Letter from the Editor

The production, staging and singing of Cosi were a gratifying success and all those concerned with its preparation and performance should be pleased. As for the attendance at the performances, that is another matter. The first night was fairly good, about 1300, but the second performance on Sunday could not have been watched by many more than 700. Considering that the Spring Opera is an annual event, carefully planned, and generally lavishly staged, why such small audiences? Opera may be for everybody but obviously everybody is not interested in seeing a live performance. We can speculate about the various reasons Cosi did not attract greater audiences and perhaps come up with ideas to improve matters for the future. Think about it.

We should look ahead to the summer production of Donizetti's Elixir of Love. Plan now to attend a performance of this heart-warming comedy either on Friday evening, July 29, or Sunday afternoon, July 31, or as a number of us do, attend both performances and hear the different singers. Better yet, get some of your non-opera-going acquaintances to do something different for a change and attend the Summer Opera. If they enjoy good theater, or Broadway musicals, they will respond favorably to The Elixir of Love.

I have been underwhelmed by the responses to my request in the last Newsletter for volunteers to help prepare material for the Newsletter or help in its production. I expected only a few responses, but I may have to redefine "few." We shall manage. I know that many readers do enjoy the Newsletter and want it to continue but have little or no time to devote to submitting material for its content. It is just that without feedback I get the feeling that I am writing to myself. Wasn't there an old song about "I'm gonna sit right down and write myself a letter..."? Hey, out there, are you listening?

What to Take with You Upon Exile

In the last Newsletter, under "Food for Thought" I raised the question of what musical recordings you would take with you if you were to be exiled to another planet, never to return to Earth, and limited to a choice of five albums. For example, would you choose an album containing all nine Beethoven symphonies as one of the five? Your second pick could be an album of all five of his piano concerti. The third could be an album of the four Brahms symphonies, and so on. By careful reading of the Schwan catalog or going through your own collection, you could end up taking five albums containing close to 40 or more records. However, the intent of this question is not to see how many LP's, CD's or cassettes you could take meeting the "limit of five" but rather to force you into a decision of what music you would want to listen to for the rest of your life if the range of choices were drastically limited. I have made my choices, or rather tried to, and find that each time I make a list I change two of them but steadfastly hold on to three. Here are my selections in order of preference: (1) the middle quartets of Beethoven (if there is a single album containing all 16, that would be my choice); (2) Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro, the complete opera; (3) Verdi's Otello complete opera; (4) the Mahler Symphony Number Five and the Songs of Rücker—I know there is an album containing both. My alternate here would be Mahler's Third Symphony with a selection of his songs (also available combined on a new CD album); (5) I vacillate in this between the recording of Gereshwin piano music and songs (by the Bolcoms) and Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov. Now that is a contrast. What do you make of the list? Would you like to hear my reasons for the choices? There are personal ones. I wonder if any of you would be willing to reveal your choices. Pick the right ones and I'll let you go into exile with me.

"Who Is Donizetti and What Was He?" (I keep paraphrasing old songs.)

In the past I have prepared biographical sketches of the composer and background material of the opera that is to be presented in a separate packet for the Supers. Rather than limit its availability to those of the Supers who can attend meetings, I have decided to put this material in the Newsletter. If I am going to spend all that time researching the opera and its composer, why limit the fruits of that research? What follows is a biographical sketch of Gaetano Donizetti, the composer of The Elixir of Love. There are many books on Donizetti, but unfortunately for most of us the bulk of the material appears in Italian. The two most comprehensive biographies written in the English language are William Asbrook's Donizetti and His Operas, Cambridge University Press, 1982 (a revision of his 1965 book) and Herbert Weinstock's Donizetti and the World of Opera in Italy, Paris, and Vienna in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, New York, 1963. There is also a Journal of the Donizetti Society. All three sources are available in the Rita Benton Music Library of the University of Iowa. Of course, biographical sketches may be found in the various encyclopedias and musical dictionaries, such as Grove's.

Gaetano Donizetti was born on November 29, 1797, in Bergamo in the province of Lombardy. He was born into a large family that at the time was living in rather impoverished circumstances, a fact that left quite an impression on Gaetano. In a letter written just a few years before his death, Donizetti, reminiscing about his birthplace, wrote: "I was born underground in Borgo Canale. You went down cellar steps where no glimmer of light ever penetrated. And like an owl I took flight... never encouraged by my poor father, who was always telling me: it is impossible that you will compose, that you will go to Naples, that you will go to Vienna." Took flight, indeed did. This late letter reflects much about his drive and motivation to get above his surroundings, fight the odds and prove himself to his father. The "lack of encouragement" not withstanding, Gaetano was allowed to study at the local Musical Institute in Bergamo. There he received instruction and guidance from Johann Simon Mayr (1763-1845), the Bavarian-born composer who settled in Italy and founded the Bergamo Institute. One cannot overestimate the importance of Mayr's influence upon Donizetti. He was not only his teacher but also a lifelong friend and benefactor whom Gaetano referred to as his "second father." We now marvel at Donizetti's output of 66 operas.
However, he did have a knack for diplomacy in his dealings with business persons and friends as well as family members. Despite his father's selfishness and stubbornness, Donizetti treated him with the patience and generosity indicative of a strong filial loyalty.

He married Virginia Vasselli on June 1, 1828, in a private ceremony. The couple moved to Naples where they lived until her death in 1837 at age 28. The cause of death has been a matter of speculation as it occurred at the time of a cholera epidemic. She suffered a puerperal fever and died not long after the delivery and death of their third child. The couple's first two children also died during infancy. Ashbrook suggests that there is evidence to indicate that Donizetti infected his wife with syphilis which he contracted sometime before 1829 and that the children died from complications of syphilitic infection, as did the wife. Following her death, Donizetti suffered frequent bouts of depression and despair, particularly revealing such moods in his letters around the anniversaries of her demise. Whether he blamed himself or even had any insight into his possible contribution to her death is not known. He never remarried and there were rumors from time to time about his sexual liaisons and amorous affairs. His disease developed into its final stages beginning in 1843. He started to show dramatic mental, physical and behavioral changes with increasing periods of confusion, weakness, mania, depression, and convulsive episodes. He was attended in the period of his decline by Philippe Ricord, a noted physician of that time, who had demonstrated that gonorrhea and syphilis were two distinct diseases. Gaetano Donizetti died on April 8, 1848, at age 51. After his death problems over his estate with intrafamilial squabbles persisted for many years.

The Elixir of Love (L'esilir d'amore): A Synopsis to Win You Over

Nemorino (tenor) is hopelessly in love with Adina (soprano) but he is too passive in his courtship, which annoys Adina. The arrival of Sergeant Belcore (baritone), army recruiter, creates a diversion for Adina. The sergeant is a ladies' man and almost sweeps Adina off her feet. One Dr. Dulcamara (buffo) comes on the scene selling cure-alls and convinces Nemorino that a bottle of his elixir (actually wine) will make him irresistible to the ladies after 24 hours. Drinking the stuff down gives Nemorino a rush of self-confidence, but he suffers a severe let-down when Adina announces she will marry Belcore that evening. Feeling he needs more elixir, Nemorino discovers he is too broke to buy more. He signs up for the army to get the enlistment bonus money as soon as the sergeant returns to the scene and buys more elixir. Nemorino doesn't know that Belcore has already been turned down by Adina at the last moment. Meanwhile the village girls have heard that Nemorino's rich uncle has died and left his fortune to his nephew. They crowd around him and Nemorino truly loves her and drank the elixir in order to win her. She claims she has a more potent weapon than Dulcamara's. Nemorino, noting tears in her eyes, is deeply moved and proclaims his love. After Adina tells him she has bought back his enlistment, she confesses she loves him. They agree to marry and the whole village celebrates the betrothal.
Miscellani

Post-Cost Performance Events

The "Strike Party" (hate to think of this as a celebration to destroy such wonderful sets) went off well and the strikers are most appreciative of the contributions of food, drink and cash made by the Supers. This event is important to the Opera Theater and the contribution the Supers make helps it go off smoothly and less painfully.

The potluck at Mary Wall's was a great success as usual. Good food, good company and good conversation all combine to make it a pleasing event that we will continue each year after the Spring and Summer Operas. One of the Supers attending the potluck left a tablespoon at Mary's. It has a rose design on the handle—check your tableware.

Obligations of "Subscribers" to the Newsletter

If you are on the mailing list for the Newsletter by choice, you are expected to make some contribution to the activities of the Supers, when asked, at least once during the year, even if you are not an active Super. Thus if you get a call to help provide something for the Strike Party, be it food or a small cash contribution, it would be fitting for you to do so. We are not charging you a subscription fee for the Newsletter but its creation and distribution are costly what with mailing and printing charges. Perhaps we should charge a subscription fee but as yet we do not prefer that route. The cooperation by the Supers has been unassailable but we were surprised to have been turned down on the Strike Party business by one or two persons whose excuse was not being an "active" member.

Benefit Recital

Rosemary Lack, soprano, will give a benefit recital on Saturday, June 26th, at 8:00 p.m. in the Gloria Dei Lutheran Church (Market and Dubuque Streets). Professor Robert Eckert will join her for some duets on this occasion. The Supers will provide the reception following the performance. Plan on attending.
**Elixir of Love**  
by Gaetano Donizetti  
Libretto by Felice Romani  

Beaumont Glass, stage director  
UI Symphony conducted by Michael Deane Lamkin  

July 29 at 8:00 p.m. and July 31 at 2:00 p.m.

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<tr>
<td>Adina</td>
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<td>Giannetta</td>
<td>Barbara Buddin and Nancy Hagen</td>
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<td>Nemorino</td>
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