News from the Editor

Our recent production of Peter Brook’s *La tragédie de Carmen* at the Staller Center was a great success artistically, and was very well attended by an appreciative and demonstrative audience. This was also the first time that we have transported an entire production to another venue. The move presented many logistical challenges, and required flexibility in adapting to new conditions, but the performance at the Southampton Cultural Center on Thursday, February 16 went without a hitch. In the future, we hope to be able to travel to additional locations on Long Island.

From an artistic point of view, the 2011-2012 has been one of the most ambitious, but also one of the most successful seasons in recent memory. After years of bare-bones productions because of the recession, this year we are finally able to return to the Main Stage with a full production, complete with sets, costumes, theatrical lighting, and a symphony orchestra in the pit. Our production of Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* also marks the pilot year of a new initiative in our Music Department. We are currently developing a proposal for a Center for Opera Studies and Performance, which will formalize an intersection that already exists informally in our department between performance and the academic musical disciplines. Our production of Cavalli’s *Ellogabalo* two years ago, and of Peter Winkler’s *Fox Fables* and Sheila Silver’s *The Wooden Sword* last year, were already collaborations between our opera program and musicologist Mauro Calcagno for the first, and between our opera program and faculty composers Peter Winkler and Sheila Silver for the second. This semester, Professor Ryan Minor is teaching a graduate seminar on Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*; his course has enrolled advanced music history students as well as performers. One of the Ph.D. students in this class, JJ Hudson, has graduate degrees in vocal performance and stage directing. He has been our assistant stage director all season, and will assist us for the Mozart opera as well. We have also cast him in the leading spoken role of Pasha Selim in our production. You will enjoy reading his program notes about the opera in this Newsletter, notes that are the fruits of his research for Ryan Minor’s class. Professor Minor himself will be giving the pre-opera lectures one hour before each performance.

This issue of our Newsletter is devoted entirely to our upcoming production of Mozart’s popular opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Seraglio)* on the Main Stage of the Staller Center, Friday, April 13 at 8 pm and Sunday, April 15 at 2 pm. In this issue you will find JJ Hudson’s informative program notes about the opera, the Metropolitan Opera’s synopsis of the libretto, and an interview with our stage director and our set, lighting and costume designers. Accompanying the interview are two of Sarah Iams’ costume sketches which may be found on pp. 5 and 6, and Peter Dean Beck’s set design for our production on p. 2. These sketches will give you an idea of how our production will look, and the interview gives a rare backstage glimpse at how design decisions are made at the pre-production stage. I hope to see all of you for this wonderful Mozart opera. Thank you for helping make this season such a success.

David Lawton
Notes on the Opera

Die Entführung aus dem Serail opened on July 16, 1782 in Vienna at the imperial Burgtheater. It introduced the Viennese public to a level of musical and dramatic sophistication previously unattained in German opera. Its instant success and immediate dissemination to other major European centers not only secured the reputation of its young composer in German lands, but it also introduced him to a broad European public. With more than forty premieres in thirty cities during it first decade, Entführung was, by far, the most successful of Mozart’s operas during his lifetime.

The National Singspiel (1778-1783)

Mozart arrived in Vienna in March 1781, where he would reside for the next decade until his death in 1791. The twenty-five year old composer appeared in the city just as its fledgling imperial opera company, the National Singspiel concluded its third season. Emperor Joseph II founded the National Singspiel in 1778 to cultivate German comic opera (on a North German model) as an alternative to the prevailing success of Italian opera buffa.

To meet the virtuosic musical demands, the National Singspiel engaged singers of the highest artistry; keeping them outfitted with new and suitable German material, however, proved to be difficult. Therefore, to fill-out its seasons, the National Singspiel was forced to pad their repertory with French opera comique and Italian opera buffa – performed in German translation, of course. Despite a few successes, most notably those of resident composer Ignaz Umlauf’s Die Bergknappen (1778) and Mozart’s Entführung, the National Singspiel was dissolved in 1783.

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Mozart, Stephanie, and Thwarted Plans

Mozart’s move to Vienna caught the attention of Joseph II, who encouraged him to write a German opera for the National Singspiel. Although Mozart’s prior operatic composition had been primarily of Italian opera buffa and opera seria, this new endeavor would not be his first attempt at composing a Singspiel. At age twelve, Mozart composed Bastien und Bastienne (1768), a charming one-act parody of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Le Devin du Village (1752). Additionally, prior to arriving in Vienna, Mozart had begun work on a large-scale untitled Turkish-themed Singspiel (now referred to as Zaide), perhaps with an eye towards production in the Emperor’s new theater. After completing the music for two (of possibly three) acts, Mozart abandoned work on the opera, leaving it unfinished after the Singspiel’s director, Gottlieb Stephanie the younger, rejected it as having a high tone too serious for Viennese taste. Stephanie promised to find Mozart an appropriate libretto. In July, he presented Mozart with a libretto by the most renowned German librettist, Christoph Friedrich Bretzner (1748-1807) – his new three-act Belmont und Constanze.

Mozart began to compose immediately. Within a week, he had composed the entire first act. In August, however, the production was postponed until November. In the end, the premiere of Entführung was further delayed until the following season.

From Bretzner’s Belmont und Constanze to Mozart’s Entführung

Mozart and Stephanie’s adaptation of Bretzner’s libretto left the original remarkably intact. The collaborators made four significant changes. First, they greatly expanded the role of Osmin, giving him two additional arias, and including him in five, instead of three, ensembles. This decision was made, in part, to tailor the role to the beloved comic bass, Ludwig Fischer. Second, they provided a new perspective on Konstanze’s character; the strength and resolve she displays in her ten-minute bravura aria, “Martern aller Arten” is absent in Bretzner’s libretto. Third, Mozart and Stephanie disassembled Bretzner’s third-act quintet finale, and created an internal finale (the quartet, “Ach, Belmonte!”) to conclude act two – a structural choice more conducive to Viennese taste. Fourth, and most interestingly, the collaborators changed the opera’s denouement. In Bretzner’s libretto, Selim decides to spare Belmonte’s life only after the coincidental discovery that Belmonte is his son. In Stephanie’s denouement, however, Selim learns that Belmonte is the son of his long-time enemy. He decides not kill Belmonte so that the young man may return home to his father and tell of Selim’s goodness.

Orientalism and the “Turkish” Musical Element

Bretzner’s libretto for Belmonte und Constanze is an original amalgamation of numerous common theatrical and literary traits that exploit Western European fascination with and ignorance of Islamic culture. Themes common to numerous eighteenth-century English, French, Italian, and German libretti include: Westerners who find themselves unexpectedly in the Eastern world; sexually tantalizing descriptions (or actual depictions) of a harem; portrayals of Easterners as violent people who terrorize their captive Westerners with threats of death and torture; and breathtaking depictions of Westerners escaping from their Eastern captors. The composite libretto of Entführung contains all the above characteristics, except an onstage depiction of a harem.

Much discussion of Entführung concerns its incorporation of “Turkish” music. In truth, Turkish elements (or grossly approximated versions thereof) are found in only a handful of the opera’s numbers. Mozart’s appropriation of Turkish elements is most evident in its addition of percussion associated with Turkish janissary bands – military bands accompanying the Sultan’s personal bodyguard. Bass drums, cymbals, tambourines, and triangle are characteristic instruments in this music.
Die Entführung aus dem Serail  
(The Abduction from the Seraglio)  
A Synopsis

ACT I. Pasha Selim has bought three Europeans from pirates - Constanze, a Spanish woman of good family; Blonde, her English maid; and Pedrillo, servant of Constanze's fiancé, Belmonte. Belmonte has traced them to a seaside palace, where Constanze has become the pasha's favorite and Pedrillo the gardener. Blonde has been given as a gift by the pasha to his overseer, Osmin. Belmonte's first encounter is with Osmin, who acts polite until Belmonte mentions Pedrillo, the custodian's rival for Blonde. He drives Belmonte away and then rails at Pedrillo, who has come in hopes of making peace with him. Belmonte returns to find his former servant, who tells him the pasha loves Constanze but will not force himself on her. Pedrillo will try to arrange a meeting between Constanze and Belmonte and an escape by boat with Blonde, if they can get past Osmin. In hiding, Belmonte yearns for Constanze, who soon appears with Pasha Selim. When the pasha asks her why she is always depressed by his courtship of her, Constanze replies she cannot forget her love for her fiancé from whom she was separated. After she leaves, Pedrillo introduces Belmonte to the pasha as a promising young architect. Selim welcomes him and, departing, arranges a conference for the next day. Osmin bars the way when Belmonte and Pedrillo try to enter the palace, but he is confused easily, and the two foreigners manage to get past him. Her cleverness and faces him down when he threatens her. Constanze finds Blonde and complains of her sad state, which does not improve when the pasha again asks her to marry him. She proudly refuses, preferring torture, even death. When they have gone, Blonde and Pedrillo dance into the garden, discussing their plan of escape: they will get Osmin drunk, and all four lovers will leave on Belmonte's ship. Later, Pedrillo goes about his business, finding Osmin cooperative, though drinking wine is against the Moslem religion. Thoroughly inebriated, the fat man weaves away with the bottle, leaving the coast clear for Belmonte to meet Constanze. Their reunion is shared by Blonde and Pedrillo.

ACT III. Just before midnight, Pedrillo places a ladder against the ladies' window and sings a serenade, the signal for escape. But he wakes Osmin, who is not too hung over to realize what is going on and takes them all to the pasha, who is angry. Belmonte suggests the pasha collect a handsome ransom from his wealthy family, the Lostados. At this, the pasha realizes that Belmonte is the son of an old enemy, the man who exiled him from his own country. But eventually he decides that rather than take blood for blood he will repay evil with good, freeing Constanze and Belmonte, even Blonde and Pedrillo. This does not sit well with Osmin, who will lose Blonde, but he is promised other rewards. The grateful lovers praise their benefactor as they prepare to set sail.

--Metropolitan Opera (Opera News)
Meet our Creative Team

At a recent production meeting with our creative team for Die Entführung aus dem Serail, David Lawton took the opportunity to speak with our stage director Leigh Holman, our set and lighting designer Peter Dean Beck, and our costume designer Sarah Iams, to give our readers a sense of our production by asking them several leading questions. A lively discussion ensued...

David Lawton: Often with familiar operas directors and designers decide to update the action in which the opera was originally set, in order to make its story seem more relevant to contemporary audiences. Do you intend to do that with this production?

Leigh Holman: The production does not adhere firmly to the late 1700s and it was my intention to keep the time period somewhat ambiguous. In fact our costume design incorporates colorful, more traditional costumes for the Easterners and costumes reminiscent of Post World War I and contrasting light colors for the Westerners. With Peter’s fanciful, non-literal set design, he left the door open to tell the story in any time period one would prefer. It may be true that with the success of movies like the Titanic and the TV Cult hit, Downton Abbey, some opera-goers may feel a sense of familiarity in the look of the Westerner's costumes, however the piece itself is an adventure/fantasy piece set in no particular time period or a brilliant mix of time periods as some of our favorite pieces often are (Princess Bride, Harry Potter, many productions of The Magic Flute). Peter refers to the Westerners as "Fish out of Water" which is exactly dead on. The audience may feel somewhat "out of water" as well which ironically a comfortable place for modern theater-goers.

Peter Dean Beck: The scenic design is not updated. I believe this opera is firmly rooted in the Age of Enlightenment point of view, so moving the period is ill advised. It’s all about forgiveness, as so many Mozart operas are. In Marriage of Figaro, the Countess forgives the Count (although he doesn't deserve it!). In Cosi fan Tutte, the boys forgive the girls for their giving in to their own wooing. In Magic Flute, Papageno fails all the trials and still gets the girl. In Clemenza di Tito...etc. I believe that if there is a connection between the period of a show and the present, it should happen in the audience's heads without our explaining it to them.

Sarah Iams: Yes, we have updated the costumes to be in the late teens of the 20th century. I think it is still possible to depict romantic comedy non-ironically if they are done before World War 1. Setting the opera in the 18th century can get a bit alienating for the audience, I think, because the fashion period at that time consisted of giant hoops, panniers and powdered wigs. I think in this production we are trying to contrast the eastern versus western cultures, so I would like for the audience to have a certain familiarity with the western clothes, while still setting it in a romantic setting.

DL: The plot of this particular libretto follows lines that were very popular in Mozart’s day, featuring a clash between European and middle-Eastern cultures. At the time this opera premiered, this was topical because of the rivalry between the Austrian and Ottoman empires. Relations between the East and the West are very relevant today as well, of course. Does your production allude to any of these parallels?

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LH: Frankly, when we began to work on the concept for the production, I had some uneasiness about the potential political implications for modern day audiences and I was slow to move. We are in the middle of a very long war with the East and the reference to longstanding Islamic traditions of Turkey, and the way in which Mozart’s commentary is sometimes interpreted, was not where "I wanted to go". Wanting desperately NOT to appear to take sides with the East or West was my concern. The nature of the music and the comedic and fantastical situation did not lend itself, in my opinion, to a political commentary and with that in mind, Peter Dean Beck, my wonderful partner in crime, talked me off the fence. "This isn’t political. It’s a rescue story." After we hashed through that, ideas came faster.

PDB: I don’t see it as being about a clash of East and West. I think it’s more about using an exotic setting so that the European characters can be "fish out of water" who see the native characters as mysterious, bizarre, and unknowable. The Turkish setting, in particular, is useful because it had a backward attitude toward women, a similar device to The King and I. Neither the Pasha nor the King of Siam had never encountered a woman who considered herself the equal of a man, let alone a Pasha or a King, and it’s equally eye-opening to both. But I don’t know if this feminist idea was part of the 18th century clash of East and West, or whether it crossed Mozart’s mind. (Magic Flute suggests that it did. Cosi fan Tutte suggests otherwise.) Ultimately, the Pasha’s behavior is more in accordance with the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment than the Europeans'.

SI: I think that we are trying to emphasize the comedy in this production and if we were to incorporate the current political situation, it might not be clear or funny.

DL: From what I saw at our production meeting, our audiences are in for a real treat visually, with respect to the set and costume designs, and theatrical lighting. The designs were the result of extensive discussions between the three of you. Please tell us some of the considerations that influenced the aesthetic direction that this production is taking, and please give our audience an idea of what they can expect to see on stage, visually speaking.

LH: Building on the things we’ve already said, I’d just say that audiences will experience an exotic location with color and vitality. Sarah Iams’ costume design is stunning, bold and creative. I really appreciate the boldness and courage Sarah brings to the project. Both Sarah and Peter are leaders in their fields of design and I'm thrilled to say that we will tell this story together. There is a real team feeling among us, though we all three have had varying opinions throughout the process. I think the freedom to express our ideas and reservations has given us the vehicle we needed to arrive at the gorgeous design you see now. I can certainly say that I am inspired by them during every design discussion we have.

PDB: A set creates the world of the dramatic event and therefore, sets expectations. The more representational it is, the more the audience feels it knows what to expect. The intent of the design for Abduction is to illustrate the exotic setting in a fanciful, non-literal way, in order to create as few expectations as possible, so the audience are as much fish out of water in this world as the European characters.

SI: My intent was to depict the westerners as "fish out of water" in the eastern setting that they happen in on. Also, I felt there was a bit of myopia with the westerners. Selim makes a huge change in his outlook by the end of the opera, but the westerners are just looking out for themselves, in my opinion. So I wanted to set them off by putting them in contrast to the beautiful colorful setting Peter has created. They will be in mostly whites and pale colors, while the easterners will match the set with vibrant, glinting colors. Setting the opera in the early teens was a lot of fun, because I was able to refer to silent movie performers who often wore all white French foreign legion costumes. The idea of Kostanze’s having been on a ship similar to the Titanic also lends itself for some interesting design ideas; the early teens can be a very flattering cut on a woman’s body. Lastly, I’ve been a big fan of Downton Abbey, which also takes place during this period, and got a lot of inspiration for Blonde’s look from the very detailed costumes in which the wait staff is dressed. ■
I. Full Production of Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*  
(*The Abduction from the Seraglio*)

(Three performances)
- Wednesday, April 11, 2012 at 12 noon: preview performance, Brookhaven National Laboratory
- Friday, April 13, 2012 at 8 pm: Stony Brook University, Staller Center Main Stage
- Sunday, April 15, 2012 at 2 pm: Staller Center Main Stage

Free pre-opera lecture by Ryan Minor in the Recital Hall, one hour before each performance

Save the dates!

Box Office

Tickets for Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* are $20 general admission and $10 students and seniors, and are available at the Staller Center Box Office. For tickets call (631) 632-ARTS or online at [www.stallercenter.com](http://www.stallercenter.com).

For more information call the Department of Music at (631) 632-7330
As we come to a close on the 2011-2012 Opera Season, we at the Opera Guild would like to take a moment to reflect on this past year of production and performance. The great success of Stony Brook Opera Productions was in no small part aided by the contributions of our kind and loyal patrons and friends. Your support of the Stony Brook Opera Guild helps us to bring back to you the art, culture, and standard of musical production and opera that Stony Brook University has worked so hard to achieve.

We look forward to the continued relationship between Stony Brook Opera Productions and the members of the Long Island Opera Guild.

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All contributions will be deposited in the Guild's Stony Brook Foundation account, and are tax-deductible.

We thank you for your continuing support and look forward to sharing in the 2012-2013 Opera Season with you!

-Amanda Sherlip