

ARTS

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CELEBRATING

40 YEARS

Victor DeRenzi marks a milestone as artistic director and principal conductor with Sarasota Opera

Carrie Seidman Special to Sarasota Herald-Tribune | USA TODAY NETWORK

It’s hard to imagine, but the man whose name is synonymous with opera in Sarasota – Victor DeRenzi, celebrating four decades as the Sarasota Opera’s artistic director and principal conductor – says if he hadn’t come to Sarasota in 1982, he “probably wouldn’t be in opera now.” • “I don’t like the wandering life, I don’t like to travel,” says DeRenzi, 72. “This company has allowed me time to study, time to teach myself the opera and the time to teach it to the company, and we all have the time to do it for an audience. If you freelance a lot, you don’t have that situation.” See OPERA, Page 3E

Sarasota Opera Jubilee Concert

6:15 p.m., March 26 at the Sarasota Opera House, 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota. Tickets are \$50 (or \$175 to attend a grand reception and the concert). 941-328-1300; sarasotaopera.org.

The event will feature soprano Anna Mandina, mezzo-soprano Lisa Chavez, tenor Jonathan Burton, baritone Joshua Benaim, and bass Kevin Short. Special video tributes to the Maestro will include numerous past members of the company and celebrities who have performed with opera companies throughout the world.

LEFT: Victor DeRenzi conducting in 1989. RIGHT: DeRenzi in 2022

SARASOTA OPERA



Danielle Brown and Ricardo Graziano in Sarasota Ballet’s “A Comedy Of Errors.”

SARASOTA BALLET

Sarasota Ballet performs world premiere of ‘Comedy of Errors’

Carrie Seidman Special to Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

It was back in early February of 2020 that British choreographer Sir David Bintley came to Sarasota to visit his old friend, Iain Webb, director of the Sarasota Ballet, and take a look at the dancers that would be performing his playful short work “The Spider’s Feast,” as part of a triple bill.

Bintley had recently been knighted by Queen Elizabeth for his “services to dance” after stepping down after 24 years as director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) to freelance as a choreographer with companies around the world. He’d just begun to envision a full-length ballet – a modern-day comedy based on either Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” or “Comedy of Errors,” he hadn’t decided which yet – and had engaged his frequent collaborator, Australian composer Matthew Hindson, to write an original score with a popular music foundation.

He’d also begun to consider which of the companies he’d worked with might be the best suited for the new work, which would require dancers who could bring characters to life with a deft comedic touch. The dancers in Japan, he thought, had a sense of humor “but they hide it.” The dancers in Finland also had good humor, he noted, but only “once they’ve drunk a lot.” That night, as he watched the Sarasota Ballet dancers embody the demonstrative Italians in choreographer Do-

See BALLET, Page 6E

asolorep

THE GREAT LEAP

By LAUREN YEE

Directed by VANESSA STALLING



“The best staged play I have seen in at least five years.”

- Anything Arts

NOW-APRIL 2

Artwork created by Manuel Gonzalez Ruiz & Mago Atelier

Share feelings first; don't try to make sense of them



Dear Annie
Annie Lane

Dear Annie: Some years ago, I went to a nearby office supply shop, where I saw a local couple looking around. The woman, a local musician, had Alzheimer's, but she seemed to recognize me, so we began a conversation. I don't recall what it was about, but it was the silliest, most illogical and the most fun conversation I've ever had with anyone. I just went along with whatever she said, never trying to force reality onto her and augmenting whatever her ideas were when I could.

Meanwhile, her husband seemed to be mortified beyond embarrassment.

I later left the shop, having purchased what I needed, and I felt so happy at connecting with this woman, as ridiculous as the conversation had been.

I think it is not good to try to convince such people about what "now" is like. In a way, that is reminding them that they are not well; this will make them feel

badly and feed their depression. It is better to greet them "where they are" and find a way to spread some cheer in that.

– *Going With the Flow*

Dear Going With the Flow: As Maya Angelou famously said: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Thank you for your insightful story.

Dear Annie: Nearly 13 years ago, my husband and I lost our 12-year-old son to a severe asthma attack. Since then, I have encountered numerous instances where I meet new people and am asked how many children we have. I have tried a couple of different ways to answer, but it always seems to be incredibly awkward either way.

On occasion, I have simply said that we have a daughter, but then I feel unbelievably guilty for not including my son. So, then I try telling them that I have two children but one of them passed away, which usually makes the person feel bad for either not knowing or for having brought it up.

I don't want anyone to feel bad about asking, because he is part of me every day, whether someone asks or not, but I also don't want to exclude him be-

cause he is, after all, still my son. Can you help me construct an appropriate response that won't leave either me or the inquirer feeling guilty?

– *Seeking Tactful Reply*

Dear Tactful Reply: I am so sorry for your loss. You have absolutely nothing to feel guilty about. Answer anyone who asks you how many children you have in exactly the way that would make you feel most comfortable. If you don't want to tell the story of your son to someone, then don't, and if you do want to tell them, then tell them.

You have suffered enough, and you don't need to place anyone else's guilt or discomfort above your own feelings. That is their problem. The only thing to do is exactly what feels right for you and your family in that moment, and don't worry about what anyone else thinks or feels.

"How Can I Forgive My Cheating Partner?" is out now! Annie Lane's second anthology – featuring favorite columns on marriage, infidelity, communication and reconciliation – is available as a paperback and e-book. Visit <http://www.creatorspublishing.com> for more information. Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

BESTSELLERS

- HARDCOVER FICTION**
1. **"The Paris Apartment"** by Lucy Foley (William Morrow)
 2. **"One Italian Summer"** by Rebecca Serle (Atria)
 3. **"The Atlas Six"** by Olivie Blake (Tor)
 4. **"House of Sky and Breath"** by Sarah J. Maas (Bloomsbury)
 5. **"The Club"** by Ellery Lloyd (Harper)
 6. **"Abandoned in Death"** by J.D. Robb (St. Martin's Press)
 7. **"Phantom Game"** by Christine Feehan (Berkley)
 8. **"The Maid"** by Nita Prose (Ballantine)
 9. **"The Lincoln Highway"** by Amor Towles (Viking)
 10. **"The Judge's List"** by John Grisham (Doubleday)

- HARDCOVER NONFICTION**
1. **"The Whole Body Reset"** by Stephen Perrine (Simon & Schuster)
 2. **"Undistracted"** by Bob Goff (Thomas Nelson)
 3. **"The Way Forward"** by O'Neill/Meyer (Dey Street)
 4. **"Red-Handed"** by Peter Schweizer (Harper)
 5. **"Atlas of the Heart"** by Brene Brown (Random House)
 6. **"Comedy Comedy Comedy Drama"** by Bob Odenkirk (Random House)
 7. **"Life Force"** by Tony Robbins et al. (Simon & Schuster)
 8. **"Food IQ"** by Holzman/Rodbard (Harper Wave)
 9. **"Black Ops"** by Ric Prado (St. Martin's Press)
 10. **"I'll Start Again Monday"** by Lysa TerKeurst (Thomas Nelson)

- MASS MARKET PAPERBACKS**
1. **"Sooley"** by John Grisham (Anchor)
 2. **"Finding Ashley"** by Danielle Steel (Dell)
 3. **"Fast Ice"** by Cussler/Brown (G.P. Putnam's Sons)
 4. **"Afraid"** by Jackson/Ivy/Childs (Zebra)
 5. **"The Violent Storm"** by Johnstone/Johnstone (Pinnacle)
 6. **"Dead River"** by Johnstone/Johnstone (Pinnacle)–
 7. **"Dangerous Mountain Rescue"** by Christy Barritt (Love Inspired Suspense)
 8. **"Before Buckhorn"** by B.J. Daniels (HQN)
 9. **"A Wish upon a Dress"** by Debbie Macomber (Mira)
 10. **"Daylight"** by David Baldacci (Grand Central Publishing)

- TRADE PAPERBACKS**
1. **"My Hero Academia, Vol. 30"** by Kohei Horikoshi (Viz)
 2. **"Verity"** by Colleen Hoover (Grand Central Publishing)
 3. **"Hook, Line, and Sinker"** by Tessa Bailey (Avon)
 4. **"Reminders of Him"** by Colleen Hoover (Montlake)
 5. **"The Love Hypothesis"** by Ali Hazelwood (Berkley)
 6. **"Where the Crawdads Sing"** by Delia Owens (G.P. Putnam's Sons)
 7. **"People We Meet on Vacation"** by Emily Henry (Berkley)
 8. **"Steal"** by Patterson/Roughan (Grand Central Publishing)
 9. **"The Silent Patient"** by Alex Michaelides (Celadon)
 10. **"The Lost Apothecary"** by Sarah Penner (Park Row)

BOOK REVIEW

A clear view of Lincoln's vision for lasting peace

Lee Scott
Special to Jacksonville Times-Union
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

"Lincoln and the Fight for Peace" by John Avlon (Simon & Schuster)

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations." – The final paragraph in Lincoln's Second Inaugural address.

"Those 74 words remain the best sentence in American politics. There is poetry and rhythm but more than that: there is durable wisdom, pointing us toward a more perfect union ... Lincoln has showed us the way," says journalist and historian John Avlon in his new history, "Lincoln and the Fight for Peace." Avlon takes us with him as he explores the last six weeks of Lincoln's life and his push for a magnanimous peace.

"There have been more than 16,000 books published about Abraham Lincoln, but few – if any – have focused on his role as peacemaker."

We follow along on a "dangerous two-week trip to the front lines, seeing combat up close and comforting Union and Confederate soldiers alike." He meets with his generals and admirals where he talked about his thoughts on the terms of surrender "hammering home the same message: 'Let them surrender and go home ... with the most liberal and honest terms.'"

He then explores the war torn ruins of Richmond, where on the steps of the Confederate White House he

told a crowd of freedmen and women that "you are now as free as I am... for God created all men free, giving to each the same rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Back in Washington, he gave his last speech to mark Lee's surrender to Grant to an immense crowd that had gathered on the White House lawn. He gave the general and his troops their due.

"I want it distinctly understood that I claim no part nor lot in the honor of the military achievements in front of Richmond. All honor belongs to the military." He stressed his goals for reconstruction and that "important principles may, and must, be inflexible."

On Good Friday, 1865, his last day, Lincoln had discussed the basis of Reconstruction throughout the next eight months with his cabinet. "I hope there will be no persecution, no bloody work, after the war is over. No one need expect me to take part in hanging or killing those men, even the worst of them ... Enough lives have been sacrificed. We must extinguish our resentment if we expect harmony and Union."

But it was not to be. His successor walked to a different beat, accepting "Black Codes," citing states' rights that suited his vision of the South," and vetoing a bill to expand the Freedman's Bureau and the Civil Rights Act. Thus opening the doors to the Republican Congress' sweeping, more restrictive Reconstruction laws.

Although not put in place when intended, in his final chapters Avlon points out how Lincoln's Golden Rule peace plans were followed by our leaders after World War II.

"Lincoln showed us the way."

Avlon has created a clear and consistent work on Lincoln's last days and his vision for a lasting peace. It should be read my all.

'The First Kennedys' explores a dynasty's humble Irish roots

William J. Kole
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON – Think of the Kennedys and some elitist attributes come to mind: wealth, power, influence, elegance.

But the great-grandparents of John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy possessed none of those things. And the family's improbable journey from obscurity in Ireland to eventual prosperity and celebrity in the U.S. offers hope to America's latest arrivals from Afghanistan, Ukraine and beyond.

In "The First Kennedys," released last month by Harper Collins' Mariner Books, author Neal Thompson explores the little-known stories of Bridget Murphy Kennedy and Patrick Kennedy. Both indepen-

dently fled famine in their homeland in the mid-1800s, fell in love in fiercely anti-immigrant Boston, and paved the way for the Kennedy political dynasty that followed.

The Associated Press caught up with Thompson to discuss this murky chapter in the history of a family that would become known as "Camelot" – and its lessons for today's newcomers.

AP: You open the book with Bridget burying her husband outside the city because "Boston doesn't want his Irish Catholic body in its soil." Was anti-Irish sentiment really that bad midway through the 19th century?

Thompson: I was shocked to learn how deeply Bos-

See KENNEDYS, Page 8E

NYT CROSSWORD SOLUTION

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LAT CROSSWORD SOLUTION

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MONSTER SUDOKU SOLUTION

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KIDS SUDOKU SOLUTION

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Stephanie Sundine, daughter Francesca And Victor Derenzi in 1993. SARASOTA OPERA PHOTOS

Opera

Continued from Page 1E

When he responded to the Asolo Opera Company’s search for an artistic director – just as it was becoming the Sarasota Opera and moving from The Ringling to the recently purchased former A.B. Edwards Theater downtown – DeRenzi was a brash 32-year-old with a beautiful wife, a 4-year-old daughter and 12 years of conducting under his belt, including with New York City Opera. He also had a vision for what a company could be, based on years of embracing and rejecting practices he’d observed ever since falling in love with the art form as a young boy, commuting from his family’s home on Staten Island to Manhattan for standing-room-only tickets to the Metropolitan Opera.

For 40 years he has steadfastly pursued that ideal. But when he first arrived in Sarasota – on a typically hot, humid summer day, with “no intention of living here” permanently – he had no surety that either the organization or the city’s inhabitants were ready for what he had in mind. Sarasota was not then the arts town it is today. There was no ballet company, an unheralded orchestra and prospective audience members were mostly Midwestern retirees with unsophisticated opera palates.

“My thought then was that I would



Victor DeRenzi with daughter Francesca in 1987.

take this and make it as good as it could be, but I didn’t know then how good it could be,” says the man now known to most of his colleagues as “Maestro.” “I did know that in my second season we would be in a new theater, which meant there was no template, there was nothing people were going to protect and say, ‘We’ve done it this way for years.’ I knew I could try out the ideas I had gathered.”

A vision of opera ‘as it used to be’

Foremost among those ideas was the

See OPERA, Page 4E

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(Variant 6):
Paranoia on Parade

“A GRAB BAG OF HUMOR”
-THE OBSERVER

Head Writer: Rebecca Hopkins
Contributing Writers: Kevin Allen, Sarah Durham, Stephan deGhelder, Tony Hendriks, Jim Prosser, and Nick Santa Maria. Arrangements By Jim Prosser

SARASOTA SCENE Exchange

Pictured left to right: Nick Anastasia, Richie McCall, Bill Sella, Jenna Sarmey. Photo by John Jones.

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Pictured: Grant Alan Watkins and Madalyn McHugh. Photo by John Jones.

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Opera

Continued from Page 3E

conviction that operas should represent, as authentically and accurately as possible, the work and intent of the composers who had written them. He wanted to produce opera as it was performed in the time of his favorite composer, Giuseppe Verdi, when the conductor didn't just wave a baton, but oversaw every aspect of a performance, from the notes to the sets to the costumes. He foresaw that the situation in Sarasota might offer him that degree of control and oversight. And he was right.

"Victor has created the environment of the company," says the opera's general director Richard Russell, whom DeRenzi first tapped as a singer more than 30 years ago and who has been part of the company's administrative staff since 2005. "Victor feels a responsibility and always has for everything that goes on, even to making sure the company is a congenial place to work. That's the kind of communal environment he has crafted. It pervades everything and has



Victor DeRenzi commemorating Verdi in 2001.

for 40 years. And it's all in service to the art."

DeRenzi's approach has been called "conservative," even "old fashioned," by others who have preferred to modernize the art form by restaging operas in contemporary times, places and situations. He prefers to call it "romantic."

"Actually, in a way we do very avant-garde opera here because the status quo



Victor DeRenzi with Helen and Leo Rogers in 1991. SARASOTA OPERA PHOTOS

now is to be different," he says. "Very few companies have the mission we do, which is to represent the composer's vision. We are the only place that does this, as far as I know, very specifically and intentionally."

Building bonds

DeRenzi also wanted to create what he likes to call "community" – not only within the circle of performing artists, but among local opera aficionados and between lovers of the art form worldwide. In the beginning, those grandiose aspirations were limited by the size and reach of the organization. But as Sarasota itself began to grow in size and sophistication, so did the opera, gradually adding the elements that would allow for DeRenzi's dream to take shape.

The addition of an apprentice program during his first season, and a Studio Artists' program several years later provided a base of talent to draw from and produced a polished and full chorus. Purchasing properties to house those guest artists early on proved to be a shrewd investment creating financial stability. Later, a youth opera program was added, which premiered several children's operas.

In 1989, DeRenzi started a Masterworks revival series that drew opera lovers from afar, some of whom became so enamored with the town and the company, they moved here. In 1991, the

organization formed its own orchestra. And after piecemeal improvements to the opera house over many years, a major renovation was finally completed in 2007, giving the company a performance space as impressive as its burgeoning reputation.

DeRenzi's magnificent obsession

There have been many highlights along the way, though one remains the most obvious – the "Verdi Cycle," DeRenzi's magnificent obsession to perform and conduct not only every opera, but every known note the Italian composer ever wrote. Though he hadn't yet set the goal, it began with a production of "Rigoletto" in 1989 and was originally timed to end with the 200th anniversary of the composer's birth in 2013. A recession delayed the final note until 2016, but the 28-year triumph remains DeRenzi's signature accomplishment and the one that's most likely to be the first line in his Wikipedia entry.

"If I have to look back, that's always the first thing that comes to mind," he says. "No one has ever done it and it took a long time. It also took an audience's belief in it, their feeling that, even though they'd never heard of something, it must be good. As they enjoyed the works, even the ones they knew little about, they became more knowl-

See OPERA, Page 5E

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Opera

Continued from Page 4E

edgeable. That also helped create what we have here.”

When asked about the corresponding low points during his tenure, DeRenzi says they were mostly temporary periods of financial constraint that meant cutting back on certain productions. Perhaps surprisingly, he sees the past two years, as the company was forced to deal with a global pandemic, as something to put on the positive side of the ledger. Despite intense restrictions, the opera produced a full season in 2020-2021, without a COVID outbreak in its ranks. Though this year has seen a few breakthrough cases (everyone in the organization is tested twice a week), they have forced no cancellations.

“One of the highlights for me is what this company has accomplished during COVID,” he says. “During a time when people went in a very different direction, with digital performances, or not doing anything at all, we actually produced five operas very much within the mission of our company. That will always be a very important part of our history.”

What lies ahead

For years he has been gathering information for books, but DeRenzi says he is in no hurry to complete them. He has not considered retirement and is still deeply invested in the music and bringing it to the stage in a way that produces “impassioned performances that make an audience feel how I felt when I first fell in love with opera.” Russell says his deep relationship with DeRenzi and the organization has left him well-groomed should he one day be tapped to step into the maestro’s shoes, but it is not something he anticipates soon.

“I’m not asking for that to happen and I’m happy to work with Victor as long as he’s happy to be here,” he says. “The strength of this company is going to be his legacy.”

Though DeRenzi finally gave up his New York apartment in 2017 and now lives in Sarasota year-round, when the time comes to step down, he says he will neither hand select his successor, nor hang around to critique.

“Not only would I not like to be involved in that, I absolutely should not

“The strength of this company is going to be his legacy.”

Richard Russell
Sarasota Opera general director

have a hand in it,” he says. “The worst thing that can happen to any organization is for the previous person to stick his nose in. I’ve seen that happen, people hovering around, and it’s not healthy for the organization or the person.”

A grand finale?

He is willing however, to consider what opera he might like to conduct as his grand finale, and to humorously fantasize about a literally “last” performance.

“It would be Verdi, certainly,” he says, surprising no one in earshot. “Maybe the ‘Requiem,’ with me dying at the end. But it ends softly, so the place to die would be in the middle, in the Dies Irae” – Verdi’s terrifying choral depiction of Judgement Day – “which is very dramatic. That would be the perfect place to clunk down. But then they’d say, ‘And he conducted 1,200 and ... one-quarter performances.’ What a lame history is that?”

On a more serious note, DeRenzi suggests he’d like to be remembered as “someone who would never do anything to sell out the art form.”

“I guess some people would say that I qualify as rigid,” he says, “but for me the most important thing is to never do anything to compromise the music. I’ve never used this company on a deal, never had to compromise to get something, never settled. And I never would.”

For now, he remains content to plunge into the moment and the music, without projecting about what might lie beyond the score and production he is working on today.

“I think if people ask why I’ve been here so long, it’s because I believe in opera, I believe in this company and I believe in its history and its future,” he says. “I think the world of the arts would be better off if people were committed to what they are doing, instead of what they will be doing next.”

Contact Carrie Seidman at carrie.seidman@gmail.com or 505-238-0392.



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