

## OPERA-L Archives

**Subject:** Review by Nino Pantano: NY Grand Opera's BEETHOVEN's 9th at Carnegie Hall  
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Dear List:

Here's a review by Nino Pantano of NY Grand Opera's Beethoven's 9th of Nov. 2nd, 2006, which was printed in The Italian Voice. This is the unabridged version. You can contact the reviewer with your comments directly at: judynino@aol.com

Enjoy! George

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Maestro Vincent LaSelva and the New York Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus Present a Concert including Beethoven's 9th Symphony at Carnegie Hall

### ***A review by Nino Pantano***

Carnegie Hall has been the scene for many New York Grand Opera triumphs. I recall a "sold out" magnificent concert performance of Verdi's Jerusalem (French version of "I Lombardi") a decade ago on a bitter cold snowy winter evening.

I also recall Maestro LaSelva conducting an unforgettable performance of Verdi's Requiem on the centenary of the great composer's death and recently a brilliant "Giovanna D'Arco" at the same Carnegie Hall venue in the Isaac Stern Auditorium (re-named for the great violinist who saved Carnegie Hall from the wrecker's ball!)

Thursday night, November 2nd, was a very special night for music lovers. The basic theme of the New York Grand Opera concert appears to be the redemption of love over loss and triumph over despair. The opening selection was the famous overture to Verdi's "La Forza Del Destino." Maestro La Selva gave a very spirited, unique and passionate account of this stirring piece giving the evening a rousing start. This was followed by the Act 4 duet from La Forza "Invano Alvaro" with tenor Edward Perretti and baritone Fredrick Redd. Mr. Perretti studied with renowned vocal coach Armen Boyajian and as a result, he is as fresh voiced as ever after a singing career of over 30 years. Perretti's top notes rang out with authority, power and élan and he also has an impressive lower register. Perretti was well partnered by the lustrous baritone of Fredrick Redd who had the necessary round middle voice as well as the top needed for this impassioned clash between the holiness of the cloister and the taunting thirst for revenge. The Caruso-Amato 1911 recording is recommended for

listening, and the great American duo of Richard Tucker and Robert Merrill also made the most of this wonderful piece. Perretti and Redd under the steady baton of Maestro Vincent La Selva made "Le Minaccie, I fieri accenti" a wonderful sampling of opera at its best!

This was a night of varied musical adventures for the scene switches to Poland and two important pieces by contemporary Polish composers sung by soprano Maria Knapik. Ms. Knapik was highly praised by The New York Times critic Steve Smith for her appearance with the New York Grand Opera in Central Park on August 25th, as both Nedda in "Pagliacci" and the lead role in "Suor Angelica." (As was Edward Perretti for an outstanding Canio)

At the current performance, Ms. Knapik sang the solo part of Henryk M. Gorecki's Symphony Number 3, Op. 36, second movement which is a Polish prayer to the Holy Mother which was found inscribed on the wall of the prison cell of an 18 year old girl in the Second World War. Ms. Knapik gave a soaring and heartfelt account of this tragic plea and with Maestro LaSelva at the musical helm, one marveled at his grasp and sweep of conducting this challenging modern repertoire.

This somber but impressive work was followed by the melancholy and haunting "Elegia for Soprano and String Orchestra" by Peter Paul Koprowski. This beguiling and intense piece composed in 2005 was to be a companion piece for the Gorecki work. It deals with a mother's lament for her dead son gunned down ending with the anguished cry, "Was it the bullet that killed you my dear son, or did your heart explode?" This was a potent, lyrical score with a rich orchestration that deserves a place in the symphonic repertoire.

The melodic sweep of this dirge was magnificently illustrated by the power and poignancy of Ms. Knapik's lovely full instrument that thrilled from burnished lows to plangent highs and made profound impact. This was a most auspicious and important United States premiere. The composer, singled out from the audience by Maestro LaSelva received an ovation. Many Polish groups from the diplomatic and artistic world were present and others that my sparkling wife Judy and I recognized as neighbors, including opera lovers John and Elzbieta Zawisny from Eagle Provisions in Park Slope, Brooklyn. There were floral bouquets for Ms. Knapik who stems from a family known as the Knapik Family Singers, comparable to the Von Trapp family from "The Sound of Music."

The first part of the program ended with the magnificent "Dies Irae" from the Requiem in C Minor by Luigi Cherubini whose long life (1760-1842) was graced by a prolific output as both composer and teacher. This work with a noble assist from the New York Grand Opera Chorus, I am certain, ranks in the stratosphere of those by Mozart and Verdi.

After the intermission which of course was dominated by the glorious interiors of Carnegie Hall and much excited talk about the superb performance, we spotted famed soprano Teresa Apolei among the glitterati who had an international career of renown, having sung with the magnificent Gigli, Tagliavini, Bechi and Richard Tucker. We chatted with glamorous soprano Patricia Kadvan, who was acclaimed as a star of the Basel Opera. (And also the NYGO) Queens college psychology professor Nancy Hemmes, pianist Mara Waldman and Joseph Puglisi, educator, athlete and who

with his great friend Ponselle biographer the late Enrico Aloi, spent many happy years as visitors at Ponselle's home in Baltimore, the Villa Pace and were judges in many Ponselle vocal competitions. We also chatted with cabaret performer and operatic autograph dealer Bill Safka and the ever gallant Cav.Uff. Aldo Mancusi and his wife Lisa of the Enrico Caruso Museum, just having presented a wall of "Carusiana" to display for Italian History Month at Brooklyn's Borough Hall.

The second part of the program is of course Beethoven's crowning achievement, as the program notes quote musicologist Noel Sullivan, his 9th Symphony "is not describing to us a spiritual history -he (Beethoven) is presenting to us a whole way of life." Ludwig Von Beethoven's life spanned 57 tumultuous years (1770-1827) and ended on his deathbed when he shook his fist towards the heavens during a violent thunderstorm just before dying. Maestro LaSelva conducted this piece with great delicacy and deeply felt spirituality and the heartfelt melodies so full of compassion were never better articulated. Vincent LaSelva found new depths of Beethoven for us. The Maestro touched Beethoven's soul and took us all on that special journey.

Beethoven's music with its whimsy, sport, surprises, passion, repetitive climaxes, and unsurpassable grandeur takes the listener on a roller coaster ride and in this piece the final triumph is life giving oxygen for all humanity. The Maestro was able to conjure up all these complexities and make them the uplifting whole Beethoven was striving for despite the composer's personal suffering and ever growing deafness. The New York Grand Opera played with richness and fervor. The audience knew they were hearing the best and they cheered accordingly. Each and every musician reached dazzling heights.

In the final movement of soloists and chorus, Maria Knapik's soprano caressed each note and sent musical doves to the heart of each listener. Jeeminn Lee whose glorious vibrant voice made for a thrilling Carmen at Brooklyn's Regina Opera recently, blended beautifully with warmth of tone and mezzo mellowness. Edward Perretti's heroic tenor thrilled in the upper echelons and gave his all to accommodate the triumphant qualities Beethoven desired. Fredrick Redd's authoritative and resplendent baritone was truly the herald and the chronicler of triumph as Schiller's "Ode to Joy" prevailed through the Herculean efforts of the entire ensemble.

The Freedom High School Choir "Les Chanteurs" provided just the right fresh youthful sound and helped to give this piece the spectacular finale needed. Their voices were fearless and thrilling with the chiming quality only the young could provide. "Les Chanteurs" director Rosemary Murdy-Haber deserves special praise as does each and every student who allowed us to share with them, the great heart and soul of Beethoven. This group will soon dazzle Salzburg and will rival all choral groups. How lucky we are to have them, a true national treasure! The blending of this amazing group of youngsters with the New York Grand Opera Chorus made for a visceral thrill.

Maestro Vincent LaSelva and the New York Grand Opera Orchestra gave us the gift of great music greatly performed. Maestro Vincent La Selva has in the past, led highly acclaimed performances with the New Jersey Symphony, Julliard Symphony, Bern Symphony, Brno State Philharmonic among others and

in doing so, has proven himself to be an unparalleled symphonic conductor as well as having a best selling CD of Verdi overtures much endorsed by WQXR radio.

We look forward to the next season with our beloved and ever youthful Maestro Vincent LaSelva and as always, to receive "greetings" from his wonderful wife "Danny." Here's to the 34th year of incomparable music and opera from the New York Grand Opera.

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