

## March 12, 2020 – Blitzstein's *Regina*

Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* is featured on this week's WCPE Opera House. An adaptation of Lillian Hellman's 1939 play *The Little Foxes*, it's a tale of a dysfunctional Alabama family at the beginning of the twentieth century, pitting a declining Southern aristocracy against nascent middle class industrial capitalism. Blitzstein's musical world incorporates spirituals, Victorian parlor music, Ragtime dance, verismo arias, and a large symphonic score. *Regina* premiered at the 46th Street Theatre in New York City on October 31, 1949. In 1953, City Center Opera produced a version of *Regina* with greatly expanded orchestration, giving it a more operatic sound. *Regina* was produced in Glasgow by Scottish Opera in 1991, and the New York City Opera revived it in 1992. In 2008 Long Leaf Opera produced *Regina* in Chapel Hill.

The opera takes place in 1900 at the Giddens' home in Bowden, Alabama. House servants Addie (actress **Theresa Merritt**) and Cal (baritone **Bruce Hubbard**) and Regina's daughter Zan (soprano **Angelina Réaux**) are singing with the Angel Band on the porch. Regina (mezzo-soprano **Katherine Cieasinski**) interrupts to remind Zan to get ready for supper. Mr. Marshall (actor **David Morrison**), who's forming a business partnership with Regina's brothers, Ben (bass-baritone **Timothy Noble**) and Oscar (baritone **James Maddalena**), will be the guest. The guests assemble and toast the new partnership. After Marshall leaves, Regina and her brothers exult over their prospective fortune and talk about how they'll spend it. Oscar's wife Birdie (soprano **Sheri Greenawald**) longs to return to her childhood home. Ben and Oscar complain to Regina that her husband, Horace (bass **Samuel Ramey**), hasn't put up his share of the capital yet. Regina reminds them that he's in the Baltimore hospital and suggests that he's holding out for a larger share of the profits. Ben agrees that Horace and Regina will get a higher share, provided the money is ready within a week. He notes that the extra money will come out of Oscar's profits and suggests that Oscar's son Leo (tenor **David Kuebler**) should marry Zan.

A week later, Leo tells Oscar that there are thousands of dollars' worth of bonds in Horace's safe-deposit box, and Oscar suggests obliquely that he steal them. Addie helps Horace, who has heart disease, into the house. Horace asks Addie why he has been summoned home and Addie says it's for his money. Horace realizes that Regina is up to something and tells her that he doesn't have long to live and declines to be part of the partnership. Leo goes off as Horace meets his lawyer and tells him he'll draw up a new will. Horace tells Regina he's not changed his mind. She's furious but changes her tune when an old beau, Bagtry (actor **Scott Cooper**), walks in, but she dismisses him, preferring her possessions to human love. Leo enters with Horace's bonds, and Ben and Oscar close the deal with Marshall. Regina accuses Horace of taking pleasure in her misfortune and declares that she wants him to die.

The next day, Birdie recalls her childhood home. Zan exits with Birdie, and Horace tells Addie to take Zan away; he has left cash for her. Horace explains to Regina that Leo stole the bonds, he'll treat it as a loan, and he's left Regina the bonds in his will. She's furious and tells Horace she never loved him. Then Horace has an attack and drops his

medicine. Regina makes no move to get the other bottle, and Horace tries to run upstairs for it but collapses. Ben, Oscar, and Leo realize that Horace knows what they did. Regina threatens them with jail. Ben and Oscar realize they have no recourse and concedes. Zan tells Regina that she's leaving for good. The Angel Band sings as the curtain falls.

**John Mauceri** conducts the Scottish Opera Orchestra and Chorus in this 1992 Decca/London recording, CD 433812.

From the 1980 broadcast of the Houston Grand Opera production, **Maralin Niska** sings "The Best Thing of All," Regina's signature song: <https://youtu.be/WbX071fCKKE>.

As a bonus, we'll heard arias and ensembles from Samuel Barber's *Vanessa*, Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*, and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*.

This Saturday afternoon, March 14th, at 1:00 p.m. we're please to broadcast the Metropolitan Opera's production of Richard Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*), with **Evgeny Nikitin** in the title role. Also heard are **Anje Kampe** (Senta), **Franz-Josef Selig** (Daland), **Sergey Skorokhodov** (Erik), **Mihoko Fujimura** (Mary), and **David Portillo** (Steersman). **Valery Gergiev** conducts.

Next Thursday, March 19th, please join us for an encore performance of Charles Gounod's *Faust*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007), starring **Plácido Domingo** (Faust), **Mirella Freni** (Marguerite), and **Nicolai Ghiaurov** (Méphistophélès). **Georges Prêtre** conducts this 1978 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 online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on our Android or iPhone apps.

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*Bob Chapman*

**W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House**