



Finding the colors of tragedy

The Romeo and Juliet story dates to before

Shakespeare, and has been reworked in many forms. What is it about the young star-crossed lovers that keeps playwrights, composers, filmmakers and audiences coming back? I posed that question to the singers who will portray the tragic pair in UK Opera Theatre's production of Charles Gounod's opera—Greg Turay and Manuel Castillo, the Roméos, and Rachel Sterrenberg and Julie LaDouceur, our Juliettes.

Their answers: "It talks to the human heart," and it's "so beautifully tragic."

Staging *Roméo et Juliette* is "a tremendous undertaking for a university," says Turay, and demands a great deal vocally and emotionally from the singers. "But we have wonderful students who are perfect for these roles," says UKOT director Everett McCorvey.

Preparing to sing the title roles requires a lot of work. There's the music, of course. Turay finds Roméo "probably the most demanding role I've taken on." It lies very high, and he's on stage almost the entire time. Castillo agrees. "The tenor part can be straining for the voice. If you get too much into the drama you won't get to the end. It's like running a marathon."

LaDouceur says learning the French text takes a lot of time—"not just my text but everyone else's, or you can't really give all you have from your heart. Then you have to transfer the meaning of the words into the voice. The voice can have so many colors, and one of the big things is finding those colors."

Sterrenberg says the emotion is critical, "mak-

ing it not just music but something the audience will relate to." Studying Shakespeare's play helped her "understand why the characters are saying and doing what they are." Turay says the libretto lacks "much of Juliette's character development," so the singer must convey that vocally.

The same is true for Roméo. "You start out with your own interpretation," says Castillo, "and you add what the stage director gives you and what the conductor gives you, and these layers create the final interpretation."

The characters develop emotionally in the course of the tragic lovers' four duets. Juliette's first aria and the first act duet are light and showy, and each succeeding duet deepens her character. LaDouceur describes Juliette as "young and spunky and sweet and a little shy, but deep down she's one tough cookie."

The singers say Gounod's music is "incredibly beautiful" and "makes it easy to find the emotion." LaDouceur says, "Juliette displays a huge range of emotions, and Gounod really paints the images. You know what the composer wants just through the

music that precedes what you're going to sing."

One feature that makes this opera a special challenge to stage is the Act III sword fight. Bryan Robertson, a fight choreographer from Cincinnati, taught form, parrying, and footwork. "Those blades aren't super sharp," explains Turay, "but they are sharp, so you have to know every move."

The opera will be sung in French with English supertitles. Says McCorvey, "Everyone has studied Shakespeare's play in school, so this is an opportunity to see the operatic version. That's a rarity!"

— By Georgiana Strickland



Clockwise from upper left: Turay, LaDouceur, Sterrenberg and Castillo

Lights, action, voice: Opera in grade schools

UKOT's Schmidt Opera Outreach Program (SOOP) is building a new generation of opera singers and lovers, all while saving Little Red Riding Hood and sparing the Big Bad Wolf.

Little Red's Most Unusual Day, with libretto by John Davies and music by Rossini and Offenbach, tells the familiar tale with a few twists, such as a suggested romance between Red's mother and Ranger Dudley.

"In our show, the wolf doesn't eat anybody," explained soprano Taylor Coriell, who portrays Little Red. "And we don't kill the wolf at the end. Some of the kids in our audience are fairly young, and we don't want to scare anybody." The target audience is kindergarten through fifth grade.

In her first year as SOOP staff member, Courtney Turay has booked *Little Red* into 58 schools in 24 counties. It's receiving an enthusiastic response, Coriell said. "The kids cheer for Little Red and try to warn her when the wolf is sneaking up."

The program began in 2003 as a joint venture of UK Opera Theatre and The Lexington Opera Society and is assisted by a generous grant from the William E. Schmidt Foundation. SOOP has performed in schools all over Kentucky and introduced thousands of children to opera.

"Because it's a story they already know," Coriell said, "they don't have to concentrate too hard on the story line. This allows them to focus on the music. Any preconceived notions they have about opera being boring are dispelled because this is understandable and fun."

In addition to Coriell, *Little Red's Most*

Unusual Day features Caleb Ashby, Chris Baker and Susan Rahmsdorff as well as Carson Schneider on keyboard.

At times, the singers break character to speak directly to the audience. There are also short talks by the actors before the show and question and answer sessions after when they reinforce the lessons of *Little Red*: "Beware of strangers," and "Listen to your parents."

The 35-minute show includes general music

information as well as insight into distinguishing voice types and preparing a performance. Coriell relishes the fact that children get to see a place for themselves in this art form, whether as an enthusiastic audience member or a performer. She said many of the schools they visit have little or no music curriculum, so for some children this may be



Courtney Turay

"Little Red's Most Unusual Day" is a hit with grade school students.

their first, or only, exposure to this kind of art.

Turay agreed. "We are exposing many children to an art form that they've never had any experience with. It would be wonderful if every student in Kentucky not only was exposed to this, but also felt it was accessible to them. And, that it inspired them to enjoy this art form for an entire lifetime."

Turay said almost every school administrator she approaches wants the program but some cannot afford it. The cost to schools is \$600 for one performance or \$950 for two, which covers the cast and crew and travel expenses. People interested in sponsoring a performance can contact Turay or Marc Schlackman at UK-SOOP@gmail.com. Performances are scheduled through Nov. 22 and dates are still available.

— By Anne Taul

Oh, the things they did....

University of Kentucky opera students and recent graduates didn't take the summer off. From Salzburg to Berlin to Holland America Cruise Line and the Kentucky Speedway, they entertained appreciative audiences and gained valuable performance experience. Here are just a few of the things they did last summer. A more complete list is at www.lexingtonopera.com.

Mary-Hollis Hundley sang Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* at the Lyric Opera Studio Weimar, Germany.

Arianna Afshari performed Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the Lyric Opera Studio Weimar, and sang in a benefit recital for the Studio. She received a full scholarship to the Franco-American Mozart Academy in Salzburg, Austria, to perform Madame Goldentrill in *The Impresario*, and the Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute*.

Antonio Castillo-Ibarra, Jacquelyn Chance, and Juelan Brown all studied at the Freie Universität in Berlin through Fulbright Awards. The program gives students a glimpse of Germany's higher education system through an intensive academic curriculum in German language, history, and culture.

Matt Turner performed Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* at La Musica Lirica, a five-week vocal program in Novafeltria, Italy.

Natalie Tyson-Multhaup played Iza in *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* at the Franco-American Vocal Academy in Périgueux, France.

Adam Von Almen was a classical lead singer for one of Holland America Cruise Line's European tours. He traveled to Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and England.

Mitchell Hutchings was an Apprentice Artist with Opera Saratoga Springs. He had the role of Frank in *Die Fledermaus*, and Ben in *The Telephone*. He was also in the chorus of *Così fan tutte*.

Reginald Smith, Jr. was a Young Artist with the Janiec Opera Company at the Brevard Music Center where he sang Germont in *La traviata* and in the chorus of *L'elisir d'amore*.

Ashley Jackson performed scenes at the Opera Training Institute of Chicago, including Mrs. Ford

in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, and Adrianna in *The Boys of Syracuse*.

Philip Eschweiler performed Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Léon in *Signor Deluso* with the Public Theatre of Minnesota.

Nick Johnson performed a solo for 1,300 youth at Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina, and played live music weekly at restaurants in Frankfurt.

Rachel Sterrenberg played Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi*, and Mary Warren in *The Crucible* at the Chautauqua Music Festival in New York.

Ellen Graham sang in the chorus for *A Flowering Tree*, *Eugene Onegin*, and *The Magic Flute* at Cincinnati Opera.

Lisa Clark participated in the Black Family Reunion with the Cincinnati Opera, and was a vocalist at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Paris, Kentucky.

Joanna Schnurman performed scenes in the American Singers Opera Project in North Carolina, Agatha in *Der Freischutz*, Mercedes in *Carmen* and Kate in *Pirates of Penzance*.

Rebecca Blackwell attended the six-week week Vocal Arts and Operetta program at Interlochen Center where she performed Little Buttercup in *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Evan Johnson participated in the Masterworks Festival in Winona Lake, Indiana.

Taylor Coriell sang Jeanie in *The Stephen Foster Story* and played an ensemble role in *The Wizard of Oz* for Stephen Foster Productions.

Michael Preacely performed several recitals this summer, including a benefit recital with doctoral candidate Dione Johnson. He also sang the national anthem for the opening of the 2011 Kentucky Speedway NASCAR series.

How do you direct a classic love story? Sundine answers that question and more

Stephanie Sundine began directing opera in 1998 after a distinguished singing career as a soprano. This fall she directs *Roméo et Juliette* for UKOT. She recently shared some of her thoughts on this opera and directing with LOS board member Sylvia C. Davis.

Q. How did you develop the connection with UKOT?

A. I met Everett McCorvey in Sarasota, where my husband, Victor DeRenzi, is Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Sarasota Opera. I explained that I not only direct operas for professional companies, but for university programs as well. Everett indicated that he would like for me to direct an upcoming opera for UKOT. It was the easiest job I ever landed!

Q. This is your first time to direct *Roméo et Juliette*. What makes you relate to it?

A. How can you not relate to *Roméo et Juliette*? I'm a romantic at heart. I have experience with many versions of the Romeo and Juliet story. Although my favorite work by Gounod is his *Faust*, I am drawn to the story of Romeo and Juliet and all the characters. In approaching *Roméo et Juliette* for the first time, I have spent a lot of time with the words, checking translations, and seeing what Gounod says about the emotion of the words through the music he composes.

In addition, I look beyond what the composer and librettists have created and spend time with other source material, of which there is much for this story. I have studied Shakespeare's play carefully, especially since the librettists Barbier and Carré did adhere closely to Shakespeare's version.

Q. The original Romeo and Juliet were quite young. How do you direct the singers, who are of necessity older, to adjust to the age difference?

A. The body language of the singers must reflect the age of the young person, so that we're not seeing all-knowing adults trying to be kids. The singers must appear youthful, fresh,

and unaware of the big picture. A certain willing suspension of disbelief is necessary.

Q. Gounod's music is highly sensual. How do you instruct singers to present the music in a way that gets this sensuality across without demeaning young love?

A. In any love scene I never let it get embarrassing or stage it in a way that would make characters or audiences uncomfortable. But there is passion

between Romeo and Juliet and they must become comfortable with one another and it must be compelling. It would make no sense if they just sat on the edge of the bed holding hands. They do, after all, consummate their marriage.

Q. Do you see the young couple as victims of fate? Immature judgment?

A. They are victims of fate. Friar Laurence does not get to the tomb before Romeo does. We don't know why. He has told Juliet that he will be at the tomb with her

husband when she wakes up and she and Romeo will flee to a new life. And, of course, Romeo never receives the letter explaining Friar Laurence's plan.

Romeo and Juliet's relationship was not planned. It just happened. They are soul mates. They have very little invested in the Montague and Capulet fight, as compared, for example, to Mercutio and Tybalt. It is perhaps similar to a situation in which a Palestinian woman falls in love with a Jewish man. Love just happens.

Q. What else would you like our readers to know?

A. I was very impressed with the level of talent among the singers when I was here in April to cast the opera. It is now a pleasure to get to know them better as we begin our work together.

I would encourage the audience to read Shakespeare's play and to view Zeffirelli's 1968 film version of the story before coming to the opera. It is a good idea to get to know the play by reading and seeing it and then to take notice of the similarities and differences in the actual opera production.



Stephanie Sundine

Star lineup of judges for Met auditions

The Lexington Opera Society proudly announces the distinguished judges for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Kentucky District Auditions November 19 at Memorial Hall:

Anthony Laciura is known for his character roles as a comprimario (next to the first) tenor. A native of New Orleans, he made his operatic debut in 1965 as a teenager. He earned music degrees from Loyola and Tulane universities before his debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 1982 as the major-domo in *Der Rosenkavalier*. He made 877 appearances at the Met through 2008. Described as “the clown prince of opera,” Laciura said that worked for him. “Choosing to be the second best turned out to be the best.”

He has sung internationally, and frequently at the Santa Fe Opera. In 2010, director Martin Scorsese cast him as Eddie Kessler in the HBO series *Boardwalk Empire*, which continues this fall on Sunday evenings.

Johanna Meier was one of the foremost Wagnerian sopranos during her 20 year-plus performance career. She made 78 appearances at the Met and her international roles included three years as Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* at the Bayreuth Festival, where she was the first American Isolde.

Meier grew up in Spearfish, South Dakota, where she and husband, Guido Della Vecchia, still reside. Born into an operatic family that toured with the *Luenen Passion Play*, Meier grew up performing. She and her husband continued to stage the *Passion Play* until 2008, when it ended after almost 70 years of the Meier family depicting the last days of Christ.

Meier is artistic director of The Johanna Meier Opera Theater Institute at Black Hills State University. The two-week summer program, in its 14th year, offers individualized teaching and coaching, with performance opportunities, to pre-professional opera singers.

Sherrill Milnes, a legendary dramatic baritone, is best known for his Verdi roles. As a child on a farm in Illinois, he sang and played six different instruments. Milnes studied at Drake and Northwestern Universities intending to teach but, following a summer apprenticeship at Santa Fe Opera, focused on becoming an opera singer.

Milnes launched his performance career sing-

Radio Opera Returns!

Central Kentucky opera lovers can once again enjoy Saturday afternoon broadcasts. Beginning in mid-October, WKYL.FM (102.1), our new classical music radio station, will carry seven Houston Grand Opera performances, and from December 3 onward, all 23 from the Metropolitan Opera. The MET schedule is available at www.Metopera.org. Take note of the different starting times.

NPR's World of Opera is also available now, on WEKU (88.90 FM) Sundays from 7 to 11 p.m. and on WKYL (102.1 FM) Saturdays from 1 to 4:30 p.m.

ing with the Chicago Symphony Chorus and on tour with the Goldovsky Opera Theater. He sang at New York City Opera in 1964, made his debut at the Met in 1965 and went on to 655 performances there through 1997.

Milnes' technique and style were so flexible that he convincingly sang roles ranging from the lowest villains to passionate idealists. Yet his vocal quality was unique and recognizable. Opera News said that Milnes “pretty much owned” the Verdi roles he sang at the peak of his career.

In 2001 Milnes and his wife, Maria Zouves, founded V.O.I.C.E. (Vocal and Operatic Intensive Creative Experience). Their workshops are geared toward understanding the challenges of being a professional opera singer. Milnes is professor emeritus of voice at Northwestern University and Artistic Advisor to Opera Tampa.

In 2001 Milnes came to Lexington as the Artistic Consultant for UK Opera Theatre's *Don Giovanni*. In addition to judging the District Auditions, he will conduct a master class at 2 p.m. Nov. 20 at Memorial Hall.

John Greer, who recently joined the UKOT faculty as vocal coach, will accompany the auditions and the master class. He comes to UK from the New England Conservatory where he was Director and Chair of Opera Studies.

The class and the auditions are free and open to the public.

— By Louise Shouse

Lexington Opera Society Calendar

OCTOBER

Opera Spectacular with Tedrin Lindsay, Catherine Clark Nardolillo and Jacqueline Roberts, 5 p.m. Oct. 9. Ticketed event. Contact lhs4574@aol.com for more information.

Roméo et Juliette, Lexington Opera House. 7:30 p.m. Oct. 22, 28, 29; 2 p.m. Oct. 23. Ticketed event.

Schmidt Youth Vocal Competition, Singletary Center, UK campus. 8:30 a.m., Oct. 22, Free.

NOVEMBER

Metropolitan District Auditions, Memorial Hall, UK campus. Time: TBA, Nov. 19. Free.

Metropolitan Opera master class, 2 p.m. Nov. 20. Free.

DECEMBER

Alltech Holiday Celebration of Song, Victorian Square, 6 p.m. Dec. 11. Free.

JANUARY

Samson et Dalila (concert version) with Kentucky Symphony Orchestra, Singletary Center, 3 p.m. Jan. 22. Ticketed event.

FEBRUARY-MARCH

Verdi's *Falstaff*, Opera House. 7:30 p.m. Feb. 25, March 2,3; 2 p.m. Feb. 26. Ticketed event.

Alltech Vocal Scholarship Competition, Singletary Center. 2 p.m. March 4. Free.

JUNE

It's a Grand Night for Singing, Singletary Center. 7:30 p.m. June 8-10, 15-16; 2 p.m. on June 10, 17. Ticketed event.

Ticket Purchase Policy Changes

There are important changes to UKOT ticket purchase policies this season.

It's no longer possible to buy all tickets at the Singletary Center for the Arts box office. Now, tickets for productions at the Lexington Opera House must be purchased from the Lexington Center Box Office on the 3rd level of the Shops at Lexington Center or by phone at 859-233-3535, by fax at 859-253-2726, by mail to 432 West Vine St., Lexington, 40507. A fee is charged for all tickets except those bought in person. The box office is open weekdays 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Weekend hours vary. The Lexington Center accepts Mastercard, Visa, Discover and American Express.

Tickets for UKOT productions at Singletary can be purchased from the box office there (405 Rose Street), by phone at 859-257-4929, by fax at 859-323-9991, online at www.singletarytickets.com. Box office hours are weekdays 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sat. noon until 5 p.m. if there is a weekend ticketed event. Processing fees apply to every purchase. The Singletary Center accepts cash, checks, VISA, Mastercard, UK Plus Accounts and Singletary gift certificates.

Prices for *Roméo et Juliette*, *Falstaff*, and *Grand Night* 2012 are \$40 for adults, \$37 for seniors, \$37 for U.K. faculty/staff, \$15 for students, and \$10 for children under 12. *Samson et Delilah* is \$25 for adults and \$20 for seniors/faculty/staff.

Bravo Guild members are eligible for a discount for one performance of *Roméo et Juliette*, *Falstaff*, and *Grand Night* 2012. The discount is not available for *Samson et Delilah* or any special ticket packages. The discount allows you to buy a second ticket at half price with the full price purchase of one adult/senior/U.K. faculty or staff ticket. This cannot be used with any other discount or special offer. You may only use one discount for each purchase, and can only use the BG discount for one performance of each production.

A special Shakespeare Package is available this season: Buy tickets for *Grand Night* 2012 at the Singletary Center and show them when you buy tickets for *Roméo et Juliette* and *Falstaff* at the Lexington Center for a \$15 discount on the adult/senior/faculty/staff tickets for these two operas. This offer expires Oct. 22. With this discount, two adult tickets (one for each opera) cost \$65, two senior or faculty/staff tickets cost \$59. It doesn't apply to student or children's tickets.

Tedrin's Recording Corner

by Tedrin Blair Lindsay, PhD

Surely Romeo and Juliet are the most sympathetic tragic lovers of all time, as immortalized in Shakespeare's play of tender insight and rapturous poetry. The lyricism of his setting practically defies any composer to tell the story in music more effective than his verse, though many have tried with results ranging from the obscure (such as Delius' 1901 opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet*) to the celebrated (such as Bernstein's 1957 musical *West Side Story*).

The most successful operatic adaptation thus far has been Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (1867). Like that composer's other great opera *Faust*, based on Goethe's masterpiece, *Roméo et Juliette* can be shown to suffer from comparison to its literary source's dramaturgy and characterization, yet Gounod's melodious score offers its own pleasures, and has now held sway for almost 150 years as the best operatic representation of its story, as has *Faust*, for that matter.

A fine 1998 recording of *Roméo et Juliette* features contemporary opera celebrities Roberto Alagna and Angela Gheorgiu, conducted by Michel Plasson (EMI Classics 56123), but it cannot compare with the 1969 rendering (EMI Classics 65290) by the legendary Franco Corelli and Mirella Freni, under the baton of Alain Lombard, although the French diction by both superstars, especially Freni, is ludicrously Italianate. Their voices fill the music with magnificent amplitude and their delivery is the very definition of "passionate." I recently encountered two of our community's musical eminences, pianist Cliff Jackson and musicologist Diana Hallman, and asked them to name their favorite recording of this opera. Without hesitation, they both said, "Oh, the Corelli/Freni!" So there you have it, on the best authority.

Bellini's rendition of the R & J story, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (1830), is based on the same source as Shakespeare's rather than on the Bard's famous interpretation, so the plot is somewhat less enthralling despite the same basic outline. There are two excellent recordings of this opera. One is Riccardo Muti's 1985 traversal (EMI Classics 64846) with Agnes Baltsa, one of my favorite singers, as Romeo (a mezzo soprano in Bellini's work), and as Giulietta, Edita Gruberova, an undeniably great singer whose

Learn more with Dr. Lindsay

Dr. Tedrin Blair Lindsay will resume his lecture series this fall, focusing on Shakespeare. Classes meet Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon at the Niles Gallery on the main floor of the Lucille Caudill Little Fine Arts Library (except the October 15 lecture will meet in the downstairs rehearsal room at the Schmidt Vocal Arts Center). Cost: \$20 per class, \$5 for students. No reservations required.

24 September: *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (by Bellini)

1 October: *Roméo et Juliette* (by Berlioz) and *A Village Romeo and Juliet* (by Delius)

8 October: *Romeo and Juliet* (by Prokofiev) and *West Side Story* (by Bernstein)

15 October: *Roméo et Juliette* (by Gounod)

22 October: NO Class

29 October: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (by Britten)

5 November: *Troilus and Cressida* (by Walton)

12 November: *Antony and Cleopatra* (by Barber)

For more information, go to: www.lexingtonopera.com/pages/events/lectures.shtml

work I do not particularly appreciate, although her artistry shows well in this role. However, the 1976 recording (EMI Classics 86055) led by Giuseppe Patané is more dramatic, more exciting, and boasts stronger singing. Janet Baker makes a more elegant and urgent Romeo than Baltsa, and Beverly Sills as Giulietta sings Gruberova right off the balcony, so to speak.

As viable as these operatic versions of Romeo and Juliet are, two other composers succeeded better than either Gounod or Bellini in capturing the story's richness through non-operatic musical settings: Berlioz' "dramatic symphony" (1839) and Prokofiev's ballet (1936). My favorite recording of the Berlioz was conducted by Muti in 1986, with Jessye Norman, John Aler, and Simon Estes as the soloists, and the Philadelphia Orchestra (EMI Classics 72640). The Prokofiev was given a stunning 1991 performance by Valery Gergiev and the Kirov Orchestra on Philips 432 166-2.

Compare and contrast for yourself how these musical geniuses responded to and expressed the timeless story of the star-crossed lovers, Romeo and Juliet.

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