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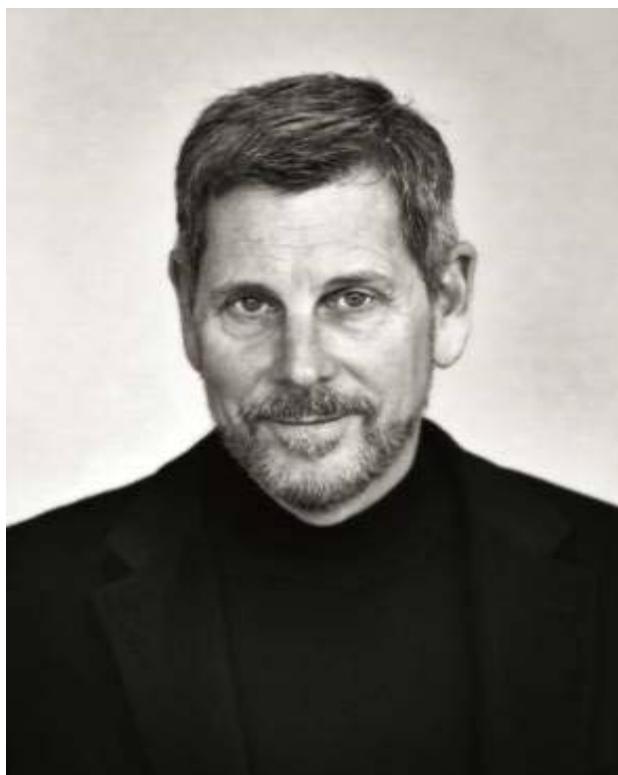
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LARRY HANCOCK **Production/General Manager of Opera San José** **Discusses the 2013-2014 Season**

By Iride Aparicio

Pictures courtesy of Opera San José



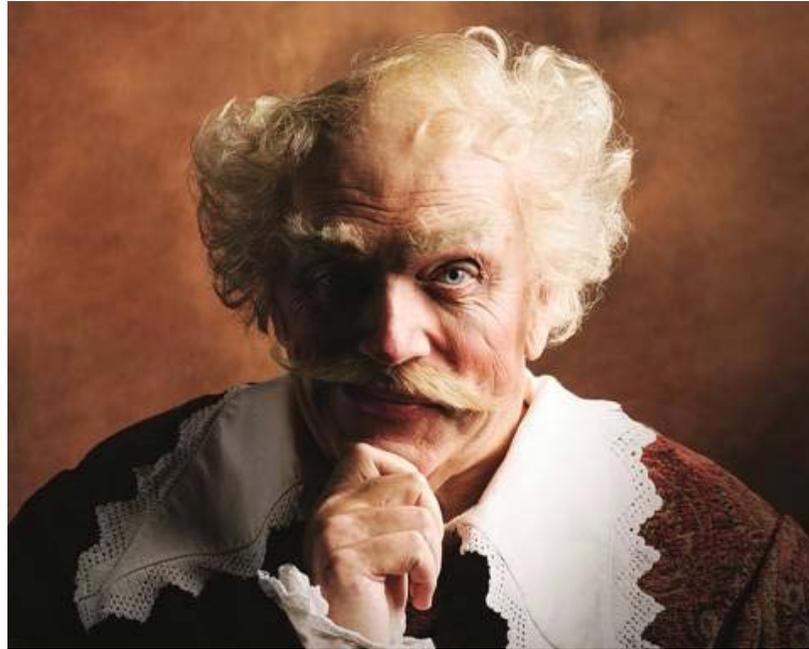
SAN JOSÉ, CA – A founding member of Opera San José staff, **LARRY HANCOCK** had worked for O.S.J. as Director of Public and Media Relations in 1983, as Marketing Director in 1985 and as Artistic Administrator in 1989, before becoming Director of Marketing and development in 1991. Mr. **HANCOCK** served as Director of Production/General Manager of Opera San José during its 2009-2010

Season and continues in that position.

In an exclusive interview, CULTURAL WORLD BILINGUAL discussed with Mr. HANCOCK the 2013-2014 Season of O.S.J., the last for General Director Irene Dalis, founder of the company in 1984, who just announced her retirement effective July 2014.

“Since there are lots of unknowns for the 30th Season” (That will open on September 7, of this year) Mr. HANCOCK tells us at the beginning of the interview, “we will explore what we know. So let’s start with the productions”: Verdi’s masterwork *Falstaff*, Humperdink’s *Hansel and Gretel*, Puccini’s *Madame Bovary*, and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813-1901) FALSTAFF



L. H. “*Falstaff* (written in 1893) was Verdi’s last ópera. Verdi was born in 1813, so to celebrate his two hundredth birthday , we are doing two of his óperas: *Il Trovatore*, which we are presenting until February 24, and *Falstaff* which will be presented next Season.

“*Falstaff* is certainly one of Verdi’s best óperas. It is not to be the finest comic ópera for an Italian composer, *The Barber of Seville* (written by Rossini) is more popular, has a better libretto, and the music is more sophisticated, but *Falstaff* is atonishinly beautiful and well composed. Everybody who listens to *Falstaff* agrees that if not charming, it is a great work of art.

“The source of *Falstaff* is “*The Merry Wives of Windsor*,” a play that Shakespeare wrote at the request of Queen Elizabeth I and was first presented at court. During Verdi’s time, there was a re-discovery of Shakespeare in Italy, because his works were translated to Italian, so when Verdi discovered the poet, he started using his works. The first ópera he wrote based on Shakespeare was *Macbeth*. He then tried to get *King Lear*, and he actually had a libretto for it, but not a note was composed for the ópera because he never found the company who had the right combination of singers to do this stupendously-difficult Shakespeare’s play.”

“Now going back to *Falstaff*. The reason that Elizabeth I wanted Shakespeare to write another play was that in *Henry IV* (A Shakespeare’s historic play) there is a funny character called “Plump Jack.” The queen apparently liked the character so much that she wanted another play with this character, Shakespeare wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for her. In The character of *Falstaff* in Verdi’s ópera was drawn from the combination of the new guy in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and “plump Jack.”

In the opera of the same name, Falstaff is an old knight whose days of glory in the battlefield are now past. Now he is poor and figuring out how to get money so he could continue living the way he is accustomed to live. He decides he is going to get the money from some rich woman who has a husband (He could be her “*paramour*”) so Falstaff picks up two ladies, and writes them love letters thinking that one or the other will succumb to his charms. The problem is that these two ladies are friends and one calls the other to tell her about the letter she received. Together, they decide to teach this man a lesson. It is a fun opera, but we only have done *Falstaff* once because it is very difficult to find a good tenor who could perform *Falstaff*. This time we have a guest artist but I still don’t have his name.”

“So let’s talk about *HANSEL AND GRETEL*.

ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK (1854-1921)
HANSEL AND GRETEL



L. H. “We actually have never done *HANSEL AND GRETEL*. A long time ago we did a much reduced version of the work during the Christmas time, an hour-long version of *HANSEL AND GRETEL*. It was meant for children, and we actually took it into schools. That was about twenty five years ago.

“Since we never did the real ópera, this is our first presentation. The stage director for the production will be LAYNA CHIANAKAS who as you may remember directed our production of *La Voix Humaine*. She came back to San José and accepted a teaching post at S.J. State. She did such a wonderful job in *La Voix*, that we are bringing her back to direct this work and ANDREW WHITFIELD, a new young conductor, will be conducting. He came here after conducting a couple of hundred productions in New York, so both are going to get together and create a wonderful *HANSEL AND GRETEL*.”

“We have not decided yet if we are going to build a new production or if we are going to rent an existing production. If we rent, it is probably going to be one from Saratoga who is very pretty and very traditional. It would be a charming *HANSEL AND GRETEL* with the fairy tale presented just as you expect to see it, with a wicked witch and a candy house. We will have a happy opera for the Holiday Season because it comes in November, and *with* both the director and conductor directing it is going to be grand. Also the music is grand, because Humperdink, its composer, wrote the opera for children but its music for adults. In style, his music resembles Wagner’s.

GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858-1924) MADAMA BUTTERFLY



L. H. “In our 30th anniversary Season we want to do things that we really like so we are going to revive *Madama Butterfly*, and BRAD DALTON who is now directing *Il Trovatore* is going to come back with his *Butterfly* again which was the most remarkable *Butterfly* I have ever seen in my life.

“When the original *Butterfly* play, written by JOHN LUTHER and DAVID BELASCO, was first shown in New York, the reason why everybody came to see it and was the hottest ticket in New York was the lighting. Electric light had never been used to light a play before, so the transitions to get from afternoon to evening, to night time, to dawn, to next day, were what people came to see and what PUCCINI tested in his music. He wanted to keep the same lighting effect in his music, and it was a big deal at the time. Now everybody wants to see it because Cio Cio Sam (known as Madama Butterfly) is such an incredible heroine and the music is so divine.

“A terrific lighting designer can really take the show. The truth is that a good performer can overcome an uninteresting set and that a good performer can overcome uninteresting costumes. But nobody weighs against a bad light designer. If you have bad lighting in *Butterfly*. no artist can overcome that.”

“Some of the performers in this work will be sopranos MELODY KING, who is Japanese. And CECILIA VIOLETA LOPEZ, (Mexican-American). Both will play the lead role of *Butterfly* (O.S.J. uses two different casts for each one of its operas), the *Susukis* (Madama Butterfly’s maid) will be Mezzo-sopranos NICOLE BIRKLAND, and TORI GRAYUN. I only have one tenor’s name which is JAMES CALLON, and the only baritone they have listed for the production is EVAN BRUMMEL,

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791) *DON GIOVANNI*



L.H. *DON GIOVANNI* is going to be directed by conductor GEORGE CLEVE, the most renown of all the local conductors in the Bay Area. He used to be the principal conductor of the San Jose Symphony Orchestra and he conducts most of the Mozart's operas we do because he is the Mozart specialist. We have a new stage director who is coming from Germany where he has worked for ten years at the Wiener Staatsoper (The Vienna State Opera) His name is DANIEL WITZKE. He was recommended to us by a singer who sang the role of Don Giovanni under his direction. We are pleased to have him here.

In a more serious tone, Mr. HANCKOCK discusses the fact that like all the other Operas, around the nation O.S.J. had cuts in funding so there are other things he cannot talk about at this time because they are still in the planning stage.

L.H. "We are still doing a lot of research on sets and costumes because we do not want to reduce our standards, so we are facing the dilemma of how to put our 30th season on the stage with the same glory and panache that we are accustomed to, with less money."

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