

## In Its 10th Season, Boston Midsummer Opera Brings The Rarely Seen 'Martha' To The Stage



Stephanie Kacyonis (Nancy) and Jason Budd (Plunkett) of Boston Midsummer Opera's "Martha" Production (Courtesy Boston Midsummer Opera)

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[Boston Midsummer Opera](#), which is about to have its 10th season, mainly under the musical guidance of one of our most inspired and exploratory conductors, Susan Davenny Wyner, has made a healthy habit of emphasizing tuneful comic operas we don't often get a chance to hear. Works like Rossini's "The Italian Girl in Algiers," Otto Nicolai's "[The Merry Wives of Windsor](#)" (based on Shakespeare's comedy about Falstaff) or last year's folksy "The Bartered Bride." Ideal summer entertainment.

One of my favorite BMO productions was Lee Hoiby's "Bon Appetit" with the great Judy Kaye as Julia Child singing an episode from the famous chef's TV show (not all Midsummer Operas are

from the 19th century), on a double bill with Leonard Bernstein's satire of suburbia, "Trouble in Tahiti."

This summer, BMO is firmly back in the 19th century with Friedrich von Flotow's "Martha" (which premiered in Vienna in 1847). It's an opera probably very few of us in this country have ever seen but it includes two of the most famous arias in the entire operatic repertoire. One of them, "M'appari" ("She appeared to me" — this summer's production will be in English), has been a tenor favorite from Caruso (who sang it at the Met and made a landmark recording in 1917) to Pavarotti. In Joyce's "Ulysses," it's one of the tunes running through Leopold Bloom's mind.

The other aria, "The Last Rose of Summer," is actually a traditional Irish melody with words by Thomas Moore. It's sung by the heroine, an 18th-century British lady who, for her amusement, disguises herself as a maidservant named Martha. Flotow incorporates the song into the texture of the entire opera.

Here's a remarkable recording of "The Last Rose of Summer" by Nina Simone:

Except for the strong bass David Cushing, a welcome figure in Boston's opera world, as Sir Tristan Mickleford, the heroine's lordly cousin, and bass Jason Budd as the tenor's best friend (he was the excellent Falstaff in the Nicolai), the young BMO cast is largely unfamiliar to me.

Stage director James O'Leary, who has a serious interest in musical theater as well as opera and teaches at Oberlin, will be discussing "Martha" before each performance with former Globe music critic Richard Dyer, whose witty pre-opera talks for BMO have become a delicious tradition.

With conductor Davenny Wyner at the center, I'm confident in "Martha's" musical qualities. And I'm eager to finally see a production of it.

*Performances are at the Tsai Performance Center at Boston University: evenings July 29 and 31, at 7:30 p.m., with a Sunday matinee, Aug. 2, at 3 p.m. Visit the Boston Midsummer Opera's website for [more information](#) and to [listen to other recordings](#).*