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**Date:** Tue, 22 Nov 2005 10:15:04 EST  
**Reply-To:** Operalust@AOL.COM  
**Sender:** Discussion of opera and related issues <OPERA-L@LISTSERV.CUNY.EDU>  
**From:** Operalust@AOL.COM  
**Subject:** World Premiere workshop of Kirke Mechem's THE NEWPORT RIVALS  
**Content-Type:** text/plain; charset="ISO-8859-1"

The University of Maryland Opera Studio and U Md. School of Music bravely took on a workshop presentation of the recently completed KIRCHE MECHEM opera, THE NEWPORT RIVALS, based on Sheridan's THE RIVALS. The work is scheduled for a world premiere by Lyric Opera San Diego in 2007. I came into the final of three performances last night totally blank, only having seen the comedy several times before, never having even heard of Mr. Mechem. He has apparently written much vocal music and numerous operas are listed in his bio, including, Tartuffe, John Brown, and the upcoming Pride & Prejudice. His music is enjoyable, though this work required much in the form of recitative so that the basic story line is not lost.

The scene has been moved from 18th century Bath to late 19th century Newport, Rhode Island, and the height of the American aristocracy or high society. The basics of the play are kept, and indeed, it works quite well in this setting. LEON MAJORS direction is simple, but often comical and enjoyable. The basic set of white fabric covered chairs and tables is even more simplistic, but actually worked very well for this workshop budget setting. The characters were all in white, but clearly in costumes of their rank and stature in society.

This was also my first trip to the Clarice Smith Performing Arts complex at the University of Maryland, and the warm, cozy (orchestra and one-tiered) Ina & Jack Kay Theatre is truly an intimate setting for small scale opera with perhaps about 600 seats (almost half of which were full for this free presentation). Titles were clearly projected on two large video screens to the left and right of the stage at both the orchestra and balcony levels; this was necessary, despite the excellent English diction of the cast, merely for the wordiness of the work, which is crucial to its understanding.

Lydia Larkspur - Brooke Evers(sop.)  
Mrs. Malaprop - Alexandra Christoforakis(mezzo)  
Jack Absolute - Kyle Hastings (bar.)  
Nicholas Astor - Tanner Knight (ten.)  
Julia - Jennifer Matthews(mezzo)  
Sir Anthony Absolute - Christopher Flint(bass-bar.)  
Lucy - Kari Sorenson(sop.)  
Jasper Vanderbilt - Alvaro Rodriguez(ten.)  
Baron von Hakenbock - Terry Eberhardt(bar.)  
Ensemble -Serina Canino, Lee W. Hinkle, Ellen Roche, David Travis

Conductor-Miah Im

My biggest personal problem was being able to transfer the music from the two pianos to how it will sound with an orchestra. There were clear arias, duets, ensembles, all of which could be easily followed; how will this transfer to the production stage with even a chamber orchestra, again the words being so important.

The work starts with a duet where the cousins Lydia and Julia talk of their

loves, a solo following for Lydia where she speaks of her love, Waverly, an opera composer, and how she wants to marry him and live in blissful poverty in a garret in Paris like Bohemians (the strains in the music from La Boheme are overly apparent). The second scene is between the adults where we realize that Mrs. Malaprops malapropisms are the heart of the text, and sadly many of these were lost to this audience. Although, everyone did laugh at "Flatulence witll get you nowhere" in Act II. Her first aria is on the education of young girls (specifically her niece, Lydia), followed by Sir Anthony pontificating on how to raise a son.

Lucy, the servant, who seems to slowly becoming rich from tips as the go-between, sings of Simplicity in a wonderful area with the servants' ensemble.

The scenes basically switch from the Malaprop/Larkspur home (where white tablecloths cover the tables) to the local men's club, where these cloths reverse to red. The first club scene is for most of the men, singing about their women. As in Restoration comedy, everything ultimately gets mixed up and confused between all the lovers, and we go to intermission. The first act was just over one hour, the second much shorter, and basically brings all the action into culmination with three couples happily agreeing to marry.

The young performers were excellent, although I wonder what "older" mezzo with comic style and grace would play Mrs. Malaprop in the fully staged production, as this role is so crucial to the comedy of the work. We have so many capable young singers today, that the bulk of the cast could be easily cast almost anywhere, proof given by the hard work and wonderful presentation of this cast from the Maryland Opera Studio.

ALAN J. SAVADA, CTC  
Washington, DC

"Uns is gegeben, daß wir immer meinen, anderswo wäre das Glück, und so beneiden wir alle, die anders sind."--Reisebuch aus den Österreichen Alpen by Ernst Krenek

translates as:

It is our lot always to imagine that happiness lies elsewhere, and so we envy all things that are different.

"The lure of travel set my heart afire"--Erich Korngold from DIE TOTE STADT

"If you ask me what I came into this world to do, I will tell you I came to live out loud--Emile Zola

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