

# Classical Voice

Lifestyle blog for serious music lovers

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## Howard's End America, a Compelling New Chamber Opera for Modern Times

By [Elsa Tranter](#)  
2/25/2019

**Photo credit: Jasmine Van T**

[Earplay](#), with RealOpera, two adventurous San Francisco music groups, staged the world premiere of

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Nov 8, 2018

## October 2018

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Oct 8, 2018

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Sep 18, 2018

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Jul 2, 2018

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Jun 6, 2018

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Jun 1, 2018

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15 Classical Music Festivals to See This Summer  
May 27, 2018

THE RING coming soon to San Francisco!  
May 26, 2018

## January 2018

this new chamber opera this weekend at [Z-space](#) in San Francisco. It was an exciting evening of music, successful in many ways, if not all.

E.M. Forster's turn-of-20th Century novel "Howard's End" is considered by many to be his masterpiece. A film and a TV series have kept the original in the public eye for over a century. Its success can be attributed to its timeless themes—social conventions, personal style, class differences and the duality of restraint and expressiveness—as well as its writing and well-drawn characters. Set in England, it involves three couples—the upper class Wilcox family, owners of the estate Howard's End, the Bloomsbury type liberals (two sisters) and a working class pair. They interact in many ways.

The opera [Howard's End America](#), written by **Allan Shearer** to a libretto by **Claudia Stevens**, is their seventh operatic collaboration. An earlier piece was the recent "Middlemarch in Spring". The current opera transports the action to 1950s Boston with Howard's End on the coast north of the city (Marblehead, for those familiar with New England). The industrialist (turned banker) and his wife and their obnoxious son; the 'do good' activist sisters; and the working class struggling clerk (here notably an African-American and his partner) are the main characters.

LA Phil's Double-Delight: John Williams Celebration on Dudamel's Birthday  
Feb 3, 2019

## January 2019

Mozart and Beethoven in Harmony with Modernism  
Jan 31, 2019

Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Mesmerizing Minimalism in Five Numbers  
Jan 28, 2019

Ailing Mehta Returns to Give Strong Brahms Performances  
Jan 11, 2019

## December 2018

Mandolinist Avi Avital and L.A. Chamber Orchestra Heat Up Winter With Vivaldi  
Dec 29, 2018

Homecoming Mehta Turns LA Phil Into a Brahms Orchestra  
Dec 16, 2018

## November 2018

East Meets West: A Magnificent Chorus of Prayers for Unity  
Nov 20, 2018

LA Opera's Fantastic 'Hansel and Gretel' Is an Early Holiday Treat  
Nov 18, 2018

The Old Globe Joins LA Phil in a Multimedia 'Tempest'  
Nov 13, 2018

In Tchaikovsky and Dvorak, Czech Philharmonic Exudes Warmth and Charm  
Nov 9, 2018

Yo-Yo Ma Fans Prove Centuries-old Music Still Relevant  
Jan 7, 2018

Conductor Charles Dutoit  
Accused of Sexual Assault  
Jan 7, 2018

## November 2017

David Cooper, DSO Principal  
Horn, to Leave for Berlin  
Philharmonic  
Nov 15, 2017

## October 2017

Post-Harvey, Houston Grand  
Opera Regroups at New Venue  
Oct 12, 2017

When classical music becomes  
another character in a movie  
Oct 9, 2017

Seattle Symphony's '[untitled]':  
Trains, automobiles and  
Tennessee Williams  
Oct 9, 2017

Nursery using classical music to  
calm babies  
Oct 9, 2017

Seattle Symphony Announces  
Thomas Dausgaard as Its New  
Maestro  
Oct 3, 2017

## September 2017

'I only listen to classical music  
now. I listen to Bach every night':  
ABBA's Benny Andersson  
Sep 29, 2017

## May 2017

Glass's Satyagraha Still Relevant at  
40: Colorful Staging, Luminous Voices  
and Orchestra Peal Out Gandhi's  
Truth  
Nov 4, 2018

Back by Popular Demand, Taiwan  
Philharmonic Shows its French Colors  
Nov 1, 2018

## October 2018

A Powerfully Moving Bernstein Tribute  
by a Former Protégé  
Oct 29, 2018

Pianist Seong-Jin Cho Impresses in  
LA Recital Debut  
Oct 26, 2018

A Rainbow-Colorful Take on  
Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet  
Oct 22, 2018

Classical Music is New Again in LA  
Phil's 100th Season  
Oct 9, 2018

Mozart Masses Consecrate and  
Inaugurate PSOC Season  
Oct 6, 2018

## September 2018

Pacific Symphony's Opening Concert  
Has Glam, Fun and Poetry  
Sep 30, 2018

Domingo's Star Shines Brightly in a  
Dark "Don Carlo"  
Sep 25, 2018

A Stirring Mozart Requiem Opens LA  
Master Chorale New Season  
Sep 24, 2018

## August 2018

A Delightful Bowl of Beethoven, Orff  
and British Comedy

Adding the race issue to the class issue in 1950s Boston is an interesting, if not totally effective, shift for the opera. As an example, in the opening scene, Leonard Bast, the black man, meets Helen Schlegel, one of the two sisters, after a Boston Symphony performance of Beethoven's Ninth symphony, and they join voices in a bit of the "Ode to Joy" as the ultimate in musical beauty. This is later contrasted with Leonard's partner's love of the jazz music of the 1930s suggesting that it is less worthy of attention. To a modern audience this seems like a stereotypical false dichotomy, although in the 1950s it might have been more accurate. (In the novel the music is Beethoven's Fifth symphony—Forster was a great lover of classical music). The twists and turns of the plot were sketched out but not developed fully, so knowing the story in advance was a big help).

The set design and projections, by a Bay Area regular, **Jeremy Knight**, were excellent. Using wonderful rolling ocean waves through an open window

Benjamin Grosvenor Endorses  
Casio Digital Pianos  
May 4, 2017

## October 2016

Famous British conductor  
Neville Marriner, 92, has died  
Oct 3, 2016

## September 2016

Decca and DG join to release  
New Complete Mozart Edition  
on 200 CDs  
Sep 7, 2016

## April 2016

Pilot tells violinist she can't carry  
on her \$20M Guarneri  
Apr 30, 2016

latest from WQXR, New York  
Apr 19, 2016

latest from Operavore  
Apr 18, 2016

Arena di Verona summer festival  
in liquidation after failed labor  
talks  
Apr 9, 2016

2016 Van Cliburn Amateur  
Competition News  
Apr 1, 2016

## March 2016

Van Cliburn winner finds 2  
daughters slain; wife pleads not  
guilty  
Mar 29, 2016

## February 2016

at Howard's End in all sorts of weather, was most entrancing, as were the city skyline, the Back Bay house fronts and the seedy back streets. And the small touches such as the old-fashioned thermos bottle at the family picnic were effective throughout. The costumes, by Marina Polakoff, seemed authentic (and familiar to me)—lots of cashmere cardigans, wide petticoated skirts, and pedal pusher pants. The stage director, Philip Lowery, is another familiar face to Bay Area audiences, being involved with several other musical groups. He brought the production together in a very satisfying way.

The singers were well-cast and all were true to their parts. Bass-baritone **Philip Skinner** as the industrialist Henry Wilcox, gave a compelling performance, despite being a bit indisposed from a chest cold. He is a stalwart of the Bay Area opera scene and always comes through. His ailing wife, seen only in the first act, was beautifully acted and sung by mezzo-soprano **Erin Neff**, a regular performer at San Francisco Opera. She had a great deathbed aria. Their son

Aug 31, 2018

A Pleasant Outdoor Summer Night  
with Perlman and Dudamel  
Aug 24, 2018

## July 2018

Dudamel Conducts a Forceful 'Otello'  
at the Bowl  
Jul 18, 2018

Bernstein 100 Celebration Continues  
at the Bowl  
Jul 11, 2018

## May 2018

'Schumann Focus' Project Features  
Pianist, Cellist and Psychologist  
May 28, 2018

LA Opera's "Rigoletto" Has Great  
Tunes, Fanciful Costumes and Sizzling  
Hot Voices  
May 20, 2018

Mother's Day with Mother Goose and  
Labèque Sisters  
May 14, 2018

André Watts plays "Emperor"  
Concerto in Grand Style  
May 7, 2018

## April 2018

Sunday at the Phil, Bernstein 100 and  
Beethoven's 9th  
Apr 26, 2018

Mahler's "Das Lied" Features Soloists  
and CGI Effects  
Apr 26, 2018

## March 2018

A San Franciscan Night to Remember  
at Disney Hall

Grisly murder of concert pianist by husband jealous of her success

Feb 24, 2016

Unique version of Vivaldi's Four Seasons in Manchester, UK

Feb 23, 2016

Dudamel and YOLA at Super Bowl 50: Too brief but Still a Win

Feb 8, 2016

## January 2016

Nikolaus Harnoncourt announces his retirement

Jan 2, 2016

## December 2015

Kurt Masur (1927-2015)

Dec 19, 2015

Charles, the shallow frat boy, was sung with appropriate nastiness by baritone **Daniel Cilli**. The two sisters, soprano **Nikki Einfeld** as the endearing Margaret and soprano **Sara Duchovnay** as the willful and reckless Helen, gave strong performances. Tenor **Michael Dailey** gave an emotional performance as the unfortunate Leonard Best, caught in the snares of the 'do-gooders' and left to suffer the consequences. His partner Jacky, a fading club singer, was played with spunk and pizzazz by **Candace Johnson**.

Through the ups and downs of the plot, the book (and the opera) has a satisfying conclusion, with some sort of justice delivered to those who deserve it

The small chamber orchestra, made up of some top local musicians, was conducted peppily by Music Director **Mary Chun**, who did an excellent job. The music was at times beautiful and

Mar 29, 2018

"Orpheus" Legend Reborn With Joffrey Ballet

Mar 11, 2018

Ebullient Brahms Piano Trios with Yo-Yo Ma and Friends

Mar 6, 2018

## February 2018

Dudamel Presents Bernstein's Mass at Great Musical Theater

Feb 6, 2018

A devilishly fun "Candide" at L.A. Opera

Feb 5, 2018

## January 2018

Dudamel Conducts Brahms Ending in a Birthday Bash

Jan 29, 2018

A sensory Multimedia Presentation from Finland

Jan 27, 2018

## December 2017

Mehta Out, MTT In for Mozart and Bruckner

Dec 17, 2017

## November 2017

Domingo Is Nabucco in LA Opera's Authentic Period Production

Nov 5, 2017

Gergiev Brings Mariinsky Orchestra to L.A. in an All-Russian Concert

Nov 3, 2017



## October 2017

there were a few emotional duets, but more often it was a play set to music and not so much enhanced by it. The occasional nods to other styles—the bits of Beethoven and the jazz tunes—were pleasant additions but left the reminder of how un-tuneful the rest of the music was.


At the end of the evening, I was quite impressed with the overall effect of the performance, without feeling a need to re-listen to the music. It is heartening that new operas are being written (and performed) even if they don't all become classics. This one was worth seeing!

*Elsa Tranter is a Bostonian who has lived in Berkeley for over 40 years and has been an opera goer for most of those years. She worked as a graduate student adviser at UC Berkeley and still attends Cal Performances regularly. Her favorite composer is Wagner and her favorite opera is Tristan und Isolde.*

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 February 25, 2019 /  Elsa

Tranter /  Comment

 San Francisco, Opera Review

 Howard's End America, Earplay, RealOpera, Z-Space

Riccardo Muti Leads Chicago Symphony in Memorable L.A. Debut  
Oct 24, 2017

An Enchanted Evening at LA Opera's 'Pearl Fishers'  
Oct 20, 2017

Mozart Headlines LA Phil's New Season  
Oct 6, 2017

## September 2017

LA Opera's Landmark 'Carmen' Has Vocal Glamour and Audience of 10,000  
Sep 26, 2017

Strong Force at Hollywood Bowl with John Williams, Kobe Bryant  
Sep 8, 2017

## June 2017

LA Phil Closes Season with Brilliant Bartok Cycle and Janáček Fanfare  
Jun 6, 2017

## May 2017

Cast Change Adds Vocal Glamour to L.A. Opera's Final 'Tosca'  
May 17, 2017

In OC debut, British Pianist Benjamin Grosvenor Plays with Fire and Elegance  
May 6, 2017

A Thrilling Ring Cycle in a Nutshell  
May 2, 2017

## April 2017

L.A. Opera Ends Main Season with Unexpectedly Entertaining 'Tosca'  
Apr 28, 2017