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The Academy of Vocal Arts Presents Philadelphia Premiere of Verdi's *Oberto*

**January 26, 27, and 31, 2012
Center City and Haverford venues**

Philadelphia: The Academy of Vocal Arts will present the Philadelphia premiere of Giuseppe Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, in concert with orchestra, January 26 and 27 in the Kimmel Center's Perelman Theater and January 31 at The Haverford School. AVA's music director **Christofer Macatsoris** will conduct the AVA Opera Orchestra. Featured in the role of Leonora is AVA soprano **Michelle Johnson**, a 2011 national winner of the prestigious Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions. *Oberto* was written over a four-year period and had its first performance at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, on November 17, 1839. The opera was rarely performed, and did not have its American premiere until 1978.

AVA will present a pre-opera lecture by music director Christofer Macatsoris. The cast will perform selections. The lecture will take place on Wednesday, January 18, 2012 at 5:30 p.m. in AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater, and is free and open to the public. Reservations are required. Those interested should call 215 735-1685.

SYNOPSIS

Oberto takes place in Northern Italy in 1228. Riccardo, the Count of Salin guerra is about to wed Cuniza, the sister of Ezzelino da Romano, but has seduced and abandoned Leonora, daughter of Oberto, Count of San

Bonafacio, who was recently defeated in battle by the Salinguerra. Oberto and Leonora travel to Bassano, where the wedding is to take place, to tell Cuniza. Unwilling to accept her future husband's infidelity, Cuniza calls off the wedding, but Oberto demands revenge. He challenges Riccardo to a duel, and is mortally wounded. Riccardo goes into self-imposed exile and Leonora enters a convent.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

CHRISTOFER MACATSORIS, *conductor*

Maestro Macatsoris began his conducting career in Italy at the Conservatory in Milan. He went on to study conducting privately with such famed maestri as Fausto Cleva, Max Rudolf, and Tullio Serafin, and studied composition with Vincent Persichetti. Among his many performance credits are appearances with **Philadelphia Lyric Opera Company, Pennsylvania Opera Company, San Francisco Opera Center**, and numerous regional opera companies. In 1970, Max Rudolf invited him to The Curtis Institute of Music, where he taught and conducted for seven years. Mr. Macatsoris was the music director of the weekly NBC-TV program, *Opera Theatre*, and was music director and conductor for two seasons with the **Opera at Ambler Festival**. As a pianist, he toured with **Metropolitan Opera** singers in recital programs.

As music director of AVA since 1977, he has led acclaimed performances of *Il tritico*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Don Giovanni*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and *Albert Herring*, which was broadcast on PBS. In addition, many operas received their Delaware Valley premieres at AVA under his baton, including *Idomeneo*, *La finta giardiniera*, *Deidamia*, *Capriccio*, *Un giorno di Regno*, and *Wargo's A Chekhov Trilogy*. Mr. Macatsoris appeared at **The International Corfu Festival**, Greece, in 1981 and 1982, leading performances of *The Rape of Lucretia*, *La sonnambula*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Così fan tutte*. He has conducted in many regional American houses and has been on the conducting staff of **San Francisco Opera Company**. He is in great demand as a lecturer and for master classes which he has conducted at major universities such as Johns Hopkins, Tulane, Loyola of New Orleans and SUNY-Buffalo. He frequently serves as a panel judge for the **National Council Auditions of the Metropolitan Opera**, and earns high praise for his interpretive abilities and total commitment to excellent opera theater. This past season Maestro Macatsoris celebrated thirty years as AVA's Music Director.

MICHELLE JOHNSON, *soprano* from Pearland, Texas, is a fourth-year AVA resident artist. Ms. Johnson is a grand prize winner of the 2011 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She recently won the top prize from the William Matheus Sullivan Foundation and second prize, audience favorite, and WRTI broadcast radio audience favorite in the 2011 Giargiari Bel Canto Competition. Other awards and achievements include first prize in the Gerda Lissner International Vocal Competition, first place at The Marian Anderson Historical Society Scholars Competition, and a grant from the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation, all in 2011. At AVA she has sung

the roles of Giulietta in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, the title role in *Suor Angelica*, Mistress Crane in *The Scarlet Letter*, Countess in *Capriccio*, Leonora in excerpts from *Il trovatore*, Alice Ford in *Falstaff*, and Silvana in *La fiamma*. In 2012 she will sing the title role in *Aida* with Glimmerglass Opera and Leonora in *Il trovatore* with Opera in the Heights. She has participated in the International Institute of Vocal Arts in Chiari, Italy, Tanglewood Music Center, Music Academy of the West, and V.O.I.C.Experience. Ms. Johnson holds a B. M. in Vocal Performance from the New England Conservatory of Music and an Opera Training Certificate from the Boston University Opera Institute.

MARGARET MEZZACAPPA, *mezzo-soprano* from Euclid, Ohio, is a third-year AVA resident artist. Ms. Mezzacappa won the top prize in the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation International Vocal Competition, first prize in the Gerda Lissner Foundation Competition, second prize in the Palm Beach Opera Vocal Competition, third prize at the Loren L. Zachary Foundation Competition, fourth prize in the Giulio Gari Foundation International Vocal Competition, and an encouragement award from the George London Foundation, all in 2011. Ms. Mezzacappa was the winner of the 2009 Giargiari Bel Canto Competition and 2008 Baldwin-Wallace College Concerto Competition. Recently she performed the role of Emilia in *Otello* with the Opera Company of Philadelphia. At AVA she has sung the roles of the Mother's Voice in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*; La Principessa in a concert version of *Suor Angelica*, Frugola in a concert version of *Il tabarro*, Adelaide in *Arabella*, Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff*, Azucena in excerpts from *Il trovatore*, and the First Wife in *The Scarlet Letter*. Ms. Mezzacappa holds a B. M. in Music Performance from Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music, where she sang Public Opinion in *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Baba in *The Medium*, Juno in *Semele*, and Mum in *Albert Herring*.

VIKTOR ANTIPENKO, *tenor* from St. Petersburg, Russia, is a third-year AVA resident artist. Mr. Antipenko studied Choral Conducting at St. Petersburg Conservatory. He sang with the Marijinsky Opera Chorus for five years, with solo roles in *Eugene Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Boris Godunov*, *Khovantchina*, *The Gambler*, *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk*, *The Nose*, *La forza del destino*, *Fidelio*, *Idomeneo*, *King Roger*, and *Benvenuto Cellini*. At AVA he has sung Luigi in a concert version of *Il tabarro*, The Beadle in *The Scarlet Letter*, and Parpignol in *La bohème*. In 2010 Mr. Antipenko made his New York debut in Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* with the New York Metamorphoses Orchestra. Other roles include the Shepherd and the Sailor in *Tristan und Isolde* at Opéra de Lyon and Don Jose in *Carmen* with the Allentown Symphony. This fall Mr. Antipenko will sing the role of Radames in *Aida* with Royal Flemish Philharmonic in the Almere Havenkom Festival.

SCOTT CONNER, *bass* from Olathe, Kansas, is a third-year AVA resident artist. In 2010 he was the Philadelphia district winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. At AVA he has sung Lindorf, Coppélius, Dr. Miracle and Dapertutto in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*; the title role in *Don Giovanni*, Colline in *La bohème*, First Man in *The Scarlet Letter*, Direktor in *Capriccio*, and Oroveso in excerpts from *Norma*. Other roles include the title role in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Nashville and Columbus Opera; Masetto and Il commendatore in *Don Giovanni* with Opera Cleveland; the King in *Aida*, Don Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Nourabad in *The Pearl Fishers*, Wagner in *Faust*, all with Wichita Grand Opera; Mathieu in *Andrea Chenier* with Mobile Opera; Alidoro in *La Cenerentola*, Dr. Grenvil in *La traviata*, both with Opera New Jersey; Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* with Springfield Regional Opera; and Curio in *Giulio Cesare* with Lyric Opera of Kansas City. Mr. Conner holds a B.M. in Vocal Performance from the University of Missouri—Kansas City Conservatory of Music.

THE CAST

Oberto, *Count of San Bonifacio* bass - Scott Conner, Musa Ngquangwana

Leonora, *his daughter* soprano - Michelle Johnson

Cuniza, *sister of Ezzelino da Romano* mezzo-soprano - Margaret Mezzacappa, Chrystal Williams, Olivia Vote

Imelda, *Cuniza's confident* mezzo-soprano - Bettina Schweiger, Sasha Hashemipour

Riccardo, *Count of Salinguerra* tenor - Viktor Antipenko, Mo El Zein, Nelson Ebo

FACT SHEET

***Oberto* in concert**

Premiere: Teatro alla Scala, Milan, on November 17, 1839

Composer: Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto: Temistocle Solera, based on an existing libretto by Antonio Piazza

Thursday, January 26 and Friday, January 27, 2012 at the Perelman Theater
Tuesday, January 31, 2012 at Centennial Hall, The Haverford School
All performances 7:30 p.m.

Christofer Macatsoris, conductor
 The AVA Opera Orchestra
 Sung in Italian with English supertitles

\$60 adults / \$50 seniors / \$25 30 and Under / Students \$10

January 26 and 27 performances: 215 893-1999 or www.kimmelcenter.org

January 31 performance: 215 735-1685 or www.avaopera.org

The Academy of Vocal Arts' 2011 / 2012 Season

Les Contes d'Hoffmann / Offenbach

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Saturday, November 12, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 15, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 17, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Central Bucks South High School

1100 Folly Road, Warrington, PA

Saturday, November 19, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Centennial Hall, The Haverford School

450 Lancaster Ave. Haverford, PA

Monday, November 21, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 22, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

An Evening of Russian Romances

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Tuesday, December 13, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, December 15, 2011 @ 7:30 p.m.

Oberto / Verdi

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

Thursday, January 26, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Friday, January 27, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Centennial Hall, The Haverford School

Tuesday, January 31, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Pelléas et Mélisande / Debussy

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Saturday, February 25, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 28, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 1, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 3, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Jubilate! A Concert of Sacred Music

Haddonfield United Methodist Church

29 Warwick Road, Haddonfield, NJ

Sunday, March 11, 2012 @ 7:00 p.m.

St. Mary's Episcopal Church

104 Louella Avenue, Wayne, PA

6

Saturday, March 17, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

The Church of the Holy Trinity

Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia

Sunday, March 18, 2012 @ 7:00 p.m.

L'elisir d'amore / Donizetti

AVA's Helen Corning Warden Theater

Saturday, April 28, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 1, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 3, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Central Bucks South High School

1100 Folly Road, Warrington, PA

Saturday, May 5, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Centennial Hall, The Haverford School

Tuesday, May 8, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 10, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

Walter K. Gordon Theater at Rutgers/Camden

3rd and Pearl Sts. Camden, NJ

May 13, 2012 @ 2:30 p.m. matinée

Farewell Recital

The Church of the Holy Trinity

Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia

Friday, May 11, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

**Operas: \$60 adults / \$50 seniors / \$25 30 & Under / \$10 students
Add \$35 per person for PREMIUM SEATING / group rates available**

For more information, contact 215-735-1685 or visit www.avaopera.org

THE ACADEMY OF VOCAL ARTS

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 Dworchak, Ryan Edwards, Wilhelminia Fernandez, Allan Glassman, Vernon Hartman, Nancy Fabiola Herrera, Luis Ledesma, James Morris, Stuart Neill, John Packard, James Pease, David Poleri, Julien Robbins, 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, Jan Cornelius, Stephen Costello, Ellie Dehn, Manon Strauss Evrard, Michael Fabiano, Jesus Garcia, Othalie Graham, Eglise Gutiérrez, Bryan Hymel, Takesha Meshé Kizart, Angela Meade, Keith Miller, Latonia Moore, Ailyn Pérez, Dongwon Shin, Taylor Stayton, and James Valenti.

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