

Chicago Tribune

Winter's best in classical music

Lyric Opera plans new production of 'Faust'

By John von Rhein, Tribune critic

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Many of Chicago's classical music producers, including Chicago Opera Theater, wait until the final three months of the concert season before hauling out their choicest wares. Still, there is a lot of tempting music to look forward to between now and then. Here, in chronological order, are 10 of the winter's more promising performances:

Northwestern Winter Chamber Music Festival: Violinist and Bienen School of Music faculty member Blair Milton always puts together winning combinations of music and musicians for the festival, which begins its 14th edition next weekend. Among the guests for the six-concert series are cellists Lynn Harrell and Ken Olsen, violinists Ilya Kaler and Robert Chen, Dorian Woodwind Quintet and the Jupiter and Lincoln string quartets. *Friday to Jan. 24; Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, 50 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston; 847-467-4000, pickstaiger.org.*

"The Elixir of Love": Lyric Opera of Chicago revives its 1977 production of Donizetti's delightful bel canto comedy about a country bumpkin (Giuseppe Filianoti) who buys a phony elixir from a quack, Dulcamara (Alessandro Corbelli), hoping it will win the favor of the fair Adina (Nicole Cabell). Bruno Campanella keeps the tunes bubbling in the pit. *Ten performances, opening Jan. 23; Civic Opera House, 20 N. Wacker Drive; 312-332-2244, lyricopera.org*

Music of the Baroque: Mozart, Handel and Haydn will figure prominently in three sets of concerts conducted by Jane Glover. You have your choice of catching the Mozart Requiem, a choral program titled "Handel and the Royals" and a pairing of Haydn symphonies with double concertos by Bach and Mozart. *Feb. 5 and 7; Feb. 28, March 1; March 28, 31; First United Methodist Church, 1630 Hinman Ave., Evanston; and Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph St.; 312-551-1414, baroque.org*

Chicago Symphony Orchestra: Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas can be depended on to bring us 20th century masterpieces. Included in his two weeks of concerts are Alban Berg's Three Pieces for Orchestra along with an all-Stravinsky program that includes the monumental opera-oratorio "Oedipus Rex." *Feb. 11-21; Symphony Center, 220 S. Michigan Ave.; 312-294-3000, cso.org.*

"The Damnation of Faust": Lyric Opera's second Faust staging of the season looks to be one of the season's major highlights. An increasing number of opera companies have staged Berlioz's "dramatic legend" in recent decades. For Lyric's first-ever production of a Berlioz work, music director Andrew Davis will lead a strong cast — Paul Groves as Faust, Susan Graham as Marguerite and John Relyea as Mephistopheles — in a new production by British director Stephen Langridge. *Seven performances, opening Feb. 20; Civic Opera House, 20 N. Wacker Drive; 312-332-2244, lyricopera.org.*

"The Marriage of Figaro": What opera-goer doesn't dote on Mozart's ever-fresh comedy of Eros? Lyric Opera brings back its witty and elegant Peter Hall production with a top-drawer cast that includes Danielle de Niese as Susanna, Kyle Ketelsen as Figaro, Anne Schwanewilms as the Countess, Mariusz Kwiecien as the Count and Joyce DiDonato as Cherubino. Andrew Davis will preside over seven performances, with Leonardo Vordoni taking over the remaining four. *Opens Feb. 28; Civic Opera House, 20 N. Wacker Drive; 312-332-2244, lyricopera.org.*

"Beyond Flamenco: Finding Spain in Music": Celebrate the cultural heritage of Spain through its music, poetry and visual art, as leading Spanish musicians (including pianist Pedro Carbone and conductor Angel Gil-Ordóñez) perform works by Albeniz, Falla, Rodrigo and others in a three-day festival, with commentary by co-creators Anthony Muñoz-Molina and Joseph Horowitz. The musical performances will be augmented by an exhibition of Julio Gonzales's drawings and sculpture at the Smart Museum. *March 4-6; Mandel Hall, University of Chicago, 1157 E. 57th St.; 773-702-8068; chicagopresents.uchicago.edu.*

Rembrandt Chamber Players: The estimable Chicago group presents the third and final installment of its multiyear Mahler Project — a rare performance of Arnold Schoenberg's chamber-orchestra arrangement of Mahler's orchestral song cycle "Das Lied von der Erde." Jane Glover conducts. *March 23; Gottlieb Hall, Merit School of Music, 38 S. Peoria St.; 312-360-3145, rembrandtchamberplayers.org.*

eighth blackbird: Leave it to this adventurous sextet to come up with the most provocative new-music event of the spring. "Slide" is a concert-length music theater work conceived and performed by composer Steven Mackey, actor-singer Rinde Eckert and the ensemble. The piece is said to explore "the seduction and manipulation of the American psyche" in today's world, combining sound, text, movement and image. *March 24; Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph Drive; 312-334-7777, harristheaterchicago.org.*

"Vespers of 1610": Claudio Monteverdi's sacred masterpiece, one of the glories of the early Italian Baroque, will come alive in a collaboration by the chamber choir Bella Voce and the period ensemble Callipygian Players, with violinists Rachel Barton Pine and Martin Davids. *March 29; Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph Drive; 312-334-7777, harristheaterchicago.org.*