



KHEDIVAL OPERA HOUSE, CAIRO 1869

# CSO

## November 2019

# Newsletter

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## 150 years of Opera in Egypt and Leoncavallo centennial

November 2019 has 2 unique occasions: the first is National with the celebration of 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of the first opera house not only in Egypt but in Africa and the whole middle-east.

The second is quite international as it is Ruggiero Leoncavallo 100<sup>th</sup> death anniversary.

### 150<sup>th</sup> Opera Birthday

The opera house was built on the orders of the Khedive Ismail to celebrate the opening of Suez Canal. Verdi's opera Rigoletto was the first opera performed at the opera house on 1 November 1869. Ismail planned a grander exhibition for his new theatre. After months of delay due to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Verdi's new opera, Aida, received its world premiere at the

Khedivial Opera House on 24 December 1871.

In the early morning hours of 28 October 1971, the opera house burned to the ground. Cairo has waited till 1988 to benefit from a Japanese grant to inaugurate the actual opera house..

CSO is celebrating this unique occasion on the 14<sup>th</sup> with highlights from Rigoletto, La Traviata, Un Ballo in Maschera, Carmen, Thais etc.. featuring Sopranos **Iman Mostafa, Dalia Farouk, Rasha Talaat**, Mezzos **Jolie Faizy, Amina Khairat**, Tenors **Amr Medhat, Hisham El Guindy, Tamer Tewfik** and Baritones **Mostafa Mohamed, Ezzat Ghanem** accompanied by A Cappella choir. Music Director **Ahmed El Saedi** will conduct.



**Rasha Talaat**

Soprano



**Mostafa Mohamed**

Baritone

## I Pagliacci: La commedia è finita! A unique Experience

On the 15<sup>th</sup> CSO celebrates the centennial of the great verismo composer Ruggiero Leoncavallo. Although he is of course Italian, he is still related to Egypt since he worked for 3 years as a piano teacher and pianist to the brother of Khedive Tewfik Pasha! *Pagliacci* is a masterpiece that grows from the enduring vibrancy of the theatrical tradition, *Commedia dell'Arte*, which had its defining period in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was theatre of convention played by absolute professionals, with a line-up of standard characters such as Arlecchino, Colombina, Pulchinello, Capitano, Servetta and the Zanni figures who rendered improvised text. The influence of *Commedia* on Italian opera is profound, its traditions animating many Italian composers during the 17th and 18th centuries and persisting into the early 19th century. The genius of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* is in its stated ambition to abandon the "vecchie usanze", the old customs of *Commedia*, and to make a theatre based on "truth" – real passions as opposed to stylised archetypes. These real passions are explored in the opera plot in the context of those formal archetypes via the "play within a play" and finally break free of them to make a gesture based on the hyper-reality of the passions. In the end, they defy the formal conventions and break free from the formal constraints of the

situational comedy of *Commedia*. Nevertheless, the *Commedia* characters are mirrors of many of the less comfortable predicaments of human life: illicit love, the sting of unrequited desire in old age, servants outwitting masters and opportunistic charm seducing those with wealth and power. However, in the world of *Commedia*, these all too human discomforts are contained within the two dimensional perspective of the mask, rhetorical practice and formulae, and the lazzi or comic turns – which hold a benign mirror up to nature – through which the audience can see at a safe distance the pains of being human and laugh at them as a cathartic experience. The clown somehow heals our sorrow through sharing it and demonstrating its lurking absurd potentials.

Our concert performance cast includes **Gianni Leccese** as the unhappy clown; **Renata Vari** as his young wife, Nedda; **Francesco Baiocchi** as her lover, Silvio; **Federico Buttazzo** as Beppo, her stage lover in the play-within-a-play, and **Gabriel Manro** as the hunchback Tonio, whose unrequited declaration of love precipitates the tragedy.

The concert, organized in collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo, is conducted by maestro **Fillipo Arlia** with A Cappella Choir under **Maya Gvineria**.

### THE SOLOISTS



**Renata Vari**

Soprano



**Gianni Leccese**

Tenor



**Gabriel Manro**

Baritone

## Romantic Flair

A unique concert in Cairo on the 30th will feature famous American pianist **Alexander Frey** under the baton of maestro **Ahmed El Saedi**.

It may come as a disappointment to some of us to learn that the theme of Brahms's Variations on a theme by Haydn is not by Haydn at all. It is a joyful, poised work, unpretentious and skillfully wrought, in which the purity and grace of Haydn's Classical style (which the tradition-oriented Brahms continued, in his own way), blend seamlessly with the warmth of feeling and sound favored by Brahms and his Romantic contemporaries. The presentation of the solemn, almost march-like theme retains the field-partita's wind-based texture, with pizzicato strings added. Eight compact, enjoyably diverse variations follow. The boisterous Variation 6 has the character of a hunt, with horns firmly to the fore. The finale is a stirring passacaglia, a miniature set of variations within the larger variations. The theme returns at the close, in full orchestral dress and triumphant mode

George Gershwin considered jazz as the voice of the American soul. Rhapsody in Blue occupies a special place in American music: it introduced jazz to classical concert audiences, and simultaneously made an instant



star of its composer. From its instantly recognizable opening whine in the clarinet through its brilliant finale, Rhapsody in Blue epitomizes the Gershwin sound and instantly transformed the 25-year-old songwriter into a composer of "serious" music.

If we compare Dvorák's Eighth Symphony (1889) to some of the great symphonic works written around the same time, the difference will become readily apparent. In the previous year, 1888, Tchaikovsky completed his Fifth (E minor), in which he was grappling with grave questions about Fate and human life. The same year, César Franck introduced his Symphony in D minor, whose complex emotional journey leads from self-doubt to eventual triumph. Johannes Brahms finished his fourth and last symphony (E minor) just a few years earlier (1885) with a magnificent passacaglia that infused that Baroque variation form with genuine Romantic passion. Dvorák composed this

Symphony at his summer retreat in celebration of his admission to the Prague Academy. The composer wanted to produce "a work which is different from the other symphonies, with individual ideas worked out in a new way." With its cheerful and optimistic end, we shall notice that this masterwork is unique and a perfect conclusion to the gala.

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