

in which it was written? Director Robert McQueen and Designer Christina Poddubiuk are doing exactly that.

As Robert McQueen explains, *Without anyone's acknowledgement that they are directly in the path of imminent destruction, this group of artists meet to discuss and engage in the activity of creation ... an act of profound bravery and, perhaps, denial. This is a house whose appearance is testament to generations of devotion to, and love of art ... a house of such outstanding artistic wealth that it will shortly be a prime target in Hitler's campaign-of-acquisition during the war. This is a house that has the look and feeling of luxury and leisure in a world about to explode.*

McQueen is intrigued to be creating a production whose witty narrative is set on the eve of chaos. It brings to mind a cinematic work like *Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini* or a Chekhov novel in which "nothing much happens except that one world comes to an end and another begins". It is a setting that I feel fits perfectly with Timothy's description of the work as "unflatteringly beautiful with that late Strauss evanescence, which is so heartbreaking".

What would Strauss think of setting the opera in his own time? He plays merrily with anachronism throughout *Capriccio*. The opera dips into many eras: a 16th century sonnet and its 20th century translation, music from the 18th century alongside echoes of Verdi, Wagner, and Strauss himself. Amid such eclectic borrowing, it seems natural to add another contemporary voice to the fascinating mix that Strauss created as he ranged over half a millennium of art and human folly.



Costume Sketch for the Countess and for La Roche, Christina Poddubiuk, Designer

Opera Lovers' Discount



Bolen Books, one of POV's most generous, long-time sponsors, is offering a special discount during the run of *Capriccio*.

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Subscribers' seats are on hold for renewal until April 26. All subscriptions received and processed after April 30 must be charged the new 12% Harmonized Sales Tax. Remember to subscribe early to save on tickets, service charges, and to avoid paying HST. New and renewing subscribers welcome! Watch for our 2010-11 season brochure in the mail or visit the subscription table at performances of *Capriccio* and *Così fan tutte*.

CAPRICCIO
FEBRUARY 25, MARCH 2, 4, AND 6 AT 8 PM. SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, AT 3 PM
THE ROYAL THEATRE. Pre-performance lobby lecture at 6:45 pm (2 pm on February 27)
 An opera in one act, performed without intermission. Sung in German with English surtitles

Events Calendar

COMMUNITY OUTREACH EVENTS

INSIDE OPERA with Robert Holliston.
Sunday, February 14, noon to 1:20 pm.

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, MacLaurin Music Wing, University of Victoria.
 An in-depth presentation and discussion of POV's production of *Capriccio* with Robert Holliston and Timothy Vernon.
 Free of charge. Reservations required. **Phone 250-385-0222 before noon February 12.**

Master Class with J. Patrick Raftery
Tuesday, February 16, 7 pm.

West Lobby, the Royal Theatre, 805 Broughton.
 Observe as J. Patrick Raftery (M. Taupé in *Capriccio*) coaches selected members of the POV chorus. Anna Cal accompanies on piano.
 Free of charge. Phone 250-382-1641 to reserve.

Sense of Occasion

Thursday, February 25, 6:30 pm.

Pre-Performance Reception to celebrate the opening night of *Capriccio*. Gourmet finger foods and wine will be served. Space is limited. Dress is festive. East Lobby, the Royal Theatre.
 \$25 per person. Call 250-382-1641 to reserve with payment.

DONOR EVENTS

Hard Hat Shop Tour

Wednesday, January 27, 5:30 pm.

POV Scene Shop, 631 Pembroke Street. Discover the behind-the-scenes magic of *Capriccio*, meet our stagecraft professionals, and listen to Artistic Director **Timothy Vernon** and Director of Production **Ian Rye** as they discuss the opera and the design concepts. A thank you event for *POV Producers at the Designer level (\$150)* and up and for *President's Circle members*. Invitations have been sent by mail.

Gold Circle Soirée

Saturday, February 6, 7 pm.

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Performance and reception with members of the cast of *Capriccio*. For *President's Circle members at the Gold Circle and above*. Invitations have been sent by mail.

PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE SPONSOR



Working Rehearsal

Saturday, February 20.

1 pm: coffee and cookies. 1:20 pm: Discussion with **David Shefsiek**. 2 pm: Sitzprobe begins. Royal Theatre, 805 Broughton. For all *President's Circle members* and *POV Producers at the Director level (\$250)* and above. Invitations have been sent by mail.



Strauss Capriccio

A Conversation on *Capriccio* with Timothy Vernon

POV's original production of Richard Strauss's *Capriccio* is an extraordinary event, not just because the opera is a gorgeous rarity being produced on stage for the first time in Canada, and not just because it will be recorded for broadcast by CBC – but because our own Timothy Vernon is a "grand-student" of both Richard Strauss (*Capriccio*'s composer and co-librettist) and Clemens Krauss (co-librettist and conductor for the opera's 1942 premiere).

POV's third foray into Richard Strauss, following productions of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Daphne*, is thus a source of particular joy for Timothy.

In 1965 Timothy left Victoria for 10 years in Vienna, where he studied under the guidance of Hans Swarowsky, who had studied conducting with both Strauss and Krauss.

Swarowsky is also responsible for the most notable lines in the *Capriccio* libretto. In 1939, as Strauss and Krauss were working on *Capriccio*, they cast about for an authentic French love sonnet to represent the cause of words in the words-vs-music debate within the opera. Swarowsky, who was working for Krauss as a dramaturge, was charged with finding an appropriate 18th century poem. When his research revealed that love sonnets had gone out of fashion at that time, Swarowsky suggested a sonnet from the *Continuation des Amours* of the 16th century poet Pierre de Ronsard.

Swarowsky translated Ronsard's poem into elegant and lyrical German,



and the delighted Strauss immediately set it to music, first as a Lied for voice and piano, then, with some changes, as the pivotal sonnet whose iterations form the core of the opera.

Swarowsky went on to make his mark as a conductor and as one of the most influential teachers of the century, counting among his students Claudio Abbado, Bruno Weil, Zubin Mehta ... and Timothy Vernon.

Timothy remembers Swarowsky as a man of great charm, with a sly and sardonic sense of humour. *We students could look forward to a bracing dose of having our heroes dumped upon, for Swarowsky was a harsh critic of much standard practice.*

He insisted that musical interpretation should go back to the score and remain true to the text of the composer – a modern approach very much in tune with Strauss's own.

Timothy found Swarowsky to be an outstanding teacher, with encyclopedic knowledge and a rigorous, autocratic approach to analyzing every note of a score for function, meaning and structure – rationalism trumped the emotional side of music. Timothy recalls Swarowsky asking students to name the greatest work by Wagner. The usual suspects emerged, including *The Ring Cycle* and *Tristan und Isolde*. But no – for Swarowsky, the greatest Wagnerian opus was the text of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. For Timothy this



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epitomizes Swarovsky's intellectual and analytical bent, which is what made him such a superb teacher and such a fine translator – as his contribution to the libretto of *Capriccio* makes clear.

Timothy first saw *Capriccio* as a student in Vienna, in a production conducted by one of Strauss's great colleagues and proponents, Karl Böhm, to whom *Daphne* is dedicated.

Capriccio took some time to grow into Timothy's affections: *It doesn't have the immediate éclat of Salome or Elektra, both products of Strauss's early enfant terrible days, nor the upfront sentimental emotions of Der Rosenkavalier. It is a late work, and like the late works of the greatest composers, Capriccio is an astonishing distillation of Strauss's genius. With its limpidity, its lack of anything extraneous to either text or score, the urbane and knowing text, the beautifully constructed scenes, the in-jokes for those who love opera – it is little wonder Strauss considered this Conversation Piece for Music his artistic legacy.*

In fact, even as he was completing *Capriccio*, Strauss was writing to Krauss, *Do you really believe that after Capriccio...something better or even just as good could follow? Is this D flat major [the opera's final key] not the best conclusion to my life's work for the theatre? After all, one can leave only one testament!*

Strauss's last completed opera, *Capriccio* shares a quality of transfiguration – a sense of reaching beyond – with the other works of Strauss's magnificent late flowering, including *Die Liebe der Danae*, the

second Horn Concerto, the 1946 Oboe Concerto, the poignant *Metamorphosen*, and the transcendent *Four Last Songs*.

Timothy again: *The music is unflinching in its inspiration: marvellously witty and wise and ripe, with a terrific sense of delight and of the ineffable evanescence of life itself; it gives off an iridescent flash of vigour and life and humour, and such human and mortal beauty; it is quite consoling.*

As with the greatest opera composers (think Mozart, Puccini, Verdi) Strauss's sense of the theatre is as strong as his musical inspiration. Timothy sees La Roche, *Capriccio's* pragmatic, over-the-top man of the theatre, as something of a mouthpiece for Strauss, advocating for the entire theatrical experience. Strauss obsessed over every aspect of the creative process – witness his fascinating, detailed correspondence with a succession of librettists – Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Stefan Zweig, poor Joseph Gregor (who never quite “got” Strauss), and Clemens Krauss. Strauss was definitely not the kind of composer to take a ready-made libretto off the shelf, stir and add music!

When asked what he would add to the words-vs-music conversation in *Capriccio*, Timothy responds, *Well, the opera is so well structured that there are not a lot of dangling edges. I don't know that I would have come down on either side at the end. Though I might add that with Strauss, the composer becomes the dramaturge. Pace, plot, moments when tensions mount, moments of resolution – everything is moved forward by the music. The composer really is in charge – but he must be inspired by the text.*

Background

How to solve a love triangle? Commission an opera! ... who knew?

At their chateau outside Paris, the Countess Madeleine and her brother the Count host a group of artists, who rehearse the entertainment for Madeleine's birthday and argue passionately about opera. The poet, Olivier, and the composer, Flamand, are rivals for Madeleine's love. Finally she tells them to collaborate on an opera – and she will decide how it ends. But it's not that simple! This is a woman who wants to have her cake and eat it!

Infused with humour and wit, *Capriccio* is both an entertaining love triangle and a luscious satire on the arts. It is sophisticated (Strauss called it a *bonbon for the connoisseur*), and it repays with richness and delight the effort of getting to know it.

Anyone can luxuriate in the gorgeous orchestration and elegant ambience. And even as it probes the nature of love and the meaning of art, *Capriccio* is wickedly funny. Here are wonderful comic characters: a tipsy Italian soprano; a tenor obsessed with his fees; a Count for whom art is but the way into an actress's bed; a poet who is infuriated when the composer ruins his verse by setting it to music; a theatre director who insists the public wants just pretty girls, eye-filling sets, and grandiose special effects; and a prompter, who, by the simple act of falling asleep on the job, can sabotage a play and bring the whole edifice of art tumbling down: *When I sleep I become a sensation. The actors cannot go on speaking, the audience wakes up!*

The knowledgeable musician will find *Capriccio* to be a compendium of operatic styles and a guide to opera history. It brims with musical quotations from Couperin, Gluck, Rameau, Verdi, Wagner – and Strauss, who recycles some of his old tunes and slips a number of in-jokes into the fascinating brew.

The concept of *Capriccio* originated in 1934. Stefan Zweig, the Jewish librettist for Strauss's opera *Die Schweigsame Frau*, had fled Nazi Germany for England. In the British Museum he came upon a little one-act libretto by Giovanni Battista Casti, *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (*First the music, then the words*), which had been set to music by Antonio Salieri and premiered in 1786 in a double bill with Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor*.

Zweig sent a rough sketch to Strauss, but the idea languished until 1939, when Strauss trotted it out again, bringing in Clemens Krauss to help in the creation of *Capriccio*.

Strauss's Time

Who among the younger generation can really imagine a great city like Munich in total darkness, or theatre-goers picking their way through the blacked-out street with the aid of small torches giving off a dim blue light through a narrow slit? All this for the experience of the Capriccio première. They risked being caught in a heavy air raid, yet their yearning to hear Strauss's music, their desire to be part of a festive occasion and to experience a world of beauty beyond the dangers of war led them to overcome all these material problems.

Rudolf Hartmann

Strauss was 78 when *Capriccio* premiered on October 28, 1942 at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, in the midst of World War II. He had completed the score in August 1941 and a few months later moved his family from Garmisch-Partenkirchen to Vienna to protect them from ongoing harassment by Nazi officials – for his family included a Jewish daughter-in-law, Alice, and two beloved grandsons.

Strauss's international eminence as a composer is probably what allowed Alice and her children to survive the war. But he was unable to save Alice's grandmother, who was



Set Model for Capriccio, Christina Poddubiuk, Designer

taken to Theresienstadt concentration camp while he was working on *Capriccio*. Eventually 26 of Alice's relatives would die in the camps. And in February 1942, just months before the *Capriccio* premiere, Stefan Zweig committed suicide.

As the premiere approached, the problem of nightly air raids had to be considered. Since raids usually occurred between 10 and 11 pm, the performance started at 7 pm, and ran in a single extended act without an intermission so that the audience could, with luck, find their way home before the air raids began.

Rudolf Hartmann, who produced the premiere, recalled, *The première was a success, to an extent hardly anticipated by composer, librettist and all those associated with it. Afterwards it was difficult to relinquish the liberating and uniting atmosphere created by the artistic quality of the new work. But outside the blackened city waited, and one's way homewards was fraught with potential danger.*

Capriccio continued to play to sold-out houses in Munich until, almost exactly a year later, the opera house was destroyed by bombs.

The Production

In 1942, the Nazi war machine was operating at full power, grinding its way over Europe. In October, a gorgeous lyric bauble about a flirtatious 18th-century countess putting on a private opera was first performed in Munich.

Bloomberg News

Critics are divided on whether *Capriccio* is frivolous escapism or a subtle defence of art against those who would destroy it. Strauss set the action far away from the war – in a luxurious chateau near Paris at the time when Gluck began his reform of opera, about 1775. Marie Antoinette had just become Queen of France; the French Revolution was yet to come. With its frequent references to such 18th century figures as Gluck, Rameau, and Voltaire, the opera seems firmly lodged in 1775. Yet, given the backdrop against which it was written and Strauss's frequent skirmishes with the Nazi authorities, there is behind the banter a frisson of impending tragedy.

So why not keep this production in the elegant 18th century family home of the Count and Countess, but move it to the time

About the Artists



Robert McQueen has directed an eclectic range of shows, including Vancouver's First-Nations-themed *The Magic Flute*, the Spanish language production of the

musical juggernaut *Mamma Mia* in Mexico City, and the world premiere of *Where Elephants Weep*, Cambodia's first rock opera.



Christina Poddubiuk has over 20 years experience as an award-winning set and costume designer at theatres throughout North America, including the Shaw and Stratford Festivals.



Erin Wall (the Countess) recently debuted at both the Metropolitan Opera and La Scala and joins us between debuts at the Vienna State Opera and Bavarian State

Opera. In 2007 she triumphed at Santa Fe Opera in another great Strauss role – Daphne.



James Westman (the Count) has performed with Lyric Opera of Chicago, the English National Opera, Opéra de Bordeaux, Wexford Festival Opera, San Francisco Opera, San Diego

Opera, and the Canadian Opera Company.



Joshua Hopkins (Olivier) recently debuted at the Met and has performed with Houston Grand Opera, Arizona Opera, and at Carnegie Hall. In 2006 he sang opposite the great French

soprano Natalie Dessay in Santa Fe Opera's *The Magic Flute*.



Kurt Lehmann (Flamand) has performed at Carnegie Hall and with Glimmerglass Opera and companies throughout Canada, including Pacific Opera, where he was most recently seen in

Daphne and Madama Butterfly.

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