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The Perfect Ending to the Holiday Season and Beginning of the New Year

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**SALUTE TO VIENNA
RENÉE & HENRY SEGERSTROM
CONCERT HALL, COSTA MESA, CA.
DECEMBER 29, 2007**

By: Carol Jean Delmar
OperaOnline.us

My parents were Viennese. For the last number of years, I have found myself sitting glued to the television set every January 1st, watching Walter Cronkite narrate the "Neujahrskonzert" from the wonderfully ornate and acoustically-rich Musikverein concert hall in Vienna. It was in that very building, the former home of the Vienna Conservatory, where my father studied opera and voice in the 1930s.

But this year I wanted to have the experience of a live concert, yet wasn't about to take a flight to Vienna to see one. In 1995, Attila Glatz and his wife, Marion, produced a similar "Salute to Vienna" concert where they live in Toronto, Canada. The following year, they added New York City. Mr. Glatz, who is Hungarian, wanted to expose audiences to the music he remembered from his childhood. The concerts are now being performed annually between Dec. 29 and Jan. 1 in 15 cities in the United States and 10 in Canada.

I could have seen the same cast and program at either the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles on Dec. 30, or the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall at the Orange County Performing Arts Center in Costa Mesa on Dec. 29. I decided on the latter since I'd never been to the new venue and thought that it would more closely resemble the Golden Hall in the Musikverein building. I found the 2,000-seat shoe-box-shaped theater to be quite spectacular, oozing with high-tech glass, metal and maple, acoustical canopies

and chambers, balcony-type levels of plush velvet upholstered boxes and seats, with lights in full view hanging from the canopies.

The concert didn't disappoint either. In fact, when the orchestra began playing Johann Strauss's "On the Beautiful Blue Danube," I actually had to fight back the tears, maybe because I was remembering the day my deceased father danced my first Viennese waltz with me. A lot of the people in the audience were reminiscing, but there were young people there as well. Could a trip to Vienna be in their future?



Ballroom champions show their stuff at "Salute to Vienna," 2005

One of the highlights of the evening was the Strauss Symphony of America under the baton of conductor and pianist Niels Muus. The onstage orchestra bellowed through the hall with vivid, colorful sound, especially the strings. Muus was instrumental in drawing out these musicians, at times almost teasing them, enticing them to play with quiet reserve, then egging them on into a full-blown majestic grandeur. His love for the music was communicated by his unbridled energy: the overture of "Die Fledermaus," "Tales from the Vienna Woods" waltzes, and the adorable "Pizzicato Polka" followed by the overture to "The Gypsy Baron," more polkas, and the friendly "Redetzky March," which prompted the audience to clap rhythmically in time to the music – a hallmark of the annual Musikverein concert, never missed.

One might say that this was Johann Strauss's evening, although Strauss Jr. shared the evening with composers Franz Lehár, Gaetano Donizetti and Karl Millöcker, who shared it with the splendid orchestra and some delightful singers and dancers.

Vienna native Peter Edlmann, son of the highly acclaimed bass, Otto Edlmann, is no newcomer to California. The baritone's allure was first evident when he sang Gabriel von Eisenstein in San Diego Opera's "Die Fledermaus." His pleasing vocal timbre complements his onstage charm. Whether speaking as a narrator or singing the "Lippen schweigen" waltz from "Die lustige Witwe," it was Edlmann's charm that grabbed this audience. Many American singers with competent voices attempt operetta but somehow lack *savoir-faire*. Without the charm element, an operetta is lost. Edlmann should give master classes on the subject. It was a plus that the spoken dialogue was in English with the text sung in German. Totally English productions lose much of the flavor.

Soprano Akiko Nakajima made her North American debut with this performance. Totally enjoyable to listen to and watch, her flexible technique and lyric timbre seemed well-suited for the genre performed. She looked fetching in a flowing orange gown as well as a contrasting more fitted red with black beaded gown. I was convinced that her voice was light with high tones that were at times thin, typical for many coloratura sopranos and fine for operetta. But then she surprised me with her “O luce di quest’ anima” from Donizetti’s “Linda di Chamounix,” which I’d heard sung many times by the great Joan Sutherland. Strangely enough, Nakajima showed solid musicianship and seemed to shine. She isn’t Joan Sutherland, but she is a secure performer with her own flair and style. Experience and continued work will hopefully enable her to broaden the breadth and depth of her voice so that she uses her instrument to its full advantage.

Another young singer, lyric tenor Albertus Engelbrecht, brought a seriousness to the evening and proved promising as well.

The dancers from the Vienna Dance Project, some having been principal artists with the Vienna State Opera Ballet, made the evening one of sheer joy. Although not equal to soloists with the American Ballet Theatre (the ABT), their movements were clean with high extensions, the principal male dancer was light with agile leaps and turns, and the choreography blended the artistry of ballet with the Viennese waltz.

Greatness was not what this evening was all about. In fact, great opera virtuosos would probably have served as a detraction. Flowing melodies coupled with performers who displayed an ease of singing and dance with good stage presence, grace and charm is what sold this evening. It was a resounding success. In fact, I plan to attend again next year.

Conductor, Niels Muus

Produced by Attila Glatz Concert Productions

Costumes, Christian Lacroix

Choreography, Christian Tichy

Dancers: Christian Musil, Beatrice Waulin, Christoph Wenzel, Jürgen Wagner, Judith Wansch, Klaudia Baluch



A scene from “Salute to Vienna”