

New England Opera Club



New England Opera Club Newsletter

Logo by Barbara Winston

April 2016 Program

Date: April 17, 2016
Time: 2:00 PM

Place: Brookline Coolidge Corner Library
31 Pleasant St, Brookline, MA 02446 (617) 730-2380

This month's talk: **The Operatic Stephen Sondheim** Speaker: Angelo Mammano



Stephen Sondheim, when asked about the category into which his works would fall, brilliantly begged the question by answering, "A piece is an opera when it's staged in an opera house, and a musical when it's in a theater." By that standard, Sondheim, whose *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music* and *Passion* are being staged by opera companies on both sides of the Atlantic, is a true opera composer.

Bryn Terfel, Deborah Voigt, Renata Scottò, Renee Fleming, Anne Sofie von Otter and Natalie Dessay are just a few of the many opera singers who are drawn to his music. This spring you can see Voigt in *Sweeney* in Florida or Dessay in *Passion* in Paris.

OR, you can simply visit the Brookline Coolidge Corner Library on Sunday, April 17, and enjoy Sondheim without all the fuss.

Stephen Sondheim



Directions and parking:

- From the west: Take Beacon St. toward Boston. After the intersection of Harvard and Beacon take first left across trolley tracks and left on Beacon St. and immediately get into the right lane. Take first right onto Pleasant St. Library is a short distance on the right.
- From the east (Boston): Take Beacon St. west through Kenmore Square. You will pass a Holiday Inn at the corner of Beacon St. and St. Paul St (about 1.2 miles after Kenmore Square). After this intersection, the second right onto Pleasant St. Library is a short distance on the right.
- Public transportation: Take Green Line C to the Coolidge Corner stop
- Parking: Free (on Sunday) metered street parking.
- Handicapped access: One handicapped space on the street directly in front of the main entrance, and two handicapped spaces under the library. A wheelchair ramp on the left side of the library will take you to the meeting space.
- More information at www.brooklinelibrary.org/about/directions#cc-car

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2016 NEOC Programs

(listings are subject to change)

**April 17: *The Operatic Stephen
Sondheim***

Angelo Mammano, speaker

**May 22: *Young Siegfried - The Hero
It's Hard to Like***

David Collins, speaker

June 5: *What Makes a Great Tenor?*

Erika Reitshamer, speaker

July: *Matzkin Award Dinner*

August: Bill Cotten, speaker

September: *A Bel Canto Program*

Lew Schneider, speaker

October: *Jacopo Pieri Award Banquet*

**November: *Tribute to Jonas
Kaufmann***

Meredith Palmer, speaker

December: Jack Jarzavek, speaker

Letters or Articles to the Editor:

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Annual Membership Dues:

\$35 Single, \$40 Double
(Two persons at the same address)
Mail check payable to NEOC to
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Jacopo Peri Award

*Each year the NEOC honors
a person who has made a
significant contribution to the
local opera scene.*

1982 Eunice Alberts
1983 Schuyler Chapin
1984 Boris Goldovsky
1985 Phyllis Curtin
1986 Donald Gramm
1987 Eleanor Steber
1988 John Moriarty
1989 Ernest Triplett
1990 Ron Della Chiesa
1991 Patricia Craig and
Richard Cassilly
1992 John Balme
1993 Richard Conrad
1994 Susan Stone
1995 Robert Honeysucker
1996 Scott Brumit
1997 William Miranda
1998 Norman Kelley
1999 D'Anna Fortunato
2000 Jan Curtis
2001 Roland Hayes
(*Posthumously*)
2002 Bradley Pennington
2003 Sharon Daniels
2004 Sarah Caldwell
2005 Jeffrey Rink
2006 Stephen Lord
2007 Randolph J. Fuller
2008 Janice Mancini Del
Sesto
2009 John M. Tischio
2010 Carole Charnow
2011 Federico Cortese
2012 Martin Pearlman
2014 Esther Nelson

To contact NEOC

operainfo@neoperaclub.org

Beloved Arias and Duets, Beloved Voices: Our March meeting

We all have our favorites: favorite operas, favorite arias, favorite artists... And last month's speaker is no exception.

María Iantosca, a N.E.O.C. founding member and past president, has been a major educator within the opera community. By herself and with her husband, Bill Miranda, Maria wrote, spoke and held classes about opera. Hundreds in this area owe their knowledge of opera to her. She brings to life her own love of this art,

On Sunday, March 20, Maria brought in to play for us her personal favorites from her large collections of CD's. She gave us personal insight as to why there are favorites and what makes them so special. We thank her for sharing her operatic favorites with us.

- Felice Kahn

~~~ Stephen Sondheim ~~~

**Stephen Joshua Sondheim**, described by Frank Rich, former New York Times drama critic and political writer (and currently an essayist and editor-at-large for *New York* magazine, as "the greatest and perhaps best-known artist in the American musical theater" was born on March 22, 1930. That means that the winner of an Academy Award, multiple Grammy Awards, and a Pulitzer Prize, is now 86 years old. In terms of output alone, he ranks with the most prolific theatrical composers in history. Sondheim is known principally as the composer/lyricist of many highly successful Broadway shows, but he is also praised as lyricist of *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, and as a film composer, playwright, and screen writer.

Sondheim, who was born in New York City, grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan (*Tea Party-ers beware!*) and, later, on a farm in Pennsylvania. Just as many of us can recall the moment when the wonderful world of opera opened its portals to us, so Sondheim traces his interest in musical theater to attending Jerome Kern's *Very Warm for May* when he was all of nine. Unfortunately, he did not have a very happy childhood. When he was ten years old his father abandoned the family, and when his mother died in 1992 he refused to attend her funeral, thus giving the lie to the "over-doting mother" hypothesis. Oscar Hammerstein I, the accomplished lyricist and playwright, became his surrogate father, and had a profoundly affirmative influence on the young composer.

In 1950 he graduated *magna cum laude* from Williams College in Massachusetts. Subsequently he studied composition with atonalist William Babbitt, who told Sondheim that atonality was not for him - "I don't think you've exhausted your tonal resources yet." How prophetic that statement has proven to be! During this period, Sondheim had what Giuseppe Verdi would call his "galley years" -- lots of struggle and not much recognition. That all ended with *West Side Story* in 1957. He wrote the lyrics - with the ubiquitous involvement of Leonard Bernstein, of course. (In my opinion, the original Winter Garden production has never been equaled for energy and excitement.) In 1959 came *Gypsy*, again no music but superb lyrics! Then in 1962 he gave us *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, music and lyrics- and a "hit"! In the course of a long career, he has had occasional less-than-stellar moments, but the bright lights far outshine the half-beams. These bright lights include *Company* (1973) and *Pacific Overtures* (1976). In 1979 he exceeded even his previous best with *Sweeney Todd*. It continues to be performed not only by professional theater companies, but also by opera companies. In the New York City Opera production, Mrs. Lovett was played by Lowell-born Roz Elias. Boston stagings include one at the Leob Drama Center by Harvard/Radcliffe, which I found to be dramatically superior to the more the more recent extravaganza on Boston's Hemenway Street.

In 1985 Sondheim won the Pulitzer Prize in drama for *Sunday in the Park with George*. I attended a totally absorbing showing in New York by the Roundabout Theatre Company. (As I was leaving the theater, who should be standing in my path but legendary Barbara Cook. We talked about Marilyn Horne and Santa Barbara. It was frosting on the cake!)

The recent PBS presentation of *Sondheim! The Birthday Concert* with Patti La Pone, Audra McDonald, Mandy Patinkin, Elaine Stritch (as we are told, James Levine's favorite Broadway *diva*), and Bernadette Peters, among others, was a delight, visually and aurally. With Patti La Pone's "The Ladies who Lunch" from *Company* and "I'm Still Here" from *Follies* on the same program, the message matched the messenger.

When people ask you, "Where are the tunes in Sondheim?", remind them of *Sweeney Todd*'s "Johanna" and "Not While I'm Around," *Evening Primrose*'s "Take Me to the World," *Merrily We Roll Along*'s "Not a Day Goes By," and "One More Kiss" from *Follies*. It doesn't get better than that!

Angelo Mammano

## Opera Diary

Local Opera and Classical Music, April 2016

April 2, Radio ( 1:00pm) and Hd live broadcast (12:55pm)

**Metropolitan Opera:** *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini

**April 2 & 3, 7:30 pm: *The Essential Ring, part 1***

**Boston Wagner Society:** *Concert performance of excerpts from the Ring's first two operas*

**April 2:** Cary Hall, Lexington, MA | More: 781-523-9009 | [lexingtonsymphony.org/come-to-concerts/concerts](http://lexingtonsymphony.org/come-to-concerts/concerts)

**April 3:** Keefe Center for the Arts, Nashua, NH | More: (603) 595-9156 | [symphonynh.org/events/april-3/](http://symphonynh.org/events/april-3/)

April 3, 10 am

**Coolidge Corner Theater,** 290 Harvard St, Brookline | Paris Opera, *La Damnation De Faust*, Berlioz

More: (617) 734-2501 | [www.coolidge.org/](http://www.coolidge.org/)

April 3, 2:30 pm

**Boston Bel Canto Opera:** *Duo Operatic Concert* - Michelle Trainor, soprano, Giovanni Formizano, tenor, Bradley Pennington, piano | Dante Alighieri Italian Cultural Center, 41 Hampshire St., Cambridge | More: Admission \$21.00, \$18 Seniors and Students | Limited parking adjacent to building, also street parking

**April 15, 16 @ 7:30 pm**

**Boston Baroque:** *The Magic Flute*, Mozart | NEC's Jordan Hall: 290 Huntington Avenue, Boston | More: Call 617-987.8600, or [https://bostonbaroque.secure.force.com/ticket#details\\_a0SU0000002JndnMAC](https://bostonbaroque.secure.force.com/ticket#details_a0SU0000002JndnMAC)

**April 9, 5:00 pm**

**Boston Wagner Society:** *Screening of Tristan und Isolde in concert*, Wagner

Goethe Institute, 170 Beacon Street, Boston | More: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/berlin-philharmonics-digital-concert-hall-simon-rattle-conducts-tristan-und-isolde-tickets-21308069008>

April 9, Radio, 1:00pm

**Metropolitan Opera:** *Simon Boccanegra*, Verdi

**April 10, 2:30 pm**

**Boston Wagner Society:** *Confessions* - Presentation by Erica Miner, former Met violinist

Brookline Public Library, Coolidge Corner branch, 31 Pleasant St., Brookline, MA

More: (617) 730-2380 | [bostonwa.nextmp.net/events/coming-events/](http://bostonwa.nextmp.net/events/coming-events/)

April 16, Radio (1:00pm) and Hd live broadcast (12:55pm)

**Metropolitan Opera:** *Roberto Devereux*, Donizetti

April 23, Radio (1:00pm)

**Metropolitan Opera:** *Otello*, Verdi

Apr 29, May 4, 6, 8, 7:30 pm; May 1 & 8, 3:00 pm

**Boston Lyric Opera:** *The Merry Widow*, Lehár

Shubert Theatre, 265 Tremont Street, Boston | More: 617-542-4912 | 617.542.4912 | [www.blo.org](http://www.blo.org)

April 30, Radio (1:00pm)

**Metropolitan Opera:** *Elektra*, R. Strauss

April 14 - 16, 7:30pm; April 17, 2pm

**Boston University:** *A Midsummer Night Dream*, Britten | More: 617-353-2752 or

[www.bu.edu/calendar/?uid=175370@17.calendar.bu.edu&day=2016-4-16](http://www.bu.edu/calendar/?uid=175370@17.calendar.bu.edu&day=2016-4-16)

April 24, 7:30pm

**Boston Early Music Festival:** *Les Arts Florissants* | Sanders Theatre, 45 Quincy Street, Cambridge |

More: 617-661-1812, [www.bemf.org/orderfms/orderform.htm](http://www.bemf.org/orderfms/orderform.htm)

April 24. 3:00pm

**Chorus Pro Musica:** *Requiem*, Verdi | Symphony Hall, 301 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston | More:

[www.choruspromusica.org/concerts](http://www.choruspromusica.org/concerts)