

BRAVO!

LEXINGTON OPERA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER VOL. 11 NO. 3 SPRING 2012

WHAT GRAND NIGHTS AHEAD!

A Grand Night for Singing celebrates 20th anniversary

In 1993 two professors at the University of Kentucky, one voice and one theater, had an idea. Why not, they thought, present a Broadway revue using voice students and community members? It would be a good town-gown activity and give the classically-trained students a chance to loosen up, dance a bit, and develop another set of marketable performance skills.

Although the voice teacher, Everett McCorvey, and his dean, Rhoda Gale Pollock, agreed the thing was sure to lose money, they decided to put on the show.

Everything went fine until the night of the only performance. The opening had to be delayed 20 minutes so people lined up out the door of the Singletary Center could buy tickets to the show.

It's a Grand Night for Singing was off and running and it has not stopped since. In 20 years it has grown from one night to two full weekends, from a cast of 21 to over 70, from a doubtful economic proposition to one of the financial pillars of the lauded UK opera program.

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Prelude, Lexington's best party, *is getting even better this year*

Lexington's best party is getting better.

"Prelude to *It's a Grand Night for Singing*" has been distinguished for a decade by the outstanding selection of wines for tasting furnished by The Liquor Barn to accompany the gourmet food. This year spirits and beer will be added to the tastings, promising an even more festive occasion!

Returning to the Singletary Center for the Arts on UK's campus, guests will have two hours beginning at 6:30 to sample the food and drink while placing their bids on myriad silent auction items. The list continues to grow but it will include exquisite one-of-a kind jewelry, unique wine and food baskets from Liquor Barn, gift certificates for everything from restaurants to massages to voice lessons and tickets for a box at Keene-

land or to *La Traviata* at Cincinnati Opera.

At 8:30 the party will move into the Recital Hall to hear a sampling of songs from the upcoming *Grand Night* and the added

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"Prelude" ticket information

"Prelude to *It's a Grand Night for Singing*"
Singletary Center for the Arts, May 19, 6:30 p.m.
Tickets at <http://www.lexingtonopera.com>



The 2011 cast sings "The Brotherhood of Man" from *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

Grand Night: 20 years, 1,100 singers, 700 songs

From Page 1

"We have presented over 700 numbers in the 20-year history of *Grand Night* and we have had over 1,100 singers and 400 different orchestra members in the cast," McCorvey recounted. "That's pretty amazing!"

This year, as rehearsals get underway for the 20th anniversary *Grand Night*, the show has long since established itself as a "must see" for hundreds. Each *Grand Night* has a theme and this year it will be the greatest hits from the first 19 years. "Last year we had audience members fill out cards to tell us what some of their favorite selections were," McCorvey explained. Some favorites included *Hairspray*, "Hey, Big Spender," and the *Jersey Boys* medley.

And how has *Grand Night* performed as a teaching tool? "From the cast we have had singers who have gone on to stardom including Jennifer Fair, a regular on the cabaret circuit (for more on Fair,

see page 4); Phumzile Sojola and Andrea Jones Sojola, who are currently on Broadway in *Porgy and Bess*; and Reshma Shetty, who is currently star of the television show *Royal Pains*," McCorvey said.

Lexington Herald-Leader arts writer Rich Copley

wrote about the 10th *Grand Night* that several singers invited back to perform in that anniversary show were booked up in musical productions across the nation and could not join the cast. "Success does have its price," Copley noted.

It is a price McCorvey is willing to pay. "The reason that Jim Rodgers (the theater professor) and I started *Grand Night* was to produce a show that challenged the opera singers to

dance, sell a Broadway song, and become more flexible in body and in singing a tune. It has been successful well beyond my wildest dreams."

Longtime *Grand Night* fans seem to be eager to pay to see the stars of tomorrow. Ticket sales have been brisk since they began in April.

Ticket information

Where: Singletary Center for the Arts, UK Campus

When: 7:30 p.m. June 8, 9, 15, 16; 2 p.m. June 10, 17

Tickets: Purchase at Singletary box office, online at <http://www.uky.edu/SCFA> or call (859) 257-4929. (Processing fees apply.)

MUSICIAN, TEACHER

New vocal coach brings many talents, experiences to the job

Composer. Conductor. Accompanist. Coach. UKOT's new vocal coach, John Greer, is a man of many interests and talents.

Greer believes the breadth of his experience allows him to bring unique perspectives to his work. As a composer, he feels he can offer a personal approach to the works of other composers. He sees a "theatrical sensibility" to the opera stage that sometimes is not emphasized. And he hopes to bring "the attention to detail," usually confined to recital work, to the operatic stage through his work with young singers.

A native of Canada, Greer grew up in a musical family. He began playing the piano, ever-present in his home, by age six, and singing in the church choir soon after. He spent much time with singers as a piano and composition student at the University of Manitoba. To expand his musical horizons, Greer continued his education at the University of Southern California. He also served as general manager and head of music at the Brevard Music Center in North Carolina during the summers and worked on the music staffs of Glimmerglass and Chautauqua Opera programs.

Greer believes his new position at UK chose him rather than the reverse. He had heard of the vocal program at UK but did not understand its strength and character until he came to interview. Once here, he was impressed by the great vision and work of Everett McCorvey in bringing this program to its present high quality.

Greer said the atmosphere and energy in the UK vocal department are inspiring. "The students are astonishingly talented. They are so curious about all kinds of repertoire and open to exploring new things." He appreciates the blending of operatic and oratorio styles and finds it rewarding to help students discover styles suited to their voices that further their creative growth.

As the new head vocal coach, he sees the UK program poised at a wonderful moment of growth. "Managing that expansion is a marvel-

ous opportunity to maintain quality," he said. For him, this is a chance to learn what goes into building and maintaining a program at this level. Greer is especially impressed by the superior recruiting of young singers, made possible through support from Alltech and others.

Greer's musical influences are eclectic and numerous. They include Bach and Mozart along with Menotti, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Stephen Sondheim. His favorite operas are *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*. He also talks about Puccini, Verdi, Benjamin Britten, and French operas. Among his own compositions are two operas for children.

Greer hopes that the variety of his musical experience will encourage his students to explore many aspects of their art. One of his main goals is "to raise stylistic awareness and make students realize the parameters of that expression." He has particular interest in "the creative aspect of organization in bel canto and coloratura literature."

Being a vocal coach is exciting, he said, because each singer is "a different amalgamation of talents. It is extremely rewarding work."

— By Anne Taul



John Greer joined UKOT as vocal coach this year.

JENNIFER FAIR

High Cs on the High Seas

UKOT graduate Jennifer Fair has taken her talent around the world as a singer and cabaret artiste on cruise lines. Lexington Opera Society board member Sylvia Davis caught up with Fair in New Zealand to learn how the singer developed this unique career path and how her time at UK helped her prepare for it.

A few years ago, while based in NYC and traveling around to various singing jobs, I decided that I wanted to find a way to travel abroad, sing, get paid for it, and create something of my own all at the same time. After a lot of brainstorming, hard work, and creative thinking, I came up with a theme for a show, hired an arranger for the songs that I wanted to sing, and wrote a script for what I wanted to say. Then I put together a DVD of show clips from a live performance and pitched my promotional materials to an agent who began booking me as a solo headline act on various cruise lines in the industry.

I chose as the theme for the main show, "The Leading Ladies: A Celebration of Divas." This was a vessel for launching the languages, cultures and musical genres of some of the greatest leading ladies of our time. It allows me, for example, to sing a tribute to Edith Piaf and then turn around and celebrate the popular songs associated with Sarah Brightman or a famous aria of one of Puccini's heroines. After receiving an undergraduate degree in Music Education ('96) and a Masters in Voice ('98) from the UK School of Music, this seemed like the natural thing after all those musicals, operas, opera scene programs, revues and choral concerts both professionally and during my formative years with UKOT, including many *Grand Nights*.

I am typically away for a week or so at a time. I have just flown to New Zealand, will stay here

BRAVO!



Fair



Audience participation for "Mein Herr Marquis"

for seven days, then disembark in Tahiti. I'll fly home for six days and then on to Panama for another job, and so the cycle continues.

This pattern allows for some sense of "abnormal normalcy" as well the possibility to freelance other jobs or book the show in another venue when opportunity knocks and time allows.

I have been fortunate enough to see the passionate tango in Buenos Aires, the Sydney Philharmonic at The Sydney Opera House, the Sphinx and Pyramids in Cairo, the ruins of Pompeii, the Acropolis, to go snorkeling in the Great Barrier Reef and Bora Bora, to ride a gondola in Venice and, most memorably, to enjoy tours of Antarctica by Zodiac landing while experiencing the serenity of nature in its most perfect organic state. Name a "bucket list" destination and chances are a ship will go there.

Most important, with the opportunity to sing for audiences from all over the world, I am able to experience firsthand the magical power of the international language of music, which is the truly the greatest gift of all. "Wherever your heart is, that is where you will find your treasure." (Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*)

Graduates sing around the world

Baritone **Nicholas Davis**, who studied with Dr. Angeliqye Clay, will do graduate work at the University of Michigan. This summer he will sing Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and Colline in *La Bohème* for the Janeic Opera Company of the Brevard Music Center.

While at UK, Nicholas was a soloist with the UK Chorale and bass soloist in Haydn's *Missa Sancti Nicolai* and the Mozart *Missa in C*. He performed Papageno in *The Magic Flute* (Undergraduate Studio, 2010) and the Pirate King in *The Pirates of Penzance* (Undergraduate Studio, 2011). Last summer he delighted audiences as Gomez in "When You're An Addams" in *It's a Grand Night for Singing!*



Soprano **Ashley Jackson**, who studied with the late Gail Robinson and Cynthia Lawrence, will attend La Musica Lirica in Italy this summer, where she will perform Fortuna in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and understudy Musetta in *La Bohème*. Upon returning to the U.S., Ashley will perform at the Atlantic Music Festival, Waterville, ME.

While at UK, Ashley performed Pamina in *The Magic Flute* (Undergraduate Studio), Gapka Gapkanovna in the world premiere of Schnauzer's *With Such Friends*, as well as Sister Sarah and Nancy Miller in the world premiere of Joseph Baber's *River of Time*. She also performed the partial roles of the

Clockwise from upper left: Davis, Jackson and Sterrenberg

Governess in Benjamin Britten's *Turn of the Screw* and Belinda in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. She was also a featured soloist in *Grand Night*.

Soprano **Rachel Sterrenberg**, who studied with Dr. Everett McCorvey, will work toward a master's degree at the Curtis Institute of Music, studying with Mikael Eliassen and Marlena Malas.

A native of Madison, GA, she came to UK as the first place recipient of the 2008 Alltech Undergraduate Vocal Competition. She has appeared as Dana Kelso in *River of Time*, the First Lady in *The Magic Flute* (Undergraduate studio), and Musetta in *La Bohème*. Other credits include La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi*, and Mary Warren in *The Crucible* with the Chautauqua Music Festival. She sang Juliette in UKOT's production of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* in the fall of 2011, and most recently performed Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* with the Hamilton-Fairfield Symphony Orchestra in Hamilton, Ohio.



Rachel was a winner of the Kentucky District Metropolitan National Council Auditions last fall and won the Encouragement Award at the Metropolitan National Council Mid-South Regional Competition this spring. Other honors include the 2009 Peterson Vocal Competition and the Strauss Award in the 2011 Orpheus National Vocal Competition.

— By Madeleine Baugh

Prelude: One-of-a-kind chances to travel, dine, imbibe

excitement of the live auction. The featured item of the evening is a one-of-a-kind collection of Maker's Mark bottles, sure to attract some serious bidding. The hammer will also go down on a gourmet dinner for eight prepared by Portofino's, a one-week time share at the Club Regina in Cabo San Lucas, and a week in a three-bedroom penthouse in St. Maarten.

Tickets are \$100 each, \$75 each for purchases of four, or more and \$50 for patrons 21

to 39. Call 859-338-7112 or email lsnewsome@demovellan.com for further information.

The Lexington Opera Society exists to support the UK Opera Theater program and "Prelude," more than just a great party with exquisite auction items, is LOS' primary fund-raising event annually. So come to have a great time with food, drink, and music and bring your checkbook to have a chance at some of the outstanding items and support these talented young singers.



Young students have fun learning to dance, sing, entertain.

Lexington Opera Society Calendar

MAY

"Prelude to *It's A Grand Night for Singing!*"
Singletary Center for the Arts, University of
Kentucky campus.
May 19, 6:30 p.m.
Ticketed event.

JUNE

It's a Grand Night for Singing!
Singletary Center, UK Campus
June 8, 9, 15, 16, 7:30 p.m.
June 10, 17, 2 p.m.
Ticketed event.

JULY

Academy for Creative Excellence:
One- and two-week vocal, acting and dance
training camps for 1st-8th grades. Details
and registration materials at:
academyforcreativeexcellence.com
July 2-7 Broadway Bound Conservatory:
Creativity Incorporated
July 9-14 Broadway Bound Junior Perform-

mance Camp: *If Toys Could Talk*

July 16-29 Broadway Bound Middle School

Musical: *Who's Bad?*

July 23-27 High School Academy for Solo
Voice

July 30-Aug 3 Junior Academy for Solo Voice

OCTOBER

The Phantom of the Opera

Lexington Opera House

October 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 7:30 p.m.

October 7, 13, 14 2 p.m.

Ticketed event.

NOVEMBER

Metropolitan Opera District Auditions

Memorial Hall, UK Campus

November 17.

Free.

For tickets call:

Singletary events: 859.257.4929

Opera House events: 859.233.3535

Tedrin's Recording Corner

Grand, golden musicals

By Tedrin Blair Lindsay, PhD

When the months wind around to May and June, I always steep myself in Broadway musicals to help stay in *Grand Night* mode. For this column, I would like to turn you on to a few recordings of classic Golden Age musicals made in more recent years using operatic forces.

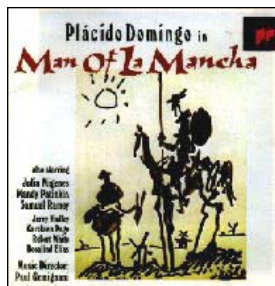


Dr. Lindsay

These projects of revisiting important American show scores are usually conductor-driven. One of the most active of these conductor/curators is John McGlinn, whose work with the London

Sinfonietta has produced

three especially elegant recordings. First is his complete *Show Boat!*, starring Frederica von Stade and Jerry Hadley as Magnolia and Ravenal, and Teresa Stratas as Julie (EMI 49108, 1988). What this *Show Boat!* may lack in Broadway verve, it more than makes up for with symphonic sweep, and it's wonderful to hear Jerome Kern's full score with all its gorgeous incidental music as well as its beloved songs. McGlinn also leads a spectacular complete *Kiss Me, Kate* with Thomas Hampson and Josephine Barstow at the head of the cast, and the sparkling brilliance of Cole Porter's music and lyrics is well-served in the full context of its Shakespearean double-story (EMI 54033, 1990). As wonderful as these two recordings are, McGlinn outdoes himself with Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon* (Angel 54481, 1992). This is not only one of the most beautiful of all Broad-



way scores, but in my opinion the single greatest recorded rendition of a musical theatre classic. With Broadway stars Brent Barrett and Rebecca Luker as Tommy and Fiona, this magical show comes to life on the sound waves and will lodge permanently in your heart. Just to hear tenor John Mark Ainsley sing "Come To Me, Bend To Me" whenever you want to is worth the purchase price.

Other excellent conductors have set their sights on reviving worthy Broadway scores. John Mauceri is at the helm of an exciting rendition of the Gershwins' *Strike Up the Band*, also starring Brent Barrett and Rebecca Luker (Elektra Nonesuch 79273-2, 1991), and Simon Rattle leads Thomas Hampson, Audra McDonald, and Kim Criswell in a charming performance of Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* (EMI 56753, 1999). Last but not least, the dean of Broadway music directors, Paul Gemignani, has assembled a magnificent operatic all-star cast accompanied by the American Theatre Orchestra for a superlative *Man of La Mancha* (Sony Classical 46436, 1996). Plácido Domingo in the title role heads a list of singers which also includes Julia Migenes, Samuel Ramey, Jerry Hadley, Carolann Page, and Rosalind Elias, and Mandy Patinkin as a hilarious, touching Sancho Panza. If you need inspiration, you need to hear Domingo's interpretation of "The Impossible Dream."

Let a show tune fill your heart and make it a whole grand summer for singing!



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