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★ RECENTLY IN PERFORMANCES

Aida at Aspen

Most opera professionals, including the individuals who do the casting for major houses, despair of finding performers who can match historical standards of singing in operas such as *Aida*. Yet a concert performance in Aspen gives a glimmer of hope. It was led by four younger singers who may be part of the future of Verdi singing in America and the world.

Prom 53: Shostakovich — *Orango*

One might have been forgiven for thinking that both biology *and* chronology had gone askew at the Royal Albert Hall yesterday evening.

Written on Skin at Lincoln Center

Three years ago I made what may have been my single worst decision in a half century of attending opera. I wasn't paying close attention when some conference organizers in Aix-en-Provence offered me two tickets to the premiere of a new opera. I opted instead for what seemed like a sure thing: William Christie conducting some Charpentier.

La Púrpura de la Rosa

Advertised in the program as the first opera written in the New World, *La Púrpura de la Rosa* (PR) was premiered in 1701 in Lima (Peru), but more than the historical feat, true or not, accounts for the piece's interest.

Pesaro's Rossini Festival 2015

The 36th Rossini Opera Festival in Rossini's Pesaro! *La gazza ladra* (1817), *La gazza* (1816) and *L'inganno felice* (1812) — the little opera that made Rossini famous.

Santa Fe: Placid Princess of Judea

Unlike the brush fire in a distant neighborhood of the John Crosby Theatre, Santa Fe Opera's *Salome* stubbornly failed to ignite.

Airy and Bucolic Glimmerglass Flute

As part of a concerted effort to incorporate local color and resonance into its annual festival, Glimmerglass has re-imagined *The Magic Flute* in a transformative woodland setting.

Glimmerglass Conquers *Cato*

Bravura singing and vibrant instrumental playing were on ample display in Glimmerglass Festival's riveting *Cato in Utica*.

Energetic Glimmerglass *Candide*

Bernstein's *Candide* seems to have more performance versions than *Tales of Hoffmann*.

Die Eroberung von Mexico in Salzburg

That's *The Conquest of Mexico*, an historical music drama composed in 1991 by German composer Wolfgang Rihm (b. 1952). But wait. Wolfgang Rihm construed a few sentences of Artaud's *La Conquête du Mexique* (1932) mixed up with bits of Aztec chant and bits of poem(s) by Mexico's Octavio Paz (d. 1998) to make a libretto.

Scottish Sensation at Glimmerglass

Glimmerglass is celebrating its 40th Festival season with a stylish new production of Verdi's *Macbeth*.

Norma in Salzburg

This Salzburg *Norma* is not new news. This superb production was first seen at the Salzburg Festival's springtime Whitsun Festival in 2013 with this same

★ PERFORMANCES



28 Aug 2015

Aida at Aspen

Most opera professionals, including the individuals who do the casting for major houses, despair of finding performers who can match historical standards of singing in operas such as *Aida*. Yet a concert performance in Aspen gives a glimmer of hope. It was led by four younger singers who may be part of the future of Verdi singing in America and the world.

The title role was taken by the young American soprano Tamara Wilson, who received accolades as a replacement *Aida* at the MET last December. Wilson's cool and silvery soprano reminds one of great interwar *Aida*'s—Elizabeth Rethberg comes to mind—rather than Leontyne Price, Maria Callas, Renata Tebaldi or other postwar singers who have led us to expect broad warm, darkly golden-toned voices in this role. (Wilson even looks a bit like something out of an early 20th century photograph—which I mean as a compliment.) Wilson's voice is so perfectly focused that at pianissimo it easily fills even an acoustically problematic space such as Aspen's large tent, yet it can also swell to a thrilling forte, and beyond to

Aida at Aspen

A review by Andrew Moravcsik

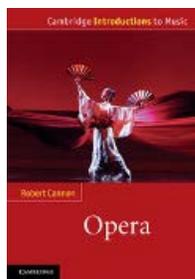
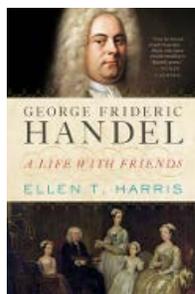
Above: Tamara Wilson [Photo by Aaron Gang courtesy of Columbia Artists Management Inc.]

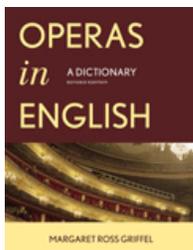
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cast. It will now travel to a few major European cities.

The power of music: a young cast in a semi-stage account of Monteverdi's first opera

John Eliot Gardiner conducted a much anticipated performance of Monteverdi's first opera *L'Orfeo* at the BBC Proms on 4 August 2015, with his own Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists.

Cold Mountain Wows Audience at Santa Fe World Premiere

On August 1, 2015, Santa Fe Opera presented the world premiere of *Cold Mountain*, a brand new opera composed by Pulitzer Prize and Grammy winner Jennifer Higdon.

Manon Lescaut, Munich

Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich. Some will scream in rage but in its austerity it reaches to the heart of the opera.

Proms Saturday Matinée 1

It might seem churlish to complain about the BBC Proms coverage of Pierre Boulez's 90th anniversary. After all, there are a few performances dotted around — although some seem rather oddly programmed, as if embarrassed at the presence of new or newish music. (That could certainly not be claimed in the present case.)

The Maid of Pskov (Pskovityanka) , St. Petersburg

I recently spent four days in St. Petersburg, timed to coincide with the annual Stars of the White Nights Festival. Yet the most memorable singing I heard was neither at the Mariinsky Theater nor any other performance hall. It was in the small, nearly empty church built for the last Tsar, Nicholas II, at Tsarskoye Selo.

Prom 11 — Grange Park Opera: Fiddler on the Roof

As I walked up Exhibition Road on my way to the Royal Albert Hall, I passed a busking tuba player whose fairground ditties were enlivened by bursts of flame which shot skyward from the bell of his instrument, to the amusement and bemusement of a rapidly gathering pavement audience.

Saul, Glyndebourne

A brilliant theatrical event, bringing Handel's theatre of the mind to life on stage

Roberta Invernizzi, Wigmore Hall

'Here, thanks be to God, my opera is praised to the skies and there is nothing in it which does not please greatly.' So wrote Antonio Vivaldi to Marchese Guido Bentivoglio d'Aragona in Ferrara in 1737.

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fortissimo—all without spoiling the timbre or line. The technical difficulties of the role—including the dolce high c in “O Patria Mia,” which only a few singers per generation can really sing as written—pose for her no problem. Her clear diction, subtle inflection and musical intelligence, combined with an ability to act with her face, added up to coherent musical-dramatic characterization of the title character: more girlish and vulnerable than one generally sees. As she ages, the voice may fill out further, particularly at the bottom. If so, Wilson may become an Aida for the ages.

As Ramfis, Morris Robinson commanded the stage even when sharing it with one hundred others. His thundering cries of “Guerra!” rang above the first scene concertante finale, his sonorous bass floated just audible above the opening chorus of the second scene, his subsequent high f at “Folgore morte” was firm, and so on through the night. He acted equally well: his looming presence added an ominous element to the Egyptian priesthood and his quick glances signaled that he was on to Radamès and Aida long before anyone else. Diction is the only area in which Robinson could improve, but this former all-American football player (who began singing opera seriously only at 30) is already more than repaying the early faith of the Met and other companies.

At least at this stage in his career, Brian Mulligan wisely rejects the gruff bluster with which most baritones approach Amonasro in favor of scrupulous and sensitive attention to the score. His approach was evident from his opening declaration (“Suo padre!”). Most baritones announce their belated presence with a ringing forte at this point, which makes some dramatic sense for a king in disguise. Yet Mulligan sang it as Verdi plainly wrote it in the score: forte at first, but with a lovely, almost reflective, decrescendo. Elsewhere Mulligan's scrupulousness and sensitivity paid dividends as well, particularly in the Act III duet with Aida. Here again we may have the makings of a heavyweight Verdi greatness.

The fourth young singer, tenor Issachah Savage, clearly possesses that rare operatic gift: a near-ideal natural instrument to sing Radamès. He delivers bronze-hued grandeur for the heroic passages and a sweetly mixed timbre for the more intimate ones. Though he has been singing this role for several years, however, nervousness seemed to undermine his big moments. He cut off many extended and exposed phrases, sagged flat and dropped a line in “Celeste Aida,” and failed to produce a clear tone on both the final A of Act 3 and the penultimate pianissimo B-flat of Act 4. Still, this young Philadelphian is a singer to watch; he may yet achieve historical greatness in *spinto* and dramatic roles.

The fifth lead singer, Mezzo Michelle DeYoung, was by far the most experienced and best-known singer on stage. She is a consummate professional. The voice is even and smooth from top to bottom and the diction clear. She looks the part and she has clearly thought out the musical-dramatic effects she seeks at every point: her portrayal of Amneris is more sympathetic than the scenery-chewing norm. Yet in the end one wonders if this is really the right role for someone without the requisite chesty mezzo power and steely edge of a classic Verdi mezzo, particularly at the extremes of the voice. She simply failsto command the stage at Amneris's grandest moments: the Act II duet and, above all, the end of the Judgment Scene, where the ultimate high A is made to ring out more powerfully and longer than the strict four beats in Verdi's score.

As for the smaller roles, Pureum Jo delivered the Sacerdotessa's exotic lines smoothly but (whether due to placement or intent) too loudly: the temple priestess's voice is supposed to emerge mysteriously and exotically from somewhere in the darkness of a vast temple, which is why Verdi marked it to

be subtle and soft, even though off-stage. Bass Matthew Treviño and tenor Landon Shaw II used strident declamation, good diction and excellent acting—not to mention the appearance of handsome young *mafiosi*—to make the most of their cameos as the King and the Messenger.

Given that they (I am told) had less than a week and few rehearsals, the Aspen Festival Orchestra under Robert Spano performed with remarkable fluidity, accuracy and idiomatic style. To be sure, the orchestra contains ringers, such as Elaine Douvas (Principal Oboe of the Metropolitan Opera) and David Halen (Concertmaster of the St. Louis Symphony), who can handle this material in their sleep. But it also includes top students and young professionals, who acquitted themselves impressively. (No lack of a younger generation among orchestral musicians, evidently!) Only the triumphal trumpets in the higher key struggled. The chorus sang lustily, but also with subtlety when it mattered most. Spano directed well, only occasionally proceeding with excessive caution. By necessity, a semi-staged production will emphasize the intimate aspects of this opera, which took place within a hollow cloth pyramid, open on the side facing the audience. It made for an adequate, though not impressive, set. Comic relief was provided in the Triumphal Scene by permitting a half dozen very large white balloons to bounce around the audience, as the principals—still inhabiting the world of 5000 years ago—watched bemusedly from the stage.

Andrew Moravcsik

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