

BACK FROM THE DEAD

A resurrected Eugene Opera brings Maria de Buenos Aires to life

“Born on a day God was drunk,” Maria inhabits a Buenos Aires demimonde populated by ghosts, criminals, marionettes, pasta makers, psychoanalysts and other shady characters. She’s seduced by tango, becomes a prostitute, is murdered — and then things get *really* weird.

That’s just Act One of Ástor Piazzolla’s surreal, melancholy *Maria de Buenos Aires*, which **Eugene Opera** brings to the Hult Center’s Soren Theater Friday and Sunday, May 4 and 6.

The great Argentine composer’s 1968 “tango operita” has been performed often all over the world, including by Portland’s Third Angle new music ensemble with the University of Oregon’s own smoky-voiced mezzo soprano Milagro Vargas.

Set mostly in a shadowy Argentine nightclub, this production features Colombian-born soprano Catalina Cuervo, who claims to have starred in the title role (with multiple opera companies) more often than anyone else. It also features experienced American baritone Paul La Rosa, Argentine born actor Milton Loayza, renowned Argentine tango dancers Fernanda Ghi and Guillermo Merlo, and a quartet of local dancers.

Piazzolla’s tango-tinged music is as dramatically seductive as lyricist Horacio Ferrer’s story is strange. In Act Two, Maria goes to hell and, among other adventures, bears a child who may be herself — maybe a metaphorical parallel to Eugene Opera’s own recent financial collapse and rebirth? It’s good to have not just the company but contemporary opera and, on her 50th birthday, Maria de Buenos Aires back among the living.

We can celebrate another new-music birth Saturday, May 5, when the **Composers of Oregon Chamber Orchestra** makes its concert debut at the UO’s Beall Concert Hall. Professor, conductor, composer and all-around contemporary music advocate Brian McWhorter leads performances of brand-new works by a half dozen UO student composers.

There’s also a bit of new music on the **Oregon Mozart Players** May 12 concert at Beall: Chinese-American composer Zhou Tian’s aptly named *Joy*, an exuberant short work that embodies youthful energy. The program also fea-



tures Mozart’s ebullient Symphony No. 38 and the winners of the orchestra’s Young Soloist Competition in classics by Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky.

A very different combination of music and theater than Piazzolla’s arrives at Beall on Monday, May 14, borne by the **Elsewhere Ensemble**, a New York theater-music group whose members hail from the US, the UK, France, Belgium, Russia, Switzerland, Japan and beyond.

Various configurations converge on different projects. This one revolves around three stories by the great Russian playwright Anton Chekhov and features award-winning Broadway actors and a new original score for string trio composed by the ensemble’s violinist, Colin Pip Dixon.

Piazzolla’s aren’t the only south-of-the-border sounds heading our way this month. On Wednesday, May 9, **Trio Brasileiro** brings its *choro* and other Brazilian music to the WOW Hall. This is the virtuosic guitar-mandolin-percussion band that’s turned in so many excellent recordings and performances with Israeli jazz clarinetist Anat Cohen in recent years, but their own original music goes well beyond jazz, drawing fruitfully on traditional Brazilian forms as well as newer global influences.

Three days later at The Shedd, Seattle-based Brazilian composer/pianist **Jovino Santos Neto** returns with his quartet with their mix of various Brazilian rhythms, from

choro to *forró* to samba and more. On May 11, another Shedd returnee, eight-timer **John Pizzarelli**, brings his guitar, pianist Konrad Paszkudzki, bassist Mike Karn, his ever-charming stage manner, and his American Songbook standards and maybe even a bit of bossa nova.

Speaking of retro jazz, on May 10 and 13, **Emerald City Jazz Kings** play their 20 greatest hits at The Shedd, as voted on by fans via The Shedd’s website, including a hit from 1895 through Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin, the Gershwins, Johnny Mercer, Cole Porter and the rest. They’ll play the same sets at Corvallis’s LaSells Stewart Center this Friday, May 4, and at Florence Events Center Sunday afternoon, May 6.

Finally, if you thought this #MeToo thing had gone too far, now one of those uppity females has transgressed another male bastion: Franz Schubert’s *The Miller’s Daughter* (*Die Schöne Müllerin*), originally written for (presumably male) baritone singer and pianist.

This Sunday afternoon, May 6, at First United Methodist Church, 1376 Olive Street, soprano **Emma Lynn** sings Schubert’s immortal 1823 song cycle about unrequited love, abetted by pianist Andrew Pham. Just last week, a pair of great sopranos did the same thing up in Portland. Is nothing sacred? As with Maria de Buenos Aires, one can only hope ... ■

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