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## **The Academy of Vocal Arts presents Richard Strauss' CAPRICCIO**

**The fully staged production with piano accompaniment features  
Luke Housner as music director and staging by Dorothy Danner.**

**Philadelphia: Which is more important – the words or the music?** Richard Strauss' brilliant final opera, *Capriccio*, explores this intriguing conundrum at **The Academy of Vocal Arts** for five performances only in AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater from February 20 to March 2, 2010.

*Capriccio*, subtitled "A Conversation Piece for Music" premiered at the Nationaltheater München on October 28, 1942. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the precept "Prima le parole, dopo la musica" (first the words, then the music) had been a guiding principle for opera composers. When in 1786, the composer Antonio Salieri's comic opera *Prima la musica e poi le parole* with libretto by Abbate Giovanni Battista Casti was presented at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna as part of a double bill with Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor*, even Mozart himself began to have his doubts, as views concerning the relationship between poetry and music were no longer as unanimous as they had formerly been. In a letter, Mozart wrote: "I don't know whether the words of an opera ought to be the obedient daughter of the music..."

In the 1930's, when composer Richard Strauss was searching for a libretto for his new opera, German writer Stefan Zweig suggested the Casti libretto, but Zweig was unable to work on it due to political persecution by the Nazis. Strauss turned to an old friend, Clemens Krauss to develop the libretto.

AVA's production will be fully staged and costumed, and accompanied by Luke Housner at the piano. Dorothy Danner, a favorite with AVA artists and audiences alike, will direct.

### **SYNOPSIS:**

At the château of the Countess Madeleine, a rehearsal of Flamand's newly composed sextet is in progress. The poet Olivier and the composer Flamand debate the relative merits of music and words. The theatre director La Roche tells them both that impresarios are necessary to bring their work to life. Olivier has written a new play for the Countess' birthday the next day, and they proceed to a rehearsal.

The Count, teases his sister the Countess that her love of music parallels Flamand's attention to her. In turn, she tells her brother that his love of words explains his attraction to the actress Clairon. The Count is inclined towards brief affairs, but the Countess wants long-lasting love. She cannot decide between Flamand and Olivier. Clairon arrives, and she and the Count read a scene from Olivier's play

Olivier tells the Countess that he means the sonnet for her. However, Flamand has set the sonnet to music and sings it, which appalls Olivier. Flamand declares his love to the Countess and she asks him to meet her in the library the next morning. Refreshments are served as dancers and singers entertain the guests. La Roche describes his two-part birthday entertainment, the "Birth of Pallas Athene", followed by the "Fall of Carthage". He then challenges Flamand and Olivier to create new masterworks and the Countess commissions them to collaborate on an opera.

The Count and Clairon depart for Paris, with the theatre company. In the final scene, as moonlight shines, the Countess learns that both Olivier and Flamand will meet her in the library to learn the ending of the opera. Still undecided, she sings of the inseparability of words and music, and consults her image in the mirror for a decision. The major-domo announces that "Dinner is served", as the opera ends.

## **THE ARTISTS:**

### **LUKE HOUSNER, *Music Director and Accompanist***

A native of western Massachusetts, Luke Housner earned a Master of Music in Vocal Accompanying and Coaching from the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, where he studied with internationally acclaimed vocal coach John Wustman. He received his Bachelor of Music, with a double major in Piano Performance and Vocal Accompanying, from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

Mr. Housner combines vocal coaching with extensive performing, opera assembling, choral preparation and musical direction. During the summers of both 2008 and 2009, Mr. Housner was principal coach and performance pianist for the Astoria Music Festival in Oregon and then went on to coach and musically direct productions of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro* for the Lyric Opera Studio Weimar in Weimar, Germany. During the 2009-2010 season at AVA, serves as music director, principal coach and performance pianist for a conductor-less, fully staged production of Strauss's *Capriccio*. In previous seasons at AVA, he has done the same with Janáček's *Kát'a Kabanová*, Barber's *Vanessa*, Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and Strauss's *Elektra*.

Mr. Housner has been engaged as a guest vocal coach at the Central City Opera Festival in Colorado, Portland Opera's Young Artist Studio, Hong Kong's Academy of Performing Arts, and the Utah Opera Festival. For over eleven years, he has accompanied the Philadelphia Singers, the resident chorale of the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he has performed on various subscription series concerts as pianist, organist and harpsichordist. Mr. Housner has also served as rehearsal pianist and vocal coach for soloists, and has played under the batons of Charles Dutoit, Christoph Eschenbach, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Andrew Davis, and Kurt Masur. Mr. Housner joined the faculties of both The Academy of Vocal Arts and the Curtis Institute of Music in 1996.

### **DOROTHY DANNER, *Stage Director***

In the two decades since leaving her career as a dancer and actress, Dorothy Danner has directed and choreographed more than 150 productions of operas, operettas, musicals, and plays. While equally at home in dramatic works, she is particularly noted for her inventive staging of comic works.

A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Ms. Danner has directed with such companies as Opera Pacific, The Atlanta Opera, The Minnesota Opera, The Manitoba Opera in Winnipeg, Glimmerglass Opera, Virginia Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, New Orleans Opera, and Portland Opera, among others. Her repertoire of staged productions includes *Tosca*, *Postcard From Morocco*, *Albert Herring*, *The Mikado*, *La Cenerentola*, *La grand Duchesse de Gerolstein*, *Wargo's Chekhov Trilogy*, *Candide*, *Rosemarie*, *La traviata*, *Iolanthe*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tender Land*, and *She Loves Me*.

Recent activities include *Man of La Mancha* at New Jersey's famed Papermill Playhouse, scenes, programs, and fully staged productions at Portland State University, New York University, Carnegie Mellon Institute, and with the Young Artists Program of Pittsburgh Opera and Florida Grand Opera. Ms. Danner's staging of "An Evening with Gilbert & Sullivan" for The Boston Pops was televised nationally over PBS.

Other engagements include *Manon* and *The Pirates of Penzance* with Piedmont Opera, *Die Zauberflöte* with Opera Pacific, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for The Cleveland Opera, *The Merry Widow* with Opera Grand Rapids, *La fille du regiment* with The Kentucky Opera, *Man of La Mancha* with Opera Omaha, and *South Pacific* with Utah Festival Opera.

Ms. Danner has also served on the faculties of The Juilliard School and the Curtis Institute of Music.

#### **JAN CORNELIUS, soprano (Countess)**

A native of Houston, Texas, third-year soprano Jan Cornelius is quickly making a name for herself in the opera world today. Ms. Cornelius was most recently named a 2009 semifinalist in the Monserrat Caballé International Vocal Competition in Zaragozo, Spain. There she also had the honor of participating in master classes and a concert conducted by the great soprano herself. In 2009, she was a Second Prize winner in both the Loren Zachary Vocal Competition as well as the Fritz & Lavina Jensen Foundation Competition. She was also a semifinalist in the prestigious Metropolitan Opera National Council Competition. She was a First Place Winner of the 2008 Gerda Lissner Foundation Vocal Competition, and Second Prize recipient in the 2008 Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation Vocal Competition. At AVA, she has performed the roles of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, Violetta in *La traviata*, the title role in *Anna Bolena*, and Silvana in Respighi's *La fiamma*. This season she will perform the Countess in Strauss's *Capriccio* and Mimi/Musetta in *La bohème*.

Ms. Cornelius has participated in young artist programs with the companies of Saint Louis, Chautauqua, Pensacola, Mobile, Birmingham, and Des Moines. Prior to enrolling at the Academy of Vocal Arts, she was a member of Virginia Opera's Spectrum Young Artist Program, where she appeared on the main stage as Frasquita in *Carmen* and Nedda in *Pagliacci*. She also performed Micaela in *Carmen* at Chautauqua Opera in the summer of 2007.

Jan Cornelius attended Louisiana State University and received her master of music at the University of Houston's Moore School of Music.

#### **ALEX LAWRENCE, baritone (Count)**

Alex Lawrence, was born in Boston and studied at Northwestern University in Chicago. For four years, while continuing his studies at Northwestern with renowned baritone Sherrill Milnes and Bruce Hall, he also worked with the V.O.I.C. Experience Foundation, directed by Mr. Milnes and Maria Zouves. Currently, Mr. Lawrence is a third-year artist-in-residence at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, studying with Bill Schuman. With AVA he has sung Malatesta in *Don Pasquale*, Germont in *La Traviata*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and the title role of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Mr. Lawrence was the top prize winner in the 2009 Opera Index Competition, and is the recipient of a scholarship from the American Opera Society of Chicago, as well as encouragement grants from the Licia-

Albanese Puccini Foundation and Opera Index Foundation. He also earned third place in the 2008 and 2009 Gerda Lissner International Vocal Competition and was a finalist in the Martinelli-Pertile competition in Montagnana, Italy and the 2009 Liederkrantz competition general opera division.

In the summer of 2009 Mr. Lawrence made his Tanglewood Festival debut under the baton of James Levine, singing the role of Kothner in Act III of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* in concert as well as Baritone I in a fully staged production of Stravinsky's *Renard*, directed by Mark Morris. He made his professional stage debut in 2006 with Cedar Rapids Opera Theater in *H.M.S Pinafore* and *Susannah*, then joined Des Moines Metro Opera in 2007 as an apprentice artist. Other roles in his resume include Il Conte in *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Cortona, Italy under the auspices of Oberlin in Italy; Tagliaferro in Piccinni's *La Buona Figliola* at the Teatro Piccinni in Bari, Italy and The Marquis in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, along with a variety of assignments in other productions at Northwestern University.

## FACT SHEET

### CAPRICCIO

BY RICHARD STRAUSS WITH LIBRETTO BY CLEMENS KRAUSS  
opera in one act, sung in German with English supertitles

Music Director and Accompanist: **Luke Housner**  
Stage Director: **Dorothy Danner**

### CAST

The Countess, soprano.....Jan Cornelius, Michelle B. Johnson  
Clairon, *an actress*, contralto..... Cynthia Cook, Olivia Vote  
Flamand, *a musician*, tenor.....Noah Van Niel, Zach Borichevsky  
Olivier, *a poet*, baritone..... Christopher Bolduc, Wes Mason  
The Count, *the Countess' brother*, baritone..... Alex Lawrence, Norman Garrett  
La Roche, *director of a theatre*, bass.....Scott Conner, Nicholas Masters  
Monsieur Taupe, tenor..... Sean Arnold  
Italian singers.....Maria Aleida, soprano, Taylor Stayton, tenor  
The Major-Domo, bass.....Zachary Nelson

### PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

February 20, 23, 25, 27 and March 2, 2010 @ 7:30 p.m.

The Helen Corning Warden Theater at AVA

1920 Spruce St. Philadelphia, PA 19103

**Theater is wheelchair accessible**

**Tickets are \$48 adults / \$43 seniors / \$28 students**

**Add \$35 per person for PREMIUM SEATING**

**Special group rates available**

**For more info, contact 215-735-1685 or visit [www.avaopera.org](http://www.avaopera.org)**

The mission of The Academy of Vocal Arts, founded in 1934 by Helen Corning Warden, is to provide tuition-free vocal and opera training of the highest quality, and financial support during training, to exceptionally talented and committed young singers who have the potential for international stature, and to present them in professional performances that are accessible to a wide community.

Gifted singers come from throughout the world to seek the exceptional guidance and training that The Academy of Vocal Arts offers. AVA's four-year program is unique, not only because it is a fully tuition-free institution that focuses solely on operatic training, but also because it has established a niche as an organization that produces opera. Admission is determined by competitive annual auditions, with an average of 8 to 10 singers admitted each year. The total roster of resident artists is purposely kept low and averages 25-30 in total. Those who are accepted receive training equivalent to more than \$70,000 per year. A faculty of individuals who are among the finest in their fields provides intensive training in voice, acting, stage combat, repertoire, languages, and other related subjects necessary for an operatic career.

Over the past seven decades, outstanding singers of international stature have attended AVA, including David Adams, Lando Bartolini, Gwendolyn Bradley, Thomas Carson, Elizabeth Carter, Richard Clark, Dominic Cossa, John Darrenkamp, Joyce DiDonato, Harry Dworkak, Ryan Edwards, Wilhelmina Fernandez, Allan Glassman, Vernon Hartman, Nancy Fabiola Herrera, Luis Ledesma, James Morris, Stuart Neill, John Packard, James Pease, David Poleri, Julien Robbins, Valerian Ruminski, Jane Shaulis, Hugh Smith, Ruth Ann Swenson, Indra Thomas, Richard Troxell, Victoria Vergara, Stephen West, Beverly Wolff, and currently making their mark in the opera world, recent graduates Burak Bilgili, Stephen Costello, Ellie Dehn, Michael Fabiano, Jesus Garcia, Othalie Graham, Eglise Gutierrez, Tracie Luck, Angela Meade, Latonia Moore, Ailyn Pérez, Dongwon Shin, and James Valenti.



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