**Letter from the Editor**

We are back to press after the holidays and must begin to orient ourselves toward the support of the Spring production of *Cosi fan tutte*. As in past productions of the University Opera Theater, we will be looking for help in diverse areas: backstage and production functions where appropriate, publicity, educating the public, promoting ticket sales, food for promotional parties and for the *strike* party, and learning more about the opera ourselves. We should also be prepared to enjoy ourselves as we fulfill the role of Supers.

Plan now to reserve the dates for the opera presentation: April 29th at 8:00 p.m. and May 1st at 2:00 p.m. Many Supers do attend both performances as doing so provides the opportunity to hear different casts. Four roles are available for supernumeraries as gondoliers and/or musicians for those of you who want the chance to appear in an opera. I do not know how many readers of the newsletter will have singing roles (chorus or otherwise) but I am sure that some of you are among the singing performers.

In the last newsletter I asked about the Houston premiere of *Nixon in China* and audience reactions to it. I have read some of the critics' reports, but critics are not the public, and in the long run an opera has to win over the public even in this day of the powerful Broadway critic. I heard word from Steve Slezak who had contact with relatives and friends who attended opening night of *Nixon*. Apparently many of the audience left at different points with the later departers applauded in the lobby by those who had left earlier!

As for the reaction to the music and libretto, the consensus was as might be expected: unsingable/unmusical for the most part and too static a libretto. How much action could there be at a state-ceremonial dinner—when no loves, hates, plots or intrigues are being exposed? Adams is no Verdi. Of course there are going to be critics who will support avant garde material for its own sake and will find musical value in anything new. The new generation appears to take to minimalism as the wave of the future. Many of the great composers in the past had to go through periods of turning off audiences, suffering their taunts and failing to be appreciated in one or another locale. Remem-

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**November 12 Meeting Report**

In the absence of Mona Shaw, Miriam Canter acted as facilitator. Members present discussed the problem of holding meetings on a weeknight when a Music School or Arts Center event is taking place. The consensus was that the Supers meeting could start earlier and finish in time to permit members to attend such events without much difficulty.

Professor Glass reported that the Goose Girl production was to be taken to the Burlington schools the next week. He also indicated that there is a possibility of getting Birgit Nilsson for a lecture/master class sometime in March or April, 1988, during her visit to the United States. Her visit will be part of the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the first Swedish settlement in this country. It remains to be seen if the invitation can be managed with respect to funds for stipend, travel, etc. The Supers discussed various ways money could be raised to help.

Miriam reported that the University of Iowa Foundation has set up an account for Music School Student
Report Cont.

Travel to be used as needed. The Supers agreed that this account should be open for donations without having to specify a benefit recital event or person. (The fund is open for donations at any time.) The group was reminded that there is also a Foundation account for donations to the University Opera Theater Fund. (Newsletter readers, take the hint!—Ed.)

The birth of Lotte Lehman and Beaumont Glass' biography of the singer that will be released for the occasion. The Super's propose to hold a party on Saturday, February 27th honoring both events. Four Supers volunteered to serve as a committee to work out the details: Hope Solomons, Marlene Stanford, Phyllis Evans, and Linda Behrendt.

Looking ahead to the Spring opera, two Supers, Anna Stranieri and Jean Kern, volunteered to oversee the needs for the strike party.

The rest of the meeting was devoted to ways of promoting Così, how to tap the student audience, involve the The Daily Iowan, create placards for Cambus ad spaces, write series of articles for newspapers, etc. The ideas and suggestions flowed magically. The Supers will be happy to share them with Peter Alexander of the Arts Center Relations and help in any way they can.

January 11 Meeting Report

Mona Shaw led the meeting. Two new members were introduced: Steve Munzenmaier and Barbara Bell. The School of Music Concert and Recital Series Calendar (a copy is included with this newsletter) was handed out to members present. Members are encouraged to distribute them around the city, put them on bulletin boards, etc. Extra copies are available from Mona Shaw at the Music Building or by calling her.

Dr. Marilyn Somville, director of the School of Music, reported on a reception held for Herald Stark (former School of Music voice faculty and opera director from 1934-76) at the Hilton Palacio del Rio in San Antonio, Texas on December 29, 1987. The reception was given to honor Professor Stark and to announce the new scholarship fund that has been established in his name. More than 100 of Professor Stark's former and current students attended the event, which was held during the annual NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) Convention also held at the Hilton in San Antonio, December 26-30. The fund, which will be used to assist exceptional voice/opera students, is titled the Herald Stark Opera Scholarship Fund and will be handled by the University of Iowa Foundation.

The details for the Evangeline Noël Glass recital on February 27th were discussed. The program will be a typical Lotte Lehman recital and will start at 7:00 p.m. in Harper Hall, Music Building. Opera Supers will sponsor a reception for attenders at the home of John Fitzpatrick following the recital. Volunteers from among the members present at this meeting were sought to act as ushers for the recital.

It was decided to hold a reception for the students who will be singing in the Metropolitan Opera Audition Preview Recital. These are students who will be singing at the District Met competition in Des Moines, which leads to the Regional and ultimately the National Metropolitan Opera Audition. The recital is Tuesday, January 26 at 8:00 p.m. The reception will follow the recital in the lounge of the Music Building. All Supers are encouraged to attend the program to show their support for the local contestants.

It was announced that there will be patron tickets ($25.00 each) for Così and a reception for patrons following the opening night performance. Supers will be asked to serve as host/hostesses for the reception although the food, etc. will be arranged by the Foundation. Concerns were expressed about the way a similar reception was handled after last year's opera and steps will be taken to correct some of these problems.

The rest of the meeting was centered on promotional parties and receptions. It was decided that a single event for the press and community arts leaders and best held on a Friday, downtown, from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Details are to be worked out.

UI Opera Cast for Così

As is customary, the Spring Opera is double cast to permit more students to have the opportunity to sing roles. Dates for the opera are Friday, April 29th at 8:00 p.m. and Sunday, May 1st at 2:00 p.m. in Hancher Auditorium. The opera is being staged by UI Opera Theater director, Beaumont Glass and James Dixon, director Orchestral Studies, will conduct. Costumes and scenery will be designed by Margaret Wenk, the lighting designer is David Thayer. Along with the UI Symphony Orchestra the cast will include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cast Role</th>
<th>April 29</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary Lack</td>
<td>Fiordiligi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara Buddin</td>
<td>Dorabella</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristie Tigges</td>
<td>Despina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joshua Breck</td>
<td>Fernando</td>
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<td>Wayne Neuzil</td>
<td>Guglielmo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeffrey Hook</td>
<td>Don Alfonso</td>
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Original Cast for *Così* (1790)

| Merry Belz | Fiordiligi |
| Tracy Quinto | Dorabella |
| Jean McDonald | Despina |
| Phil Koffron | Ferrando |
| Brian Burkhardt | Guglielmo |
| Jeff Fields | Don Alfonso |

The cast of the first performance of the opera which was given in Vienna on the 26th of February, 1790, consisted of Adriana Ferrarese del Bene (Fiordiligi), Louise Villeneuve (Dorabella), Vincenzo Calvesi (Ferrando), Francesco Benucci (Guglielmo), Francesco Bussani (Alfonso), and Dorotea Bussani (Despina). This cast was known to Mozart and his librettist da Ponte as the opera was being written. The information in the following comes from Brian Trowell’s chapter in the English National Opera Guide, *Così fan tutti* and da Ponte’s memoirs.

Adriana Ferrarese del Bene (so named as she came from Ferrara as did the sisters in the opera, an in-joke by da Ponte), about 35 years of age at the time, was da Ponte’s mistress. When Mozart had heard her sing in other operas before *Così* was planned, he had not been impressed by her vocal abilities but acceded to da Ponte’s wishes. It was said that by this time she was no great beauty, but da Ponte claimed, “She had fine eyes and a beautiful mouth.” In a London appearance in 1785, she apparently impressed some reviewers as having a sweet voice and the ability to master the ornamental florid style of singing that was held to be in good taste then. However, it was conceded that she was not a good actress. Da Ponte wrote the role of Fiordiligi specifically for Adriana. Mozart for this part was able to exploit her wide range mannered singing style despite her dubious reputation as singer and actress. Da Ponte who was her champion defended her against all criticism. Apparently she had an impetuous nature that provoked ill feelings in others. She loved to tease rivals and make facetious remarks about them. Such behavior, and perhaps her relationship to da Ponte, led her to be dismissed from the opera company shortly after *Così*. Subsequently, da Ponte, too, was dismissed as he rashly tried to protect her.

Little is known about Louise Villeneuve, the Dorabella. It was stated that in contrast to Adriana, Louise was one of the great beauties of her time. Mozart composed three fine arias for her to be inserted into other composers’ operas during August and October, 1789. She had sung in Vienna since 1788 in one of da Ponte’s other collaborations (*Abore di Diana*). According to a review in the *Wiener Zeitung* she was “justly applauded for her charming appearance, her subtle, expressive acting and her artistically beautiful singing.”

Vincenzo Dalvesi, the Ferrando, was the leading lyric tenor in Vienna until 1794. He came to Vienna after successes in Parma and Venice. A review in 1790 described him as “one of the best tenors from Italy, who combine a voice naturally sweet, pleasant and sonorous with a technique which, without being mannered or overly cultivated, never fails to please our public.” He was the highest tenor Mozart ever composed for.

The Guglielmo, Francesco Benucci, was one of the finest baritone roles of his age and well-known to Mozart as his first Figaro and Leporello. He was considered as good an actor as singer. He had been the leading buffo in Venice in 1778-79. Benucci performed all over Europe and is said to have sung the first Mozarts ever heard on the London stage: the duet *La ci darem la mano* from Don Giovanni. He was described as having “a very round, beautiful full bass voice” and was noted for his subtle underplaying of buffo roles and his ability to take on serious roles equally well.

The Bussanis (in the roles of Alfonso and Despina) were man and wife offstage. Francesco Bussani had settled in Vienna not only as a singer but as a stage manager. According to da Ponte he was “master of every trade save that of honest man.” Da Ponte blamed him for trying to ruin Figaro by getting the authorities (censors) to refuse to allow dancers to be used in the Fandango scene of that opera. Mozart never wrote an aria for Bussani other than parts of the double roles he took in Figaro and Giovanni (Bartolo/Antonio in the former and the Commendatore/Masetto in the latter). He had a generous bass voice but was weak in the lower register. Bussani was noted to have an officious “gobbling turkey-cock manner” that may have been parodied deliberately by Mozart for Bartolo’s La vendetta aria in Figaro. By the time of Cosi, he was 47 and may have been losing his ability to sustain a line. Whatever the reason, Mozart did not provide a proper aria for Don Alfonso in his opera.

Dorotea, Bussani’s wife, had sung Cherubino but no other part for Mozart except Despina. Da Ponte disliked her as he did her husband. He claimed she gained her following by “grimaces and clown tricks.” He also implied that she was unfaithful to her husband, making him “live a dog’s life.” There are accounts of her being more of an actress than a singer, with an attractive physique. Others were said to describe her as having a beautiful and charming chest voice that was used with good humour and mischievously (as Fidalma in Cimarosa’s *The Secret Marriage*). Considering the dislike that both Mozart and da Ponte had for the Bussanis, it is remarkable that they were chosen for the opera. On the other hand with their personalities and their love of intrigue perhaps the pair provided the composer and his librettist the essence of the way Alfonso and Despina would function in *Così*. 
Let not the foregoing descriptions of the original cast, how they may have been chosen for their parts, and how the parts may have been written to fit them dismay our current young singers who have been chosen for the roles this coming spring. But do take heed. Someday a new composer for a new opera may have one of you in mind, not only for the demands the music may make, but also for the characterization of the role.

Are opera composers nowadays fitting roles to specific persons that hope will sing in the premiere of the work?

Department of Notable Quotes

Without music life would be a mistake
   -Frederich Nietzsche

God sent his Singers upon earth
With songs of sadness and of mirth.
   -Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Where Gluck found his personal style by rescoring French tragedy, Mozart synthesized his form by combining the astute verbal art of the satirist with the deeply musical commentary of the romantic.
   -Ethan Mordenn
   The Splendid Art of Opera

I like an aria to fit a singer as perfectly as a well tailored suit of clothes.
   -W.A. Mozart
   one of his letters (1782)

In Cosí fan tutti the dying eighteenth century casts a backward glance over a period outstanding in European life for grace and charm and, averting its eyes from a new age suckled in a creed of iconoclasm, sings its swan-song in praise of civilization that has passed away forever.
   -Sir Thomas Beecham
   A Mingled Chime (1944)

Miscellany

Don't forget the Metropolitan Opera Preview Recital on Tuesday, January 26, 8:00 p.m. in Clapp Recital Hall. Check your School of Music Concert and Recital Series Calendar for other events upcoming this semester. The School offers outstanding artists from on and off this campus, and events are usually free.

Also, remember Evangeline Nöel Glass' recital with Beaumont Glass, accompanist on Saturday, February 27 at 7:00 p.m., Harper Hall, Music Building.

The Opera Supers of Iowa City Newsletter is sent as a service to Opera Supers. It is hoped that those who receive the newsletter, even though they may not be "active" Opera Supers, (attend meetings regularly etc.) will contribute in some way to our projects at least once during any given year.

The time for our next meeting has been changed from February 8 to February 22, since the Iowa Caucus Meetings are held on the prior date.

Important Numbers

Mona Shaw, Public Relations Coordinator..... 335-1667
Dwight Sump, Opera Production Manager..... 335-1153
Margaret Wenk, Opera Designer.. 335-2988
Arthur Canter, Newsletter Editor............... 338-1217
Miriam Canter, Hospitality.................... 338-1217
Shirley Harrison, Costumes.................. 337-5729
Mary Wall, Scenery............................ 338-2618

Reserve your Cosí tickets today!

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