

Photo: Christian Steiner

Our Town composer
Ned Rorem.

The Timeless Message of *Our Town*

Excitement is building for the opening of Festival Opera's first West Coast Premiere. *Our Town*, by noted American composer Ned Rorem, is based on the classic drama by Thornton Wilder. During his lifetime, Wilder consistently refused to have his landmark play translated into

an opera, although he was asked many times. It was not until his nephew, the executor of his estate, became convinced that the play would not be compromised that efforts moved forward. Bringing together librettist J.D. McClatchy and composer Ned Rorem, Tappan Wilder has helped one of the most familiar works in American literature to evolve into a new art form. Indiana University Opera Theater was lead commissioner, presenting the world premiere in early 2006, and Festival Opera was invited to be one of five co-commissioners.

Festival Opera's West Coast Premiere, under stage director Beth Greenberg, features the company debuts of tenors Richard Byrne and Thomas Glenn, as well as the return of soprano Marnie Breckenridge.

"The music sweeps you along in a way the play doesn't, it's this river of music that moves you with the story."

Setting America to Music

The pairing of Rorem and McClatchy is ideal for this work. Rorem is particularly well known for his vocal works and has been called by *Time Magazine* "the world's best composer of art songs." His works for the voice are only a portion of his extensive compositions, which include the 1976 Pulitzer Prize-winning orchestral suite, *Air Music*. McClatchy is a distinguished American poet and long-time Thornton Wilder scholar. Author of five poetry collections and numerous literary essays, he is gaining prominence as a librettist for American opera, including Tobias Picker's *Emmeline* for Santa Fe Opera,

and Saylor's *Orpheus Descending* for Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Now in his early 80s, Rorem has been writing music for more than half a century. Director Beth Greenberg believes that he is literally at the height of his powers, bringing to this work an extraordinary craftsmanship. As she says, "Rorem is a composer who has always remained true to his voice. His sound is very much the

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A Double Debut as Stage Manager

An Interview with Richard Byrne

Arguably the most complex role in *Our Town* is that of the Stage Manager. In virtually every scene, he moves seamlessly in and out of the action, sometimes as narrator, sometimes participant. Director Beth Greenberg describes the character as having omniscient powers; he predicts the future, speaking of it in the manner of one who has been there. Stepping into this key role in the West Coast Premiere will be tenor Richard Byrne. A veteran of major opera houses around the world, including the Metropolitan Opera in the U.S., Byrne feels the role is an especially good fit for his voice. When he heard of Festival Opera's upcoming production, he asked to be considered for the role. It didn't take artistic and music director Michael Morgan long to decide he would be ideal.

This will be Byrne's debut with Festival Opera and it signals a major step for him in another way: the role of Stage Manager will be his first leading role as a tenor. Since leaving the Eastman School

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From the Chair

Two years ago when the subject of *Our Town* first came up, I saw it as a tremendous, if challenging, opportunity for Festival Opera, but it was hard for me personally to know what to expect of the opera. My exposure to American opera was distinctly minimal, having grown up in an Italian and French opera loving family. But I also knew that when I saw the company's production of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* in 2002, I left the theater stunned by the power of the music and the almost physical emotion of the piece.

In thinking about *Our Town*, I had the opportunity to talk with Jerry Kuderna, a long time enthusiast of twentieth century music, whose music appreciation class at Diablo Valley College is often oversubscribed and always well-attended. When he learned about the West Coast Premiere, he was eager to tell me of his personal experience and connection with Rorem's music. But when I asked Jerry how to market the opera, how to encourage people to come, he looked at me and said simply, "First, you have to fall in love with the music." It was a revealing moment. Could I talk about this opera without discovering

what makes Rorem's music touch people?

Over the past year I have consciously expanded my musical experience, challenged myself to listen to new things, explore new musical styles. My eight-year-old daughter does not hear music the way I hear music – she has an openness that comes from fewer expectations and the natural curiosity of a child. By trying to hear music her way, by allowing myself to be influenced by the enthusiasm of others like Jerry, I have happily discovered an appreciation for music outside the norm of my past experience.

Perhaps you are already a devotee of Rorem, of contemporary works, or new operas. But if you are not and are hesitant to experience *Our Town*, if you're used to Verdi and unsure you'll like Rorem, let me be the first to urge you to come. The story is well known and, in fact, speaks to the value of looking beyond the familiar. Like the characters in Grover's Corners who fall into the routines of daily life and miss what's really important, we can fall into a comfortable pattern and forget to be open to the beauty that can be found in new experiences.

— Roberta Emerson ■

The Best-Kept Secret in Walnut Creek

by Bernardo Scarambone, Sherman Clay

The next time you're in downtown Walnut Creek, looking for a fine place to dine or shop, you might hear about one of the best-kept secrets in town. Actually you might even hear it for yourself!

On the corner of Locust and Cypress streets, music lovers have found a place to share their

passion – the Sherman Clay concert salon. Since 1870, Sherman Clay has supported the music and arts community. In the store's elegant music salon, musicians of all types gather for recitals, lectures and master classes, and to spread their love of music. From complete Beethoven sonatas to "Twinkle twinkle little star," you can hear every kind of music each month. These intimate concerts are free of charge but seating is limited, so reservations are appreciated.

Last April, Festival Opera partnered with Sherman Clay to present a wonderful concert of American art songs. The positive response from the community inspired them to schedule a second concert for June 22nd. Singers from Festival Opera will present selections from Bizet's most famous opera, *Carmen*.

So be sure to find yourself surrounded by beautiful music in Walnut Creek's most cozy concert hall soon. And go ahead, spread the secret! Sherman Clay is at 1388 Locust Street, Walnut Creek, CA 94596, (925) 932-0100. ■

Executive Director
Helen Sheaff
welcomes guests to the
Festival Opera concert
at Sherman Clay.



Photo: Michael Harvey

Festival Opera 2007 Preview

Carmen

Carmen

(in French with English supertitles)

Music by Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy
after the novella by Prosper Mérimée

Conductor Bryan Nies
Stage Director Heather Carolo
Set Designer Peter Crompton
Carmen Kendall Gladen
Don José Ryan MacPherson
Escamillo Eugene Brancoveanu
Micaëla Rebecca Garcia

Performances:

July 7, 10, 13 – 8:00pm

Matinee Sunday, July 15 – 2:00pm

Leshar Center for the Arts

Tickets: \$36-100 Call (925) 943-SHOW (7469)
or visit www.festivalopera.com

Background:

Carmen is one of the world's most familiar operas with its memorable music and tale of passion and violence. While *Carmen* is now staged more often than any other opera, its popularity was by no means immediate.

At the time it was written, operas were largely set in the palaces of the noble and wealthy, matching their lifestyle and tastes. *Carmen* burst on the scene an early example of verisimo or "true to life" opera, scandalizing its audience with its violent plot and lower class characters. After its March 1875 debut at the Opera Comique in Paris, the opera was condemned in the press as immoral and the production was soon cancelled. Bizet was bitterly disappointed, and died just three months later, never knowing how immensely popular his work would become.

More than a century later, listeners around the world continue to marvel at Bizet's ability to use his music to bring to life the dramatic story of the tempestuous gypsy, Carmen.

Synopsis:

Workers, soldiers and children fill the town square in Seville as Micaëla searches in vain for her sweetheart, Don José. Just after she leaves, he arrives as the girls from the cigarette factory emerge, including the gypsy, Carmen. She airs her philosophy that "love is a wild bird that cannot be tamed," enticing nearly all the men. Don José pays little attention and, challenged by his indifference, Carmen tosses him a flower as she returns to work. Micaëla returns with a message – and a kiss – from his mother before leaving. Carmen is arrested for fighting with the other girls. Assigned to watch over her, Don José succumbs to her seductive song inviting him to meet her at a local tavern. He allows her to escape, resulting in his own arrest.

At the tavern, the toreador Escamillo arrives boasting of his success in the ring. He is attracted to Carmen, but she ignores him and sends her friends on a smuggling trip, waiting instead for Don José. But when the bugle calls the soldiers back to camp and he prepares to go, she angrily mocks his love. His lieutenant appears looking for Carmen and Don José jealously attacks him. Having broken the law, he has no choice but to join the smugglers.

Hiding among the gypsies, Don José regrets leaving his home and Carmen loses interest in him. Joining her friends in fortunetelling, she foresees her own death. When the gypsies leave Don José to guard their plunder, Micaëla arrives, hoping to convince him to return home to his ailing mother. She is instead forced to hide as Don José fights with Escamillo, who has arrived looking for Carmen. The gypsies separate the men, and Don José leaves with Micaëla, determined to recapture Carmen's love.

Escamillo and Carmen, now lovers, arrive at the plaza for the bullfight. Although Carmen's friends warn her that Don José is lurking, she is nonchalant. When he appears and begs her to return, she spurns him. Blinded by jealousy, Don José stabs Carmen to death as the crowds inside the arena cheer for Escamillo.



Kendall Gladen (mezzo soprano) makes her debut with Festival Opera in the title role. Now a second-year Adler Fellow, Gladen made her 2005 San Francisco Opera debut as Giovanna in *Rigoletto*, and has since appeared in other roles. She has been cast in their *Magic Flute* this fall. Among other roles, Gladen has sung Lily in *Porgy and Bess* at Washington National Opera and Mamma Lucia in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at Sarasota Opera. A former young artist with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Gladen has been a regional finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and received awards from the Sullivan Foundation and the Monsanto Fund.



Eugene Brancoveanu (baritone) debuts with Festival Opera as the toreador, Escamillo. Since completing his second season as an Adler Fellow in 2006, the Romanian-born singer has appeared in many roles for San Francisco Opera and for companies throughout North America and Europe. He originated the role of Marcello in Baz Luhrmann's production of *La Bohème* on Broadway in 2005, for which he received an honorary Tony Award. Brancoveanu makes his debut with New York City Opera as Pandolfe in *Cendrillon* this fall. He is a recent winner of the National Young Opera Singer Competition in Leipzig and the International Music Award in Loenbergl, Germany.



Ryan MacPherson (tenor) sings Don José in his debut with Festival Opera. He has appeared in houses around the US and is sought after for both traditional and contemporary works. He has been particularly praised for his appearances with the New York City Opera, including the roles of Flamand in *Capriccio* and Ferrando (*Così fan Tutte*). A former participant in both the Merola Opera Program and the Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Program, MacPherson received the Richard F. Gold/Shoshana Foundation Career Grant in 2005.



Rebecca Garcia (soprano) returns to Festival Opera as Micaëla, following her 2004 debut in the title role of *Roméo et Juliette* as well as Paquette in *Candide* in 2005. She has appeared as Amina (*La Sonnambula*), Violetta (*La Traviata*) and Gilda (*Rigoletto*) with the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia and as Mimi (*La Bohème*) and in the title role of *Manon* with Chautauqua Opera. Garcia has been a regional award winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and received the Blanche Thebom award in 2004.

Festival Opera 2007 Preview

OUR TOWN

Our Town*(in English)*

Music by Ned Rorem (1923-)

Libretto by J.D. McClatchy

after the play by Thornton Wilder

Conductor Michael Morgan

Stage Director Beth Greenberg

Production Designer Matthew Antaky

Stage Manager Richard Byrne

Emily Webb Marnie Breckenridge

George Gibbs Thomas Glenn

Performances:

August 11, 14, 17 – 8:00pm

Matinee Sunday, August 19 – 2:00pm

Leshner Center for the Arts

Tickets: \$36-100 Call (925) 943-SHOW (7469)

or visit www.festivalopera.com**Background:**

First produced in 1938, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* has long been considered the quintessential American drama. With its seemingly simple story, the play touches audiences with its fundamental message to treasure the time we are given with those we love.

For half a century, composers sought to turn the famous drama into operatic form, but Wilder resisted. It was not until prize-winning poet and librettist J.D. McClatchy approached Wilder's estate that the rights were released and Rorem was selected as composer. In transforming this seminal work, Rorem and McClatchy retained the drama's ability to connect the audience to each character. The clean lines of this deceptively simple story of life and love have been preserved in an intimate, accessible chamber opera.

Through artistic director Michael Morgan, Festival Opera became one of five co-commissioners and secured the right to present the West Coast Premiere. *Our Town* made its international debut at the prestigious Indiana University Opera Theater in 2006.

Synopsis:

As a funeral procession crosses the stage to the strains of an old hymn, the Stage Manager emerges to introduce the audience to Grover's Corners, New Hampshire in 1901. After introducing the two central families, headed by Doc Gibbs and Editor Webb, the Stage Manager serves as narrator in revealing the connections between characters. George Gibbs, star of the high school baseball team, and Emily Webb, the best student in class, are drawn to each other despite their differences. That evening, the church organist's behavior disrupts choir practice, while at their bedroom windows across from each other, Emily and George discuss a homework problem. When Mrs. Gibbs returns from choir practice, she and her husband linger on the moonlit porch reminiscing, while George and Emily gaze at the moon and each other.

Three years later Emily and George are preparing for their wedding day. The Stage Manager again appears, revealing to the audience how the young couple fell in love. He revisits their conversation about what is important to them, what bothers them about each other, and their dreams of the future. In the church on their big day, they confront their hesitations and fears, but their parents encourage them to the altar and the community celebrates.

The scene again turns to the cemetery in the summer of 1913. The souls of the dead, some of them townsfolk seen previously, are gathered to witness the funeral procession. Mrs. Gibbs explains that it is Emily, who has died in childbirth. As the Stage Manager meditates on the progression of life and death, Emily joins the dead. Although she has already begun to detach, she misses her life and wonders if she can return one last time to be part of it. Although the dead warn her it will add to her unhappiness, Emily insists and is escorted by the Stage Manager back to her thirteenth birthday. She is bitterly disappointed to discover that everyone is preoccupied with the small unimportant tasks and routines of the day. Emily returns to the dead, lamenting the lack of understanding of the living and their failure to appreciate how fleeting joy and life truly are.



Richard Byrne (tenor) makes his Festival Opera debut as the Stage Manager this season. Byrne has performed extensively for major companies, including the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Santa Fe Opera and others worldwide. His wide-ranging repertoire includes roles such as Schauard (*La Bohème*), Figaro (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) and Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress*. Byrne can be heard as Ulrich Eisslinger in *Die Meistersinger Von Nürnberg* conducted by Sir Georg Solti on London/Decca Records.



Thomas Glenn (tenor) sings the role of George Gibbs in his Festival Opera debut. A recent graduate of San Francisco Opera's Adler program, he made his SFO debut in 2005 in Busoni's *Doktor Faust*. He returned in 2006 as physicist Robert Wilson in the World Premiere of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*, a role he recreated at both Amsterdam Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. In addition, the native Canadian has sung with the National Arts Center there, and with Central City Opera and Toledo Opera.



Marnie Breckenridge (soprano) returns to Festival Opera following previous appearances as Gilda in *Rigoletto* in 2004 and Cunegonde in *Candide* (2005), a role she subsequently recreated for Prague State Opera. She has appeared in a variety of roles throughout the US including the title roles of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Roméo et Juliette*. She has broad experience in contemporary works, including a critically acclaimed turn as Nelle in Clark Suprynovicz's *Chrysalis* for Berkeley Opera last year and her appearance in the debut of Jake Heggie's new concert opera *To Hell and Back* with Philharmonia Baroque this June.



Beth Greenberg (stage director) returns to Festival Opera after stepping in as stage director during the final week of rehearsals for *Tosca* last season. She has directed numerous productions for New York City Opera as well as companies in Tokyo, Peru and Austria. Greenberg has extensive experience in the development and staging of new operatic works, including *Before the Night Falls* by Jorge Martin and *The Rat Land* by Gordon Beferman, and is equally well-known for her work in theater. Greenberg has been a Fulbright scholar and is a Think Tank Fellow for the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership.

The Timeless Message of *Our Town* ...continued from page 1

sound of America of the 50s and 60s. This has always been Rorem's musical vocabulary." And with it, he invites the listener into the very American *Our Town*, giving it even greater depth and emotion.

Opera – A Cultural Tradition

Our Town is Festival Opera's first premiere but not its first venture into American opera. Earlier productions included a highly acclaimed 2002 production of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* in 2005. The company is excited to be a part of what is becoming a wave of new opera creation. In just the past year alone, the Bay Area has seen a number of premieres from the very large *Doctor Atomic* (by John Adams) at San Francisco Opera, to the rather small *Every Man Jack* (by Libby Larsen) at Sonoma City Opera.

"We need new works for this art form to continue," contends Greenberg. "It's great to do *Madama Butterfly* and *Tosca*, but we also have to support American composers and new American works. I don't know where this art form can go in another generation if we don't do that."

The most familiar operas have their roots in 18th and 19th century Europe, where everyone listened to opera, from royalty to common workers. Greenberg believes that it is important for American operas to become part of people's lives. "The more people see and hear it, the more it becomes part of our cultural tradition. Theater is a mirror of our society," she says.

The Familiarity of *Our Town*

Part of what makes *Our Town* attractive as an opera is its familiarity, the revisiting of a great American story, but in a different way. Choosing a well-known story for opera creation is a long held tradition. As artistic and music director Michael Morgan points out, by the time Mozart wrote *Don Giovanni*, it had already been the basis of a half dozen operas and everyone knew the story.

Our Town is one of the most often-performed and studied plays in America with good reason. As Greenberg describes it, "One of the strategic viewpoints is the routine of seeing young people come of age, get married, die. It's the pattern of our town – of any town. And then suddenly Act III becomes an extraordinary, almost mystical experience. It speaks to what our endeavors are as human beings here on earth." The play reinforces a fundamental truth, that it is

our personal relationships that bring the greatest joy and value to our time on earth.

The opera stays very true to the drama, eliminating only a few scenes and minor characters. In fact, Morgan believes that *Our Town* is even more powerful as an operatic piece. "The music sweeps you along in a way that the play doesn't, it's this river of music that moves you with the story. In a Mozart opera, you can really hear every emotion of the characters in the orchestral music. What the singers do is just gravy. And this is that kind of opera."

The *New York Times* called Rorem's music for *Our Town* "accessible, singable and full of integrity," and others described its "unmistakable Americana flavor" and "passionately expressive" music. Morgan adds, "[the work is] direct and deceptively simple... but simple as only someone who really knows what they're doing is able to do." The intimate theater of the Leshner Center is particularly well suited to *Our Town*'s chamber style, which uses a smaller-size orchestra with fewer strings, a piano and no percussion.

Relevant for All Time

Wilder wrote the play in 1938 with specific instructions: "no curtains, no scenery." As director, Greenberg knew she wanted to respect Wilder's directions, but saw that the opera would also need to be theatrical. "There would need to be some sets, scenery and costumes, but it would have to have the quality of 'no scenery, no curtain,'" she says. While developing her staging, she met with both Rorem and McClatchy.

Production designer Matthew Antaky has achieved a simple setting which delivers both the simplicity of Wilder's intent and the visual interest of a modern drama. Included are set pieces that give a sense of turn-of-the-century America. "But while I wanted it to be looking backwards, I didn't want it nostalgic," says Greenberg. "I wanted it to have some meaning for our contemporary life and for our future." Antaky's design incorporates the shapes of the period but interprets them in modern materials and textures.

Our Town
Act I
A bare stage. A formal procession, in silhouette, proceeds slowly across the stage, singing a hymn.

J.D. McCLATCHY CHORUS NED ROREM

Chorus
O God, our help in
O God, our help in

Chorus
A - gas past, Our hope for years to come, Our life - ter from the stars - y
A - gas past, Our hope for years to come, Our life - ter from the stars - y

Chorus
A - gas past, Our hope for years to come, Our life - ter from the stars - y
A - gas past, Our hope for years to come, Our life - ter from the stars - y

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Page 1 of Ned Rorem
and J.D. McClatchy's
score for *Our Town*.

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A Double Debut as Stage Manager ...continued from page 1

of Music, he has often sung smaller tenor roles, but has generally been known for his lighter baritone roles, such as Rossini's Figaro. Byrne says there were many times over the years when he had a sense he should consider making the change. But it wasn't until two years ago that he made the decision to shift fully from the baritone to tenor repertory. Since then he has focused on making the transition and is excited to have this opportunity to make his debut, not only with Festival Opera, but in a true tenor role.

FO: What kind of signals did you get that you should be singing the tenor repertory?

RB: *I'd always sung some tenor roles, what you could call "baritenor" roles, that bridged the gap. But the turning point was probably when I went to Chicago to audition for the great Sir Georg Solti in 1996. He was looking to cast Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, which has three supporting tenor roles. I began singing my baritone aria and, in his heavy accent, he cried out "STOP! What are you doing?" I was pretty nervous so I said, "Well, I was told to sing something in German." And he said, "Yes, yes, but you're a tenor. OK, we take you. NEXT!" I got to sing in that Meistersinger, which was also recorded.*

FO: And here you are 10 years later, taking a lead role as a tenor.

RB: *I think I reached the final moment at Santa Fe Opera two years ago. It's an outside venue and it was a baritone role and I just felt that it was too low – it was as if the notes were blown into the arroyo somewhere! I was tired of working to always reach*

lower. I've spent the last year studying with a vocal teacher to extend my voice upward. It was hard to rehearse during the day as a baritone and then work at night on being a tenor, so I actually did turn down some work to do this.

FO: Is it rare to transition to a higher voice type?

RB: *I don't think it's that rare. Perhaps it happens more with female voices. Some of it is because decisions are made too soon. If you're young when you go to conservatory, you get put into a box. You might not have a teacher who hears it. And then making a decision to*

change really depends a lot on where a singer is in their career.

FO: How did you get connected to *Our Town*?

RB: *I've known Beth Greenberg since I first walked into NYCO, where I've worked for years singing a variety of roles. I also met Michael Morgan many years ago and had run into him again in Santa Fe. After Beth mentioned she was going out to direct the project, I coincidentally ended up at a dinner party with Tappan Wilder. When I heard him describe the opera and say that he thought the Stage Manager was a great tenor role, I thought the stars were aligning and I should check it out!*

FO: Do you like to sing new operas?

RB: *I've done a lot with NYCO and elsewhere. I like the vocabulary, both dramatically and musically. And when you've sung the ninth production of a really well-known opera, there's not much more you can contribute intellectually as a singer – not in terms of its impact on people. They still enjoy it, it's a good night at the opera, but it doesn't necessarily move them. Something like *Our Town* has a message – that lots of us walk through life not realizing we have to engage, really appreciate, every moment. There's an integrity there and it's something I can really get my head around. For opera to survive as an art form, we have to do something that will affect [the audience]. If we do something that's good for them, we'll do something that's good for the art form too.* ■

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Photo: Gary Beechey, Canadian Opera Company



Richard Byrne as Ned Keene in the Canadian Opera Company production of Britten's Peter Grimes

Alumni Notes: Where Are They Now?

Over the past 16 years, Festival Opera has been dedicated to nurturing the careers of emerging artists. The company has had the privilege of featuring a number of exceptional artists, many of whom have continued on with stellar careers, achieving high honors for their work. A brief update on some of Festival Opera's past stars:

Tenor **Brandon Jovanovich** recently received the prestigious 2007 Richard Tucker Award. This \$30,000 prize is presented each year by the Richard Tucker Foundation to an American singer "poised on the edge of a major international opera career." Jovanovich first sang with Festival Opera in *La Tragedie de Carmen* in 2001 as Don José and returned the following year as Sam in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. The following year, he debuted at Santa Fe Opera and the famous La Scala in Milan. Jovanovich appeared as Levin in the world premiere of *Anna Karenina* with Florida Grand Opera this April.

Baritone **Hector Vasquez** was appointed program director for the Houston Grand Opera Studio a little over a year ago. A major young artist development program, the Studio was founded by composer Carlisle Floyd and HGO's then General Director, David Gockley, who is now at San Francisco Opera. Vasquez has performed a number of roles for Festival Opera, most notably his highly-acclaimed portrayal in the title role of *Rigoletto* in 2004 and Reverend Blitch in 2002's *Susannah*.

Mezzo Soprano **Buffy Baggott** appeared in the role of Schwertleite (*Die Walkure*) with Canadian Opera Company as part of their Ring Cycle in September 2006. The event was in celebration of the grand opening of the new Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts in downtown Toronto. Baggott made her debut with Festival Opera as Charlotte in *Werther* (2000), returning as Suzuki (*Madama Butterfly*) and the title role of *La Tragedie de Carmen*. A former Young Artist at Lyric Opera of Chicago, she has appeared in many productions there over the past few years. In 2006 she was cast in the world premiere of Clark Suprynovicz's *Chrysalis* for Berkeley Opera, which also featured alumni **Marnie Breckenridge**, who returns to Festival Opera this summer in *Our Town*.

Baritone **Bojan Knezevic** recently flew to Mazatlan, Mexico to sing in the international premiere of Gordon Getty's opera *Plump Jack*, a concert performance at the Angela Peralta Theater. Knezevic made his debut with Festival Opera as Marcello in *La Bohème* in 1998 and has since appeared numerous times in Festival Opera productions, most recently as Scarpia in last season's *Tosca*. He will appear this summer with the Mendocino Music Festival in a concert version of *Così fan Tutte*. ■



Our Town ...continued from page 5

Greenberg believes that not only is this true to the playwright's intent, there's value in simplicity. "Everyone has a different antenna for images. The audience brings their own imagination and their own experiences. It's important to allow the audience to get intrigued."

As Thornton Wilder dictated, there will be no curtain to rise on the opening of the performance. A set of chords leads the chorus into a reharmonization of the familiar hymn, *Oh God Our Help in Ages Past*, connecting the audience with the dead at the beginning and again in Act III. This simple musical theme builds into a work of greater complexity, just as the simple story speaks to far more than day-to-day small-town life. *Our Town* leaves audiences with a timeless message about how we live our lives and what is truly important. ■



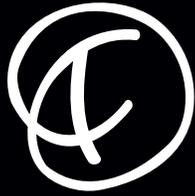
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6:00 p.m.
Sunday, June 24, 2007

Top to bottom:
Brandon Jovanovich
Hector Vasquez
Buffy Baggott
Bojan Knezevic



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Roberta Emerson
Editor

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Rossmoor Festival Opera Club:
Carmen lecture/discussion
Location: Hillside Clubhouse, Rossmoor
- **June 22, 6:00 p.m.**
Sherman Clay Concert
Location: Sherman Clay, Walnut Creek
- **June 24, 6:00 p.m.**
Opera in the Park concert
Location: Civic Park,
Civic and Broadway, Walnut Creek
- ★ **July 7, 8:00 p.m.**
Opening Night: *Carmen*
Location: Leshner Center for the Arts
Pre-curtain lecture in the theatre: 7:00 p.m.
No-host reception following the performance
- **July 10 & 13, 8:00 p.m.**
Evening performances: *Carmen*
Location: Leshner Center for the Arts
Pre-curtain lecture in the theatre: 7:00 p.m.
- **July 15, 2:00 p.m.**
Matinee performance: *Carmen*
Location: Leshner Center for the Arts
Pre-curtain lecture in the theatre: 1:00 p.m.
- **July 17, 7:00 p.m.**
Opera on the Lawn: *Carmen*
Location: Meadowood Napa Valley
Pre-opera seated or al fresco dinner
available. Call (707) 963-3646
- ★ **August 11, 8:00 p.m.**
Opening Night: *Our Town*
West Coast Premiere
Location: Leshner Center for the Arts
Pre-curtain lecture in the theatre: 7:00 p.m.
No-host reception following the performance
- **August 14 & 17, 8:00 p.m.**
Evening performance: *Our Town*
Location: Leshner Center for the Arts
Pre-curtain lecture in the theatre; 7:00 p.m.
- **August 19, 2:00 p.m.**
Matinee performance: *Our Town*
Location: Leshner Center for the Arts
Pre-curtain lecture in the theatre: 1:00 p.m.
- **December 12, 6:30 p.m.**
Festival Opera Guild: Holiday Dinner
Location: Lafayette Park Hotel, Lafayette