

OPERA BOSTON

The Score

Fall, 2009

Dear Friends,

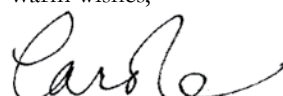
Before I welcome you to the 2009-10 season, and another issue of *The Score*, I'd like to revisit the 2008-09 season for a moment to thank each and every one of you who played a role in our year-end fundraising drive. With the help of Trustees, Overseers, subscribers, volunteers, artists, staff, friends, and a generous matching gift from the Gregory E. Bulger Foundation, we were able to close the gap and end a very challenging year in the black!

Moving forward, the new season is one of great promise and excitement for Opera Boston, as I hope you will see in these pages. Please read on and get to know the legendary contralto Ewa Podleś and dazzling mezzo Stephanie Blythe. Our world-premiere commission, *Madame White Snake* is coming together; the principal artists gathered this summer for a run-through and recording session with composer Zhou Long and creator and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs, and *The Score* was there. Last but not least among

our distinguished guests, we are thrilled to welcome the legendary baritone Sherrill Milnes to be our 2009 InnOvation gala honoree, in a beautiful event to be held this November 5th. Please check our website for details.

I hope you enjoy this peek behind the scenes at the people and projects that help make Opera Boston the innovative and dynamic company it is. Thank you for your support, and I look forward to seeing you at the opera!

Warm wishes,



Carole Charnow
General Director



Photo by Randy Goodman

Honoring Sherrill Milnes



Sherrill Milnes



November 5, 2009
Cocktails at 6pm
Dinner at 7pm
www.operaboston.org

Opera Boston is proud and delighted to select the great baritone Sherrill Milnes as this year's InnOvation Award honoree. Mr. Milnes will be honored at this year's benefit gala, which will be held on Thursday, November 5th in Boston.

His vocal artistry is unsurpassed, and he is one of the foremost operatic baritones of his generation. Of the more than 70 roles in his repertoire, many of his monumental triumphs have been in Verdi's great baritone roles: Rigoletto, Simon Boccanegra, Macbeth, Nabucco, Iago in *Otello*, and Miller in *Luisa Miller*, among numerous others.

A quintessentially American artist, Mr. Milnes was born on a dairy farm in Downers Grove, Illinois. He toured the United States performing with the Boris Goldovsky Opera Theater, logging over 100,000 miles by bus during an era when many American performers

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Meet Overseer Anna Gabrieli

Anna Gabrieli, Opera Boston Overseer, is no stranger to the stage. The soprano's career started here in Boston at the age of 14. "I was drawn into opera by my future husband", Anna reflects. "When I was fifteen, I was singing in a lesson and my teacher was apparently impressed. So she invited a young man in, her next student, to hear me sing. His name



Anna Gabrieli

was Peter Elvins, and we were married when I was 19." Peter, a bass, and Anna would attend performances at the Opera Company of Boston and were inspired by singers who had studied abroad to move to Italy to continue their training. "So we went to Milan to study. It was a wonderful place to be," says Anna.

Anna's European career blossomed after her operatic debut as Gilda in *Rigoletto* in Rome. Over fifteen years, throughout Italy and Germany, Anna donned costumes inspired by the Folies Bergères, sang Konstanze from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in both Italian and German, and performed the Verdi *Requiem* in recital halls far and wide. Boston opera lovers may have seen Anna as the title roles in *Aida* and *Norma*, and in *La Voix Humaine* with the Boston Lyric Opera.

Teaching, however, has become Anna's true passion. Today she can be found nurturing young performers at the Longy School of Music. Her teaching philosophy is one of simplicity and safety, and this

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An Interview with Ewa Podleś

Few voices are as distinctive in the opera world as that of Polish contralto Ewa Podleś. A figure of considerable intrigue, Mme. Podleś's career has spanned the globe, with rave reviews of her powerful performances and the rich timbre of her unusual voice. Stateside, Mme. Podleś has performed with the Seattle Opera (the title role of Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, Adalgisa in Bellini's *Norma* and Erda in Wagner's *Ring* cycle); San Diego Opera (*Cesare*); San Francisco Opera (Principessa in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*); and most recently the Metropolitan Opera as La Cieca in the fall 2008 performance of *La Gioconda*.

The Score had an opportunity to speak with Mme. Podleś this summer about the greatly anticipated revival of her role as Tancredi, and her work in the recital hall with pianist Garrick Ohlsson.

TS: *You have been described as giving the definitive interpretation of Tancredi. Please describe your relationship with this role.*

EP: In fact, *Tancredi* should be titled *Amenaide* because her part is chock full of florid passages and breathtaking cadenzas, whereas *Tancredi* is devoid of low and high notes (limited to one octave) or even coloratura, so it pales by comparison. This is why twenty years ago I decided to follow the tradition of ornamenting this role in ways Rossini *didn't*, adding stunning cadenzas that exploit my wide range and give my character a chance to share center stage—musically—with *Amenaide*. But now I understand that Rossini was right. Opera is not the Olympics, showing only who sings higher, faster, louder or longer. Singing *Tancredi* I concentrate on the text, expressiveness, the *color* of the voice: dark, low and masculine, embodying the tragedy of the hero. *Tancredi* has to genuinely *move* listeners, not only excite with pyrotechnics. Rossini had his reasons in avoiding elaborate cadenzas for this role. Maybe it was intended as a specific contrast to *Amenaide*.

TS: *Can you tell me about recent recording with Garrick Ohlsson (Mussorgsky: Songs and Dances of Death; Rachmaninov/Chopin/Tchaikovsky/Szymanowski's: Songs and Piano Music)?*

EP: It was a "live" and hence imperfect recording, my absolute favorite kind and infinitely preferable to ones made in a controlled studio, perfected with correction after correction! Listening to such recordings you are not able to accurately assess the performer's assets or liabilities.

TS: *And you are returning to Wigmore Hall, London to perform with Mr. Ohlsson again this December; can you talk a little bit about this partnership?*

EP: After my husband Jerzy Marchwinski ceased performing because of problems with his right hand, Garrick is incomparable. We truly like and appreciate each other and together we really create something onstage. He is a magnificent pianist and true musical *partner*. I trust him implicitly. He is truly telling the story with me. Because he knows and plays the music by heart, he is not distracted by the score or turning pages or anything that would compromise his concentration.

TS: *Are you the "one true contralto"?*

EP: Unfortunately, the term "contralto" is misapplied and misunderstood, because it has been used to describe typical *alto* voices like Kathleen Ferrier's or Marian Anderson's. In fact their voices were *alto* voices, low and dark, but without the other attributes of an authentic contralto, specifically both an alto's low notes and soprano's highs (around three octaves), coloratura facility and



Ewa Podleś in Teatro Real's production of *Tancredi*
Photo by Javier de Real, 2007

naturally dark voice. There are many wonderful altos, but authentic contraltos are very rare, which is perhaps why I suspect there has been widespread interest in my work. I don't know every singer performing everywhere in the world today so I can't say whether I'm the "one true contralto," but I can say that I am a true contralto and don't know firsthand of another one around.

TS: *To date, do you have a favorite moment of your career?*

EP: I don't have any particular or favorite moment of my career. I am always happy to see, hear and feel the public's love, and know they understand and appreciate what I am trying to give them. When I hear a heartfelt, enthusiastic ovation and know that I have brought some joy into people's lives, I am the happiest person in the world. ■

Sherrill Milnes (continued from page 1)

built their careers at small houses in Europe. He became a standout in New York, first at City Opera, and later at the Metropolitan Opera. He made his debuts in the great European houses only after he became an established star at home.

For his performances of roles like Iago and Scarpia, Mr. Milnes was described as "opera's finest villain" by the *New York Post*. Offstage, however, he's been a hero to generations of young singers, having held teaching positions and given masterclasses around the world. He is currently the John Evans Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Music at Northwestern University, and, with his wife Maria Zouves, founded VOICEexperience, a not for profit organization that helps young singers develop and pursue careers in music.

For more information about the gala, please contact Development Manager Linda Markarian at 617-451-3388 x 15. ■

Bringing the Myth to Life: The Creation of

Madame White Snake

This February will see one of the many highlights of Opera Boston's 2009-2010 Season: the world premiere of *Madame White Snake*, the traditional Chinese fable brought to life by composer Zhou Long and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs. *The Score* had the opportunity to attend one of the first *tutti* (full cast and ensemble) rehearsals for a preview of the new work.

The opera is a beautiful fusion of traditional western form with eastern tonal influences. Fate guides the characters throughout the opera, as foreshadowed by Madame White's moving cry "This is my destiny to love and be loved, or to die." The chorus enhances the supernatural theme of the opera as an omniscient Greek chorus, alternating between haunting song and recitative.

Chinese soprano Ying Huang in the title role of Madame White demonstrates her incredible versatility as a singer. She sings sweetly of hopeful love and, when tragedy strikes, unleashes her powerful voice in a siren wail. Male soprano Michael Maniaci adds an ethereal quality to the production, while tenor Peter Tantsits as Xu Xian and bass Dong-Jian Gong as Abbot Fahai round out a world-class ensemble.

There is a palpable energy among the cast, as the performers have the unusual opportunity to work with a living librettist and composer. Chorus member Sol Kim Bentley says, "It's exciting to have the librettist and composer at rehearsals to tell us exactly what they intended on a word or phrase, and it's also been fascinating to see different drafts of the work. It's definitely a living art form, and collaborative."


What can audiences expect? "I think what Opera Boston has become known for—creative productions of new operas or operas that are not in the standard repertoire", says chorus member Greg Zavracky. "I'm excited to see the visual aspect of the production come to life. From some of the stage direction in the score, it looks interesting!" Audiences will have to wait

until Friday, February 26 to see former A.R.T. Artistic Director Robert Woodruff's vision for the production.

Celebrating the Premiere in Boston

Opera Boston's work with *Madame White Snake* extends beyond the stage and throughout the city. Opera Boston's Education staff, working closely with librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs, has created an interactive storytelling unit for young children based on the White Snake myth. The program will run at the Boston Children's Museum this fall and winter.

A program will also be developed for third through sixth graders, focusing on local schools that teach Chinese. This workshop will introduce the myth through interactive drama games to spark a larger discussion about the cultural traditions of Beijing Opera and China. To broaden the reach of this exciting new curriculum, Opera Boston will partner with Primary Source, an organization dedicated to global history and humanities education, to train teachers to use the *Madame White Snake* program this fall.

Adults have a chance to get an inside look at the production as well. The Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) will serve as the site for an informative opera class taught by Opera Boston's talented pre-show lecturer, David Collins. After the introductory class, participants will attend the opera and then have a post-show dinner with Collins to discuss the production. "This is a wonderful opportunity to provide children and adults with a richer understanding of opera," says Rachel Alder-Golden, Opera Boston's Education Coordinator. 



Above: Soprano Ying Huang
Left: Librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs and Composer Zhou Long
Photos by Clive Grainger

Mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe will grace the Opera Boston stage in the spring of 2010, as Offenbach's devious and charismatic Grande Duchesse. A star of the stage, in the prime of her career, the mezzo-soprano's recent performance in the title role of *Orfeo ed Euridice* in the Metropolitan Opera and Mark Morris production of Gluck's masterpiece solidified her reputation as one of the brightest voices in opera today.

Ms. Blythe was named Musical America's Vocalist of the Year for 2009, and the versatile mezzo has appeared in prestigious opera houses and symphony halls worldwide in the title roles of *Carmen*, *La Grande-Duchesse*, *Tancredi*, *Mignon*, and *Giulio Cesare*. Her upcoming engagements include the Verdi *Requiem* with the San Francisco Opera and a return to the Seattle Opera for the complete *Ring* cycle. Collaborating with pianist Warren Jones, Ms. Blythe has also performed in various recitals at Carnegie's Zankel Hall, Lincoln Center's Great Performers Series at Alice Tully Hall, the 92nd Street Y, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The Score caught up with Ms. Blythe during her preparation for her performance as Fricka in *Das Rheingold* at the Seattle Opera in August.

TS: *You have performed the role of La Grande-Duchesse before. Do you have an attraction to this character? Can you tell me more about your relationship with the role?*

SB: I became aware of *La Grande Duchesse* for the first time when I was an undergraduate at SUNY Potsdam. I had been watching a videotape of the Metropolitan Opera's 100th Anniversary Gala with some friends one evening, when I heard Frederica von Stade singing the Duchesse's first aria, "Ah, que j'aime les militaires." I was particularly struck with her marvelous performance and the inherent joy of the aria – it made me think that it might be a good audition piece for me. I went to the music library and found it immediately – shocking, as I know now that the score is quite difficult to find. At any rate, I learned it and made it part of my audition package. When I sang it in New York for Yves Abel in an audition some years later, he asked me to perform the role with L'opéra Française. I was thrilled! The best part of the story is that just before I went to begin rehearsals for *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*, I was in San Francisco doing a concert version of *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, starring Ms. von Stade. I had the opportunity to thank her for introducing me to Grande-Duchesse, as well as having the supreme pleasure of performing with her. Several years later, I was working with her on a Gala, after which, once again, I was going to sing *Grande-Duchesse*, this time in Philadelphia. It was just the loveliest coincidence to have this cosmic connection between the two of us and this role. It has been dear to my heart ever since.

TS: *You have been quoted as saying: "You only get one voice, and that's it. Once it's shot, it's shot. You have to be intelligent and choose carefully." Can you please expand on this statement?*

SB: There isn't much more to say about that comment. You only get one voice. You can't take it in to the shop for an

overhaul if you find that you have made choices that have resulted in damage to your instrument. This applies to roles that you choose as a singer, and to your lifestyle as well.

TS: *How do you prepare for a performance/new role?*

SB: I study the score, reading through the text first. I have found in the past several years that learning notes and rhythms comes much more easily when you already have the text in your mouth. I take the role to a coach who has experience with the particular opera, and I try to learn as much as I can of the music that is around my role, both in the surrounding voices and the orchestra. Knowing what is going on around you gives the greatest sense of security! I haven't always been as disciplined as I should have been and worked the way I have just described, but when I do, I get the most out of rehearsal, and ultimately the best experience in performance.

TS: *Please tell me about your work with the MET and Mark Morris on Orfeo ed Euridice.*

SB: *Orfeo* was a wonderful experience on many levels. I have been a fan of Mark Morris for years, and we had met on several occasions prior to working on *Orfeo ed Euridice*. When I was asked to sing the role in his production, you could have knocked me over with a feather! It was my first time working with Mark, my first time singing *Orfeo*, my first title role at the MET – what wasn't exciting about singing this part? Fortunately, the production was very friendly and very supportive. Being surrounded by such wonderful dancers and having the amazing MET chorus right behind me, not to mention Mo. Levine in the pit – that made it all the more wonderful.




Stephanie Blythe as *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*, 2004
Kelly & Massa Photography/Opera Company of Philadelphia

Mark has a beautiful connection to music. It flows through him and tells a fantastic story. Watching him work with the dancers and learning his vocabulary of movement was incredibly instructive. He gave me insights on how communicative

the body can be and really helped me to think in new ways about the energy of bodies onstage. I have always felt fairly intuitive about how to react to fellow actor/singers onstage with words and music, but working with Mark and in such close proximity to dancers, made me more aware of how bodies in motion react to one another.

TS: *You are considered one of the most sought after stars in the operatic world today...where can we see you onstage in the future? Any particularly exciting projects on the horizon?*

SB: I am particularly happy to be making my stage debut with San Francisco Opera this fall as Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, as well as returning to the MET in *Il Trittico*. It will be a joy to share the stage in that triptych with my dear colleague and friend, Patricia Racette. I am returning to Covent Garden singing a role I dearly love, Baba the Turk, in *The Rake's Progress*. A very exciting event will be my concert debut with Mo. Levine and the MET orchestra at Carnegie Hall, performing Elgar's *Sea Pictures*. But I am truly happy to be a part of Opera Boston's *La Grande-Duchesse*. This will be a very happy collaboration, due in no small part to the work with David Kneuss, our director, who is a long time friend and mentor. I can't wait! 

Encouraging Young Talent: The Opera Factory



Opera Boston's upcoming season has inspired the tagline "Love is a Battlefield," so it was no surprise to discover the Opera Factory's Artistic Team making daggers for their August production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. "It's a last minute addition," laughed Scenic Artist, Gronk. "I saw these rulers and thought they looked dagger-like."

Creativity is at the heart of the Opera Factory, a five-week summer program for students produced in partnership by Opera Boston's Education and Outreach program, headed by Education Coordinator Rachel Adler-Golden, and The Cloud Foundation. In its second year, the Opera Factory brought together eighteen students from all over the Boston area, ages 14-18, at Cloud Place in Copley Square to experience all the elements of an operatic production.

The teens self-selected their field of interest, either auditioning to perform in the opera, or joining the Artistic Team, which developed the set, created props, and designed costumes. This year the Artistic Team was under the leadership of renowned visual artist, Gronk. Gronk first worked with Opera Boston as the set designer for the daring production of *Ainadamar* in the fall of 2007. During the Opera Factory, Gronk challenged the students to use the non-traditional space at Cloud Place, imagining a visual installation as opposed to a decorative set. To inspire their creative process, the Artistic Team visited Opera Boston's costume shop and the Museum of Fine Arts. "Opera is the ultimate art," said Gronk, "there is poetry, scenic design, music – it's the ultimate of creativity."

Opera Factory alumna Rebekah Priestly, now a first year student



Students participate in the Opera Factory production of *Così fan tutte*
Photos by Clive Grainger

in voice at Eastman School of Music, came back to Cloud Place to help with this year's production. "It's a great program, you want to come back," she said. "It's just really down to earth, and there is no competition. You are free to explore, and you're not self-conscious. It's really fun to see the new singers."

Stage Director Alexandra Borrie created an abridged libretto in English to help the nine singers master the classic work. In rehearsals, Borrie encouraged these talented performers to explore new depths of their craft. "Just singing is not enough anymore. I want them to be well rounded performers, so I introduce a lot of bodywork and movement," said Borrie. Music Director Bill Geha agrees that the Opera Factory is groundbreaking in the holistic experience it provides the young participants.

The group's hard work was received with an enthusiastic response when the production opened on August 7 to a packed house. "Opera Boston brings new expertise to the Cloud Foundation which allows us to expand our programming for teens in a totally new direction," said Alison Kotin, Cloud Foundation Program and Outreach Coordinator, when talking about the partnership behind the Opera Factory. "The Cloud believes strongly in fostering opportunities for cross-disciplinary and collaborative art work...Opera Boston has brought us wonderful opportunities to get young people excited about operatic performance and contemporary stagecraft." ■

Anna Gabrieli (continued from page 1)

and this belief has become her "crusade" as a teacher. "As the singer's body is his or her instrument, singers are particularly vulnerable to fears, uncertainty, and criticism," states Anna. "I believe it is essential, and certainly most efficacious, to create an environment of safety and trust. It is also important and most effective to make the process as simple as possible."



Anna Gabrieli as Christine in *Intermezzo*
Avery Fisher Hall, 1972

Opera Boston audiences have had the pleasure of hearing one of her most successful students, Quincy native and famed soprano Barbara Quintiliani. Barbara has been working with Anna for the past 11 years. Of the start of their collaboration, Anna fondly recalls, "she was having trouble with her high notes. The year before she sang in the Met auditions, and her high notes weren't in order, so she only got 2nd place. Then she had two lessons with me and that's all it took. She's been non-stop from there. It's been a long row to hoe and she's needed lots of moral support, but it's been wonderful to be part of her life and development. She is truly amazing."

Her draw to Opera Boston? "I like [the company] because they hire *real* singers. Not just nice packages, so to speak. I'm much more intrigued by an interesting artist with a wonderful voice. They hire a lot of really good voices and are not as concerned with little ensemble effects. And their whole idea of repertoire is *great*." ■

Photo by Clive Grainger



Keith Jameson as Vašek in *The Bartered Bride*, 2009

The Score

OPERA BOSTON

... and much more!

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La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein Apr. 30, May 2 & 4, 2010

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