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## Monteverdi meets the 1940's as UK Stages "The Coronation of Poppea"

Don't let the 1940's staging throw you for a loop when you attend a performance of UK's spring opera production *The Coronation of Poppea*. This art form comes directly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and will be presented with an authentic baroque orchestra! But this version is being staged in the 1940's. Who knew they were producing film noir?

*L'Incoronazione di Poppea* (*The Coronation of Poppea*) by Claudio Monteverdi, one of the earliest masterpieces of Baroque opera, had its premiere at the Teatro di Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice in 1642, less than a half century after the creation of this new art form in Florence in 1597. Inspired by new discoveries of Classical Greek and Roman arts and scientific knowledge during the Italian Renaissance, a group of aristocratic music lovers in Florence known as 'the Camerata' set about re-creating the style of the Classical Greek theatre which (as they imagined it) gave equal weight to text and music so that each word of the text could be clearly understood. This emphasis on monody (a single solo vocal line) stood in deliberate contrast to the current polyphonic musical style in which the words of the texts were often distorted in service of elaborate intertwined multiple vocal lines.

*L'Incoronazione* broke new ground as well with its subject matter. Monteverdi's earlier operas, *La Favola d'Orfeo* (*The Legend of Orpheus*) in 1607 and *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (*The Return of Ulysses to his Home*) in 1641 were based

on stories from Classical Greek mythology and literature, but his last opera was the first one in the operatic canon to focus on actual historical characters: the Roman Emperor Nero and his second wife, Poppea. The Venetian poet Giovanni Francesco Busenello drew the inspiration for the libretto from the *Annals* of the Roman historian Tacitus (55 A.D. - 117 A.D.), who described in detail the glamour and corruption of the Imperial Court. Busenello focused on direct dramatic expression of the passions which drive the characters, and his straightforward presentation is matched perfectly by Monteverdi's restrained and lovely melodies.

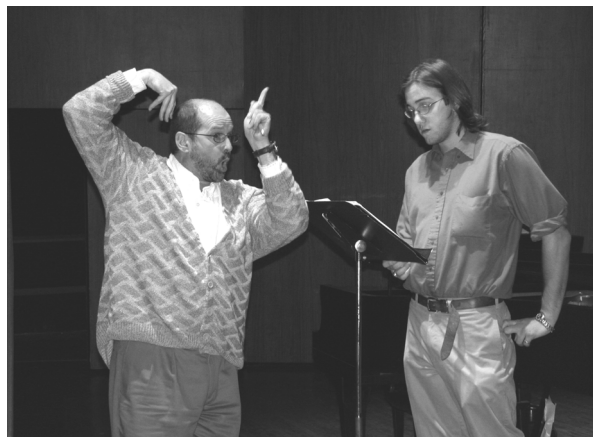
The opera covers Poppea's rise from notorious courtesan to Empress of Rome, a story replete with seductions, betrayals, and revenge, all set to glorious music. The libretto has been "called the least moral in all opera, [with] wrong triumphing over right, lust over love" (according to H. W. Simon's summary in *The Victor Book of the Opera*, 1968, Simon & Schuster), so the story is particularly well suited to the dark tones of the *film noir* setting chosen by Guest Stage Director Sandra Bernhardt for UKOT's production on March 25, 27, and 29 at the Singletary Center Recital Hall on the UK campus.

A word of explanation about the vocal casting for *Poppea*: in baroque operas, many of the roles were originally sung by 'male sopranos' (*castrati*), renowned for the strength and purity of their high voices. Later productions often featured female sopranos in these same roles, or male baritones singing a vocal line transposed to the lower register. The Emperor Nero (Nerone), Poppea's former lover Ottone, and the Empress Ottavia's attendant Valetto were originally *castrato* roles, but in this

(Continued on page 4)

BRAVO!

## A Simple Twist of Fate



**Bender is impressed with the quality of student in the UK voice program and the opportunities students have to perform in different venues.**

Dennis Bender tells his students there are many obstacles to be faced pursuing an operatic career.

The accomplished bass knows first hand about obstacles and how precarious building a career can be. There's a Bob Dylan song with the line "blame it on a simple twist of fate." And that's exactly what changed his career path and brought the Canadian native to teaching. As his career was just beginning to take hold, an accident in France landed him in the hospital where he underwent major surgery and a year of intensive physical therapy. "I didn't sing for over a year," says Dennis. He was 35 and it was a pivotal moment in his life. "I had to think of what I was going to do, if I could still be a singer." He returned to Pittsburgh, where he had been studying with Claudia Pinza (daughter of Enzo Pinza) and where his on-stage career had begun to take off. His year of recuperation had found him reading a lot of anatomy and studying the acoustical aspects of singing. He became intrigued with the "science" of the voice and began to wonder if he wanted a life in academia. He started graduate studies and began teaching. "You are always a student," Dennis says, "and teaching helps you as a performer because you have the opportunity to be involved in the process from beginning to end." He is now finishing up his doctorate at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.



"Singers", says Dennis Bender, the newest faculty member of the UK voice program, "must balance the technical and artistic aspects of classical singing." He likens it to a right brain/left brain balance that requires students who are eager and inquisitive. "But the base," he says, "has to be about the art and the joy. In his workshop class, which provides students the opportunity to experience all aspects of performing a scene from an opera, he tells his workshop students "do as much research as you can do about the characters – the more research you do, the more real it will be for you."



Dennis has performed in productions with Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Company of Boston, the Cleveland Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony and the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. He sang in the New York premiere of Shostakovich's *The Nose* and has performed other roles from contemporary operas. Keep your eye on Dennis Bender and his students! You can visit his website at [www.uky.edu/FineArts/Music/faculty/bender\\_dennis](http://www.uky.edu/FineArts/Music/faculty/bender_dennis)

Pat Trotter

## 2004 Prelude to *It's a Grand Night for Singing*

### *A Spring Feast of Wine, Song, Food, and Elegance*

How many great experiences can one night hold? Count the ways to have fun at Lexington's premier wine event: The

#### **Prelude Specifics:**

**When:** Saturday, May 8, 2004, at 7:00 PM

**Where:** Downtown Arts Center, 141 East Main, Lexington  
**How Much:** \$75/person. Call Dr. George Privett, at 278-7226, for tickets and information

**Dress:** Operatic, dramatic, dressy, or however you want to look while you have a great time

**Why:** The lush "Prelude" sets the stage for the 2004 *It's a Grand Night for Singing*, a wildly popular trio of performances scheduled for June 13 this year, highlighting *One Thousand and One Nights* -- music from the longest running Broadway shows. For Grand Night tickets, call 859-257-4929.

"Prelude to *It's a Grand Night for Singing*" on Saturday, May 8, at the Downtown Arts Center.

Number 1: Swirl, sniff, and sip good wines selected by event sponsors, the Liquor Barn. These wine connoisseurs at the Liquor Barn help us to choose a broad array of Prelude tasting wines that will amaze you by their quality and impress you by their affordability. Discover delicious wines you can afford and use every day.

Number 2: Eat fine, wine-friendly food, presented by Liquor Barn and another one of Lexington's finest caterers.

Number 3: Buy luxury items, including spectacular wines and

other wonderful items, at silent and live auction prices, while helping a great cause.

Number 4: Enjoy two fine news celebri-

ties, **Dia Davidson and Kevin Christopher**, both of WLEX-TV, graciously contributing their services as mistress and master of ceremonies for the evening program and auction.

Number 5: Enjoy a thrilling mini-concert of Broadway music performed by great singers in an intimate cabaret setting, sipping your favorite of the evening's wines.

In addition to great bargains on cases of outstanding wine, happy Prelude-goers in the past have snapped up opera weekend trips to Chicago, beautiful jewelry, fine art, Florida condo rentals, a Tempur-Pedic mattress, a gorgeous oriental rug, Botox treatments, diagnostic medical screening scans, rare voice lessons with great Lexington teachers, and more.

You do the numbers – they add up to Lexington's best spring fun. Help strengthen the bottom line and capabilities of our remarkable local opera treasure, UK Opera Theatre, which Lexington Opera Society's "Prelude" supports.

Count on having a grand time at the "Prelude to *It's a Grand Night for Singing*" 2004. You'll find a place in your own private "Thousand and One Nights" collection for this evening of stellar wine, great music, and wonderful company.

In addition to our **Season and Event Sponsor**, the **Liquor Barn**, sponsors already signed for the "Prelude" include **National City Bank, Lexington Diagnostic Center, Family Foot Care/Michael J. Morrill, M.D., Elsbeth Johnson, Deborah Drury Interior Design, and Bryant's Rent-All**. An event sponsorship is \$1,000, and with that comes eight tickets to the "Prelude," four tickets to "*It's a Grand Night for Singing*," and promotions in the event invitation, at the event, and in the newsletter. If you or your company would like to be an event sponsor, please call George Privett, M.D., at 859.278.7226.

Rona Roberts



**Satisfy your curiosity about opera!**

**Opera 102 is underway!**

**See page 6 for a complete list of remaining lectures and dates**

*Poppea continued from page 1*

production the roles are sung (respectively) by soprano Katherine Sherwood, baritone Michael Turay, and tenor Andreas Kirtley, and soprano Rachel Black appears as Poppea's nurse Arnalta (originally a tenor role)! Adrialia Arbalez-Moutz sings the title role of Poppea, the Stoic philosopher Seneca is portrayed by Edward White, Jr., the Empress Ottavia is sung by Cristy Prichard, Jennifer Sgroe appears as Drusilla, and Kimberly Henshaw is Ottavia's maid Damigella. The three goddesses who open the opera are Jeryl Cunningham (*La Fortuna*), Kimberly Venhuizen (*La Virtù*), and Jamie Tennant (*Amore*), Carolina Fernandez-

McNanus sings the role of Nutrice, Christopher Conley appears as Liberto, and Yuell (Chuck) Chandler sings the role of Nerone's friend Lucano. Justin Ballard appears as Littore, Kelly Wiggins sings the role of Pallade, Adrienne Schram is Venere, and Melissa Snow-Groves, Dan O'Brian, Denisha Ballew, Anne Fuchs, and Whitney Myers appear in supporting roles.

Monteverdi's original score for *Poppea* was unfortunately not preserved, and the surviving manuscript in his hand (intended evidently for rehearsals) includes only the continuo line (which underscores the *recitative* texts, the vocal lines, and a few sketches for *ritornelli*

(developments of the vocal lines). Modern productions of the opera therefore rely heavily on individual conductors' interpretations and editing of this manuscript, based on. The UKOT production features the New Trinity Baroque ensemble, based in Atlanta, whose extensive experience with the unique nature of early baroque music make them an ideal choice.

The three performances of *The Coronation of Poppea* on Thursday, March 25, Saturday, March 27, and Monday, March 29 will begin at 8 p.m. in the Singletary Center Recital Hall. Please call the Singletary Center Ticket Center (859-257-4929) for ticket information.

Mary Powell

"The 40's had the look of the film noir element that I wanted - i.e. I wanted this world to be filled with people who would kill for what they wanted."

Director, Sandra Bernhard

## Director Sandra Bernhard Goes for the "40's "look"

Sandra Bernhard will be putting a new spin on a very old opera, staging Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea* in the 1940's. Ms. Bernhard, Opera Director at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, brings a wealth of experience to UK Opera Theatre. She has served as assistant director of the San Francisco Opera company for more than 38 productions since 1990 and has directed productions of *Tosca*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmen*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La Boheme*. She has also directed productions at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Minnesota Opera, Portland Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Baltimore Opera, opera pacific, and many others.

Bernhard commented on her staging of the opera.

"The setting of 1940's was important to me as I wanted the students the chance to deal with the themes and the characters in a context that was closer to a historical context that they could relate. I am using the idea that this piece is very similar to film noir. You have characters that are willing to risk their lives to gain what they want and who are charged both politically and romantically in their pursuit. You also have characters that are ruthless in their means to their ends. These are all tenants of film noir."

"We have linked the gods to the characters also in the form of icons that have more meaning in today's world. The god of Love is linked to the idea of radio/tv or how news spreads fast and

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## The BRAVO Committee and the LOS—A Working Partnership

The Lexington Opera Society (LOS) includes two groups of people who share a love of opera and who work together to support the programs of the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre (UKOT). The 26-member LOS Board of Directors constitutes one group. Each Director serves one or more three-year terms on the Board, and accepts the responsibility to make a substantial financial contribution to LOS each year, as well as agreeing to serve on various LOS committees.

The other group, the Bravo Committee, is a small cadre of volunteers whose financial contributions are more modest in size but who give their time and skills to support opera by assisting with LOS fundraising events such as the annual the "Prelude to Grand Night" party in May. Bravo Committee members also help with publicity, hospitality for guest artists, and by working backstage at UKOT productions and LOS-sponsored events such as the Metropolitan Opera district and regional auditions each November, and the UK Opera Workshop each May. Other volunteer activities include ushering at events, staffing the Bravo publicity/CDs & tapes sales tables at these events (volunteers receive free admission), and providing and/or helping with refreshments when needed.

Two years ago the LOS Board of Directors decided to publish this quarterly newsletter to help spread the word about its activities and to help us identify more opera lovers willing to support the goals set forth in our Mission Statement - cited on the address page of this newsletter. If you have been thinking about joining the Bravo Committee but have put it off, we hope very much that you will do so now. See Membership Application below.

We are excited about our relationship with UKOT - which began well before 'Town and Gown cooperation' became a catchphrase! Please help us grow our support of this priceless community asset by joining BRAVO today!

**We are excited about our relationship with UKOT - which began well before 'Town and Gown cooperation' became a catchphrase!**

### BRAVO Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Circle category:

Bravo Committee Membership	\$15.00 single \$30 family
Opera Buff	\$30.00—\$50.00
Duet	\$51.00—\$100.00
Aria	\$101.00—\$500.00
Overture	\$501.00—\$1000.00
Figaro	\$1000.00+

Total enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to the Lexington Opera Society and mail to:  
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## Learn about opera the easy way!

### An Introduction to Opera – Tedrin Blair Lindsay, Instructor

#### Spring 2004 Schedule

(Subject to change)

#### Lecture Series

Classes remaining this semester:

March 20	Preparing a Production of Monteverdi's <i>The Coronation of Poppea</i> Guest Speakers: Early Music Specialists leading UK's production
March 27	In Depth with Wagner <span style="float: right;">Guest Speaker: Dr. Ben Arnold</span>
April 17	In Depth with Verdi
April 24	In Depth with Puccini

#### Performances

March 25, 27, 29	* <i>The Coronation of Poppea</i> (Monteverdi) (see article on page 1)
TBA	<i>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</i> (Music by Rossini and others)

\*Not included in Course Tuition

For information on tuition and registration contact the UK Opera Theatre at (859) 257-9331 or e-mail [opera@uky.edu](mailto:opera@uky.edu) Cost per class is \$25.00

## UK Opera Theatre Calendar Spring/Summer 2004

### *"The Coronation of Poppea" by Monteverdi*

Thursday March 25, Saturday, March 27 & Monday, March 29, 2004 at 8:00 PM  
Singletary Center for the Arts Recital Hall

### *It's a Grand Night for Singing*

Friday and Saturday, June 11 & 12, 2004 at 8:00 PM and Sunday, June 13th at 2:00 PM  
Singletary Center for the Arts

### *Opera Outreach cont'd from page 7*

schools that otherwise have little support for arts and humanities activities. The cost of a production of *The Billy Goats Gruff* in a school is \$500. Because there are many schools that cannot afford to pay this fee, sponsorship is critical. In many communities across the state, local businesses and individuals have generously sponsored the cost of a performance for their local schools so that the students could experi-

ence the joy of opera and receive the special CATS educational materials to help them prepare for the statewide tests. However, there are still many schools that need sponsors, and we invite you to help them enjoy this entertaining and educational program! If you would like to sponsor a performance, please contact the UK Opera Theatre at (859) 257-9331.

*Jane Kelton*

## Opera? What's that?



"Opera! Yuk!"

"Opera? What's that?"

"Opera! I don't like it!"

These are typical responses from primary school students to the word "opera" - and dismaying news to those of us who are interested in cultivating the next generation of supporters for this splendid art form. But thanks to the combined efforts of the Lexington Opera Society and UK Opera Theatre, thousands of Kentucky's schoolchildren have changed their minds after seeing this year's UKOT touring production of *The Billy Goats Gruff*, a delightful 1-hour opera written especially for young children. Some 50 performances statewide have been scheduled - an increase of 60% over last year's UKOT touring production of *The Three Little Pigs*. Clearly, the effort made by the LOS Education Outreach Program and UK Opera Theatre to introduce opera to Kentucky schools can be called a resounding success.

Children and adults alike will be completely captivated by the clever story and lively music, supported by the outstanding quality of singing and acting in the production. The role of Ormin, the troll, is sung by Mark Huseth, a UKOT doctoral student of Professor Gail Robinson. Mark has become a familiar face to Bluegrass opera goers through his leading roles (including the title role in *Don Giovanni* and Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*) with

UK Opera Theatre. .

The three Billy Goats are played by Don Erbe (Dandini) a native Lexingtonian who studied with former UK professor of voice, Dr. Stephen King, and received his Master of Music degree at the University of Arizona; Terry Thompson (Lucy), who received her Master of Music degree at UK in 2000 after studying with Dr. Everett McCorvey and Professor Gail Robinson; and Matthew Campbell (Ernesto) who is a student in the Master of Music program at Boston University. Jennifer Ku, who received her Ph.D. at the Moscow Conservatory and is currently in the Doctor of Music Arts program at UK, is the pianist for the production. Margot Buchanan returns as Stage Director and Production Coordinator after her successful touring production of *The Three Little Pigs* for LOS/UKOT in 2003.

Schools that book a performance of *The Billy Goats Gruff* receive a bonus: an educational package designed to help prepare students for the state-wide CATS standardized tests on arts and humanities (covering music, the visual arts, theatre and dance). This package includes a pre- and post-performance study guide with lesson plans offering information about the composers (Mozart, Rossini and Donizetti) whose music is featured in the opera, and about the various art forms that are combined in the genre of opera. In addition, *The Billy Goats Gruff* ad-

resses the issue of bullying, an important concern in our schools today, according to the advocacy group "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids". This issue-specific focus had proved to be a valuable selling point for the production.

Support for opera has grown tremendously in Kentucky over the past decade, thanks in part to the dedicated educational efforts by LOS/UKOT. Thanks to the hard work and determination of music lovers in Lexington and elsewhere, it has now become a familiar and much sought after form of entertainment throughout the Commonwealth. However, without the continual effort to educate succeeding generations of opera lovers, the audience will decline. With that in mind, taking a delightful, entertaining and informative production into the elementary schools of the commonwealth seems a very worthwhile endeavor indeed.

Most performances of the 2003 Education Outreach Program's production, *The Three Little Pigs*, took place in schools in central Kentucky, but *The Billy Goats Gruff* on tour covers the entire Commonwealth from Whitley (south of Corbin) in southeastern Kentucky to Louisville and western Kentucky, with several performances scheduled during spring break. We believe that it is particularly important to LOS and UKOT that the Educational Outreach Program reach smaller, outlying

(Continued on page 6)

The Education Outreach Program is one of the most important activities in the highly successful partnership of Lexington Opera Society and the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre.



**Bernhard cont'd from page 4**

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★  
 ★ **Bravo!** ★  
 ★ To the ★  
 ★ Liquor Barn ★  
 ★ Season Sponsor of the ★  
 ★ Lexington ★  
 ★ Opera Society ★  
 ★ And ★  
 ★ Starbucks ★  
 ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

without remorse. The god of Fortune is linked to the press of the newspaper. The pen is mightier than the sword and sometimes is still mightier than the sword but does not reach as many people as radio or tv. The god of Virtue is linked to the spokes person or word of mouth. Once we thought of this as the most prevalent way to spread all word from rumor to thought to political rally. We trusted the face from which we received notice as we were face to face. News no longer travels this way. The god of Wisdom is the professor in the ivory tower - locked away without regard or wonder of the changes in the world. “

“The political events seem as prevalent today as they were when this opera was written. It is a struggle of power and above all how to keep that power. In light of our pending national elections, we see this power struggle everyday.”

*Pat Trotter*



**Support Opera in the Bluegrass by sending your contribution to the Lexington Opera Society, sponsoring a UKOT production, joining the Bravo Committee or serving as a volunteer! Opera is on the move in Lexington! Don't be left out!**

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