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Neal Stulberg, conducting. Photo: UCLA

### **UCLA gives voice to more composers in wider Ring Festival celebration.**

By Carol Jean Delmar

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In a previous OperaOnline.us Commentary, I suggested that Ring Festival LA be expanded to include other composers in addition to Richard Wagner to balance the programming. Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich proposed the same thing, but the Board of Supervisors pushed through a substitute motion and endorsed the all-Wagner event. The “Ring” performances and the festival were distinctly two entities then. Now they appear to have been merged into one, with the “Ring” cycles being the centerpiece of the festival.

The whole enterprise could have been organized with the diversity we suggested, though, which the UCLA Department of Music is now proving thanks to the courageous artistic decision made, I assume, by Neal Stulberg, the UCLA director of orchestral studies who

normally conducts the student orchestra.

On May 27 at 8 p.m. as part of Ring Festival LA, James Conlon will conduct the UCLA Philharmonia. I suggested early on that the “Recovered Voices” composers (composers who were persecuted by the Nazis) be part of the festival, and now they are. There is not a glint of Wagner in this program -- only the music of Franz Schreker, Alexander Zemlinsky and Arnold Schoenberg. I applaud James Conlon for his willingness to be flexible and Neal Stulberg for his sensitivity and for having the fortitude to break the mold.

A highlight of the evening will no doubt be the performance of Schoenberg’s stunning “A Survivor from Warsaw, Op. 46” by the UCLA Philharmonia. Stulberg will act as the narrator. I only hope his interpretation will match Hermann Prey’s rendition (on YouTube) with gripping intensity.

Whether you like Schoenberg’s twelve-tone compositional style or not, the narration over orchestration with chorus creates an emotionally-charged six-minute score that leaves you speechless. The piece pays homage to victims of the Holocaust, the narrator being a concentration camp survivor from the Warsaw ghetto who describes how guards counted and beat Jews until they either died or were transported to death camps.

It is still incomprehensible to me that the Board of Supervisors failed to see the merit of diversifying the festival. I may not attend many of the events, but I do intend to attend this concert which celebrates the wonderfully talented UCLA students who make up the UCLA Chamber Singers, the UCLA Philharmonia and the UCLA University Chorus. This concert will give them the opportunity to perform under the motivating direction of James Conlon, and the evening will truly forge a bond between the UCLA Department of Music and LA Opera.

Neal Stulberg, James Conlon and members of the UCLA music department should be applauded for their sensitivity toward all cultural groups in arriving at this decision. More of the same would have been encouraging from other participants to introduce the world to LA’s multitude of artistic and multicultural talent in a creatively free environment without constraints. Celebrating one anti-Semitic composer with a focus on one of his works will not accomplish this end. Maybe next time.

Program to include Zemlinsky’s Psalms 13 and 83, and Schreker’s Intermezzo for Strings and “Valse Lente.”