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Volume 14, Number 11

AUTHOR	Luciano Pavarotti PHILLIP GEORGE	1
CONCERT REVIEWS	Open San Francisco MARK ALBURGER	3
	Big Screen at the Ballpark PHILLIP GEORGE	4
CALENDAR	Of November 2007	5
CHRONICLE	Of September 2007	6
COMMENT	By the Numbers Item	8 8

ILLUSTRATIONS:

i, 2 Luciano Pavarotti; 3 John Adams; 4 Dimitrije Popovic - *Samson and Delilah*
5 Conlon Nancarrow; 5 Joe Zawinul, 7 Michael Tilson Thomas; 8 David Tudor; 9 Soldiers in Iraq

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Luciano Pavarotti

PHILLIP GEORGE

Death of Luciano Pavarotti (b. 10/12/35, Modena, Italy) -- one of the greatest tenors of the 20th century, whose appeal crossed stylistic boundaries -- of pancreatic cancer. 9/6/07, Modena, Italy

Luciano Pavarotti (b. 10/12/35, Modena, Italy) was the son of baker/singer Fernando Pavarotti and cigar factory worker Adele Venturi. The boy's four-person family was of modest means, occupying a two-room apartment until wartime considerations in 1943 obliged them to rent a single room from a farmer in the nearby countryside.

While his singing career never took off due to stage fright, the elder Pavarotti had amassed a collection of recordings by Enrico Caruso, Beniamino Gigli, Giovanni Martinelli, Tito Schipa, and Enrico Caruso. At about age nine, Luciano joined his father in singing in a small local church choir.

While Pavarotti -- upon graduation from the Schola Magistrale -- was interested in becoming a professional football goalkeeper, his mother convinced him to become a teacher. He taught in an elementary school for two years but before allowing music to take over. Pavarotti's father gave his consent reluctantly, with an agreement that the young singer would have meals and lodging until 30, after which, barring success, he would earn a living by any means possible.

Pavarotti began serious study in 1954, at 19, with Modena tenor Arrigo Pola, who taught him without compensation. It was only after this that Pavarotti became aware of his perfect pitch.

His first success was in 1955 as a member of Modena Choral Rossini, a male choir which included his father, winning first prize at the International Eisteddfod in Llangollen, United Kingdom; a success that inspired him dedicate his life to music. Around this time, he met singer Adua Veroni, marrying her in 1961.

When Pola moved to Japan, Pavarotti studied with Ettore Campogalliani. A fellow student proved to be Pavarotti's childhood friend, Mirella Freni, whose mother worked alongside his in the cigar factory, and who would go on to make many appearances and recordings with him.

During his years of musical study Pavarotti held part-time jobs as an elementary school teacher and insurance salesman. His first six years resulted a handful of compensation-free small-town recitals. After deciding to give up singing when a nodule developed on his vocal cords, his medical situation immediately improved, a condition he later attributed to psychological reasons.

In 1961, Pavarotti made his debut as Rodolfo in Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* at the Teatro Municipale, Reggio Emilia, presenting the same role on February 23, 1963 at the Vienna State Opera, soon after followed by the Duke of Mantua in Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and a first performance at the Royal Opera House.

Association with Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyng, resulted in an Australian tour in yet that same year and his American debut in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* for the Greater Miami Opera in February, 1965. This was soon followed by his La Scala debut in Boheme, with Freni as Mimi and Herbert von Karajan conducting. A first appearance as Tonio in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* took place in quick succession on June 2 at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in performances that led to his moniker "The King of the High Cs".

His Metropolitan Opera debut came on February 17, 1972, again in a production of *La fille du régiment*, with a record 17 curtain calls, followed by his first solo recital at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri (1973). In the spirit of his father, the tenor clutched a handkerchief throughout the latter début, and the affectation became a signature characteristic of his solo ventures.

A 1976 Salzberg Festival solo appearance was followed by his first television performance (*La Bohème*), which was also in the first *Live From The Met* telecast in March of 1977. By now a superstar, he was the cover story in *Time* magazine in that same year, singing again at the Vienna State Opera with von Karajan, as Manrico in Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. Pavarotti returned to Salzberg the next year for Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*,

The Pavarotti International Voice Competition for young singers was established in the early 80's, with the tenor performing with the winners in 1982. This was also the year of his lowest and highest cinematic endeavors, respectively the romantic comedy *Yes, Giorgio*, and Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's striking adaptation of *Rigoletto* for television.

1983r took him back to Salzberg for W.A. Mozart's *Idomeneo*, and, in 1985, the world traveler sang Radames in Verdi's *Aida* at La Scala, with a two-minute ovation of "Celeste Aida" on opening night. A second Pavarotti Competition in 1986 staged excerpts of *La Bohème* and Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. An outgrowth of this was the first concert in China's Great Hall of the People before an audience of 10,000.

The third Pavarotti Competition in 1989 again staged performances of *L'Elisir d'Amore* and *Un Ballo in Maschera*, the same year when his reputation as "The King of Cancellations" came to a head, when Ardis Krainik and the Lyric Opera of Chicago severed a 15-year relationship, after an eight-year period, during which Pavarotti had cancelled 26 out of 41 appearances.

Pavarotti became even more positively high-profile when his interpretation of "Nessun Dorma" from Puccini's *Turandot*, became the signature song of the BBC 1990 World Cup in Italy, becoming the singer's trademark aria. *The Three Tenors* concert held on the eve of the final at the Baths of Caracalla, with Plácido Domingo and José Carreras eventually became the biggest-selling single classical record ever. The height of fame became the height of controversy in 1992 at La Scala, where his performance in Verdi's *Don Carlo*, conducted by Riccardo Muti, was booed and criticized, resulting in the singer's last association with that august hall, opting instead for such appearances as one at London's Hyde Park before a record 150,000-strong attendance, and another, in June 1993, before more than 500,000 on the Great Lawn of New York's Central Park. The following September, near Paris's Eiffel Tower, he sang for a crowd of 300,000.

The winners of the fifth Pavarotti Competition accompanied Pavarotti in performances in Philadelphia in 1997, and on December 12, 1998 he became the sole opera singer to perform on *Saturday Night Live*, with Vanessa Williams and U2.

The acrimonious breakup with his manager of 36 years, Herbert Breslin, in 2002, was followed two years later by Breslin's *The King & I*, criticizing singer's acting, note-reading ability, and personal conduct. In another life-change in 2003, Pavarotti married former personal assistant Nicoletta Mantovani, the mother of his daughter Alice.

He began his farewell tour in 2004, at the age of 69, performing for last time in locations old and new, including at the Met (March 13), which gave him a 12-minute standing ovation for his role as Mario Cavaradossi in Puccini's *Tosca*. In a subsequent year of denials and cancellations, Pavarotti took Breslin to task in a BBC interview (acknowledging he had difficulty following orchestral parts), underwent neck surgery to repair two vertebrae (March), and cancelled a *Three Tenors* concert in Mexico due to laryngitis (June).

While more cancellations followed in early 2006, due to back surgery and infection while in the hospital, he rallied on February 10 for the year's Winter Olympic Games in Turin, Italy, with the longest and loudest ovation of the night. Continuing his international "farewell tour," Pavarotti was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in July 2006.

In August 2007, Pavarotti was hospitalized as his condition worsened. He died September 6, 2007 at his home near Modena, with his wife, sister, and three older daughters present.

He holds two Guinness Book of World Records: for receiving the most curtain calls (165) and for the best selling classical album (*In Concert by The Three Tenors*, shared by Domingo and Carreras).



Concert Reviews

Open San Francisco

MARK ALBURGER

Gnarly and precious -- it sounds like the title of a new work by John Adams (whose *Gnarly Buttons* was premiered a few years back) -- but it was, in fact, the general impression of this year's San Francisco Symphony Opening (September 19, Davies Hall), possibly the most substantial gala taken in by this reviewer in 16 years of covering this august ensemble.

The program opened with a triptych of unexpectedly-assembled American shorts: the crowd-pleasing and stirring Aaron Copland *Fanfare for the Common Man*, the substantially less-well-known and chromatically cranky *Andante* of Ruth Crawford Seeger, and Adams's stirring and scenic *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, who kept applause at bay between the movements, sold the assemblage as a complete package, and sold the whole show as well, with the audience, as it so often has been in the MTT years, ready to accept whatever this musical conjurer calls forth.

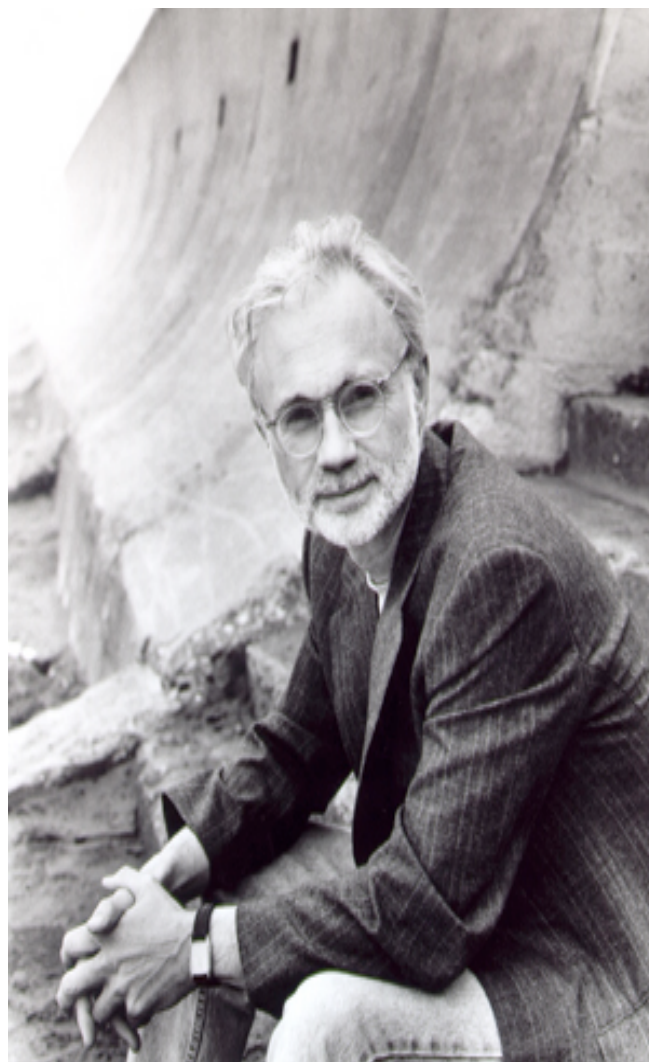
Happily, the Copland was heard in its original version, not the twisted orchestral form found in the composer's *Symphony No. 3*, and the Crawford Seeger (a string orchestra take on the interior of *String Quartet 1931*) stood up to similar paeans of Bela Bartok et al of mid-last century. The Adam -- perhaps not among his strongest works, though certainly among his most often played -- chugged and sparkled along as a protracted coda, and somehow made this mini-suite all make sense.

So much for some of the gnarly. The precious part came with the lovely soprano Renee Fleming and Maurice Ravel's decidedly un-middle-eastern *Sheherazade*. This is not your great-great-great grandfather's Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade*. Far from it, the Ravel unfolds languorously in three Tristan Klingsor poems that must be heard to be believed. This was also not your slam-bang first-act finale, but, again, the well-heeled and well-champagne'd auditors seemed totally satisfied.

Fleming returned with more traditional fare with two Giacomo Puccini arias, respectively "Visi d'arte" from *Tosca* and "O mio babbino caro" from *Gianni Schicchi*, the latter soaring forth in its delicate thirds and octaves. Fleming's control, musicality, and tone were all wonderfully on display here and in her encore Jewel Song from Charles Gounod's *Faust*.

The gnarly and precious were simultaneously on display in Thomas's own eclectic suite of music from the *Romeo and Juliet* of Sergei Prokofiev. Never trust a printed program on an MTT gala and, true to form, the conductor was all over the map in stirring and gorgeous selections more and less familiar, with a second encore, continuing in a Russian vein from an earlier era: the Polonaise from Peter Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.

Gnarly and precious programming. And almost completely convincing. A pleasure to have a living, Bay-Area-American composer on the program, too, in the Adams. But what about those old time opening-program commissions? No, I still haven't forgotten, Michael: a fine tradition worth reviving....



Big Screen at the Ballpark

PHILLIP GEORGE

The medium was the message on September 28, when a much bally-hoed and quite expensive experiment took place in simulcasting Camille Saint-Saens's *Samson and Delilah* with a fine production by the San Francisco Opera that, if not exactly a home run, delivered a respectable base hit at AT&T Park.

SFO's David Gockley, on the ascendant locally after his years of innovations with the Houston Opera, achieved an outreach goal in reaching out to an audience literally beyond the confines of the War Memorial Theater across town. The stands were more than halfway full, and this, coupled with the families and friends strewn across the ball field on blankets and lawn chairs, made for an impressive-size audience, albeit still smaller, one assumes, than for a standard paying crowd at a sporting event.

What sports-arena opera fans received as a freebie was the opportunity to take in a grand musical tradition on a giant state-of-the-art screen -- although, from distance of the average gazer's viewpoint, one could have been sitting at home in front of a mini. Still, the crowds! The garlic fries! The paid parking! The cold weather! The wind currents that whipped the sound hither and yon (more noticeable during arias than choruses)! What was not to like?

Well, it was not Napoleon brandy. It was a home-made hooch experience, but the audience pretty much behaved itself, as a cross between the All-American Pastime and the Some-American Divertissement, only guffawing a few times during the sexy scenes (something not evident from the well-turned out crowd in the theater, occasionally projected on the screen).

Visuals were arguably better than live, with pans and close-ups as sophisticated as a pre-recorded experience, which did however, at times, hold up the notion that opera was conceived as a proscenium-at-a-distance experience. And it was alarming to see ancient Palestine unfold under the logos of contemporary commerce Toyota Safeway Budweiser PG&E (any other takers? I'm getting nice commissions here....)

By composition or production, the opera grew in excellence as it proceeded, with the chorus in good form, and strong performances from Clifton Forbis (Samson), Eric Jordan (Abimelech), Juha Uusitalo (The High Priest of Dagon), and Olga Borodina (Delilah) -- at least, as far as could be discerned from the wobbly audio, possibly at least in part due to air cross-currents. Time synchronization was a little off, too (probably for the same reasons, remotely possibly due to the relative speeds of light and sound), which made for unintended "bad dubbing of a foreign movie" at times.

Set designs and costumes, and even the opera's original conception, made for a free interpretation of place and time, with allusions to ancient Babylonia and Egypt along side of those from Gaza and Israel -- how little changed even centuries later! The overall screen images, however, were roundly sumptuous, and the split screen effects subtly enhancing.

In the great split between concert and stage composers, Saint-Saens seems to lie squarely in the former camp. Is it any surprise that the composer of *Carnival of the Animals*, *Symphony No. 3 ("Organ")*, and an impressive *Cello Concerto*, produces his most memorable music in *Samson* with the third-act ballet instrumental "Bacchanale"? Still, the French master does have his theatrical sense, and a masterful stroke indeed it was to have the impassioned confrontation in Act II between the titular characters unfold against a storm worthy of Gioacchino Rossini or Giuseppe Verdi.

Strangely dramatic and dauntingly stage-crafty is the climax, where, after some surprisingly un-dramatic choral work (the better to shake you up in the end, my dear), the walls must come tumblin' down (and did they ever, artfully, cleverly). This may be the ultimate wham-bam-thank-you-opera-goer ending, and the AT&T audience responded with all the enthusiasm of a tractor pull. Yee-hah! Play opera!



Calendar

November 2

Berlin in Lights involving the Berlin Philharmonic. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. Through November 18.

November 18

Yvonne Raine's *RoS Indexical*, re-imagining the premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Hudson Theater, New York, NY

November 17

Pianist-composer Thomas Adès in Conlon Nancarrow's *Three Canons for Ursula*, plus his own music and that of Leos Janacek, Igor Stravinsky, and Niccolò Castiglioni. New York, NY.



Chronicle

September 6

Death of Luciano Pavarotti (b. 10/12/35), of pancreatic cancer. Modena, Italy. "Known for his televised concerts, media appearances, and as one of The Three Tenors, Pavarotti was also noted for his award-winning charity work, raising money on behalf of refugees, the Red Cross and other worthy causes. Pavarotti began his career as a tenor uneventfully. He sang opera in obscurity throughout Europe, but broke out after a performance with soprano Joan Sutherland, who invited the young tenor to join her in touring internationally. By the 1970s, Pavarotti had become known worldwide, famed for the brilliance and beauty of his tone especially into the upper register. His 'high C' would be one of his trademarks. Pavarotti was launched into popular culture after a performance of 'Nessun Dorma' for the opening ceremony of the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Italy. The first of the famed *The Three Tenors* concerts was held on the eve of the final match of the tournament in which Pavarotti performed together with fellow star tenors Plácido Domingo and José Carreras. Through these performances, Pavarotti brought hits previously confined to the opera world to a much wider audience; Pavarotti further spread his influence with appearances in advertisements and concerts with pop stars. Unlike many crossover artists, Pavarotti always maintained his identity as an opera star" [Wikipedia, 9/8/07].

September 7

Brooklyn opera company's production of Giacomo Puccini's *Il Tabarro*, set on a retired oil tanker. Red Hook, New York.



September 11

Death of Joe [Josef Erich] Zawinul (b. 7/7/32, Vienna, Austria), of skin cancer, at 75. Vienna, Austria. "[He] soared to fame as one of the creators of jazz fusion and performed and recorded with Miles Davis . . . Zawinul won widespread acclaim for his keyboard work on chart-topping Davis albums such as *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*, and was a leading force behind the so-called 'Electric Jazz movement. In 1970, Zawinul founded the band Weather Report . . . After that band's breakup, he founded the Zawinul Syndicate in 1987. Zawinul . . . emigrated to the United States in 1959, [and] is credited with bringing the electric piano and synthesizer into the jazz mainstream. . . . Zawinul played with Maynard Ferguson and Dinah Washington before joining alto saxophonist great Cannonball Adderley in 1961 for nine years . . . With Adderley, Zawinul wrote several important songs, among them . . . 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.' Zawinul then moved on to a brief collaboration with Miles Davis, at the time Davis was moving into the electric arena" [Internet release]. "Zawinul, a classically trained . . . pianist . . . achieved fame as a co-leader of the electrified jazz band Weather Report. . . . [He] lived in Malibu. . . . Weather Report, which Mr. Zawinul led with saxophonist Wayne Shorter, was in the front ranks of the music that came to be called fusion. But he already had an impressive list of accomplishments before Weather report recorded its first album in 1971, and he remained active and influential after the group disbanded in 1986. . . . 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy' the biggest hit of Adderley's career . . . reached No. 11 on the Billboard singles chart in 1967. It was also one of the first jazz records to feature an electric piano. Mr. Zawinul's solo on that instrumental caught the ear of Miles Davis, who brought Mr. Zawinul into the studio in 1969 as one of three keyboardists on what would become Davis' first electric album, *In a Silent Way* . . . [T]he emergence of fusion, a heavily amplified, rhythmically insistent blend of jazz and other music . . . attracted young audiences and alienated jazz purists. Mr. Zawinul became both celebrated and vilified as one of the architects of the movement when he formulated Weather Report with Shorter, a veteran of Davis's band, and the bassist Miroslav Vitous. Vitous soon left, and the band underwent numerous personnel changes over the years, with Mr. Zawinul and Shorter the only constants. Its greatest success came in the late 1970s, when the young electric bass virtuoso Jaco Pastorius was a member and Mr. Zawinul's composition *Birdland* became an international hit. Although Shorter and Pastorius wrote for the band, Mr. Zawinul was its principal composer, and Weather Report came to be defined by the wide range of sounds and textures he created on synthesizers and other electronic keyboards. 'Weather Report was an entity of its own,' Mr. Zawinul said in the New York Times last year. "You can't call it rock or fusion or all these comical words." Two years after he and Shorter went their separate ways, Mr. Zawinul formed the Zawinul Syndicate. Like Weather Report, that group, which celebrated its 20th anniversary with an extensive tour this year, underwent frequent personnel changes.

Unlike Weather Report, it was unambiguously Mr. Zawinul's project: The music, incorporating ideas from Africa and other parts of the world, was almost all composed by him, and his vast array of electronic keyboards was always front and center. . . . His first instrument was the accordion, which he began playing at 6, but by his teenage years he was a pianist, a student at the Vienna Conservatory and a devoted jazz enthusiast. When he moved to the United States in 1959, he had been a professional musician for close to a decade. His progress after that was rapid. Shortly after arriving in New York, he was hired by the trumpeter Maynard Ferguson, and he went on to work with singer Dinah Washington before joining the Cannonball Adderley Quintet in 1961" [Peter Keepnews, *The New York Times*].

September 15

San Francisco Composers Chamber Orchestra in Mark Alburger's *The Pied Piper Suite*, John Beeman's *Free Form*, David Graves's *Life Is Like That*, Loren Jones's *Dancing on the Brink of the World*, Beeri Moalem's *Desires*, Lisa Scola Prosek's *Trap Door*, Clare Twohy's *Music for Flute, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, and Strings*, and Erling Wold's *Mordake Suite*. Old First Church, San Francisco, CA.

September 16

Celliola and friends in Tom Flaherty's *Scenes from Sarajevo* (2003) and *Cellorimbian Flights* (2006), Peter Yates's *Handful of Dust* (1999), Maurice Ravel *Sonata for Violin and Cello* (1920-1922), and Eric Moe's *The Lone Cello* (1998). Bridges Hall, Claremont, CA.



September 19

San Francisco Symphony Opening Gala, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, in Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, Ruth Crawford Seeger's *String Quartet 1931* (in an excerpt for string orchestra), John Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, Maurice Ravel's *Scheherazade* and music from Giacomo Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* (the latter two with Renee Fleming, and a suite from Sergei Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA. "[The] opening gala . . . - delayed for two weeks while the orchestra went gallivanting around the summer festivals of the Old World - showed no sign of strain or fatigue. Quite the opposite, in fact. In a well-chosen program, the orchestra sounded robust and alert, playing with all the flair of an ensemble eager to get into the swing of a new season. Thomas was on his game, conducting with his best blend of precision and spontaneity. Even soprano Renée Fleming, the starry guest artist, sounded splendid in music of Ravel, Gounod and Puccini . . . in performances . . . lustrous and free. The result was one of the most enjoyable and vivid gala concerts the orchestra has offered in years. Maybe this late-start ploy needs to be trotted out more often. Some of the repertoire - including the opening triptych of short works by Aaron Copland, Ruth Crawford Seeger and John Adams . . . - had been road-tested during the recent tour and showed signs of having been finely honed in the process. Beginning the evening with the trio of American curtain-raisers, like an elegantly arrayed tray of hors d'oeuvres, was a programming masterstroke (you can just imagine how it went down in Europe), and the orchestra rose to the challenge with superbly focused playing. The stirring, grandiose brass-and-drum strains of Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* gave way to the beautifully dissonant counterpoint of Crawford Seeger's *Andante for Strings*, an orchestral adaptation of one movement from her magnificent *String Quartet* of 1931. And close on the heels of those two came Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, with its rambunctious rhythms and exuberant scoring to suggest how *The Rite of Spring* would have sounded if only the young Stravinsky had known the music of Steve Reich. Thomas led a performance that was as celebratory as it was inviting. Fleming spread her visit across both halves of the program, relegating the heavy lifting of Ravel's *Shéhérazade* to the early part of the evening and saving a couple of gorgeously rendered Puccini gems for later. The Ravel emerged in long, luminous phrases, and the orchestra supported Fleming with a well-judged mix of voluptuousness and rhythmic clarity. . . . Fleming gave an encore before intermission - a sparkly rendition of the Jewel Song from Gounod's *Faust* - then returned during the second half for Puccini: strong-toned, emotionally focused accounts of 'Vissi d'arte' from *Tosca* and 'O mio babbino caro' from *Gianni Schicchi*. There was a handful of excerpts from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* - not, oddly enough, the ones listed in the program, which left even the maestro shuffling pages of his score in evident perplexity - and then the Polonaise from [Peter Tchaikovsky's] *Eugene Onegin*" [Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9/21/07].



Comment

By the Numbers

Placement of the society article re the San Francisco Symphony's 2007 Opening Gala in the San Francisco Chronicle, 9/21/07:

E1 / front section of the website

Placement of the music review re the San Francisco Symphony's 2007 Opening Gala in the San Francisco Chronicle, 9/21/07.

E3 / buried in "other Datebook reviews"

Item

Orchestra conductor Mohammed Amin Ezzat tapped his music stand impatiently, and the violin tuning and friendly jabbering finally eased to a rest.

He raised his baton, and in that split second before the first note a remarkable thing happened: silence. It was a rare moment in a city blasted by the oppressive noise of generators, air conditioners, helicopters, gunfire, shouts and explosions.

What followed was not yet a great reading of the masterwork in front of the remaining members of the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra. This was their first rehearsal after a summer break. But it was a familiar harmony of strings and brass and woodwinds that drowned out the sounds of war, if only for the afternoon.

"I've been dreaming of this my whole life," said pianist Zuhail Sultan, 16, one of 10 students who fill in during rehearsals because of the difficulty of getting all 70 musicians to central Baghdad for the Saturday and Tuesday sessions.

She lost her parents in the last four years, one to violence, one to illness. Her older brothers worry about her crosstown trips to rehearsal, she says. But like many here, music is her balm.

"We're lucky to be musicians," Zuhail said. "We can express ourselves through music, whether we are sad or happy or any other feeling. Playing with this orchestra brings me joy."

Ezzat, the conductor, was not concerned with his musicians' feelings, but how they played the notes on the page; their tempo and pitch. The orchestra's next concert was two weeks away. With stops and starts, the first two dozen measures took close to an hour to traverse. Woodwinds rushed the cello section, violinists fumbled a complicated passage, and someone intruded on a marked rest.

First strings alone, he barked, then brass. His only English words were spoken after a rap of his baton: "One, two, three."

The piece at hand was written in 1965 by an East German composer who took a thread of traditional Iraqi music and expanded it for orchestra. It is a slow and melancholy affair called *Since I Have No Protection*.

Orchestra Director Karim Wasfi had returned this day after spending four months in hiding. There were three attempts on his life, the fallout of Islamic extremists' hatred of all things from the West, including its music.

"I always knew I was going to come back," said Wasfi, a cellist who studied at Indiana University. "There was no logic to it. It's just that I missed this place."

He was standing at the entrance to a large, mirrored studio in the Ballet and Music Institute, a performing arts school and rehearsal space. Inside, his musicians sat on folding chairs, strings in front, horns in back and woodwinds in the middle.

The orchestra took a beating after the U.S. invasion 4 1/2 years ago. Looters stole all they could carry from the school and broke much of the rest. Help has since come from all over the world, including from a La Cañada Flintridge teenager. Instruments have been replaced and sheet music recovered. But other losses run deeper.

"The difficulty has been the development of our repertoire and the next generation training to be musicians," Wasfi said. "And, obviously, there is the difficulty getting guest conductors, guest musicians. We had so many ambitious plans before the war."

The orchestra plays works by Duke Ellington and George Gershwin, as well as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Chopin's piano concertos.

Sam Enriquez
Los Angeles Times
9/23/07

