a bad thing if the National Endowment for the Arts disappeared? Would really smart people find another way to get their work produced? Perhaps art that emerges without subsidies is real, whereas art that exists only through enormous subsidy has no effect on cultural life. Discussion was lively and concluded with unanimous support for the teaching of art appreciation in school. Walsh emphasized that saving money on arts classes in order to spend it on metal detectors is counter-productive both to the safety of our students and to our society in general.

Louise Shouse

UK Opera Theatre 2005-2006 Season

October 28th and 29th
Puccini's *Gianni Schicci*
and *Suor Angelica*

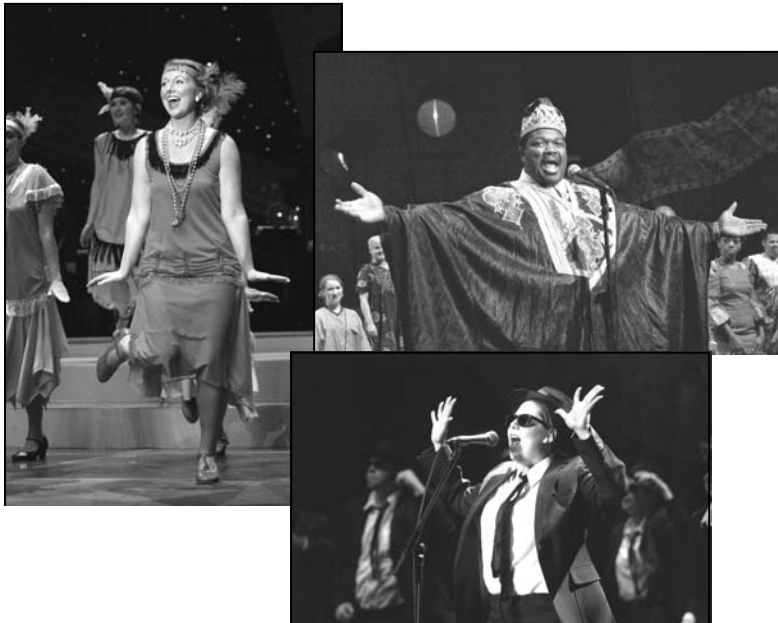
February 2nd, 4th, 9th, 11th
Mozart's *The Magic Flute*

March 31st, April 1st, 2nd, 7th, 8th
Carousel

June 9th, 10th, 11th, 16th, 17th
It's A Grand Night for Singing

**A very special "Thank you" to all our
Lexington Opera Society and
Bravo Committee volunteers,
and the helpful staff of the Down-
town Arts Center who helped make
this the smoothest, most successful
"Prelude to Grand Night" ever!**

More Performances for Grand Night in '06



UK Opera Theatre has announced that *It's a Grand Night for Singing*, one of Lexington's most popular and spectacular musical events of the year, will add two more performances for 2006. Mark your calendars now for June 9, 10, 11, 16 and 17, 2006.

Scenes from the 2005 Grand Night show courtesy of photographer Tim Collins.

Stites & Harbison, PLLC, Sponsor of *The Little Prince*

In difficult times of budget cuts in the schools, often the ax falls first and hardest on the fine arts program. LOS and UKOT believe that our mission includes making opera accessible to children, especially culturally under-served children, by finding a way to provide tickets to our performances.

In February, a generous grant arrived from Stites & Harbison, PLLC, a staunch supporter of the arts and other cultural causes in Lexington for many years. The law firm's grant funded 100 tickets for children to come to the opening night performance of *The Little Prince*. Without this scholarship assistance, none of these children could have attended.

We are convinced that music is the one language that all of us share, regardless of nationality, age and position. Music transcends time and culture to remind us how alike we all are. Music enables us to express our deepest feelings. Music is an outstanding teacher. Music is wonderful fun!

LOS, UKOT and 100 children extend our warmest thanks to Stites & Harbison, a great corporate friend in difficult times.

Half notes.....

Heartfelt thanks to our generous sponsors!



To learn more about the Lexington Opera Society visit our web site www.lexingtonopera.com for all the latest on what's happening.



LOS Spring Workshop Takes a New Turn

A special part of the 10 day workshop was the day-long workshop-within-a-workshop presented by Dr. Arlene Shrut.



The 16th annual LOS Opera Workshop (May 25 – June 3 on the UK campus) featured a special day-long Master Class with Dr. Arlene Shrut, voted 'Vocal Coach of the Year' in 2004 by *Classical Singer* magazine. Dr. Shrut appeared as a special guest artist thanks to a generous donation from LOS Board member Angela Rice. Arlene is the founder of New Triad for Collaborative Arts (www.newtriad.org), which promotes a new approach to performing intimate vocal forms such as art songs based on poems. "Song is the perfect recipe for making connections", says Dr. Shrut, and her method focuses on building fully shared musical partnerships between performers and audience through a deeper expression of all aspects of the art form.

Shrut earned two solo piano degrees from the Eastman School of Music and a Doctorate in Accompanying from the University of Southern California. She was a recipient in 1981 of a

Fulbright grant to Germany in vocal coaching and is the founder of the National Association of Accompanists and Coaches. The admired keyboard performer, who has been hailed by the *New York Times* as a "strong and sensitive pianist", brings a fresh and vibrant approach to the interpretation of many different aspects of

the vocal music repertory. She is currently a faculty member at the Julliard School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music.

Shrut's mission, as she explained to the students, is teaching singers how to connect the separate parts of a song - the words, the story, and the music. In traditional vocal education, students learn the mechanics of singing (breath control, etc.) and vocal coaches focus on tone quality and phrasing. The New Triad method extends this training a step further by emphasizing communication of the meaning of

the words and the integral relationship between the pianist and the singer. Shrut noted that modern audiences often do not know the languages of opera librettos or poems set to music, and so the singers must learn how to communicate 'what happens next', pairing closely with the piano accompanist in a duet as they progress through the aria or song. During her Master Class she worked with each of the Opera Workshop students in individual coaching sessions and then in a unique group session. Needless to say, the experience of working with this extraordinary coach and accompanist was one the students will long remember.

Throughout the 10-day Workshop, Guest Director Sally Stunkel (who directed *Madama Butterfly* for UKOT in February 2005) and Jim Rodgers (Professor Emeritus of Theatre at UK) taught acting and created a delightful final-evening program of scenes on June 3 from Cimarosa's *The Secret Marriage*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, Mozart's *Idomeneo*, Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Von Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Laurie Fields



Workshop participant, Jacob Pence, portrays Falstaff in a scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* during the Scenes Night performance.

(choreographer for UKOT's *The Little Prince* in April 2005) coached stage movement, Stephen Penn and Nan McSwain (UK School of Music) provided vocal coaching, and Daniel Townsend (a recent graduate of the UK Theatre program) taught a class in make-up



Photo by Mary Powell

An Evening of American Opera

Three one-act operas by American composers were directed by Sally Stunkel, Visiting Professor in the UK Vocal Music Program (Spring 2005), on April 29 at the Briggs Theatre by her Opera Workshop class. The opening piece was a light romantic comedy, *Fortune's Favorite* by Seymour Barb, with Jacob Cook as Richard, Alysha Graves as Emily, and Kirsten Perkins as The Waitress. *The Face on the Bar Room Floor*, a time-traveling romantic melodrama by Henry Mollicone, was inspired by a narrative poem written in 1877 by H. Antoine D'Arcy after a chance encounter with a drunken artist in a Colorado bar. Xue-Lian Li appeared as Isabelle and Colleen Lauve as the eponymous Madeleine, with Yuell (Chuck) Chandler singing the dual roles of Larry/Matt, and Owen Sammons as Tom/John. *The Power of Xingu*, by James Legg, expertly captured Edith Wharton's sly commentary on the literary pretensions of a ladies luncheon club in her short story (Xingu). Stephen Penn was vocal coach and piano accompanist for the first two operas, and coach/accompanist Nan McSwain was assisted by Davy Anderson (percussionist) for the final opera.

Photo caption:

The cast of The Power of Xingu (left to right): Rachel Farrar (Mrs. Roby), Colleen Lauve (Mrs. Leavitt), Tiffany Fox (Osric Dane), Ashleigh Kreider (Mrs. Ballinger), Simona Oravcova (Mrs. Garrett), and Karmesha Peake (Mrs. Harrow).

Thank You!



*Season sponsor of the Lexington
Opera Society*

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