A WINTERS’ TALE

PUCCINI’S AMERICAN OPERA: THE CONVOLUTED STORY OF A MELODY

By GLENN WINTERS

In its opening strains, one could be forgiven for assuming that Puccini had adapted a song from the Stephen Foster catalogue, Italian words notwithstanding. In fact, the David Belasco stage play on which Puccini based the opera actually did use various Foster songs, similarly nostalgic ballads like “Old Dog Tray” and “Camptown Races.”

While in New York to oversee rehearsals for the world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera House, Puccini is said to have received a lot of unsolicited advice from well-meaning Americans unfamiliar with Italian opera: “Mr. Puccini, if you want this here opera to have an authentic American sound, you should stick in some good old American numbers like Suwannee River—they like that one!” I’m sure Puccini smiled as tolerantly as he could manage. Following the first performances, many critics leapt to the assumption that Jake Wallace’s song was an adaptation of Foster.

In Act I of Puccini’s The Girl of the Golden West, the miners’ poker games are interrupted by the arrival of the camp minstrel, Jake Wallace. Jake sings the opera’s first real vocal solo, a nostalgic song with chorus called “Che farrano i vecchi miei” (What will my old folks do). This song, one heavy with nostalgia for family and home, touches the miners. Remember: going to the California Gold Rush territory was an arduous challenge. This was undeveloped wilderness accessible only by overland stage (a journey filled with dangers of many types) or by sea. Once there, gold-seekers were stuck in a harsh physical environment with few comforts. Homesickness was common, a phenomenon Jake exploits in his solo.

The truth is that “Che farrano” has a much different origin.

MEET THE ARTISTS

A Tale of Jake and Jill

By POWERS PETERSON

Jake and Jill went to VO
To star in The Golden West.
Jake sang first and wowed the crowd,
Then Jill likewise impressed.

Long-time spouses bass-baritone Jake Gardner and spinto soprano Jill Gardner have shared the stage before, most recently in Tosca at Opera Coeur d’Alene in Idaho this August. Their performances in The Girl of the Golden West, however, will be the first time they’ve appeared together at Virginia Opera.

Both credit their entries into opera through learning to play instruments. Jill’s family discovered her fascination with the piano when, as a child, she knocked her front teeth out trying to climb onto her great grandmother’s piano bench. She could read
The Editor’s Notes
By POWERS PETERSON

With *The Girl of the Golden West* Virginia Opera moves from a Biblical tale of spurned love and revenge to a more modern take on — spurned love and revenge, though with a better outcome — at least in terms of the “hero.”

In this issue Glenn Winters takes a slightly different approach to his musings in “A Winters’ Tale.” Can you read music? You’ll see what I’m talking about on page 2. “Meet the Artists” is plural this time: husband and wife Jake and Jill Gardner sat for separate interviews with neither aware of what the other had said. (My choice.) Perhaps the most challenging thing for me in this issue was trying to tell the story of generating the action for the fistfights and the accompanying general mayhem. Those fight scenes have to convince the audience. Just as with costume design, the fight coordinator also has to take into account the other actors, the sets, the music, and the mood. Read “Behind the Scenes” on page 5.

Guild activities continue apace. We’re hosting the cast and crew of *The Girl of the Golden West* for a Western-style dinner soon. We’re anticipating the annual Holiday Luncheon on December 2nd in conjunction with the Virginia Symphony League. Before and during the luncheon our Gift Shop will display its wares on site at the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club. We’re gearing up to attend Guild Night with our invited guests in February. And I’ve already begun to squirrel away items for the biennial Merchant of Venice rummage sale next April — it’s never too soon to recycle.

For those of you who enjoy the history of opera, look closely at the photo to your right. I’m in front of Gran Teatro La Fenice, the opera house in Venice. Tell me, what famous operas premiered there? (Hint: Verdi composed them all.)
Chairman’s Corner
By MARK E. BOARD

What an amazing first production! Samson and Delilah was yet another great success for Virginia Opera. A special shout-out to Chesapeake native Court Watson for his astounding set design and costumes...you hit a homerun, Court. And even before the curtain went up, the Guild had many success stories as well. We enjoyed a fun-filled kick-off party in August; hosted 73 members and their guests at our hospitality tent at Opera in the Park; raised money for Virginia Opera at our beer and wine tent during Fest Events “Ribtoberfest;” served a flavor-laden Mediterranean buffet for 65 cast members and crew. We could not have achieved this without the help of those many Guild members who stepped up to make it all possible. We also have a new initiative with our newsletter, Coloratura. We’re distributing print copies before Dr. Glenn Winters’ pre-opera lectures and in the lobby before a performance. If you can help hand out Coloratura at one or more of the three upcoming productions, please contact Powers Peterson at powersp@me.com.

Fall ushers in the holidays. So, I encourage you to look at ways you can combine your gift giving with supporting the Virginia Opera.

Our Gift Shop in the lobby of Harrison Opera House is plentifully stocked with wonderful items you could choose for your friends and family. Janita Hess has added new items this year, including men’s ties, and Virginia Opera barbecue aprons. Step inside and see for yourself. Janita will temporarily transport our Gift Shop wares to the Norfolk Yacht & Country Club for the Holiday Luncheon on Saturday, December 2, 2017. This festive event is held every year in conjunction with the Virginia Symphony League. Might I suggest you invite a friend to join you at the Holiday Luncheon? Be entertained by both opera and symphony performers and begin your holiday shopping at the Gift Shop. Another thoughtful gift would be tickets to an upcoming Virginia Opera production. Choose from A Midsummer Night’s Dream beginning February 9, 2018, or Lucia di Lammermoor beginning March 23, 2018. Introduce someone who’s never experienced live opera to something really fabulous.

And don’t forget Guild Night. It’s on Tuesday, February 6, 2018 in the Grand Lobby of Harrison Opera House. It’s yet another opportunity to introduce a friend to Virginia Opera. Invitations to both the Holiday Luncheon and Guild Night will be sent out soon. Mark your calendars now. Here’s wishing each and every Guild member the happiest of holidays – let’s make Virginia Opera our gift of the season!

GUILD EVENT
Holiday Luncheon
By AMBER TAYLOR REEVES

Come one! Come all! The Virginia Opera Guild’s annual Holiday Luncheon in conjunction with The Virginia Symphony League will be held on December 2nd at the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club. Festivities will begin at 11 a.m. A cash bar will be available. Come mingle and enjoy early holiday shopping with the numerous temptations offered by the Opera Guild Gift Shop and the Symphony League Boutique. Following a plated lunch with a vegetarian option, we will be entertained by a vocalist from Virginia Opera and by a member of the Virginia Symphony.

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The Opera Guild and the Symphony League alternate chairing the event. Virginia Symphony League Col. Tom Meurer (also a Guild member) heads the event this year. Amber Taylor Reeves and Marianne Nicholson are the co-chairs for the Guild.

Don your best holiday finery and come gather with us! Listen to enchanting music that will get your holidays started. You won’t want to miss this sparkling event! As at past luncheons, there will be table arrangements by The New Leaf available for purchase. Tables can be reserved for parties of 8-10, so reserve early. Contact Amber Taylor Reeves at amberlaru@gmail.com. Guests are most welcome to attend, so invite your friends ($40/member; $45.00/guest).

Floral arrangements by The New Leaf

Photos by DRA
music before she could read words. So, Jill planned to be a classical pianist, and she was studying to be such. But that changed when she took a minor in voice. Gail Odom, her voice teacher then, allowed Jill’s “voice to develop naturally,” such that Jill was faced with a difficult choice: pianist or singer? She chose singing and went on to receive a Master’s degree in Vocal Performance from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. As her voice matured, she became comfortable with spinto roles such as those sung by Renata Scotto and Diana Soviero. Having been a Young Artist at Tri-Cities Opera in Binghamton, NY, and later at Glimmerglass Festival, she turned professional in 2005.

Speaking of Jake, he learned to play trumpet because his family thought musical training was integral to a well-rounded education. His initial career goal was to become a high school band teacher. In high school he had been singled out because of his vocal abilities. In his first year at the State University of New York in Potsdam, he was required to sing in the school’s choir. His first all-school concert – Beethoven’s Mass in C major – was “life changing.” His voice was “exceptional enough” that he was selected for the school’s 24-voice chorus that performed at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall. About that same time he saw Andrea Chenier at Tri-Cities Opera – but only because his then girlfriend’s mother bought them tickets, Jake was “blown away by the amazing production.” So a voice major it was.

The Girl of the Golden West has Jake and Jill onstage together. But whom else would they choose to sing with? Jill would choose to sing with Maria Callas and Jake would choose to sing with Cesare Siepi. The reasons are identical: both know they could learn much from interacting with those consummate actors with “beautifully produced voices.” Both Jake and Jill have sung in Italian, French, German, English, Spanish, Czech, and Russian. They agree Russian, though not easy, is easier to learn than one would think because it’s lyrical. Russian “teaches the tongue a whole new way to sing because of the way the hard and soft consonants align.” For her 2016 role as Tatiana in Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin (Eugene Opera, Eugene, OR), Jill spent a year studying the language. Czech, however, is far more challenging. Janáček’s music is predetermined by the rhythm of that language. Since the accent is on the first syllable, the singer “has to get the language right in order to get the music right.”

Continuing to play the piano is advantageous for Jill in that her knowledge allows her to teach herself roles, as she did with the role of Blanche in Previn’s A Streetcar Named Desire (Hawaii Opera Theater, Honolulu, 2017). Jake credits having worked with conductor Simon Rattle on Mozart’s Così fan tutte at Glyndebourne Festival Opera in 1991 as exposing him to an advantageous attitude. Rattle “is nothing but demanding and yet he’s incredibly gracious. Rattle makes decisions based on what’s best for the art,” not for himself.

Jill and Jake Gardner have lives apart from opera. They both perform in concert and in musical theater. He’s a chef and is currently reading the culinary encyclopedia Larousse Gastronomique in English – just to get ideas. She’s reading Kingsolver’s novel The Lacuna, and, to prepare for the role of Minnie, Lael Morgan’s Good Time Girls of the Alaska-Yukon Gold Rush. They tend the gardens in their North Carolina home, travel extensively, and obviously, make beautiful music together.
Erik Gaden makes his Virginia Opera debut with his choreography of the fights in *The Girl of the Golden West.* Although Erik trained as an actor, his interest in stage violence is longstanding. He says it stems in part from the “exhilaration of creating explosive moments in a live performance.”

How does one create a believable scene while ensuring the performers are not at risk of injury? Erik credits choreographer Stephen Davis, his teacher and mentor at Centenary University (Hackettstown, NJ). Davis “brought an infectious energy into the actor, Erik understands where the trained in the martial arts. Further, as an actor, Erik understands where the constraints. In addition, although he has not studied ballet, Erik has taken modern jazz dance lessons and also has trained in the martial arts. Further, as an actor, Erik understands where the flexible because each actor, each role, each stage, each set has its own constraints. In addition, although he has not studied ballet, Erik has taken modern jazz dance lessons and also has trained in the martial arts. Further, as an actor, Erik understands where the

Since every performer learns in his own way, it’s Erik’s responsibility to identify what each actor is comfortable with and how far each can be pushed. “There’s a lot of give-and-take when choreographing violence — and there has to be trust.” Then there’s the matter of body types. A larger person would not fight the same way a much smaller person would. “The move sets — general techniques a character would use in a fight — vary depending on the individual speed, strength, and agility of a character. And the actors have to be comfortable with what you’re asking of them.” Factor in the sets and the other characters on stage and choreographing violence in many ways resembles choreographing a ballet sequence.

Although this is the first opera for which he will choreograph the fight scenes, Erik has previously worked on numerous straight plays and musicals. The most challenging stage violence he has created was for *Night of the Living Dead LIVE!* for interACT Theatre Productions (South Orange, NJ). “It’s not everyday one has the opportunity to choreograph the zombie apocalypse.” When choreographing human characters, a choreographer considers a character’s thought processes and emotional complexity. “When choreographing for undead creatures bent on destroying the world, it’s a bit different. There is no deep motivation, just a primal instinct. The fights are more urgent, more intense.” For this particular production Erik incorporated everything from melee weapons such as axes and crowbars to firearms and unarmed combat.

What’s his next challenge after a zombie apocalypse? There are two productions on Erik’s must-do list. The first is *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* by Martin McDonagh. This very physical play has “everything — a huge gun fight, torture, fist fights, and more.” The second is Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth.* Erik says *Macbeth* depends on the real or implied violence on stage for its integrity. “Violence is the major device used to propel the action throughout the play. And then there’s the final, visceral battle between Macbeth and Macduff.” The fight director’s vision “advances the themes of and conflicts in this play in ways that are different than in other plays.”

For *The Girl of the Golden West* Erik doesn’t anticipate using every weapon in his extensive arsenal — firearms, halffight, short sword, long sword, unarmed combat, and dagger — but there will be plenty of fisticuffs. After all, it’s Puccini’s version of American author David Belasco’s wild, Wild West.
The Virginia Opera Guild has a tradition of feeding the hungry cast and crew members on the Sunday evening prior to opening night of each new production. The long rehearsal hours during the week preceding an opening are quite grueling, so it is with pleasure that we can provide delicious sustenance. While we may not have menus fully planned as yet, we are gearing up for the upcoming season by dreaming up “themed fare” for the performers’ enjoyment.

To accompany the biblically based Samson & Delilah, our first dinner had us serving a smorgasbord of Mediterranean fare. There were lamb dishes, couscous, tabbouleh, humus, pita bread, and other dishes that complemented this theme.

Our guests at the second opera, The Girl of the Golden West, will be treated to barbecue, fried chicken, baked beans, cornbread, coleslaw, salad, and all the fixin’s!

A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the third opera, will feature classic English fare. That includes shepherd’s pie, fish and chips, bangers and mash, and crumpets, just to name a few delectables. Of course, all of our meals will include vegetarian options and desserts appropriate to the themed meal.

For the last opera, Lucia Di Lammermoor, we will serve traditional Scottish foods — salmon, potato scones, Scotch broth or cock-a-leekie soup, and shortbread. Rest assured we will NOT be serving haggis or blood sausage!

You don’t have to be a gourmet cook to participate in bringing these dinners to life. You just have to be willing to take a little time. Let’s get creative! Join Amber Reeves and me and the other committee members as we whip up something special for the artists and the crews. You can also donate purchased food, including desserts, and/or needed supplies to round out our meals.

So, this season, come join the Artists Dinner Committee! Maybe we’ll even have a drink and a few laughs together!
VIRGINIA OPERA EVENT

Save the Dates!

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<td>Merchant of Venice Preview for Guild Members</td>
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<td>Merchant of Venice Rummage Sale</td>
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**Opening Night at the Gold Rush Saloon**

This pre-opera event will take place from 6:30 – 8 p.m. on Friday, November 10, 2017 in the Grand Lobby at the Harrison Opera House.

This is an event you'll want to attend. Get into the spirit of the Old West by rounding up your friends and neighbors and coming to Virginia Opera's one-night only saloon. Don those Stetsons and jodhpurs – but no spurs, please. Play a hand of poker – à la Minnie and Rance in Act 2. Sidle up to the bar for a shot of bourbon or a beer. Enjoy the sounds of the banjos. Try your hand at panning for gold. Maybe you’ll take home one of the raffle prizes – but not one of the dancing girls.

The festivities are open only to ticket holders for *The Girl of the Golden West*. The cost is $25.00 per person or $40.00 per couple.

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**GUILD ACTIVITIES**

**Merchant of Venice Rummage Sale**

The rummage sale will take place Saturday, April 28, 2018 at the Harrison Opera House. There will be a special pre-sale event for Guild Members only on Friday, April 27, 2018.

We’re looking for just about everything: housewares, furniture, jewelry, bikes, sporting goods, artworks, rugs, luggage, handbags, briefcases, working electronics and appliances, lamps, books, CDs and DVDs, seasonal items, glassware, crockery, knickknacks, and decorative items. (No clothing or shoes, please. We will accept scarves, belts and purses in good condition.)

The Guild needs volunteers to assist in accepting donations, sorting and pricing items, and monitoring departments during the sale. If you would like to volunteer to help and/or donate items, contact Barbara Buchmann at barbara4700@gmail.com.
Jim Deming

Colonel Jim Deming, a retired colonel, has a favorite song, but it's not an aria. It's Frank Sinatra’s “My Way.” It was his mantra throughout his 26-year Army career. Why? Because his career path did not follow the usual A to B, B to C, C to D, promotion, D to E, E to F – you get the picture. Jim describes his path for those 26 years as “schizophrenic” in that he didn't adhere to the rigidly prescribed route. He preferred it his way. Whatever the path, they do call him Colonel. His assignments allowed him to travel to all 26 NATO countries. Because his final assignment in 2002 was in Norfolk, he decided to put down roots in Hampton Roads thereafter.

Jim's favorite opera is Gounod’s Faust. In Austria on the occasion of his thirtieth birthday, Jim treated himself to a ticket to the Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna State Opera). The opera's appeal is two-fold: “the music is simply beautiful and the characters are complex.” Because of his military experiences, Jim relates to this opera's exploration of the consequences of grand bargains gone awry with unintended consequences.

Jim's first opera, however, was Aida at the Baltimore Opera. He was in seventh grade. The performance came complete with “live elephants borrowed from the Barnum & Bailey Circus, marching across the stage.” Jim was immediately “hooked on opera.” Years later he subscribed to and supported the Washington National Opera in D.C. With his posting here, he then became involved with the Virginia Opera. Jim began housing visiting artists 14 years ago. He's hosted over 25 vocalists, directors, designers, and musicians since then. Perhaps his most unforgettable guest was an Asian tenor whom Jim virtually never saw during the entire stay. Because the man “was so polite he did not want to bother the host” with his comings and goings, the singer entered and exited the house only through the large picture window overlooking the portico. Jim wonders what the singer would have done had the bedroom been on the second floor. The tenor got along well, however, with two other denizens of the night who inhabit the house, Jim’s cats, Buster and Miss Pearl.

Some years later, Russell Allen invited Jim to join the Statewide Board of Directors of Virginia Opera. He subsequently became Treasurer, a post he held for five years. Currently he is the Chair of the Virginia Opera Foundation Board of Trustees and also serves on the Guild’s Board of Directors. Because of his experience with Aida at such an impressionable age, Jim understands VO’s mission to cultivate young audiences. “I believe we need to introduce young people to opera early on in their lives to keep opera alive for future generations.”

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<td>Artists Dinner for The Girl of the Golden West, HOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 18</td>
<td>12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>The Exterminating Angel / Adès</td>
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<td>Dec 9</td>
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<td>Hansel and Gretel / Humperdinck</td>
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<td>Feb 10</td>
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<td>Hindoyan / Yende, Polenzani, Luciano, D'Arcangelo</td>
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<td>La Bohème / Puccini</td>
<td>Armiliato / Yoncheva, Phillips, Fabiano, Meachem, Lavrov, Rose, Plishka</td>
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<td>Mar 10</td>
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<td>Semiramide / Rossini</td>
<td>Benini / Meade, DeShong, Camarena, Abdrazakov, Speedo Green</td>
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