

- [Home](#)
- [About Classical Voice North America](#)
- [Are you a music critic? Join the MCANA](#)
- [Contact the Editors](#)
- [Around the U.S.](#)
- [Support us](#)
- [Around Canada](#)
- [Music Critics Create Annual Opera Award](#)
- [International](#)
- [Digital](#)
- [Issues in the Arts](#)
- [Member Blogs](#)
- [RSS FEED](#)
- [Members on the Web](#)
- [Calendar Focus: Critics' Picks](#)

Navigate to

Campra's *Carnaval* Is A Musical Circus On Teeming Stage

[Share / Save](#) [f](#) [t](#) [r](#)



A scene from the Boston Early Music Festival production of André Campra's 'Le Carnaval de Venise.'

(Production photos by Kathy Wittman)

By **Keith Powers**

BOSTON — Every two years, Boston's Back Bay gets polyglot. A Dutch conversation on one corner. Sharing updates in French about a new luthier on another. An argument about Baroque dance in German across the way.



David Evans, Jesse Blumberg, and Ryaan Ahmed in the Campra production.

Welcome to the [Boston Early Music Festival](#), the biennial conference and overwhelming glut of performances that transform the city with a profoundly international feel. For these ten days, Boston’s description as the Athens of America actually rings true.

The centerpiece of the festival has always been its main-stage opera revival, and this year the BEMF team — directed musically by [Paul O’Dette](#) and [Stephen Stubbs](#), with staging by [Gilbert Blin](#) — have revived [André Campra’s *Le Carnaval de Venise*](#), which opened June 11 and runs through June 18.

First produced in Paris in 1699, this “opéra-ballet” follows a long line of successful BEMF productions. Previous stagings of Lully ([Thésée](#), 2001; [Psyché](#), 2007), Monteverdi ([L’incoronazione di Poppea](#), 2009), and Charpentier ([La Descente d’Orphée aux Enfers](#), 2015) have been thrilling revivals exploring Baroque styles. Most productions have toured America and Europe, and five of the subsequent recordings have been nominated for Grammys.

To paint the picture broadly, Campra’s *Le Carnaval de Venise* occupies the musical space after Lully and before Rameau, during the [reign of Louis XIV](#). The French were recovering from a long [war with the Augsburg Alliance](#) and trying hard to repair relations with Venice. These historic considerations serve as an undercurrent to the story; stylistically, this “opéra-ballet” is among the first stagings to integrate ballet, drama, and music, rather than to offer them as discrete entertainments.



Amanda Forsythe as Isabelle.

The artistry flows seamlessly, with singers, dancers, and actors playing through [Jean-François Regnard’s](#) libretto and Campra’s score. The setting of Venice during winter carnival finds a quartet of lovers, some miffed, some hopeful, at the core of the story. In this production, carnival means chaos. Blin’s stages are almost always packed with revelers — gossiping, flirting, and scheming in asides behind the action. Even during the overture, the curtain flaps and rustles from behind with expectations of activity.

Dance, music, and theater provide the entertainment in equal measure. The score, in general, is straightforward, not drawing attention to itself. Concertmaster [Robert Mealy](#) conducted largely unison, string-based accompaniment, his instrumental forces sitting face-to-face at audience level, not in the pit. Their sound throughout was sturdy and engaged.

The quartet of lovers dominate the singing. Both Isabelle (soprano [Amanda Forsythe](#)) and Leonore (soprano [Karina Gauvin](#)) love Leandre (baritone [Jesse Blumberg](#)); when he chooses Isabelle over Leonore, Rodolphe (bass-baritone [Douglas Williams](#)) takes offense, angry that his own suit for Isabelle is rejected.

The love-and-revenge plot steps lightly over the action, which focuses on the carnival, and the intercession of a second opera — the Orfeo myth, sung in Italian — which the revelers decide to attend during the course of the festivities.

Supporting voices were equally strong. Mezzo-soprano [Mireille Lebel](#) sings as Minerva in Act 1, then returns as La Fortuna in subsequent scenes; tenor [Aaron Sheehan](#) also fills multiple roles, including a star turn as Orfeo in the Italian opera, as does baritone [Christian Immler](#). All of the singers brought their early-music chops: clear, lyric lines, with understated vibrato.

Forsythe especially performed with facile expression; when she thinks Leandre has been killed and sings “[Mes yeux, fermez-vous à jamais](#),” holding a bloody reveler’s mask, it marks one of the few simple, touching moments in the production. Gauvin, more of a forceful artist, partnered robustly with

Williams in the revenge duet (“*Que l’Amour dans nos coeurs se transforme en colère*”), the orchestra vigorously supporting.



Choreographer-dancer Caroline Copeland.

In spite of love and murderous revenge, most of *Le Carnaval de Venise* laughs its way along. “Orfeo” is treated as a glorious farce: Mealy conducts the orchestra through hyperbolic, overly emotive phrases, while bathetic singing with mock coloratura and foppish poses undercut the story.

Until the staging of “Orfeo” after Act 3, the set was a rather modest Venetian street/canal scene. Hades brought things to life, the stage transforming itself into a pit of the damned, the costumes red-and-orange cloaking, for the unfortunate shades in residence.

The choreography makes *Le Carnaval de Venise* special. [Melinda Sullivan](#) and [Caroline Copeland](#) recreate movement styles reflecting various hierarchies, from noble to comic. Some movement was restrained, with unforced elegance; other scenes — from the “Orfeo” interlude, or in the multiple *commedia dell’arte* entertainments during the carnival — were danced with abandon. A gavotte of the gondoliers in Act 3 — using oars as props — was by turns tasteful, complex, and acrobatic.

Some opening night foibles (hats that refused to stay on, badly over-applied make-up, “buildings” swaying in the background of the set) will easily be rectified. And it is carnival, so crowded sets and hectic visuals help recreate that atmosphere. The blocking was prodigiously planned, but characters still ran into each other and hindered sight-lines. Visual gags and behind-the-action intrigue need to be toned down. Too much was happening too often.

It is hard to imagine *Le Carnaval de Venise* having the same success in a recording as previous BEMF operas. A true blend of dance, music, and theater, to be appreciated as such, the work stages more like contemporary musical theater than contemporary opera.

With the vast musical, costume, choreographic, and staging resources that BEMF brings to such a production, *Le Carnaval de Venise* successfully creates its own kind of spectacle. It runs through June 18. For information and tickets, [click here](#).

Keith Powers covers music for WBUR’s ARTery and for the GateHouse newspapers. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com



Boston Early Music Festival musical co-Directors Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs.

Date posted: June 16, 2017

Add your comment

XHTML : You may use these tags : `` `<abbr title="">` `<acronym title="">` `` `<blockquote cite="">` `<cite>` `<code>` `<del datetime="">` `` `<i>` `<q cite="">` `<s>` `<strike>` ``

This is a Gravatar-enabled website. To get your own globally-recognized avatar, please register at Gravatar.com

Your comment

Your comment

Name

Email

Website

[« Texas Bach Fest Sees Energy Surge With New Director](#)

Search this site

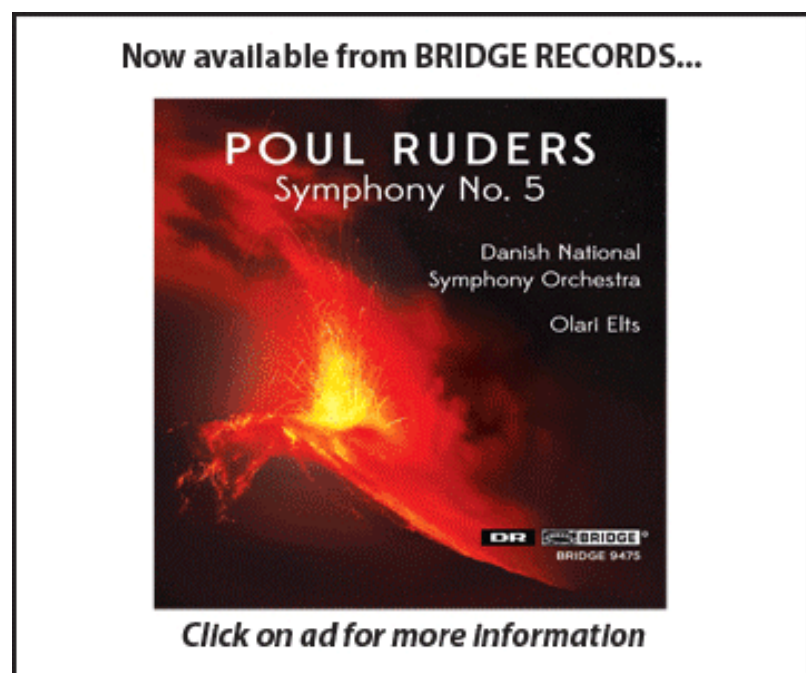
[+](#) Share / Save [f](#) [t](#) [s](#)

 [Get Classical Voice North America via RSS](#)



• [COMING EVENTS: Midwest Fests Get Jump On Summer](#)

- **COMING EVENTS:** Canada Turns 150 in 2017, Makes Joyful Noise
- **COMING EVENTS:** Orchestras Raise Curtain on Opera Sans its Trappings



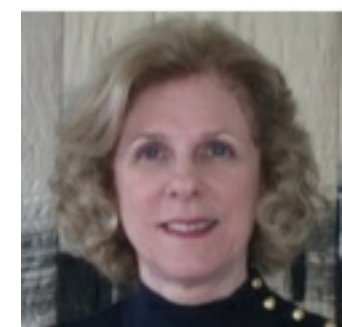
Help Us Grow



Support quality coverage of the performing arts.

Click here to help Classical Voice North America resound!

MUSIC CRITICS ASSOCIATION CREATES ANNUAL AWARD FOR BEST NEW OPERA



Barbara Jepson
MCANA President

I am pleased to announce the creation of the MCANA Award for Best New Opera, to be given annually beginning in spring of 2017. Presented by the [Music Critics Association of North America](#) (MCANA), the award will honor the composer and librettist of an opera that received its world premiere in North America during the preceding year. The winning composer and librettist will be profiled here at *Classical Voice North America*. [Full story](#) →

Classical Voice North America (CVNA) is a writer-run journal of classical music criticism and commentary by the expert members of MCANA, with occasional guest contributors. Are you a music writer? [Join us](#).

Stories We Like: Recommended by MCANA members

[Philip Gossett, scholar of 19th-century Italian opera, is dead at 75](#) -- By John von Rhein at the [Chicago Tribune](#)

[21 Canadian symphony concerts you can't miss in 2017-18](#) -- By Robert Rowat at [CBC Music](#)

[Uncompromising music survives on the Brooklyn waterfront](#) -- By Francis X Clines at the [New York Times](#)

[Tackling race in opera -- at center stage](#) -- By Anne Midgette at the [Washington Post](#)

[Spivakov, Moscow Virtuosi, mark nearly 40 years of successful partnership](#) -- By Aaron Keebaugh at [Boston Classical Review](#)

[CSO principal oboe Alex Klein is denied tenure](#) -- By John von Rhein at the [Chicago Tribune](#)

[Mozart, Rachmaninoff and a New Chance to Hear a Piano Master](#) -- By Barbara Jepson at the [Wall Street Journal](#)

[For Renee Fleming, the future is filled with possibilities](#) -- By Kyle MacMillan at the [Chicago Sun-Times](#)

[Ravinia creates conductor laureate title for James Levine – By John von Rhein at the Chicago Tribune](#)

[Nico Muhly on Why Choral Music Is Slow Food for the Soul – By Nico Muhly at the New York Times](#)

[Vancouver Symphony Orchestra taps Dutch conductor Otto Tausk as next music director — By David Gordon Duke at the Vancouver Sun](#)

[Breaking Elgar`s Enigma — By Daniel Estrin at the New Republic](#)

[The real reason musicians are dropping out of music schools — By Claire Motyer at CBC Music](#)

[How the arts helped kill off the NEA — By Matt Burrieschi at Salon.com](#)

[Ten women composers who are changing contemporary classical music — By Stephen Raskauskas at WFMT.com](#)

[The fate of the critic in the clickbait age — by Alex Ross at the New Yorker](#)

[Seattle Symphony brings homelessness inside the concert hall -- By Jason Victor Serinas at the Seattle Times](#)

[Barenboim Does Bruckner at Carnegie Hall -- By Barbara Jepson at the Wall Street Journal](#)

[The Improbable Encore: Oboist Alex Klein's comeback story -- By Elly Fishman at Chicago Magazine](#)

[Curtains fall on arts critics at newspapers -- By Jed Gottlieb at Columbia Journalism Review](#)

[Boston Opera Collaborative's staged song cycles examines women's contrasted lives -- By Aaron Keebaugh at Boston Classical Review](#)

[Meet Beth Morrison, the producer who runs her opera empire from a 2-bedroom apartment -- By Jeff Lunden at WOSU](#)

[Daniil Trifonov's sleight of hand -- By Alex Ross at the New Yorker](#)

[Akhmaten Glows in Sun and Shade at LA Opera — By Rodney Punt at LA Opus](#)

[Uber, but for millennials who want orchestras in their living room -- By Charlie Locke at Wired](#)

Visit These Classical Music Websites



>> Bay area events, previews, reviews and news.



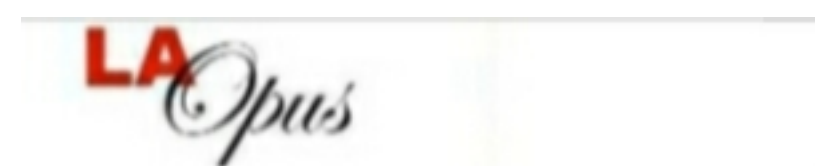
>> North Carolina's statewide arts journal



>> Windy City music and theater, classic and new



>> Promoting classical music in Northeast Ohio



>> Reporting on music and the lively arts



>> News Roundup | Industry News | Special Reports

Classical Voice North America is on Twitter



Classical Voice
@Classical_Voice



Gonna see an Upstate legend, Mary Jane Swygert as Dolly Levi! Check out HELLO DOLLY! from @gottheatre on @trycelery shop.trycelery.com/page/589f1781c...



HELLO DOLLY!

This American Musical Theatre Masterpiece first appeared on Broadway ...
shop.trycelery.com

20m



Classical Voice Retweeted



Chuck Lavazzi
@clavazzi

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

Member Recommended Websites

- [La Scena Musicale](#)
- [Notes on Notes](#)
- [Musical America](#)
- [Chicago On the Aisle](#)
- [The Wholenote](#)
- [CVNC Arts Journal](#)
- [Opera Chic](#)
- [Arts Journal](#)
- [Opera Today](#)
- [Cleveland Classical](#)
- [NPR Music](#)
- [Opera News](#)
- [Cleveland Classical](#)
- [Miami Clásica](#)
- [San Francisco Classical Voice](#)
- [Parterre Box](#)
- [Musical Toronto](#)
- [New Music Box](#)
- [The Rest is Noise](#)

Navigate to