



SEATTLE OPERA  
SPEIGHT JENKINS GENERAL DIRECTOR

## A LETTER FROM SPEIGHT JENKINS

Dear Friends,

The second season in a new hall in some ways can be more challenging than the first. During the inaugural year, we strove to offer works that conveyed the stature of the hall. In this second season, we know a little more about the hall in terms of what it does best while still making sure that we excite you with our choices. I think it is safe to say that we have a great new hall with wonderful acoustics; it's my challenge, happily accepted, to present opera worthy of both the hall and, more importantly, of you, our loyal subscribers.

In 1994, Seattle Opera produced Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*, directed by Stephen Wadsworth, with sets by Thomas Lynch, costumes by Martin Pakledinaz, and lighting by Peter Kaczorowski, the same team that would be asked to create Seattle Opera's new *Ring* cycle. *Lohengrin* was a huge success, and I hardly have to remind those of you who were there of the amazing animatronics swan or the lovely fields of tulips. We bring this remarkable production back next summer with a great cast, perfect for our great new hall. The Dutch tenor Albert Bonnema makes his Seattle debut in the title role. I have enjoyed his Siegfried in two theaters in Europe and last season he was the young lover in San Francisco's *Katya Kabanova*. He will be partnered by Marie Plette, one of the most exciting young American sopranos, whom you will hear this month as Micaëla in our *Carmen*. Greer Grimsley returns for his world renowned Telramund, and the Canadian bass Gidon Saks will make his debut in the role of King Henry (Saks has been particularly noted for his Boris, a role I have seen him perform twice). As a particular treat, we have a role debut: Jane Eaglen will take on her first Ortrud. Asher Fisch, who conducted *Parsifal* so marvelously last summer, will also return.

It has been more than nine years since the strains of *Rigoletto* have been heard in Seattle; and next October, the jester will be back. Two jesters actually, both who are well known and important. In the Wednesday/Saturday cast will be Kim Josephson, and the Friday/Sunday cast will feature Stephen Kechulius a very impressive American singer who has notched quite a few *Rigolettos* on his belt prior to his appearance here. The daughter, Gilda, will bring two debuts: Norah Amsellem, an American whose career has largely been in France, will sing Gilda in the first cast. Ms. Amsellem also sang Liù in *Turandot* last season in San Francisco. She's one of those rare sopranos who can sing coloratura and yet have enough weight in the voice to shine in Puccini. The other Gilda, Sandra Lopez, impressed me tremendously in audition. She has sung the role in quite a few American theaters. The Duke of Mantua, the man who is not usually loved by the audience except that he has three of opera's greatest arias, will serve to introduce Frank Lopardo, an internationally acclaimed American tenor, to Seattle. In the Friday/Sunday cast we will hear an extremely exciting Mexican tenor, Raúl Hernández, who has become well known for this part. Sparafucile will be sung by Perry L. Brown, who made such a big impression as the minister Don Fernando last May in *Fidelio*, and Maddalena will be sung by the American mezzo-soprano Mary Ann McCormick, who has a major career in Europe. Edoardo Müller, who has led so much bel canto opera here but has never conducted Verdi in Seattle, will return for these performances. The director is Linda Brovsky, who will offer a very new, fresh approach to *Rigoletto* in Robert A. Dahlstrom's revised set. Thomas C. Hase will light the opera.

It's been over twenty years (the 1980/81 season to be exact) since Puccini's first hit, *Manon Lescaut*, has been given in Seattle. This gloriously tuneful and yet very challenging opera demands two great leads, and I think we have them. Carol Vaness, who in 1985 sang her first Manon here in Massenet's opera, now sings her first Manon Lescaut. Her success in *Tosca* suggests what she will do with this character, who is very different but has some of the same vocal requirements. Her Des Grieux will be Jay Hunter Morris, who last sang Pinkerton here in *Madama Butterfly*. Since then, he has sung a lot of repertory in Europe with great success. The other Manon will be Victoria Litherland; her Des Grieux will be Ted Lee. Both are artists with distinguished resumé's: Ms. Litherland has sung at the Metropolitan Opera and in Washington, while Lee has appeared more in Europe than in America. There are three other major roles: Manon's brother, Lescaut, will be sung by the distinguished American baritone, Earle Patriarco, last here in the title role of *The Barber of Seville*. Her wealthy protector, Geronte, will be sung by Arthur Woodley, who has sung a variety of roles in Seattle, beginning with a brilliant Doctor Bartolo in *The Marriage of Figaro*. The young student Edmondo will be sung by Doug Jones. Antonello Allemandi will return after his last two successes—*Tosca* and *Un ballo in maschera*—to conduct *Manon Lescaut*. The production comes from Montreal and will be directed by Bernard Uzan.

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Since 1998, no production has been requested so many times of me as Daniel Catán's *Florenxia in the Amazons*. It opened here then to a moderately good box office and, once word spread, promptly sold out every seat. *Florenxia* has played in three cities; it has been wildly successful in every city, including a repeat in Houston, but I think it has a special core of fans here in Seattle. The conductor is the same, Vjekoslav Sutej, who conducted the world premiere, as is the remarkable Francesca Zambello production with the wonderful boat designed by Robert Israel. The cast is completely different, except for Gabor Andrasy as the Captain. Nancy Gustafson will sing the title role in the Wednesday/Saturday cast, with Wendy Hill singing Florenxia in the Friday/Sunday cast. Ms. Gustafson last appeared at Seattle Opera more than ten years ago, as Antonia in *The Tales of Hoffmann*. She has gone on to great success all over Europe and this country; I have tried unsuccessfully to bring her back several times. Finally, my efforts have paid off for this *Florenxia*. Ms. Hill most recently sang one of the Flower Maidens in *Parsifal*. She was the lead soprano in *Xerxes* a few years back and is perfectly suited to Florenxia. The rest of the cast will sing all the performances. Nathan Gunn, probably the most eagerly sought American lyric baritone, returns to Seattle Opera (he was our Papageno in *The Magic Flute* in 2000) as Riolobo, with Luretta Bybee (Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff* in 2000) as Paula. Two newcomers will fill two important roles: Frances Lucey, who is based in Munich, will sing Rosalba, the journalist pursuing Florenxia, and D'Arcy Bleiker, a Welsh bass-baritone who sang one of the most exciting auditions I have ever heard, will sing Álvaro. Lawrence Brownlee returns to Seattle Opera in the tenor role of Arcadio. Brownlee has made a wonderful career in the short time since he sang Ernesto in last January's *Don Pasquale*. After a series of three bel canto tenor roles at La Scala last spring, he received in the course of about ten days ten or twelve European engagements. Everyone everywhere is appreciating his remarkable high and expressive tenor.

For our new production of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, we have some very exciting artists in addition to Vinson Cole, for whom this production has been planned. Ideally, there would be one soprano. I have heard many famous and not-so-famous sopranos attempt all three of Hoffmann's loves, and I have yet to hear one who can really handle them all properly. Had Offenbach lived to prepare the opera, they could be sung by one artist, and indeed should be. But even though it was first composed for one soprano, Offenbach had to change it when it was moved to a different theater. He revised only two of the parts, with the unrevised Giulietta very much lower and in a different range. I, therefore, have opted to have three sopranos: Harolyn Blackwell for the doll Olympia, Marie Plette as the tragically ill Antonia, and Nancy Fabiola Herrera, a newcomer who is making it big all over Europe, as the courtesan Giulietta. Hoffmann's sidekick, Nicklausse (and the Muse), will mark the return of Helene Schneidermann, last heard as Olga here in *Eugene Onegin* and recently a big hit as Rosina in San Francisco's *Barber of Seville*. The four nemeses of Hoffmann will be sung by one of the most exciting American bass-baritones, John Relyea. He was here only once, as Basilio in the 2000 *Barber*. His career has skyrocketed since. The four servants will be enacted by Doug Jones, the most exciting interpreter of these roles whom I know.

The Friday/Sunday cast of *Hoffmann* has major singers as well. John Uhlenhopp, here last in *The Cunning Little Vixen* ten years ago, has made a great success in lighter heroic roles in Europe and will sing the title role. The second nemesis will be the American bass-baritone Dean Elzinga, who has sung the role with great success in three or four American cities, and the Friday/Sunday cast Nicklausse will be Linda Pavelka, a Flower Maiden in last summer's *Parsifal*. Julianne Gearhart, a Young Artist from 2002/03, will return in the Friday/Sunday cast as Olympia.

They say that one can't come home again, but at Seattle Opera I don't believe in that. I have watched Dean Williamson's burgeoning conducting career since he began it some three years ago: *Lucia* in Minnesota, *Eugene Onegin* in New Jersey, *Carmen* in St. Louis. He has risen as a conductor in the classic, European manner: a great coach-accompanist and an assistant conductor at Seattle Opera, and now a conductor in his own right. I am thrilled to welcome him back to Seattle Opera to conduct *The Tales of Hoffmann*. It will have been 14 years since *Hoffmann* has been heard at Seattle Opera. I hope this will be its most memorable presentation.

So, here is our 2004/05 season. Two operas in Italian by Verdi and Puccini, one Wagner opera, and one opera in French and one in Spanish give us a variety of languages and styles. We have some exciting debuts and the return of many who have delighted us in the past. I hope it is a season that excites you and one which will honor our new and wonderful Marion Oliver McCaw Hall.

Sincerely,

Speight Jenkins  
General Director  
Seattle Opera