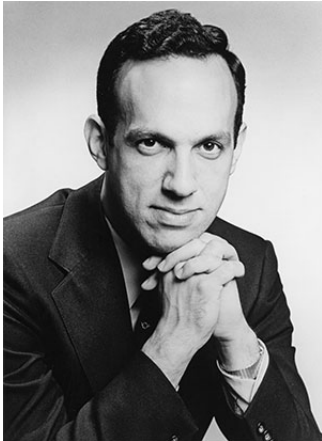


**Preview: CIM Opera Theater mounts first Cleveland productions of Richard Strauss' 'Ariadne auf Naxos'**

Published February 22, 2010

by Daniel Hathaway



The annals of opera history are littered with original concepts that never panned out on the stage. A prime example is Richard Strauss's 'Ariadne auf Naxos', which was originally intended to be a half-hour's musical diversion at the end of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's version of Molière's

play, 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme'. As it turned out, the Strauss add-on grew to three times its original length. The two pieces together added up to over six hours in running time and required hiring both an opera company and a Comedia dell'Arte group. Not a sustainable business plan.

Though the original concept was revived for the Edinburgh Festival of 1997 -- the kind of unusual experience festivals are supposed to provide -- Richard Strauss's one-act opera is almost always performed today in its revised version of 1916. That's the version of 'Ariadne' the Cleveland Institute of Music Opera Theater will stage in Kulas Hall this week from February 24-27.

Artistic Director David Bamberger thinks this will be the first Cleveland production of the opera. "As far as we know, to the best of our knowledge, the whole score has never been presented here before".

After spending many seasons as general manager of Cleveland Opera before the company reorganized, Bamberger was hired in 2004 to develop an opera program at CIM along with Mary Schiller, head of the voice department. Before, his job was to fill the three thousand seats of the State Theater for three performances of each opera. His job at CIM is very different.

"One of the things that's been great fun about my being at CIM is that our first question is

what will work with the students. Sometimes that means standard repertory, so since I've been there, we've done 'Magic Flute', and we've done 'Fledermaus', and other times it means going medium afield, which I guess you would say would be 'Ariadne', and sometimes fairly far afield, so we did 'La Finta Giardanera', and last year we did a Salieri one act, the work that had composed to be presented the same night as Mozart's 'Impressario'. Then last year we double billed a Haydn piece I'd never done with 'Suor Angelica'. When I don't have to start off with the question of 'how do I sell 9,000 seats?', it means I'm not doing 'Butterfly' again. I love 'Butterfly', but this has given me both the opportunity, the obligation and the necessity of making joint educational decisions with the conductor and the voice faculty. That has led to new adventures and it's been great fun".

Bamberger always begins with a practical assessment of his forces. "We're always selecting our works first and foremost on the basis of what students we have, and constellations just happened to coincide for this particular production, so don't assume that we're going to do 'Salome' next year and 'Turandot' the year after. We try to give our students wonderful experiences -- which we hope will be wonderful experiences for the audience as well. The goal is to find a way to challenge students without killing them. 'Siegfried' would be a challenge, but probably not the best one".

Lots of singers get to participate in 'Ariadne', and Bamberger enjoys a particular depth of vocal talent in staging this production. "Virtually all the roles are double cast, which is also part of the configuration where the stars need to align. The fact that we had one person that can sing Ariadne or one person who can sing Zerbinetta is an interesting curiosity, but that doesn't meet our needs".

One of 'Ariadne's' chief theatrical curiosities is the simultaneous performance of an opera and a Commedia in the house of the richest man in Vienna. This provides an even deeper educational experience. "One of the interesting things for the students who are doing the Commedia roles is that

those roles defy everything that they are accustomed to in acting. The basic premise of modern theater is that the actors are having deep emotional discoveries and the audience is an observer, but most of the time you don't recognize their existence. The Commedia principle is exactly the opposite -- everything I do is between me and you, and aren't I clever, and wow! look at this and let's share it. And for that matter, it's a different kind of presentational form for the opera seria people -- it's more balletic. So it's been a very nice challenge and a very good learning experience for the students. This piece is unique in that it has many spinoffs for performing in other works".

One other alignment of constellations brought the Metropolitan Opera's live broadcast of 'Ariadne' to the airwaves last Saturday. Although that's a kind of free publicity for the CIM productions, Bamberger notes "I think it would be better if it had happened the other way round. Ariadne is such a visual piece that I would have liked people to see us first then say, boy, that was great, but now let's focus in on the music a little more!"

*CIM Opera Theater performs Richard Strauss's 'Ariadna auf Naxos' with the CIM Orchestra under Harry Davidson from Wednesday, February 24 through Saturday, February 27th at 8 pm in Kulas Hall at CIM. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for students and seniors and groups of ten or more.*