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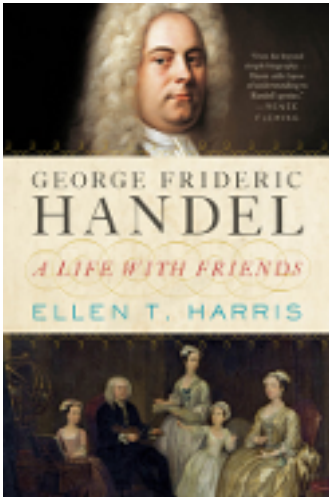
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RECENTLY IN PERFORMANCES

**A Bright and Accomplished Cenerentola at Lyric Opera of Chicago**  
Gioachino Rossini’s *La Cenerentola* has returned to Lyric Opera of Chicago in a production new to this venue and one notable for several significant debuts along with roles taken by accomplished, familiar performers.

***La Bohème*, ENO**  
Back in 2000, Glyndebourne Touring Opera dragged Puccini’s sentimental tale of suffering bohemian artists into the ‘modern urban age’, when director David McVicar ditched the Parisian garrets and nineteenth-century frock coats in favour of a squalid bedsit in which Rodolfo and painter Marcello shared a line of cocaine under the grim glare of naked light bulbs and the clientele at *Café Momus* included a couple of gaudily attired transvestites.

**Luigi Rossi: *Orpheus***  
Just as Orpheus embarks on a quest for his beloved Eurydice, so the Royal Opera House seems to be in pursuit of the mythical music-maker himself: this year the house has presented Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* at the Camden Roundhouse (with the Early Opera Company in January), Gluck’s *Orphée et Eurydice* on the main stage (September), and, in the Linbury Studio Theatre, both Birtwistle’s *The Corridor* (June) and the Paris–music–hall style Little Lightbulb Theatre/Battersea Arts Centre co-production, *Orpheus* (September).

**64<sup>th</sup> Wexford Festival Opera**  
Wexford Festival Opera has served up another thought-provoking and musically rewarding trio of opera rarities — neglected, forgotten or seldom performed — in 2015.

**Christoph Prégardien, Schubert, Wigmore Hall London**  
Another highlight of the Wigmore Hall complete Schubert Song series – Christoph Prégardien and Christoph Schnackertz. The core Wigmore Hall Lieder audience were out in force. These days, though, there are young people among the regulars : a sign that appreciation of Lieder excellence is most certainly alive and well at the Wigmore Hall. .

**The Magic Flute in San Francisco**  
How did it go? Reactions of my neighbors varied. Some left at the intermission, others remarked that they thought the singing was good.

***La Vestale*, La Monnaie, Bruxelles**  
In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spontini’s *La Vestale* was a hit. Empress Josephine sponsored its premiere, Parisians heard it hundreds of times, Berlioz raved about it and Wagner conducted it.

**Shattering *Madama Butterfly* Stockholm**  
An intelligent updating and outstanding performance of the title role lead to a shattering climax in Puccini’s Japanese opera

***Theodora*, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées**  
Handel’s genius is central focus to the new staging of Handel’s oratorio *Theodora* at Paris’ Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.

**Bostridge Sings Handel**  
1985 must have been a good year for founding a musical ensemble, or festival or organisation, which would have longevity.

**Arizona Opera Premieres Kálmán’s *Arizona Lady***  
*Arizona Lady* is the last operetta that Hungarian Jewish composer Emmerich Kálmán (1882–1953) wrote. A student at the Budapest



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

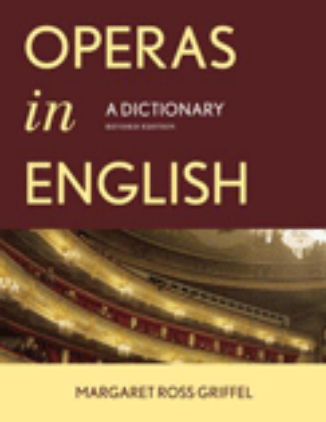
A review by James Sohre

Above: Corinne Winters as Magda and Anthony Kalil as Ruggero

Photos © Ken Howard

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Academy of Music, he learned from the same teachers as Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. After successfully staging an operetta in Budapest, Kálmán moved to Vienna.

**The Met's First Five Productions**

The only thing that is at all radical or even noteworthy about the current Metropolitan Opera season is its imbalance: five Donizetti operas to one Wagner.

**Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar* at REDCAT**

On October 8, 2015, Los Angeles Opera presented Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek’s *Song from the Uproar: The Lives and Deaths of Isabelle Eberhardt* at REDCAT, the Roy and Edna Disney Cal Arts Theater in Walt Disney Concert Hall. The opera was part of L A O’s “Off Grand Program” which features chamber works in spaces smaller than the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

**Loft Opera Presents an Evening of Excellent Ensembles, No Beer Required**

Loft Opera has been hailed as the future of opera by multiple newspapers, magazines, and blogs across the nation, and even said to be “in the process of reinventing opera for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” according to James Jorden from The New York Observer.

***The Tales of Hoffmann* — English Touring Orchestra**

Jacques Offenbach’s opéra fantastique, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, is a notoriously Protean beast: the composer’s death during rehearsals, four months before the premiere left the opera in an ‘non-definitive’ state which has since led to the acts being shuffled like cards, music being added, spoken dialogue and recitative vying for supremacy, the number of singers performing the principal roles varying, and even changes to the story itself — the latter being an amalgam of three tales by E.T.A. Hoffmann.

**Bellini *I puritani* : gripping musical theatre**

Vividly gripping drama is perhaps not phrase which you might expect to be used to refer to Bellini’s *I Puritani*, but that was the phrase which came into my mind after seen Annilese

**Strong music values in 1940's setting for Handel's opera examining madness**

As part of their Madness season, presenting three very contrasting music theatre treatments of madness (Handel’s Orlando, Bellini’s *I Puritani* and Sondheim’s Sweeney Todd) Welsh National Opera (WNO) presented Handel’s Orlando at the Wales Millennium Centre on Saturday 3 October 2015.

**Bostridge, Isserlis, Drake, Wigmore Hall**

Benjamin Britten met Mstislav Rostropovich in 1960, in London, where the cellist was performing Shostakovich’s First Cello Concerto. They were introduced by Shostakovich who had invited Britten to share his box at the Royal Festival Hall, for this concert given by the Leningrad Symphony Orchestra. Britten’s biographer, Humphrey Carpenter reports that a few days before Britten had listened to Rostropovich on the radio and remarked that he ““thought this the most extraordinary ‘cello playing I’d ever heard””.

***Falstaff* at Forest Lawn**

Sir John Falstaff appears in three plays by William Shakespeare: the two Henry IV plays and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

**Music and Drama Interwoven in Chicago Lyric's new *Le nozze di Figaro***

The opening performance of the 2015–2016 season at Lyric Opera of Chicago was the premiere of a new production of Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* under the direction of Barbara Gaines and featuring the American debut of conductor Henrik Nánási.



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 Wheeler; 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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