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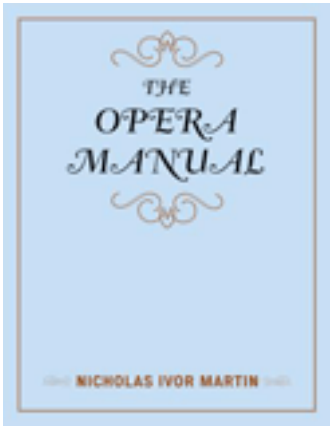
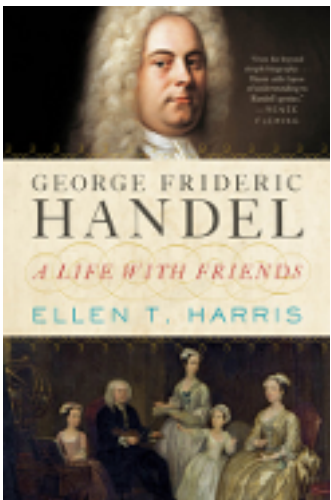
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RECENTLY IN PERFORMANCES

West Wind: A new song-cycle by Sally Beamish
In a recent article in BBC Music Magazine tenor James Gilchrist reflected on the reason why early–nineteenth–century England produced no corpus of art song to match the German lieder of Schumann, Schubert and others, despite the great flowering of English Romantic poetry during this period.

Florencia en el Amazonas, NYCO
With the New York Premiere of *Florencia en el Amazonas*, the New York City Opera Steps Out of the Shadows of the Past

Idomeneo, re di Creta, Garsington
Opportunities to see *Idomeneo* are not so frequent as they might be, certainly not so frequent as they should be.

Don Carlo in San Francisco
Not merely *Don Carlo*, but the five–act *Don Carlo* in the 1886 Modena version! The welcomed esotericism of San Francisco Opera’s extraordinary spring season.

Jenůfa in San Francisco
The early summer San Francisco Opera season has the feel of a classy festival. There is an introduction of Spanish director Calixto Bieito to American audiences, a five–act *Don Carlo* and two awaited, inevitable role debuts, Karita Mattila as Kostelnička and Malin Bystrom as Janacek’s *Jenůfa*.

Musings on the “American Ring”
Now that the curtain has long fallen on the third and last performance of the *Ring* cycle at the Washington National Opera (WNO), it is safe to say that the long–anticipated production has been an unqualified success for the company, director Francesca Zambello, and conductor Philippe Auguin.

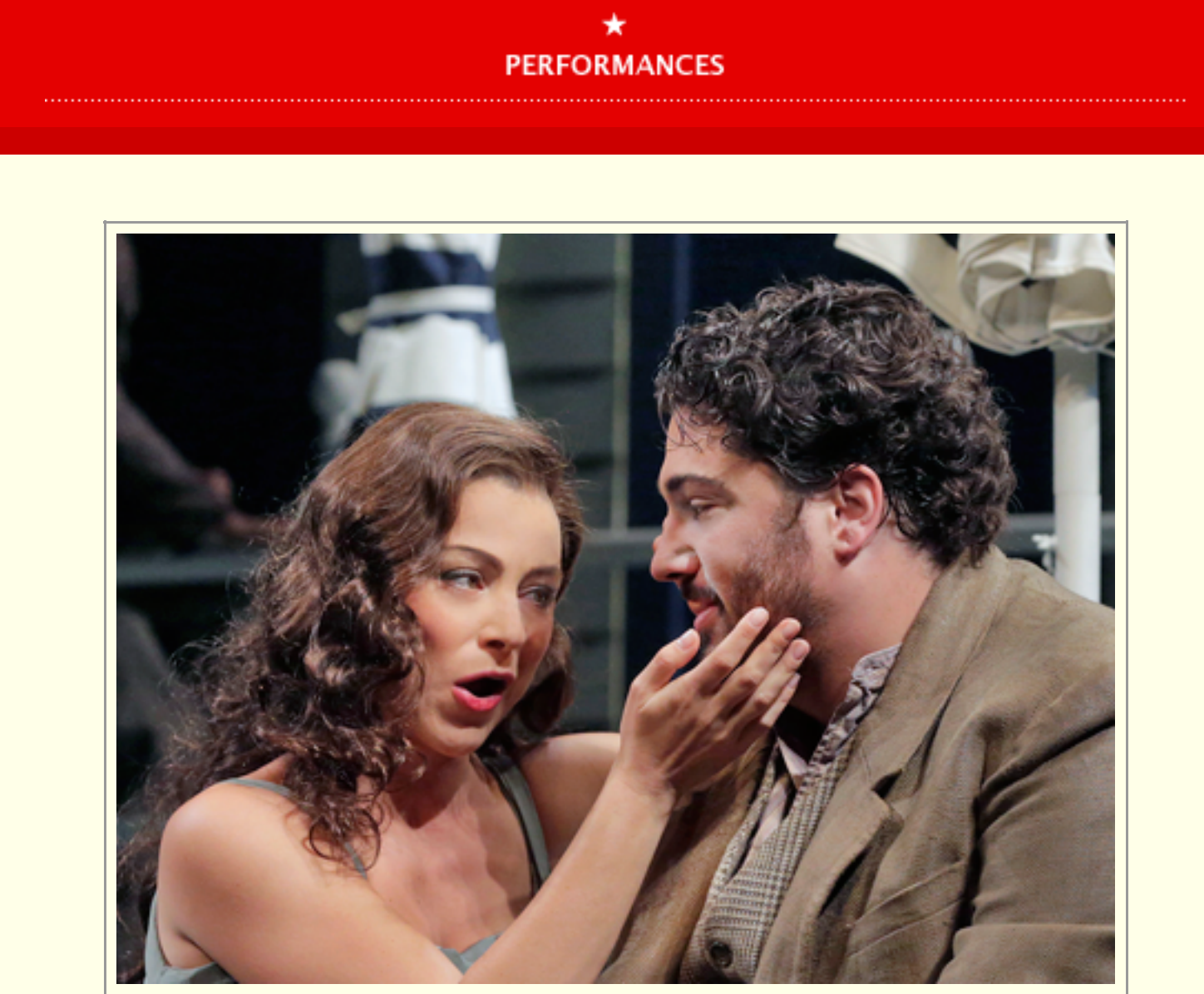
Nabucco, Covent Garden
Most of the attention during this revival of Daniele Abbado’s 2013 production of *Nabucco* has been directed at Plácido Domingo’s reprise of the title role, with the critical reception somewhat mixed.

The Cunning Little Vixen, Glyndebourne
Four years ago, almost to the day (13th to 12th), I saw Melly Still’s production of *The Cunning Little Vixen* during its first Glyndebourne run. I found myself surprised how much more warmly I responded to it this time.

London: A 90th birthday tribute to Horovitz
This recital celebrated both the work of the Park Lane Group, which has been supporting the careers of outstanding young artists for 60 years, and the 90th birthday of Joseph Horovitz, who was born in Vienna in 1926 and emigrated to England aged 12.

Opera Las Vegas: A Blazing Carmen in the Desert
Headed by General Director Luana DeVol, a world–renowned dramatic soprano, Opera Las Vegas is a relatively new company that presents opera with first–rate casts at the University of Las Vegas’s Judy Bayley Theater. In 2014 they presented Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* and in 2015, Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. This year they offered a blazing rendition of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*.

La bohème, Opera Holland Park
Ever since a friend was reported as having said he would like something in return for modern–dress Shakespeare (how quaint that term seems now, as if anyone would bat an eyelid!), namely an Elizabethan–dress staging of *Look Back in*



22 Jun 2015

La Rondine Swoops Into St. Louis

If *La Rondine* (The Swallow) is a less-admired work than rest of the mature Puccini canon, you wouldn’t have known it by the lavish production now lovingly staged by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

Tosca, *Boheme*, and *Butterfly* may be the bread-and-butter operas, but *La Rondine* can prove to be a highly satisfying sorbet, a lighter weight dalliance that nonetheless has its share of memorable melodies. Witness that during the first act intermission, the audience was mingling humming *Doretta’s Song*, almost against its will. After Act Two the line at the bar was having a go at the famous ‘Ohrworm’ from the quartet. Giacomo could sure write a tune! What he couldn’t do in this case, was make up for the fact that in Giuseppe Adami’s libretto, nothing much really happens.

No Japanese honor suicides, no offing of villainous police chiefs, no worrisome consumptive coughing, nada. All we have here is a bored demimondaine who decides to go slumming at a lower class Parisian bar, falls instantly in love with a young visitor, chucks all the wealth to be with him, but then pretty much gets bored again and leaves him flat. Now Puccini himself made a good deal out of a similar scenario in the youthful *Manon Lescaut*, which bristles with passion. But in *La Rondine* there is really nothing at stake.

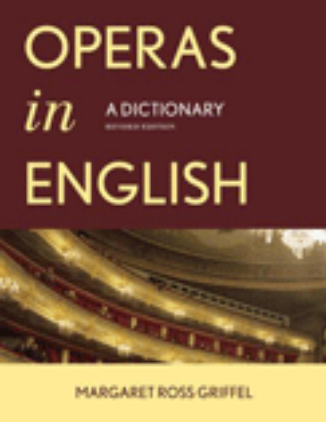
La Rondine Swoops Into St. Louis

A review by James Sohre

Above: Corinne Winters as Magda and Anthony Kalil as Ruggero

Photos © Ken Howard

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Anger, I have been curious about the possibilities of ‘down–dating’, as I suppose we might call it. Rarely, if ever, do we see it, though.

Holland Festival: Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, Amsterdam

Leading a very muscular Dutch Radio Philharmonic, Principal Conductor Markus Stenz brilliantly delivered Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck* with a superb Florian Boesch in the lead and a mesmerising Asmik Grigorian as Marie his wife.

Pietro Mascagni: *Iris*

There can’t be that many operas that start with an extended solo for double bass. At Holland Park, the eerie, angular melody for lone bass player which opens Pietro Mascagni’s *Iris* immediately unsettled the relaxed mood of the summer evening.

***L’italiana in Algeri*, Garsington Opera**

George Souglides’ set for Will Tuckett’s new production of Rossini’s *L’italiana in Algeri* at Garsington would surely have delighted Liberace.

Carmen in San Francisco

Calixto Bieito is always news, *Carmen* with a good cast is always news. So here is the news.

***Eugene Onegin*, Garsington Opera**

Distinguished theatre director Michael Boyd’s first operatic outing was his brilliant re–invention of Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* for the Royal Opera at the Roundhouse in 2015, so what he did next was always going to rouse interest.

Bohuslav Martinů’s *Ariane* and *Alexandre bis*

Although Bohuslav Martinů’s short operas *Ariane* and *Alexandre bis* date from 1958 and 1937 respectively, there was a distinct tint of 1920s Parisian surrealism about director Rodula Gaitanou’s double bill, as presented by the postgraduate students of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

***Lohengrin*, Dresden**

The eyes of the opera world turned recently to Dresden—the city where Wagner premiered his *Rienzi*, *Fliegende Holländer*, and *Tannhäuser*—for an important performance of *Lohengrin*. For once in Germany it was not about the staging.

***Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Glyndebourne**

Having been privileged already to see in little over two months two great productions of *Die Meistersinger*, one in Paris (Stefan Herheim) and one in Munich (David Bösch), I was unable to resist the prospect of a third staging, at Glyndebourne.

***The Threepenny Opera*, London**

‘Mack does bad things.’ The tabloid headline that convinces Rory Kinnear’s surly, sharp–suited Macheath that it might be time to take a short holiday epitomizes the cold, understated menace of Rufus Norris’s production of Simon Stephens’ new adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Olivier Theatre.

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That puts a heavy burden on the performers to flesh out the consequences of their decisions and make you “feel their pain.” And to a large extent director Michael Gieleta and his accomplished cast and collaborators did just that.

Set Designer Alexander Dodge has created a marvel of a paneled box set drawing room, that at once evokes the confines of the Parisian salon where the story begins, and the freedom of the Nice seaside, where it ends. This is accomplished by an overall blue hue, with the bottom five feet or so subtly textured to resemble the sea. Gieleta and Dodge further choose to begin each act with a pre-set beach chair down center (soon struck) to presage the final act (when more chairs are added). The upstage “wall” is mostly a curtain, which pulls to reveal a platform that first contains Bullier’s tavern in Act Two, and then becomes a boardwalk and row of cabanas in Act Three. Very effective and attractive playing spaces, all.

Mr. Gieleta moves his forces about these environments exceedingly well. With the salon being dominated by a massive dining table, he invents any number of clever stage pictures while always maintaining good focus. I liked rolling in the piano from stage right when it is required for *Doretta’s Song*. In Two, the revelers vary between being contained on the tavern platform, or spilling onto the street which gets decorated with poles and strings of beer garden light bulbs as part of the action.

By Act Three, I began to fully appreciate the levels that Mr. Dodge created with not only the upstage platform, but by having the downstage drop off right and left of a central platform, to give three different heights. The director took full advantage of the possibilities, to include having Magda change clothes in her boudoir on the lower right level before dashing out on the town.



John McVeigh as Prunier, Corinne Winters as Magda, Ashley Milanese as Yvette, Elizabeth Sutphen as Bianca, and Hannah Hagerty as Suzy

Gregory Gale contributed truly sumptuous costumes for the rich guests in the first act, then took it down a notch with colorful middle class street wear (and soldiers’ uniforms) in the Second Act. His casual beachwear in Three was simple and comfortable. This was beautifully detailed work. Only one thing

bothered me and that was that Magda’s “simple black dress” that she wears out on the town kept parting in the front revealing her bloomers. Intentional? Hmm.

Christopher Akerlind made some bold lighting choices, with sharp rectangular specials, moody washes, and heightened, almost abstract atmospheres. It did inject a rhythm and visual excitement missing from the story. Tom Watson’s hair and make-up design was exceptional in delineating classes and temperaments.

Veteran Stephen Lord conducted a knowing, stylistically comfortable reading, and the musicians responded with generous playing that made them sound more lush and imposing than their numbers might imply. His communication with the singers was sensitive and the show breathed and surged as Puccini must. Maestro Lord also had a keen sense of pace and I was especially appreciative that he did not let the singers get too indulgent in the lovely, but repetitive quartet.

The chorus of Gerdine Young Artists performed superbly as trained by Chorus Master Robert Ainsley. Puccini has filled out much of the first two acts with choral effects, and they all made their impression. If you would take the time to look at the cast list, please realize that once you are past the first five names, all of the rest of the featured roles were taken with laudable and applaudable results, by members of the Gerdine Young Artists. These promising, talented singers covered themselves in glory the whole night., and they remain the heart of OTSL.



[Anthony Kalil as Ruggero and Corinne Winters as Magda](#)

Matthew Burns brought admirable suavity and a bit of gravitas to Rambaldo’s scolding and blathering. As Lisette, the animated Sydney Mancasola was a delight, and her well-focused flights of fancy fell easily on the ear. Her enchanting portrayal was exceedingly well sung. John McVeigh, as Prunier, threatened to walk away with the show. Arguably the most complete characterization on the stage, McVeigh put his playboy good looks in service of creating a most lovable cad. John also sang with real refinement, his honeyed tenor encompassing all of the

role’s demands.

Tenor Anthony Kalil is a big tall bear, a physical trait that might naturally work better for a bumbling-but-lovable Nemorino than for an OMG-love-at-first-sight Ruggero. That said, Mr. Kalil has an impressive, incisive tenor instrument. His ringing sounds filled theatre with real Puccinian squillo. His future seems assuredly bright.

Corinne Winters has all the necessary attributes for Magda. She is lovely and elegant. Her soprano can soar with the best of them, and her intelligence and attention to detail are second to none. Her seamless vocal production seems to have darkened just a bit since last I heard her, making her lower middle more forward placed. This resulted in some loss of diction in that range, especially when sustained banks of strings were playing. Ms. Winters made *Doretta’s Song* the showpiece it must be, and sang with luster throughout.

Whether it was her choice or the director’s, I found it hard to warm to her until well into Act Two. For all its vocal virtues, her Magda seemed too arch, too above it all. It improved and Corinne and Anthony sang the final scene very well indeed. But, while every phrase was well calculated, and every effect wholeheartedly attempted, I was longing for some real chemistry, some

emotional connection, rather than two marvelous performers singing beautifully to the back wall. Both of these artists could deliver that real heartbreak with just a modest change in blocking and focus.

Everything about *La Rondine* was first class, and I greatly admired it. But I wanted to be touched by it. Truth in reporting, the audience received it rapturously.

James Sohre

Cast and production information:

Magda: Corinne Winters; Lisette: Sydney Mancasola; Ruggero: Anthony Kalil; Prunier: John McVeigh; Rambaldo: Matthew Burns; Suzy: Hannah Hagerty; Yvette: Ashley Milanese; Bianca: Elizabeth Sutphen; Gobin: Joshua Wheeker; Crébillon: Erik Van Heyningen; Périchaud: Luis Alejandro Orozco; Butler/Major Domo: David Leigh; Adolfo: Charles Sy; Rabonnier: Josh Quinn; Two Singers: Liv Redpath, Joshua Blue; Two Young Women: Jessica Faselt, Stephanie Sanchez; Grisettes: Anna Dugan, Lilla Heinrich Szász, Ann Toomey; Student: Todd Barnhill; Conductor: Stephen Lord; Director: Michael Gieleta; Set Design: Alexander Dodge; Costume Design: Gregory Gale; Lighting Design: Christopher Akerlind; Wig and Make-up Design: Tom Watson; Chorus Master: Robert Ainsley

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