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### **THOMAS HAMPSON RECITAL LOS ANGELES OPERA OCTOBER 3, 2009**

**Thomas Hampson returns to his American roots with a recital of merit in LA.**

By: Carol Jean Delmar  
OperaOnline.us

Thomas Hampson is the quintessential Renaissance man. That's what being an opera singer does to you. You not only have to learn how to sing with the voice that God gave you, but you have to learn music and text, and you have to become a consummate musician and actor as well. Then, if you're very lucky, you find yourself traveling all over the world, becoming fluent in the languages you sing, and you soon discover the American fascination with Europe.

Like many opera singers, Hampson found Vienna captivating. At least I assume that he did since he set up residence there. That was when he looked like the typical all-American guy who could grace the cover of any movie tabloid; but his image has

changed, and he's turned into a man of substance. He doesn't speak English like an American anymore. He's given the language some breeding.

I kind of like the evolved Hampson, but then my parents were Viennese, and I too became enamored with the city of music – with its Musikverein, Burgtheater, Staatsoper and Kärntner Strasse. But as all of us learn, there is a time when we want to come home, and Hampson has done just that. He's taken up residence in New York City now, and he's promoting his CD of American songs.

Of primary significance in Hampson's life is the "Song of America Project" – a collaboration between him and the Library of Congress which brings to light the often forgotten composers and lyricists of the American song – their music and texts that display and commemorate the American experience of freedom in the context of art.

This is the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what is considered to be the first American art song: "My Days Have Been So Wondrous Free," composed in 1759 by Francis Hopkinson.

After expressively singing Schubert, Liszt, Korngold and Strauss Lieder, Hampson began the American portion of his recent recital in Los Angeles with the Hopkinson piece. The audience in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion was enthralled with him.

"My days have been so wondrous free, the little birds that fly with careless ease from tree to tree were but as blest as I," he sang.

Then he switched to the language of love with Stephen Foster's "Open Thy Lattice, Love."

"In the voyage of life, love our pilot will be. . . . While the moon's in the sky and the breeze on the sea!"

He made me remember how beautiful our American poetry could be as he sang every tone, every word with sheer delicacy and purpose supported by the brilliant collaborative pianist Vlad Ifinca, who was receptive to his every sound, breath and intonation.

Every singer is unique. Bass-baritones and baritones come in various varieties. There are the full, rich Verdi baritones and there are lyric baritones who have a more focused tone which is sometimes closer to the tenor Fach. Although Hampson sings Verdi, his forté in Lieder is his ability to communicate tones that sound pure, focused and often multi-colored. He can float a legato line, awaken us with a fortissimo or hold us spellbound with a falsetto sung pianissimo. I don't generally approve of male singers who jump into falsetto because the chest in the male voice usually is too dominant to make a natural bridge, and the break is too noticeable and jolting; but Hampson has the ability to narrow a pure head tone so that it flows effortlessly into falsetto, and the effect is astoundingly beautiful, almost breathtaking. Another words, he has mastered his technique.

In the portion of the recital titled “A Panorama of American Song,” Hampson sang Aaron Copland’s “The Dodger” with spunk and verve and applied his artistry to works composed by Edward MacDowell, Henry T. Burleigh, Arthur Farwell, Amy Beach, Elinor Remick Warren, William Grant Still and Charles Ives. We were exposed to the longing of a lithe, familiar “Shenandoah” and a sensitively-sung fragile “Beautiful Dreamer.” You could have heard a pin drop.’’

At times, as in Ives’ “Charlie Rutlage,” Hampson turned to the Western cowboy dialect. He sounded a bit Irish at times, and sometimes he was just plain ‘ol American. His diction was crisp and clear, and he had a way of accentuating the “t” consonant so we could never forget that he was enunciating it. He seemed to have analyzed every phrase, note and breath to arrive at the most appropriate interpretations for his talent, and then he shared those interpretations with all of us.

I only have one criticism and I don’t really know if it’s a criticism. Maybe it’s more of an observation. Some singers – very few exist unfortunately – have the ability to pour what appears to be so much natural, raw emotion into their beings that we in the audience are moved. Hampson’s artistry seems more calculated, more predetermined. We watch and listen to the beauty he creates with every utterance, expression, move and intonation. We watch and listen spellbound, but we don’t feel as much. With the former, we lose ourselves and forget our presence in the concert hall. With the latter, we are spectators observing the art. I don’t know which approach I prefer, but I do know that watching a true artist is inspiring.

Hampson plans to expand the “Song of America Project” on the Web at [thomashampson.com](http://thomashampson.com), [hampsong.org](http://hampsong.org) and [songofamerica.net](http://songofamerica.net). By the beginning of 2010, he will have sung recitals as part of his current tour at the Ravinia and Tanglewood Festivals, in San Francisco, Portland, Santa Barbara, Boulder, Philadelphia, Atlanta and Princeton.

Welcome home, Tom!