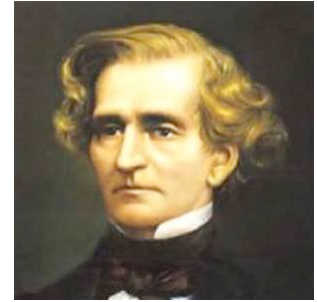


Béatrice et Bénédict, Opéra Comique by Hector Berlioz
University Opera production directed by William Farlow
UW Symphony Orchestra conducted by James Smith

A Delightful Comedy to Usher Out a Veteran Director



William Farlow's final opera takes the stage in University Opera's spring production of Hector Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict*. Sung in French with English surtitles by Christine Seitz and spoken English dialogue by Ric Merritt, the work will be given three performances – Friday, April 11 at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, April 13 at 3:00 p.m. and Tuesday, April 15 at 7:30 p.m. All shows will be presented at the Carol Rennebohm Auditorium in Music Hall on the UW-Madison campus.

"My time here has been the most extraordinary and rewarding of my career and it is with great pride that I begin my final year as a stage director," says Farlow. For his last show, he has chosen a delightful comedy, full of friendly trickery and an unlikely match made in heaven. Based on Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Béatrice et Bénédict* is sure to delight. "One of my greatest joys," says Farlow, "has been to help develop young singers for the professional world."

During his sixteen seasons with University Opera, Farlow has brought to life over thirty opera productions and an equal number of scenes performances. His career has taken him to Scotland, Mexico, Canada, and throughout the United States, and he has worked with artists such as Plácido Domingo, Kiri Te Kanawa, and Carlo Maria Giulini.

The current show cast includes undergraduate and graduate students as well as alumni from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Music, supported by the **UW Symphony Orchestra** under the direction of **James Smith**. The roles of *Béatrice* and *Bénédict* will be performed respectively by **Lindsay Metzger** and **Daniel López-Matthews**, and the role of *Héro* will be portrayed by **Anna Whiteway**. **Erik Larson** will appear as Don Pedro, and **Jordan Wilson** will perform the role of Claudio. The cast will be joined by University Opera alumni **Dr. Benjamin Schultz** and **Kathleen Otterson**, who will perform the roles of Somarone and Ursule. Schultz is the assistant director of the School of Music, and Otterson is a senior music instructor at Edgewood College, and also serves as music director at Christ Presbyterian Church. Her local career is marked by appearances with Madison Opera, Madison Savoyards, and the University Opera.

Production and music staff includes assistant conductor **Kyle Knox**, costume designers **Sydney Krieger** and **Hyewon Park**, technical director and set designer **Greg Silver**, lighting designer **Steven M. Peterson**, scenic artist **Liz Rathke**, vocal coach and musical preparation **Thomas Kasdorf**, and chorus master **Susan Goeres**.

Tickets are \$22 for the general public, \$18 for senior citizens and \$10 for UW-Madison students, available through the Campus Arts Ticketing office at (608) 265-ARTS and online at arts.wisc.edu. Tickets also may be purchased at the Vilas Hall Box Office, Monday-Friday, 11:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Any unsold tickets may be purchased at the door beginning one hour before the performance.

SYNOPSIS, *BÉATRICE ET BÉNÉDICT*

by John W. Barker

The lively overture, long a popular concert piece on its own, is built out of four themes heard during the opera.

Act I

[No. 1, Chorus] A crowd gathered in Messina's central square awaits the return of their victorious soldiers. [No. 2, Victory Song; Sicilienne] Hero welcomes passionately her beloved, Claudio [No. 3, Air], while her cousin Beatrice renews her "merry war" with another officer, Benedict. The latter two, while sparring with outward disdain for each other [No. 4, Duo], recognize the attraction between them, for all their denials.

Another officer, Don Pedro, reports the plans for the marriage of Hero and Claudio, and the two men tease Benedict about his renunciation of marriage for himself [No. 5, Trio]. He insists that, if he ever breaks his vow, he should be draped with a sign reading "On display here: Benedict the married man." This stubbornness only prompts Claudio and Don Pedro to trick Benedict into marrying Beatrice.

The officious musician, Somarone, rehearses a wedding piece he has composed for the occasion [No. 6, "Grotesque Epithalamium"]. Benedict appears, listening to the rehearsal. Likewise, but apart, Claudio and Don Pedro begin their plot by ostentatiously having a contrived conversation about how tormented Beatrice is over her love for Benedict, and how she hides her feelings behind her outward scorn. This is simply meant for the ears of the nearby Benedict, who hears and is amazed. He decides that he must, out of pity, match her feelings and "be horribly in love with her" [No. 7, Rondo]. At least, he admits, she has obvious charms upon which he can dwell.

When he leaves, Hero and her friend Ursule appear in discussion of a parallel deception they are pursuing. They have, in fact, persuaded Beatrice that Benedict is secretly in love with her. They hope this scheme will not go too far. But Hero is ultimately caught up in the blissful anticipation of her marriage the next day, and the two women sing of the beauties of the moonlight flooding them [No. 8, Duo-Nocturne].

Act II

With a banquet in progress, Somarone launches into a tipsy Improvisation and Drinking Song [No. 9] in praise of the wines of Sicily. Beatrice appears and in a long soliloquy [No. 10, Air], she re-assesses her feelings for Benedict, remembering how anxious she was over him during his recent military absence; she admits that she does love him, and sets aside her former pride. Hero and Ursule, observing Beatrice's change of attitude, tease her, and they invite her to share the happiness Hero is enjoying. The three women join in a Trio [No. 11] in which they flippantly debate the pros and cons of matrimony.

Leaving Beatrice behind, Hero and Ursule depart for church. An offstage chorus, accompanied by guitar alone, sings a beautiful Wedding Hymn [No. 12]. Benedict enters, and he resumes the old verbal sparring with Beatrice, but it is now undermined by their covert recognition of their feelings for each other. The other characters appear, ready for the wedding, and all join in a solemn Wedding March [No. 13].

A notary has appeared with the wedding contract for Claudio and Hero to sign. He has also brought a second contract, prepared, upon instructions, for Beatrice and Benedict. They hem and haw, but Claudio and Hero each produce samples of romantic verse that the two have privately written about each other. Capitulating, they sign their contract, to loud cheers. Somarone is called in with fanfare [No. 14, Banner Music], bearing a large placard with the self-threatened words:
"Tis here you see Benedict, now the married man!"

Finally matched, the pair launch a new kind of sparring [No. 15, Scherzo-Duetto]: they accept that irresistible love has humbled their pride, and they accept the delights of the moment, knowing that their sharp wits, the basis for their mutual attraction, will soon emerge. "We're in love today; yes, a truce is agreed on; but tomorrow, war is declared again!" And the chorus sets its seal on the prospect.

Madison Opera Trips' bus excursions to Lyric Opera's 2014-15 season are scheduled for:
October 22 – *Capriccio* November 12 – *Il Trovatore* December 15 – *Anna Bolena*
February 18 – *Tannhäuser* (the first three at 7:30, the Wagner at 6:00). For information on these bus trips to Chicago, call Fern Lawrence at (608) 238-1529 or FernLawrence @ hotmail.com .

THE LAUGHTER OF BITTER OLD AGE

by John W. Barker

Hector Berlioz is still a misunderstood genius. Despite the mounting frequency in the performance and recording of his works, he is still given a stereotypical reputation by general opinion. A bombastic and undisciplined composer who is only interested in spectacular effects. He himself ironically assisted this stereotype: when introduced to him, the crusty Prince Metternich asked Berlioz if he was the composer who always wrote for 500 performers. *No, no, Monsieur, I sometimes write for 450.”

Yet Berlioz was, in fact, capable of the greatest delicacy and sensitivity. He composed a number of truly beautiful songs for voice and piano, as well as subtle pieces for chorus. His late oratorio, *L'enfance du Christ* (“The Infancy of Christ”) is a devout work of the greatest tenderness and modesty. And throughout his scores, even ones of grandiose scale, there are segments of gentle simplicity.

Berlioz was, in sum, a pioneering Romanticist, a brilliant composer and writer whose genius could comprehend a range of musical and emotional expression. On the foundations of Beethoven, he blazed a trail of experimentation that astonished his contemporaries, and influenced even his detractors.

If there were threads that can be followed throughout his career, two stand out. One is his love for the plays of William Shakespeare. A devotee of literature all his life, Berlioz really fell for the Bard when, as a struggling novice musician in Paris, in 1827, he saw a touring production of *Hamlet*. It was not only the play that electrified him, but also the actress playing Ophelia, Harriet Smithson. He became passionately infatuated with her and, despite some emotional digressions elsewhere, eventually hounded Smithson into marriage: though it produced one son, it was essentially unhappy.

Unending, however, was Berlioz’s infatuation with Shakespeare, who became one of his great literary idols, and an inspiration for a number of his musical compositions. The first was a concert overture, *Le Roi Lear*, Op. 4 (1831). Though Berlioz never paid full justice to his love for Smithson with a full treatment of *Hamlet*, he did compose two miniatures based on the play. One was a setting for women’s chorus based on the Bard’s description of the Death of Ophelia (1848). The other was an impressive March for the Final Scene of Hamlet (1844)—for orchestra with chorus, and a final fusillade by firing squad. These were published together as the second and third items of his curious 1852 collection, *Tristia*, Op. 18.

Above all, there was one of his most original works, and arguably his greatest, his *Roméo et Juliette*, Op.17 (1834). This was not an operatic treatment but, by his own designation, a “Dramatic Symphony”. Taking his cue from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Berlioz incorporated solo and choral voices into movements of the piece, but left it to the orchestra to tell the bulk of the story; only in a finale does he resort to a quasi-operatic resolution scene. Nor would these be the end of his Shakespeare obsession.

The other major thread in his life, meanwhile, was his yearning to become a major opera composer. While we may think of him primarily as the first great virtuoso of orchestration, he was also deeply committed to vocal music. He loved setting texts, and had a very special sympathy for the human voice. Opera ambition was only an extension of that vocal perceptiveness. After all, it was through opera that composers achieved fame and wealth, and especially so in Paris.

Having established a concert-hall identity with his sensational *Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14 (1830), Berlioz hoped to consolidate his reputation with his *opera semiseria*, as he called it, *Benvenuto Cellini*. Its style was bold and progressive, but hostilities and sabotage wrecked its premiere at the Paris Opéra in 1836. This was a shattering setback for him, and characteristic of the difficulties he would continue to have with the Parisian establishment and public. There was only partial vindication when his friend, Franz Liszt, gave it its premiere, in a revised version, at Weimar in 1852.

Berlioz did try again. In 1841, with the distinguished Scribe as his librettist, he began work on an opera titled *La nonne sanglante* (“The Bloody Nun”) but eventually abandoned it, leaving only some written fragments. His discouragement with operatic composition and performance prospects must have affected the character of his next venture—dramatic, but not theatrical. Drawing on the great poem by another of his literary idols, Goethe, Berlioz composed *La damnation de Faust*, Op. 24, which he called a “dramatic legend”. Almost to avoid previous troubles, he made it, as he thought, an unstageable concert work—an intention foiled in recent years by companies and directors that have mounted new-fangled stagings of the piece. The composer himself wrote most of the text, and into this brilliant score he recycled some earlier music he had composed on Goethe’s poem. Yet again, the Parisian critics and public scorned this masterpiece by the

prophet-without-honor-in-his-own-land in its 1846 premiere. Its success in other countries was scant recompense; it was his long frustration that he had to go outside France for recognition. Again avoiding the theatrical, Berlioz assembled an oratorio, or *trilogie sacrée*, entitled *L'enfance du Christ* ("The Infancy of Christ"), Op. 25 (1854): as mentioned, its delicacy and tenderness have been a surprise to those who do not recognize his capacity for those qualities.

Another of Berlioz's literary idols was the Roman poet Virgil, whose great epic, the *Aeneid*, the composer had loved since childhood. Despite all his best judgement and his terrible experiences, he found himself driven to compose the most ambitious of all his projects, his five-act opera, *Les Troyens* ("The Trojans"), on the story of the Trojan Aeneas and the Queen of Carthage, Dido (1856-58). Anticipating Wagner, Berlioz was now settled as writing his own librettos. Beyond anything he could have expected, the story of his struggles for this opera's production is an epic in itself, and they would plague him the remaining eleven years of his life. A mangled production of only Acts III-V in 1863 just rubbed salt in his wounds: he never did see a complete production of it, and it was performed complete only after his death—in 1890, in Germany!

Adding to the misery of this debacle were the personal sufferings of his declining years. His father died in 1848, his two sisters following (1850, 1860). His once-beloved Ophelia, Harriet Smithson, from whom he had separated, died in 1854. His second wife died suddenly in 1862. A woman with whom he had a flirtatious correspondence died in 1863, the same year in which he witnessed the exhumation and transfer of Harriet's remains. His son by his first wife, Louis, died at sea in 1867. By the last decade of his life, burdened down by his rounds as a traveling conductor as well as by these personal losses, Berlioz was a broken, disillusioned man, ready to welcome death.

Yet, he had one more work of lyric theater to create after all. Among the Shakespeare plays he had discovered was *Much Ado about Nothing*, and as early as 1833 he made sketches for a one-act libretto, only to bypass it for his *Cellini*. Nevertheless, the idea had not disappeared. After long involvement with an impresario in the German resort town of Baden-Baden, when the impresario asked him to write an opera for his musical season, Berlioz returned to the idea of adapting *Much Ado*. Perhaps precisely to escape from the horrors he was going through with *Troyens*, Berlioz needed a comic subject at last (like Verdi with his valedictory *Falstaff*). Moreover, this work was a chance for him to extend his efforts in reforming the traditionally frivolous form of the *opéra comique*. That is opera which is not "through-composed" but which alternates musical numbers with spoken dialogue. He had tried it ambitiously with *Cellini*, and now he did it even more deftly, if with no less imagination, in *Béatrice et Bénédicte*. When the latter was first performed, in 1862, it was justly enjoyed by the audience, though visiting Parisian critics were nasty and negative. The work was not to be performed in Paris until 1890—the same year as the full *Troyens* was given in Karlsruhe—twenty-one years after Berlioz had died!

The score contains, after the overture, fifteen musical numbers. Berlioz wrote both the lyrics and the dialogue. Lovers of Shakespeare may be shocked to discover how much Berlioz has discarded from the original play. Gone are the machinations of the evil Don John, and the plot to derail the marriage of Claudio and Hero. Gone are the shenanigans of Dogberry and Verges and their keystone-cops band. Gone, even, is any shaping of the characters of Claudio and Hero. As the title indicates, this is a show specifically about Beatrice and Benedict, and about how they are tricked into discovering that, underneath their outward hostility, is real love for each other.

There is compensation for all that is discarded, however. The character invented by Berlioz, Somarone (whose name derived from a colloquial Italian word for "jackass"), may seem to be a low-comedy distraction. But in creating him Berlioz had in mind the same idea that Wagner did with his Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*: revenge on his critics. For Berlioz, the blustering, pretentious charlatan Somarone was a stand-in for the pompous academics and the mean-spirited critics and rivals who had prevented him from winning the status he deserved as France's most important and original composer of the day.

Berlioz described *Béatrice et Bénédicte* as "a caprice written with the point of a needle". Contravening our stereotype of the bombastic Berlioz, it reveals unfailingly the refinement, precision, and clarity of which he was capable. Commentators have called it no less than "Mozartean", but it is far from the strenuous neo-Mozartism of Stravinsky's own last opera, *The Rake's Progress*. It is, rather, simply an inherent Berliozian character fully revealed. Listening to it is its own justification: music of wit, extraordinary beauty, dazzling in both choral and orchestral imagination.

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

A dining idea for Friday, April 11, Opening Night for *Béatrice et Bénédict*

You are invited to join our Opera Props group at the University Club for a social hour:
Cash bar and fellowship 5:00 - 5:45.

From **5:45 - 7:10**, a light dinner will be served plated style in the main dining room. Wines and coffee will be provided with dinner. This meal is \$35 inclusive (no tip/tax fees).

Our program: Soprano Lydia Eiche will discuss her voice study to date, and plans for future work: you may recall her Zerlina in our recent *Don Giovanni*, or her Dalinda in *Ariodante* last semester. She is currently completing her undergraduate degree in vocal performance.

The Menu, with choice of entrée

Spring Salad with roasted beets, gorgonzola, crushed walnuts; Choice of breads.

Chef Nick Dulak offers two entrée options, with a choice of Malbec or Sauvignon Blanc wines, or coffee, tea, or milk.

Choice 1 – Cassoulet: Slow-cooked Duck Confit and Sausages with White Beans and Wilted Kale,

Choice 2 – Wild Mushroom Strudel with Sautéed Spinach, Wrapped in Puff Pastry and served with Haricots Verts and a Duchess Potato.

Dessert: Vanilla Crème Brulée.

Please send us your list of names of those attending, with the choice of entrée, and a check for your group (\$35 per person).

Checks should be payable to “UW Opera Props,” and please mail **by April 7** to **Peg Wallace, 2220 Chamberlain Avenue, Madison 53726.**

Questions? Call Dan Shea at 836-6911. The University Club is located at 803 State Street Mall.

April is a big month for **student recitals** – here are some special ones, all in Mills or Morphy Halls:

Thursday, April 3 at 7:30: Jim Doing Studio – All-student recital, art songs, opera, musical theater.

Saturday, April 5 at 6:30: Christina Kay, soprano with Tiffany Yeh and strings, wind, piano quintet.

Saturday, April 12 at 3:30: the Perlman Piano Trio (+2) in Schubert, Haydn, Dvořák.

Sunday, April 13 at 6:30: Yohan Kim, baritone.

Saturday, April 19 at 6:30: Erik Larson, baritone with Thomas Kasdorf and string quartet.

Thursday, April 24 at 6:30: Sarah Richardson, soprano.

Saturday, May 3 at 1:30: Nicole Tuma, mezzo soprano with Steve Radke and oboe, flute in songs by Bach, Britten, Heggie, Schoenberg and others about cats and people.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF OPERA PROPS

Dear friend of the University Opera,

As you know, our upcoming opera is based on *Much Ado About Nothing*, and indeed the libretto Berlioz put together for this opéra-comique provides for precious little actual action! But if you engage with the sublime music Berlioz provided, you want the singers only to stand and deliver the phrases as beautifully as they can. This is an opera that rewards study in advance, and to help get you started we have listed several selections from the internet on our website uwOperaProps.org that we hope will “hook” and guide you to listen and read further! Bill Farlow has assembled a cast for this production that is well-equipped to do a memorable job with this music, and the orchestra will have many opportunities to display Berlioz’s complex but elegant music: your close listening will be richly rewarded.

The Opera Props Board

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Once again, the opportunity to hear a great operatic rarity with fresh young voices in a university environment will be seen as a great gift to us, the well-prepared listeners! And our UW Opera program will once again have enabled the orchestra players to engage with a magnificent score that requires interaction with stage players, a useful discipline. We can understand why conductor Jim Smith might have called the opera program here “the jewel of our whole School of Music program!” (We have that exclamation on good authority.)

Thus it is a great relief to hear that the music faculty and L&S administration have decided to hire an Interim Director for our Opera program, and in fact there are several superb candidates visiting campus during the first weeks of April! We have been advised by Music faculty that this very good news was enabled by the Opera Props board’s decision to donate \$25,000 to help fund the first year of that interim position, and we are proud to have cooperated with Music’s request for that help.

Since our fundraising is mainly aimed at scholarships for students in the Voice and Opera programs, we now will have to work harder to provide those funds. Please consider helping Props to rebuild!

Now, news of another sort: We are proud of soprano Emily Birsan’s great success in Lyric Opera’s young-singer program, she has completed three years there and is already in great demand. In fact she will be singing April 4-6 for the Madison Symphony’s Mozart *Requiem*, and again May 2-4 in the MSO’s “Gershwin Legacy” concert. She will give a master class 1:00-2:30 on April 3 in Mills Hall and you are invited to observe.

Further, the well known mezzo soprano Susanne Mentzer, in town to sing for Madison Opera’s *Dead Man Walking* (April 25, 27), will give a master class 1:15-3:15 in Humanities 1321. Please join us there as well! For more information, check the internet at music.wisc.edu.

Much ado about Opera!

Dan Shea

Catching Up with Kitt Reuter-Foss

by Dan Shea



Kitt Reuter-Foss was in the news again in January, for giving a concert – she called it “a song journey” – to benefit a piano restoration project at Arboretum Cohousing on Erin Street. For lots of us, the idea came at a perfect time: We hadn’t caught up with Kitt for several years, and one of her last projects as a UW voice student was as Beatrice in Karlos Moser’s 1988 presentation of this semester’s opera, performed then in English translation as *Beatrice and Benedick*. Thus the January event would give us a perfect opportunity to hear Kitt again in concert, and to request an interview about her work these days.

January 18 arrived in typical snowy fashion, but the atmosphere in Arbco’s gathering space was warm and every seat taken. Nothing stiff about this concert, right from the top Kitt kept a humorous exchange going with husband Scott Foss and piano accompanist Jennifer Hedstrom. Both halves of the program began with tributes to love and marriage: “He touched me” by Levin and Schafer, and “Where is love” and “As long as he needs me” by Lionel Bart.

The program proceeded with more usual fare including classic opera arias from *Carmen*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Werther*, as well as a surprise from the soprano literature, “O mio babbino caro” from *Gianni Schicchi*. We could luxuriate in Kitt’s familiar plush mezzo sound and relaxed charm.

We noticed many voice students in the audience, and clearly there was much to learn from Kitt’s traversal of these favorite arias. After a lengthy intermission/reception, Kitt continued her tutorial with musical theater hit numbers by such as Sondheim, Lloyd Webber, Lerner and Lowe. Altogether it was a fine evening with banter about Kitt’s arrival on the UW-Madison campus with ambitions for admission to the UW Swing Choir, but then learning from her mentor Lois Fisher that her voice had true operatic potential. That led to serious voice study during the 1980s when she sang leading roles in campus shows like *Trouble in Tahiti*; *Kiss Me, Kate*; *Albert Herring*; and *Beatrice and Benedick*, while teaching and helping Scott bring up their daughters Erica and Alli.

In 1990 Kitt was pronounced a Metropolitan Opera National Auditions winner, and she embarked on a whirl of vocal coaching, rehearsals, performances first at the Met, and later at the opera houses of Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, Portland, Salt Lake City, and many others including Madison and Milwaukee. Her repertoire includes the roles of Carmen, Cherubino, Despina, Dorabella, Nicklausse, Rosina, Hansel, Suzuki, Maddalena (Verdi’s), and many others – that’s a lot of singing, not to mention her concert work with orchestras in the Masses and Oratorios of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Mahler and more. But we know that she loves jazz and musical theater too and has a full complement of singing that repertory.

As is well known locally, in the late 1990s serious vocal issues arose with an acid reflux condition that eventually necessitated surgery in 1999 by a local otolaryngologist. Luckily the surgery was completely successful and Kitt’s career resumed with major bookings and activity. But later a new problem began to occur – the gradual onset of a kind of nocturnal epilepsy: seizures would occur occasionally at night and cause memory problems, a critical factor for a singer performing on stage. By 2008 the problem became serious enough so that Kitt decided to retire from her active stage career. Now, thanks to recent medical advances, there are procedures that give hope to diminish these seizures, and in fact Kitt scheduled herself for such an operation just days after her January concert for Arboretum Cohousing! To date, the procedure has been successful and Kitt gradually is resuming her teaching activities. We can give thanks to this courageous and resourceful artist for the pleasure her long career has brought us, and wish her a happy return to all the activities she enjoys most!

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