



UW Opera Props News February-March 2009

ART AND DESIRE

Music and original libretto by Maura Bosch
University Opera production directed by William Farlow
UW Chamber Ensemble conducted by Ching-Chun Lai

A world premiere production comes to the Rennebohm Auditorium this month. This new opera confronts hard questions about an artist's life and work: how to assess the value of artistic creation, how to justify the cost to personal relationships an artist's work may incur? Composer Maura Bosch was invited two years ago Opera Director Bill Farlow to compose a one-act opera, and she gladly accepted the challenge. One of her motivations was "the opportunity to engage in real collaboration with the wonderful musicians at UW," in particular to write an opera for our students.

Ms. Bosch explained how she worked: "I decided to write my own libretto. I know what subjects move me, and I cannot write my best music unless I am moved. Several years earlier, I had seen the movie 'Pollock' which was a quite faithful retelling of Jackson Pollock's life made by the actor and director Ed Harris, and I could not get this movie out of my head. It summoned up so many feelings that I have about art, about its centrality to my life and the sacrifices that one is willing to make just to keep going, as well as the heartbreak when it becomes out of reach. It did not take me long to decide that Jackson Pollock and the themes of his life would become the themes of my opera.

"I decided early on that the opera would depict just a single scene. As it turns out, it is a scene not even from Pollock's life, but a scene involving his wife, Lee Krasner, and friend, Clement Greenberg, and it takes place twenty years after Pollock's death. The scene is absolutely fictional. In real life, Krasner and Greenberg became estranged from each other shortly after Pollock died. It is completely unlikely that a meeting like the one depicted in the opera could have ever taken place. Yet the scene provides an opportunity for these characters to express their most important feelings about art and about life: for Krasner, about the loss of her husband, the mess of her marriage before he died, her struggle to make art through it all, her frustration at remaining always in the shadow of Pollock; and for Greenberg, about the tragedy of his friend's life and death, and the decline of his own influence and reputation beginning with that death.

"The scene takes place in a lonely bar where Krasner and Greenberg (supposedly) meet, ending their long estrangement. As the scene progresses, additional people come into the bar, in particular, a man who resembles the dissipated Pollock near the time of his death. He is accompanied by two much younger women. It does not take long for him to begin to create a disturbance in the bar (cont'd next page)

**ART AND DESIRE WILL BE PERFORMED ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20 AT 7:30,
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22 AT 3:00, AT MUSIC HALL, 925 BASCOM MALL.
TICKETS AVAILABLE AT UNION THEATER BOX OFFICE (\$10 GENERAL PUBLIC, \$9 SENIORS, \$5
STUDENTS)**

which eventually Krasner and Greenberg cannot ignore. They do not recognize this man as Pollock, but he is Pollock, and the two women with him remind us that Pollock was with two young women when he died in a car crash twenty years earlier. The presence of these five characters together in a scene out-of-time provides everyone with the opportunity to express their deepest feelings about each other and about art. Even though they seem to be at odds with each other, they all have the same problem: they love art as much as they love life itself.”

With such a storyline to engage our imaginations, we can hope for an exciting evening filled with interesting ideas.

Our premiere production features UW students Amanda Compton (Lee Krasner), Ryan Thorn (Clem Greenberg), Scott Johnson (Jackson Pollock), Ryan Patrick McEldowney (Bartender), Alyssa Butch (First Girl), Emily Campbell (Second Girl). Production staff includes costume designers Sydney Krieger and Hyewon Park, technical director Greg Silver, lighting designer Steven M. Peterson, set designer Angelina Paoli, rehearsal pianist Susan Goeres, graphic designer Michael Patrick Willians.

University Opera gratefully acknowledges the support of the Dara Elizabeth Welty Memorial Fund for commissioning this new work and for making this production possible.

A few words on our composer, offered by John W. Barker: Longtime followers of the University Opera may recall, from back in 1993, the opera *Mirabell's Book of Numbers*, based on the poetry of James Merrill. The composer was Marjorie Hess. When the composer subsequently married, she changed from her maiden name to the new one of Maura Bosch. Based in Minneapolis, Bosch has built a steady and varied output. Her instrumental music has been partly influenced by her exploration of the accordion as a player. But her predominant interest has been writing for the voice and for the theater. She was trained at Princeton University, where she met Mimmi Fulmer as a fellow student, and has since written a good many compositions for her, both large and small.

Bosch is a skilled writer for voices, with a feeling for melodic line. Her opera is well-crafted, and is likely to offer much of musical beauty as well as dramatic interest.

The University of Wisconsin Opera Props is a friends-group designed to encourage the UW Opera and its connected voice program in the UW School of Music. The organization has two primary goals: to promote and enhance the enjoyment of the Opera productions, while encouraging attendance at other vocal programs by students and faculty, and to fund annual awards to promising vocal students. Opera Props seeks to serve as a link between University Opera and the surrounding community. The group welcomes as members all who enjoy the UW Opera productions, and who take an interest in the progress of students in its program.

This Opera Props Newsletter has been produced and edited by Charles Anderson, John W. Barker, Kristine Bengtson, John Kruse, and Dan Shea.

SOME UPCOMING U.W. EVENTS FEATURING VOCAL MUSIC

Wednesday, Feb. 18: Soprano Danielle de Niese conducts a master class (Morphy, 4:30-6:00), open to the public with Q&A session following.

Thursday, Feb. 19: Danielle de Niese in concert. Union Theater, 8 PM (lecture by John Barker, 7 PM; for location check TITU schedule at Union entrances).

Thursday, Feb. 26: Paul Rowe, baritone, and Christina Lalog, piano, with John Aley, trumpet, Alison Rowe, Violincello, with photography by Katrin Talbot, present song cycles by Enesco, Ewazen, Laitman. Mills Hall, 7:30 PM.

Sunday, March 8: Opera Workshop features *Le nozze di Figaro*, two scenes: "Non piu andrai" (Governor Harris, Jennifer Sams, Celeste Fraser) and Count/Susanna duet and aria (Kristin Schwecke and Anders Tobiason); *Giulio Cesare*: "Non disperar" through "L'empio, sleale" (Kristin Schwecke, Tyler Mitchell, Anders Tobiason); *Faust*, Jewel Song (Celeste Fraser).

We also will have two guest performers, James Kryshak and Jamie Van Eyck, presenting arias (unstaged, repertoire TBD).

OTHER VOCAL MUSIC EVENTS IN MADISON

Friday, Feb. 13: Madison Savoyards presents "Winter Jollity." The program schedules thirteen songs, drawn from each of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, with a special focus on characters who make us laugh. It also will introduce next summer's Savoyard's production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*. Among the performers will be several alums of the University Opera program, including Emily (Wallace) Whelan, Kathleen Butitta, Ryan Thorn, and Scott Johnson. (Unitarian Meeting House, 7:30; tickets (\$10) available at the door.)

Sunday, Feb. 15: Brahms concert by Kathleen Otterson, mezzo-soprano, and Susan Goeres, piano. St Joseph Chapel, Edgewood, 2:30 PM.

Sunday, March 1: Handel's *Semele*, excursion to Milwaukee's Florentine Opera (register by February 16, call 608-262-2451 for details).

Friday, March 13: Mozart's *Così fan tutte* presented by Madison Opera (Capitol Theater, 8 PM), also March 15 at 2:30. For further information see madisonopera.org.

Monday, March 23: *Cavalleria rusticana & Pagliacci*, Madison Opera bustrip to Lyric Opera (for further information call Fern Lawrence at 238-1529).

Tenor James Kryshak Wins at Metropolitan Opera Regional Auditions

James Kryshak, a tenor Master's student studying with Julia Faulkner, won first place in the Upper Midwest Metropolitan Opera National Council Region Auditions. He will advance to the semi-final round in New York in February with a chance to move onto the Grand Finals Concert on February 22nd. Our congratulations to Jim, who has taken lead roles here in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Don Pasquale*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Mikado*.