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An appreciation and analysis of the 'Standard Repertory' of opera

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## **Review: A Hilarious “Impresario” Creates a “Rossignol” Land of Enchantment – Santa Fe Opera, August 1, 2014**

**August 2nd, 2014**

The state of New Mexico styles itself as the “Land of Enchantment”. The state’s major opera company, the Santa Fe Opera, created its own Land of Enchantment, a mythical China inspired by Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale, “The Nightingale”.

The extraordinary evening is the product of the brilliant mind of Michael Gieleta, a Polish born British director of opera and legitimate theater, whose mentors have included Giorgio Strehler and Sir Nicholas Hytner.

[Below: Below: Polish-born British Director Michael Gieleta; edited image, based on an Albert Zawada photograph from [wysockieobcasa.pl](#).]



Gieleta merged two seemingly disparate operatic pieces, Mozart “Der Schauspieldirektor” (translated as “The Impresario” and Stravinsky’s short opera “Le Rossignol”.

“The Impresario”, is Mozart’s short comic musical interlude that dates from 1786, the same year as he composed “The Marriage of Figaro”. The five pieces it contains so closely resemble the style of “Figaro” that one could imagine Mozart moving arias and ensembles from one to the other.

In Gieleta’s hands the impresario is named Yuri Yussupovich (played by baritone Anthony Michaels-Moore) who struggles with producing opera in the early 20th century, after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

Emigre opera stars escaping the revolution have made opera casting a buyer’s market, but none of the three divas under consideration wish to concede being cast in the most prestigious role with the highest wage.

[Below: Opera company general director Yuri Yussupovich (Anthony Michaels-Moore, left) gets a briefing on the company’s financial situation from business manager Otto van der Puff (Kevin Burdette; edited image, based on a Ken Howard photograph, courtesy of the Santa Fe Opera.)]



His finance guru is Otto van der Puff, yet another zany assignment for Kevin Burdette [see [Buff Buffo: An Interview with Kevin Burdette](#)].

Puff tries to persuade Yussupovich to scuttle his intent to produce an “art for art’s sake” Stravinsky opera and to mount instead a popular work that people want to see.

A master of rapid, tongue-twisting comic wordplay, Burdette had the audience in stitches during a wacky patter song, and secured the kind of roaring ovation at song’s end to which he has become justifiably accustomed.

The dueling divas themselves conspired to outdo themselves in over-the-top routines. Madcap allusions to such operatic characters as Tosca and Salome will amuse the veteran opera-goer.

[Below: Discussing who should have the lead role in “Le Rossignol” are from left to right, Adellina Vocedoro-Gambalunghi (Erin Morley), Yuri Yussupovich (Anthony Michaels-Moore), Vlada Vladimirescu (Brenda Rae, in blue top) and Chlotichilda Krone (Meredith Arwady, in green dress and furs) edited image, based on a Ken Howard photograph, courtesy of the Santa Fe Opera.]



The audition of Adellina Vocedoro-Gambalunghi (soprano Erin Morley) was not only embellished by satirical operatic gestures but were continuously framed by two very funny (and very athletic) ballet dancers.

The Rumanian diva Vlada Vladimirescu (soprano Brenda Rae) camped her way through the jokes about the Transylvanian sub-species of vampire and presented herself as a package deal with hubby Vladimir Vladimirescu (tenor Bruce Sledge).

Mezzo-contralto Meredith Arwady, in the role of the Chlotichilda Krone – not just over-the-top, but over-the-hill – sang Don Giovanni’s (interpolated) *Champagne Aria* in something resembling the original key.

[Below: the Fisherman (Bruce Sledge, standing inside grand piano) sails across the stage; edited image, based on a Ken Howard photograph, courtesy of the Santa Fe Opera.]



She has an ace-in-the-hole, however. Her current squeeze is a banker (bass-baritone David Govertsen) of unlimited wealth, willing to finance the opera’s production costs and cast salaries, as long as Madame Krone gets a role.

Mme. Krone agrees to take on the role of Death. Financial backing assured at this modest price, Stravinsky’s “Rossignol”, the Impresario’s “art for art’s sake” piece will be performed.

As an added bonus, it turned out to be something the “a work that people *want* to see”.

[Below: the Emperor of China (Anthony Michaels-Moore, center, standing) appears, surrounded by his subjects; edited image, based on a Ken Howard photograph, courtesy of the Santa Fe Opera.]



### *Andersen’s and Stravinsky’s Tale of the Nightingale*

Stravinsky’s opera follows Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale closely. The courtiers of the Emperor of China persuade a Nightingale to entertain the emperor, who loves the bird’s song.

However, the Emperor of Japan presents the Emperor of China with a mechanical nightingale, which impresses the the latter. The real nightingale, hurt, flies away.

In time, the Emperor of China is on his deathbed. The mechanical nightingale is broken. The real one flies to his bedroom and sings, impressing Death.

The nightingale persuades Death to restore the Chinese Emperor to health, on condition that it continues to sing.

[Below: the Japanese emperor's emissaries (in center, second floor) present the Emperor of China (Anthony Michaels-Moore, standing left, with outstretched arm; edited image, based on a Ken Howard photograph, courtesy of the Santa Fe Opera.)]



### ***The Impresario Creates the Opera***

In Gieleta's staging, mundane elements of the Impresario's office, are transformed into magical features in the Chinese Emperor's realm.

Sledge's Vladimir Vladimirescu is cast as the Fisherman, whose re-occurring plaintive song seems to be the human equivalent of the nightingale's.

(One imagines that Stravinsky was influenced by his personal orchestration teacher, composer Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who infused his semi-historical, semi-fairy-tale opera "Sadko" with dreamily exotic elements.

In fact, I personally find the "Rossignol" fisherman's song reminiscent of "Sadko's most familiar musical passage, the Song of the Indian Trader, most often called the *Song of India*.)

[Below: the mechanical nightingale performs; edited image, based on a Ken Howard photograph, courtesy of the Santa Fe Opera.]



### ***The Structure of "Rossignol"***

"Rossignol" is divided into three short acts, the first of which was composed several years earlier, in what many regard shows his mentoring by Rimsky-Korsakov.

The brilliant style with its revolutionary incorporation of musical dissonance that Stravinsky later developed in his great ballets *Firebird* and *The Rites of Spring* is evident in the two later acts, composed years later for the opera and ballet impresario, Sergei Diaghilev (whom Yuri, the Impresario, seems very specifically to represent.)

At Diaghilev's request, "Rossignol" was completed and put on a double bill with Stravinsky's new ballet, *The Rites of Spring*.

Thus, the year 2014 represents the centenary of both the completed "Rossignol" and one of the greatest of 20th century ballets.

[Below: the Nightingale (Erin Morley, right) has secured the recovery of the Emperor of China (Anthony Michaels-Moore, left); edited image, based on a Ken Howard photograph, courtesy of the Santa Fe Opera.]



The cast of “Rossignol” is comprised of Erin Morley as the Nightingale, Anthony Michaels-Moore as the Emperor of China., Bruce Sledge as the Fisherman, Brenda Rae as the Cook, Kevin Burdette as the Chamberlain, David Govertsen as the Bonze, and Meredith Arwady as Death.

The principal dancers included soloists Jenna Siladie, Yoni Rose and Annie Rosen. The dance ensemble included Anthony Bocconi, Jesse Campbell, Reed Luplau, Shane Rutkowski, Xiaoxiao Wang and Jonathan Royce Wyndham.

Kenneth Montgomery conducted. James Macnamara created the Scenic Design, Fabio Toblini the costumes. Christopher Akerlind was responsible for Lighting, Andrzej Goulding for projections. Sean Curran was Choreographer.

[Below: Igor Stravinsky at age 33 in the Paris of 1915, the year that followed the premieres of “Le Rossignol” and the ballet “The Rites of Spring”; resized image of the Jacques-Emile Blanche oil painting.]



### Recommendation

I enthusiastically recommend the Double Bill of Mozart’s “Impresario” and Stravinsky’s “Le Rossignol” both to the veteran opera goer and to a person new to opera.

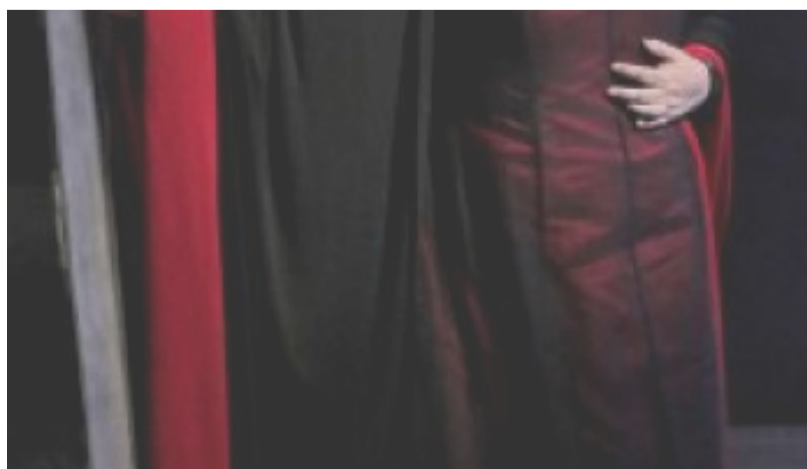
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The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the page "Opera Warhorses". The page cover photo features a black background with a small image of two opera performers and the text "Opera War..." and "375 likes". Below the cover is a "Like Page" button. The post itself has a profile picture of the same two performers, the name "Opera Warhorses", and a timestamp of "4 hrs". The text of the post reads: "My review of San Francisco Opera's September 27th performance of Verdi's 'Luisa Miller' has been posted at [www.operawarhorses.com](http://www.operawarhorses.com). In my review I wrote that "'Luisa Miller' is based on the play Kabale und Liebe by the German playwright".

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