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Special Report: Pauline Viardot and Friends, First Hand.

The stars shine bright for tribute to Pauline Viardot at San Francisco Performances, as Carol Jean Delmar writes in this tribute to the great mezzo.





Top: Mezzo-Soprano Frederica von Stade and baritone Vladimir Chernov at Wigmore Hall, Photo by Douglas Robertson; Connie and Barry Baron, Carol Jean Delmar and Vladimir Chernov in San Francisco; soprano Melody Moore and Carol Jean Delmar. Photos: Drew Altizer.

**PAULINE VIARDOT AND FRIENDS
SAN FRANCISCO PERFORMANCES
MARCH 20, 2008**

By Carol Jean Delmar
OperaOnline.us

“Pauline Viardot and Friends” has been a successful concert venture between legendary mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade and highly acclaimed baritone Vladimir Chernov since 2006, when it was performed in London’s Wigmore Hall and at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris. At that time, the third singer to grace the stage was soprano Anna Caterina Antonacci, with French actress Fanny Ardant as narrator. On March 20 and 22 in the Herbst Theatre in San Francisco, rising soprano Melody Moore became the third voice, and another legend, Marilyn Horne, took on the role as narrator.

The night was a tribute of sorts in memory of Pauline Viardot (1821-1910), who was a celebrated mezzo-soprano, composer and teacher of Spanish origin -- and the talk of the town in French cultural circles. She was the daughter of the elder Manuel García and the sister of Maria Malibran, and she inspired the likes of composers Chopin, Liszt, Berlioz, Meyerbeer, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Schumann and Fauré, as well as writers including Flaubert, Dickens, Delacroix, Henry James, George Sand and Ivan Turgenev.

She debuted as Rossini’s Desdemona in London in 1839 and married writer Louis Viardot in 1840. She met Turgenev in St. Petersburg in the 1840s. He fell in love with her and lived near or with her and her husband for the rest of his life, between 1862 and 1883. Very controversial – Pauline Viardot captured the hearts of the high society. She sang Rosina, Norma, Azucena, Fidès in Meyerbeer’s “Le prophète,” the title role in Berlioz’s edition of Gluck’s “Orfée,” and many other roles. But, foremost, she composed.



So in honor of her engaging compositions, I was honored to be in the presence of von Stade, Chernov, Moore and Horne, to witness an evening that was a delight to the senses. The music was beautiful; the voices, superb (von Stade's charm and purity, Chernov's mellow timbre and charismatic Russian deliverance, and Moore's dramatic tonal clarity); plus Horne's forthright narration brought the audience into the Viardot salon.

I was present at the reception that followed. Thank you San Francisco Performances for a lovely evening!

Lotfi Mansouri, director
Peter Grunberg, pianist/music director
Emil Miland, cello
Judy Flannery, producer
Georgia Smith, writer



Carol Jean Delmar, Vladimir Chernov



Marilyn Horne (file)