

Saturdee Opry Links Solo/Tutti Edition / Rip Rense

Saturdee Opry Links is yet again posted for all you dimwits, dullards, ingrates, and those who are listening to the new Taylor Swift album for the tenth time in two days. . .to ignore. It's the Solo/Tutti edition, that is, ten selections that are alternately by solo artists, and by choruses. Fascinating choices, if I do say so, myself. From the obscure Meyerbeer aria that is slam-banged into greatness by Franco Corelli to the final bow, the delicate, poignant, humming chorus from Puccini's "Madame Butterfly." You simply could not spend a better, more enriching, interesting time than to survey this survey. But. . .it requires sitting and listening, contemplating, reading words (you remember reading, yes?), and allowing the musical charm to sneak up on you. Or bowl you over, as the case may be.



Bowl, I mean scroll, down. . .

And further down. . .

A little more. . .

Saturdee Opry Links Overture:

Offenbach: "Cascoletto, ou le Lazzarone" (opera comique in two acts.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTIQOBn4Sog>



Franco Corelli



Renata Tebaldi



Risë Stevens



Michael Spyres

1. (Solo)

It's the solo/tutti edition! Meaning. . .one solo singer, followed by a choral selection! We start with a real bang, courtesy of Meyerbeer and tenor Franco Corelli. . .

Giacomo Meyerbeer was THE most popular opera composer of the 19th century. His grand, sprawling, heavily dramatic works were admired by other adherents to orchestral color and bombast such as Hector Berlioz. Wagner, rumored to have secretly admired (or envied) the Jewish Meyerbeer, campaigned heavily against him---an attitude that much later was taken up by the Nazis. Partly as fallout from this quashing of his work, and partly due to their ambitious scale (typically five acts), Meyerbeer's oeuvre fell into neglect in the later 20th century, though is now more in repertorial evidence. His operas are said to combine German romanticism with Italianate singing---something reflected in the man's very name. "Meyerbeer" is drawn from his given surname, Beer, and Meyer, from his beloved grandfather, is

German. The composer changed "Jakob" to the Italian Giacomo during a lengthy period of study in Italy. Got it? Here we have a whale of a Meyerbeer aria, from one his most performed works, "Les Huguenots"---a five-years-in-the-making epic succeeding his 1836 hit, "Robert le Diable." The plot? Well, as Tom Leher sang, "Oh, the Protestants hate the Catholics, and the Catholics hate the Protestants. . . ." This is one hell of a performance by Corelli---certainly one of his best. Here is the love aria (and precede), "Non loin des vieilles tours... Plus blanche que la blanche hermine"---sung in Italian. Hair-raising.

Setting : An apartment in the chateau of the Count de Nevers, Paris, France, August 1572

Synopsis : Raoul tells of an unknown beauty, whom he rescued from the attentions of a band of students near Amboise, and with whom he was fallen madly in love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuaqj5sf3wU>

TRANSLATION:

https://www.aria-database.com/translations/huguenots01_plus.txt

For those who want to sing along:

<https://theoperadatabase.com/PDFs/Meyerbeer/Tenor/Plus%20blanche%20que%20la%20blanche%20hermine.pdf>

2. (Tutti)

In Donizetti's goofball farce, "Don Paquale," an old fool proves there is no fool like. . .an old fool.

The gist: The doddering old bachelor, Pasquale, wants to marry---just to punish his rebellious nephew, Ernesto, because he is in love with a young penniless widow, Norina. Pasquale reminds his nephew that he has offered to fix him up with a rich bi---er, wealthy woman---on pain of disinheritance if he refuses. Well, Ernesto refuses again, so Pasquale disinherits him. But there is now the problem of a new heir. . . Pasquale consults the devious Dr. Malatesta, who suggests to Norina that she should be introduced to Pasquale as Malatesta's sister, Sofronia, fresh from the convent! A virginal vision of chastity and purity! The idea: they are "married" by a fake notary, leaving Pasquale at the manipulative mercy of Ernesto and Norina! There's more, but you get the manipulative point. In Act II of "Don Pasquale," the servants get together and gossip, which is hardly surprising, given the goings-on at home. This is ""Che interminabile andirivieni." Or "What endless comings and goings!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YGNZ5NGwvY>

TRANSLATION:

<https://www.opera-arias.com/donizetti/don-pasquale/che-interminabile-anti-rivieni/>

(more)

3. (Solo)



Refice

Here is something of a rarity. The 1934 opera, "Cecilia," was written by one Licinio Refice, who is widely thought to have been a good candidate to succeed Puccini, except that he was a priest, and the subject matter of his work was religious. "Cecilia," set in the third century, involves the martyrdom of Cecilia. Though she is the patron saint of music, the opera is largely concerned with her dedication to faith and virginity. You know, like Madonna. Christopher Webber in Opera Monthly notes that despite the religion backdrop, "the duets. . . charting his conversion to Christianity through her chastity, are passionately intense, while Cecilia's scalding martyrdom evokes heady carnality rather than transcendence." Hmm. . . Refice, by the way, died while rehearsing a 1954 "Cecilia" in Rio, with Renata Tebaldi in the lead. Here is Tebaldi with an aria from the opera, "Per amor di Gesu" ("For Love of Jesus"), which is shot through with poignant Puccini-esque beauty, backed with glowing orchestration. I regret that I could find no translation, but the title would seem to indicate that this is a declaration of undying commitment to Christ. Implications of carnality notwithstanding.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uon4EnclxYY>

4. (Tutti)



Nicolai

Here is another (too) rare item, from "The Merry Wives of Windsor," by Otto Nicolai, based on the Shakespeare play. Nicolai was a mid-19th century composer, conductor, who also happened to be one of

the founders of the Vienna Philharmonic. He wrote five operas, of which “Windsor” was the most popular. There would have been more wonderful work from him, but the poor man died of a stroke at only 39, just two weeks after the premiers of “Wives.” This is the brief, but gorgeous choral segment, “Voices From the Forest,” in act III. All the music in this opera is said to be lustrous, with colorful orchestration and great, soaring arias. If the delicate beauty of this passage is an indicator, it must be true. Translation unavailable, but this all has to do, of course, with pranking Falstaff.

Synopsis:

Fluth and Reich are finally let in on the plan by their wives and the four of them decide to take Falstaff for a ride one last time. The knight is expected to show up at a grand masked ball in Windsor Forest. Additionally, Herr and Frau Reich each plan to take advantage of the confusion to marry Anna off to their preferred suitor. Instead, however, she has arranged a nighttime meeting with Fenton in the forest. After the moonrise, the masked ball in the forest begins. At first, Falstaff, disguised as Ritter Herne, is lured by the two women, but then he is frightened by various other guests disguised as ghosts, elves, and insects.

Here are two versions:

1. Portland State University

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhNeZm38rsY> Start at 2:01:09.

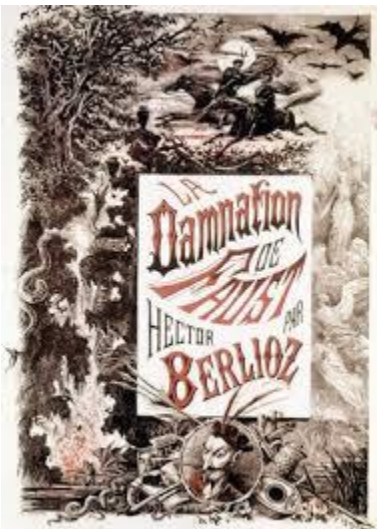
2. Rutgers Opera Theater

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zemw0XWSO4k> Start at 1:38:50.

ANNNNND, yes, here is the corresponding scene in Verdi’s last opera, “Falstaff.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=We0heyFkqXU> (Start at 1:46:20.) With English subtitles.

5. (Solo)



Hector Berlioz’s “The Damnation of Faust” is neither fish nor fowl, oratorio nor opera, but something in between. An opera-torio. This likely accounted for the apathetic public response at its 1846 premiere at the Opera Comique in Paris, deeply disappointing the composer. But the work---for four solo voices, seven-part chorus, large children’s chorus and orchestra---had legs, and is still performed in concert repertory today. In part four of this opera-torio, Faust has seduced, then callously abandoned Marguerite, who still awaits his return. She can hear soldiers and students in the distance, which reminds her of the night Faust first came to her house. But this time he is not among them. Meanwhile,

Faust, embittered for making a deal of eternal youth with Old Scratch, calls upon nature to cure him of his world-weariness. ("Nature immense, impénétrable et fière"). The tenor is Michael Spyres.

Concert performance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDJ6f5EMzX0>

Staged performance by Terry Gilliam!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v62_oleAKto

TRANSLATION:

*Great Nature, impenetrable and proud,
You alone grant a truce to my endless tedium.
On your all-powerful bosom I feel my wretchedness less,
I find again my strength, and think at last I live.
Yes, blow, hurricanes! Cry out, deep forests!
Crumble, rocks! Torrents, surge with your waves!
With your sovereign sounds my voice loves to join.
Forests, rocks, torrents, I adore you!
Worlds that sparkle
To you my desire leaps up
From a heart too vast and a soul changed
By a happiness that flees from it.*

FRENCH:

*Nature immense, impénétrable et fière,
Toi seule donne trêve à mon ennui sans fin.
Sur ton sein tout puissant je sens moins ma misère,
Je retrouve ma force, et crois vivre enfin.
Oui, soufflez, ouragans! Criez, forêts profondes!
Croulez, rochers! Torrents, précipitez vos ondes!
À vos bruits souverains ma voix aime à s'unir.
Forêts, rochers, torrents, je vous adore!
Mondes, qui scintillez,
Vers vous s'élance le désir
D'un cœur trop vaste et d'une âme altérée
D'un bonheur qui la fuit.*

(more)

6. (Tutti)



Leoncavallo's "Il Pagliacci" probably contains the ultimate opera stereotype, that of the crying clown. It is duly exalted for the "greatest hit" aria, "Vesti La Giubba," and the fabulous, disarming prologue, "Si Puo'," in which the character, Tonio, explains that actors might be acting, but they are acting with true feeling universal to everyone: *So you will see love, as real as human beings' love / You will see the sad fruit of hate / You will hear agonies of grief / cries of rage and bitter laughter!* But there is more wonderful fare in the opera, of course, and one such moment is the bell chorus. In act one, villagers suggest that members of a visiting acting troupe go drinking at a tavern. Canio and Beppe accept, but Tonio stays behind. The villagers tease Canio that Tonio is planning an affair with his wife, Nedda. Uh-oh. Not something to joke about! Canio warns everyone that while he may act the foolish husband in the play they are about to see, in real life he would never tolerate any man making a pass at Nedda. A villager asks if Canio really suspects Nedda of straying. He says no, and sweetly kisses wifey-poo on her sweating forehead. As the church bells ring vespers, he and Beppe leave for the tavern, leaving Nedda alone. *Let us go! Let us go! / Ding dong, the vespers sound. . .*

Here is a concert performance of the bell chorus, "Din Don. . .suona vespero."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQMASAgtuHw>

And how it can look on stage:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdxOVDQuvK0>

TRANSLATION:

<https://www.opera-arias.com/leoncavallo/pagliacci/don-din-don-suona-vespero/>

(more)

7. (Solo)



Jonathan Tetelman just debuted at the Met in “Rondine”. . .

Puccini’s 1917 quasi-opera, “La Rondine” (“The Swallow”), famously began in the vein of a Viennese operetta, but wound up as an opera---well, sort of. It’s Puccini Lite, really, with a badly misfired third act---though it does contain two of the composer’s very greatest melodies in “Chi il bel sogno di Doretta” (Doretta’s Dream) and the quartet, “Bevo al tuo sorriso fresco” (“I drink to your fresh smile.”) The gist of the story: Magda, a wealthy courtesan, a “kept woman,” longs for a life of freedom and romance, as does SOL. She disguises herself and hits the Paris nightclubs, falls in love, but in the end, feels unworthy of her suitor, Ruggero, and returns to sugar daddy. 'Twas ever thus. The potential is here for a moving story, but Puccini’s heart did not seem to be in the proceedings, at least in act three. Here is a short tenor aria, a tribute to Páree! This is ““Parigi! È la città dei desideria,” with Jonathan Tetelman as Ruggero, from a current Met production of “Rondine.” With English subtitles.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaKiJSyOirM>

ANNND. . . just for fun, here is another Puccini tribute to another city---Florence! From “Gianni Schicchi,” which premiered a year after “Rondine,” this is “Firenze è come un albero fiorito,” or “Florence is like a flowering tree.” Sung by Juan Diego Florez.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrnCltYsF3Y>

(And his studio recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sC8j2PUJKCI>)

Synopsis: After telling his family that he has called for Gianni Schicchi to help them regain their inheritance, he proceeds to sing them a noble song which extolls the virtues of Florence and that Gianni Schicchi embodies all of them.

TRANSLATION:

Florence is like a flowering tree

which in Piazza dei Signori has trunk and branches,

but the roots bring new forces

from the clear and fruitful valleys!

And Florence sprouts and soars

firm buildings and slender towers rise!

*The Arno, before running to its mouth,
sings kissing Piazza Santa Croce,
and his song is so sweet and so sonorous
that to him the streams have descended in chorus!
Thus scholars in arts and sciences descend there
to make Florence richer and more splendid!*

*And from Val d'Elsa down from the castles
welcome Arnolfo to make the tower beautiful!
And let Giotto come from the wooded Mugel,
and the brave merchant Medici!
Enough with narrow-minded hatred and spite!
Long live the nova people and Gianni Schicchi!*
ITALIAN:

*Firenze come un albero fiorito
che in piazza dei Signori ha tronco e fronde,
ma le radici forze nuove apportano
dalle convalli limpide e feconde!
E Firenze germoglia ed alle stelle
salgon palagi saldi e torri snelle!*

*L'Arno, prima di correre alla foce,
canta baciando piazza Santa Croce,
e il suo canto Ã" sÃ- dolce e sÃ- sonoro
che a lui son scesi i ruscelletti in coro!
CosÃ- scendanvi dotti in arti e scienze
a far piÃ¹ ricca e splendida Firenze!*

*E di val d'Elsa giÃ¹ dalle castella
ben venga Arnolfo a far la torre bella!
E venga Giotto dal Mugel selvoso,
e il Medici mercante coraggioso!
Basta con gli odi gretti e coi ripicchi!
Viva la gente nova e Gianni Schicchi!*

8. (Tutti)



Werner Herzog

No grander, more rousing choral operatic sequence comes readily to mind than the “Arrival of the Guests” from Wagner’s early success, “Tannhauser.” The 1845 opera is based on two German legends: Tannhauser, the mythologized medieval German singer and poet, and the tale of the Wartburg song contest (also the basis for Wagner’s later masterpiece, “Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg.”) The story? The struggle between sacred and profane love, and Wagner’s pet theme that runs through all his operas: redemption through love. Here is that sequence, directed by Werner Herzog.

Synopsis:

Act 1, scene four:

The guests assemble in the great hall, singing "Freudig begrüßen wir die edle Halle" (“With joy we greet the noble hall”), take their places in a semicircle, with Elisabeth and the Count in the seats of honor in the foreground.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT5lgmv8eow>

Sing along!

(Search for begrüßen, and start at scene four)

https://www.murashev.com/opera/Tannh%C3%A4user_libretto_English_German

For those uneasy with Wagner for political/philosophical reasons, here is a famous essay by Deems Taylor.

<https://www.bestlibrary.org/files/monster.pdf>

(more)

9. (Solo.)



Here is our weekly concession to the familiar, you will be pleased to know. The great mezzo-soprano Risë Stevens was universally acclaimed as the greatest "Carmen" in Metropolitan Opera history. She certainly played the role enough, a staggering 124 times. She had poise and polish and coquettish elan, on top of a glistening gilded tone. Today, the role is far too often realized with vulgarity, groin-grinding, mostly bare (usually sweaty) breasts, outright sluttishness, thanks to the meddling directors and producers who conflate lurid displays with "empowerment" (a widespread tragedy in feminism and the culture at large.) Stevens would have none of it, I'm sure. She was dedicated to art, not crassness. The lady debuted at the Met in November 1938, as Octavian in Richard Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier," and finished in 1961 after 353 performances in a great variety of roles. She also kind of pioneered the globe-trotting artists of today, way back in 1954, when she sang an evening performance at La Scala in Milan, caught a (propeller) plane to New York and sang a matinee at the Metropolitan Opera the next day. Wow. Ms. Stevens once helped put an entire Metropolitan Opera season back on course after a labor dispute threatened to derail it. Making special note of the millions of Americans who listened to the Saturday afternoon broadcasts, she sent a telegram to President John F. Kennedy asking him to intervene. He did, and the show went on. Finally, Stevens' acclaimed RCA Victor recording of the complete "Carmen," conducted by Fritz Reiner and co-starring Jan Peerce, Robert Merrill and Licia Albanese remains a best-seller and has been continuously available since its original 1951 release. Here is the fabulous Ms. Stevens with the Séguedille (an old Castilian folk song/dance form in triple time) from Bizet's "Carmen." "Près des remparts de Séville," or "Before the ramparts of Seville. . ." What a beguiling melody! Who ever gets tired of it?

Setting: A square in Seville

Synopsis: After Carmen is arrested for fighting another girl in the cigarette factory, Don Jose is assigned to watch her. She sings that she wants to go to her friend Lillias Pastia's inn and insinuates that she would like him to go with her.

Live on stage, in 1947:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5aaZoo6AGg>

Studio recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nz3shlmg0Dk>

Translation:

<https://www.aria-database.com/search.php?individualAria=43>

FINAL BOW: (Tutti)



The SOL solo/tutti edition started with a bang, goes out with a sigh. This is the "Humming Chorus" from Puccini's "Madama Butterfly." (I highly recommend seeing the Met "Live in HD" broadcast of this opera next month; the Anthony Minghella production is stupendous.) Why a humming chorus, sung by people you (according to original stage instructions) never see? Here's why: in the fall of 1900, Puccini sat in a London theater, watching a brand new play, "Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan," by David Belasco (adapted from John Luther Long's 1898 short story.) At one point in the play, Belasco dictated that Butterfly sit in the center of the stage, awaiting the return of her beloved American Lt. Pinkerton, who had pledged to come back to her long before. She does this for an entire night, never sleeping, as the sun sets, the stars come out, and the sun rises. Puccini was spellbound. The staging put all the focus on Butterfly's plight, goodness, trust, innocence. In his mind, the composer decided there and then to write an opera based on the play, and to include the same sequence, but illustrated with music. That music is the "humming chorus." Here are three versions of it. First, a very interesting and touching montage of old Japan footage from the movie version of "Butterfly," and second, how it can look on stage (the Anthony Minghella production), and third, a concert performance.

Movie (start at 1:41:25)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3stgof-xyN0>

Wichita Grand Opera production (start at 1:38:10)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYp9ibaefRI>

Concert Performance:

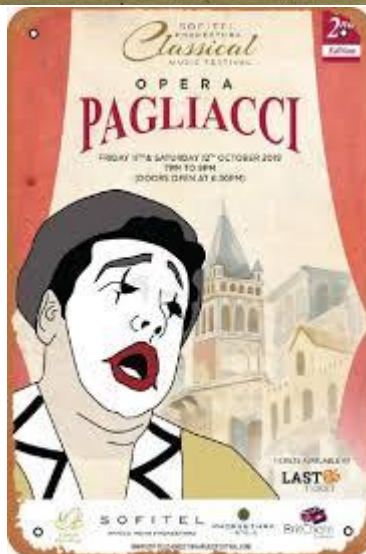
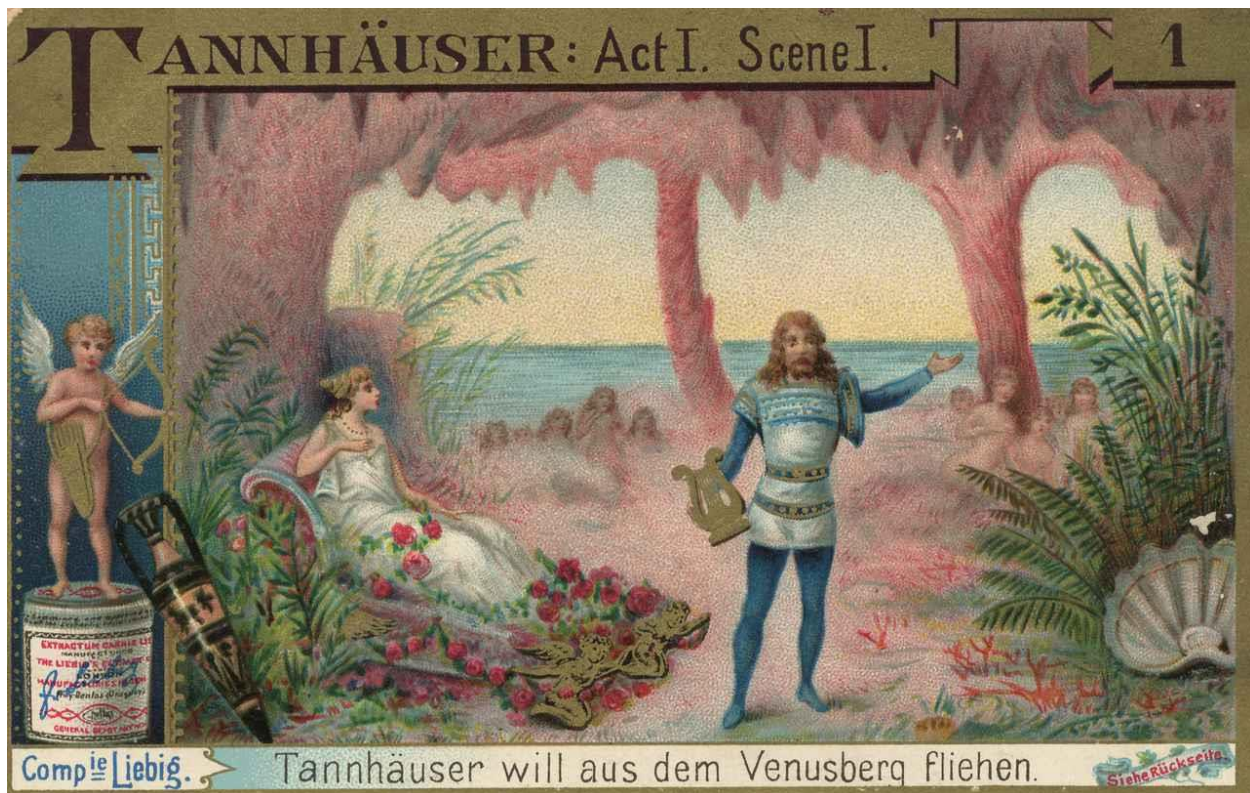
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbQDY0i7_88

(more)





Met production of "Butterfly"



(annnnnnnd...)

