In This Issue...
Ruth Dobson

Welcome to the June 2013 issue of the Sacred in Opera newsletter.

We have sad news to announce in the loss of a leader in this field, Dr. Carl Gerbrandt. We pay tribute to him in this issue, not only by including his impressive credentials and referring to his body of work, but by acknowledging his huge influence in promoting sacred opera as a separate and viable genre in its own right. His inclusion of many works we don’t typically categorize as sacred music drama is the inspiration behind the featured article of this issue, “What is Sacred Opera?” We hope it will make each of you think about the definition of sacred opera and perhaps broaden your own perceptions and ideas.

Ruth Dobson, Editor Sacred in Opera Newsletter

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Carl James Gerbrandt
October 27, 1940 - January 23, 2013

Dr. Carl James Gerbrandt, 72, who received the Sacred in Opera Lifetime Achievement Award from NOA in 2010, died peacefully in his home in Colorado surrounded by family on January 23, after a six-month battle with cancer. Carl was born on October 27, 1940, in Meade, Kansas, to a Mennonite pastor, Jacob, and wife Mary, who were also schoolteachers and farmers. Music was always at the center of the home. After living in Kansas, Oklahoma, Montana, and South Dakota, the family settled in Reedley, CA, when Carl was in the 8th grade.

There he met Marilyn Friesen. They began dating at the end of their senior year of high school, where both graduated from Immanuel High School in 1958, and were married on August 11, 1961. In 2011, their 50th anniversary was celebrated in grand style, with over 150 guests enjoying Mexican food, piñatas, and decorations.

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After two years at Biola University in California, he transferred to Tabor College in Kansas, where he earned his Bachelor of Music Education in Voice and Conducting in 1962. He attended Wichita State University for graduate school, where he earned a Master of Music Education in Voice Performance and Choral Conducting in 1963. After returning to Tabor College to teach for three years, he and Marilyn moved to Baltimore, Maryland. In 1974, he earned his Doctor of Musical Arts in Voice Performance at Peabody Conservatory of Music of Johns Hopkins University. During his time there, he also held the posts of Director of Admissions, Opera Director, and Voice Professor. Post-doctoral studies were spent at Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie in Detmold, Germany.

He made his professional opera directing debut at Washington DC’s Kennedy Center. His staged production of Mendelssohn’s “Elijah” and one of his performances as bass soloist in Handel’s “Messiah” with the Annapolis Naval Academy were filmed by PBS-TV and broadcast nationwide. He also held a position as Minister of Music at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC, for several years. During his and Marilyn’s years in Baltimore, they were blessed to have a daughter, Lynée, and a son, Gregory.

In 1979, the family moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where Carl created the Sacred Music Drama program at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His time in Louisville inspired him to write his book, “Sacred Music Drama: The Producer’s Guide,” which was published in 1993; a second edition was released in 2007 by AuthorHouse Publishers. In 1983, the family moved to Greeley, CO, where Carl was hired as Director of Opera Theater, Voice Professor, and Graduate Student Advisor at the University of Northern Colorado. He retired from UNC in 2005 and was given the title of Professor Emeritus. As Music Director and Conductor of the Greeley Chorale for 20 years, he directed the 100-voice community choir on six international concert tours and presented ten world premieres. He initiated the Chorale’s English Madrigal Feaste in 1989 and founded the Greeley Children’s Chorale a year later.

Carl sang over 70 opera and oratorio roles and directed over 40 operas in his lifetime. His “Opera in Education” programs have given presentations at three national music conventions and reached thousands of young people. Carl’s true passion was nurturing his voice students and reveling in their successes, many having distinguished opera careers, including several with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

From Cambridge University in England, Carl was awarded both Visiting Fellow and Scholar research positions, the latter of which is the highest position given to a non-UK citizen. In 2006, he received the Arts Alive Award for his extraordinary service to the arts in the Greeley community, and in 2010 the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Opera Association.

In retirement, he continued to guest direct operas and conduct concerts; in La Paz, Mexico, he taught voice students at the music academy. The family has always loved the southern Baja region and has vacationed in San Jose del Cabo and La Paz for 27 years. The past three have taken Carl and Marilyn on a new journey of involvement in their local English church and mission ministries in La Paz. Carl is survived by his wife, Marilyn; daughter Lynée (Matthew) Graves, Brighton, CO; son Gregory Gerbrandt, NYC; grandchildren Braden, Camden, Justina, and Brandt Graves, all of Brighton, CO; sisters Geraldine Dueck, Portland, OR, and Pauline (Jon) Willems, Long Beach, CA; and many nephews, nieces, and cousins. Services for Carl were held at 2:00 P.M. Saturday, February 9, 2013 at the First Presbyterian Church of Greeley, with a reception following in the Celebration Center.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Greeley Chorale or TEAM Missions (www.team.org, missionary Peter Gatto) in care of Allnutt Funeral Service, 702 13th Street, Greeley, CO 80631. Friends may view the online obituary and send condolences at www.allnutt.com.
What is Sacred Opera?

by Ruth Dobson

In our past issues we have profiled many diverse sacred operas, including The Pilgrim’s Progress by Ralph Vaughan Williams, Hugo Weisgall’s Esther, St. Thomas the Carpenter and Eve’s Odds by Bruce Trinkley and Jason Charnesky, The Priess’s Tale with music by Delvyn Case and libretto by Christopher Hood, Rendezvous with Destiny by Theodores Sflotlos and Dr. Mozelle Clark Sherman, and many others. We have explored the possibility of staging works not originally conceived as staged drama, including Mendelssohn’s Elijah and Bach’s St. Matthew Passion. In this issue we will continue to broaden the definition of sacred opera with the inclusion of works that we may normally associate with this genre.

Carl Gerbrandt’s monumental work on sacred opera, Sacred Music Drama: The Producer’s Guide, (AuthorHouse, 2006) has been a major source of information for many of our articles for the Sacred in Opera newsletter since its inception five years ago. His text describes in detail over 280 works, from sacred chamber opera to grand opera, from the Baroque to the contemporary.

Most of the works he explores come from religious sources such as the Old and New Testaments, or from stories with a religious theme, as in The Gift of the Magi. He of course includes operas that form the traditional core of sacred drama, Britten’s Noye’s Fludde, Menotti’s Amahl and the Night Visitors, Mary Elizabeth Caldwell’s many works, Vaughan Williams’ The Pilgrim’s Progress, and many other well-known works.

In addition, he includes all of Handel’s oratorios, Judas Maccabeus, Samson, Saul, Joshua, Esther, Athalia, Belshazzar, Deborah, Jephtha, Joseph, and Solomon, and provides guidance for staging them. He includes Mendelssohn’s Elijah and St. Paul, and Bach’s St. John Passion and St. Matthew Passion. In his description of the St. John Passion, Gerbrandt says, “While this work was intended for concert presentation, the dramatic flow is quite adaptable for the stage, and can be visually effective. The chorus may be involved in the action but is best used as a Greek chorus. Dramatic involvement of the chorus could be enacted by a dance or pantomime troupe. Twelve chorales are used as strategic points throughout the work. It was intended by Bach that these chorales be sung by the congregation. The St. John Passion may be staged in a theatre, but is most suitably adapted in a sanctuary with a large stage and chancel area.”

(Those of you who have attended NOA conventions in the past few years have had the opportunity to attend several sessions about the staging of oratorio, including Carl’s own session in 2010. This informative session addressed the logistics of staging Elijah, and featured his son Gregory Gerbrandt in an outstanding performance.)

As I have continued to peruse his definitive text, I have also been struck with his inclusion of several works more associated with the standard operatic repertoire, or repertoire not primarily considered sacred. Verdi’s Nabucco, Saint-Saens’ Samson et Dalila, Britten’s The Rape of Lucretia, Poulenc’s Dialogue of the Carmelites, Richard Roger’s Two by Two, The Village Singer by Steven Paulus, Il Combatimento di Tancredi e Clorinda by Monteverdi, and X (The Life and Times of Malcolm X) by Anthony Davis are all featured among the 280 works.

In his description of the The Rape of Lucretia, Gerbrandt says in his notes, “While this opera is more associated with secular repertoire, the message most certainly makes a strong Christian statement.” Indeed, the closing choruses in Lucretia conclude with these words from the libretto by Ronald Duncan: “For this did I see with my undying eye, His warm blood spill upon that Hill and dry upon that Cross? Is this all loss? Are we lost? Answer us or let us die in our wilderness. Is it all? Is this it all? It is not all. For now He bears our sin, and does not fall, and He carrying all turns round stoned with our doubt, and then forgives us all. For us did He live with such humility, for us did He die that we might live, and He forgive wounds that we make, and scars that we are. In His passion is our hope Jesus Christ, Savior, He is all, He is all.”
Of his inclusion of the story of Malcolm X, Gerbrandt says “This biographical opera, by Anthony Davis, on the life and personality of Malcolm X is not a sacred opera per se, but deals with the beliefs and life of a religious Muslim leader. The opera opens to a scene involving Malcolm as a child with reflections on his impoverished childhood. The remainder of the plot deals with his conversion, travel to Mecca, and his rise to leadership among the Muslims.”

I decided to look through my opera scores and see what other operas are based on a strong spiritual theme, but are not traditionally considered sacred.

What makes them such compelling dramas? Many of them reach much deeper than the many variations of happy and sad personal stories of most opera plots.

(It would be interesting to be able to have a lively conversation with Carl about the operas I have chosen for this article. Would he approve or strongly disagree? I’m hopeful that he would at least consider the points I will attempt to make.)

When a sacred or spiritual element is added to the mix, opera enters into the realm of the profound. Speaking in wild generalities, I’ve often told my voice and song literature students that art songs really fall into just two major categories—“happy” and “sad”—with myriad numbers of gradations under those headings. It is their task to find the many different layers and levels of the human condition that are found in each song. “Happy” songs can be cheerful, ecstatic, joyful, loving, flirtatious, raucous, etc. Songs that fall under the heading of “sad” include those that are bittersweet, melancholy, angry, grieving, heartbroken, and many other gradations of emotion. All take specific insight and interpretive choices that are true to the mood of the text and music. We know that singers need to make each song unique, giving it their own particular “point of view” to truly engage an audience and be true to the intention of the poet and composer. Starting from these two general headings gives a singer at least a starting point from which to explore the song more deeply.

But when a song deals with the sacred, it becomes more difficult to categorize it as “happy” or “sad”. These songs are profound, with a depth that goes beyond the human condition. Religious songs that come to mind are Schubert’s “Im Abendrot,” Brahms’ “Auf dem Kirchhofe,” and Wolf’s “Gebet”. The approach to these songs is decidedly different for the singer than the preparation for yet one more song about romance. They are not necessarily better songs, but they are surely different.
Suor Angelica is also an opera about redemption and forgiveness. Suor Angelica has borne an out-of-wedlock child and is forced to enter a convent by her family. In the Roman Catholic faith, she commits the mortal sin of suicide by poisoning herself, after belatedly learning that her little son has died. But she too is forgiven in the last scene of the opera and is welcomed into heaven by a forgiving God. The power of Angelica’s broken heart and sorrow is understood and forgiven.

Contrast the ending of Faust and Suor Angelica with that of Don Giovanni. The Commendatore gives Don Giovanni many opportunities to repent, but he remains defiant until the end. This is one opera that does not end with the main character ascending into heaven! The furious pacing of Mozart’s music, which begins with the rape of Donna Anna and the murder of her father, turns out to be one long ride to Hell for Don Giovanni. His murder of the Commendatore sets Don Giovanni’s fate into motion. The opera rarely detours as we follow his unrepentant journey. Is there a more powerful ending in opera?

The only ending scene I find more compelling is from the next opera on our list. The sound of the guillotine falling on the necks of the Carmelite Nuns who are martyred in Poulenc’s Les Dialogues des Carmélites is surely the most wrenching ending scene in all opera. This theme of religious martyrdom dominates Les Dialogues des Carmélites (Dialogue of the Carmelites) by Francis Poulenc, which has a libretto by Georges Bernanos (adapted to a lyric opera with authorization of Emmet Lavery, inspired by a novel of Gertrud von le Fort and by a scenario of Rev. Father Bruckberger and Phillipe Agostini). This is an opera about religious oppression. The leaders of the French Revolution order all religious groups dissolved, threatening the continuation of the Carmelite convent that is home to Sister Blanche and the other nuns. The nuns unanimously vow to become martyrs. They are arrested and go to their execution singing.

Les Misérables, perhaps the world’s most famous musical, is of course based on Victor Hugo’s novel, considered by many to be one of the great novels of all time. Toward the end of the novel, Hugo explains the work’s overarching structure: “The book which the reader has before him at this moment is, from one end to the other, in its entirety and details ... a progress from evil to good, from injustice to justice, from falsehood to truth, from night to day, from appetite to conscience, from corruption to life; from bestiality to duty, from hell to heaven, from nothingness to God. The starting point: matter, destination: the soul. The hydra at the beginning, the angel at the end.”
A Sacred Opera?

I recently saw a powerful production of Jake Heggie’s *Dead Man Walking* at Eugene Opera. It also made me think about the larger definition of sacred opera. Normally we associate the film and opera *Dead Man Walking* with the issue of capital punishment. But it is also about the power of redemption and forgiveness. One of the central characters is a devout Roman Catholic nun and the other a heinous murderer. The soul of the story is the conflict between them. In fact, in the two productions of this opera that I have seen, I felt the more powerful theme than the morality of capital punishment is that of Sister Prejean’s constant prayer for the forgiveness of the murderer’s sins and his resistance to her prayers. Sister Prejean continues to pray for Joseph De Rocher, although she knows he was indeed guilty of this hideous murder of two young people. She prays fervently for his soul, hoping that he will be forgiven right until the very end of the opera. It ends with his execution after his eventual acknowledgment of guilt to her. It’s a powerful resolution and one of the most compelling modern operas I have ever seen. I had previously seen it at Pittsburgh Opera in 2004 and was struck by its power then.

*Dead Man Walking* has become one of the most performed contemporary operas, with over 33 productions since the premiere in 2001 at San Francisco Opera. It has been presented at opera houses throughout the world, including Dresden SemperOperna, Cape Town Opera in South Africa, Sydney Opera, and Malmö Opera in Sweden. Audience members are clearly drawn into this powerful story and stay riveted until De Rocher’s execution at the end. Moral conflict and forgiveness are clearly universally powerful themes.

The Story

The first scene of *Dead Man Walking* takes place at Hope House, Sister Helen’s mission, run by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Medaille. Sister Helen, with the aid of some of the other sisters, is teaching the children a hymn; this hymn, “He Will Gather Us Around”, becomes Helen’s leitmotif during the course of the opera. After the children leave, Helen reveals to her colleagues that she has heard from an inmate she has been corresponding with, asking her to be his spiritual advisor, and that she has decided to accept. The sisters are shocked, warning Helen of the dangers of her position, but she is firm.

Helen arrives at the prison and is met by Father Grenville, the prison chaplain, who conducts her inside. Father Grenville criticizes Sister Helen’s choice to work with De Rocher, claiming that the man is unreachable; he tells her that she’s in over her head. Helen responds that it is her duty to attempt to help the man. Father Grenville leaves her to meet with Warden Benton, who asks many of the same questions and also criticizes her decision. He then conducts her to Death Row to meet with De Rocher.

Warden Benton and Sister Helen walk through Death Row to reach the visiting room. They are accosted by the inmates (chorus) who in turn shout profanities at her and ask her to say prayers for them. Warden Benton conducts De Rocher into the visiting room. He is friendly and easy-going. They converse; he asks her to speak at the pardon board hearing on his behalf. He seems convinced that she will not return to help him; she assures him that such is not the case.

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The National Opera Association

The Sacred in Opera

Sister Helen is present with De Rocher’s mother and two of his younger brothers, who plead with the pardon board on his behalf. One of Joseph’s victims’ parents lashes out at her in anger. The four parents of De Rocher’s victims speak angrily to his mother and to Sister Helen, who attempts to calm both sides in the debate. The parents accuse her of not understanding their pain and sorrow. Word comes from the pardon board; De Rocher has not been granted his wish. Barring intercession from the governor, he is to die for his crime.

De Rocher is convinced that Helen has abandoned him; she enters, late, and tells him that she has not and will not. He is angry, and rejects all her suggestions to confess and make peace with his actions. The warden enters and tells Helen to leave at once. Helen is attempting to find money to get food from the vending machine, having forgotten to eat. She begins to hear the voices, in her head, of the parents, the children at Hope House, Father Grenville, the motorcycle policeman, Warden Benton, and her colleagues, all telling her to stop attempting to help De Rocher. The warden enters to tell her that the governor has refused to act to save him, and gives Helen some money for the machine. She stands for a moment, then faints.

As the execution date nears, Helen and Sister Rose pray for the strength to forgive De Rocher. On the evening of the date set for the execution, De Rocher and Sister Helen are talking; they discover they share a common love for Elvis. For the first time he admits that he is afraid. She reassures him, urging him to confess and make peace with what he has done; again he refuses.

The warden enters and informs them that Mrs. De Rocher is there to see him.

Mrs. De Rocher and her two younger sons are there. Joseph visits with them, and attempts to apologize; she will have none of it, preferring to believe to the end that he is innocent. Helen also speaks with the victims’ parents. Helen and De Rocher converse for one last time; once again she attempts to get him to confess to the murders. This time, something in him snaps; he breaks down and tells her the entire story. He expects Helen to hate him; instead, she says she forgives him, and that she will be “the face of love” for him. He thanks her. Father Grenville enters and begins the final preparations for the execution.

Guards, inmates, the warden, the parents, the chaplain, and protesters assembled outside the prison sing the Lord’s Prayer as Sister Helen reads a passage from the book of Isaiah. They approach the death chamber, and Helen is separated from De Rocher. The warden asks if he has any last words; he says he does, and asks forgiveness from the parents of the murdered teenagers. The warden gives the nod, and the execution proceeds. De Rocher dies thanking Helen once again for her love; the opera ends as she stands over his body and sings her hymn one last time.

When it premiered in 2000 at the San Francisco Opera, the hot-button issue of the death penalty and the work’s bald depictions of death shocked many opera lovers. Critical reaction to the opera was generally favorable; in particular, critics praised the sharp, finely delineated performances by the principals and the simple yet effective production.

De Rocher, played by Michael Mayes, finally admits his guilt to Sister Prejean, played by Janis Kelly, in the Eugene Opera production of Dead Man Walking.

The Story (cont.)

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De Rocher, played by Michael Mayes, finally admits his guilt to Sister Prejean, played by Janis Kelly, in the Eugene Opera production of Dead Man Walking.
I thought it was worth sharing another facet of Eugene Opera’s recent production of *Dead Man Walking*. Eugene Opera, the University of Oregon, and the community of Eugene were all involved in a month-long series of lectures and related events surrounding the production. Similar ideas have also been implemented in other communities, with collaborations about specific productions between universities, churches, synagogues, and opera companies and programs. I’ve included the following detailed information about the collaboration in Eugene in the hope that events like these will continue to inspire us nationwide.

“Prisons, Compassion, and Peace” was a month long event in the City of Eugene during March 2013. It encompassed city-wide events, featuring Prisons and Peace, a UNESCO – University of Oregon international conference; Eugene Opera’s Northwest premiere of the opera *Dead Man Walking*; Eugene Public Library’s Community Read of Sister Helen Prejean’s classic, *Dead Man Walking*; and the 40th Anniversary celebration of Sponsors, Inc. The Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts and the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art provided exhibits. Author Sr. Helen Prejean and composer Jake Heggie headlined the month's events.

Most events were free and open to the public. Here is a list of some of the events leading up to the performance.

**JAN 17, 31; FEB 14, 28, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON SCHOOL OF LAW, 4 – 5:30 PM**

Buddhism and the Death Penalty (Jan 17): Randi Getsushin Brox of the Portland-based Dharma Rain Zen Center prison volunteer program and UO French Professor. Judaism and the Death Penalty (Jan 31): Rabbi Maurice Harris, former junior Rabbi at Temple Beth Israel in Eugene and UO and LCC Instructor. Christianity and the Death Penalty (Feb 14): Dan Bryant, Pastor, First Christian Church, Eugene. Interreligious Perspectives on the Death Penalty: Panel Discussion (Feb 28): led by UO Religious Studies instructor and Gandhi scholar Veena Howard; includes Islam and Hinduism.

**FEB 1 – MARCH 30, DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE FOR VISUAL ARTS AND EUGENE PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Exhibit: “Visions from Within”

Personal insight and the creative process: Juried exhibition created by current and former prisoners and organized by Sponsors, Inc. Opening reception at DIVA, Friday, Feb 1, 5:30-8 PM.

First Friday ArtWalk, Friday, March 1.

**FEB 23, EUGENE PUBLIC LIBRARY, 3 PM**

Community Read Opening Event: by Sr. Helen Prejean

Welcome by Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy, Eugene Public Library Director Connie Bennett, and Sponsors, Inc. Executive Director Paul Solomon. Keynote by UO Prof. Steven Shankman, UNESCO Chair for Transcultural Studies, Interreligious Dialogue, and Peace; and Dr. Mark Beudert, General Director of Eugene Opera. Poetry by Prisoners, organized by Sponsors, Inc.

**FEB 28, HULT CENTER LOBBY, 11:15 AM**

Performance: “Showcase: Dead Man Walking”

The producers and cast of the opera, starring Metropolitan Opera soprano Janis Kelly, discuss the design of the production and perform excerpts.
Prisons, Compassion, and Peace (cont.)

MARCH 1, THE CITY CLUB OF EUGENE, 11:50 AM

Prisons, Compassion, and Peace

The link between art and public policy will be discussed by Prof. Steven Shankman, UNESCO Chair for Transcultural Studies, Interreligious Dialogue, and Peace; Rev. Tom English, Sponsors, Inc. Board Chair and prison chaplain; Connie Bennett, Eugene Public Library Director; and Eugene Opera General Director Mark Beudert.

MARCH 1 – APR 7, JORDAN SCHNITZER MUSEUM OF ART

Exhibit: “The Last Supper”

Painted porcelain plates by Prof. Julie Green (OSU) illustrate final meal requests of death row inmates. Artist’s talk on Wed. March 6, 5:30 PM. http://www.greenjulie.com

MARCH 15, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON SCHOOL OF LAW, 9–10:30 AM

UNESCO/UO conference On Prisons and Peace: Panel Colloquium

International Perspectives on the death penalty with international UNESCO Chairs, Pascale Boucaud (Lyon, France) and Dimitri Spivak (St. Petersburg, Russia).

MARCH 15, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON SCHOOL OF LAW, 10:45-11 AM


Showing of award-winning documentary about UO’s Prison Exchange Program.

MARCH 19, EUGENE PUBLIC LIBRARY, 5:30 PM

Readings: Prison-related Poetry and Prose

The Windfall Reading Series of the Library presents this program of readings, organized by Lane Literary Guild and Sponsors, Inc.
Spotlight on New Sacred Operas

The Gospel of Mary Magdalene by Mark Adamo

World première at San Francisco Opera, Spring/Summer of 2013

On the San Francisco Opera website, General Director David Gockley talks about the upcoming premiere:

“Many subscribers have asked me why we chose to do an opera on this subject. My response is that this is one of the world’s great stories in a new and exciting version, written and performed by some of the most extraordinary artists in opera today. Some, though, have expressed bewilderment. “Mary Magdalene, sure: but a Gospel of Mary? My Bible includes only the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John! How can this be an opera?”

But there is a Gospel of Mary: and this opera is based not only on that text, but also on other versions of the New Testament story that only came to light seventy-five years ago. In 1948, in the Egyptian desert, archaeologists discovered a treasure trove of these alternate versions: the Gospels of Mary, of Thomas, and of Philip; the Dialogue of the Savior; Pistis Sophia (Faith-Wisdom, in the Greek) to name a few. All these versions—while echoing the sayings and character of Jesus as described in the traditional Gospels—shed brilliant new light on Jesus, his teachings, and his relationships: especially his relationship with a woman known as Mary from the Galilean city of Magdala, known more commonly as Mary Magdalene.”

(We will report on this exciting new opera in an upcoming issue of the Sacred in Opera newsletter.)

2013 Convention Performance

The Sacred in Opera performance was presented at the historic and beautiful First Congregational Church in downtown Portland on Friday, January 4 at 7:30 pm. “The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains” Act IV, Scene II from The Pilgrim’s Progress by Ralph Vaughan Williams, and excerpts from The Masque of Angels by Dominick Argento were featured.

Stage direction was by Kurt-Alexander Zeller. Ruth Dobson served as Production Coordinator. Both are members of the Sacred in Opera committee of NOA. Portland’s Consonare Chorale, conducted by Georgina Philippson, provided the excellent chorus for both excerpts. Metropolitan Opera baritone Richard Zeller, a resident of Portland, sang the role of the Pilgrim in the Vaughan Williams and well-known Portland baritone Kevin Walsh sang Metatron in The Masque of Angels. NOA President-Elect David Holley joined the cast of the Vaughan Williams as the Messenger. Several other Portland area singers joined the production, showcasing both the beautiful Vaughan Williams and Argento excerpts and the considerable vocal talent of the Northwest region of NOA.

Photos by Richard Poppino

TOP: David Holley and Richard Zeller in The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains

BOTTOM: Ensemble, The Masque of Angels
Committee Members:
John Pfautz, Chair
Ruth Dobson, Editor, SIO Newsletter
Kurt-Alexander Zeller
G. William Bugg
Susan McBerry

If you wish to be added to the SIO e-mail list please send your request and e-mail address to John Pfautz at: johnpfautz@augustana.edu

The SIO Newsletter is looking for contributors. If you have presented a recent production or have information about a new or neglected sacred drama, please share it with us.

We are interested in your thoughts and ideas. We are starting a new column of “Letters to the Editor”. Please e-mail us and we will print your response to our articles.

Email Ruth Dobson at: dobsonr@pdx.edu

Layout by Daniel S. Hammond

RUTH DOBSON is nationally recognized as a performer, educator, and arts administrator. She was awarded the Governor’s Arts Award from the state of Oregon in 2007 for her distinguished lifetime work in the field of opera. For 28 years she was Professor of Music and Director of PSU Opera at Portland State University, where she also taught voice, vocal pedagogy, and song literature. Under her direction, PSU Opera productions of Le nozze di Figaro in 2000 and Don Giovanni in 2003 were awarded first place in the opera production competition of the National Opera Association. She was for ten years a Founder (with Ellen Faull, Professor Emeritus of the Juilliard School) and the Artistic Director of Bel Canto Northwest Vocal Institute at PSU. After her retirement from PSU she joined the voice faculty at the University of Oregon, a position she held from 2006-2012. She was Co-Founder and Director of both the Astoria Music Festival and the Portland SummerFest Opera in the Park. Her many current and former voice students are singing professionally throughout the United States and Europe. She has been a frequent soprano soloist with most of the major performing arts organizations in the Northwest, including the Oregon Symphony, Portland Opera, Portland Youth Philharmonic, Alaska Choir of the North, Abbey Bach Festival, Peter Britt Festival, Walla Walla Symphony, Missoula Symphony, Great Falls Symphony, Astoria Music Festival, and the Festival of New Music in Seattle. She received her Master’s Degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where she held a graduate fellowship as an opera coach/accompanist. She was invited to return to the University of Cincinnati to give master classes in vocal chamber music as part of their Grandin Festival.

She has been both a Board Member and Governor of the Northwest Region for the National Opera Association, as well as serving for five years as Chair of the Sacred in Opera Initiative. She is currently editor of the SIO Newsletter. She is a long-time member of NATS and serves as Vice-President of the Cascade Chapter. In 2005 she was honored with membership in Phi Kappa Phi at Portland State University.