The major production of UNLV Opera’s 2014-15 season is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s beloved opera The Marriage of Figaro. Based on Beaumarchais’ classic eighteenth-century play, Le nozze di Figaro will be sung in Italian with English supertitles. The UNLV Symphony Orchestra joins us for the production in the Judy Bayley Theatre March 20-22. Double-cast to provide more opportunities for the singers of UNLV Opera, this Mozartean favorite features the upcoming nuptials of valet Figaro (Ianrod Gargantiel and Christophe Kennedy) and maid Susanna (Cassandra O’Toole and Olivera Gjorgoska). Their master, the Count Almaviva (Christopher Withrow and Xavier Brown), has his eye on Susanna instead of his wife, the Countess Almaviva (Lillian Roberts and Sheronda McKee). Meanwhile teen-aged page boy Cherubino (Nicole Thomas and Olivia Sirota) fancies the Countess, and just about any other attractive young woman. So that includes the gardener’s daughter Barbarina (Bethany Smith and Lacy Burchfield) but not spinster Marcellina (Cordelia Anderson and Carrie Wachsberger). Doctor Bartolo (Alex Baskin) and music master Don Basilio (Faustino Solis and Edwin Cerna II) round out the cast, along with judge Don Curzio (Daveon Bolden and Tyler Mortensen) and drunk uncle Antonio (Donovan Crespo and Mark McCreery). Musical preparation will be by UNLV Opera vocal coach and pianist Kosta Popovic.
UNLV Opera sweeps National Opera Association competition

UNLV Opera won 1st place in 2 of the 3 categories at the 2015 National Opera Association Collegiate Opera Scenes Competition. This national event invited 4 finalists in each division to compete at the national convention in Greensboro, North Carolina. DMA students Stephanie Weiss and Lillian Roberts won the graduate Opera Division II with their dramatic scene from Paul Hindemith’s Sancta Susanna (which UNLV Opera presented in its entirety in fall 2013). The competition’s first ever Musical Theatre division was won by undergraduates Xavier Brown and Cheyna Alexander, who presented an excerpt from Stephen Sondheim’s Into the Woods. The incredible Jae Ahn-Benton served as the pianist for both scenes and was key to the dual win.

AWARDS

UNLV Opera director Dr. Linda Lister was named the Winner of the 2014 American Prize in Directing.

Nicole Thomas won the Nevada District Metropolitan Opera Council Auditions, and will advance to the Rocky Mountain Regional Finals in Denver in February.

NEWS

UNLV Opera alum Cecilia Violetta Lopez has landed her first contract with the Metropolitan Opera. She will be a cover for their 2015 production of The Merry Widow.

Lillian Roberts, Linda Lister and Stephanie Weiss after their win at the 2015 NOA Collegiate Opera Scenes Competition.
Divo in Training: Christophe Kennedy

Sophomore Christophe Kennedy made his operatic debut last semester, as the Armchair in Ravel’s The Bewitched Child. Just a semester later, he is playing one of his dream roles, and he’s only nineteen. Soon to debut as Figaro in Le nozze di Figaro, he admits: “I really never thought I’d be doing opera just a little more than a year ago, but with the help of my high school conductor Mr. William McKoy and UNLV voice professor Dr. Alfonse Anderson, they’ve really brought out the talents I had inside of me. The more that my confidence grows with my voice, and the more I understand the beauty of the craft of opera, the more passionate I get about it. Also, the one person I really look up to is Xavier Brown, who was also featured in Divo in Training not too long ago. He’s my idol because he’s not much older than me, yet so gifted and talented, and I aspire to achieve that skill level then exceed it.” Catch Christophe as Figaro this March.

Alumni win Rave Reviews

UNLV Opera alumni are getting rave reviews across the country. Dominick Chenes debuted as Riccardo in Austin Lyric Opera’s Un ballo in maschera, leading the Huffington Post to call him “a breakout star” as well as a “powerhouse lyric tenor.”

Reviewing Opera San Jose’s production of Rigoletto, the Mercury News said: “Soprano Isabella Ivy, one of the company’s new resident singers, grew steadily in her portrayal of Gilda, singing with remarkable ease and purity of tone, reaching up to capture the highest of silvery high notes.”

Cecilia Violetta Lopez also debuted in Rigoletto this season, singing with Opera Idaho. The Idaho Statesman stated: “it was Lopez’s Gilda that was the gem of the evening. A native of Rupert, she dazzled the audience with her rich soprano and gave a remarkable performance that showed a keen acting ability as she made her professional debut in her home state. She has a huge career ahead of her.”

The Play’s the Thing: Opera Workshop Scenes April 24

The famous quote from William Shakespeare’s Hamlet provides the title for this scenes program: The Play’s the Thing. Shakespeare’s writings have been the inspiration for numerous operas and musicals, and UNLV Opera Workshop’s spring performance will highlight some of the musical works based on Shakespearean theatre. Featured scenes will include selections from Verdi’s Falstaff and Nicolai’s The Merry Wives of Windsor. Star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet are the stars in both Bellini’s I Capuleti e i Montecchi and Bernstein’s West Side Story, while The Taming of the Shrew is the source for Cole Porter’s Kiss Me, Kate. Join us April 24 at 7:30 pm in Dr. Arturo Randol-Grillot Recital Hall for an evening that brings together the bard and the opera composer. You can Brush Up Your Shakespeare, as well as your Porter, Verdi, Britten, Bellini, and Bernstein.

“Pair of Children’s Operas Delight”

The Las Vegas Review Journal reviewer Richard Davis had kind words for UNLV Opera’s double bill of Barab’s Little Red Riding Hood and Ravel’s L’enfant et les sortileges. He praised Xavier Brown’s “creamy rich baritone” and the “confident comedic performance” of Nicole Thomas. He wrote: “Olivia Sirota is brilliant as L’Enfant terrible” and “Cassandra O’Toole was magnificently operatic as Le Feu (the Fire).

Congratulations to all of the cast members who played everything from frogs to fire dancers in this bare-bones opera workshop production.
Opera Rebels

UNLV OPERA THEATER

Editor: Linda Lister

UNLV

Save the dates!

Spring 2015 Performances

March 20-22  UNLV Opera Theater:
Le nozze di Figaro by W.A. Mozart

April 24     UNLV Opera Workshop:
The Play’s the Thing
(Music by Verdi, Bellini, Britten, Porter)

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From UNLV Opera’s Fall 2014 production of Ravel’s L’enfant

Left to right:

Olivia Sirota (The Child) and Christopher Withrow (The Clock)

(Photographed by Gianni Becker)