

March 5, 2020 – Massenet’s *Don Quichotte* & Leigh’s *The Man of La Mancha*

Seventeenth-century Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes is best remembered today for *Don Quixote*, the story of a country squire obsessed with chivalry. His magnum opus has inspired operas, ballets, concertos, songs, and a Broadway musical. On tonight’s WCPE Opera House, we’ll hear Jules Massenet’s *Don Quichotte*, whose title role was written expressly for the great Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin. It was first performed by the Opéra de Monte Carlo on February 19, 1910. As a bonus, we’ll hear Mitch Leigh’s 1965 Broadway musical *The Man of La Mancha*, performed by a mostly operatic cast.

In the Massenet version of the story, the elderly Don Quichotte (bass **Nicolai Ghiaurov**) arouses the jealousy of one of Dulcinée’s (soprano **Régine Crespin**) admirers by singing her a serenade. She intervenes to prevent a duel, and then sends Quichotte on a fool’s errand to retrieve a stolen necklace, promising to marry him if he’s successful. In search of the necklace, Quichotte and his servant Sancho Pança (baritone **Gabriel Bacquier**) approach some windmills. Mistaking them for giants, the Don attacks them.

By his knightly manner, Quichotte is able to win over the robbers to the point that they voluntarily surrender Dulcinée’s necklace. The Don and Sancho come to Dulcinée’s house to turn over the necklace. She’s overjoyed to receive it, but when Quichotte demands her hand as his reward, she derides him and sends him away. In the final act, the “knight errant” is dying. He begs Sancho to pray for him. In the distance, the Don hears the voice of Dulcinée singing to him of love. Transported, he dies, leaving the grief-stricken Sancho.

Kazimierz Kord conducts the Chorus and Orchestra of the Suisse Romande in this 1978 Decca/London recording.

Here’s the trailer for Lyric Opera of Chicago’s 2016 production of *Don Quichotte*:
https://youtu.be/_3HGjHxT1U0.

In Mitch Leigh’s *Man of La Mancha*, **Plácido Domingo** sings Cervantes/Quixote, **Mandy Patinkin** is Sancho Panza, and **Julia Migenes** is the “lady” Aldonza. The cast includes **Carolann Page** as Antonia, **Jerry Hadley** as the Padre, **Rosalind Elias** as the Housekeeper, **Robert White** as the Barber, and **Samuel Ramey** as the Innkeeper.

This Saturday, March 7th, at 1:00 p.m., we’ll broadcast the Metropolitan Opera’s production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Così Fan Tutte*. Don Alfonso (**Gerald Finley**) wagers with Ferrando (**Ben Bliss**) and Guglielmo (**Luca Pisaroni**) that their fiancées Fiordiligi (**Nicole Car**) and Dorabella (**Serena Malfi**) will not be faithful to them while they’re off on military adventures. The ladies’ maid, Despina (**Heidi Stober**), advises the sisters to take new lovers while their men are away. **Harry Bicket** conducts.

Be sure to join me next Thursday, March 12th, for Marc Blitzstein's *Regina*, a 1949 adaptation of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* that presents a bleak picture of upper-class, early 20th-century America, showing how greed can destroy a family. **Katherine Ciesinski** sings the title role and **Samuel Ramey** is her husband Horace Gibbens. Other principals include **Angelina Réaux** as daughter Alexandra and **Sheri Greenawald** as sister-in-law Birdie Hubbard. **John Mauceri** conducts this 1992 recording.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed "live" online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House