

# OPERA ON RADIO

by

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A Dossier of Radio Transcripts

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## Abstract

This dossier is the product of an internship with the radio station CFMU 93.3 FM (McMaster University) which I completed between September 1995 and March 1996 as part of the program Master of Arts in Music Criticism.

CFMU is a campus/community radio station located on the McMaster University campus. The station caters to a wide variety of interest groups and musical tastes, and boasts a unique and diversified schedule of programs, while providing extensive hands-on training for those interested in pursuing a career in broadcasting. Throughout the course of my internship, I was able to produce and present my own weekly radio program, and in the process gained considerable experience in the many facets of the broadcasting medium.

Chapter One, *The World of Radio*, is a discussion of some of the challenges that I faced in the process of learning to become an effective broadcaster, and offers suggestions to anyone interested in creating an original radio program. Chapter Two presents a selection of transcripts from my weekly program entitled *Sunday Morning at the Opera*, supplemented by my own critical commentary on the effectiveness of each broadcast. Finally, Chapter Three, "A Critic at the Mike", focuses on some of the issues central to my project, in particular, the effectiveness of opera on radio and the role of radio broadcasting in music criticism.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE WORLD OF RADIO

I have always been intrigued by the idea of opera as a purely musical genre, independent of the stage, and by the role of radio in bringing the music of opera to a vast, disparate audience. Growing up in the “radio days” of the 1980s, broadcast music was everywhere, and many a weekend was spent near the radio listening to what seemed like endless hours of opera on the air. Back then, as they are today and have been for the past sixty-five years, the live Saturday-afternoon broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera House represented an exceptionally high standard in classical music broadcasting, and instilled in me a lifelong desire to get behind the microphone.

Yet despite my enthusiasm for the world of radio and my burgeoning love of opera, the idea of opera on radio had always struck me as something of a paradox, and, although intrigued, I was never quite convinced of the effectiveness of separating the music from its visual component. Even those inimitable Met broadcasts of my youth often failed to capture for me the meaning of the work being presented because their chosen format did nothing to compensate for the missing visual element. Most of the time, an announcer would read a cursory synopsis of the plot, and then the opera would be played in its entirety, while we inexperienced listeners would let the music go by without any knowledge of the text and no “surtitles” to help us along.

It was with this background, as an enthusiastic opera fan but hardly an expert in the genre, and as an aspiring music critic intrigued by the role of radio in my discipline, that I decided to pursue my own radio broadcast devoted exclusively to the presentation of music from the operatic repertoire. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the steps that I took to make my desire to get behind the microphone a reality, and will touch on some of the problems which I encountered along the way.

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In the late summer of 1995, I began to seek out a radio station which would allow an enthusiastic but inexperienced broadcaster like myself to do some hands-on work. Before approaching the station that I ultimately chose with my program concept, I found it necessary to consider that station's format, overall style and target audience so that my program would be a suitable addition to the existing schedule.

McMaster University is fortunate to have at its command a firmly established campus/community radio station of exceptionally high standards of professionalism which offers a rare training environment for prospective broadcasters. In considering this station, which employs the call letters CFMU, I was anticipating the opportunity to do extensive hands-on work as opposed to simply observing experienced broadcasters in action, which would have been the case at a larger station. The staff of CFMU is, in fact, comprised almost entirely of volunteers with little or no

broadcasting experience; at present, almost 175 volunteers work under the supervision of just two full-time staff members. Far from being a mere training ground for amateurs, however, CFMU displays a consistently high level of professionalism, and, as is seldom the case at higher profile stations, all CFMU announcers are encouraged to express their personalities (no matter how unconventional) and to make the most of their own unique skills and knowledge. In a recent programming bulletin, the station management boasted of its “pool of tremendously talented and well-informed people who are enthusiastic about their subject.”<sup>1</sup> The result of this enthusiasm is a radio station with an overall style that is progressive, energetic and, more often than not, refreshingly eccentric.

CFMU originated in 1964 as a weekly one-hour program known as “Mac Radio” on Hamilton’s CHML, just two years after the establishment of McMaster University’s Board of Student Broadcasting. Within a few years, the Board had acquired sufficient support from the McMaster Students’ Union to facilitate the purchase of its own equipment, and the station, then called CKMR, began broadcasting from campus on an AM frequency. McMaster Radio received its community broadcasting license in 1977 and by January of 1978 had relocated to 93.3 on the FM dial under the call letters CFMU.

Like many smaller campus/community stations, CFMU tends toward an

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<sup>1</sup> [?] “CFMU-FM Comes Alive - A Look Back at CFMU’s Roots,” *The Frequency: The Program Guide for CFMU 93.3 FM*, Vol.2, No.1 (Fall 1995).

eclectic mix of musical styles, boasting “diverse alternative programming” intended to appeal to a wide variety of tastes; as former CFMU production manager Clair Hynes explains, “to listen to CFMU for a whole day is to listen to a whole kaleidoscope of sounds.”<sup>2</sup> Many non-music programs are presented as well, including those dealing with politics, gender issues and multicultural themes, as well as more standard fare, such as news and live sports broadcasts. Such diversity in programming is reflected in CFMU’s slogan, “Redefining Radio.”

Classical music is well represented at CFMU. As of August 1995 the station offered four classical variety shows each week, as well as one devoted exclusively to contemporary classical works. Opera, however, had yet to be introduced into the schedule — I was told, in fact, that there were no regular opera broadcasts at any station within the city of Hamilton, and so my ideas were greeted with a great deal of interest and enthusiasm.

### *Creating a Program*

Once I had sensed some interest on the part of the management of CFMU, I began to put together a formal proposal outlining some of my ideas. However, there were still a few important questions to consider, the first being that of a time slot, which I knew would determine in large part the type of show that I could do.

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<sup>2</sup> Clair Hynes, “A Day in the Life of CFMU,” *The Frequency*, Vol.2, No.1(Fall 1995).

CFMU employs a “block” programming format, with brief contrasting programs placed in succession throughout the broadcast day; this is the opposite of the “vertical” format employed by stations which specialize in one type of music only.

As a result, most of the time slots at CFMU range in length from one half hour to one hour. I was concerned that, had I been given one of these slots, my original desire to present full-length opera broadcasts would have given way to highlights or theme programs. I was hoping for at least two hours, preferably in the evening “prime-time” hours, which I felt to be the most suitable time for the presentation of opera. In the end, I was successful only on the former count, and was assigned a morning time slot of two and a half hours, which would allow me just enough time to develop an extensive script in addition to playing operas in their entirety, as I had originally planned.

Although complete operas were to be the main focus of my show, I did take the opportunity to experiment with some considerably less-structured formats. For example, on several occasions I presented what are known as “variety shows”; these are perhaps the most common type of radio program, in which the announcer plays selections at random, with ad-lib commentary throughout. During this type of show, one can take a very free approach to the selection of musical tracks, with the only determining factor being the amount of time remaining in the program. I also presented two “theme shows,” one focusing solely on Canadian singers, orchestras

and opera companies, and the other dealing with highlights from operettas and musicals. In the case of both of these programs, I selected musical segments and timed them out precisely in advance, but my commentary, although thoroughly researched, was unscripted. Such programs provided a good contrast with my more “formal” shows, and, more importantly, gave me the opportunity to practise my ad-lib announcing skills.<sup>3</sup>

Once I was made aware that a suitable time slot was available, I began to consider my audience in greater depth. Although it is notoriously difficult to determine precise audience demographics, I was assured that my audience would be largely comprised of university students with little or no formal musical education, but with a strong interest in exploring all forms of music, from alternative to folk, to classical and, I hoped, to opera.<sup>4</sup>

Because I was by no means an expert in the opera genre myself, I felt a certain affinity with this audience, and looked forward to addressing listeners who, like myself, might be listening to a particular opera for the first time; for many of my listeners, I realized, opera might be a new experience altogether. I planned to use a “semi-educational” format, avoiding the use of specialized musical terms, and focusing

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<sup>3</sup> A complete listing of broadcasts given between September 1995 and March 1996 is provided in the appendix to this document.

<sup>4</sup> For a thorough and informative discussion of the various methods of obtaining audience statistics in radio broadcasting with a focus on audience psychology and behaviour, see “Broadcasting’s Near-Universal Audience” in Herbert H. Howard and Michael S. Kievman, *Radio and T.V. Programming* (New York: MacMillan, 1986), pp. 143-176.

instead on history and anecdote. Also, I wanted to adopt a decidedly listener-oriented approach which I felt could be achieved by mentioning musical points of interest, especially those which would be audible to the inexperienced ear. Along the same lines, I felt that distinctive segments of text and extra-musical noises could be crucial factors in establishing points of orientation, and alerting my listeners to “where they were” in the progression of the plot.

Once I had considered the aforementioned issues, I was ready to submit a program outline to Janis Nixon, the Program Director at CFMU. The following is an excerpt from my proposal:

As a frequent CFMU listener, I am aware of the wide variety of programs that exist at the current time, and I feel that a program devoted exclusively to opera would fit in quite well. I would like to present one opera each week in its entirety, but divided into brief sections, each one accompanied by a summary of the action and translations of text where appropriate, as well as critical commentary on the recordings being used. I think that such an “audience-friendly” format would have a distinct advantage over that used by many classical stations, which present an opera in its entirety after a lengthy synopsis, leaving the listener completely lost as to the significance of the music and words.

In terms of programming, I would like to present operas which are currently being performed in the area, so that certain broadcasts will serve as previews to live performances by either Opera Hamilton or the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto; aside from attracting a much-needed younger audience to live operatic performances, this could also prove to be a valuable source of advertising dollars for CFMU.

My proposal was accepted by the station at once, and I was assigned my

official time slot; however, I was apologetically told that longer time slots for the fall season were limited, and I was assigned to Sunday mornings at six o'clock. I was sceptical at first, wondering who would want to listen to opera at such an unusual time, but I was later reassured by a good number of early morning phone calls from listeners just waking up and turning on their radios.<sup>5</sup>

### *Preparing a Script*

Although the process of preparing my scripts varied slightly from one program to the next, in most cases there were four distinct stages involved. First of all, regardless of whether I was preparing to broadcast an opera that was unfamiliar to me or one that I knew rather well, I began by listening to a recording without the aid of a libretto or score. In this way, I aimed to approach the opera from the standpoint of the "uninformed listener," and my attention was drawn to such things as striking orchestral sounds, distinctive segments of text and prominent extra-musical noises or sound effects. Also, I found it necessary to listen carefully to the particular recording that I had chosen to air, in order to ensure that the points I mentioned in my script were clearly audible. After listening to the opera, I would begin to write my synopsis,

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<sup>5</sup> I was further encouraged when I read a report which stated that radio, as opposed to television, "achieves its highest audience levels between six and ten A.M." (Howard and Kievman, *Radio and Television Programming*, p.146).

using the libretto as a starting point; the process of writing a synopsis involved not only summarizing the action, but also taking note of such things as distinctive text, stage settings as specified by the composer and large and small-scale formal divisions.

The third stage involved returning to the recording in order to determine possible (and logical) places where I could pause to speak; at this point, I would also take note of audible instances of text and scene-painting, or any other salient points illuminated by my study of the libretto. It was during this stage that I often had to decide whether “cuts” would be necessary, and, if so, where they should occur.

Finally, I would consult a score in order to verify instrumentation at points which I deemed novel or striking to the ear.

Early on, I anticipated that in devising a script for each program some significant problems would arise, specifically because the playing of complete operas would leave me only limited time to discuss the works in question. Even within the relatively long time slot that I was eventually given, I knew that some decisions would have to be made as to what I could include in my script, and that I would often be forced to decide between discussing the music and the text. Although I had initially hoped to place equal emphasis on the music, I expected that I would only have enough time to provide a clear synopsis of the action, along with some of the cues I mentioned above. However, in the few cases where I presented operas in English I

was able to pay more attention to musical, as opposed to textual cues.<sup>6</sup>

### *Orientation and Training*

Since January 1996, CFMU has introduced an extensive training program for all new station volunteers, which includes workshops in such areas as general programming, production, news and sports, and multicultural and musical programming. The goal of these workshops is to guide prospective CFMU announcers through the production of a “demo” tape, which will be reviewed by the station before each new programming season.

At the time that I first approached the station, such training programs did not exist, and since I had little technical experience and was aware of the fact that I would be all alone in the booth that first Sunday morning, I was a little nervous about all the strange knobs, buttons, and levers that I saw before me as I toured the studio for the first time. To learn how to use the control board, I was invited to sit in on a few other programs and “tech” them, as it is called, a job which involves cueing up CDS as well as promotional announcements, advertisements and what are known as “stingers,” those brief, attention-grabbing station identifications commonly used at all

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<sup>6</sup> Transcripts #5 (*The Flying Dutchman*) and #6 (*Peter Grimes*) demonstrate cases where I felt justified in discussing the music in greater detail, the latter for the reasons mentioned above, and the former because of the descriptive and representative nature of the music, which I felt could be easily perceived even by inexperienced listeners.

radio stations.

After a few sessions in the studio, I had learned enough about the technical aspects of broadcasting to begin to anticipate some problems that might arise when it came time to present my first program. CFMU uses what is known as a “combo” format, in which the announcer usually acts as producer, programmer and sound engineer as well. Therefore, since I would be “teching” my own show, I sensed that choreographing my actual physical movements would be a source of constant worry. For example, I noticed that it would be virtually impossible to be “on mike” and to be cueing up a recording at the same time, and I wondered how so many radio announcers made all of this darting around from one console to another sound so “smooth.”

The second cause for alarm came when I was first warned about “dead air,” those fatal stretches of silence, either caused by technical error or faulty planning, which are the radio announcer’s greatest enemy, and which the audience must never hear for more than a few seconds. To avoid dead air, most board operators use a technique known as “cross-fading,” which involves raising the volume of a selection before the track that is playing has come to an end; likewise, it is customary to go “on mike” during the last minute or so of a selection and talk over the music, raising the volume of the music again before going to a station break. While I admired the smoothness of execution that these techniques required, and their resulting

atmospheric effect, I did not use them, of course, during my first program, knowing that dead air between tracks of classical music was not only desirable, but also, in most cases, unavoidable. A few days later, I ran into a well-meaning colleague who had listened that morning, and who advised me that I had waited too long after the music finished to begin talking; instead, I should start to talk just before each segment came to an end.

This incident illustrates something which is quite common at stations that present a wide variety of music aimed at a non-specialized audience, and where the conventions of classical music are not fully understood. The classical music broadcaster in this situation is faced with countless problems, and often station rules geared toward non-classical programs must be challenged. For example, it is customary for the station's program director to determine down to the minute the playing of advertisements, promotional material and public service announcements. These times are set out in a log book which the broadcaster must initial to prove that each announcement was played when specified, as the advertisers expect to hear their paid-for material at that precise time. Such strict scheduling can cause numerous problems for the announcer, especially in the broadcasting of classical music, where segments often exceed ten or fifteen minutes and cut into the time that has been set aside for non-musical material. The problem is magnified, of course, when broadcasting opera, in which the musical segments are frequently as long as one hour.

In my case, I sought out and was granted special permission to “cluster” announcements instead of playing them at their indicated times, and I was not required to play advertisements at all.

### *Writing for Radio*

Inevitably, a large part of each of my broadcast scripts would consist of plot synopses, and I was concerned that reading such material over the air would sound pedantic to a radio audience. I anticipated that in order to bridge the gap between myself and my audience, I would have to do everything I could to ensure that my synopses were “ear-catching”, and I constantly strove to improve the on-air effectiveness of my scripts. The progress that I made will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

There are considerable differences between a synopsis which has been written for publication, in a concert program, for example, and one written for radio broadcast. The audience in the opera house leisurely reads the provided synopsis while the last of the crowd filters in, and appreciates the detail which it entails, presented accurately and succinctly. Such an audience doesn’t expect much more than this, as the spectacle which they are about to witness takes precedence over the text; the synopsis is a preliminary to the event, but not the event itself. Quite the opposite, the text which has been written for radio broadcast, whether opera synopsis,

newscast or weather report, *is* the event, as there are no visual goings-on to distract the listener; in radio, as opposed to the concert hall, all of the audience's attention is focused on what is being heard. Consequently, when writing a synopsis for radio broadcast it is not enough to merely list the facts, but rather the facts must be communicated to the listener in an effective, interesting and "ear-catching" manner. In short, the synopsis written for radio must aim to fulfill an artistic, as opposed to a functional purpose.

Just as formal writing differs from everyday speech, there are considerable differences between a text written for the eye and one written for the ear. For example, when writing for radio, certain grammatical rules can often be cast aside without detrimental effect; a sentence which begins with the word "and" — such as, "And today on the program..." — sounds perfectly correct when used in a radio script, but would of course be avoided in formal prose. Likewise, incomplete sentences often work quite well even in a prepared text, and the rules of sentence construction can be stretched in many ways. In general, it is essential to write in a more intimate as opposed to a formal style, with a focus on the individual, and not the mass audience; in *Writing for Television and Radio*, Robert Hilliard recommends that a script be written "as if the presenter were sitting in the audience's living room making an informal presentation."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Hilliard, *Writing for Television and Radio*, 5th ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1991), p.55.

Finally, it is a good idea to avoid constructing a sentence or sequence of words which may look good on paper but cause problems during the actual broadcast. It was for this reason that I altered the statement “when he [Scarpia] breathes his last” in my script for Puccini’s *Tosca* to read “when he takes his final breath.” The first of the two phrases was particularly difficult to enunciate clearly over the air.

### *The “Radio Voice”*

In the world of radio, a suitable voice is without a doubt the announcer’s greatest asset. In classical music broadcasting in particular, a very specific type of voice seems to be widely in demand; in *Broadcast Voice Performance*, Michael C. Keith observes that “not unlike Easy Listening, Classical has a taste for the resonant, mature voice.” Along with a naturally low speaking pitch and what Keith describes as a “lushly textured” vocal tone, these are two of the most desirable attributes that the classical music broadcaster can possess.<sup>8</sup>

Broadcasting manuals for beginners seem almost unanimous in their assertion that the development of a radio voice simply cannot be taught, and that, much like musical talent, a voice suitable for broadcasting is a natural gift. Many would assert that the field of broadcasting is not for those with an uninteresting, unpleasant, or otherwise unsuitable voice; Keith adds reassuringly that “not all people are born with

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<sup>8</sup> Michael C. Keith, *Broadcast Voice Performance* (London: Focal Press, 1989), p.65.

a Stradivarius-caliber voice.”<sup>9</sup>

From my own personal experience, I tend to disagree with such discouraging generalizations, and I believe that the ability to alter the quality of the voice is something which can be learned rather quickly with practise. Although I realized that I could not completely “change” my voice (which is pitched quite low but possesses a naturally thin timbre), over the course of a few weeks I gradually learned to shape and direct it in subtly different ways to make it sound more resonant and full on the air. Some additional ways of improving the on-air quality of the voice, as suggested by Keith, include focusing on correct breathing, as “a lack of oxygen when speaking accentuates voice-quality deficits,” as well as warming up the voice, much as a singer might, by flexing the jaw, singing and humming.<sup>10</sup> I found this last piece of advice to be especially helpful when having to administer a cheery “Good Morning” every Sunday at six, when my voice was still fast asleep.

### *Vocal Delivery: Putting the Voice to Work*

Quite apart from the matter of the “radio voice” itself are the many factors which can either guarantee or inhibit an effective delivery of a broadcast script. One of the most common difficulties faced by inexperienced broadcasters is the tendency

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<sup>9</sup> Keith, *Broadcast Voice Performance*, p.125.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

to speak too fast, especially when reading a prepared text; my very first broadcast, which finished a full ten minutes ahead of schedule, was a case in point. Dr. Alan Walker, formerly of the BBC, recommends timing the text in advance while reading aloud as opposed to “in one’s head,” as the tendency to speed up seems to increase as the volume of the voice decreases.<sup>11</sup> Another common problem is that of speaking too loudly into the microphone, which causes the voice to sound distorted over the air; I was advised to position my mouth close to the microphone, but to speak no louder than I would to one person sitting directly across from me in the studio.

The most effective broadcasters are able to read everything, even the most mundane advertisements, with exceptional style and flair, and there are a few ways to ensure that this is always the case. When reading any type of prepared text over the air, it is crucial that the announcer have a thorough knowledge of the material beforehand. In many cases, an announcer is required to read text written by someone else, as in the case of news copy, commercials or promotional announcements. A good announcer would never attempt to read such material “cold” without first getting a “feeling” for it, or, more importantly, making sure that it is free from errors and that there are no unfamiliar words or awkward names to pronounce. When reading a text that you have written yourself, it is tempting to assume that you can forgo this crucial step; I made this mistake during one broadcast, when I confidently

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<sup>11</sup> Conversation with Dr. Alan Walker, 16 February 1996.

began to read my synopsis, only to pause and stumble over words which I had unknowingly mistyped. One of the first lessons I learned was that the announcer who stutters, stammers or pauses out of uncertainty for even the slightest instant has lost the audience's attention.

Pronunciation is, of course, a major concern, especially for the classical music broadcaster, who must constantly grapple with foreign names and terms and pronounce them in a way that is not only correct but also sounds confident and "smooth." The radio announcer has a responsibility to find out the correct pronunciation of problematic words and names before going on the air, because the mistakes one makes behind the microphone will be accepted as correct by a large portion of the radio audience, especially those listeners with little exposure to classical music. I once read a letter in a well-known music journal from an opera fan who praised the agile tongues of the Met broadcasters and admitted, "they don't know it, but they are my speech coaches, and I listen to every commentary and interview for clues on how to say names I've only read."<sup>12</sup> Such a testimonial should be sufficient to convince the radio announcer of the considerable power he or she holds in disseminating correct pronunciations, not only of performers' names, but also of musical terms, titles of works and operatic text.

One of the most common techniques of preparing a text to be read over the air

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<sup>12</sup> Susan K. Dunman, "Hiking up to Valhalla: Confessions of a Newborn Opera Fanatic," *Opera News* (May 1991), p.40.

involves marking such things as correct pronunciations and points of stress directly into the script, a technique which I will demonstrate in Chapter Two. In addition, the use of natural bodily gestures during the broadcast can be an extremely effective way to improve your on-air delivery; Michael Keith advises his students to “be expressive, even deliberately dramatic, when vocalizing prior to the actual taping or broadcast.”<sup>13</sup> Such techniques, which I used *during* my broadcasts as well, prevented me from sounding like I was talking to a microphone instead of an audience full of real people.

One of the most elusive problems in broadcasting is that of “putting a face behind the voice,” letting your own personality — and individuality — become an integral part of your on-air persona. In *Television and Radio Announcing*, Stuart Hyde expresses his annoyance at the trend toward an “‘announcerish’ sound,” based on that standardized set of inflections and mannerisms which seem to be the sole property of the television and radio announcer. Hyde continues:

Tune across the radio dial in any part of the country and you will soon hear someone trying very hard to approximate the phonation, articulation, phrasing, and pronunciation of the stereotyped announcer. His effort is misplaced; he is not supposed to be a mimic. Good announcing is not *imitation*; it is *communication*. Most outstanding announcers succeed because they are unique. They retain their individuality as they focus on getting their message across. True communication begins when an announcer *learns who he is, reflects himself*

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<sup>13</sup> Keith, *Broadcast Voice Performance*, p. 126.

*in his delivery, cares about the message he is sending, and knows that he is speaking to individuals, not a crowd.*<sup>14</sup>

It is possible, of course, to bring too much of one's own personality into a broadcast, and, when this is the case, the announcer is putting the needs of the audience second to his or her own. Michael Keith quotes Marilyn Helzer, Vice President of Programming for Minnesota Public Radio, on the subject of classical music broadcasting:

Talking too much is a bad habit in any situation or venue, but especially on the air. With our format it is important to get on with the music. An announcer with a wonderful voice can fall into the trap of loving to hear herself talk. Simply put, leave your narcissism at home.<sup>15</sup>

Helzer expresses a common opinion when she implies that, in classical music broadcasting, it is the *music* that is of primary importance, and not the announcer. Similarly, in *The Art and Science of Radio*, Linda Busby and Donald Parker describe the classical radio persona as one that “does not interfere with the flow of the music,” as opposed to the rock persona, which becomes “directly involved in the music.”<sup>16</sup>

During the course of my internship at CFMU, a station which, due to its

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<sup>14</sup> Stuart W. Hyde, *Television and Radio Announcing*, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 17 (italics his).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Keith, *Broadcast Voice Performance*, p.65.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Busby and Donald Parker, *The Art and Science of Radio* (Toronto: Allyn and Bacon, 1984), p. 117.

distinctive format, encourages its announcers to “be themselves” at all times, I felt myself resisting this approach and suspected that what is sometimes called “personality-based broadcasting” is perhaps not as suitable to classical music broadcasting as it is to most other formats. Still, I found that as my experience grew and I began to feel more and more comfortable behind the microphone, I was able to bring a little bit more of “myself” into each broadcast.

### *The Radio Announcer as Producer*

In the broadcasting profession, and particularly at a small campus/community station such as CFMU, it is very rare that the responsibilities of the radio announcer are limited to such things as speaking on the air, providing commentary and reading prepared scripts. In most cases, the announcer must also act as producer, sound technician and, all too often, troubleshooter and repairperson. The role of the radio announcer, especially at a small station, may call for a considerable amount of flexibility and the ability to make split-second decisions.

During the course of my internship, much time was spent in matters of production, including such things as the timing of musical and textual segments, preparing promotional material and making decisions regarding theme music. In preparing any type of music broadcast within a prescribed time frame, it is essential that all musical segments be carefully timed out. Also, in the case of my opera

broadcasts, I found it necessary to preview the recordings I had chosen to air well in advance to determine where cuts could effectively be made in case of an unexpected change in schedule. I learned this lesson the hard way, after my program was delayed by twenty minutes one morning due to an equipment failure, and the recording I had been scheduled to play offered very few “clean” cuts. I was also faced with the opposite problem on more than one occasion; once, due to an overly-sensitive CD player and a recording that was slightly damaged, I had to pause in the middle of the first act because of skipping and distortion, and therefore had a half-hour of time to fill at the end of the program. Such a situation requires rummaging in the station library for some suitable music to fill the rest of the time slot, or, preferably, having done sufficient research in advance to “stall” with anecdotes, historical information, or comments about the recording while assessing the problem or calling in someone else who can fix it. However, the announcer is often the only person in the studio, and must be prepared at all times for equipment failure or similar disaster to strike.

Returning to matters of production, there are many ways, once you have developed a program, to give it added flair, the most important being the choice of theme music, which should be not only “ear-catching” but also well-suited to the overall style of the program, the time of day, and, of course, to the musical genre. After much consideration, I chose to start each program with the opening section of Wagner’s overture to *Der Fliegende Holländer*. I chose this music for a variety of

reasons, but primarily because it was lively enough to catch the attention of my sleepy listeners, and was a relatively well-known piece associated with the opera genre. Most importantly, the section of music that I chose was of an ideal length, and ended with a gradual fade to near silence which provided a perfect “lull” in which to begin my initial audience address. While many classical programs use a different opening theme for each show, I used my theme music consistently, because I found it to be as important in identifying my program as the title.

The importance of atmosphere cannot be understated in the world of classical music broadcasting, especially within the context of a variety station, where promotional material may be geared toward listeners of non-classical music. At such a station, promotional material, “stingers,” service announcements and advertisements are often geared toward the station’s target audience, and as a result the overall style of this material (including such things as background music) often reflects that audience’s tastes. Most of the time, I was able to preview “stingers” and announcements before airing them in order to choose those which best complimented my program. On the few occasions when I was unable to preview, I ended up with highly inappropriate material that made my station break sound “jarring” and destroyed the atmosphere that I had worked so hard to establish.

### *The Matter of Nerves: Facing the Microphone for the First Time*

There are few tasks more intimidating than sitting down at the microphone for the first time, faced with the knowledge, as the clock ticks away the remaining few seconds before your show begins, that hundreds, possibly thousands of people will soon be able to flick a switch and hear your voice in their own homes. To conquer nerves, many professional broadcasters recommend visualizing the audience as a single listener, focusing on that one person instead of one hundred, or one thousand.

It is worth the effort to overcome anxiety, as nerves tend to have a deadly effect on the voice, and there is no faster way to lose an audience than by speaking in a quivering, uncertain manner. Quite simply, the radio broadcaster is a performer, and, just as in a musical performance, the best defences against an attack of nerves are practise, preparation and experience.

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In the previous pages, I have touched on a few of the specific concerns faced by the radio announcer, and have attempted to give some idea of what is involved in putting a radio program together. In the next chapter, I have selected a few of my actual broadcasts in order to illustrate some of the problems and challenges that arose during my internship at CFMU, specifically those related to presenting opera

effectively on radio.

The transcripts I have chosen to include in Chapter Two are organized in chronological order, and are therefore representative of my growing experience as an on-air announcer and writer for radio. In addition, these transcripts demonstrate some of the ways in which my initial goals, as outlined in the preceding pages, changed — some by choice, after much consideration, and others out of necessity. By focusing on my growth as a broadcaster I do not mean to imply that in the space of seven months on the air I had mastered all aspects of broadcasting technique; in fact, every time I review these transcripts, there are countless words, phrases and statements that I wish I could go back and change. And, even today, every new morning behind the microphone brings new challenges, and a continuous striving for improvement.

It is often said that radio broadcasting is equal parts art and science, and, as such, while the scientific elements — such as the operation of equipment, specifics of sound production, and many other similar things — can be easily learned through research, demonstration and repetition, the more subtle artistic aspects can only be learned through experience, and perfected through trial and error, perseverance and, above all, creativity and imagination.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TRANSCRIPTS

The following chapter contains transcripts from seven of the twenty-nine broadcasts of *Sunday Morning at the Opera* given between September 1995 and March 1996. The transcripts which I have chosen to include in this chapter illustrate some of the various problems that I had to consider when preparing for an opera broadcast, as each opera presented unique challenges and demanded a slightly different method of summarization. In the italicized material at the beginning of each transcript, I have outlined some of the difficulties that I experienced and, in most cases, have also commented on the effectiveness of the overall broadcast.

It should be mentioned that these are literal transcriptions, and I have, for the most part, chosen to leave them in their original form. However, in certain cases I have added text which I felt, upon later reflection, would have improved a broadcast; these additions, which consist most frequently of phrases of foreign text, are placed between square brackets ( [ ] ).

I have chosen to omit certain portions of text which occurred immediately before and after station breaks, including mention of music played during the preceding segment as well as station identification, notification of upcoming

programs, and other material not directly related to the subject of the broadcast. I have also omitted all systematic references to the recordings being played, and have instead specified the selected recording at the beginning of each transcript.

I have used the following three symbols to divide the sections of each transcript, and to indicate what took place at these points:



indicates references to recording information;



indicates playing of the music summarized in the preceding section of text;



indicates a station break.

The order of these symbols within each transcript corresponds to the order in which they occurred during the actual broadcast.

The majority of the text of each transcript was prepared in advance in order to facilitate a clear understanding of the plot and a smooth verbal execution. However, I have also included certain sections of text which were improvised during broadcasts, and I have identified such material by placing a vertical dotted line in the left margin. Most of this improvised text occurred at the beginning of each program, during my initial audience address, but I have also included a few examples of non-scripted material which dealt with reviews of the recordings used, promotional information for upcoming live productions, and, in one case, a review of one such production.

Any footnoted text which appears within a transcript was not mentioned as

such during the actual broadcast, but has been fully documented at the bottom of the page on which it appears; footnotes are numbered successively within each transcript.

## TRANSCRIPT #1 – *Tosca*

*I chose Puccini's Tosca as the subject of my first broadcast for a number of reasons, but primarily because it was an opera with which I was quite familiar myself, and one which seemed a suitable choice for my audience as well; I did not want to alienate first-time listeners by playing a "difficult" opera, such as Berg's Wozzeck, for example, which I saved for a later broadcast. Because this was the first time I would actually be speaking on the air, I anticipated having to deal with a certain amount of nerves, and was therefore careful to script the entire program, including my opening and closing remarks, in case I was unable to organize my thoughts under the pressure of the situation.<sup>1</sup> The effect was, as one might expect, extremely unnatural and "stiff," and I realized that certain types of material would demand an "off the cuff" approach in order to be effective on radio.*

*The overall stiffness of the Tosca broadcast caused me to question the issue of reading from a script, and encouraged me to experiment with other methods of presenting a synopsis. While I was on the air, I had felt very conscious of the fact that I was reading, and suspected that my audience would too; for the next week's airing of Verdi's La Traviata I hoped to eliminate this problem by providing myself with only a list of points, upon which I would elaborate during the broadcast. The result was no more successful, as, under the pressure of the situation, I omitted many crucial details, and my delivery was marred by pauses, mispronunciations and misreadings, as well as the sound of pages being frantically flipped to*

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of consistency, these sections will be indicated as ad-libbed text within the transcript.

*search for information that I had not had the forethought to ensure was right in front of me. It became quite obvious to me that a clear presentation of the information was more important than striving at all costs to sound “natural,” and so I returned to scripting the synopsis portion of each program.*

*In keeping with my original intention of presenting each opera in manageable portions of ten to fifteen minutes, each preceded by a summary of the action up until the next point, I divided the playing of Tosca wherever I felt there was an audible cessation of action culminating in a cadence or similar feeling of closure; specifically, I paused the recording at the appropriate location, resumed reading my synopsis, and then restarted the CD player. However, when I later listened to a recording of my Tosca broadcast, it became abundantly clear to me that these divisions were not only detrimental to the overall musical effect, but also to the sense of dramatic impetus. Furthermore, what sounded in the studio to be a clear break in the music often came across quite differently on the air, as the silence between tracks seemed to be amplified and of a different quality than the empty spaces — the engineered silence — on the recording itself.*

*When broadcasting opera, finding a clear break in the music can often be a daunting task, especially when the recording in question has placed the music “across the tracks” so that the end of one track does not also correspond to the end of a musical section. In Puccini’s operas, where there are very few noticeable pauses in the music, this problem is amplified significantly; often, in order to pause where I had intended, the music had to be “faded” up or down for the cuts to sound smooth. It was not until the broadcast of Verdi’s Simon Boccanegra, which took place a few weeks later and followed a similar format, that I decided to abandon my original format; in both cases, I had tried to encourage a perfectly clear understanding of the plot*

*by dividing the synopsis and the playing of the work into sections, but I later came to the conclusion that the preservation of the intent of the music was more important. In the future, I decided to pause the music to speak only at the conclusion of a scene or an act.*

*As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I have frequently inserted into the body of the transcripts fragments of foreign text which I felt should have been mentioned during the broadcast itself. I had initially assumed that citing foreign text in a synopsis would only confuse my listeners and serve them little purpose, but I later realized that mentioning certain distinctive phrases or words, such as Cavaradossi's cry of "Vittoria" in Act Two of Tosca, could provide key points of reference, regardless of an understanding of the text.*

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## **09/10/95 06:00 - 08:30 Tosca – G. Puccini**

[EMI 1959: Maria Callas, Giuseppe DiStefano, Tito Gobbi, Franco Calabrese, La Scala Orchestra and Chorus, Milan — Victor DeSabata (CD)]

Good morning and welcome to *Sunday Morning at the Opera*, a brand new program here on CFMU devoted exclusively to music from the world of the opera. My name is Heather Slater and I will be your host this and every Sunday morning between six and eight thirty as we listen to music from the great operas and operettas...and we'll start things off this morning by listening, in its entirety, to one of the greatest of them all, Puccini's

*Tosca.*

Puccini's fifth opera, *Tosca*, received its premiere on January fourteenth of 1900 at la Teatro Constanzi in Rome, a highly anticipated event, as it followed so closely on the heels of the immensely successful *La Bohème*. The libretto, by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, was conceived after the play of the same name by Victorien Sardou, the rights to which were in effect "stolen" by Puccini from his less well-known colleague Alberto Franchetti who had also decided to set the story to music. With the help of his publisher, Puccini had concocted a tricky scheme in which Franchetti was convinced to disregard the play due to its shockingly violent nature. That accomplished, Puccini was quick to snatch the story up for himself.

The premiere of *Tosca* was a great success, despite Puccini's apparent anxiety on opening night; "Don't you know," he asked, "that since *Bohème* all the guns are aimed at me? And if, God forbid, I have made a mistake, all those guns are going to shoot."<sup>2</sup> The audience on hand that evening was enthralled, but, just as the composer had expected, the critics fired away, saying that while *La Bohème* had had poetry in abundance and no plot, *Tosca* was all plot and no poetry. And while there is perhaps a grain of truth to that last statement, *Tosca* has nonetheless survived as one of the true greats of the operatic repertoire.

*Tosca* takes place in Rome at the turn of the nineteenth century, at a time of widespread political unrest. Floria Tosca, the well-known and beautiful soprano, is

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<sup>2</sup> George Marek, *Puccini: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), p.195.

in love with the painter and republican loyalist Mario Cavaradossi, a long-time enemy of the evil Baron Scarpia, chief of the Roman Police. At the time of the opera, Scarpia is searching for an escaped political prisoner by the name of Cesare Angelotti, and comes to believe that he is being harboured in the church of Sant'Andrea by Cavaradossi, who has been seen painting there. When Cavaradossi is captured for questioning and refuses to reveal the prisoner's whereabouts, the lecherous Scarpia uses Tosca as a pawn, offering her lover's life in return for complete submission to his desires.

Act One takes place inside the church of Sant'Andrea; on one side of the stage is an easel bearing a partially covered portrait of a woman, and surrounded by a basket of food and an assortment of painter's tools. At the other side is a locked gate which leads to the Chapel of the Attavanti. After a turbulent orchestral introduction, Angelotti enters in the tattered clothing of a prisoner. He looks frantically about for the key which has been left for him, then exclaims joyfully when he finds it at the foot of a statue of the Madonna. He tries the key in the locked gate, finds that it fits, and disappears inside the Chapel. Seconds later the music takes a jovial turn, and the church Sacristan enters, mumbling about the unpleasantries of his job, which involves, among other things, cleaning brushes for the cavalier Cavaradossi. Seeing the covered painting and the untouched basket of food, he comments that his master has not been in today, and at the sound of the church bells, he kneels suddenly to pray.

As the Sacristan finishes his prayer, Cavaradossi enters, and proceeds to

uncover the painting, revealing a portrait of a stunningly beautiful Mary Magdalene with blond hair and blue eyes. The Sacristan gasps, recognizing its subject as the Marchese Attavanti who has been coming to Sant'Andrea often as of late to pray at the foot of the Madonna. Cavaradossi admits that he had painted the beautiful girl while she was absorbed in prayer. He resumes painting, but soon loses himself in thought; from his pocket he takes a miniature portrait of Tosca, and glances back and forth between this and the painting. And in the aria "Recondita armonia," which will end our first segment this morning, he marvels at the wonder of art, which has the power to blend such diverse beauties as his beloved Tosca, with her raven hair and dark eyes, and this mysterious fair-haired stranger. Throughout this aria, the Sacristan can be heard in the background, muttering pessimistically that women are akin to the devil, and Cavaradossi should perhaps spend more time pondering God.

 (Act One, beginning)

"As I paint her portrait, Tosca, my only thoughts are of you"...with these words, Cavaradossi resumes his work. The Sacristan asks to be dismissed, and helps himself to some of the painter's still untouched food on the way out. Hearing the Sacristan leave, Angelotti believes the church to be empty, and emerges cautiously from his hiding place in the Chapel. At the sight of Cavaradossi, he is startled and turns to hide once again, but then cries out in recognition, and greets the painter like an old friend; momentarily startled, Cavaradossi recognizes Angelotti as the Consul

of the fallen Roman Republic, and offers him his devoted service. Hearing Tosca beckoning from outside the church, Cavaradossi gives Angelotti what is left of the food and ushers him back into the chapel.

At this point, Tosca calls out Mario's name three times from outside the church, and enters suspiciously, asking her lover why he had locked the door; jealous by nature, she suspects Mario of hiding another woman, and claims she heard the sound of skirts rustling from within. Mario attempts to placate her with a kiss, but she turns away coquettishly, saying ["Innanzi alla Madonna"] "not in front of the Madonna." After praying briefly, Tosca reminds Mario that she will be singing in the premiere of a new cantata at the Palazzo Farnese that evening, and that afterward, they may go to his villa. Mario's reply of "tanto" ["so be it"] is distracted, as he is still thinking of Angelotti; Tosca is upset by this, but soon manages to capture his full attention with talk of their secluded little love nest, hidden in a grove far away from the miseries of the world [in the aria "Non la sospiri la nostra casetta"]. After passionately agreeing to come, Mario again remembers Angelotti, and bids Tosca to leave him to his work.

On her way out, Tosca glances up and sees the portrait of the Maddalena, and is startled by the golden hair and blue eyes. She asks Mario, "who is this woman?" and Mario replies simply that she is the Maddalena — "Do you like her?", he asks. Tosca replies that she is far too beautiful, which Mario misinterprets as a compliment. After scrutinizing the portrait for another minute, Tosca recognizes the woman as the Marchese Attavanti, and she flies into a rage, accusing Mario of taking

another lover; it was her, she says, whom I heard when I approached the gate.

Mario calms Tosca by praising her beauty and renewing his vows of love, and again asks that she leave him to his work. Soothed, Tosca bids Mario farewell, and offers some reluctant praise for his new Maddalena; on her way out, however, she takes a final glance over her shoulder and warns [“Ma falle gli occhi neri”] “but change her eyes to black.”

 (Act One continued)

After Tosca has left, Cavaradossi unlocks the Chapel gate and ushers the fugitive Angelotti inside, apologizing for his sweetheart’s jealous behaviour. He asks of Angelotti’s plan, and learns that the prisoner is actually the brother of the Marchese Attavanti, who has left him some women’s clothing and a fan with which he may make his escape from under Scarpia’s watchful eye. At the mention of the evil Scarpia, Cavaradossi cries out in anger, and vows passionately that Angelotti will be saved, even at the cost of his own life; he gives Angelotti the key to his villa, and promises to meet him there after dark. As Angelotti is about to leave, Cavaradossi confides in a whisper that there is a well in the yard of his villa which would serve as a good hiding place. A cannon shot is heard, alerting Scarpia’s men to the escape of the prisoner, and both men rush out of the church, Cavaradossi deciding at the last minute to accompany his friend.

At this point, the Sacristan enters with news that Napoleon has been defeated, and is surprised to find that the painter is not at his easel. Soon, priests,

choristers and children enter from all sides and proceed to celebrate the good news [in a noisy chorus punctuated by cries of “Bonaparte”]. But the celebration is cut short at the entrance of Scarpia, who chastises the revellers for their disrespectful behaviour in the house of God; he sends them away, but detains the Sacristan for questioning in the matter of the escaped Angelotti. The Sacristan leads Scarpia to the chapel gate, which is partly open; entering the chapel, Scarpia finds only a woman’s fan, and recognizes its crest as that of the Attavanti. He then sees the portrait of the Marchese and demands to know the identity of the artist. The Sacristan, by now paralysed with fear, stutters “the cavalier Cavaradossi,” and implicates his master further by pointing out the empty lunch basket in the chapel, to which Cavaradossi has no key. Secretly pleased, Scarpia remembers that the cavalier is not only a wanted political revolutionary but also the lover of the desirable Floria Tosca, and the Sacristan, realizing that he is unable to stop the wheels of fate now that they have been set in motion, mutters a desperate prayer under his breath [“Libera, me domine”].

 (Act One continued)

Absorbed in his own thoughts, Scarpia muses that the fan of the Attavanti may be his key to winning the jealous Tosca; “Where Iago had a handkerchief,” he says, “I have a fan to drive a lover to distraction.” When Tosca enters, having come to inform Mario that her concert will end later than she had expected, she is upset and suspicious to learn that her lover has left quite suddenly. Scarpia seizes the

opportunity to comfort her, and to a reverent hymn-like tune he praises her piety and nobility; soon, however, the music takes a more sinister turn, as Scarpia presents Tosca with the fan and his concocted story about Cavaradossi. Recognizing the crest of the Attavanti, Tosca rages against the woman in the portrait, convinced that her suspicions were justified. To himself, Scarpia comments with satisfaction that the poison he has planted is taking effect; to Tosca, he says that he would give his life if only he could banish her tears. But Tosca's tears quickly turn to anger as she imagines the lovers at Mario's villa, and she storms off, eager to catch her faithless lover in the act of deception.

After Tosca has left, Scarpia calls for Spoletta, one of his officers, and orders him to follow her. The church bells begin to toll the evening mass, and Scarpia congratulates himself on having set loose the "falcon of jealousy" which has already begun to nest in Tosca's heart. As the choristers enter singing the "Te Deum," Scarpia continues to elaborate on his plan with growing passion; he is suddenly jolted from his evil thoughts by the sounds of the choir, and kneels to pray, first crying out ["Tosca, mi fai dimenticare iddio"] "Tosca, you make me forget God." And that will bring Act One of Puccini's *Tosca* to a close.

 (Act One, conclusion)  

Act Two takes place in Scarpia's apartment in the Palazzo Farnese, where the gala concert featuring Floria Tosca is about to take place. Scarpia is seated at supper but seems distracted, and wonders aloud about the progress of his evil plan. He

pauses to look at his watch, and then rings for his servant Sciaronne and asks him if Tosca is in the palace. Sciaronne responds that a chambermaid has gone to look for her; Scarpia writes a note summoning Tosca which he gives to Sciaronne before sending him away.

Returning to the table, Scarpia reassures himself that Tosca will come, if not by her own will, then for love of Mario. In the aria which follows, he admits that in matters of love sweet surrender and gentle kisses are not for him, but rather, he prefers the violent conquest [“la conquista violenta”] and exclaims “Bramo” — “I crave...I pursue the object of my desire, satisfy myself and cast it aside.”

At this point, Spoletta enters, out of breath, and informs Scarpia that he and his men were unable to find the escaped prisoner, but have brought Cavaradossi instead. Scarpia is pleased and orders his rival to be brought in for questioning, just as the sounds of the cantata begin to rise from the floor below. As the questioning begins, Cavaradossi is distracted by the sound of Tosca’s voice in the background, but he denies, with growing vehemence, each of Scarpia’s accusations. Tosca arrives, out of breath, and Cavaradossi draws her aside and begs her not to tell what she knows. Scarpia is furious at this obvious deception, and sends Cavaradossi to the torture chamber.

Alone with Tosca, Scarpia learns that the cavalier was alone at the villa, and that Tosca has dismissed her earlier suspicions as foolish jealousy spawned by Scarpia’s evil lies. Scarpia now repeats the questions for Tosca, who comments that it seems one must lie to please him; Scarpia responds that the truth might shorten a

very painful hour for her lover. He proceeds to describe in detail the way in which Cavaradossi is being tortured, and his words are punctuated by groans from within the chamber; horrified, Tosca agrees to tell him everything, if he will order his men to stop. Scarpia agrees, but denies her request to speak to her lover first. Still, Tosca hears Mario's voice from within bidding her to be courageous and silent; strengthened by his words, she again refuses to speak, and Scarpia resumes the torture. Noticing Tosca's growing despair at the sound of her lover's cries, Scarpia remarks that "Tosca on the stage was never more tragic." Finally, Tosca says that she can bear no more and collapses on the sofa, crying "what have I done to deserve this torture?" — but her pleas are in vain and she resigns herself to submit to his will.

Scarpia orders his men to stop, and allows the unconscious Cavaradossi to be brought to Tosca; regaining consciousness, he asks her if she spoke, and she replies "no, my love." At the same moment, Cavaradossi overhears Scarpia ordering Spoletta to retrieve Angelotti from the garden well, and he turns angrily to Tosca, accusing her of betrayal. Suddenly, Sciaronne bursts in with the news that Bonaparte has scored an important victory, and Cavaradossi utters a joyous cry of victory ["Vittoria"], prompting an outburst of anger from Scarpia, who orders him to be returned to the chamber.

Alone with Tosca, Scarpia puts on a gentlemanly air and offers to discuss Cavaradossi's fate; when Tosca asks "Quanto?"— what is your price — Scarpia laughs heartily and replies "you, my dear." He lunges toward her and she tries

frantically to escape, but suddenly falls silent at the ominous sound of drums in the distance, which, Scarpia says, signify the doomed being led to execution. At this point, Tosca falls to the floor in prayer and sings the famous aria “Vissi d’arte,” which begins with the words “I have lived for art, I have lived for love, why, Oh Lord, dost thou repay me with this torment?”

Before we begin to listen to Act Two of *Tosca*, I just wanted to say a few words about the recording you’re listening to this morning. This recording is a true classic, and is often considered to be not only the greatest recording of *Tosca*, but also perhaps the greatest opera recording of all time. Maria Callas first sang the role of Tosca in 1942 at the age of twenty-one, and was so well-received that she was asked to sing the role twelve more times that year. Within a few years she had achieved widespread fame and had really made the role of Tosca her own...and this particular recording of *Tosca*, made in 1959, showcases Callas when she was truly in her prime. Also on this recording is the baritone Tito Gobbi, who, in my opinion at least, is one of the best Scarpias on record, and no one else that I know of quite captures the “snarliness” that Gobbi gives Scarpia on this recording. And aside from the outstanding singing, the recording itself also sounds great, which is surprising since it *is* a monophonic recording.....but the sound is really remarkable, and has really stood the test of time. So if you’re looking to buy yourself a great recording of *Tosca*, this EMI re-issue is

probably the best you're going to find.

 (Act Two, beginning)

On her knees before Scarpia, Tosca makes a final plea, to which Scarpia responds “you ask of me a life, I ask of you an instant.” Spoletta enters with the news that Angelotti has killed himself and that plans for the execution of Cavaradossi are under way, and Tosca finally surrenders. But first, she says, her lover must be set free; Scarpia replies that this is impossible, as all must believe that the prisoner is dead. He tells her that he will arrange for a mock execution; “just like Count Palmieri,” he orders Spoletta, who nods solemnly in understanding and leaves. Alone again with Scarpia, Tosca demands a letter of safe conduct so that she and Mario may flee Rome forever; as he sits down to write the letter, Tosca notices a knife lying on the desk gleaming in the candlelight, and while Scarpia is engrossed in his task, she picks it up and hides it behind her back. Finishing the letter, Scarpia approaches Tosca with arms outstretched, leering “you are mine at last” — but his cry of passion turns into a shriek of pain as Tosca plunges the knife deep into his chest, exclaiming [“Questo e il bacio di Tosca”] “This is Tosca’s kiss!” As Scarpia falls to the ground, Tosca commands him to look into her eyes, so that he may recognize his killer; when he [takes his final breath], she says calmly, “and now I can forgive him.” Staring at the motionless body, she utters the famous line [“E avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma”] “And all of Rome trembled before him.”

At this point Tosca goes to the desk and washes her hands, checks her hair

and clothing, and then looks for the safe conduct pass. She finally finds it in Scarpia's bloody outstretched hand and wrestles it free. About to leave, she suddenly returns to the body, takes two candles from the desk, lights them, and places one on either side of Scarpia's head. She places a crucifix on the dead man's chest and leaves, closing the door gently behind her.

 (Act Two, conclusion)  

As the curtain rises on Act Three, we see the platform of the Castel Sant' Angelo, the very same prison from which Angelotti had escaped; at the left is a desk with writing materials, a bench and a chair, on the right is a stairway leading to a small high platform. It is the hour just before dawn, and church bells toll the beginning of a new day. In the distance, the song of a shepherd can be heard, and soon a jailer enters and sets about his daily chores. A group of guards enter leading Cavaradossi, whom the jailer begins to question; when Cavaradossi is told that he has but one hour to live, he asks the jailer a favour, offering his ring as compensation. The jailer appears doubtful, but Cavaradossi proceeds, asking that he be allowed to write a note to his beloved Tosca, and the jailer finally agrees, taking the ring.

Sitting at the desk, Cavaradossi begins to write, but is soon distracted by memories of his first meeting with Tosca; he sings the aria "E lucevan le stelle," which begins "the stars shone, and the earth was sweet perfume as she entered the garden," and ends with the words "gone is that time, and desperately I die; never

have I loved life so much.” He drops his head and weeps, and is so lost in his despair that he at first fails to see Tosca entering; she approaches him with the safe conduct pass, and the two lovers read it together, rejoicing that they are free. When Tosca relates the story of Scarpia’s death, Cavaradossi sings the aria “La dolce mani”; “such gentle hands, how could they have done this?” Tosca does not reply, but proceeds to inform Mario of the planned mock execution; then the two lovers reflect on their strife and look forward to a future of freedom and love.

 (Act Three, beginning)

Suddenly jarred from her reverie, Tosca reminds Mario that he must make a convincing fall when the fake bullets are fired; before she leaves, she assures Mario of his reward — “I shall seal your eyes with a thousand kisses, and call you by a thousand names of love.”

A squad of soldiers enter from the rear, along with Spoletta, the jailer and a sergeant. When the church bells strike four, the jailer approaches Mario and removes his cap, then leaves. Tosca whispers yet another reminder to Mario; fall down on the first shot, act natural, and don’t rise until I tell you it’s safe — and then retreats to the left of the platform. She is restless and impatient, waiting for the grim preparations to end, and watches her Mario, thinking how handsome he looks. Finally a shot rings out, and Mario falls heavily to the ground; Tosca is thrilled with her lover’s convincing fall, and silently applauds him. She waits for the men to disperse, hoping that Mario does not misjudge their retreat and rise too early. After

a few minutes, she orders him to get up at once; she receives no response, and rushes into the square, crouching to help him to his feet. Confused, she raises his cloak, and sees that he is dead.

Tosca cries out in despair, realizing that Scarpia has had the final word. Nearby, a clamour arises as all learn that Scarpia is dead by Tosca's hand; Spoletta, Sciaronne and the soldiers enter the square to detain her, but she escapes and rushes to the parapet. Exclaiming "Scarpia, we shall meet before God!", Tosca leaps to her death while the men look on in disbelief.

 (Act Three, conclusion)  

## TRANSCRIPT #2 – *Simon Boccanegra*

*The broadcast of 24 September 1995 was the first in a series of “preview broadcasts” scheduled the weekend before selected Opera Hamilton or Canadian Opera Company productions with the intention of giving listeners some exposure to the opera before hearing it live. The transcript for this program differed slightly from previous ones in that I attempted to focus to a greater extent on matters of stage setting and atmosphere with the intention of providing my listeners with a context within which to visualize the setting as they were listening to the broadcast, and a taste of what to expect during a live performance. Later, I decided that there was no reason that this technique should be limited to my preview broadcasts, and so henceforth, at every scene change I gave a relatively detailed summary of the stage setting.*

*Because of the extremely complex relationships between the characters in Simon Boccanegra and in the plot itself, the preparation of a synopsis for this broadcast was a daunting task, comparable only to the broadcast of *The Marriage of Figaro* which I presented a few weeks later. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the writer of a synopsis intended for publication in a concert program has the luxury of including every significant detail of the plot, as such a synopsis will be read (hopefully) long before the lights go down. When writing for radio, on the other hand, one must consider that an overly detailed synopsis may become tiresome for the listener, and so the goal should be to focus less on detail and more on audible points of interest.*

*In writing about Simon Boccanegra, I found it especially difficult to avoid complexity, because every detail was so crucial to the plot; furthermore, as is so characteristic of Verdi’s*

*operatic style, every action, every nuance, every thought of every character can be heard in the music — for example, the Doge's uttering of amazement while Amelia tells the tale of her childhood, or Paolo's fear while under scrutiny in the Council Chambers. As a result, my synopsis for this particular broadcast, which I will reproduce here exactly as aired, was so lengthy that I was forced to omit a few sections of music; once again, I decided that the preservation of the music should come first whenever possible, and in the future, particularly for the broadcast of The Marriage of Figaro, I tried to modify the complexity of the text so that I could play more of the music.*

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**09/24/95 06:00 - 08:30 *Simon Boccanegra* – G. Verdi**

[Deutsche Gramophone 1977: Piero Cappuccilli, Mirella Freni, Nicolai Ghiaurov, José van Dam, José Carreras. La Scala Orchestra and Chorus, Milan — Claudio Abbado (LP)]

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Good morning, and welcome to *Sunday Morning at the Opera* for this weekend of Sunday, September the twenty-fourth.....and a busy weekend this is for opera lovers in and around Hamilton, as Saturday night marks the opening of Opera Hamilton's regular season with a performance of Verdi's seldom heard *Simon Boccanegra*, which you will hear in its entirety — perhaps for the very first time — on the program this morning. And while I'm on the

topic of Opera Hamilton, I should mention that this year's season will also bring performances of those two reigning kings of comic opera, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and those productions will feature such artists as Russell Braun, Benjamin Butterfield and Shari Saunders, as well as many other area favourites. So there's lots to look forward to this year in the way of popular favourites, but also, as we have come to expect from Maestro Lipton, a Verdi rarity as well — you may well remember last season's very successful performance of *I Due Foscari*, and the production of the opera we will hear today promises to be just as memorable an event.

It was late spring in 1856 when Verdi began work on a new opera which was commissioned by the Teatro Fenice in Venice. This came after quite a busy period during which the composer was occupied with numerous performances of the *Sicilian Vespers*, as well as ongoing revisions and alterations of such earlier operas as *La Traviata* which had been given its extraordinarily unsuccessful premiere in March of 1853. By late summer, Verdi had chosen as his subject a play by Antonio Garcia Gutierrez which told the tale of the commoner and pirate Simon Boccanegra who was elected as Doge of Genoa in 1339, and was poisoned by a patrician enemy during a political banquet some twenty years later.

The libretto was adapted from the play by Francesco Maria Piave, with a few textual additions by the Tuscan poet Giuseppe Montanelli. The first performance of

*Simon Boccanegra* took place on the twelfth of March, 1857, and was an utter disaster, something to which the composer was quickly becoming all too accustomed. Verdi remarked: "I've had a fiasco in Venice almost as great as that of *La Traviata*; I thought I'd done something passable, but apparently I was mistaken."<sup>1</sup> While the critics seemed pleased with the work, praising its "beautiful melodies and profound philosophy," audiences seemed unwilling to embrace the opera's sombre subject matter, and yearned instead for those easy-to-digest musical truffles that had been so generously supplied by Verdi in his earlier works. It was not until twenty-four years later, on March twenty-fourth of 1881, when a new and much altered version of *Simon Boccanegra* was given its first performance at the La Scala Theatre in Milan, that Verdi was able to redeem himself in the eyes of his public with a much more tightly constructed and skilfully handled work, and what is generally considered to be some of the very finest music that he ever wrote.

The opera is in three acts with a prologue which takes place twenty-five years before the action of the first act; there is no overture, although Verdi wrote a fine prelude for the work which he mysteriously discarded, and which is now heard occasionally as a concert piece. As the curtain rises on the public square of Genoa, we hear some gentle music played by the strings, reminiscent of a swelling sea. It is nighttime, and against a background of the distant sea the church of San Lorenzo can be seen; on the right is the Fieschi palace, home of Jacopo Fiesco, the mortal enemy of Boccanegra. To the left of the stage are several smaller homes.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter of 29 March 1857 quoted in Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (London, Cassell, 1978), p. 253.

The goldsmith Paolo Albiani enters with Pietro, a fellow commoner, and the two men discuss the forthcoming election. Paolo announces that he plans to nominate “that brave man who chased the African pirates from our seas,” and offers Pietro riches and glory in return for his support. Pietro enthusiastically pledges his loyalty, and exits the stage.

Now alone on stage, Paolo reveals his less than noble motives; he vows that he, a mere plebian, will rise to the height of the mighty Genoese patricians, apparently on the coattails of this man who will be the new Doge. At this point Simon Boccanegra enters, wondering why Paolo has been anxious to speak to him, and Paolo urges his friend to seek the newly opened position of Doge. Simon hesitates, but Paolo goes on to say that Maria, the daughter of Fiesco and mother of Simon’s lost child, is being kept in the Fieschi palace, and that, as Doge, Simon could bear her away at once. Sensing Simon’s growing interest, Paolo offers to share in the dangers of the position, and Simon finally answers [“Sia”] “So be it,” then leaves at Paolo’s urging.

In the next scene, Paolo is joined by Pietro, along with a boisterous crowd of sailors and workmen, of whom Paolo begs support. He tells of the beautiful young woman being kept prisoner by her father in the palace, and angers the crowd so thoroughly that they agree to stand behind him in his revolt. The crowd exits, rejoicing and shouting the name of Simon Boccanegra.

Just as the square clears, a distraught Fiesco emerges from the palace and sings the aria “Il lamento spirito,” in which he relates that Maria is dead, and then rages against Simon, who dared to love her against Fiesco’s will; at the same time, voices

can be heard from within the palace, chanting the Mass for the Dead.

Simon enters, lost in happy thoughts, and rejoicing that he will soon be reunited with his beloved Maria, but he is surprised at the sight of Fiesco, who advances toward him in menacing fashion. Simon greets Fiesco with a plea for forgiveness, and begs for the man's support in his quest to become Doge. Fiesco replies that he will only stand behind Simon on the condition that he agrees to give up the daughter born to him and Maria some years earlier. Simon sadly relates the story of the child, who was left in the care of an elderly woman while her father was at sea -- but before Simon could return, the woman died, and the child was forced to wander in search of shelter and had not been seen since. Fiesco replies coldly that if he cannot have the child there shall never be peace between the two men, and he disappears into the shadows.

Thinking himself alone, Simon rages against Fiesco, then knocks at the door of the palace, while in the orchestra the timpani is struck three times. Thinking it strange that the doors are unlocked, he enters the palace, while Fiesco mutters from the darkness [*"T'inoltra e stringi gelida salma"*] "go in and embrace a cold corpse." At this point, we hear Simon cry out Maria's name in anguish, and he rushes pale and horrified from the palace. At the same time, the voices of the commoners can be heard approaching from a distance, and chanting Simon's name, while Simon imagines that the voices are rising from hell. At this point, the music takes a sudden, festive turn and Paolo enters, followed by a cheering crowd bearing torches and ringing bells of celebration. They praise the reluctant Simon as their new leader, the

Doge of Genoa, while Fiesco, who has been watching from the shadows all along, utters a jealous curse.

Just before the curtain falls, we hear the cries of the commoners, chanting “Viva Simone, del popolo eletto,” “the people’s choice,” and Simon is carried away amid the throngs as the prologue comes to a close.



Act One takes place twenty-five years later, with Simon Boccanegra still the acting Doge of Genoa. The curtain rises on the garden of the Grimaldi home, just outside Genoa; to the left we see the Ducal palace, and in the background, a wide expanse of blue ocean. The young Amelia Grimaldi sits looking out toward sea, and sings the aria “Come in quest’ora bruna” in praise of its beauty; the music here is remarkably picturesque and evocative of the sea, with shimmering string tremolandos and a “bubbly” woodwind figure which dominates much of this first scene.

In the aria “Vieni a mirar la cerula,” Amelia recalls the night her elderly guardian died and she was left to wander alone, and we come to realize that she is actually the lost daughter of Simon Boccanegra. She sings of her lover, the young nobleman Gabriele Adorno, for whom she now waits.

Suddenly, we hear from offstage a man’s voice singing a joyous song and accompanying himself on the guitar; it is Gabriele, and Amelia lets out a happy cry that her lover has arrived safely. She greets him with an embrace, then admits that she is terribly unsettled by the recent political turmoil and fears for Gabriele’s life; she

claims that she has sensed a plan in the works between Gabriele and Andrea Grimaldi, her guardian, whom we soon come to realize is actually the cold-hearted Fiesco in disguise. Gabriele is reluctant to give anything away, but hints that he and Andrea are considering an uprising against the Doge; he then begs Amelia to set aside her fears, and instead “shelter her thoughts in the harbour of their love.”

At this point a servant enters announcing a messenger from the Doge; Pietro enters, and tells Amelia that the Doge wishes to pay her a visit. She gives her assent, then turns frantically to Gabriele and tells him that the Doge is coming to seek her hand in marriage on behalf of Paolo, his courtier. She begs Gabriele to marry her at once, and so he leaves to make the necessary arrangements. On his way into the palace, Gabriele meets Andrea Grimaldi, and proclaims his love for Amelia and his desire to marry her at once. Andrea replies that Gabriele must first know the secret of Amelia’s childhood; she is an orphan of unknown ancestry, and was found in a cell previously occupied by the real Amelia Grimaldi, who died in a nunnery while her parents were in exile. Gabriele replies that none of this concerns him, and he plans to marry the girl nonetheless. Overjoyed at the prospect of this young nobleman as a son-in-law, the elder Grimaldi grants his blessing.

In the distance, we hear the sound of trumpets announcing the entrance of the Doge. The two men rush to hide, but before they do, Andrea cries out “Presto il di della vendetta sorga!”: “soon, the day of vengeance shall dawn.”

 (Act One: Scene One, beginning)

As soon as Gabriele and Andrea have disappeared from sight, the Doge enters with his entourage. He sends everyone away, commanding them to return at the stroke of the hour, and as they leave Amelia enters, clearly nervous. The Doge questions Amelia about her relatives, still in exile, and then offers her a pardon in their names. Sensing Amelia's unease, the Doge asks the young girl why she lives in such seclusion, and implies that she must not be very happy. On the contrary, she replies; she is in love, but her betrothal is being jeopardized by a tyrant who is after the Grimaldi wealth and wants her for his wife. Startled, the Doge cries out "Paolo," and Amelia confirms that this is indeed the man's name.

At this point we hear a plaintive melody played by the oboe, and Amelia sings the aria "Orfanella il tetto umile," in which she reveals to the Doge the details of her unfortunate childhood. She tells of the old woman who took care of her, and who gave her a locket with a picture of her mother inside; at these words, the startled Doge draws the very same picture from his pocket, identifying the woman as Maria. The two embrace, reunited as father and daughter, and sing of their joy in an impassioned duet which begins with the words "Figlia, a tal nome io palpito"; "daughter, at that name I tremble."

As Amelia enters her father's palace, Paolo returns, anxious to know if the girl has accepted his offer of marriage. The Doge coldly replies "Give up all hope," and turns to leave. Paolo calls out in anger: "have you forgotten to whom you owe your throne?" He receives no answer, and whispers to Pietro that since he cannot have Amelia willingly, he shall have her by force. He orders Pietro to approach the girl

while alone at the seashore, take her aboard Paolo's waiting ship, and then sail her to the house of Lorenzo, a fellow conspirator. Pietro complies, then leaves to carry out his task.

 (Act One: Scene One, conclusion)

The remainder of Act One takes place in the Council Chambers at the palace of the Doge. Boccanegra is seated on a throne, surrounded by twelve councillors on either side representing the commoners and the nobles. Paolo and Pietro are seated with the Plebian councillors. We hear a herald's trumpet, and the Doge announces that a plea for peace has come from Venice — but the councillors reject it at once, hungry for war. As the Doge urges the men to rethink their vote, an uproar can be heard in the distance, and all rush to the window; as the crowd comes closer, the Doge recognizes Gabriele Adorno in the lead — the revolt which the young man had planned along with the elder Grimaldi is finally under way. Pietro quietly warns Paolo to flee, lest his plot to abduct Amelia be revealed, but the Doge orders the doors to be blocked, and Paolo is trapped.

From the square, the mob cries [“Morte ai patrizi!”] “Death to the nobles” and to the Doge as well. Upon hearing his name, the Doge orders a herald to open the doors and tell the crowd that he welcomes them without fear. Again, we hear the herald's trumpet, this time far away, and all is eerily silent as he relates the message of peace.

Suddenly the crowd erupts, crying “Evviva la Doge” — “long live the Doge” —

and a mob bursts into the palace to face the nobles. Gabriele and Fiesco are seized, and the Doge questions Gabriele about the bloody sword that is still in his hands. Gabriele replies that he has killed Lorenzo, the tyrant who abducted Amelia, but before he died Lorenzo had sworn that a man of power had urged him to commit the crime. Furious, the Doge demands the man's name, but Gabriele responds that Lorenzo had died before he could reveal it. Suddenly Gabriele rushes toward the Doge with his sword drawn, having become convinced that this is the man of whom Lorenzo spoke — but Amelia rushes in and throws herself between the two men, begging Gabriele to stab her instead, then asking the Doge to have mercy on her lover.

The Doge orders Gabriele to be released and urges Amelia to relate the tale of her escape from capture. She replies that she had threatened Lorenzo by reminding him of the Doge's power; if he had been caught, she warned, Boccanegra would show him no mercy, and hearing this, Lorenzo was overcome by fear, and let her go. She then announces that another man was involved but has gone unpunished; she looks coldly toward Paolo, but does not speak his name. Meanwhile, the councillors have grown restless and begin to fight among themselves, until the Doge admonishes them with talk of peace and brotherly love, in the aria "Plebe! Patrizzi!"

In a mass of confusion Act One approaches its climax, and all can be heard singing at once: Amelia begs Fiesco to give up his revolt and embrace peace; Pietro again begs Paolo to leave, but he refuses, saying "the serpent that impels me is swollen with poison"; Gabriele gives thanks for Amelia's safety, while Fiesco curses

the Doge, saying “this proud city lies in the hands of a pirate.”

The clamour dies down, and Gabriele offers his sword to the Doge, who refuses it, asking only for the young man’s word. He turns to the crowd, and calls angrily for Paolo; and, in the most dramatic moment of the opera, he pronounces the fateful words, “within these walls there is a villain who hears me and grows pale — let the thunder of my words fall upon the wicked scoundrel.” He commands Paolo to repeat the words “Sia maledetto” — “Let him be accursed.” Trembling, Paolo repeats the Doge’s words, thereby pronouncing a curse which is destined to fall upon him alone, and as the curtain falls, he flees in terror as the crowd echoes his ominous words.

 (Act One: Scene Two)  

Act Two takes place in the Doge’s quarters in the ducal palace at Genoa. As the curtain rises, we rejoin Paolo, who laments the terrible curse that the Doge has cast upon him, or rather, that he has been ordered to cast upon himself. Resigned to death, he vows not to go alone, and empties a vial of poison into a wine goblet which sits on the Doge’s table, saying “let death take its choice between the poison and the dagger.”

Shortly, the prisoners Fiesco and Gabriele are led in, and Paolo pulls Fiesco aside. He warns him that his small band of rebels will be no match for Simon’s powerful forces, and that Fiesco would be wise to kill the Doge while he sleeps instead. But Fiesco refuses, and is sent back to his cell. Turning to leave, Gabriele admonishes Paolo for his cowardly plan, but pauses when Paolo says that Amelia is

still in the palace, and is being kept at hand as pleasant diversion for the Doge. As he leaves, Paolo advises Gabriele to fight the Doge to the death in order to get her back. At the thought of his Amelia in love with the Doge, Gabriele erupts with fury, not yet aware, of course, that Amelia is actually the man's daughter. He sings the aria "Sento avampar nell'anima" — "I feel a fire of jealousy" — in which he rages against the Doge, once his enemy, now his rival in love.

Suddenly, Amelia enters and Gabriele turns on her, accusing her of infidelity; Amelia admits that the Doge loves her, but purely, and that she loves him in return. Gabriele demands an explanation, but Amelia only replies that if he trusts her he will someday know the truth.

At this point, we hear the Doge approaching, and Amelia urges Gabriele to hide. When he refuses, Amelia warns that if he is seen, he will be sent to the scaffold. He protests, but finally allows Amelia to usher him out onto the balcony, raging all the while that Simon Boccanegra shall die at his hands.

 (Act Two, beginning)

In the final two scenes of Act Two, Amelia asks the Doge for permission to marry Gabriele; the Doge refuses at first, but then gives in, on the grounds that Gabriele renounce his political ties. When Amelia leaves, the Doge sits at the table, takes a sip of the poisoned wine and falls asleep at once.

While the Doge is sleeping, Gabriele, still under the impression of Paolo's lie, creeps up behind him and raises a dagger over his head, but Amelia rushes in and

stops him, just as the Doge is coming to. A trio follows in which the true identity of Amelia is revealed; now aware that she is the daughter of the Doge, Gabriele throws himself at the man's feet, begging forgiveness. When Gabriele's band of rebels can be heard approaching, the Doge bids Gabriele to join them; Gabriele refuses, saying he will fight on the side of the Doge, and he leaves to greet his comrades with a message of peace. Impressed by the young man's nobility, the Doge gestures toward his daughter, saying, "She will be your reward."

 (Act Two, conclusion)  

As the curtain rises on Act Three, we see a room in the Doge's palace. Fiesco enters, along with a captain and Pietro, and as the three men discuss the victory of the Doge over the rebel factions, Paolo is led in in chains. Fiesco asks of his fate, and Paolo replies that he is being led to the scaffold, but is content in the knowledge that the man who convicted him will soon be dead by his hand. Paolo begins to tell how he poisoned the Doge, but is interrupted by the sounds of a choir in the next room, singing at the wedding of Gabriele and the former Amelia Grimaldi, now known as Maria Boccanegra. Paolo comments that Gabriele is marrying the girl he tried to abduct, and Fiesco, now aware that Paolo initiated the plan, raises his dagger, but then restrains himself, leaving Paolo to be led off to the headsman's axe.

Alone, Fiesco muses that Simon should have rightly died at *his* hands; he then hears the Doge approaching and hides. The Doge enters with the captain of his army and a herald; the captain proceeds to read a decree in honour of all those who died in

battle.

The two men leave Simon, who laments his dwindling health and the burning fever which rages throughout his body. He feels a rush of cool air from the sea and sings the aria “Refrigerio! La marina brezza,” while the orchestra provides a brief recollection of that shimmering sea music from the opening of the second act.

His song is interrupted by the arrival of Fiesco, who emerges from the shadows vowing revenge, but Simon greets him as an old friend, telling him of Amelia’s true identity. Now aware that the girl is his own granddaughter, Fiesco breaks down in joyful tears, and sadly tells Simon of Paolo’s murderous deed.

In the next scene, Maria and Gabriele enter along with a crowd of attendants and wedding guests. Maria expresses shock at Fiesco’s presence, but embraces him warmly when she learns of his true identity. She turns to her father, who announces to the shocked gathering that he has but a short time to live; he then rises, places his hands on the heads of the couple, and offers a final marriage blessing. He names Gabriele as the successor to his throne, and reaches out to Maria, preparing to speak — but he can only manage a strangled whisper before falling dead to the floor. At the balcony of the palace, Fiesco announces the death of Simon Boccanegra, and the church bells begin to toll in mourning.



### TRANSCRIPT #3 – *Jenůfa*

*In Chapter One, I alluded to the transformation of a functional script into an artistic one, and discussed some of the ways in which a script can be prepared in advance in order to maximize its effectiveness on the air. In the following transcript I will demonstrate one such technique, that of “graphic annotation,” which involves adding expressive markings to the script in much the same way a musician plans out dynamics, points of emphasis and similar interpretative gestures by marking them into a score. Such markings permit the announcer, just like the performing musician, to “interpret” the script at hand, and are one of the most effective ways to ensure a smooth delivery; in Television and Radio Announcing, Stuart Hyde often refers to “talking” a script, as opposed to reading it, and this can only be made possible through preparation in advance.<sup>1</sup>*

*Although the term “graphic annotation” is my own, the technique is quite common among professional broadcasters, and many symbols are widely accepted as standard; often, news copy arrives at a station marked for broadcast, in order to help the announcer read it effectively and with the proper emphasis. However, the technique can also be a highly personal one, and in fact should be in order to be most effective; similarly, the techniques used will change according to the particular demands of the radio script. In discussing Janáček’s *Jenůfa*, for example, I anticipated a problem with pronunciation, and, although I had been careful to learn the correct*

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart W. Hyde, *Television and Radio Announcing*, p. 39.

*pronunciations of the characters' names, I was concerned that under the pressure of the actual broadcast I would stumble over a few of the more challenging ones. Therefore, every time these names appeared in the script, I spelled them in a roughly phonetic way to ensure that I pronounced them properly every time.<sup>2</sup> While some broadcasting manuals recommend learning and using standard phonetic spellings, I found it much more effective to make up my own.*

*Other symbols used in the sample transcript include: ..... to mark a brief pause, // to mark a slightly longer one, and (•) to indicate an even longer one, often used for effect at dramatic points, and to separate sections of the script. Also, I have frequently underlined words to indicate special emphasis; in cases where one word in a sentence requires more emphasis than another, I have underlined the more important word twice. Occasionally, I have also used the symbol  underneath text to denote an increase in volume and vocal intensity toward the goal of a given paragraph or section, usually at a climactic point in the plot.<sup>3</sup>*

*In the following transcript, I have also “graphed” ad-libbed sections of text in order to demonstrate the natural inflections of the voice, although this would, for obvious reasons, not be planned in advance.*

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of clarity, I have used correct spellings throughout this transcript, but have provided my own spellings within square brackets at the first appearance of each name.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of vocal delivery, “intensity” can be achieved through a subtle increase in both the pitch and tempo of the voice.

10/15/95 06:00 - 08:30 *Jenůfa* – L. Janáček

[Decca/London 1982: Elisabeth Söderström, Wieslav Ochman, Peter Dvorsky, Eva Randová, Lucia Popp. Vienna State Opera Orchestra and Chorus, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra — Charles Mackerras (CD)]

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Good morning, and welcome once again to *Sunday Morning at the Opera* for this Sunday, October the fifteenth.....My name is Heather and I will be your host, as always, until 8:30 this morning...Today's program is the third in a series of previews of the many live opera productions which are happening right now in the area. Two weeks ago, we listened to *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Richard Strauss which is still in production with the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto until.....I believe until the eighteenth, and today on the program we will hear the opera that the C.O.C. has chosen to run in conjunction with the Strauss, that being the opera *Jenůfa*, by Leoš Janáček. And incidentally, this C.O.C. production of *Jenůfa*, which has been running for about a week and half or so, is receiving all kinds of praise, most of it being directed at mezzo-soprano Judith Forst, one of Canada's true opera greats, in the role of the stepmother. And by all accounts, this is not one to be missed, so if you're planning on catching one of the remaining few performances of *Jenůfa*, and are wondering what to expect, stayed tuned for the next two and a half hours as we listen to the opera in its entirety.

The Czech composer Leoš Janáček is known primarily for his intensely tragic

operas which combine authentic folk tunes with an expressive, almost romantic approach to the vocal idiom. *Jenůfa*, the third of Janáček's nine operas, was composed painstakingly between the years of 1894 and 1903, and is perhaps the most tragic of them all.....The opera was based on a controversial play by Gabriela Preissová entitled "Her Stepdaughter" which was given its premiere in Prague in 1890. After having seen the play, an enthusiastic Janáček contacted Preissová, who later wrote, "He said that he had fallen in love with *Jenůfa*, and already whole sentences of [the play] rushed into his mind which he immediately dressed with his music.....He studied the cries of the young men at their folk dancing, he went off to the mill where he listened to and noted down the noises of the turning and rumble of the mill wheel."<sup>4</sup>

The premiere of *Jenůfa* took place on the twenty-first of January, 1904 at Brno, the town of Janáček's birth, and marked the first great success of Janáček's career.....yet it was not until 1916, when the opera was given in Prague, that Janáček could boast of widespread fame. The opera is in three acts, and we will listen first to Act One // in its entirety.

As the curtain rises on Act One, we see a scene in a small mill town, and we hear the sound of the mill-wheel turning, represented in the orchestra by eerie repeated notes on the xylophone. The beautiful *Jenůfa* stands peering off into the distance, with her grandmother and cousin Laca nearby. *Jenůfa* laments that her

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<sup>4</sup> John Tyrrell, *Janáček's Operas: A Documentary Account* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 42-43.

lover Števa [Shtayva], Laca's half-brother, has not yet returned, and this must surely mean that he has been drafted by the army; Jenůfa is concerned, as she is pregnant with Števa's child and is depending on his safe return so that they may marry.

Jenůfa's grandmother urges her to get back to work, and Laca, spiteful because it was Števa and not he that inherited the rights to the mill, complains that he and Jenůfa are treated as mere labourers.

Suddenly, the shepherd boy Jano enters, his face red with excitement; Jenůfa has been teaching the boy to read, and he rushes to embrace her...the grandmother looks on and comments that Jenůfa has the brain of a man, and could have even been a schoolmaster. The foreman of the mill enters, and pays Jenůfa a gentlemanly compliment, and Laca proceeds to taunt the girl, making light of her attraction to Števa. He comments to the foreman that Jenůfa will make an exceptionally pretty sister-in-law.....making sure that Jenůfa is not listening, he admits that he is love with her, and plans to sabotage her wedding to Števa — that is, if Števa is not drafted first. To Laca's dismay, the foreman replies that Števa is a free man, as the army did not take him. Jenůfa overhears the foreman's words and rushes to embrace both her grandmother and her step-mother, the Kostelnička [Kostelneeshka], who has just entered, while Laca circles around in a rage, remarking that Števa is as strong as a horse, and should certainly have been taken.//

In the next scene, the recruits can be heard approaching from a distance, laughing and singing as if drunk. Jenůfa watches expectantly for a moment, and then, seeing Števa, rushes to meet him. Števa staggers toward her, quite drunk, and,

as the noise of the crowd dies down momentarily Jenůfa questions him.....but he only replies haughtily that he is the owner of the mill, and as such all the village girls desire him, and so he need not answer to her. He shows Jenůfa a bouquet of flowers given to him by one of his young female admirers, and as the crowd erupts into song and dance, Števa grabs Jenůfa and spins her around wildly in the centre of the crowd.

After watching the rowdy celebration for a few minutes, the Kostelnička enters and orders the dancing to stop. She tells Števa that he is just like his father, and forbids him to marry Jenůfa until he can prove that he can give up drinking for a full year. The grandmother orders the recruits and musicians to go home, and scolds them for leading her boys astray, and the scene closes with a solemn chorus, in which everyone reassures the weeping Jenůfa that all young couples must overcome their differences.....and in the background the mill-wheel continues to turn. ☹

As Act One continues, Števa and Jenůfa are left alone on stage, and Jenůfa urges him to treat her step-mother with a little more respect, so that the wedding may go off without a hitch. Števa reminds Jenůfa of all the other girls, just as pretty and deserving of his attention, and Jenůfa threatens to kill herself. With mocking sincerity, Števa reassures Jenůfa that she will always be the prettiest of them all, and he leaves her to her work.//

At this point, Laca returns, holding his newly sharpened knife. He begins to mock Jenůfa for her blind loyalty to his untrustworthy brother, but Jenůfa continues to defend her lover. Knowing that Števa cares only for Jenůfa's pretty face, Laca rushes forward and slashes her cheek with his knife. Jenůfa cries out in pain and the

foreman and others hurry onstage.....and as the curtain falls on Act One, Laca retreats into the shadows, shocked and ashamed at what he has done. ☹️



As the curtain rises on Act Two we see the inside of the Kostelnička's dreary apartment, and the orchestra plays some dark, ominous music which foreshadows the tragic events about to come. Five months have passed, and a pale and horribly disfigured Jenůfa sits sewing near her mother. We learn that the Kostelnička has hidden her step-daughter during her pregnancy and the birth of her son, who is now just eight days old. She criticizes Števa, who has not yet come to see his child, despite her repeated warnings. Still mourning the absence of Števa, Jenůfa ignores her step-mother, and imagines that she hears her son crying; the Kostelnička comments that Jenůfa should perhaps spend less time doting over her sleeping child, and more time praying to God to take the troublesome things off of her hands. Jenůfa feels faint, and leaves to lie down, while the Kostelnička reflects on Števa's lack of responsibility, and wishes that the baby had never been born.//

Suddenly, Števa appears meekly at the door, and apologizes for his absence; he admits that he was horrified when he first saw Jenůfa's disfigured face, and could not bear to be near her. The Kostelnička falls to her knees, begging Števa to stay and look at his child, and to make Jenůfa his wife.....but Števa replies that he is now engaged to Karolka, the mayor's daughter, and leaves.

A few minutes later, Laca appears, pledging his love for Jenůfa and asking the

Kostelnička for her step-daughter's hand in marriage. The Kostelnička replies that Laca must first know the truth, that Jenůfa has just given birth to Števa's child. Laca reacts violently to this news, and the Kostelnička suspects that Laca will never marry her step-daughter as long as Števa's child is with her; thus, she continues her story, telling Laca that the child has died. She orders Laca to go and find out more about Števa's upcoming marriage, and Laca rushes off, overjoyed that he is finally free to marry the girl whom he has loved for so long.//

In the next scene, the Kostelnička sings a dramatic monologue in which she reflects on her terrible lie; she reassures herself, saying that in killing the child she will be setting it free from a life of disgrace, as a child without a father, conceived out of wedlock. She wraps the child in a scarf, and rushes out into the night.

Having heard the door close, Jenůfa emerges from her room, calling out for her mother. She is frightened at first to see that the baby is gone, but assumes that her step-mother must have taken the child to town to show her friends; still, she senses danger, and kneels to pray.//

Jenůfa's prayer is interrupted by a knock at the window; it is the Kostelnička, who tells Jenůfa that she has been fast asleep with a fever for several days, and that her son has died. Jenůfa cries out in anguish, and demands that Števa be told at once.....but the Kostelnička replies that Števa has already been by since the baby's death, offering money but not marriage. The Kostelnička continues, saying that Jenůfa is still loved by Laca; at the same moment, Laca returns and takes Jenůfa's hand, proposing marriage. The Kostelnička is pleased, believing that she has made

the right choice.....but, as the act comes to a close, she falls under the torment of her hideous act, and, just before the curtain falls, she cries out that it seems as if Death were all around her. ☹

🎵 (Act Two) 🎯 🖱

Act Three takes place some two months later, and, as in Act Two, the curtain rises on the Kostelnička's apartment. It is the day of Jenůfa's wedding to Laca, and preparations for the ceremony are under way. Jenůfa has nearly recovered, but the Kostelnička seems pale and distracted, clearly still feeling guilt over her murderous act. An elderly attendant enters, and asks Jenůfa if she is nervous; such feelings, she says, are normal for a young girl about to lose her freedom.

A knock is heard at the door, and the Kostelnička cries out in fear.....but it is only the mayor and his wife, who have come to offer their congratulations. The mayor comments that the Kostelnička looks quite ill and not herself, to which she responds that she is in terrible pain and feels herself fading away. The Mayor's wife remarks snidely that Jenůfa seems ready for a funeral, and that she should be more festively dressed for her own wedding; she demands to be shown Jenůfa's closet, and is lead offstage by the Kostelnička and the mayor.

Now alone together onstage, Laca offers Jenůfa some flowers that he has brought, but she refuses them, saying that he deserves a more worthy bride. Laca admits that he was at first taken aback by the news of Jenůfa's pregnancy, but that he forgave her immediately, and vowed to spend the rest of his life making up for the

pain that he had caused her.

Laca and Jenůfa are interrupted by the arrival of the wedding guests as the time of the ceremony draws near. Karolka and Števa enter first, and Jenůfa encourages the two brothers to shake hands. The Kostelnička reappears with the mayor and his wife, and is dismayed to see Števa. A group of village girls appears in the doorway and performs a song and dance for the bride; when they are finished, the ceremony is set to begin, and the Kostelnička begins to read the service. (•)

Suddenly, a chorus of terrified cries can be heard from offstage, and in a moment the shepherd boy Jano rushes in, and tells the mayor that some villagers have found the body of a newborn baby frozen into the ice, and are on their way into town with the corpse. The wedding guests rush out along with Jenůfa and Laca, but the Kostelnička remains behind, calling out for her mother to protect her.

After a few minutes, Jenůfa's cries can be heard from outside; she has seen the little red bonnet on the head of the frozen corpse and realizes that the baby is her own. She staggers inside, following a crowd of villagers and the mayor, who holds the tiny infant in his hands. Hearing her cries of recognition, the crowd presumes that Jenůfa has killed her own child, but before they can detain her the Kostelnička calls out from the back of the room, admitting to her terrible deed and describing how she had smothered the child to death and pushed him through a hole in the ice. (•)

Karolka is horrified and leaves, refusing to marry Števa, and Laca laments that it was his attempt to disfigure Jenůfa that has led to this tragedy. Jenůfa is shocked at first, and approaches the Kostelnička angrily, but softens when she hears her step-

mother's words "I realize now that I loved myself more than I loved you." Jenůfa forgives her step-mother, and bids her God's blessings as she is led away by the mayor. Alone again with Laca, Jenůfa begs him to leave, saying that he will be better off with a much less troubled soul, but as the curtain falls, Laca only takes Jenůfa's hand and pledges his eternal love.

 (Act Three)  

## TRANSCRIPT #4 – *The Marriage of Figaro*

*It was with some apprehension that I decided to air my first opera by Mozart on 29 October 1995, as I had long suspected that the operas of Mozart were perhaps not quite as well-suited to air play as those I had previously chosen to feature on the program; I assumed that since the dramatic element of the plot was so often secondary in importance to the music in Mozart's operas, the progression of the plot would not be as easily "heard" by musically untrained ears. Compared to the operas of Puccini and Verdi, Mozart provides the listener with fewer clues as to what is happening at any given moment; in *The Marriage of Figaro* in particular, extra-musical effects are few and far between, and when they do occur they are so well integrated into the musical texture that they pass by virtually unnoticed — for example, when the Countess rings for Susanna near the beginning of Act One. Also, orchestral depictions of settings and moods are more subtle and nondescript; I had no shimmering sea music to describe, as in *Simon Boccanegra*, and no orchestral depiction of a mill-wheel turning, as in *Jenůfa*. In short, I anticipated that the operas of Mozart might be less effective on radio.*

*As it turned out, however, the broadcast of *The Marriage of Figaro* was one of the most successful of all, ironically because of the potentially inhibiting qualities mentioned above. For example, due to the absence of more obvious points of reference, I had to rely to a greater extent on the text, which, because of the strophic construction of many of the individual selections, was reinforced through repetition. In addition, it seemed that the structure of the opera, the very independence of its musical sections, allowed the audience to appreciate the music for its own sake, without having to search for clues as to the action of the plot.*

*In my synopsis of The Marriage of Figaro, I wanted to avoid the sort of complexity which I felt had marred my broadcast of Simon Boccanegra, but I was faced with a plot that was even more complex; I attempted to solve this problem by focusing less on the details, and more on the humour of the story.*

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### 10/29/95 06:00 - 08:30 *The Marriage of Figaro* – W.A. Mozart

[EMI/ANGEL 1959/1994: Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, Anna Moffo, Fiorenza Cossotto, Giuseppe Taddei, Eberhard Wächter, Ivo Vinco. Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus — Carlo Maria Giulini (CD)]

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Good morning and welcome to *Sunday Morning at the Opera* on 93.3 CFMU for this Sunday October the twenty-ninth...my name is Heather Slater and I'll be with you, as always, until 8:30 this morning...and today on the program we will listen to the music of Mozart, the opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. And one of the reasons I wanted to play this particular opera for you this morning is because of a great new recording which just arrived at the studio.....actually, this is just one in a whole series of opera recordings released last year by EMI Classics, which features re-issues of some truly classic recordings and some outstanding casts as well. This particular recording of *The Marriage of Figaro* is a re-release of the 1961 recording featuring Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Anna Moffo and Giuseppe Taddei, three top

Mozart interpreters.....and of course, it's very rare that you get to hear a cast of this calibre without an equally impressive price-tag, but the best thing about this EMI series is the reduced price, which they've made possible by fitting all of the music onto two discs instead of three, and so you're only paying about half the price, about thirty dollars for each recording. So this is a great recording that also happens to a great value, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

*The Marriage of Figaro* was Mozart's first mature comic opera, and its composition in 1786 marked the beginning of a very fruitful collaboration with the librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. Da Ponte's libretto was based on a satirical play by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, whose plot, while comparable in modern day terms to a rather tame soap opera, was nothing short of scandalous in its day; the play's production in Germany and Vienna was banned for a time by the Emperor Joseph the Second, who thought it too outspoken for a polite audience. And it's no wonder the play caused such a stir — the plot is full of mockery of the upper class and glorification of the role of servants, as well as numerous open references to sex, all subject matter which Mozart embraced with much enthusiasm.

And by the way, if you happen to notice a few similarities between *The Marriage of Figaro* and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, this is because the latter was based on a related play by Beaumarchais which features the same trio of characters: the dashing young Count Almaviva, the coy Rosina, and Figaro, the charismatic barber of Seville. In Mozart's opera, the story takes place some years later, with

Rosina now the Countess, and the Count much older and not nearly as “dashing.”

As the curtain rises on Act One, we see a partly furnished room in the palace of the Count Almaviva; it is to be the apartment of the newly-married Figaro and Susanna, the attendants of the Count and Countess. We hear Figaro counting aloud — “Cinque, dieci, venti” — as he measures the floor, while Susanna tries on a hat she plans to wear for the wedding; she is mortified when Figaro remarks that their room is in a most convenient location, as Susanna will not have far to go should her mistress call out in the night. Susanna replies slyly that their proximity to their masters’ bedroom will also make it convenient for the Count to come and pay her a visit in Figaro’s absence if he should so desire. The Countess rings for Susanna, and Figaro curses the Count’s lustful intentions toward his lover; in the aria “Se vuol ballare, signor Contino,” he vows revenge against his master.

In a moment, the housekeeper Marcellina enters with Dr. Bartolo, and the two proceed to hatch a plan to blackmail Figaro into marrying Marcellina, to whom he has defaulted on a debt. Dr. Bartolo has his own reasons for plotting revenge, as Figaro had arranged the marriage of the Count and the Countess Rosina, who was formerly the object of the doctor’s affections; Bartolo sings the aria “La vendetta,” in which he promises that the scoundrel Figaro will pay for his actions.

Susanna enters, and in a mockingly polite duet she and Marcellina attempt to compliment each other, but the conversation quickly turns hostile, and Marcellina storms off in a rage.

In a moment, the page Cherubino enters as well, and, as is customary, this

young boy's part will be sung on this recording by a female soprano. Cherubino has just been scolded by the count for flirting with the gardener's young niece Barbarina, but he proceeds to wistfully tell Susanna that he is quite enamoured by the beautiful Countess. He steals one of the Countess' ribbons from Susanna, and offers in return a little song of desire which he has just written, the aria "Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio," "thoughts of love overwhelm me," which he vows to sing for every woman in the palace.

Just as Cherubino finishes his song, he hears the voice of the Count approaching, and rushes to hide behind a nearby chair; the Count enters, flirting openly with Susanna, but he runs to hide as well when the voice of the music master Don Basilio is heard outside the door. Basilio enters, spouting the latest gossip about the Countess and Cherubino; the Count has soon heard enough and emerges from his hiding place in anger, announcing that the flirtatious Cherubino must be sent away. He relates that the previous day, upon searching Barbarina's room, he had found the young boy hiding beneath a tablecloth; to demonstrate, he lifts the cloak from the chair, and is surprised to find Cherubino there again. He realizes that the boy must have overheard his lascivious conversation with Susanna, but Cherubino replies that he tried very hard not to hear.

Figaro enters suddenly with a group of servants, exclaiming that it is the day of his marriage to Susanna, and he humbly asks the Count to perform the ceremony; the Count agrees, and all except Cherubino proceed to cheer the soon-to-be-wed couple. Susanna sadly reveals that Cherubino is soon to be sent away, and the Count agrees

to pardon the boy, on the condition that he join the military at once. The act ends with the famous martial aria “Non più andrai,” in which Figaro bids farewell to the boy, and jokingly reminds him that he will soon have to abandon his flirtatious ways and succumb to a life of discipline and honour.



Act Two takes place in the bedroom of the Countess, and begins with the aria “Porgi, amor,” “May love bring an end to my sorrow,” in which the Countess sadly reflects on the news that her husband has been flirting insatiably with Susanna. Susanna enters, reassuring her mistress that the Count’s flirtations are all a matter of routine, and that girls of her rank are easy prey for such men.

Figaro enters with a plan to trick the Count, and perhaps catch him in his own trap; he has sent the Count an anonymous letter telling him that the Countess has been regularly meeting a young lover in the garden. He encourages Susanna to set up a similar rendezvous with the Count, but tells her that she is to dress Cherubino in women’s clothing and send him in her place; Figaro rushes out, eager to set his plan into action.

Just then, Cherubino enters, and Susanna begs him for a song; he sings the famous aria “Voi, che sapete,” “You ladies who know what love is, tell me if it is in my heart,” after which the two women praise his charming voice. Susanna begins to flirt with the restless boy for his disguise, and sings an aria in praise of his handsome young face; meanwhile, the Countess notices that the military commission which the boy

holds has been left without a seal, and also that the boy has wound a ribbon around his arm. When she questions Cherubino about the ribbon, not recognizing it as her own, the boy attempts nervously to explain, then collapses into tears.

The scene is interrupted by the sudden angry knocking of the Count, who demands to know why the bedroom door is locked. The Countess sends Cherubino to the closet to hide, and lets her husband inside. The Count proceeds to show his wife the incriminating letter, but is interrupted by a noise from the closet; he is suspicious, but the Countess reassures him that it is only Susanna, and she attempts to divert his attention by taunting him about his forthright affections for the girl. The Count pays no attention, and demands that Susanna come out of the closet at once, and when he gets no response he storms off to find a crowbar, dragging the Countess along with him.

Susanna, who has been hiding in the corner of the room throughout this exchange, calls for Cherubino to leave the closet, and she quickly takes his place, leaving the boy to leap out of the bedroom window and escape through the garden. The Count and Countess return, and the Countess, believing her prank to have backfired, admits that it is actually Cherubino in the closet; the Count flies into a rage, demanding that the boy come out at once, and both are surprised when Susanna appears instead. Momentarily humbled, the Count apologizes to his wife and begs for her forgiveness. The Countess resists his pleading at first, but soon forgives him, at Susanna's urging.

Figaro enters, announcing that the musicians have arrived, and the wedding

ceremony is all set to begin. Still suspicious, the Count asks him if he knows anything about the anonymous letter, and, being unaware of the recent happenings, Figaro steadfastly denies any knowledge of the letter, until the women hint that they have already told the Count the truth.

Suddenly, the gardener Antonio enters carrying a broken flowerpot; he claims to have seen someone jump out of the window of the Countess' bedroom, and believes it to have been the page Cherubino; Susanna whispers to Figaro that this was indeed the case, and so Figaro boldly announces that it was he himself who jumped from the window in fear of the consequences of the letter. Antonio says that if the man was indeed Figaro, then he must surely own the papers which were found in the garden; seeing that they are Cherubino's enlistment papers, Figaro scrambles for a moment, then, with the help of Susanna, replies that he had been taking them to be sealed.

The Count accepts this explanation, but still suspects that he has been had, and is relieved when Marcellina and Dr. Bartolo enter, believing them to be his only chance to stop the wedding of Susanna and Figaro. He agrees to hear their case, much to the dismay of the soon-to-be-married couple, and the act ends with a septet in which each character expresses his own reaction to the recent turn of events.

 (Act Two) 

As the curtain rises on Act Three, we see a room in the palace decorated for a wedding feast; the Count is alone, still dwelling in confusion over the events of the

previous act. The Countess and Susanna enter quietly from the rear, the Countess quickly hiding and urging Susanna to go and ask the Count for some smelling salts. Susanna does, and the Count gives them to her, joking that she may need them herself when she loses Figaro to Marcellina because of his unpaid debt. Susanna pretends to be willing to obey the Count in return for his mercy on her lover; the Count is overjoyed, and orders her to meet him in the garden later that evening. On her way out, Susanna runs into Figaro, and reassures him that their plan may work after all and they most surely will be married when the Count is brought to disgrace. The Count overhears their exchange, and swears revenge in the aria “Vedrò, mentr’io sospiro, felice un servo mio!” — “Why should a servant of mine be so happy?”

At this point, Marcellino and Bartolo enter, along with an official who declares that Figaro must either pay Marcellina the money he owes her or marry her at once. Figaro replies that he is of noble birth, and can only marry with his parents’ consent, but sadly, he was kidnapped as a baby and has since been unable to locate his true parents. He offers proof of his noble heritage, and prepares to show them a birthmark on his arm — but before he can display the mark, the surprised Marcellina describes it in detail, and we realize that she is actually Figaro’s mother, and Bartolo his father.

Just as Susanna re-enters, Marcellina rushes to embrace her son, and Susanna proceeds to slap Figaro’s face, thinking them to be lovers; Marcellina explains the situation, and all (except for the Count) proclaim their joy.

In the next scene, the Countess awaits a meeting with Susanna; she is worried

that their plan may be too dangerous, and decides that she herself will impersonate Susanna in the garden that evening. In the aria “Dove sono I bei momenti,” she laments the pain which her husband has caused her. She leaves momentarily, and the Count enters with Antonio, whom he tells irritably that Cherubino is still in the palace. The Countess returns with Susanna and dictates a letter confirming the latter’s rendezvous with the Count; once the letter is written the Countess seals it with a pin which she says must be returned by the Count.

Just then, a group of villagers enters, bringing flowers to the countess; they are led by Barbarina and Cherubino, who is dressed as a girl. Antonio sees through the boy’s disguise, and replaces his girlish hat with a military cap, causing the Count to fly into a rage. Barbarina reminds the Count of all the times she succumbed to his desires, and that he had promised her anything in return for her affections; she tells him now that she only desires Cherubino as a husband.

The wedding ceremony gets under way, and a chorus sings a hymn of praise to the Count, while attendants bring bridal veils for both Susanna and Marcellina, who will wed Bartolo. Susanna stealthily hands the letter to the Count, and as the act draws to a close, the Count dismisses the wedding guests and promises a splendid party later that evening.

 (Act Three)  

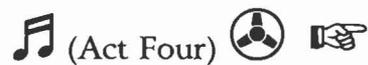
The fourth and final act of *The Marriage of Figaro* takes place in the garden outside the palace; as the curtain rises, we see Barbarina frantically searching for

something which she has apparently dropped, and she sings the aria “L’ho perduta.” Figaro and Marcellina enter, and Barbarina explains that she has lost a pin which the Count had given her to return to Susanna. Figaro is shocked, taking this to mean that Susanna is having an affair with the Count; he hides among the trees, vowing revenge on behalf of himself and all of jilted mankind, while Marcellina leaves in a hurry, hoping to warn Susanna.

Just then, Susanna and the Countess enter dressed in each other’s clothing, ready to deceive the Count once and for all. Susanna (really the Countess) asks for permission to remain in the garden alone for a while, and the Countess (really Susanna) agrees and leaves. In the guise of Susanna, the Countess sings the passionate aria “Deh! vieni, non tardar,” and Figaro is quietly consumed by jealousy, believing her song to be intended for the Count.

Cherubino enters looking for Barbarina, and flirts with the Countess, thinking her to be Susanna. Just as the boy is about to kiss her, the Count enters and proceeds to seduce the woman he believes to be Susanna. Figaro finds the real Susanna, whom he believes to be the Countess, and tells her that if they hurry, they can catch their respective lovers in the act of betrayal. When Figaro hears the Countess’ voice, he realizes that she is actually Susanna but pretends not to notice, hoping he can catch her in her own trap; in turn, Susanna intends to punish Figaro for having doubted her fidelity. Figaro proceeds to seduce her, and Susanna, still thinking that he believes her to be the Countess, slaps him across the face; Figaro confesses that he knew it was her all along, and the two make amends.

In the meantime, the Count has lost sight of the woman he believes to be Susanna, and Figaro and the real Susanna decide to trick him even further; they pretend to be lovers, leading the Count to erupt with anger and call for witnesses. Bartolo and Marcellina enter, as well as various servants, Cherubino and Barbarina, and the Count publicly denounces the woman he thinks to be the Countess. He is shocked to hear the voice of the real Countess emerging from behind the trees, and he realizes that he has been had once again. And the opera comes to a close with a lively chorus in which the Count is forgiven and all is happily resolved.



## TRANSCRIPT #5 – *The Flying Dutchman*

*The broadcast of Wagner's The Flying Dutchman was given in conjunction with the Canadian Opera Company production which began on 26 January 1996. This production, under the direction of Christopher Alden, was a highly unconventional one which featured considerable changes to the set directions, as well as significant alterations of details in the plot. Because I had attended the opening night performance just two nights before my show aired, I was able to let my listeners know what to expect in advance. I felt that in this case, it was important to present a traditional synopsis, so that anyone attending one of the remaining performances would be aware of the extent to which liberties were taken by the producer.*

*It was during the preparation of this broadcast that I first considered a new technique which I hoped might provide another dimension of "immediacy" for my listeners in order to help them orient themselves during the playing of the opera. Until this point, my synopses had focused on distinctive sections of text or audible points of interest, but now I saw the possibility of incorporating segments of the music into my script as well. The use of illustrative musical examples during an educational classical music program on radio is quite common, and can be extremely effective, especially if a separate medium, such as a piano, is used; certain intermission features of the Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts are one well-known example. However, I hoped to incorporate such examples into the script itself, so that a description of a certain musical motive, for example, would be followed immediately by its playing. I thought that this would be especially helpful for an opera such as The Flying Dutchman, in which the motives are so crucial to both the dramatic and musical structure.*

*In the end, after spending much time experimenting with different methods of recording examples, I was unable to put my plan into action, the main problem being one of “choreography”, as mentioned in Chapter One; I was unable to be at both the microphone and the cassette console at the same time and could therefore not cue up my examples and resume reading my synopsis without causing some excessive “dead air.” Nevertheless, I have inserted the musical examples which I intended to play into the body of the following transcript in order to illustrate this very useful broadcasting technique.*

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**01/28/96 06:00 - 08:30 *The Flying Dutchman* – R. Wagner**

[EMI/ANGEL 1981: José van Dam, Dunja Vejzovic, Kurt Moll, Peter Hofmann, Eric Moser, Kaja Borris. Vienna State Opera Chorus, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra — Herbert von Karajan (CD)]

Good morning and welcome to another edition of *Sunday Morning at the Opera* here on 93.3 FM, CFMU.....I am your host, Heather Slater, and I'll be with you until 8:30 this morning.....Today on the program, we'll be listening to Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, an opera which is currently in production with the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto, the premiere of which I just attended Friday night at the O'Keefe Centre.....and perhaps a little later in the show I'll tell you a little bit about this very unique production, because while it was certainly one worth seeing, especially if you're interested in non-

traditional stagings, it did have some considerable faults. But first, let me tell you a little bit about *The Flying Dutchman*, and then we will listen to the opera in its entirety.

Wagner completed *The Flying Dutchman* over the course of seven weeks during the fall of 1841, and the work was premiered on January second of 1843 at the Dresden Court Theatre just a few months after the highly successful first performance of *Rienzi*. The libretto is Wagner's own, and was inspired by a novel of Heinrich Heine as well as various other versions of the Flying Dutchman legend. According to the legend, a Dutch sailor once proclaimed that he would sail the seas until the day of judgement, whereupon Satan, overhearing his vow, cast a curse upon the sailor ordering him to do just that. The sailor's only hope for salvation lay in the love of a faithful woman, and so he was permitted to go ashore in search of a companion once every seven years.

The nautical setting of *The Flying Dutchman* grew out Wagner's own personal experience, in particular a stormy sea voyage which he undertook from Riga in 1839. During this trip, the Captain was forced to dock at a particularly rocky section of the Norwegian coastline, and later Wagner wrote: "A feeling of indescribable content came over me when the enormous granite walls echoed the hail of the crew as they cast anchor and furled the sails. The sharp rhythm of this call clung to me like an omen of good cheer, and shaped itself presently into the seamen's song in my *Flying*

*Dutchman.*<sup>1</sup>

We will first hear the overture, which is built on various motives from the opera, each one representing a specific character or theme, this, of course anticipating the leitmotif technique which Wagner would use in his later operas. The opening is dominated by the Dutchman's theme, a forceful rising motive played by the brass, which you will all of course recognize from the theme music to this program:

The image shows a musical score for the Dutchman's theme. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth notes that rise in pitch, starting on a middle C and ending on a G. The bottom staff is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth notes that rise in pitch, starting on a middle C and ending on a G. The score is marked with a forte (f) dynamic and a marcato tempo. The instrumentation is indicated as 'Hus. & Bssn. marcato'. The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata.

This theme will recur every so often throughout the opera both to mark appearances of the Dutchman and also as a general reference to his character. In the first quiet section after the introduction you will hear the redemption motif:

The image shows a musical score for the redemption motif. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth notes that rise in pitch, starting on a middle C and ending on a G. The bottom staff is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth notes that rise in pitch, starting on a middle C and ending on a G. The score is marked with a pianissimo (pp) dynamic and a ritard. tempo. The instrumentation is indicated as 'pp Cor anglais, Hus. & Bssn. ritard.'. The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata.

.....which will become the theme of Senta's Ballad in Act Two. And a bit later in the overture, you will hear snippets of the lively sailor's chorus which begins Act Three:

<sup>1</sup> Frank Granville Barker, *The Flying Dutchman: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Breslich and Foss, 1979), p. 19.



And as you're listening to the overture, also note the wavelike swell played by the strings, which represents the storm at sea, and which we will hear intermittently throughout the first act.

As the curtain rises on Act One, the stormy music continues and we see a rocky shore on the Norwegian coastline, with waves crashing up against the rocks. It is nighttime, and a native ship is approaching the shore. We hear the shouts of the sailors announcing their arrival as they throw down their lines, and then the bass voice of Captain Daland, who emerges angrily from the ship, cursing the storm which has steered him and his men seven miles off course. He sings of his home, which he had glimpsed briefly before the storm rose up, just as he was picturing himself embracing his beloved daughter Senta. He curses the storm, ending his aria with the words "Whoever trusts the wind trusts Satan's mercy." He then returns to the ship to wait out the storm and calls to his Steersman to keep watch.

We next hear the tenor aria "Mit Gewitter und Sturm," "In Gale and Storm" sung by the Steersman; this a simple aria, very much like a folk-song, in which the Steersman sings of the maiden who awaits him on shore. He is interrupted by a crashing wave which violently rocks the ship, and which Wagner scores as massive thuds for percussion and brass. During the second verse of his song, the Steersman

ods off, but is soon jolted awake by the sound of the Phantom Ship casting its anchor, represented musically by three emphatic horn blasts. There is silence for a moment, then the Steersman resumes his song, but he falls asleep again as the Dutchman comes ashore.

At this point we faintly hear the Dutchman's theme; then, the accompaniment dies away and we hear a brief, mournful sounding recitative in which the Dutchman tells of his cursed existence. He laments that he will never find true love, and that his only companion for eternity shall be the sea. "To you, ocean tides," he sings, "I shall be true, until your last wave breaks, and you are drained dry." The aria which follows takes on a darker tone as the Dutchman recalls how he has yearned for death, even provoked it, but such was not his fate. The central section of the aria is gentle and prayerful, as the Dutchman begs the angel of God to decide his fortune.....but then he cries out for eternal destruction, as only the end of the earth can free him from his curse. The aria ends optimistically on a major chord, with the Dutchman's crew echoing his words in hushed voices in the background.

At this point, we again hear the Dutchman's theme, and Daland appears on deck; he looks with alarm at the Phantom Ship and reprimands the Steersman for falling asleep at his post. The Steersman leaps to his feet and calls twice to the Dutchman's ship, but is answered by silence. Daland sees the Dutchman on shore and cries out to him; from a distance, the Dutchman replies that he has come from afar and seeks refuge from the storm. Daland joins the Dutchman onshore, and listens as he tells the sad tale of his long life doomed to the sea. He asks Daland to

take him in for a time, and offers him priceless treasures in return; he then produces a chest of jewels. Daland exclaims in awe, but the Dutchman only replies “What use is treasure? I have neither wife nor child, and my home I shall never find.” He then offers the Norwegian all of his riches in exchange for his daughter as wife.

The remainder of Act One is dominated by much brighter music, in the style of Wagner’s earliest works; to a waltz-like tune, Daland agrees to the Dutchman’s proposal, and the two sing a lengthy duet, in which each man praises his own good fortune. They are interrupted by the call of the Steersman, announcing the south wind, which is represented by rapid scales played on the clarinet; we once again hear the busy shouts of the sailors as they prepare to cast off, and the duet resumes. The Dutchman promises to follow Daland's ship once his crew has had a chance to rest, concerned that Daland will see that his ship is piloted by evil forces. As the act comes to a close, we hear Daland whistle for his crew to cast off, and, after a brass fanfare, a grandiose chorus is sung by the sailors over the swell of the waves.

Now before we listen to Act One, I’d just like to point out something about the way in which this opera is divided. Wagner originally intended *The Flying Dutchman* to be performed in one continuous act, sort of as a precursor to the type of “continuous music” that he would adopt in his later operas, and so even though modern productions usually allow for a scene change between acts, there are no actual breaks in the music at these points. So, in order to avoid making abrupt cuts to the music, we’re going to listen to the entire

opera in two large sections, the first extending to the end of the “Spinning Chorus” which begins Act Two...and at that point we’ll take a brief pause before we listen to the rest of the work. So, let me just give you a brief summary of what is happening in this first section of the second act....

Act Two takes place in the home of Daland, where a group of women are gathered at spinning wheels in front of a fire. As they spin, they sing of the men out at sea who will soon return to woo them with exotic trinkets, and they imagine that their spinning wheels will hasten their journey home. Throughout the chorus, the girls mock Senta, whose lover is a hunter, and who will bring her not gold, they joke, but game. Mary, the nurse, mocks Senta, who stares transfixed at a portrait of a ghostly pale, dark-haired man; it is the Flying Dutchman, with whose legend Senta has become obsessed. And as the “Spinning Chorus” comes to a close, Senta begs Mary to sing for her the “Ballad of the Flying Dutchman,” but Mary, somewhat frightened, refuses, and Senta prepares to sing it herself. And after our break we will resume with “Senta’s Ballad.”

  (Overture; Act One; Act Two, beginning) 

We’ve already heard the “Spinning Chorus” which opens Act Two, and which leaves Senta standing motionless in front of the Dutchman’s portrait about to sing of his legend. The very popular aria which follows is commonly known as “Senta’s Ballad,” and in it Senta mimics the sailors’ cries of “Jo-ho-ho” from Act One. The

girls are moved by the sad tale of the Dutchman and they sing the last stanza in rushed tones without accompaniment. Senta breaks in and emphatically states that she will be the one to break the Dutchman's curse, and the women exclaim in surprise.

Just then, Erik storms in, having heard Senta's final vow; he approaches her angrily, and tells her that he has seen her father's ship on the horizon. The women hurry out in surprise and rush off to prepare dinner; Senta begins to follow them, but Erik holds her back. He is afraid that Daland has come to offer Senta a more worthy husband, and he sings the impassioned aria "Mein Herz, voll Treue bis zum Sterben," "I offer a heart true unto death." But Senta only brushes him aside, anxious to meet her father, and Erik accuses her of being obsessed with the Dutchman's portrait. Senta replies, "Do you not feel the pain, the deep grief, with which he gazes upon me?", and Erik exclaims "Satan has ensnared you!", his words emphasized by alarming repeated chords in the orchestra. He tells her that he dreamed of a foreign ship, and saw two men coming ashore; one, he tells Senta, was her father.....the other, he continues, pointing ominously at the portrait of the Flying Dutchman, was *him*. A brief silence follows, and Senta realizes that she must go and meet the ship. Erik cries out ["Mein Traum sprach wahr"] "My dream spoke the truth" and flees in terror, again accompanied by those ominous repeated chords in the orchestra.

In the next scene, as the intensity of the music dies down, Daland and the Dutchman appear in the doorway; Senta stands transfixed, and Daland comments on her strange behaviour. She asks her father for the stranger's name; Daland replies

with a folk-like aria which is reminiscent of his Act One duet with the Dutchman, and in which he introduces Senta to her betrothed. In a hushed voice, Daland notices that both Senta and the Dutchman stand as if in a daze, regarding each other with wonder, and so he leaves.

The music builds to a climax, and we hear a gentle restatement of the Dutchman's theme; then, all is silent and the Dutchman begins a hushed aria without accompaniment. He proclaims in awe that he has found the woman who will break Satan's curse, and Senta replies passionately, turning the Dutchman's aria into a duet which continues throughout much of the second act. In the midst of this duet, the Dutchman asks Senta if she is prepared to swear eternal fidelity, as only true love can break the curse. Senta replies that such is her nature, and she pledges true love unto death as the duet resumes. At this point, Daland enters cautiously and asks in a whisper if the betrothal has been accepted, as his guests are impatient, and anxious for the celebration to begin.

The third act begins without a pause; on the right is the house of Daland, on the left his ship and that of the Dutchman, the former lit up for a celebration, the latter shrouded in darkness. On the deck of the Norwegian ship, the sailors gather and sing their famous chorus, the tune of which was first heard in the overture; they call joyfully to the Steersman to abandon his watch and join the party — "Steuermann, lass die Wacht!" A group of women arrives with food and wine for the sailors, but when they see that the sailors are enjoying themselves without their help, they head toward the Dutch ship to rouse its crew. The Norwegian sailors call out to

stop them, joking that their neighbours must be either dead or too old to celebrate, for they don't answer. After continued attempts to rouse the Dutch crew, the sailors begin to feel uneasy and resume their lively chorus.

Suddenly a fire blazes up mysteriously on the deck of the Dutch ship, the water begins to churn and a piercing wind rages through the blood-red sails. A chorus of eerie voices rises from the Phantom Ship, punctuated by the Dutchman's theme. The Dutch ship rocks violently in the sea, while Daland's ship remains still; seeing this, the Norwegian crew comments in a nervous whisper. They try to resume their chorus, but the phantom voices rise up again, and the sailors rush below deck in terror.

In the next scene, Senta and Erik rush onstage, having heard the strange singing from the Dutchman's ship. Erik extends a final plea to Senta, warning her that she knows not what unholy power awaits her. After a plaintive introduction played by the oboe, he begins a lyrical aria in which he reminds Senta how she once pledged herself to him, and swore that her love was true. The music takes a sudden violent turn at this point, and the Dutchman rushes in, having heard Erik's words. He faces Senta and declares her untrue; in anger and despair, he revokes his pledge, and orders his crew to prepare to sail, as the wave motive surges in the background. In an urgent trio, Senta begs the Dutchman to stay, and renews her promise; Erik attempts to hold her back, warning her that she is in Satan's clutches.

In his final aria, the Dutchman swears that the unfaithful lover is doomed to eternal damnation, and that by leaving Senta, he will be saving her. Mary and

Daland rush in with a crowd of sailors, and try to hold Senta back; she tears herself loose, and rushes to a rock overhanging the sea. Crying “Here I stand, true to you unto death!” she leaps into the sea.....and just before the curtain falls, the Phantom Ship disappears under the sea, while, against the redemption motif, the ghostly figures of Senta and the Dutchman can be seen rising toward the heavens.

  (Act Two continued & Act Three)

Once again, Wagner’s *Flying Dutchman* is currently in production with the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto, with performances taking place until about the middle of February at the O’Keefe Centre right downtown.... But just a warning, if you’re planning on heading to Toronto to see one of the remaining performances of *The Flying Dutchman*, you may be in for a bit of a surprise. As I mentioned earlier in the program, I managed to catch the opening night performance this past Friday, and I have to say I came away with mixed feelings.....There was some really terrific singing, especially from soprano Eva-Maria Bundschuh, who played Senta, and also baritone Gidon Saks in the role of Daland.....but overall, I thought this production left much to be desired....first of all, it’s a very “non-traditional” interpretation, so if you’re expecting to see massive ships and a dramatic storm scene you may be a little disappointed, because Christopher Alden, who directed this production, has gone with an unusually.....minimalistic stage setting, with a rectangular... box-like structure representing the interior of *both* of the ships,

and also the inside of Daland's house in Act Two. Now unfortunately the use of only one set for all three acts made for some rather noticeable....logic problems, you could say.....for example, in Act One, when Daland and the Steersman call out to the Phantom Ship, it's hard to get past the fact that the Dutchman is not down the coastline as Wagner intended, but is actually standing right behind the two men on the same ship. But oddly enough, other scenes worked rather well, for example the "Spinning Chorus," and also the Sailors' Chorus from Act Three....overall, though, I felt that the sets Christopher Alden used really hampered the effectiveness of this production, and you might find that you do too....



## TRANSCRIPT #6 – *Peter Grimes*

*The broadcast of Benjamin Britten's Peter Grimes was the very first to focus on an opera with an English text, and I anticipated that this fact would minimize some of the comprehension problems I had experienced in the past when writing my synopses. In this case, I planned to spend more time discussing the musical details as opposed to action of the plot; as I mentioned in Chapter One, time constraints had often limited the content of my script to one or the other. In the case of operas with foreign text, a clear explanation of the text had been my first consideration, and musical cues were only mentioned occasionally in order to reorient my listeners. In preparing for Peter Grimes, however, I did not have to contend with the problem of a language barrier, and was therefore free to write my script in a much less structured manner, focusing less on the text and more on the music instead. I could assume that details of the plot would be self-evident, and could therefore dispense with a traditional, detailed synopsis.*

*However, when I first listened to the recording of Peter Grimes which I had chosen to air, a somewhat unexpected problem arose. Due to a frequent overbalancing on the part of the orchestra, as well as the extremely thick accents possessed by the all-English cast, the meaning of the text was more often than not impossible to decipher; as far as my audience was concerned, much of the work may just as well have been in a foreign language. With this in mind, I knew that by not providing my audience with some form of a plot summary, I would be doing them a disservice. In the end, I compromised by writing a general plot summary, and pointing out only the most distinctive verbal cues, which were fortunately in abundance, while focusing for the most part on the music.*

*Near the end of this broadcast, I was faced with an interesting dilemma; in the final scene of Act Three, just after the Captain has advised Peter Grimes to sail out to sea and scuttle his ship, there is a full minute of silence, which, while effective on the recording and even more so in a live performance, translated to “dead air” on radio. Because I had not previewed the entire recording before playing it, this unusually lengthy silence took me by surprise; since I had only mentioned this feature in passing in my synopsis, I offered an explanation when the segment had come to a close.*

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## **02/04/96 06:00 - 08:30 *Peter Grimes* – B. Britten**

[Decca/London 1958: Peter Pears, Claire Watson, James Pease, Jean Watson, Owen Brannigan. Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden — Benjamin Britten (CD)]

Good morning and welcome to another edition of *Sunday Morning at the Opera* here on 93.3 CFMU....my name is Heather Slater and I'll be with you until 8:30 this morning. And today on the program we'll be listening to a work that is arguably the most popular opera composed thus far in the twentieth century, or at least the one which finds its way into the concert hall the most often....this of course being Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*. The recording we'll be listening to today is a particularly interesting one,

which was first released in LP format in 1959, and features two of the cast members involved in the premiere of the work, namely Owen Brannigan and the legendary tenor Peter Pears. But best of all, at least from the standpoint of “authenticity,” this recording is conducted by Benjamin Britten himself, so we have a rare opportunity to hear a recording which represents the composer’s very own conception of the work.

Britten adapted the story of *Peter Grimes* from a poem called *The Borough* by the mid-eighteenth-century poet George Crabbe which is set in the small coastal fishing village of Aldeburgh near Sussex, England in 1750. The choice of setting was a very personal one for Britten, who wrote “my life as a child was coloured by the fierce storms that sometimes drove ships onto our coast and ate away whole stretches of the neighbouring cliffs. In writing *Peter Grimes*, I wanted to express my awareness of the perpetual struggle of men and women whose livelihood depends on the sea.”<sup>1</sup>

The character of Grimes is said to have been modelled after an acquaintance of Crabbe’s, a somewhat troubled fisherman by the name of Tom Brown who was known to have savagely beaten his father on more than one occasion, and also the young boys who worked at different times as apprentices aboard his ship, each of whom died mysteriously while under Brown’s care. Britten and his librettist Montagu Slater updated the story to about 1830 and omitted the role of the father but otherwise the plot remained basically the same. In the opera, Britten plays on the

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Britten, “Introduction” to *Peter Grimes: Sadler’s Wells Opera Books No.3* (London: Bodley Head, 1946), p. 8.

duality of Grimes' character, who is torn between the need for love and social acceptance on the one hand and his violent impulses on the other.

*Peter Grimes* was given its premiere on June the seventh, 1945 in London at the Sadler's Wells Opera house, the very first performance to take place in the theatre since it re-opened after World War II. The opera is in three acts with a prologue, with each act divided into two scenes to allow for a change of set, and for each of these breaks in the action, Britten supplied atmospheric orchestral interludes which I will describe as they occur.

The prologue takes place in the village courthouse, where a hearing is under way in the death of a young boy who had been an apprentice on Peter Grimes' ship. Grimes is called to the stand by Swallow, the mayor of the Borough. While Grimes tells his tale, the crowd mumbles its disapproval in the background, already convinced of the fisherman's guilt. The mayor calls forth Ellen Orford, the schoolmistress, who had helped to bring the boy ashore. In the end, the mayor rules the death accidental, but advises Peter not to take on any more apprentices. He orders the court to be cleared, leaving Peter alone with Ellen, and the two begin an unaccompanied duet throughout which the voices alternate until the last stanza, when they come together in unison to sing the words "Here is a friend." Ellen exits the stage, and is followed a few moments later by Peter as the prologue comes to a close, and the music of the first interlude begins without a pause.

This first orchestral interlude foreshadows a coming storm; it begins quietly with a repeated motive played by three solo violins; then, a restless rising and falling

motive is played by the woodwinds, representing the turbulent waters; and finally, we hear chords played by the low brass. These three ideas combine and grow gradually into a raging storm throughout the first scene of Act One.

This first scene takes place at the harbour fish market, where townsfolk are gathered to meet the fishing boats. The general conversation centres around the storm that is on its way, and the mood of the music is light and folk-like, with a chorus sung in unison. This changes, however, when Peter Grimes calls from the distance for help with his ship, and no one is willing to go to his aid. Finally Captain Balstrode goes forward to help, and when Grimes comes ashore, Keene, the apothecary, announces that he has found Grimes a new apprentice. He summons the carter Hobson, who replies that his cart is too full and sings a little song complaining about his job, while the townsfolk mutter “dirty jobs” in the background. Ellen Orford steps forward to offer help, and the ladies of the crowd exclaim in astonishment; Ellen replies with the brief aria which begins “Let her among you without fault cast the first stone” before she leaves with Hobson to fetch the boy.

At this point the intensity of the storm music begins to build; Balstrode announces that the storm is fast approaching, and all head for the shelter of the pub. Balstrode is left with Peter, and the scene ends with a duet between the two men, in which Peter vows to marry Ellen in order to save his reputation. As the curtain falls, the second interlude begins, and the storm rises to fever pitch, heavily scored now for full orchestra; when the curtain rises again we see the interior of the local pub, and every time the door opens to let someone in, the stormy music can be heard at full

power.

There is general merrymaking going on, including some flirtation between the local Rector and the two nieces of the character known as Auntie, the proprietor of the pub. Finally Grimes enters, and seems unmindful of the townspeople gathered around him. He sings an impassioned aria, the first full-scale aria we have heard thus far; here, for the first time, the instrumentation is lush and conventionally tonal. When Grimes finishes his song, the crowd remarks that he must be mad, and soon a fight erupts between Grimes and the drunken Rector. Balstrode nervously begs for someone to start a song, and so a round gets under way which begins with the words “Old Joe has gone Fishing”; Grimes joins in near the end with an eerie twist to the words, but soon the round is interrupted by the entrance of Hobson, Ellen and the boy. Grimes grabs the boy and orders him to come home with him at once, and as they exit, the crowd calls out “Do you call that home?”, referring to the decrepit, overturned boat in which Peter lives. And here the curtain falls on Act One.



Just before the curtain rises on Act Two, we hear the third orchestral interlude, this one depicting the sea shimmering in the early morning sun, represented by a lively woodwind figure played over solid chords in the low brass. It is a Sunday, and as the curtain rises, we see a church in the near distance, and small groups of townspeople casually making their way inside for the morning Mass. In the foreground, Ellen sits near the seashore watching the boy, and she sings of the beauty

of the water, with its waves glittering in the sunlight; as the church service begins, we can hear the congregation begin to sing. The boy sits quietly at Ellen's side, and she tries to draw him out of his silence, but when he turns his back to her for a moment, she notices a tear in his coat. She leans closer, and is horrified to see a bruise on the boy's neck; she says calmly, "it's begun," while in the background, Miss Sedley, whose has been watching, rushes inside the church to spread the news.

At this point Peter enters, needing the boy's help, and Ellen gently confronts him about the bruise, singing "were we mistaken to have schemed to solve your life by lonely toil?" Peter listens at first, but quickly loses patience with Ellen's concern, and strikes her across the face; he drags the boy offstage just as the sounds of the final Amen rise from the church. He turns back and calls out "Lord have mercy upon me," to a tune which will become the basis for the remainder of the act.

Seeing Ellen slumped over in tears, Auntie rushes in with a few village men and the trio sings "Grimes is at his exercise," and as the crowd surrounding Ellen grows, this phrase becomes a large-scale chorus. Amid the hubbub, the Rector stands up and incites the angry crowd to action, and they turn on Ellen for her misplaced loyalty. At this point Ellen begins another brief aria, to the words "We planned that our lives would have a new start," while in the background we hear scattered comments from the villagers. Ellen is unable to calm the crowd, and they decide to march onward to Grimes' hut. There is a sudden eerie silence at this point, and Hobson enters beating a drum, the sound of which leads the men off to confront Grimes. The woman are left onstage to sing a pensive quartet in which they reflect on the recent events and

bemoan their lot as women.

The fourth interlude begins in the same mournful vein, with a plaintive viola solo, but soon a march-like motive in the winds takes over, reminding us of the crowd heading to Grimes' hut. The interlude becomes a set of variations on the viola's theme, and as it builds to a climax, the curtain rises on Grimes' hut; Grimes enters, pushing the boy in front of him, and calling out "Go there." He is in a rage, aware of the scandal circulating among the townsfolk. He throws clothing toward the boy, getting him ready to sail, but pauses when he finds a sweater that Ellen had knitted for the boy. He handles the sweater with tenderness for a moment, but then catches a glimpse of the sea through the door and rushes the boy along again.

Seeing that the boy is frightened, Grimes backs away and sings of what life will be like when he has redeemed himself in the eyes of the town gossips. Soon, Hobson's drum can be heard approaching from a distance, as well as the voices of the townspeople. Grimes pauses to listen, then turns angrily on the boy, believing that he has confided in Ellen. As the noise of the mob grows louder, he orders the boy to scale the cliff which borders the ocean shore, and a moment after the boy has left the orchestra rises to a loud, dissonant chord, then falls into an eerie figure played on the celesta, just before we hear a muted scream as the boy falls to his death.

Grimes makes a hasty exit just as the mob arrives, pounding at the door of the hut; they enter, surprised to find nothing suspicious, and assume that Grimes and the boy are out at sea, while the bassoon and tuba accompaniment serve to momentarily lighten the mood as the men leave. Only Balstrode is left to inspect the hut, and as

the act comes to a close, he makes his way to the back door from which the boy fell, sensing that all is not well.

 (Interlude Three & Act Two)  

The fifth orchestral interlude which opens Act Three is very placid and peaceful, and represents the borough under the light of the moon and stars, with the flute representing the twinkling stars. The curtain rises on the interior of the pub, where a small band gathered near the back of the room begins to play a series of dances while the townspeople stomp around on the dance floor. We first hear a rustic country dance, to which Swallow and the nieces add a melody; a gentle waltz is heard next, as Mrs. Sedley corners Keene, suspicious of the boy's whereabouts and anxious to tell what she knows of Peter and the boy.

The next dance is a hornpipe, and just as it begins, a group of men enter bidding each other goodnight. Mrs. Sedley sings to herself of the murder that is in the air, and soon Ellen enters solemnly, holding the boy's discarded sweater, which she shows to Balstrode. She sings the aria which begins "Embroidery in childhood was a luxury of idleness," lost in thoughts of what her discovery means. Balstrode comes forward to comfort her and the two sing a duet to the words "And we shall be there for him."

The band strikes up a final dance, and as the first scene of Act Three comes to a close, the crowd gathers again in the pub, now certain that Mrs. Sedley speaks the truth. Hobson is ordered by Swallow to gather a group of men to bring Grimes in,

and calls “Grimes is around,” which further riles the crowd; soon, scattered voices can be heard chanting the name “Peter Grimes,” culminating in fierce cries before they disperse.

The final orchestral interlude represents the fog which gradually seeps in from all sides and covers the now empty stage. Through the fog, Grimes can be seen docking his boat, alone, and wearily making his way up from the shoreline as the music builds in intensity. A ghostly echo of the chorus’ cries of “Peter Grimes” can be heard, and Grimes, now verging on madness, begins an eerie monologue, without orchestral accompaniment. Hearing the voices in the distance, Grimes answers, frantically calling his own name in return.

A fog horn sounds, played by a tuba offstage, and Ellen approaches Grimes as the crowd continues to call out his name in the distance. Grimes tells his story, and Balstrode overhears, then approaches Grimes warily; in a section of spoken dialogue, he tells Grimes that he must sail out to sea, run his boat up onto the rocks, and let himself sink with it. There is a moment of silence as Balstrode walks with Peter to the shore line, and then he and Ellen watch as Grimes casts off from the shore for the last time.

The music builds from the silence, with the same music which began the first scene of Act One as the dawn breaks, and the fog of the previous night disperses. Swallow enters and announces that a boat has been seen sinking out at sea, but the townspeople take no notice, and resume their morning chores.

## TRANSCRIPT #7 – *Der Freischütz*

*When I decided to air Weber's Der Freischütz, I was faced for the first time with the problem of spoken dialogue in the place of recitative; dialogue in German comprises, in fact, almost half of the entire opera. Although I suspected that these sections wouldn't be very effective over the air, I knew that I would not be able to simply omit them. I had initially assumed that since there was no music throughout these sections of German text, they would be of very little interest to my listeners; however, after a discussion with Dr. Alan Walker, who defined dialogue as "recitative without music," I began to consider the two along similar lines, and came to the realization that the dialogue should be considered an integral part of the musical structure.<sup>1</sup>*

*Also, the lively "Singspiel" character of the dialogue in Der Freischütz encouraged me to leave most of it intact. In The Marriage of Figaro, the recitative was of a fairly static nature, and so the elimination of certain sections did not take away to any great extent from the broadcast. In the case of Der Freischütz, however, and particularly because of the live recording I had chosen to air, the dialogue was exceptionally dramatic, filled with the sounds of rifle shots and rowdy villagers dancing on the stage. In short, the dialogue was essential to the progression of the plot in a way that could be readily perceived by the ear; in many ways, it was just as captivating as the music.*

*Still, a few cuts had to be made in the interest of time, and so I chose to eliminate only those portions of dialogue that filled the more static moments (such as Kuno's monologue in Act One) and summarize in my synopsis the action that was being missed.*

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with Dr. Alan Walker, 16 February 1996.

02/18/96 06:00 - 08:30 *Der Freischütz* – C. M. von Weber

[Denon 1985: Reiner Goldberg, Jana Smitkova, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, Günther Emmerlich, Ekkehard Wlaschiha, Olaf Bär, Andrea Ihle, Theo Adam. Dresden State Opera Orchestra and Chorus — Wolf-Dieter Hauschild (CD)]

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Good morning, and welcome to *Sunday Morning at the Opera* for this Sunday, February the eighteenth....my name is Heather and I'll be with you, as always, until 8:30 this morning.....And today on the program, one of my own personal favourites, a wonderful German opera which we don't get the chance to hear live very often, for a variety of reasons, I suppose, but perhaps most likely because this opera is notoriously difficult to stage. I am speaking, of course, of the opera *Der Freischütz* by Carl Maria von Weber, and today on the program, while you may be hard-pressed to find a live production of this work lately, you will at least get to hear one. You'll be listening to what has to be one of the finest live recordings of *any* opera, at least that I know of, and one which I think is particularly successful in capturing the spirit of this great work.

Carl Maria von Weber has been called the greatest German musician ever — in fact, those were the very words spoken by Richard Wagner at Weber's funeral in December of 1844.<sup>2</sup> Since he was a contemporary of Mozart, the operas of Weber, which also include *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*, are often overshadowed by those of the great master of German opera. And yet, many would assert that Weber's operas are

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<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Schreiber, in liner notes to Weber's *Der Freischütz* (Denon Digital Stereo 90C37 7433-35, 1985), p. 23.

decidedly more progressive, even original; in his own words, Weber aimed to produce time after time “the kind of opera all Germans want — a self-contained work of art in which all elements, contributed by the arts in co-operation, disappear and re-emerge to create a new world.”<sup>3</sup> And with such a philosophy of the genre, it is no wonder Weber found such a loyal follower in Richard Wagner.

*Der Freischütz*, or “The Free-Shooter,” was the first of Weber’s operas to bring him public acclaim, most likely because of the German folk tunes, of which the audience at the Berlin premiere were especially fond. The libretto was written by Friedrich Kind and was based on a German folk legend which he discovered in a collection entitled *Popular Tales of the Northern Nations*. As the story goes, a hunter, down on his luck and unable to make a decent shot, was visited by the devil, who offered to cast him seven magic bullets in return for his soul. Six of these bullets would never miss their mark, but the seventh, unbeknownst to the hunter, belonged to the devil, and would fly only as he willed it.

In the opera, we meet the good-hearted Kuno, who is ready to step down from his post as head marksman to the Duke of Bohemia. A young hunter named Max, who plans to marry Kuno’s daughter, is encouraged to participate in a trial shot, but he is beaten by a mere peasant, and loses his confidence altogether. With the help of the scheming hunter Kaspar, who has already sworn himself to the Black Huntsman, Max soon turns to the forces of evil to help him in his quest.

The overture to *Der Freischütz* is divided roughly into three sections with a brief

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<sup>3</sup> James Anderson, *The Complete Dictionary of Opera and Operetta*, 2d ed. (New York: Wings Books, 1993), p.122-123.

introduction; the first section has a pastoral theme played by the French horns, and it is these horns which give the overall work a feeling of the hunt. The next section is considerably darker, and begins with an urgent rising figure in the low strings, but soon we hear a much more lighthearted theme, which is later expanded into the closing material of the overture.

Act One takes place in the Bohemian countryside shortly after the Thirty Years' War; it is near dark and a rowdy crowd of peasants and villagers are gathered to witness a shooting contest between Max, a highly regarded hunter, and Kilian, a fellow peasant. Just as the overture ends, we hear a gunshot fired by Max, and then another, fired by Kilian, which is followed by shouts of praise from the crowd. Kilian has won the contest, and the villagers sing a chorus of "Victoria" — "Victory to the marksman!" A trumpet fanfare is heard, announcing the arrival of the village musicians, who begin to play a baroque-style march during which the townspeople dance. Kilian begins a joyful aria, arrogantly mocking Max, and after each verse, the crowd sings the refrain, the women starting off with a bizarre imitation of Kilian's laughter.

Kilian's song provokes Max to pull him to the ground in anger, but soon the royal marksman Kuno enters, along with Kaspar. The good-hearted Kuno is disturbed by the violent scene, but Kilian reassures him that it is all in fun; after all, who can resist the irony of a skilled hunter being upset by a mere peasant? In the background Kilian mumbles on about someone named Samiel, then warns Max that a spell of bad fortune has been cast upon him, and that he must go to the crossroads

the next Friday, armed with a bloody sword — Kuno cuts off Kaspar’s warning, but reminds Max of the trial shot to take place the next day which Max must win if he desires the hand of Kuno’s daughter Agatha in marriage. Kuno explains the significance of the trial shot; many years ago, in this same forest, the Duke had discovered a man strapped to the back of a wild stag as punishment for poaching. Filled with sympathy for the man’s plight, the Duke had ordered Kuno’s grandfather, a hunter, to shoot the deer without injuring the man; as a reward, he offered the hunter the title of royal marksman, with a home in the castle and all the forest as his kingdom. The hunter’s shot was sound and he claimed his prize, but adversaries protested that the bullet was a magic one, one of the six free-bullets granted by the Black Huntsman. And so, the Duke declared, each young hunter hoping to win the post must successfully complete a trial shot of the Duke’s choosing.

This conversation, which takes place in the form of spoken dialogue, is followed by a trio and chorus; Max is troubled by his failure and the prospect of losing Agatha, and sings “O, diese Sonne,” “O this sun which rises fearfully before me”; he is joined by Kuno (who offers encouragement) and Kaspar (who speaks tantalizingly of the magic bullets). The peasants soon join in as well, commenting on the torment which shows on the face of the young hunter. Kuno interrupts with a brief recitative “Mein Sohn, nur Muth!” (“Have courage, my son!”) and then the villagers begin a lively hunting chorus, and again we hear those prominent French horns.

There is a brief bit of dialogue at this point, as Kuno and the peasants urge Max to come into the tavern and dance; we hear the violins being tuned, and a rustic

waltz begins...but Max is in no mood for dancing, and begins an anguished recitative, crying “why does misfortune pursue me?” In the aria which follows, he recalls that his aim used to be steady and sure, and remembers how Agatha would rejoice at his great skill. The music turns gradually darker until the last two stanzas which end with the words “despair clutches, mockery torments me,” sung to the music of that stormy second theme from the overture.

In the next section of dialogue, Kaspar emerges from the tavern, glad to find Max, and calls back for some wine to be brought out. When this arrives, he proposes a toast to Max and then begins a lusty drinking song in which he praises Bacchus, the god of wine, as well as the lovely mistress Agatha; Max is offended by Kaspar’s ungentlemanly behaviour, and says so every time his drunken companion finishes a verse.

Following Kaspar’s song, we hear a lengthy stretch of dialogue and then a rifle shot; Kaspar has ordered Max to fire at a bird flying far overhead, obscured by the trees, and Max is shocked when the bird, an impressive golden eagle, falls at his feet. He turns questioningly to Kaspar, and Kaspar tells him that he has just fired the last of the magic bullets. Still nervous about the trial shot the following day, Max begs for another bullet, and Kaspar agrees to help him cast one at midnight at Wolf’s Glen. Max pauses, knowing Wolf’s Glen to be haunted, but when Kaspar taunts him about the possibility of losing Agatha and also his pride, Max agrees to come, and exits the stage.

To bring the act to a close, Kaspar sings a darkly expressive aria which begins

with the words “Schweig’, Schweig’,” “Hush, hush that none may warn you, Hell has entwined you in its net,” and just before the curtain falls, he tears one wing from the eagle’s corpse.



As the curtain rises on Act Two, we join Agatha and her cousin Anne in a room in the house of Kuno; a picture of Kuno’s grandfather, the first royal huntsman, has fallen from the wall, and Anne stands on a ladder attempting to refasten the nail. The two women sing a duet in which Weber shows their contrasting personalities; Anne is somewhat of a comic character, and sings in rapid phrases, while Agatha sings longer notes, in a pensive, dreamy mood. While Anne jokes about the uncooperative portrait, Agatha waits and worries, impatient for Max to return from the hunt. Anne comments on the rickety old castle, where even the old gentry can tumble fall from the wall now and then; at this point she sings a lighthearted arietta which is introduced by a lively oboe melody, and in which she voices her preference for men of a younger persuasion.

In the brief dialogue which follows, Agatha admits that the incident with the portrait has frightened her; that very morning, when she had met the good hermit in the woods to receive her bridal flowers, he had warned her of danger in the air. She takes the falling portrait to be an ill omen, and worries about Max, who has not yet returned from the hunt.

At this point, we hear a sighing melody on the clarinet, and Agatha begins a

mournful recitative; an aria follows in which she praises the beauty of the forest — “Leise, Leise,” she sings, “Softly, softly, my gentle song, rise to the shimmering stars.” She interrupts her song with bits of recitative in which she notices the gathering storm, and then she offers a prayer for Max’s safe return; suddenly, we hear the sound of the hunting horns and Agatha becomes excited, singing “All’ meine Pulse schlagen,” “My every pulse is beating.” She can see Max approaching, and imagines that he wears a crown of flowers, a symbol of victory in that evening’s shooting match.

In the section of dialogue which follows, Max skirts the issue of the match against Kilian, but brags of his fine kill later that evening — he proudly pulls an eagle feather from his hat, and holds it out for the women to admire; as he does so, a lamp on a nearby table shatters without warning. Anne exclaims in disbelief, and tells Max of the portrait, which had fallen from the wall at just past seven o’clock; Max’s bravado turns to unease as he recalls that this is the exact time that he had fired the magic bullet which brought down the golden hawk. Nevertheless, he is anxious to keep his appointment with Kaspar, and lies to the women, saying that he has shot a prize buck, and must retrieve it from Wolf’s Glen. A trio ensues, in which Agatha exclaims in horror and dismay and recounts the tale of the Black Huntsman, while Max insists that promise and duty call him; the hunter’s heart is strong, he says, and knows no fear. Anne pleads with him to stay, begging him to heed Agatha’s words, but neither of the women is able to hold him back.

At this point in the second act, there is a quick scene change, and the curtain

rises on the clearing at Wolf's Glen later that same evening. The music here is eerie and suspenseful, as Kaspar builds a circle of stones around a skull. From offstage a ghostly chorus can be heard; these are the living dead who inhabit Wolf's Glen. In the distance, a clock strikes midnight, and Kaspar spears the skull with his knife, calling out to Samiel, the Black Huntsman. We hear the Huntsman's voice, and Kaspar falls to his knees begging to be released from his evil curse. In return, he promises, he will bring a young hunter who has promised to sell his soul for the seven magic bullets. "Only six bullets are his," Samiel reminds Kaspar, "but the seventh is mine," and Kaspar suggests that the seventh bullet be saved for the hunter's bride. Samiel agrees and vanishes into the night.

In the final scene of Act Two, Kaspar begins to build a fire, while praising the Black Huntsman for his mercy — we hear tremolos played by the strings, and heroic brass chords, and Max appears at the stone wall which surrounds the Glen; Kaspar turns and greets him, while fanning the fire with the wing of the slain eagle. Paralyzed by fear, Max imagines that he sees his mother's corpse, then Agatha, preparing to leap to her death from a nearby waterfall (and this is represented by a very high, shimmering falling passage scored for the strings).

In a very brief dialogue, Max comes forward and Kaspar explains how they must cast the bullets. A flute holds a sustained note while Kaspar rhymes off the ingredients; first lead; next, some broken glass from the windows of a church; then, three bullets which have hit their mark, and so on. The fire begins to burn, and Kaspar counts each of the first five bullets as it appears — "Eins," "Zwei," "Drei,"

“Vier,” “Fünf.” Every time a bullet is cast the intensity of the music rises, representing the growing fire, and the storm which soon rages through the forest. With the casting of the fifth bullet, we hear the horns again, and a band of ghost hunters on horseback gallop through the glen, singing a strange, unearthly chorus. There is a pause, and Kaspar casts the sixth bullet; the full orchestra plays a triumphant march, and the ghostly spirits of Wolf Glen approach the clearing. Kaspar cries out for help, then collapses, and just before the curtain falls, the Black Huntsman calls out to Max and takes his hand. And that will bring Act Two of *Der Freischütz* to a close.

Once again, the recording you're listening to today is on the Denon label, a recording that was made in 1985 at the Semper Opera House in Dresden, and this performance marked the re-opening of that opera house, which had been completely destroyed in World War II in 1944. On the first day of the theatre's re-opening, they staged a performance of *Der Freischütz*, and that is the very performance you're hearing this morning. So if you're wondering what all the noise is about, the stomping on stage, and the very audible moving around, this is a live recording in the opera house and it's really amazing, actually, how well they've balanced this; very rarely do you hear a live recording which displays the voices to such a great advantage. But there are some pitfalls to this recording which I feel I should mention, one of them coming up very shortly, and that is Agatha's first major aria in the second act.....Jana Smitkova sings the role of Agatha, and you'll notice a little bit of

insecurity on her part in this wonderfully virtuosic aria, which is a real shame, because it really is the low point of this recording. But, enough said, let's listen now to.....



Before the curtain rises on Act Three, we will hear a brief interlude, or entr'acte, in the French tradition, and this will give us a little preview of the Hunter's Chorus, which comes along in mid-act. As the curtain rises, two men discuss the upcoming trial shot, and one, a rival marksman, bids Max an ill-hearted good luck; the other man scolds his friend, saying that Max is a skilled hunter, admired by the Duke and betrothed to the daughter of the royal huntsman.

The two strangers leave, and Max and Kaspar remain behind, discussing the division of the magic bullets; only two are left, and Max begs Kaspar for his remaining one. Kaspar refuses, secure in the knowledge that Max holds the deadly seventh bullet, and Max storms off. The evil Kaspar spies a fox and shoots it with the sixth bullet, proposing a gruesome toast to the bride.

There is a quick scene change, and the curtain rises again on Kuno's home, where Agatha sits in her bridal gown preparing for her wedding. We hear a lyrical cello solo, and Agatha begins a gentle aria in which she prays for God's guidance. Anne enters, and in a brief dialogue tells of the furious storm which swept through the forest the previous night, and then turns her attention to Agatha, who appears to have been crying. Agatha tells her cousin of a dream she had the night before in

which she was a white dove; Max had fired at her, and she became herself once more, but noticed the torn and bleeding carcass of a black bird lying nearby.

Anne laughs at her cousin's fears; at this point we hear a solo played by the viola, and Anne begins a mockingly dark song intended to cheer Agatha, in which she sings of her old Aunt who once dreamt of a frightful creature stalking her in rattling chains (and we will hear the sound of the chains rattling at this point). Agatha trembles in anticipation — until Anne reveals that the beast was only the dog which guarded the house. Agatha turns away, clearly not amused, and Anne's song takes on a more serious tone as she comforts the bride-to-be, and finally the two women embrace.

Just as they do, the door opens and four bridesmaids enter, calling "Guten Tag." They sing a simple German folk-song, with each girl singing one verse in turn. But their singing is interrupted when Anne, who has gone retrieve the bridal wreath, returns and opens her basket with a frightened cry; a funeral wreath lies in its place. Now thoroughly convinced that evil is at work, Agatha retrieves the hermit's white roses from outside, and sets about making a wreath, pausing only to order the bridesmaids to resume their song.

As the bridesmaids' song dies away, there is another brief change of scene, and the curtain rises on an outdoor gathering at the Duke's palace. The Duke and his guests emerge from a large open tent and sing the spirited Hunting Chorus which we heard first at the beginning of the act; "what pleasures on earth," they sing, "can compare with those of the hunter, whose cup of life sparkles like gold?" There is a

brief section of dialogue in which the Duke is anxious for the trial shot to begin; Kuno advises that Max be allowed to fire his shot without Agatha nearby, so that he does not become nervous. The Duke comments that he may not be man enough for the post, and the villagers laugh. Max comes forward, clutching the last magic bullet (still unaware that it is the deadly seventh) and Kaspar scrambles up a tree for a bird's eye view of the event. At the same time, the Duke points at a white dove roosting high in a nearby tree and orders Max to fire; just as he does so, Agatha appears from amid the trees, begging Max to stop, crying "I am the white dove!" A shot rings out, and at the same time, Kaspar cries out and falls from the tree. There is a general uproar, as the onlookers rush forward to see what has happened; but soon, Agatha's faint voice can be heard, and the chorus sings praises that she is alive.

Meanwhile, Kaspar has been hit by the seventh bullet and cries out "heaven has conquered"; he calls to Samiel one last time, then collapses and dies. Now aware of Kaspar's evil ties, the crowd rejoices at his death, and the Duke commands that the corpse be thrown into Wolf's Glen; he then turns to Max and demands an explanation, and we hear a plaintive bassoon solo before Max begins to tell his tale. The Duke is unmoved, and orders the hunter to be banished forever from his land and Max replies that although he deserves this punishment, it should be known that he was only weak and never evil.

At this point we hear the bass voice of the hermit for the very first time, and his appearance is marked by thickly scored chords for the brass instruments. The hermit praises Max for his bravery and honesty, and convinces the Duke to cast him

out for only one year, after which time he may return to marry his beloved Agatha. At this point we hear a cello solo, and one by one the voices of all the characters join in until a grandiose chorus brings the opera to a close, in joyous praise of God's wisdom.

  (Entr'acte & Act Three)  

## CHAPTER THREE

### “A CRITIC AT THE MIKE”: RADIO BROADCASTING AND MUSIC CRITICISM

In the preface to his 1992 historical study entitled *Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met*, Peter Jackson recalls the troubled early years of the collaboration between the Metropolitan Opera and the National Broadcasting Company, and focuses on the difficulties which NBC experienced in their quest to bring complete, live opera performances to the public airwaves for the first time in history.

When NBC president Merlin H. Aylesworth first approached Metropolitan Opera general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza in 1931 with his plan for a weekly live opera broadcast from the Met, his response was a “flat and ringing ‘No’.”<sup>1</sup> Gatti was obstinate in his refusal to even consider Aylesworth’s proposal, but his reasons remained a matter of speculation; Jackson traces Gatti’s reluctance back to a partial broadcast of a performance of Gounod’s *Faust* by the Chicago Opera Company which aired in January of 1927, the very first instance of live opera on the air. Although this broadcast was a considerable success, the management of the Metropolitan Opera remained unimpressed, and commented that what NBC had presented was simply “not opera.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Cross, quoted in Peter Jackson, *Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met: The Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts, 1931-1950* (Portland, Amadeus Press, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, *Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met*, p. 4.

Gatti and his associates were not alone in their disinterest in a concept which would later become the basis for one of the most successful radio programs in history. At the time, opera on radio must have seemed destined for failure, as American audiences were still revelling in the visual spectacle of the Metropolitan Opera's live productions. The assertion on the part of the management of the Met that radio broadcasts of opera were, in effect, "not opera" at all expresses a fairly common opinion — that opera cannot exist independent of its visual elements.

In *Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met*, Jackson makes a passing, but significant reference to this idea, considering it from a critical standpoint:

True, the visual aspects of operatic production are lacking: not only the sets and costumes but, even more important, the actor's stage action, his carriage, and his mien — all of which should add immeasurably to . . . both the singer's conception of the role and his actual performance. But [is] not the radio audience, vast in numbers, of greater importance in the formulation of operatic taste, and in the evaluation of operas and artists, than the three or four thousand people who heard and saw the performance in the house?<sup>3</sup>

Jackson is hinting at one characteristic which makes the medium of radio unique, that being its entirely one-dimensional mode of communication. As I pointed out in Chapter One, radio commands attention to itself alone, causing the material which is being broadcast to become an "event"; as Jackson implies, such independence is impossible in the opera house, where the visual trappings cause the

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<sup>3</sup> Jackson, *Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met*, p. xiii.

audience to be distracted from listening critically.

In other words, radio encourages *imaginative* listening, and in this respect the broadcasting of opera serves as an especially appropriate example. The audience member who listens to opera on radio as opposed to witnessing a live performance in the opera house mentally “creates” a visual setting, and thus his or her imagination is not constrained by what is seen on the stage. Similarly, the listener who is exposed to a particular opera for the first time through the ears alone creates within his or her imagination a performance “ideal,” instead of accepting one staged performance as a standard against which to judge all others.

The role of radio broadcasting in music criticism remains a relatively unexplored topic, largely due to the fact that radio is often considered to be a “second-rate,” outdated medium. As a mode of disseminating information, the role of radio is usually ranked far below that of television, and, with the advent of computer-based communications technology, it is in danger of falling to a distant third. However, radio is seldom compared on similar terms with the print medium, and not much has been said about the advantages that radio broadcasting may have over the printed word as an outlet for critical expression.

In recent years, the field of journalistic music criticism has found itself in the midst of a crisis; the modern-day newspaper music critic is quickly becoming a thing of the past, and, more often than not, such critics are required to write outside of

their area of speciality, becoming “entertainment writers” as opposed to true critics. In our world of high technology — and low budgets — many critics are realizing the need to look outside the boundaries of the written review to seek something more current, effective and wide-reaching. Throughout the course of my internship, I have come to believe that radio broadcasting can provide such an alternative, and may, in fact, be an important part of the future of music criticism.

Just as the term “music criticism,” with its various implications and many forms, can be a difficult one to define, so can the concept of the “radio critic,” or, more precisely, the music critic who employs broadcasting as his or her primary medium. Due to the multifaceted nature of radio broadcasting (in the sense that the role of the radio announcer usually encompasses many other things), critical activity within the context of a radio station can take place on many different levels. Throughout the production and presentation of my opera broadcasts, I experienced critical activity at four quite distinct levels, which nevertheless overlapped from time to time.

At the most fundamental level is music criticism in the sense of research and writing about music, and the production of an original product — for example, program notes, or, in my case, an opera synopsis — which, although requiring a certain level of critical thought and discrimination, does not involve the statement of personal opinions, or the justification of such opinions. At the next level, critical

opinion, although not stated outright, becomes more apparent; specifically, I am referring to my presence on the air as an “authority,” and the choices that I made regarding the programming of particular works, the selection of recordings for airplay and even the material upon which I chose to focus in my script. This could be described as a comparatively “passive” sort of criticism, because my choices were not intended as critical statements or presented as such on the air; still, they were necessarily informed by my own critical perspectives, and, on a more fundamental level, by my own musical tastes. If we consider the scope of the radio audience, it becomes evident that in this sense radio can contribute significantly to the canonization of certain works, not to mention the widespread popularization of recording artists.

On a third level is the extension of such “passive” criticism, in particular those activities which are usually grouped under the category of “practical music criticism”; on this level, critical opinions are stated rather than merely implied, and are often directed at a consumer. The most common example is the newspaper review, which aims to guide members of the audience toward an informed purchase, whether it be of a recording or concert tickets. In radio, however, the scope of such reviewing is widened considerably, because the immediacy of radio can allow the critic to reach a vast audience at the precise moment that the musical “event” — for example, the playing of a recording — occurs, as is impossible in the print medium. More

importantly, the radio listener can reply to, react to or even disagree with a critical statement, for example, a review of a recording that has just been played, simply by calling the station. The effectiveness of the newspaper music critic is hampered by the remote nature of the medium, and the critic in this position seldom has the chance to experience such stimulating, immediate interactions because the event being described cannot be recreated on the printed page. In radio, however, the airwaves can become a critical forum, encouraging audience participation and interaction.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth and final level of critical activity finds the music critic in the role of educator, or, more specifically, as one who strives to stimulate critical thought. In the case of my opera broadcasts, especially those which previewed live productions, the key to the success of this approach was encouraging the concept of “imaginative listening” that I discussed earlier in this chapter. During my broadcast of Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman*, for example, I was preparing my audience to witness, and more importantly, to react critically to a live performance. Specifically, I aimed to represent the opera in its traditional form so that my listeners could react in an informed way to a particular live production which differed quite drastically. In my review of this production, I sought to make my listeners aware of what I felt were its considerable drawbacks, if for no other reason than to heighten their critical

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<sup>4</sup>A more recent proponent of such audience interaction can be found in Internet-accessible critical forums, where participants can respond to a review or even post one of their own.

awareness, and to make them aware that this production did not represent a “norm.” In doing so, I was encouraging my listeners to construct their own context for the work so that they could approach the live performance, or even another recorded one, with a basis for judgment that was uniquely their own. This sort of educational approach — teaching every member of the audience to sharpen his or her own critical skills, to become, in a sense, his or her own critic — is emerging as a significant new facet of music criticism, and is especially well-suited to the radio medium.

The following perspective, as expressed by a well-known radio personality, captures quite nicely the possibilities inherent in radio broadcasting:

Radio, with its word pictures, encourages people to think, to imagine. It massages the gray matter, so they say. If the message is good, if it is truly artful, it will move the listener. Radio can create warmth, intimacy, laughter and sadness. It can arouse the curious side of our nature. Good radio production can liberate and educate. It can launch the imagination into limitless flight. Good production — good art — motivates and inspires.<sup>5</sup>

I believe that the world of radio can add an exciting new dimension to the practice of music criticism, and may solve to some extent the recent crisis in the discipline; to me, it seems quite possible that the future of music criticism may lie not in the written, but in the spoken word.

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<sup>5</sup> WJCL's Al Jennings, quoted in Keith, *Radio Production: Art and Science* (Boston: Focal Press, 1990), p.33.

## APPENDIX

## Schedule of Programs • September 1995 - March 1996

09/10/95	<i>Tosca</i>	- G. Puccini
09/17/95	<i>La Traviata</i>	- G. Verdi
09/24/95	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i> *	- G. Verdi
10/01/95	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i> *	- R. Strauss
10/08/95	various	
10/15/95	<i>Jenůfa</i> *	- L. Janáček
10/22/95	<i>La Bohème</i>	- G. Puccini
10/29/95	<i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	- W. A. Mozart
11/05/95	<i>Fidelio</i>	- L. van Beethoven
11/12/95	<i>Turandot</i>	- G. Puccini
11/19/95	<i>The Barber of Seville</i> *	- G. Rossini
11/26/95	various	
12/03/95	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	- G. Donizetti
12/10/95	theme program (focus on Canadian talent)	
12/17/95	various	
12/24/95	(no program)	
12/31/95	various	
01/07/96	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	- G. Puccini
01/14/96	<i>Carmen</i>	- G. Bizet
01/21/96	<i>Pagliacci</i> *	- R. Leoncavallo
	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i> *	- G. Puccini
01/28/96	<i>The Flying Dutchman</i> *	- R. Wagner
02/04/96	<i>Peter Grimes</i>	- B. Britten
02/11/96	various	
02/18/96	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	- C. M. von Weber
02/25/96	<i>The Tender Land</i>	- A. Copland
03/03/96	<i>Wozzeck</i>	- A. Berg
03/10/96	<i>Norma</i>	- V. Bellini
03/17/96	theme program (focus on operetta highlights)	
03/24/96	<i>Samson et Dalila</i>	- C. Saint-Saëns
03/31/96	various	

(\* denotes preview of Canadian Opera Company or Opera Hamilton production)

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