

recreation & entertainment

YOUR GUIDE TO WHERE TO GO & WHAT TO DO IN HALTON

Prague opera singers come to Milton

BY LEILA WILLS

It was time to bring out the big guns for Milton Concert Presentations' last show this season. No more symphonic movements or concertos – last Friday's concert was devoted entirely to opera.

Maestro Kerry Stratton returned to St. Paul's United Church with the Toronto Philharmonia, featuring the Prague Opera Collegium. The four soloists were soprano Ludmilla Vernerova-Novankova, mezzo-soprano Jana Levicova, tenor Martin Srejma and baritone Pavel Klecka.

Stratton picked familiar favourites for this performance, including selections from the *Barber of Seville*, *Carmen*, and *Figaro*. The member of the Collegium sang solos, duets, and as a quartet to end the evening, singing Verdi's *La Traviata: Brindisi*.

Memorable performances included Delibes' *Lakme: Viens Malika* sung by Vernerova-Novankova and Levicova. Stratton called it "some of the most gentle, haunting music ever written for a pair of voices."

Klecka showcased the comic nature of the *Barber of Seville* during his solo performance, and Levicova's rendition of Mozart's *Figaro: Voi Che Sapete* had the audience cheering.

Stratton kept the audience laughing as usual, describing St. Paul's most distinct feature: "This [venue] has two notable things, the audience and its proximity."

Stratton made sure the audience got to hear a range of operatic styles, and set up the scene before each song. After a season of instrumental music, the audience was very receptive to the four Prague opera singers.

Stratton will return next season, conducting three concerts. To purchase season tickets, please call (905) 878-4732.



PHOTO BY LEILA WILLS
Maestro Kerry Stratton raises his arms to conduct the Toronto Philharmonia. The four soloists from the Prague Opera Collegium are to his left.

Top 10 Rentals

THE MAGIC OF THE MOVIES AT HOME

This week's Top Ten Movie Rentals brought to you by



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|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. National Treasure | 5. Racing Stripes |
| 2. Assault on Precinct 13 | 6. Meet the Fockers |
| 3. In Good Company | 7. Lemony Snicket's |
| 4. The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou | 8. Blade: Trinity |
| | 9. Ocean's Twelve |
| | 10. Spanglish |

New Releases

Assault on Precinct 13

Ethan Hawke, Laurence Fishburne, Ja Rule, Brian Dennehy

To survive the night, cops and criminals alike will have to unite and fight. A classic head-to-head showdown ignites in *Assault Precinct 13*, an all new update of the 1976 action thriller of the same name.

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou

Bill Murray, Owen Wilson, Cate Blanchett, Angelica Huston

Internationally famous oceanographer Steve Zissou and his crew team Zissou, set sail on an expedition to hunt down the mysterious, elusive, possibly non-existent Jaguar Shark that killed Zissou's partner during the documentary filming of their last adventure.

from the bookshelf

A REVIEW BY DIANE DINEEN

The Silenced Cry

Ana Tortajada, translated by Ezra E. Fitz
St. Martin's Press, 2004, 247 pages

Originally published as *El Grito Silenciado, Mondadori, Spain, 2000*
The Bookseller of Kabul

Asne Seierstad, translated by Ingrid Christopherson
Little, Brown, 2003, 245 pages

Originally published as *Bokhandleren i Kabul, J.W. Cappelens Forlag, Norway, 2002*

In March of 2000, Ana Tortajada, a Spanish journalist and writer, attended a lecture in Barcelona. The speaker told stories of the Afghan people; those still in Afghanistan under Taliban rule and the approximately two million of them who had fled to Pakistan and who were living in refugee camps or in dire poverty. Ana Tortajada was determined to see this situation for herself and within three months she and two female colleagues had organized the trip and travelled to Peshawar, Pakistan.

Fortunately they had local contacts including the speaker from the Barcelona lecture. It quickly became apparent that a women travelling in the Afghani area in Pakistan would face serious constraints. As for the trip to Kabul and others areas of Afghanistan - the Taliban forbade any and all visits by foreigners, especially journalists.

This book is set up as a diary, journaling the daily activities in Peshawar and the planning for the trip to Kabul. Tortajada has a good eye for the daily routine; cooking, sleeping arrangements, bathroom facilities, and the need for a kindly male companion anytime a woman ventures out of doors, the need for a burka to cover head and body. She readily conveys the indignity, awkwardness and the discomfort of an enveloping burka in the dust and heat of northern Pakistan. She discusses politics and social and cultural standards but relates these to daily life rather than treating these topics as abstract and distant.

Tortajada toured refugee camps, medical facilities, clandestine schools, markets and brick making facilities. Brick making is one way the refugees can make a meagre living. Because she had contacts in Peshawar doors and hearts were opened to her.

A short and terrifying trip to Kabul was arranged by her contacts. Although illegal and very dangerous, this trip allowed Tortajada to see the conditions in Kabul. Again doors were opened to her and information freely exchanged.

The book was written in 2000, translated into English in 2004. Her final point in this book is that although the war is over in Afghanistan most of the refugees cannot return as homes, businesses and families have been wiped out. They are likely to stay in Pakistan for the foreseeable future. The situation she observed in 2000 contin-

ues even now.

All Tortajada's royalties from this book are being donated to Afghan relief.

Seierstad was a journalist following the Norwegian troops as they participated in the war in Afghanistan, after the fall of the Taliban and the end of the war she decided to stay in Kabul for a time. Several times she wandered into a bookstore run by an Afghan man. After they got to know and trust one another he invited her home to dinner with his family and later he invited her to stay for a time with his family. This time turned into four months. Seierstad uses a pseudonym, Khan, for the family in order to protect them from any harm that might come from their befriending a foreign journalist.

This family had somehow managed to survive the many government and military changes seen in Afghanistan over the last 30 years. Individuals had been lost, shops had been lost, books had been damaged and burned but the family was still together and just as remarkably, reasonably well housed and fed. Surviving had not been easy and life after the war was still dangerous and precarious.

As the story goes on we learn about censorship, we learn about the destruction of historic and cultural items and we see the post-war chaos that exists in Kabul. As a woman, Seierstad had access to the women and children so she tells us about the arranged marriages, the dashed hopes of professional women not allowed to practice, the difficult circumstances facing children who want to go to school in a damaged and dangerous city. We see the difficulties caused when the husband and father chooses to marry a second wife and bring her into the household, sharing space and him with wife number one.

As a Western woman Seierstad was also able to mingle with the men. We see that they are tied to cultural traditions but most are good, well-meaning men in difficult circumstances. Even male children, whom one might assume to be fortunate, face educational and job difficulties that warp their lives.

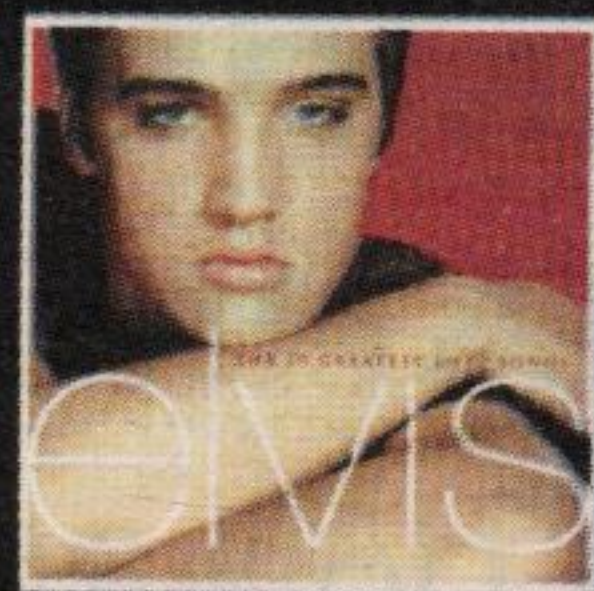
The people and the situations are complex; Seierstad remains sympathetic and never critical.

This book has been a bestseller in Europe and is now doing well in North America. Part of the profits is donated to Afghan relief.

AM 740

prime time radio

All Time Favourites



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★ TONY BENNETT ★ DIONNE WARWICK ★ TOM JONES

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