

THE CONSUL, Music and libretto by Gian Carlo Menotti

University Opera production directed by William Farlow

UW Chamber Orchestra conducted by James Smith

University Opera presents Menotti's gripping *The Consul*

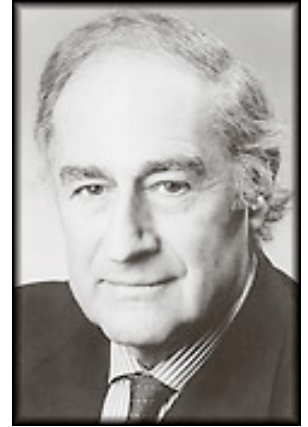
Menotti's 1950 opera won that year's Pulitzer Prize for Music and the New York Drama Critics' Circle award for Best Musical, and ran for eight months. Since that time it has been translated into at least a dozen languages and seen in over twenty countries. It is an overwhelming story of resistance to implacable government forces with tragic circumstances leading to ultimate defeat.

The work will be given three performances at the Carol Rennebohm Auditorium of Music Hall on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus during April 15 - 19.

Briefly, the action unfolds in an unidentified totalitarian state where the political dissident John Sorel is on the run from governmental operatives. John is forced to leave his wife Magda, his baby and his mother, with Magda instructed to apply for a visa to leave the country. He will wait to cross the border until his family is safe. Magda makes repeated visits to the consul's office where many people are also waiting for visas, and after being worn down by the bureaucracy and mounting tragic events, she finally commits suicide. The score contains some of Menotti's most memorable arias.

The University Opera's production is supported in part by the Ann Crow Fund and is the final offering of the 2010-11 season. Both undergraduate and graduate students in the University's opera program make up the cast, supported by the UW Chamber Orchestra under the direction of **James Smith**. The role of Magda is shared by **Celeste Fraser** (April 15 and 19) and **Lindsay Sessing** (April 17), and **Michael Roemer** takes the role of John Sorel, **Benjamin Li** is the Secret Police Agent, **Emily Campbell** is the Secretary, **Leslie Lukas** is Vera Boronel, **Karen Bishop** is Anna Gomez, and **J. Adam Shelton** is the Magician. Sharing the roles of the Mother, Mr. Kofner, Assan, the Foreign Woman are **Amy Sheffer**, **Yohan Kim**, **Andy Aumann**, **Kyeol Lee** on April 17; and **Jennifer Sams**, **Benjamin Schultz**, **Christopher Apfelbach**, **Arielle Basile** on April 15 and 19.

Production staff includes costume designers **Sydney Krieger** and **Hyewon Park**, technical director **Greg Silver**, lighting designer **Steven M. Peterson**, set designer **Michele Field**, vocal coach **Bill Lutes** and chorus master **Susan Goeres**.



Friday, April 15 & Tuesday, April 19 7:30 PM

Sunday, April 17 3:00 PM

All performances are at MUSIC HALL

Tickets \$20 General Public, \$18 senior, \$10 UW-Madison Student

Tickets are available through the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office, 800 Langdon St.

Box Office Hours: M-F 11:30 – 5:30 PM, SAT 12-5:00 PM, Phone 608-265-2787

Or order online at: <http://uniontheater.wisc.edu/boxoffice.html>

Tickets are also available at the Vilas Hall Box Office M-F, 11:30 - 5:30 PM

THE OPERA WHOSE TITLE CHARACTER NEVER APPEARS

by John W. Barker

First performed in 1950, *The Consul* brought Gian Carlo Menotti (1911-2007) to what was arguably the highest plateau of success and fame in his career. It was preceded by five theatrical pieces: *Amelia al ballo* ("Amelia Goes to the Ball"), a one-act *opera buffa* (1937); the one-act farce *The Old Maid and the Thief*, commissioned as a work for radio (1939), then staged (1941); a one-act commission from the Metropolitan Opera, *The Island God* (1942), which was a failure; the two-act tragedy, *The Medium* (1946), which became Menotti's first production of "Broadway opera" (1947) when paired with the one-act comedy *The Telephone*.

Menotti learned from the outset to write his own librettos, his consistent practice thereafter, while he quickly came into his own as a skilled and sensitive stage director. His musical style, while continuing Italian lyric and dramatic traditions, focused on a very individual *parlando* kind of action recitative, interspersed with effective monologues and memorable melodic gems. Selectively drawing upon new musical techniques, his work remained traditionally tonal and conservative in the face of more fashionable radicalisms.

The Consul, his first full three-act opera, was to be his next venture in producing a work to be offered in commercial theaters rather than a formal opera house. Its context was the international scene, in which the newly consolidated Cold War had brought harsh totalitarian regimes to the Soviet satellite countries. Many of the opera's elements grew out of Menotti's personal experience. He lost a number of dear Jewish friends in Germany and Austria to the murderous Nazi police state. His hatred of bureaucracy stemmed from his need, as a boy swimming in Lake Lugano, to carry a passport, since the lake was divided by the Swiss and Italian borders.

Above all, he was moved by a newspaper report of a woman who, detained at Ellis Island, committed suicide--a clear model for Magda Sorel. Of the denizens of his Consul's waiting room, Anna Gomez was based on an eccentric woman Menotti had encountered in an Italian hotel, while *The Foreign Woman* was based on a lady whom he met on an airplane trip as she was visiting her daughter in the USA.

The actual genesis of the opera was sparked by Chandler Cowles, who, with Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., had produced the *Telephone/Medium* double-bill. The cast reflected Menotti's penchant for accumulating singers with whom he would work regularly. In the role of the Mother, he cast Marie Powers, whom he had brought to fame in the title role of *The Medium*, but whose egotism and temperament could cause problems. Notable among those who first took Menotti roles this time: future diva, mezzo Gloria Lane (*Secretary*); bass Leon Lishner (*Police Chief*); Maria Andreassi (*Anna Gomez*); Maria Marlo (*Foreign Woman*); and tenor Andrew McKinley as the mercurial Magician, Nikita Magadoff, who plays tricks and initiates the hallucinatory scenes.

But two names stand out. The young baritone Cornell MacNeil, before his glory days at the Met, created the role of John Sorel. And the central role of Magda Sorel created the career of the young soprano Patricia Neway, who emerged from nowhere to become an important star. Initially auditioned for *The Secretary*, Neway made Magda her signature role, singing it for many years thereafter. And, though her relations with Menotti did become strained with time, she appeared in one more of his operas, as *The Mother* in his *Maria Golovin*. Preparing the production of *The Consul* for the Philadelphia preview (March 1, 1950) was the veteran pit conductor, Lehman Engel, who had to withdraw soon and was replaced, in time for the Broadway premiere (March 15), in his first conducting assignment, by the young Thomas Schippers, to become for years the master interpreter of Menotti's music.

The Broadway production was a smash hit, winning both the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for the best musical play of the year and the Pulitzer Prize for music. It ran for 269 performances, and then was taken abroad in 1951 for a series of productions in Europe (London, Paris, Zurich, Berlin, Milan), confirming Menotti's new status as a leading composer of the day. Menotti himself recalled some curious details of these tours. In Paris on opening night, as Neway went into the oven for her suicide, to a dissonant chord and a ringing telephone, the curtain failed to come down on cue. Schippers sustained the chord as long as his players had wind while Neway "died" in endless panic, until Menotti could find someone to lower the curtain to a silent stage. The official curtain-puller had stepped out for a beer. Leading intellectuals thought this was intended as a *coup de théâtre*, but Menotti saw to it that it was not repeated. And in Milan, where the La Scala premiere assembled a local cast to sing it in Italian, Menotti enthusiastically chose for the role of Magda a then-fat Italian soprano named Maria Callas who, however, refused the part because she was, in the process, denied official admittance to the La Scala company of which she was not yet a member.

Menotti followed *The Consul* with what has become his most enduring success, the one-act television opera, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1951), but he returned to the "Broadway opera" mode with his three-act drama *The Saint of Bleeker Street* (1954), using a quasi-*verismo* style to deal with issues of religion and Italian-American minority life. In 1956 he created his witty *The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore*, in the style of the Renaissance madrigal-comedy. Betraying Cowles and Zimbalist, his steadfast producers, in favor of the unreliable David Merrick, Menotti was betrayed in his turn in attempting one more Broadway venture, the three-act drama of doomed love, *Maria Golovin*--which had to receive its premiere in Brussels in 1958.

Thereafter, Menotti's grip seemed to slip. Another television commission, *Labyrinth* (1963), made no headway, nor did another effort at the Met--*The Last Savage*, a three-act *opéra-bouffe* first performed in Paris in 1963--have any more success in 1964. By this time, deeply involved in his Spoleto Festival, Menotti turned his attention mostly to operas for children's operas, of which the most important was *Help, Help, the Globolinks!* (1968-69), in which he satirized the radicalism (and, to his tastes, the unmusicality) of the avant-garde. Among some other ephemera were two three-act operas, *La Loca* (1979), and *Goya* (1986), which failed to take much hold on critics or public.

For the latter two-thirds of his career, Menotti came to be regarded as a hopelessly shallow, dated, and burned-out composer. Whatever his flaws, however, he has left us works of enduring theatrical effectiveness. *The Telephone* remains a witty charmer, with *The Medium* a scary psychological study, *The Consul* a spare melodrama of timeless meaning, *Amahl* an endearing trifle. For my taste, though, his masterpieces are *The Saint of Bleeker Street* and *The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore*, the former a powerful drama in the Puccinian tradition, and both enriched by Menotti's study of Renaissance choral writing.

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University Opera Wish List:

We hear from the costume shop that there's an imminent need for a washing machine and dryer in fairly good condition. Do you happen to have extra versions of these machines that you'd like to put to work for opera? If so by all means call one of us, e.g. Dan Shea at 836-6911 or Peg Wallace at 233-1304.

Candid Concert Opera Presents *Don Pasquale*

We hear from the organizers of **Candid Concert Opera** that they will present four performances of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* in May in their appealing "highlights" style; here is the schedule:

Wednesday, May 11 at 7:00 pm in the Capitol Lakes Retirement Center;
Thursday, May 12 at 6:30 pm at Oakwood Village West;
Friday, May 13 at 7:00 pm at the First United Methodist Church;
Saturday, May 14 at 4 pm at St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

The casts will showcase many familiar favorites: Caitlin Cisler as Norina, Michael Roemer as Malatesta, Brian Leeper as Don Pasquale, with Ryan MacEldowney as the Ernesto for May 12 and 14, while Jacob Oxley takes that role on the 11th and 13th. This performance will feature Tom Kastle as narrator, Ellen Fast as pianist, and a string quartet with Carol Carlson, Willie McLellen, James Castenada, and Ben Ferris. For more information see www.candidconcertopera.org.

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Fresco Opera Theater's "Dueling Divas" March Show Another Hit

Some of us attended the March 19 performance of Fresco Opera's "Dueling Divas" and found it extraordinarily entertaining: the vocal and dramatic talent was superb, and the "pugilism" was very much tongue-in-cheek and not at all disrespectful of the music or singers. Rather, it provided a new way to showcase the talent of some ten singers in the showy, climactic parts of some classic arias, with an audience approval meter leading to some preliminary winners. Then a smaller field sang complete arias with the final winner receiving a cash prize. Of the highly talented group, at least two were recent UW grads: Saira Frank and Caitlin Cisler, and at the end of the evening Caitlin emerged as the overall winner with a highly entertaining "Doll song" from *The Tales of Hoffmann*. We congratulate Melanie and Frank Cain for their well-judged productions, and recommend future shows of the Fresco Opera Theater!

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Opera for the Young presents *Pirates of Penzance*

This season, Opera for the Young celebrates its 40th anniversary of bringing opera to children. Begun in 1970 by artists associated with UW, the relationship between the University and OFY remains strong. Often OFY provides one of the first professional experiences for UW trained artists. For their *Pirates of Penzance* tour, seven UW alums are taking part in the production. Come see these performers take the next step in their career.

For a complete tour schedule, go to www.operafortheyoung.org

Opera Props News is published each semester for the members of UW Opera Props.
Editorial Committee: Charles Anderson, Kristine Bengtson, Helen Schmedeman, Dan Shea.
Opera Props website: uwoperaprops.org

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF OPERA PROPS

Dear Friend,

Last semester we were moved and delighted by a Puccini double-bill: the classic comedy *Gianni Schicchi* turned out to be a *tour de force* showpiece for all the forces involved, especially our Gianni of those performances, young baritone John Arnold at the head of a hilarious and talented cast. This one-act opera contrasted brilliantly with the other offering that night: *Suor Angelica*, a tragic tale set in a convent that concluded with one of Puccini's most moving arias sung on alternate nights by two superb young sopranos, Celeste Fraser and Lindsay Sessing.

In mid-April you can hear these sopranos again, alternating as Magda Sorel, the heroine of *The Consul*, Menotti's tale of modern repression. (You'll probably have chosen which performance to attend, but I plan to attend at least twice in order to hear both our Magdas.) Whichever day you go, the high point of this opera will again be the soprano's thrilling and moving (and very Puccini-esque) aria "To this we've come." Listen for yourself to a recording or three, and I'd suggest you start with the one by Eileen Farrell at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2zDPJ1FqXg>.

And as usual, the entire well-rehearsed cast will do full justice to the work at hand, a twentieth century masterpiece.

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We know that University support for the Opera Program is being cut severely, in particular both of the program's Teaching Assistantships for 2011-12 were to be eliminated – hobbling the possible recruitment of new singers for future productions. Last summer we asked Bill Farlow and Mimmi Fulmer what Opera Props could do to help plug the gap for the short term, and this led to last September's fund-raising concert at Holy Wisdom Monastery: a marvelous way to introduce seven of our singers to the community, and an elegant event altogether. This led to our meeting John Peterson whose family foundation was willing to support a TA-ship for the next academic year, a most helpful boost to our program – many thanks to John and his J. & C. Peterson Charitable Foundation! This gift was of crucial help in putting together next year's program, and Opera Props together with an anonymous contributor was able to provide another position as well.

We now ask that you consider making a substantial contribution to the University Opera and its students: the needs are great and involve maintaining production values as well as student personnel. If you'd like to speak directly to Bill or Mimmi about ways to help, please feel free to do that via their telephone numbers listed below. Or, if you'd prefer to contribute via Opera Props, we'd be glad to hear from you via the form attached to this Newsletter that lists the address and telephone number of our Vice-President Peg Wallace.

Sincerely,

-Dan Shea

William Farlow (608) 262-3142

Mimmi Fulmer (608) 263-1882

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A FEW UPCOMING MADISON EVENTS FEATURING VOCAL MUSIC

- Sunday, April 3 (4:00 pm) — Abbie Furmansky, soprano, with Daniel Sutton, pianist-composer. Recital: A program of 19th and 20th century songs, plus a new work by Mr. Sutton. Mills Hall.
- Saturday, April 9 (8:00 pm) — Concert Choir, Beverly Taylor, conductor. Bach, *Singet dem Herrn* for double choir; Howells, *Take him, earth, for cherishing*; and works by Mendelssohn, Brahms, Piazzolla and others. Mills Hall.
- Friday, April 15 (7:30 pm) and Sunday, April 17 (3:00 pm) and Tuesday, April 19 (7:30 pm) — University Opera. Menotti, *The Consul*. Music Hall.
- Saturday, April 16 (8:00 pm) — Chorale, Bruce Gladstone, conductor. Haydn, *Te Deum in C* and four part-songs; Schubert, *Magnificat*; Mozart, *Vesperae solennes de confessore*. Mills Hall
- Sunday, April 17 (3:00 pm) — Masters Singers and Women's Chorus, Russell Adrian, Brian Gurley and Sarah Riskind, conductors. With organ: Stanford, *Ye Choirs of New Jerusalem*; Howells, *Like as the Hart*; Britten, *Festival Te Deum*; Bach, movements from *Magnificat in D*; Fauré, *Messe basse*. A cappella or with piano: Works of Byrd, Martin, Dvorák and Johnson. Luther Memorial Church
- Saturday, April 23 (8:00 pm) — Madrigal Singers, Bruce Gladstone, conductor. Lechner, *St. John Passion*; works by Victoria, Gesualdo, Lotti, Blow, Casanovas, Nestor and Poulenc. Mills Hall
- Monday, April 25 at 7:30 pm — Masters Singers, Russell Adrian, Sarah Riskind and Brian Gurley, conductors; and University Chorus, Michael Pfitzer, conductor. Masters: Bach, "Dona nobis pacem" from Mass in B minor; Bennet, *Weep, O Mine Eyes*; Riskind, *Weep, O Mine Eyes* (new composition based on Bennet); works by Victoria, Holst, Weelkes; spirituals arranged by Hogan and Swiggum. Univ. Chorus with student orchestra: opening movements from Vivaldi's *Gloria* and Haydn's *Creation* and *Lord Nelson Mass*; Pinkham, *In the Beginning of Creation* for mixed chorus and electronic tape; madrigals by Finney. Mills Hall
- Friday, April 29 (8:00 pm), Sunday, May 1 (2:30 pm) — Madison Opera. Verdi, *La Traviata*. Overture Hall.
- Saturday, April 30 at 8 pm and Sun., May 1 at 7:30 pm — Choral Union and Symphony Orchestra, Beverly Taylor, conductor. Mendelssohn, *Elijah*. With soloists Paul Rowe (Elijah), James Doing (tenor) and others. Mills Hall.
- Wednesday-Saturday, May 11-14, Candid Concert Opera, *Don Pasquale* (see article in this issue).

Some events to watch for in summer 2011:

- July 9-16 — Madison Early Music Festival. El Nuevo Mundo: The Age of Exploration in the New World. Mills Hall. For more information, see www.madisonearlymusic.org
- July 22-24, July 29-31 — Madison Savoyards. Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia Limited*. Music Hall. For more information, see: <http://www.madisonsavoyards.org/>

For more information about UW-Madison School of Music events, visit the website at www.music.wisc.edu/calendar. From the drop-down menu 'Show Events In,' select 'student recitals' to find the latest scheduling information on student recitals. Also see the Opera Props website at: uwoperaprops.org

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SCHOOL OF MUSIC ALUMNA RETURNS AS GUEST ARTIST

Soprano **Abbie Furmansky** and pianist **Daniel Sutton** will perform for the School of Music's Guest Artist Series on Sunday, April 3 at 4:00 p.m. in Mills Hall. The wife-and-husband duo are based in Europe where they have forged their careers—hers as a performer with opera companies and orchestras, his as composer and pianist. The recital is one of the school's featured events for UW-Madison's Year of the Arts, which has assembled a myriad of performances, exhibitions, films, lectures and other forums for artistic expression across campus this year. Admission to the recital is free.

Furmansky studied with Mimmi Fulmer at UW-Madison and received the Bachelor of Music degree in 1988. She came to prominence in Europe as an ensemble member at Deutsche Oper Berlin, where she quickly established herself in the lyric soprano repertoire. She has appeared with New York City Opera, Canadian Opera, Los Angeles Opera and the opera companies of Munich and Frankfurt, among others, and with Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and the Bavarian Radio Orchestra. Leading conductors with whom she has worked include Edo de Waart (currently music director of the Milwaukee Symphony), Kent Nagano, John Nelson and Christopher Hogwood.

Furmansky's current repertoire includes Mimi in "La bohème," Desdemona in Verdi's "Otello," Elvira in "Don Giovanni," the Marschallin in Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier," Marie in "Wozzeck" and many others. Last year, she made her debut as Madama Butterfly in a new production at the Staatstheater Mainz.

Sutton is a composer of works for many idioms, including symphonic, chamber and solo instrumental and vocal. In July 2005, his quartet for four trombones, "Communion, part 1" received its world premiere in Germany by members of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. His "New American Overture (July 4th at Gettysburg)" was premiered by the Magdeburg Symphony Orchestra under the baton of American conductor Carol Crawford in April 2000. As a pianist, Sutton performs his own compositions for solo piano as well as works of the standard repertoire.

For their program in Mills Hall, Furmansky and Sutton will perform "Seven Early Songs" by Alban Berg; five songs by Richard Strauss, including "Allerseelen" ("All Souls' Day") and "Zueignung" ("Dedication"); "Five Songs on Texts by Attilio Bertolucci" by Sutton; and "Seven Spanish Folksongs" by Manuel de Falla. During their five-day residency, Furmansky will meet with student singers for an informal discussion of careers, management and opportunities in Europe on Wednesday, March 30, and will lead a master class on Thursday, March 31; Sutton will meet with student composers on Wednesday, March 30.

The duo's residency is supported by the Vilas Trust and the Year of the Arts.