Volume 4, Issue 2
Winter 2005

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Building Madama Butterfly

Exquisite, authentic Japanese Costumes designed and built by UK professor and students

BRAVO!

Costume designer, Bob Haven, looking over the hand-embroidered wedding garment he designed for Madama Butterfly. Photo by Pat Trotter

Thanks to a casual chat about opera costumes a couple of years ago between Bob Haven (Assistant Professor of Costume Technology in UK's Department of Theatre) and UK Opera Theatre Director Everett McCorvey, UKOT's *Madama Butterfly* in February at the Lexington Opera House will feature a dazzling new array of authentic Japanese costumes designed by Haven specially for this production. Haven had mentioned to McCorvey that he would like to design and construct the costumes if UKOT ever mounted a production of the Puccini masterpiece, so when McCorvey decided last Spring that he had not one but two sopranos (Lillian Roberts and Shawn-Allyce White) with voices perfect for the difficult title role, he immediately called Haven to see if he was still interested. Haven saw this as a rare learning opportunity for his students and happily accepted the challenge.

Haven and his student assistants Daniel Townsend, Kiralyn Davison and Matthew Seckman began work last June on the kimono for the 12 geisha in the opera. Each costume consists of 7 pieces, including the outer kimono, undergarments, sandals, *obi*, and a very elaborate wig. Haven purchased parasols, straw sandals, and hair ornaments during a visit to San Francisco's Chinatown last summer, but to his surprise he found suitable Asian printed fabrics at Walmart! Undergrad student assistant Daniel Townsend followed authentic Japanese designs for styling the wigs, but substituted a basic headpiece of resin-impregnated fabric (heated and molded on a wig form) for the traditional Japanese headpiece made of sheet copper. The first four kimono (the word is the same for singular or plural garments) produced by Haven's Fall semester costume construction class got an unexpected 'trial run' in October 2004, when he was contacted about providing complete costumes for the geisha who appear briefly in a scene at Keeneland in the Stephen Spielberg film "Dreamer" which was filmed partly in Lexington.

As Haven explained during our interview with him in late December, the basic construction of kimono for men and women is quite different: women's kimono are essentially made in one basic size, with individual adjustments for length made by tucking up the extra fabric beneath the wide *obi* (the separate belt that fits around the body over the outer garment). Men's garments are fitted to the individual wearer, however, because the *obi* for a man's kimono is quite narrow and unsuited to securing yards of folded silk. Japanese silk fabric for kimono is woven in panels 14 3/4 inches wide, and a woman's kimono is constructed of 6 rectangles, cut to differing lengths from 9 meters of fabric. The basic design of kimono is more than a thousand years old, developed from Chinese

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Madama Butterfly

The UK Opera Theatre production of *Madama Butterfly*, through the eyes of director, Sally Stunkel, is not just a love story, which is the typical audience identification with the opera.

Fortunately for opera lovers, Giacomo Puccini did not follow Pierre Loti's story *Madame Chrysantheme* when he wrote his much beloved opera, *Madama Butterfly*. Loti's version of the story, written in 1887, had a cynical twist. At the end of his story, O-kiku-san (Miss Chrysanthemum) makes a big scene of crying and begging her 'husband' not to leave, but he must. Forgetting something at her house, he returns to find her counting her money and waiting for her next 'husband'. It was common practice at the time in Japanese treaty ports for girls, often from rural communities, to be hired or sold to city traders for employment as temporary wives. "Marriage' brokers arranged for visiting European merchants and other foreigners to meet these young women, look them over, make a selection, and negotiate a price.

Instead, the opera stems from an 1898 short story, *Madame Butterfly,* by John Luther Long, which was adapted for the stage by David Belasco. The play was presented in London at the Duke of York's Theatre and was an instant success. Coincidently, Puccini was in London for the premiere of *Tosca* at Covent Garden and saw the play on opening night. The composer was so deeply moved that he knew immediately he wanted to create an opera from the play and rushed backstage to meet Belasco. Puccini's first version of the opera, in two acts, failed at La Scala in 1904. The revised version, in three acts, was successful in May of the same year when it was produced at the Teatro Grande in Brescia. The final version that we hear today was unveiled on December 28, 1906, at the Opera Comique in Paris.

Puccini's opera revolves around the arranged marriage of Cio-Cio-san (Madama Butterfly) to a visiting U.S. Naval officer, Lieutenant Pinkerton. The marriage broker, Goro, assures Pinkerton that he can end the marriage whenever he wishes. Cio-Cio-San's family agrees to the marriage but Sharpless, the U.S. consul in Nagasaki, warns Pinkerton about the dangers of his plan, pointing out that the girl truly loves him. She converts to Christianity for Pinkerton and is cursed by her uncle for betraying the religion of her ancestors. The naval officer returns home to the United States and Butterfly hears nothing from him for three years. Sharpless comes to tell her that Pinkerton has married an American wife and will visit Japan with his bride. Cio-Cio-San shows him her son by Pinkerton. The consul had not been aware of the child's existence. She believes that Pinkerton will still return to her but she waits in vain. Finally Pinkerton arrives in Japan and approaches her house with his American bride, Kate, who has made it known that she wishes to adopt the child. Pinkerton himself cannot bear to tell Butterfly the truth and he leaves again. By now, the fragile Cio-Cio-San understands that he will never return to her and she is prepared to give the child to his father. She takes a dagger inherited from her father, says goodbye to her son, and commits suicide in the traditional Japanese manner.

Puccini did an enormous amount of research about Japanese culture, music, rituals, customs and architecture and the results are reflected in the magnificent score of this beautiful opera. There are seven authentic Japanese melodies in the score as well as fragments of others, and the musical themes include the Japanese imperial hymn. The love theme that follows Butterfly from her entrance, however, is entirely Italian in origin.

Sally Stunkel is the Guest Director for the UK Opera Theatre production of *Madama Butterfly* (February 17, 19, 24 & 26 at the Lexington Opera House). In Stunkel's eyes, the opera is not just a love story, the typical audience interpretation, but a story about the tragic clash between two different cultures. Late 19th Century Japan was struggling to forge a new identity, balancing its ancient traditions against the desire to adopt modern Euro-American culture, and both Cio-Cio-san and Pinkerton are touched by this struggle. "The music is so powerful," says Stunkel, "that you have to leave it alone. You can't fool around with it without diminishing Puccini's genius and losing the essence of the opera." Thus her focus in directing the UK Opera Theatre production of this beautiful story is to tell it as purely and honestly as possi-

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Building Madama Butterfly

(Continued from page 1)

court costumes. Because the kimono is constructed of rectangles of fabric sewn together only at the woven edges, the basic silhouette of the costume, a cylinder with very broad rectangular sleeves, is well suited to the traditional slender Japanese female figure. Opera singers with non-traditional Japanese figures must be carefully fitted with special padding that minimizes the non-cylindrical torso, to achieve the proper authentic drape of the kimono's panels. The padding, the various undergarments, the kimono, and the *obi* are individually secured by folding and tying the pieces into place. This method restricts normal movement of the torso and limbs, and traditional geisha are carefully trained to move in 'full costume' in ways that are both comfortable and esthetically pleasing. For the vocal music students who appear as geisha in *Madama Butterfly,* this means special instructions for putting on the costume items and moving comfortably on the stage (and singing) when fully dressed.

To view photos of the costumes in color visit the Lexington Opera Society web site at www.lexingtonopera.com

Before joining the Theatre Department at UK, Haven worked for several years as Costume Director at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he worked with Kabuki master Shozo Sato, now listed as one of the National Living Treasures of Japan. During his time at UI, Haven wrote up a set of directions for constructing traditional Japanese theatrical costumes, based on the work of Mahin Rassi, the principal cutter/draper for UI's Krannert Center. He has just completed a draft, co-authored with Mrs. Rassi and Prof. Sato, for the first textbook written in English on this subject. Building 36 traditional Japanese costumes with his Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 costume construction classes for UKOT's production has been an excellent 'road test' for the different sets of specific instructions for different costume elements. It is very unusual for a production of this complexity to be undertaken by a university opera program without a full-time costume workshop (at least 3 cutters and 6 stitchers working 40 hours per week), and Haven's decision to accept McCorvey's offer is testament to the vision and dedication of these two superb artists.

One of the costumes the audience will see in UK's production of Madama Butterfly.
Photos on this page provided by Bob Haven

Costumes for male performers had to be fitted to the individual wearers.

As his special contribution for this production, Haven decided to create a unique splendid red silk wedding kimono for Cio-Cio-san (Madama Butterfly). He spent hundreds of hours hand-embroidering the intricate designs associated with weddings in Japan: a pair of cranes who mate for life, pine trees revered for their strength, longevity, and flexibility under pressure, and ocean waves whose endless motion symbolizes eternal love. Haven studied traditional embroidery techniques at the Japanese Embroidery Centre, in Atlanta, where he purchased the exquisite silken embroidery thread required for the project. The process for making silk thread for weaving fabric begins with cutting open the silkworm's cocoon; this frees the worm to spin a new cocoon but produces a bundle of short lengths of filament that must be spun together into longer threads. For flat (not spun) embroidery thread, each cocoon is unwound by hand, each one yielding a single filament about 1 ½ miles long. Each flat embroidery thread is composed of 100 filaments laid down in parallel layers; the uniform direction of the fibers produces the inimitable sheen of the silken threads that

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Magic at the Met

Going to the world's greatest opera house, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, is always an emotional high, but a large group of opera fans from Lexington who went in early December, experienced a particular thrill.

Who was performing the lead in Verdi's *Aida* but Angela Brown, the new sensation who has been featured on the front page of the N Y Times, on NPR, and on CBS News. When she first opened in *Aida* in November, the Times', opera critic, famously reserved, wrote, "At Last an Aida!"

We had a chance to hear Angela's high floating pianissimos and her powerful soprano soaring over the orchestra and chorus. What a voice and what a performance! And, best of all, there was a Lexington connection. All of us had a chance to meet the new star at the reception after the performance at the Helmsley Hotel at 1:00 a.m. Why? Because she is a protégé of Everett McCorvey, our amazing UK Professor of Opera Theatre, who met her 7 years ago and asked her to join his American Spiritual Ensemble. Those of us who have heard the Ensemble in Lexington felt such pride and excitement in Angela's huge success. She is "one of us" and one more reason why we are so impressed with UK Opera Theatre. Thank you, Everett, for an unforgettable trip! And thank you, Tedrin Lindsay, our Opera 101 teacher, for making the experience so much richer!

Pam Miller

Madam Butterfly cont'd

And, block out both weekends as you no doubt will want to see both casts and get a second glimpse of the magnificent costumes.

ble.Thanks to the wealth of vocal talent in the UKOT program, the principal roles in *Madama Butterfly* have been double-cast, so the audience will have the pleasure of hearing not one but two outstanding African-American sopranos, Lillian Roberts and Shawn-Alyce White, singing the role of Cio-Cio-San on successive weekends. They follow in the footsteps of two other celebrated Metropolitan Opera singers, Leontyne Price and Camilla Williams, both African-Americans, who are considered among the most outstanding interpreters of this role.

This is Stunkel's first time to direct a Puccini dramatic opera, but she has been preparing for it for 20 years by constantly gathering materials to help her understand and interpret this great artistic work. Thus she has a strong understanding of the historical background of Japan at the time period of the story, as well as a deep appreciation for Puccini's compelling music.

Because it is difficult for the singers to learn to move on stage, and sing, wearing the costumes and wigs created for the production (see story on page 1), special rehearsal sessions have been scheduled to allow the singers to practice while wearing the costumes. In addition, Ms. Stunkel has arranged for a native of Japan, now residing in Lexington, to observe the cast and help authenticate the movements. Sally has also been working with the Asian Studies program at UK and she participated in a roundtable discussion of *Madama Butterfly* at an Asian studies conference in mid-January.

The set for the production is rented from the Virginia Opera. Although Stunkel has photos of the set from a Virginia Opera production of *Madama Butterfly,* she finds it challenging to block out the scenes in rehearsal. "I keep a list of questions as we rehearse that I will try to answer when we have the set in place. You have an empty house that can be made into anything you make it and so you create it," she explained. "Right now," she added, "the set is not speaking clearly to me." She and the cast will have to wait until a few days before the production opens before they can rehearse on the actual set.With the well-crafted direction of Sally Stunkel, the exceptional voices of the performers, the beautiful set from Virginia Opera, and the outstanding costumes designed and built by Bob Haven and his UK Fine Arts students, this production of Puccini's classic opera is sure to be one of Lexington's best artistic events of the year.

Be sure to mark both weekends on your calendar, so that you can enjoy hearing both casts and getting a second view of the magnificent costumes. For information about the performances, call (859) 257-9331.

Pat Trotter

Where are they now?

Corey Crider, past regional winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions

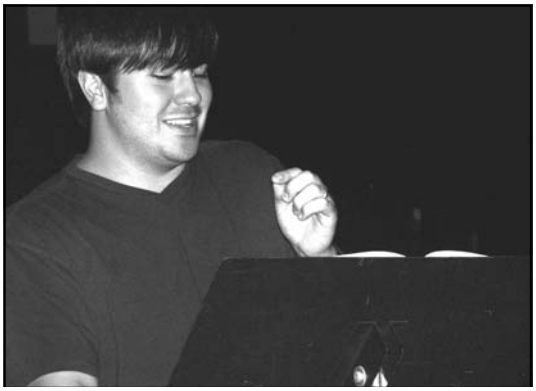

Photo by Pat Trotter

Lexington remembers Corey Crider's outstanding performance as Leporello in the UK Opera Theatre production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni,* and his subsequent regional win in the Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions in 2001. We wondered what next steps his career has taken.

Corey and his wife Michelle, a talented soprano, spent the first half of 2004 living north of San Antonio, Texas. Following in the shoes of so many young artists, they waited tables, lived with Michelle's father and sought ways to further their careers. Corey auditioned for the Education Fund at the Metropolitan Opera, a scholarship award program set up for former national semi-finalists in their auditions. He requested, and was granted, $3,000 to apply to the furtherance of his career.

In April, he was a guest soloist with the Paducah Symphony Orchestra in Paducah, KY, for their production of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony.* "This was my first time singing this work, and it was a thrill to be singing so close to my hometown of Marion, KY, and to have the Murray State University Concert Choir at my back," said Crider, a graduate of Murray State. This was the inaugural concert held in the new Three Rivers Center for the Arts. Crider said he was glad to see that Paducah " now has a fine hall in which to present the arts in all forms".

In late July on a trip up to Kentucky that was intended as a restful visit before a final moving of the bulk of the young couple's belongings to San Antonio, UK Professor Cliff Jackson encouraged the talented baritone to audition for the Artist Diploma Program in Opera at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. He recalls the audition: "So with no music, no suit, and no tie, I drove my father's pick-up truck from Danville to Rising Sun, IN, where Professor Jackson, and several of the voice/opera faculty at CCM were holding a week-long workshop for young singers. I stepped out of the truck, shook hands and met the folks from CCM, and sang one aria --the Count's aria from *Le Nozze di Figaro*--only because this was the only aria in my repertoire that Professor Jackson happened to have with him. I had no music, so when they asked me for another piece, I said, I'd be glad to sing something else for them, whatever Professor Jackson has with him, but essentially I'm on vacation and was not at all expecting to be giving an audition." One audition was enough and Corey is now in the program, and loves being 'back in the saddle again' as he puts it. He is currently preparing for a big audition season and two roles that he will sing in upcoming opera productions at CCM this year. He will sing the role of Il Re di Scozie in Handel's *Ariodante* in February; and the title role in Argento's *The Boor* in late May.

To top it all off, Michelle was hired as an elementary school music teacher in Danville, Kentucky and the couple recently learned they are expecting their first child in August.

Sylvia Davis

Costumes cont'd from pg 3

heightens the contrast between the colors of the thread and the underlying fabric. When asked to estimate the cost of commissioning a similar hand-crafted kimono from a master artisan, Haven laughed and said "Probably between $150,000 and $200,000, if you could find someone to undertake it." After the production is over, all but one of the new costumes will become part of the new LOS/UKOT costume company inventory – but the red kimono stays with its creator as the centerpiece of his studio.

Mary Powell

Detail of the embroidered cranes on the wedding garment.
Photo provided by Bob Haven

The Wig Maker

Daniel Townsend and one of his creations. Photo by Pat Trotter

Without the talents of UK senior, Daniel Townsend, the cast members of *Madama Butterfly* might have found themselves hairless. Daniel is creating all of the wigs for the UK production – 14 in all including one male wig. His interest in make-up and wigs was heightened by a class taught by Bob Haven in which students learn how to set a wig. He has been creating wigs ever since and it was naturally assumed he would take on the challenge of crafting the beautiful head pieces for the Puccini opera.

Instructions came from an acquaintance of Professor Haven and he and Daniel modified them to streamline the process. Instead of using foam to form the shapes, he is using pantyhose and batting. Using a material called Fosshape he has been able to mold the crown of the wig to which he then adds hair. Costume supply stores are the source of the hair, at a cost of roughly $10 for one wig. Daniel estimates it takes him 6-7 hours to create one wig. He hopes his wig-making skills, especially as demonstrated by the Japanese creations, will help him be accepted into graduate school where he would like to specialize in wig making and cosmetology. For a look at the process and Daniel's creations visit our website.

A wig in progress showing the pantyhose and batting used to shape the hair.

A finished wig ready for the stage. Photos by Pat Trotter

Master Class cont'd from page 7

ear, while spoken words depend on their separation to be heard accurately: "each sung vowel must have not only the right sound for its particular word, but must also not be too open or too closed to permit an easy transition to the next vowel and the next word." She asked the singers to visualize the 'magic point' inside their mouths when they sing – "a small point the size of the end of your thumb at the front of your hard palate"- that forms the center of the human instrument's sounding board from which the sound radiates outward into the air. Like Griffey, Valente emphasized the importance of the singer truly understanding the text of a song or aria, in order to interpret the emotion contained within the text instead of producing beautiful sung tones with no real meaning.

The real pleasure of attending a Master Class is watching how a good teacher can, by means of a few specific suggestions and a kind, supportive attitude, enrich, expand, and magically transform a young singer's nervous initial rendition into a genuinely personalized interpretation, all in the space of 30 minutes. It's magic, right there on the stage, and it happens every year at Memorial Hall as part of the Opera Gala Weekend.

Mary Powell

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for all the latest on what's happening.

Master Classes from Fall 2004

..... singing words is very different from speaking them because in the first case, the words are actually joined together by the music in the listener's ear, while spoken words depend on their separation to be heard accurately.

Anthony Dean Griffey and UK voice student Jeremy Cady at the Master Class conducted by Griffey last fall. Cady will appear as Lieutenant Pinkerton in the UKOT production of Madama *Butterfly in February.*
Photo by Pat Trotter

Lexington Opera Society hosted the Kentucky District and the Tri-State Regional rounds of the Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions in Lexington in the Fall of 2004. In addition to these two delightful opportunities to hear up-and-coming opera stars of the next generation, local voice faculty, students, and opera fans got two chances to watch highly experienced vocal music teachers 'in action' in Master Classes offered at UK's Memorial Hall on the day after each round of auditions.

Anthony Dean Griffey, one of the three judges for the District round of auditions, was born in High Point, North Carolina, a small town known more for its furniture industry than for producing Metropolitan Opera-level singers. Like many vocal musicians, he got his first vocal training in his local church choir, and was planning a career in music education before winning a scholarship to the prestigious Eastman School of Music put him on the road to New York City. His first teacher at Julliard, Beverly Johnson, introduced him to Gail Robinson at the Met, and the rest, as they say, is history. Robinson recruited the promising young tenor for the Met's Young Artists Program, where he benefited from working with several excellent vocal coaches in a very professional and nurturing environment. In his opening remarks at his Master Class on October 31, Griffey advised young singers "to figure out what they do well, and go with that", rather than trying to imitate interpretations of particular roles by established stars.

Griffey says that he enjoys working with singers of all vocal types, not only tenors, and he feels that he can give female singers some particularly useful pointers for roles which he has 'partnered' on stage. For example, when one of the sopranos in his Master Class, Brocha Evans, sang the "Embroidery Song" from *Peter Grimes* (one of Griffey's signature roles), he noted that her character, Ellen Orford, is desperately hoping against hope to persuade herself in this aria that Peter's violent outbursts are not the full measure of his character. Griffey also provided some memorable pointers on physical techniques, asking tenor Jeremy Cady to bend deeply from the waist while singing a sustained note, to 'teach' his diaphragm to control the flow of air without tightening up, so that the 'muscle memory' will stay with the singer when he is performing on stage. "It's like riding a bicycle", Griffey promised, "once you learn how to do it, your body remembers." Another technique was singing a vocal line on a nonsense syllable like 'yang', instead of the text, in order to concentrate on the flow of the music instead of the pronunciation of the individual words. Sometimes Griffey asked the singer to simply speak the text, as if it were a poem, after the first sing-through; this forced new concentration on the meaning of the words, apart from their integration with the music.

Benita Valente, one of the three judges for the Regional round of the auditions, opened her Master Class on November 21 with a joke on herself: she once overheard a concert audience member remark, after reading the long list of Valente's appearances with orchestras and opera companies throughout the world, "she just can't seem to hold a job, can she?" The California-born soprano won the Met's National Council auditions at an early age, and soon after made her Met debut as Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte.* She commented that when singing she sometimes feels like "three persons standing together on stage: the singer, the voice teacher who is advising how to sing each phrase, and the character being portrayed". Valente concentrated the students' attention on the proper enunciation of vowels, pointing out that singing words is very different from speaking them because in the first case, the words are actually joined together by the music in the listener's

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Spring Opera Seminar with Tedrin Lindsay

Intro to Opera lectures continue at Joseph-Beth Booksellers at Lexington Green on Saturday mornings at 10:00 AM—Following is the schedule of lectures for Spring 2005.

29 January	**Tedrin's Three Tenors: Bjoerling, Bergonzi, and Gedda**
5 February	**Two American Sopranos: Eleanor Steber and Beverly Sills**
12 February	**In Depth with *Madama Butterfly* (Puccini)**
19 February	**American Opera, Part 1**
26 February	**American Opera, Part 2**
5 March	**In Depth with *Cav* and *Pag* (*Cavalleria rusticana* / Mascagni and *I pagliacci* / Leoncavallo)**
12 March	**In Depth with *Eugen Onegin* (Tchaikovsky)**

The cost is $25 per lecture, no reservation necessary , and the package rate for all seven classes is $150.

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