



Photo: Pat Kirk for Opera San Jose

Bass Kirk Eichelberger earned stellar reviews when he sang the role of Méphistophélès for Opera San Jose (shown) and Opera Grand Rapids.

Faust: The Eternal Philosophical Struggle

The legendary story of Doctor Faust and his bargain with the devil touches a chord in audiences the world over. In many ways, the challenge Faust faces

merely reflects the human condition – the desire for more than one has, a yearning for endless youth and passion, a wish to live one’s life over. The siren call of today’s materialistic and youth-oriented culture continues to make this opera, based on a popular 16th century German fable, a reflection of the world in which we live.

From Moral to Romantic

Early tales of the aging Doctor Faust focused less on his internal conflict and more on the simple moral consequences implicit in any dealings with the devil according to the strict religious beliefs of the era. By the time philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe addressed the story in the early 1800s, a somewhat broader view was taken of Faust’s conflicting emotions, his disillusionment with science, and the irre-

sistible temptation to be ever young. Although Faust’s tryst with a young woman (Marguerite in the opera) occurs, it is Faust’s struggle with his desires and his spiritual journey that were central in Goethe’s interpretation. Goethe was fascinated by this philosophical conflict and continued to revisit it throughout his life. In a significantly revised edition completed in 1832,

the year of his death, Goethe created *Faust Part Two*, wherein Faust’s soul is redeemed and he is saved from his pact with the devil.

Just prior to the creation of the opera in the mid-1800s, French playwright Michel Carré produced *Faust et Marguerite*, which placed

“Everything is not black or white, good or evil. Life is just a lot more complex than that”

the romantic aspects of the story center stage. Since his goal was to create a popular entertainment for the masses, Carré focused on the seduction of Marguerite and gave greater life to characters such as Marguerite’s brother Valentin and her young suitor Siebel, adding conflict to the drama. Librettist Jules Barbier and Gounod had often worked with Carré and when he became involved, the dramatic focus of his play became the opera’s focus as well.

...continued on page 5

Returning Opera to its Roots

The past few years have found opera increasingly visible, riding a wave of exposure for what some consider a rather elite art form. From live movie screenings and free opera at the ballpark, to “semi-staged” operas at symphony concerts, suddenly listening to opera is popular again. But opera as mainstream entertainment is hardly a new phenomenon.

Perhaps because opera is often appreciated by a highly-educated crowd, it has undeservedly been categorized as entertainment solely for that demographic. When the art form was developed in Italy during the 1600’s however, performances were staged in public theaters where everyone could – and did – attend. Opera quickly emerged as a popular art form for the masses – so popular that some records show more than a dozen opera houses operating during that period just in Venice alone. Now however, opera seems to fight an elitist reputation. And there are some reasons it bears that reputation. For example, thanks to the sheer cost of producing opera, ticket prices can soar above

...continued on page 6

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From the Chair: Challenge is Good

At a young age, I was attracted to classical music and opera because it was challenging. I enjoyed simple and popular music but it did not stay with me and I was soon bored. Instead, I began to enjoy pieces that required me to hear them many times before they became familiar.

Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* was the first opera that I attended live. I was happy that it was outside of the popular repertory and that it dealt with very existential themes about the core anxiety of life and the difficulty of relationships. This was not Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*. I still enjoy listening to *Pelléas et Mélisande* over and over because I hear and appreciate something new every time.

Festival Opera is enjoying new challenges every day as we navigate the new world of financial and business downturns. We have appreciated many years of support from the Diablo Regional Arts Association and the Leshner Foundation. But now I want to ask for your help.

In the past few years, most business support for Festival Opera has come from outside Walnut Creek. Do you have any suggestions for

how we can identify and increase the support for Festival Opera from Walnut Creek-based businesses? Could you suggest people we might call on for sponsorships of Opera in the Park and for our August production of *Faust*?

There are many ways and levels that businesses and individuals can support our productions. You may sponsor an individual artist, a musician in the orchestra, or the Festival Opera Chorus, to name a few. I would be happy to speak with you about what opera experiences might be meaningful to you or your friends in recognition of your gift.

Winston Churchill, who triumphed over a world filled with challenge, had this to say about giving: "*You make a living by what you earn; you make a life by what you give.*"

Please send your ideas, comments, and questions about support for Festival Opera to: jbelle@bellinvest.com. I look forward to seeing you at the opening of *Turandot* on July 11 and the opening of *Faust* on August 8.

— Jim Bell ■

Enjoy Opera in the Park!

Mark your calendar for Festival Opera's annual celebration of the summer season: Opera in the Park! Bring a blanket, a picnic dinner, and a group of friends to enjoy a preview of the season with familiar arias and ensembles sung by guest artists and the Festival Opera chorus.

In addition to delivering exceptional and engaging opera productions at a very professional level, part of Festival Opera's mission is to increase opera's accessibility in the community and to introduce people to the art form of opera. Opera in the Park is a free, family-friendly event that furthers the company's efforts – last year more than half of the attendees had never been to Festival Opera's park concert and nearly 30 percent had never attended an opera performance anywhere.

Both longstanding opera fans and newcomers to opera find the Opera in the Park concert a very lighthearted and enjoyable way to spend a Sunday evening. Civic Park, Walnut Creek, at the corner of Civic and Broadway – June 28, 2009 at 6:00 pm. Don't miss it!

FESTIVAL OPERA

FORE!

**THE 2009 FESTIVAL OPERA
GOLF TOURNAMENT**

COMING THIS FALL...



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Festival Opera 2009 Preview

Turandot

Turandot

(in Italian with English supertitles)

Music by Giacomo Puccini (1858 –1924)

Completed by Franco Alfano (1875 –1954)

Libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, after the play by Carlo Gozzi

Conductor Bryan Nies

Stage Director David Cox

Set Designer Peter Crompton

Turandot Othalie Graham

Calaf Christopher Jackson

Liù Rebecca Sjöwall

Performances:

July 11, 14, 17 – 8:00pm

Matinee Sunday, July 19 – 2:00pm

Leshner Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek

Tickets: \$39 –\$100 Call (925) 943-SHOW (7469)

or visit www.festivalopera.com

Background:

Puccini spent years working on *Turandot*, but died in 1924 leaving the work incomplete. He had been fascinated by the story of the icy princess, so different from the subservient female characters of his other operas. He also became interested in Chinese instruments and incorporated their sounds in his work.

At Puccini's death, the final scene – Turandot's transformation – had not been completed. Arturo Toscanini, who was to conduct the debut, became responsible for seeing the opera was completed and assigned the task to Franco Alfano, a colleague of Puccini's. Although Alfano labored for months and completed the score, at *Turandot's* premiere, Toscanini stopped the performance after Liù's death, and said to the audience, "il maestro e morto" (Here the maestro died.) The completed work debuted at a later date.

Turandot's fairytale transformation through the power of love inspired what was arguably Puccini's greatest work, and what was called by some the last of the grand Italian operas.

Synopsis:

In ancient Peking, any man who desires to wed Princess Turandot must first answer her three riddles or die; the Prince of Persia has failed and is to be beheaded. As the crowd outside the palace presses forward, an old man falls to the ground and his slave-girl, Liù, cries for help. Calaf, hearing her cry, recognizes the old man as his long-lost father, King Timur, who has been deposed from his throne. Only Liù has remained faithful to him out of secret love for Calaf. As the Prince of Persia is led to his execution, Calaf pleads for his release. Although Turandot coldly orders the execution to proceed, Calaf is dazzled by her imperious beauty and strikes the palace gong indicating his desire to answer her riddles.

Inside, Ministers Ping, Pang and Pong hope that Turandot will find love, ending the bloodshed. Turandot enters and relates how the story of an ancestor brutally slain by a prince has turned her against all men. Although even the Emperor suggests Calaf withdraw from the quest, he refuses. After Calaf has correctly answered the first two riddles, Turandot, shaken, asks, "what freezes like ice but burns like fire?" When Calaf cries out "Turandot!" the crowd rejoices. Turandot pleads with her father to release her from her oath. He refuses, but Calaf makes a proposal: if she can discover his name before sunrise, he will die instead.

Although Turandot has commanded that no one sleep until she has learned the stranger's name, Calaf anticipates his victory in the garden. Suddenly, Timur and Liù, who had been seen with Calaf earlier, are dragged in at Turandot's command. Liù insists that only she knows the secret and, despite being tortured, refuses to speak. When her resolve is questioned by Turandot, Liù declares that it is "Love" that gives her strength, then seizes a dagger and kills herself. As the horrified crowd disperses, Turandot faces Calaf. Despite her reluctance Calaf takes her in his arms and kisses her. Feeling passion for the first time, Turandot tells him to leave with his secret. Instead he replies with his name, delivering his fate into her hands. As the sun rises, Turandot declares that she has learned the prince's name: "Love."



Othalie Graham (soprano) returns to Festival Opera following her 2006 debut in the title role of *Tosca*. Since that time, she has appeared in the title role of *Aida* with El Paso Opera, as Leonora (*Il Trovatore*) with Utah Festival Opera, as Odabella (*Afilla*) with Sarasota Opera, and performed with Bryn Terfel and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir as the soprano soloist in *Elijah*. Graham has won particular acclaim for her portrayals of the princess Turandot in productions across the country including Michigan Opera Theater, Sacramento Opera, and Opera Columbus.



Rebecca Sjöwall (soprano) makes her first appearance with Festival Opera as Liù. She was highly praised last season for her roles as Micaëla in *Carmen* with West Bay Opera and as Gilda in *Rigoletto* for San Francisco Lyric Opera. Prior roles include Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) with the New Operafestival di Roma, and La Marchesa di Poggio (Verdi's *Un giorno di regno*) with Lyric Opera of Los Angeles. A two-time district winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Sjöwall placed first in the 2007 Barnum Festival Jenny Lind Competition.



Christopher Jackson (tenor) makes his company debut as Prince Calaf. He recently appeared with Anchorage Opera as Don José (*Carmen*), and as Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*) for New York City Opera, a role he previously sang for Shreveport Opera. At NYCO he has also appeared in several new works, including the role of Prince Bolo in the world premiere of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by Wuorinen, and as both Maron and Ares in Adamo's critically acclaimed *Lysistrata*. Jackson is an alumnus of the Young American Artist program at Glimmerglass Opera.



Bryan Nies (conductor) returns to Festival Opera where he conducted *Carmen* in 2007 after several seasons as assistant conductor. Nies currently serves as assistant conductor of the Oakland East Bay Symphony and as resident conductor of the Oakland Youth Orchestra, which he led on a tour of Australia and New Zealand during the orchestra's 40th season. During the summer of 2002, Nies was honored with a prestigious Leonard Bernstein Fellowship to participate as a conductor at the Tanglewood Music Center.

Festival Opera 2009 Preview

Faust

Faust

(in French with English supertitles)

Music by Charles Gounod (1818 –1893)

Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, after plays by Carré and Johann von Goethe

Conductor/Stage Director..... Michael Morgan

Assistant Director Mark Foehringer

Faust Brian Thorsett

Marguerite..... Kristin Clayton

Mephistopheles..... Kirk Eichelberger

Valentin Eugene Brancoveanu

Performances:

August 8, 11 – 8:00pm

Matinee Sunday, August 16 – 2:00pm

Leshner Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek

Tickets: \$39 –\$100 Call (925) 943-SHOW (7469)

or visit www.festivalopera.com

Background:

Gounod's *Faust* is the most well-known of the many operas based on the 16th century play by Goethe. The powerful tale of the aging philosopher's bargain with the devil, combined with Gounod's romantic and lyrical melodies, have consistently earned it a place in the top 20 most-performed operas.

When French dramatist Jules Barbier approached the composer about collaborating on the project, he found Gounod already interested in the story. Michel Carré, who had recently produced a play based on the story, joined their efforts. Beset by delays, in March 1859 *Faust* finally made its premiere in Paris but was received with little enthusiasm. It was several years and multiple revisions before the opera achieved success.

Faust and *Roméo et Juliette* are the only two Gounod operas to remain consistently in the operatic repertoire, but *Faust*, now in its 150th year, has proved more enduringly popular with melodies and arias beloved around the world.

Synopsis:

An old and lonely man, the philosopher Faust is ready to drink poison. The sound of young people nearby reawakens his desire for the passions of youth and, cursing his failed life, he calls on the power of the devil. Méphistophélès unexpectedly appears and offers Faust a bargain – a return to the pleasures of youth in exchange for his soul. When Faust hesitates, the devil conjures a vision of the lovely Marguerite. Faust signs the pact and is instantly transformed.

At a local fair, soldiers celebrate before leaving for war. Officer Valentin asks the young boy Siébel to watch over his sister Marguerite in his absence. A lively song begins, but Méphistophélès interrupts with a song praising greed and gold. When the devil boldly compliments Marguerite, Valentin draws his sword, which breaks at the hilt. The soldiers, now recognizing the devil, hold their swords like crosses, driving Méphistophélès away. As the fair resumes, Faust asks to escort Marguerite home but she refuses.

The lovestruck Siébel leaves a bouquet for Marguerite, but the devil replaces it with a chest of jewels. When Marguerite returns, she is delighted with the jewels and puts them on as Faust arrives. As night falls, Marguerite confesses her love but begs him to leave. The devil mocks Faust's failed seduction and dares him to approach Marguerite at her window, where she yields to his embrace.

Faust abandons Marguerite and she seeks refuge in church, but is instead cursed by the devil. Valentin returns home victorious only to hear the devil singing a lewd ballad about Marguerite. Rushing to defend her, Valentin finds Faust outside and challenges him to a duel. With the devil guiding his hand, Faust kills Valentin. Marguerite runs to her brother only to have him curse her with his dying breath.

Imprisoned for the murder of her illegitimate child, Marguerite has lost her sanity. When Faust arrives to free her, she hallucinates about the day they met and refuses to leave. Méphistophélès drags Faust away as Marguerite calls upon the angels in heaven, who proclaim her salvation.



Brian Thorsett (tenor) makes his Festival Opera debut as Faust. He has appeared with opera companies around the country in a range of roles, including Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Count Almaviva (*Barber of Seville*), Lyonel (*Martha*). His debut with Opera Idaho this year was in the role of Ferrando (*Così fan Tutte*), a role he sang previously with West Bay Opera. Thorsett, a former participant in both the San Francisco Opera Merola Program and the Glimmerglass Young American Artist Program, was awarded the Grand Prize at the 30th Annual Carmel Music Society Competition.



Kirk Eichelberger (bass) returns to Festival Opera's stage following a string of memorable appearances including Bottom in last season's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Dr. Gibbs in the West Coast premiere of *Our Town*, Leporello (*Don Giovanni*), and Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*). Eichelberger sang the role of Méphistophélès earlier this year with Opera Grand Rapids and has also sung it with Opera San Jose. Following his Metropolitan Opera debut in *The Gambler* last year, he appeared as Don Ferrando (*Fidelio*) with Opera Company of Philadelphia.



Kristin Clayton (soprano) returns to the company after prior appearances as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* and Norina in *Don Pasquale*. Clayton has worked extensively with composer Jake Heggie, and sang the world premiere of his work *At the Statue of Venus* for the 2005 grand opening of the Ellie Caulkins Opera House in Denver. This past year she sang Beatrice at Houston Grand Opera in Heggie's new opera, *Three Decembers*, starring Frederica von Stade, and later reprised the role with San Francisco Opera, where she is a former Adler Fellow.



Eugene Brancoveanu (baritone) first appeared at Festival Opera in 2007 as Escamillo in *Carmen*. He has since debuted at New York City Opera as Pandolfo (*Cendrillon*), earned critical acclaim as the Pilot in San Francisco Opera's *The Little Prince*, and sang the title role in *Don Giovanni* for San Francisco Lyric Opera. An Adler Fellow for two years, he has appeared with SFO in numerous roles. In 2005, Brancoveanu originated the role of Marcello in Baz Luhrmann's production of *La Bohème* on Broadway, for which he received an honorary Tony Award.

Faust: The Eternal Philosophical Struggle ...continued from page 1

Enduring Relevance

It speaks to the universality of the character's conflict that the theme of "Faustian bargains" and their inevitable consequences continues to be sprinkled liberally throughout contemporary literature and modern music. Gounod's *Faust* is one of the top 20 operas performed annually, according to Opera America, and throughout the 20th century more performances of *Faust* were staged at the Metropolitan Opera in New York than any other opera. Festival Opera's artistic and music director, Michael Morgan, believes the basic message of this opera transcends time – that what connects people to the opera is a recognition that life's choices, like Faust's, are complicated. "Everything is not black or white, good or evil. Life is just a lot more complex than that," he contends.

Although the scandal surrounding Marguerite's seduction and pregnancy may seem mundane given what is seen in the media today, the severing of family relationships and the impact on her mental health, which led to the murder of her child, are not irrelevant. Morgan adds, "the situation may be more common but there are still problems with it. There is always a tension between how people are behaving and how people think they are supposed to behave." Although the religious views of the 21st century may be different from those of the 16th century, they continue to have influence on social behavior. This opera has a lot of religious symbolism throughout, says Morgan, and highlights the conflict between the moral ideal and reality.

An Intimate Focus

In addition to his primary role as artistic director and conductor, Morgan will also serve as stage director for this production. He will again collaborate with assistant director Mark Foehringer, with whom he directed last season's highly acclaimed *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The production team faced significant challenges just in developing a concept; budget restrictions painted an immediate backdrop for the planning process, limiting what could be done in terms of physical staging. Fortunately, as Morgan says, the team is at its most creative in tight budget times. "It forces us to be more imaginative. And *Faust* lends itself to minimalism. The message is so basic, it's really the human interaction that should be focused on, almost to the exclusion of all else."

The creativity of the production team is supported by casting Morgan describes as "luxury" – talented singers whose acting ability can make the story come to life – even in the smaller roles. Making his debut with Festival Opera in the title role, Brian Thorsett has garnered acclaim for his "clear lovely tenor" in leading roles with local companies. Returning artists include soprano Kristin Clayton, last seen as Donna Anna in Morgan's staging of *Don Giovanni* three years ago, and bass Kirk Eichelberger, whose voice in the role of Méphistophélès for Opera Grand Rapids "pierced the auditorium with laser-like precision and menace" and stole the show.

The production, designed by Matthew Antaky, will feature background projection technology, which is gaining popularity in opera productions around the world. The projected visuals can be dissolved slowly from one to another. Other lighting effects will enhance the audience's experience of transitions such as Marguerite's ascension into heaven, which Morgan wants to be dazzling. The ability to control the background changes in a very precise manner allows an almost magical interplay between the story and the setting. The change will be so gradual, the audience will notice that it's different only intermittently. "It's the way you experience a sunrise," relates Morgan. "You don't notice each different gradation of light, but at some point you realize the sky is bright and the sun is up."

Budget constraints dictated some staging decisions, but Morgan says that even given a choice, he would still chose to do it this way since the story lends itself so well to this treatment. "It's the perfect opportunity – the combination of this opera and this staging keeps the focus on the drama where it should be."

What Morgan hopes that people will take away from his staging of *Faust* will be an understanding that all the characters are multifaceted. "I believe people will find something of themselves to identify with in all of the characters. There's even some understanding of the motivations of the devil and the temptations he presents. Like all dramas, people can see aspects of themselves in the villains as well as the heroes. No one is all good or all evil, perhaps not even Méphistophélès!" ■



Photo: Hillary Langtry for Rogue Opera

Tenor Brian Thorsett, shown here in The Merry Wives of Windsor, makes his Festival Opera debut as Faust.

Returning Opera to its Roots ...continued from page 1

average symphony or musical theater rates.

Michael Morgan, Festival Opera's artistic and music director, believes the momentum behind the current interest in opera merely puts it back in its proper place as the popular art form it always was. Opera's melodramatic stories fit with the times we're living in now, he adds. So much of what is found in opera – the stories, the drama, the emotions – people can relate to in their own life experience.

Using the Media

When Peter Gelb announced in 2006 that the Metropolitan Opera would broadcast live performances to movie theaters around the country there were many questions and some dire predictions. Would it succeed in reaching people new to opera? Would people abandon live opera for the movies? Opera America distributed more than 5,000 surveys in 32 geographic areas across the country to attendees at *Live in HD* broadcasts. Data showed that most attendees were already very involved with opera – 72 percent had seen a live opera locally in the last two years and a full 50 percent had seen live opera outside their regional area. They liked seeing opera at the

movies (it was at least the second time for 75 percent of them) but they did not see it as replacing their live opera experiences.

Did opera at the movies introduce opera to new audiences? Although many (20 percent) had not seen live opera in more

than two years, only five percent of all attendees had never seen opera at all. Perhaps opera at the movies is not the pure outreach vehicle some might have hoped, but there is evidence that it increases accessibility for many and can reignite existing interest in others.

Connections have been drawn between the Met's *Live in HD* and the power their Sunday afternoon radio broadcasts had during the last century in generating new audiences. Many opera-goers today cite listening to the Met broadcasts during their youth as a formative experience. San Francisco Opera's "Free Opera at the Ballpark" routinely attracts more than 20,000 attendees who thoroughly enjoy both the star-

studded performances – and the garlic fries – in what could be seen as a throwback experience to early performances of opera in Italian amphitheaters. Certainly there is potential for opera at the movies, broadcasts in ballparks, and greater exposure on the Internet to restore the original mainstream popularity of the art form.

Seeing Opera Differently

Having opera presented in different ways can allow the audience to focus on different aspects and see and hear different things. In the last half year, a number of "semi-staged" operas have appeared on the program at symphony concerts across the country from the Oakland East Bay Symphony, and San Francisco Symphony, to the West Virginia Symphony and New York Philharmonic. Presenting opera at symphony concerts can enlarge audiences for both art forms. Says Morgan, "the more people you expose to opera, the greater the chance they'll discover they have a real connection to it."

The music of opera isn't by nature elitist, despite its reputation. "Hearing Aretha Franklin sing *Nessun dorma*... well, that may not be what you want to hear," says Morgan, "but when it happens (as at the 1998 Grammy Award telecast) you realize that this music is more universal, more flexible, than you might have expected." Paul Potts, winning contestant on the TV show "Britain's Got Talent" introduced millions to the same famous tenor aria from *Turandot* via YouTube, where he became an online sensation.

These and more typical examples of artists crossing over serve the same purpose of reaching people who might not otherwise be exposed to opera. Fans of Broadway star Kristin Chenoweth were disappointed when budget cuts forced the Met to cancel a planned production of *The Ghosts of Versailles*, which would have brought Chenoweth back to her early opera training, and very likely new people into the opera house.

Asked whether there are negatives to this blurring of art forms, Morgan is clear, "The only negative is when someone is singing something they're unprepared to sing. Otherwise it's all good!" Exposing new or different audiences to opera, building audiences through cross-over artists... in every way, broadening the musical experience can only enrich everyone – those who already appreciate opera and those who have yet to discover this vibrant form of popular entertainment. It's all good, indeed. ■

Photo:
Edgar Lee/San Francisco Opera



San Francisco Opera attracted a record 27,000 fans to this month's free simulcast performance of *Tosca* at AT&T Park.

It's Not All About Opera!

It is the artistry of the singers on the stage and in the pit that provides audiences with the essence of opera – that magical experience of losing oneself in the story and the music. But these talented artists aren't all about opera! Here's a fun peek at what some of Festival Opera's artists are like after the curtain falls and the lights come up.



Kirk Eichelberger, bass
(Méphistophélès, *Faust*)

Spends a lot of time: Reading. The poetry of John Donne, short stories by O'Henry, *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom. And *Harry Potter*!

Movie most recently seen: *Terminator Salvation*... but liked *Star Trek* better.

Would watch on TV: *Battlestar Galactica* ... except it's not on anymore.

When out of town he misses: His favorite place for Mexican food, Taqueria Lorenas in San Jose.



Othalie Graham, soprano
(Title role, *Turandot*)

Favorite sport to watch: Boxing! She's a self-described huge boxing fanatic.

Her favorite meal: Jamaica's national dish – ackee and saltfish with fried dumplings.

Recent reads: *No Lifeguard on Duty* by Janice Dickinson, *The Legs are the Last to Go* by Diahann Carroll, and *Audition* by Barbara Walters.

On a matinee-free Sunday she can be found: Shopping the flea markets with her husband!



Michael Morgan, artistic and music director
(stage director and conductor, *Faust*)

Listens to: Pop music from the 60s and 70s. Never listens to classical as background music – it requires too much attention!

Favorite TV shows: *Ugly Betty*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Weeds*, *Head Case*, and he can't wait for *True Blood* to start again.

Prefers to vacation: Anywhere near the seashore or on a transcontinental train ride.



Brian Thorsett, tenor
(Title role, *Faust*)

Cheers for: Oakland As and San Jose Sharks ... it's been a rough summer!

Best recent book: *The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield.

Dream travel destinations: Egypt, or perhaps seeing polar bears or penguins in their natural habitat.

Guilty pleasure food: Fresh, warm, soft chocolate chip cookies....



Rebecca Sjöwall, soprano
(Liù, *Turandot*)

Is currently reading: *Emma* by a favorite author, Jane Austen – she's a romantic at heart.

Like to watch: Football! She's from Wisconsin so being a Packer fan was part of her upbringing.

Meals that make her smile: Her mother is Italian, so she loves homemade pasta, but sushi is a close second.



Bryan Nies, conductor
(conductor, *Turandot*)

If not classical, he chooses: Ben Folds, the Barenaked Ladies, all kinds of jazz, and folk music.

Recently enjoyed reading: *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell.

Favorite TV shows: *The Wire* (on DVD) and never grows tired of *Arrested Development*.

Wishes he had time to: Play volleyball. He played collegiate at Northwestern but has been too busy lately. ■



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