

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

Tuned In: In the shadow of the 'Ring': big goings-on at little opera companies around the Bay

By Sue Gilmore
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 05/23/2011 11:49:04 AM PDT

Updated: 05/25/2011 02:16:13 PM PDT

It may be hard to hear, what with all the din building over the looming approach of San Francisco Opera's new take on Wagner's monumental "Ring Cycle," but there is plenty of buzz and hum thrumming through the smaller opera companies around the Bay as well.

The anticipatory glee is mounting at West Edge Opera, the scrappy but savvy little company formerly known as Berkeley Opera, which has just announced its 33rd season -- only its third in the tonier digs at the Performing Arts Theater in El Cerrito High School. Company artistic director Mark Streshinsky, ever on the alert for programming that will get rumps in the padded blue seats while breaking new ground for the art form, has crafted a season he is calling "Popera," as all three productions offer some mix of the classical and pop culture traditions.

The 2011-12 season opens at 3 p.m. Oct. 30 with Richard Strauss' "Ariadne auf Naxos," directed by Streshinsky and conducted by music director Jonathan Khuner, with well-known soprano (and Streshinsky legal consort) Marie Plette in the taxing title role. It's a perfect choice to launch the "Popera" motif, as the opera takes culture clash as its major theme: A troupe of comedians is instructed to perform on the same stage at the same time as a classical tragedy, and confounding and comical consequences ensue. The production repeats on Nov. 4 and 6.

Japanese manga and anime will be worked into the design and

execution of the second production, a new English interpretation by David Scott Marley of Mozart's "The Magic Flute." Starring the Bay Area's best known baritone (and the wags do call him a barihunk)

Eugene Brancoveanu in the role of the (usually) befeathered bird-catcher Papageno, "Flute" opens March 4, 2012, and repeats March 9 and 11, and will be directed by Caroline Altman.

No soprano has yet been signed for the closing production of the season, but you can be assured that no nonblond nonbombshells need apply. Brooklyn-born composer Ezra Laderman, former head and current faculty member at the Yale School of Music, will be enlisted to revise and reorchestrate for its West Coast debut "Marilyn," a one-act opera based on the tragic Hollywood icon's last days, which premiered at New York City Opera in 1993. "Marilyn" opens on July 29, 2012, with repeats Aug. 3 and 5, and will be directed by Elkhanah Pulitzer.

Season subscriptions, ranging from \$38 to \$185, are now on sale at 510-841-1903 and www.westedgeopera.org. Single tickets will be available Sept. 7. All three productions open and close at 3 p.m. on Fridays, with the intervening performances at 8 p.m. on Saturdays. The theater is at 540 Ashbury Ave. in El Cerrito.

REVOLVING OPERA DOORS: Walnut Creek-based Festival Opera, under the artistic direction of Oakland East Bay Symphony conductor Michael Morgan, announced its 20th season earlier this month, which was duly acknowledged in our Sunday A&E section. (Verdi's "La Traviata" in four performances in July and Frank Loesser's musical theater piece "Most Happy Fella" in four programs in August.)

But we failed to take note that long-term executive

Get a FREE ADT-Monitored Home Security System.*

(With \$99 customer installation and purchase of ADT alarm monitoring services. See important terms and conditions below.)

Call Now! 1-877-835-8373




*\$99.00 Customer Installation Charge. 36-Month Monitoring Agreement required at \$35.99 per month (\$1,295.64). Form of payment must be by credit card or electronic charge to your checking or savings account. Offer applies to homeowners only. Local permit fees may be required. Satisfactory credit history required. Certain restrictions apply. Offer valid for new Security Choice - An ADT Authorized Dealer customers only and not on purchases from ADT Security Services, Inc. Other rate plans available. Cannot be combined with any other offer. **\$100 VISA® Gift Card Offer: \$100 VISA Gift Card is provided by Security Choice and is not sponsored by ADT Security Services. Requires mail-in redemption. Call 1-888-407-2338 for complete restrictions and redemption requirements.

Print Powered By 

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

director Helen Sheaff, who retired in December after 20 years, has now had her shoes filled by Sara Nealy. Nealy showed considerable marketing moxie last year in her role as Livermore Valley Opera's first executive director, sending Brancoveanu disguised as a waiter into several area restaurants to curry favor with female diners in his stealth "Don Giovanni" mode. The resulting YouTube video was hilarious, and we have little doubt Nealy will lack inspiration for her new job.

Meanwhile, the folks at Livermore Valley Opera leapt to fill the Nealy void this month with incoming executive director Elizabeth Wells. Besides having more than 15 years of arts production and management experience, Wells is an accomplished soprano who has sung nearly 50 roles with regional opera companies in California and Oregon, where she founded and ran her own opera company for five years.

Livermore Valley Opera also this month elevated long-term collaborator Alexander Katsman, a former Merola Opera participant who started at LVO as a rehearsal pianist and moved up to music director, to his new and expanded role as artistic director. The company's upcoming 20th season will feature four productions of Gounod's "Romeo et Juliette" in September and October and four of Puccini's "Tosca" in March of 2012.

Contact Sue Gilmore at sgilmore@bayareanewsgroup.com.



Send flowers
for any occasion
Bouquets
from \$19.99
+s/h

ProFlowers®
Offer ONLY available at:
proflowers.com/happy
or call 1.877.804.1133

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™