

Stephen Schwartz and Opera Santa Barbara

World Premiere of **SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON** Merges Fabulous Musical Imagination and Drama

Theatre Review by
MARK WHITEHURST / CASA

SWEET ARIAS DESCRIBE A HUMID AND DARK STORY IN THE OPERA, *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*, at the world premiere held at the Granada, presented by Opera Santa Barbara.

Opera Santa Barbara and Stephen Schwartz partnered to launch the opening of this modern operatic work, bringing the epicenter of American Opera to Santa Barbara for a local taste of high culture.

The story is about an intuitive, her delusions, manipulations, and the destructive projections that unravel her psyche. The tragedy of the story lies in the loss of ethical and relational sensitivities in this woman with psychic abilities. How hard and cruel the results can be when an individual's desires displace reality.

The main character, Myra Foster is played deliciously by soprano Lauren Flanigan of the New York City Opera. Her hopelessly devoted husband and dupe is played by the convincing Kim Josephson. The ghost son Arthur was well played by Aaron Refrem who with

aching loneliness sang the duet *It's Always Been True*.

The overture is a powerful and subtle musical piece that prepares the audience for the depths of psychological troubles and trauma of this opera. Schwartz, best known for his scores for *Wicked* and *Godspell*, makes his way into opera with a real strength and understanding of voice, emotion, and musicality.

Well timed and evenly paced, this modern opera is special because it all hangs well on the music. The sets were phenomenal – the translucent and sectioned Victorian house – assisted the characters in their movements, added to the rhythm of story, and created a believable gestalt for a seance. Super kudos to creative set designer Heidi Ettinger.

The cast were true to their characters and added cohesiveness to the drama, with even musical performances except the occasional note by Laura Flanigan who opened the event in the throes of a headcold. The Claytons, played by Hila Plitmann and tenor John Kimberling seemed marred by their daughter's disappearance and perhaps their wealthy circumstances. Their daughter Adriana, played by Kelsey Lee Smith provided a riveting performance. Baritone Craig Hart played police inspector Watts and tenor Michael Marcotte was the Irish tenor. Mezzo-soprano Jane Shaulis and tenor Benjamin Brecher added both support and color to the performance.

The rest of the team included: Executive Producer Michael Jackowitz; composer Steven Schwartz; director Scott Schwartz; lighting David Lander; choreographer, Matt Williams; costume designer Alejo Vietti; music director and conductor Valery Rvkin brought to life the fabulous musicality of this piece.

The entire performance was extraordinary and theatre at its best. There will be two more performances on October 2 and 4, at The Granada, 1214 State Street, Santa Barbara. Tickets are available from \$23 to \$158 at the Granada or on-line at www.granadasb.org.



Michael Jackowitz, Executive Producer; **Stephen Schwartz**, Creator of *Seance*; **Scott Schwartz**, Director of *Seance*; **Steven Sharpe**, General Director, Opera Santa Barbara.



OSB Board member **Duncan Mellichamp** with wife **Suzanne**



Gün and **A.C. Moore**



Kim Josephson and **Lauren Flanigan** in *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*

Photo by David Bazemore



The chorus for the opera *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*

Photo by David Bazemore



Anne and **Michael Towbes** with **Joan Rutkowski**



Seance commission sponsors **Luci** and **Rich Janssen** with **Lauren Flanigan** (Myra)



Gillian Launie, President SB Symphony; **A.C. Moore**; and **Sara Miller McCune**, World Premiere Sponsor of *Seance*



Paul Williams, Composer; **Stephen Schwartz**, Creator of *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*; and **Michael Kerker**, President of ASCAP



Seance Cast Members **Aaron Refvem** (Arthur), **Hila Plitmann** (Mrs. Clayton), **Kelsey Lee Smith** (Adrianna)



Missy and **Will Macfayden** with **Louise Gaylord**

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Contact her at priscilla@santabarbaraseen.com • (805) 969-3301