

# FRIENDS OF OPERA

UNIVERSITY OF  
NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

## Support~Inspire~Applaud

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 1

NOVEMBER 2008

### An Insider's View of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Director of Opera William Shomos has provided the following insights into the production of Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

#### Choosing the Opera (April-May)

The first mission of UNL Opera is to serve its student population. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was an especially attractive choice because of its large number of principal roles (15), which seemed tailor-made to fit students currently in our program. I was also confident that this particularly musically astute group could tackle Britten's very unpredictable rhythms, melodies, and harmonies. I was also pleased with the show's potential to appeal to our Lincoln audience—something I always try to take into consideration.

### *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

by Benjamin Britten

Thursday, November 13 . . . . 12 Noon

Friday, November 14 . . . . . 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, November 16 . . . . 3:00 p.m.

#### Kimball Recital Hall

11th & R Streets

Adults . . . . . \$20

Faculty, students and seniors . . . \$10

Tickets available at the door or through Lied Center Box Office, 472-4747

#### Opera Preview

Talk by William Shomos  
Westbrook Music Building  
6:45 p.m. on November 14 and  
2:15 p.m. on November 16

#### Friends of Opera Reception

Friends of Opera members and their guests are invited to a reception following the Friday, November 14 performance. Principal cast members will attend

### This Issue

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* . . Cover

President's Corner . . . . . pg. 2

*Amahl* at Carson . . . . . pg. 3

Wesleyan Scenes . . . . . pg. 4

Calendar of Events . . . . . pg. 4



#### Designing the Production (May-August)

As soon as the opera was chosen, I went to work with our scenic designer, Laurel Shoemaker, who has created numerous outstanding sets for UNL Opera. We spent long, coffee-filled hours hammering out what we wanted to create on the stage. The initial phase consisted of more questions than answers: "What is the opera about—what is its meaning, beneath the exterior plot?"; "From whose perspective should the story be told?"; "How literally or abstractly should

the details of the script be handled?"; "What mood needs to be created?"; and our favorite: "Whose dream is this, anyway?". Dozens of meetings and emails, several sketches, and many models later, we arrived at our set, and the build began in mid-August. Costumes for this production are being rented from Utah Opera, where we found a style well matched to the look and mood we were seeking.

#### Auditions (late August)

Auditions were held the first week of the semester. Students were required to sing one selection, not from this production, which best showed off their "stuff." Although I generally have a very good sense, in advance, of who is suited for which role, the audition process inevitably holds surprises. Casting is never an easy task for me, knowing that while giving one student a terrific opportunity, I am denying another the same. Posting the cast list is always a difficult day for me.

The most interesting surprise centered around the casting of the fairy king, Oberon. Britten's score calls for a counter-tenor, a male singer that uses his female-like



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**Dear Friends,**

You've probably noticed Friends of Opera has a new look this year. Our new logo is the result of many months of discussions, including professional input. We like it. We hope you do, too. We think it's clean and elegant, modern, but not avant garde, and can be interpreted in many ways that reflect well on UNL Opera, our principal beneficiary.

We are also delighted at last to have a tagline (motto, slogan) that represents what we do: "Support ~ Inspire ~ Applaud." We exist to support our UNL Opera students with our material contributions and attendance at their performances, to inspire them with our commitment to excellence for UNL Opera and to applaud them as they perform in operas, recitals and in other musical productions in our community. We hope that you, our members and friends, will also give us a "new look" this year by increasing your donation level and, especially, by making attendance of UNL Opera productions a priority.

What an exciting season it will be! Beginning in November, William Shomos directs and Tyler White conducts a full production of Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I have seen rehearsals and I know you will be entertained by this show. In December UNL Opera continues its tradition of presenting *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, again in collaboration with Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln Arts Council and Friends of Opera. More information on this family favorite is found on page 3.

The New Year will bring us three exciting productions in three uniquely suited venues. In February, Alisa Belfower directs the popular and moving musical *Songs For A New World*, featuring vignettes of life-changing moments

across a 500-year time spectrum. Audience members will be intimately seated around the set on the Kimball Recital Hall stage. On April 29, 2009, UNL Opera will join the UNL Choirs and UNL Symphony Orchestra to present Mendelssohn's epic oratorio *Elijah* at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

Also in April, UNL Opera will collaborate with Sheldon Museum of Art and Friends of Opera to present *Later the Same Evening*, a one-act opera based on the paintings of Edward Hopper. Presented at the Sheldon Museum, this production is made possible through the generosity of James and Rhonda Seacrest.

Finally, in sadness, we note the passing of two charter members of Friends of Opera: George Day and John Angle, both of whom, with their wives, have been important supporters of UNL Opera and countless artistic and charitable causes in our community. We send our sympathy and prayers to Barbara Day, Catherine Angle and their loved ones.

Sincerely,



Don Burt, President

**FRIENDS OF OPERA BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Don Burt, *President*    Kathy Friedman, *Vice President*    Judy Amber, *Secretary*    Diana Warner, *Treasurer*  
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high voice, giving him an eerie androgynous character. I had initially decided to cast the role with a baritone or tenor, singing an octave lower than written. A colleague suggested that I listen to one of her students give it a whirl in the counter tenor range, and he turned out to be fantastic—the upper voice coming out with ease, beauty, and expressive insight. I think our audiences are going to like him!

### **Rehearsals (mid-September through mid-November)**

A week or two after casting, musical “coachings” begin. Students are expected to have their roles learned before these sessions, which are dedicated to establishing the musical style of the opera, working on text enunciation, setting preliminary tempos, and getting the performers accustomed to the sounds going on around their vocal line. The stage director (me, in this case), then “blocks” the show. Blocking consists of getting everyone in the right place at the right time in order to effectively tell the story to the audience. It includes everything physical that happens on the set, as well as the development of each of the characters. Students will often carry their scores for initial blocking sessions in order to write in the direction. But with subsequent rehearsals, they move “off book”, rehearsing their roles by memory. As of this writing, we have worked our way through two of the three acts and, happily, we’re right on schedule.

### **Putting It All Together (November – seven days before opening)**

This is the period in which a director needs nerves of steel! The students have learned their music, developed characters, and learned their staging in the rehearsal hall. Now, new challenges occur in short order. First come the orchestra rehearsals where the singers must adjust to the baton of the conductor and the new and multi-colored sounds around them. The staging rehearsals move from a flat rehearsal space to the newly constructed set with its multileveled and raked playing area. Theatrical lights blaze in the faces of the performers, and the newly arrived costumes inevitably alter the manner in which the actors can move about. The first dress rehearsals, where all production elements come together, seem daunting. But by the third dress rehearsal, it all starts to pull together. We’re ready for you join us!

## ***Amahl Returns to Carson In December***

For the sixth consecutive year UNL Opera will perform Gian Carlo Menotti’s Christmas classic, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. As in recent years, the production will result from the collaboration of UNL Opera, Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln Arts Council and Friends of Opera.

Principal adult roles will be portrayed by UNL students. A public school student plays the role of the title character, Amahl. The Shepherds’ Chorus will be an honors choir selected from the six public high schools. Stage direction will be provided by Dr. William Shomos, UNL Director of Opera, and Dr. Peter Eklund will be musical conductor.

**Free public performances of *Amahl* will be held on Saturday, December 21 at The Johnny Carson Theatre (Lied Center for Performing Arts) at 1:30 and 4:00 p.m. Advance reservations are required, and seating is limited. To make reservations, call 472-2494.** Additional performances for selected elementary classes also will be held in December, with webcasts available in the schools.

The one hour production tells the story of a young crippled boy, Amahl, who lives with his widowed mother, as he is transformed by his encounter with the Three Kings who are seeking the Christ Child. Commissioned for television broadcast in 1951, Menotti’s opera was a great success, and for years was televised on Christmas Eve. Although the story involves the journey of the Three Kings, its message about the true spirit of giving transcends denominational boundaries.

## **Friends Membership Dues Reminder**

Have you renewed your Friends of Opera membership for the 2008-2009 season?  
If you have not contributed since June 30, 2008, please send your donation to:

**Carol Walker, Membership Chair,  
2028 “D” Street, Lincoln, NE 68502**

***The Friends of Opera Board of Directors thanks you for your support!***

## Wesleyan Goes "Inside Composers Studio"

Nebraska Wesleyan University's opera workshop class is going "Inside the Composers Studio" in a series of scenes from operas by Mozart, Menotti, Bernstein, Purcell and others. Friends of Opera President Don Burt will serve as guest host and will conduct "interviews" with the opera characters before they perform. Performances are November 10 and 11 at 7:30 p.m. in O'Donnell Auditorium, 50th and Huntington. Admission is free.

## Met Auditions Scheduled

The Nebraska District Metropolitan Opera Auditions will be held on Saturday, November 22, 2008, at 1:00 p.m. in O'Donnell Auditorium, 50th and Huntington, on the Nebraska Wesleyan Campus. The Auditions are open to the public and admission is free.

## Calendar of Events

NOVEMBER 13, 2008

### ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***

UNL Opera  
Kimball Recital Hall, 12 noon  
Tickets: 472-4747

NOVEMBER 14, 2008

### ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***

UNL Opera  
Kimball Recital Hall, 7:30 p.m.  
Opera Preview, 6:45 p.m.  
Westbrook Music Building  
Reception for Friends of Opera members and guests after the production.  
Tickets: 472-4747

NOVEMBER 16, 2008

### ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***

UNL Opera  
Kimball Recital Hall, 3:00 p.m.  
Opera Preview, 2:15 p.m.  
Westbrook Music Building  
Tickets: 472-4747

NOVEMBER 10 and 11, 2008

### ***Inside The Composers Studio***

Nebraska Wesleyan University  
Opera Workshop Class  
O'Donnell Auditorium, 50th & Huntington  
7:30 p.m., free admission

NOVEMBER 22, 2008

### **Metropolitan Opera Nebraska District Auditions**

O'Donnell Auditorium  
50th and Huntington  
1:00 p.m., free admission

DECEMBER 21, 2008

### ***Amahl and the Night Visitors***

UNL Opera and Lincoln Public Schools  
The Johnny Carson Theatre, Lied Center for Performing Arts  
1:30 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.  
Admission is free, but advance reservations are required.  
Phone William Shomos, 472-2494

FEBRUARY 26, 27, 28,  
and MARCH 1, 2009

### ***Songs For A New World***

UNL Opera  
Kimball Recital Hall

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233 SOUTH 13TH STREET  
LINCOLN, NE 68508-2095



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