



Photo: Berkeley Opera

Soprano Angela Cadellago (shown here in *Tales of Hoffmann*) makes her Festival Opera debut in August.

Lucia di Lammermoor: Beauty in Madness

At a time when popular culture is fascinated with symbols of the gothic era – gloomy castles, curses, vampires, and witchcraft – it would seem there could be no more appropriate opera to present than the dark and disturbing *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

But whether tied to current popu-

lar culture or not, the opera, with its beautiful and hauntingly lyrical music, has long stood the test of time, appearing consistently for decades in the annual list of Top 10 Operas Performed.

A True and Tragic Tale

The opera tells of the star-crossed love of Lucia and Edgardo, young lovers from two feuding families in the Scottish highlands. Coerced into a politically beneficial but loveless marriage by her brother, the desperate Lucia kills her groom during the wedding party before succumbing to insanity. Edgardo, hearing the news of Lucia's death, kills himself in the hopes of joining her more happily in the afterlife.

The opera, based on the 1819 novel by Sir

Walter Scott, *Bride of Lammermoor*, finds its roots in a true story. A poet and novelist, Scott was not known for writing the true “gothic romances” of his times. The majority of his works told the tales and legends of Scottish history and often emphasized the noble actions of his characters. So despite some of the eerie hallmarks of gothic fiction – secrecy, violence

and madness – Scott's story was based on a true incident. Set in the Scottish highlands during the late 1600s, in the original tale Lucia's mother masterminds the disastrous marriage plan. And, although Lucia did dissolve into madness, the groom survived her

attack on their wedding night. Lucia's lover died in Scott's story, but it was unclear whether it was by his own hand or an accident.

Setting Madness to Music

Written in 1835, *Lucia di Lammermoor* was composed by Gaetano Donizetti at the height of his career. He was an exceptionally productive composer, writing nearly 70 operas in his relatively short 51 years of life. Although only a half dozen of his operas remain in standard

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The Right Stuff: An Interview with Tenor Thomas Glenn

Opera singers are cautioned to take care in accepting roles due to the potential long-term impact on their voices and, thus, their careers. Over the years, many tremendously gifted singers have sung roles too strenuous for their voices and ended up damaging their instrument, sometimes permanently. It can be taking on a role too early in their career, or taking on the wrong role altogether. Tenor Thomas Glenn, who returns to Festival Opera singing his first Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, is known for being astute in selecting appropriate roles. *The Voice* asked for his thoughts on this critical skill in building a successful career.

FO: How does a singer decide if the role is right? Is it more than just singing the notes?

TG: Many factors go into considering whether a particular role is appropriate. Generally what are considered more dramatic roles should only be taken on if a singer is able to sing a sustained line in the mid to upper reaches of the voice comfortably and without undue pressure. In operas of

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From the Chair: Open Rehearsal a Success

Chorus Master Jim Toland held court with the full Festival Opera Chorus on Sunday, June 13 at the Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church. It was delightfully clear to the opera fans in the audience that Jim is a master teacher, inspiring excellent performance from his singers and never missing an opportunity to teach the audience what was going on with the language and the music. It was also clear how hard the chorus works every year to prepare for the July and August productions.

I was privileged to witness the skill, energy and history that Mr. Toland brings to the Festival Opera Chorus and community. He took us through the major choral pieces for *Madama Butterfly* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Jim has

the appealing talent to be fierce and funny at the same time. His passion for teaching opera is a community treasure and I think the open rehearsal will become an annual event.

Festival Opera is much more than an opera company. The community that loves and supports Festival Opera enriches all of our lives and relationships. The next ways to experience this community are the performances in July and August. The board of directors and our events committee are planning another wine tasting in August, a golf tournament on October 25 and our Holiday Gala at the Claremont Hotel on December 1. Don't miss these opportunities to experience the Festival Opera community.

— Jim Bell ■

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a more dramatic nature, characters must convey text with increasingly heightened emotion. Sometimes your character must "scream" and you have to know how to do it beautifully and not hurt yourself. Furthermore, you have to know how long the role is and if you're able to sustain a full 45 to 60 minutes of singing during a three hour opera.

FO: What would you say are your "right" roles?

TG: *Until now, I have mostly sung Mozart and Rossini in the conventional repertoire. But I have also sung many secondary roles in the bigger houses, as well as modern, angular music, which presents its own challenges. Although I would have liked to have sung my eighty or so Ferrandos before meriting an Edgardo, most of that feeling is largely superstitious. I have the confidence and know what I need to do it well.*

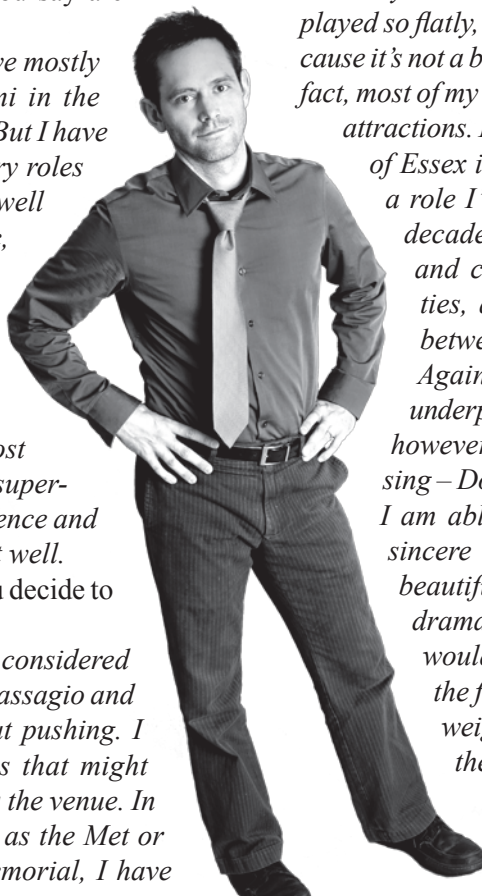
FO: What helped you decide to sing Edgardo?

TG: *As mentioned, I considered my ability to sustain the passagio and do it comfortably without pushing. I know to negotiate things that might tempt me to push, such as the venue. In truly large theaters such as the Met or San Francisco's War Memorial, I have*

to get used to trusting that my voice will carry, even when it feels like a LOT of empty space out there. So I'm glad that for my first Edgardo, we will be in the much smaller Leshner Center.

FO: What other roles that are right for your voice would you like to do?

TG: *I always reply to this question with "Tom Rakewell" (The Rake's Progress). He's such a dynamic character and I lament it's often played so flatly, but few companies mount it because it's not a big audience draw. As a matter of fact, most of my ideal roles are not big audience attractions. I'm currently preparing the Earl of Essex in Benjamin Britten's Gloriana, a role I've wanted to do for at least a decade. The lute arias are beautiful and cater to my baroque sensibilities, and I revel in the high drama between him and Queen Elizabeth. Again, a very attractive, yet grossly underperformed opera. My dream role however, is one I will probably never sing – Don Jose in Bizet's Carmen. I feel I am able to communicate honest and sincere love, and La fleur is the most beautiful aria ever written. But it's too dramatic for me now and much as I would like to sing it, I have to face the fact that I'm only 5'10" tall and weigh a mere 155 lbs. Even if I have the chops to do it, I would need greater physical largesse to be believable as a "military officer"!* ■



Tenor Thomas Glenn sings his first Edgardo in Festival Opera's August production of *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

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repertory today, those that are performed, and perhaps especially *Lucia di Lammermoor*, are universally popular. In capturing the tragic themes of the opera's story, Donizetti's score is particularly representative of the expressive and lyrical Italian bel canto style of his time.

Donizetti collaborated with librettist Salvatore Cammerano on *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and it became only the first of many operas they created together. For Cammerano, the opera was a turning point, the beginning of a very successful career as a librettist. Before his death in 1852, he worked with many other composers, including Giuseppe Verdi, for whom he wrote his final libretto – another highly successful and equally dark tale of rivalry and death, *Il Trovatore*. Cammerano stayed true to the fundamental story of the *Bride of Lammermoor* but added a layer of intrigue by replacing the social-climbing mother with a politically motivated brother, while retaining the dark despair and ultimate madness of the lovelorn Lucia.

The opera is arguably best known for Lucia's "mad scene," the famous coloratura tour de force aria in Act III. Interestingly enough, it was not always the showstopping display of vocal pyrotechnics it typically is today. In his original scoring of the aria, Donizetti included the light and soaring soprano notes to reflect the fragile nature of Lucia's collapsing mind. But it was not until 50 years later, decades after Donizetti's death, that the exceptional vocal skills of French soprano Nelly Melba caused the now-legendary and artistically challenging cadenza to be officially incorporated into printed scores.

In Donizetti's original score, Lucia's final aria was to be accompanied by a glass armonica, an instrument invented by Benjamin Franklin in the eighteenth century. The glass armonica uses rotating graduated-size glass bowls or cylinders, which are then rubbed to generate a haunting and eerie sound at different pitches. Unfortunately, a pay dispute with the instrumentalist required Donizetti to make a last-minute substitution, replacing the glass armonica with a flute for the opera's debut. Over the years since, accompaniment for the aria has been provided by the glass armonica, the flute, or both, and at times is sung acapella without either. Regardless of the accompaniment, the beauty of Lucia's soaring soprano rings with the relentless tragedy of her fate.

A Bel Canto Cast

Festival Opera's August production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* will feature a cast ideally suited for the bel canto requirements of the opera. Soprano Angela Cadelago makes both her company debut with Festival Opera, and her role debut as the tragically doomed Lucia.

A native of Napa, Cadelago has been a Metropolitan Opera Regional Finalist and a member of the Opera Santa Barbara young artists program. She has appeared numerous times with local companies, including Berkeley Opera, where her performance in 2008 as Adina in *L'Elisir d'Amore* was praised as "dazzling... easily mastering Donizetti's intricate bel canto style."

Cadelago will be well-matched by her Edgardo, tenor Thomas Glenn, who returns to Festival Opera following his debut in 2007 as George Gibbs in the West Coast Premiere of *Our Town*. Known for his lovely, clear-toned tenor, Glenn was a San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow in 2004 and 2005. He has since sung numerous roles on the San Francisco Opera mainstage, including the role of physicist Robert Wilson in the 2005 world premiere of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic*, a role he has reprised in subsequent productions around the world.

Cadelago and Glenn will be joined by two Festival Opera favorites – baritone Brian Leerhuber, last seen as the reckless and unapologetic Don Giovanni in 2006, singing the role of Enrico, and bass Kirk Eichelberger, who conveyed ruthless evil as Mephistopheles in last season's *Faust*, returning as Raimondo.

Hauntingly Beautiful

In August, the curtain will rise on a stage designed to evoke the dark and forbidding Scottish highlands. The magic of Donizetti's music and the cast's exceptional voices will help audiences connect with all the romance and tragedy of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. And, as it has for more than 150 years, the transcendent beauty of one of the most beloved of all bel canto operas will surely continue to haunt audiences long after they leave the theater. ■



Set designer Peter Crompton's model for Act I, Scene I of *Lucia di Lammermoor* captures the dramatic foreboding of the Scottish highlands.



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