



JULIA BULLOCK, soprano



"The evening's most remarkable showstopper came when Julia Bullock appeared out of nowhere to deliver a full-voiced, stunningly paced account of "Somewhere." "West Side Story" is full of musical treasures, but for just a moment it seemed as though nothing Bernstein ever wrote was quite as magical as that one song."

– SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"I loved her. If Bullock does not rise to prominence in short order, something is very wrong in the world."

– SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE

"In this performance, Bullock comes from a place of transcendence."

– LOS ANGELES TIMES

"The performance itself was something of a tour de force. Julia Bullock – the enormously gifted soprano – threw herself into the assignment with dramatic abandon and a thrilling mastery of Saariaho's intricate vocal writing."

– SFGATE

"Her soprano mellow and flexible, somber yet with a crucial undercurrent of youthful hopefulness, Ms. Bullock was a magnetically still presence – until a sensational climactic break into sinuous Baker-esque choreography."

– THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Julia Bullock, as the titular vixen, led the way in terms of clarity of delivery and beauty of sound. Her broad range of expression allowed her to be impetuous and demonstrative in her early scenes, then appealingly self-dramatizing later. Bullock's sound was especially opulent and glorious in her upper register."

– OPERA NEWS

"Ms. Bullock wielded her elegant, richly hued voice to alluring effect. She shone throughout, her sultry voice and charismatic stage presence a delight."

– THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Julia Bullock doesn't just sing to her audience. She connects with it . . . those who were drawn in by her haunting voice weren't just paying compliments, they were thanking her."

– THE DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE (Rochester)

"Some of the most exciting moments came from Bullock, the complete package as a performer, with the presence, voice, musicianship and dramatic chops to be a major star."

– ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

"Soprano Julia Bullock sang Delage's exquisite songs with a vivid presence, total dramatic involvement, a full, very beautiful voice, and technical precision. Given her assurance – actually real charisma – on stage and the maturity of her interpretation, it was hard to believe that this was her Carnegie Hall debut. She brought the house down. Seeing and hearing her in the songs was quite unforgettable."

– NEW YORK ARTS

"I found myself tearing up when she started singing in a luminous full voice, round and shining and shifting and elusive as a ball of mercury, simply because the sound she was making was so beautiful... Bullock is such a communicator that it was impossible to divorce the beauty of the notes from the content of what they were conveying."

– THE WASHINGTON POST

"There was much more than mere vocal allure: superb diction and a compelling stage manner that would have communicated much of the meaning even if the words had not registered so clearly."

– THE NEW YORK TIMES

2016 Sphinx Foundation Medal of Excellence

2015 Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellowship • Lincoln Center 2015 Martin E. Segal Award

First Prize, 2014 Naumburg International Vocal Competition • First Prize, 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions

Alexander Kaszner-Kasser Kennedy Center Debut Prize • The Albany Symphony Prize

The Sinfonia Gulf Coast Prize • The University of Florida Performing Arts Prize

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Photo: Christian Steiner



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JULIA BULLOCK, soprano

Soprano Julia Bullock's versatile artistry was recently recognized with her appointment as 2018-19 Artist in Residence for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's MetLiveArts Series in New York. Is it possible to provide a voice for stories that have been made silent? That's a question this intellectual powerhouse ponders as she crafts a season of thought-provoking and transcendent performances. This "exceptional singer of the new generation" (The New York Times), hailed as "opulent and glorious" by Opera News, adds her voice – both the rich, resonant soprano that's been garnering raves around the world, and the voice of social consciousness and activism that she considers fundamental to her role as artist – to The Met. Julia Bullock has created five programs that will be presented throughout the season, which includes collaborations with renowned guest performers and draws on the lives, legacies, and words of Josephine Baker, Langston Hughes, and Thornton Dial among others.

Equally at home with opera and concert repertoire, soprano Julia Bullock captivates audiences with her commanding stage presence. She launched the Boston Symphony Orchestra's 2017-2018 season, joining Andris Nelsons in its Bernstein Gala, has performed numerous times with the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, and has appeared with the London Symphony Orchestra and Simon Rattle, New York Philharmonic and Alan Gilbert, San Francisco Symphony conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, Baltimore Symphony conducted by Marin Alsop, NHK Orchestra in Tokyo led by Paavo Järvi, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Academy, IRIS Orchestra, New World Symphony, and New York Youth Symphony at Carnegie Hall. This season, she appears with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and at the Buffalo Chamber Music Society, Vancouver Recital Society, Mary Baldwin University and Chamber Music Society of Palm Beach.

In recital, Julia Bullock has performed at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, the Library of Congress and National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, the Celebrity Series of Boston, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Cal Performances Berkeley, University of California Santa Barbara Arts & Lectures, and Spivey Hall amongst numerous others.

Julia Bullock recently debuted with the San Francisco Opera in the world premiere of *Girls of the Golden West* composed by John Adams to a libretto by Peter Sellars, Santa Fe Opera as Kitty Oppenheimer in a new Peter Sellars production of Adams' *Doctor Atomic*, and Dutch National Opera. She performed the title role in Purcell's *The Indian Queen* at the Bolshoi and the English National Operas, and toured South America as Pamina in Peter Brook's award-winning *A Magic Flute*. Other opera roles include Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Monica in *The Medium*, and the title roles in *Cendrillon*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*.

Ms. Bullock's contextually-driven recital and educational outreach programs have taken her across the United States to venues including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall Neighborhood Concerts and the National Museum of Women in the Arts. She has appeared numerous times with the New York Festival of Song and Caramoor, as well as at the Ojai Music Festival. She premiered a work by Jonathan Berger with The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, collaborates with the International Contemporary Ensemble, and has participated in master classes with bass-baritone José van Dam, soprano Jessye Norman, bass-baritone Eric Owens, and soprano Dawn Upshaw.

Ms. Bullock's accolades include a 2016 Sphinx Foundation Medal of Excellence, a 2015 Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellowship, the 2015 Richard F. Gold Grant from the Shoshana Foundation, Lincoln Center's 2015 Martin E. Segal Award, First Prize at the 2014 Naumburg International Vocal Competition, and First Prize at the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. She was chosen to participate in the Artists-in-Training program with the Opera Theater of St. Louis, holds the Lindemann Vocal Chair of Young Concert Artists, and her management has been supported by the Barbara Forester Austin Fund for Art Song. Julia Bullock holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music and Bard Graduate Vocal Arts Program, and she earned an Artist's Diploma from The Juilliard School in 2015.

Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Ms. Bullock integrates her musical life with community activism. She has organized and participated in benefit concerts in support of the FSH Society, the Music and Medicine Initiative for New York's Weill Medical Center, and the Shropshire Music Foundation, a non-profit that serves war-affected children and adolescents through music education and performance programs in Kosovo, Northern Ireland, and Uganda.

JULIA BULLOCK, *soprano*

REPERTOIRE WITH ORCHESTRA

J.S. BACH	<i>Cantata BWV 199</i> <i>Magnificat in D Major</i> <i>Mass in A major</i> <i>St. Matthew Passion</i> <i>St. John Passion</i>
BARBER	<i>Knoxville: Summer of 1915</i>
BERLIOZ	<i>Les nuits d'été</i>
BRAHMS	<i>Ein Deutsches Requiem</i>
DEBUSSY	<i>Beaudelaire songs</i> (arr. by John Adams)
DELAGE	<i>Quatre poèmes hindous</i> (chamber orchestra)
FOSS	<i>Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird</i> (chamber ensemble)
JAEGER	<i>Letters Made with Gold</i>
MAHLER	Symphony No. 4
MOZART	<i>Requiem</i>
ROSSINI	<i>Petite Messe Solennelle</i>
VILLA-LOBOS	<i>Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5</i>
VIVALDI	<i>Gloria, RV 589</i>

OPERA ROLES

DUNPHY	<i>The Gonzales Canata</i> (2009), Gonzales
GLUCK	<i>Armide</i> , <i>Une bergère</i> (cover)
JANÁČEK	<i>The Cunning Little Vixen</i> (in English translation), Vixen
MASSENET	<i>Cendrillon</i> , <i>Cendrillon</i>
MENOTTI	<i>The Medium</i> , Monica
MOZART	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i> , Pamina <i>Le nozze di Figaro</i> , Susanna
PURCELL	<i>The Indian Queen</i> (<i>Peter Sellars incarnation</i>), <i>The Indian Queen</i>
RAVEL	<i>L'enfant et les sortilèges</i> , <i>L'Enfant</i>
ROSSINI	<i>La cambiale di matrimonio</i> , Fanní (cover)



Julia Bullock, soprano



Review: Have You Met Ms. BULLOCK? JULIA, That Is, At Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall

Richard Sasanow | *Opera World* | April 23, 2018



When the radiant, intellectual soprano Julia Bullock stepped on stage Carnegie Hall's intimate venue, Weill Recital Hall (just 268 seats), to wild applause, I felt like I was the only one hearing her "live" for the first time. Everyone else there seemed to have a personal relationship with her and her artistry.

Julia Bullock in recital. Photos: Steve J. Sherman

I'd heard glimpses of her portrayal of Dame Shirley, whose writings are the heart of John Adams' *GIRLS OF THE GOLDEN WEST*, which she debuted in San Francisco last fall to much acclaim and in some YouTube clips. Otherwise, I'd somehow missed her "live," in previous recitals and in the title roles of *CENDRILLON* and *CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN* at Juilliard. My loss--and a significant one.

At Weill, we heard the side of Bullock that gives life to a variety of songs--no arias here, though she is known for a gamut of roles from Mozart to Adams (she's doing Kitty Oppenheimer at Santa Fe this summer), Gershwin to Stravinsky, Massenet to Janacek.



This concert was filled with a broad variety of treats, accompanied by John Arida on piano who also had a chance to show off some superlative work of his own. They ranged from the Schubert *lieder* and Barber's "Hermit Songs" to her encore numbers, the haunting "One by One" by Connie Converse (which, as Bullock posits, is reminiscent of Schubert) and the delicious "La Conga Blicoti," composed by Armando Orefiche for Josephine Baker. (Bullock has a special fondness for Baker, having premiered Tyshawn Sorey's "Portrait: Josephine Baker"--he wrote "Cycles of My Being" for Lawrence Brownlee, having its NY debut at Zankel Hall next week--at the Ojai Festival a few years ago).

She was, in a word, spectacular. Her affinity for the Schubert was remarkable, tossing off the songs as if she were a native speaker of German and commenting on the music as she went along.

(continues)

Bullock started off with "Suleika I," which Brahms called "the loveliest song ever written"--and the text was written by Goethe. Rather, she explained, it was written by Marianne von Willemer, who had a relationship with the famed poet. She put us on notice: No woman left behind in this concert. She sang that first Schubert with thoughtfulness and urgency, caressing the music at every turn and putting her whole body into it; she's not a performer who stands with hands neatly folded in front of her. She took on a new persona with every piece: lilting and almost jaunty in "*Seligkeit*," prayer-like in the *Wandrer's Nachlied II*, caressing in *Lachen und Weinen*.

Finishing the first half of the program were Samuel Barber's "Hermit Songs," based on texts written by monks in the Middle Ages, speaking about their simple lives, and translated by a variety of writers. They debuted in 1953 with the then-unknown Leontyne Price and provided an opportunity for **Bullock to show not only her expressiveness but her ability to turn on a dime, with songs short and long, religious and witty, declamatory and soaring.** Bullock and Arida did some of their closest work here. I particularly like the brief, languorous "Church Bell at Night" and "Promiscuity," as well as the luxurious "The Monk and the Cat" with its odd sonorities.

The second half began with selections from Faure's "*La Chanson d'Eve*," and while Bullock's explanations were interesting, and she was moving in her in her interpretations, I can't say I warmed to the work itself. Much more compelling, for me, were her explorations into jazz and the blues written for or by black women (and Bullock's use of her increasingly mezzo-ish sound). **How lucky we are that the days are gone when a "serious" singer wouldn't dare dip into this kind of repertoire, because Bullock was truly riveting here.**

In "Driftin' Tide," written by the husband-wife team of Spencer Williams and Pat Castleton for Alberta Hunter, the singer was a low-key charmer, using a matter-of-fact style to tell about her resignation to "getting him back again." She then showed her sassy side in Maceo Pinkard's "You Can't Tell the Difference After Dark" (also recorded by Hunter), singing of the appeal of women who "may be brown as a berry." Hunter also provided another bluesy charmer for Bullock--this time, as coauthor with Lovie Austin--in "Downhearted Blues," which was a massive hit for Bessie Smith, making her a household name.

A Billie Holiday collaboration, "Our Love Is Different," provided Bullock with a seductive torch song, but it was a pair of Nina Simone compositions (the first co-written with Weldon Irvine Jr.) that provided an edgy triumph for her, though she had been hesitant about taking them on because of Simone's distinctive style: With "Revolution," she stripped away the arrangement and brilliantly sang it *a capella*. Bullock finished off the printed program with "Four Women"--showing the pain behind their cutesy names--before taking on those two encores mentioned earlier, but still leaving us wanting more.

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/bwwopera/article/BWW-Review-Have-You-Met-Ms-BULLOCK-JULIA-That-Is-At-Carnegies-Weill-Recital-Hall-20180423>

The New York Times

ARTS

This Week

By THE NEW YORK TIMES APRIL 20, 2018



The soprano [Julia Bullock](#) will sing works by Schubert and Barber and songs made famous by Billie Holiday. Credit Julieta Cervantes for The New York Times

Classical Music

April 20; carnegiehall.org.

At Weill Recital Hall, the rising young soprano [Julia Bullock](#) will be joined by pianist John Arida for a mixed program that includes canonic songs by Schubert and Barber, as well as a set of jazz and blues tunes made famous by African-American singers, including Nina Simone, Billie Holiday, among others. *WILLIAM ROBIN*

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Scene

Mar. 30-
Apr. 5, 2018

A portrait of Julia Bullock, a young woman with voluminous, curly dark hair, smiling broadly. She is wearing a dark, sleeveless top with lace detailing on the side and dark pants. She is sitting with her arms crossed over her knees.

Julia
Bullock

Rising American Soprano

Schubert meets the Blues, Courtesy of a Fast-Rising American Soprano

JULIA BULLOCK, A HIGHLY RESPECTED AND FAST-RISING AMERICAN SOPRANO, MAKES HER LOCAL RECITAL DEBUT AT HAHN HALL ON THE THEMES OF SCHUBERT, SAMUEL BARBER AND THE CONTEMPORARY BLUES

By Josef Woodard,
News-Press Correspondent



Julia Bullock, soprano
John Arida, piano

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday
Where: Hahn Hall, Music Academy of the West, 1070 Fairway Rd.
Cost: \$37, \$10 UCSB students
Information: 893-3535, ArtsAndLectures.UCSB.edu

Clearly, one of the hot tickets of the current, 2017-18 classical music season takes place in Hahn Hall on Tuesday, and with a meaty, surprising programming menu including Schubert, Samuel Barber and contemporary blues. The potent voice and charismatic persona belong to widely-respected and innately adventurous young soprano Julia Bullock, a powerful and uniquely versatile singer who has been heralded for her work in “Porgy and Bess,” “West Side Story” and John Adams’ “El Nino.”

She has also stacked up appearances with some of the world’s great orchestras — the NY Phil, LA Phil, London Symphony Orchestra (with Simon Rattle on the podium), the San Francisco Symphony — in addition to her passionate engagement in more experimental, contemporary and off the standard repertoire radar projects. In short, she’s a hot property on the current serious musical scene.

Although Tuesday’s recital, with her accompanist-partner John Arida on piano, will be her recital debut in Santa Barbara, she has passed through the 805 in recent years and left an indelible mark. There she was, as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic during its pops-y Santa Barbara Bowl performance during the 2015 Music Academy of the West season and, more distinctively, as a starring



COURTESY PHOTO

Mixing Schubert with blues and more, Soprano Julia Bullock to make local recital debut.

attraction of the Peter Sellars-directed 2016 edition of the world class Ojai Music Festival — in not one, but two challenging roles.

We checked in with the upwardly and laterally mobile Ms. Bullock for an interview before her trip out west.

News-Press: You appeared with the NY Phil, via the Music Academy of the West, were at the Ojai Music Festival in 2016, and now you are headed to Hahn Hall to give a recital of your own. Are there other Santa Barbara connections or visits we should know about?

Julia Bullock: Nothing is scheduled yet in the coming season, but I’m always happy to return to the Santa Barbara area. It’s just so damned beautiful.

NP: Your program here includes Schubert, Barber and contemporary blues, which sound like a killer combo to me. Can you explain some of the details of the program, and any connective themes in your design of the program?

JB: When I was asked to submit this recital program, I was working on Schubert songs that were to be presented alongside miniature plays by Beckett at the LA Phil. The poetry for Schubert’s, “Suleika I” was originally accredited to one of the greatest German poets and intellectuals, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, when in actuality it was written by his close confidant Marian von Willemer.

That got me thinking about how historically women often aren’t credited for their work, even if we appreciate what they contribute to our culture. I immediately considered Fauré’s “La chanson d’Eve,” in which the poet Charles Van Lerberghe composed words that consider the story of Eve, but without the voice of God or Adam interjecting.

Several years ago, I researched the writing of blues singers and musicians, and was surprised to find how many fierce songs and how much lyrical wit had been

contributed by black women, several of whom are largely not celebrated or even remembered today. In part, that was because of their “risqué” content — these women were socially and sexually liberated within themselves, and wrote unabashedly about it. It’s from that research where I happened upon Alberta Hunter and Lovie Austin; and I’ve listened to the stylings of Nina Simone and Billie Holiday since I was fifteen.

I’m not sure whether I decided to program The Hermit Songs because I was thinking of black women, and Leontyne Price was the voice that inspired Samuel Barber, or that I wanted to close the Schubert group with one of my favorite songs, “Seligkeit,” which is about finding bliss here on earth despite the desire to go to heaven.

There’s great complexity and often difficulty faced by anyone who is seeking inner peace; and from the characters of Suleika, to Eve, to the various spiritual writings of the anonymous

hermits, or the admittance of emotionally raw vulnerability in the lyrics of the blues tunes, in one way or another, every piece of music, every poet, composer and character is looking to find a space to share and be heard. We aren’t all given the allowance to express and release our voices freely, and yet we all acknowledge how important it is to do so.



Rising and adventurous soprano Julia Bullock

NP: You were clearly a star of the Peter Sellars-directed Ojai festival two years ago, between your roles in Kaija Saariaho’s “La Passion de Simone” and Tyshawn Sorey’s “Josephine Baker: A Portrait.” Was that festival experience a highlight of your recent musical life, and also a demanding task?

JB: In retrospect, the experiences I view as highlights in my musical life are also the most demanding, all encompassing, and often stressful while they’re happening, but I learn a tremendous amount working with Peter. Performing two extreme one woman shows was a large undertaking, and I wasn’t quite sure how I’d fair during the process. I can only tell you I left the theater post-performance

BULLOCK
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Jazz Studies, Down at the Nightclub

By Josef Woodard,
News-Press Correspondent



Fans of the generally stellar Santa Barbara City College jazz band program know performances, usually on the hill or upstairs. During each academic year, the bands (three different bands, of rising skill levels and culled musical experience) perform at the hilltop Garvin Theatre on this campus with the stunning view, or with occasional gigging in the close, hot house quarters of SOhO club and eatery downtown, upstairs in Victoria Court. In either venue, big band culture is well-represented in the 805 by the college's long-standing and strong program.

Last Monday, we caught a set by the impressive current incarnation of the student Lunch Break Band, directed by jazz educator Jim Mooy. The place was packed, with musicians and listeners, on and off the stage (the sax section set up on the "dance" floor), and the band filling the room with the stuff of which this fine band is made.

Kicking off the set in engaging style, Mr. Mooy led the band in a rousing take on "The Chicken," by Jaco Pastorius, the late, great bassist and underrated innovator as big band leader. On the "Soul Intro" to the tune, the warm wash of gospel feeling almost suggests a fake finale, but kicks into the funky, riff-lubed main groove of the piece, with shades of a different kind of funky chicken pulse going for it.

Guest saxist Lito Hernandez, a former member of the band who is back in town after studying at the Berklee School of Music, made a strong impression with his work on baritone sax, as the protagonist of the punningly named "Bari Bari Good" (and living up to the challenge and promise of the title).

This evening's switch-hitter award went to the tall and talented Grey Ingersoll, who worked up a robust and melodic solo on "Body and Soul," on his chosen instrument, the trombone. But he also snuck in a surprise factor, serving up a rap during

the set's chanciest and most intellectually intriguing chart of the set, "The Bridge," by noted big band leader John Daversa. That intricate maze of a piece also sported a good solo

showing by trumpeter Greg Kidde.

By way of introducing the vocalist of the set, Cambria Metzinger, Mr. Mooy mentioned

that she was leaving town to study music at Chapman College, but he reasoned that "if we do our job right, that means that people head out of town. Unfortunately, that's what's been happening lately, with half the band leaving. It's a happy problem to have." Ms. Metzinger gave an assured, glowing account of the classic "Body and Soul," the set's most generous nod to the repertoire of jazz standards.

By contrast, the final chart of this Monday soiree veered a bit too close to the smooth jazz for comfort, with the inclusion of "Baby Cakes," by saxophonist Eric Marienthal. It's one of those catchy numbers with a melody yearning for lyrics and a vocal, in the instrumental R&B mode popular in smoothville. The band had recently played the chart at the Dos Pueblos High School Jazz Festival, where the versatile Mr. Marienthal — who somehow straddled the smooth and real jazz scenes — was a special guest. At SOhO, the surrogate for Mr. Marienthal was alto saxist Brandon Boyd, engaging in some friendly cutting session-like lick-swapping for good, old school jazz measure.

On this night, the Lunch Break Band's ensemble sensibility was tight and spirited, and some soloists seized more attention than others who weren't as fully formed or realized yet. In other words, it's a student band, a work in progress, but one well worth hearing and keeping tabs on. For the next convening of the fine SBCC bands (a three-band, on-campus affair) head up the hill to the Garvin Theatre on April 30.

CONCERT REVIEW

BULLOCK

Continued from Page 5

very upset and in tears a couple of times, because I didn't feel like I did my job well.

But it's amazing what the body will allow you to do as long as the mind is not over worked. The Baker project had a particular stress, because the final drafts of the material weren't completed and received until the day before I flew to Ojai. We hadn't even run the whole piece through until the day before the opening night of the festival. So in my mind it was more of a workshop of all the material than a finished debut of a new work, and although I tried not to let the anticipation of the piece overwhelm the realities of the circumstances, that was a challenge.

But I'm so pleased to have performed all of the repertoire, because the messages that are communicated within those works are ones I can stand behind, not just as a musician, but also as a socially conscious human being.

NP: I was very impressed by your performance in Tyshawn Sorey's Baker piece, on many levels. It gave a more truthful spin on the Baker story than the public myth, was an experimental adventure as musical theater, and really gave you a challenging task in terms of the role. How was that whole experience for you?

JB: Joséphine Baker's story has followed me since I began studying classical music. I was compared to her by a teacher, and furious about it, because I didn't want to live into the trope of the "black entertainer." Given the history of how black performers were presented over the course of our history, and my own issues with my identity, because I grew up in a segregated city (St. Louis, Mo.) and experienced racism and prejudice in insidious ways, it was not a role I wanted to play.

But the more I researched, the more I listened and watched, the more I fell in love, because Baker committed herself to performing as much as she did to her humanitarian efforts, and she utilized the system that exploited her in order to present herself in front of an audience on her own terms. Beginning with my first recital tour in 2014 where the entire second half explored the objectification and demoralization of black women in particular, it became immediately clear that once I began to sing classical, western, Euro-centric music, I felt this urgency to express all aspects of my identity, otherwise I wouldn't be able to continue.

And this need seemingly resonated outwards and was received, because Peter Sellars wanted to continue exploring the subject matter, but focus on Baker specifically; New World Symphony wanted to commission to have a few of her songs arranged for orchestra — which I've since performed around the country — and Tyshawn and I continue to shape the project, which now has the title, "Perle Noir: A meditation for Joséphine Baker."

Baker's story gives me an opportunity to share many many things, because her life encompassed so much, but it seems to me that her main focus was to find liberation. And discovering that incredible sense of freedom is what turned me onto music in the first place.

NP: Are you interested in getting more deeply involved in musical theater projects which deal with issues of the Black experience, and using your medium to explore and educate on that subject?

JB: Fighting for freedom and seeking liberation are subjects that drive so much of Black American art, and those themes are indefatigable. So, in short, yes.

NP: You have worked with some of the finer orchestras in the world, including the NY Phil, the LA Phil, the SF Symphony, and the London Symphony with Simon Rattle. Is working with orchestras something you have come to savor, and imagined doing in your young years?

JB: I adore singing with orchestra, and have loved that repertoire since I first began listening to classical vocal music when I was 17. It's rich material in every respect. My favorite part of my job are the rehearsals. There's nothing greater than facing an orchestra of musicians, cluing into one another, and working to coordinate and express a shared moment together.

NP: Conversely, is the recital format something of special interest for you, in terms of allowing a more personal expression to come through, from the programming/conceptual end to the intense, focused spotlight on stage?

JB: The recital format is the most trying on the mind, because if I get distracted or lose focus, it's up to me and my pianist to pull it together, and quickly. It's you, the poetry and the music itself. The responsibility for the success of a performance becomes greater, because there aren't any external elements to tell the story like the set, lighting or costumes.

But the freedom to program as I want and use the recital format

as a tool to communicate more than just my voice is something I wouldn't pass up. This isn't about putting my talents on display, I just deeply love this material, and want to find the right context in which to communicate it so that it's more than a random collection of "lovely" music.

NP: I'm intrigued by some vocalists, in different genres, who freely move across presumed lines of idiom. You are certainly one of those, as is the jazz singer Cecile McLorin Salvant, who moves smoothly from Bessie Smith's early blues world to the chanteuse zone, standards, originals, etc. Do you think there is there a generational shift among some younger singers, in the classical scene and elsewhere, who have a broader vision of what music is and can be, in terms of style?

JB: Honestly, I think this "broad vision," has always existed. I love the recordings of Leontyne Price singing Mozart and Aida as much as her Andre Previn album, "Right as the Rain." And Nina Simone certainly explored various genres in her repertoire selections and improvisations that all found a place in her work. We are fortunate enough to live in an age where we can listen and be influenced by so much at one time. I was beginning to listen to Nina Simone around the same time as Judy Collins, and I fell in love with the voice of Régine Crespin at the same time as Edith Piaf.

I used to want to contain and mold myself within and around whatever repertoire I was singing, but I don't see a reason to do that so much anymore. I don't want to play the part of a classical singer any more than a jazz, blues, or pop singer. I just want to sing, and lend my body and mind to material I think I can deliver with authenticity and a depth of range — not so much vocal, but emotional. The important thing is to have a clear frame of reference.

I may decide to focus my musical attentions a bit more narrowly, depending on what feels sustainable and also what gives the most joy, but I've been given the space to experiment, and I want to take advantage of the platform.

NP: Are you happy with the way things are unfolding for you and your musical trajectory so far?

JB: Yes, I am. I can pick the projects on which, and people with whom I want to work. There are a few goals I have that haven't been realized yet, but honestly, there's only so much I can do over the course of a year — all in due time. I want to feel ready, poised and prepared for each opportunity that comes my way.



Julia Bullock, soprano

Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-race-and-opera-notebook-20180405-story.html>

Julia Bullock and the saga of opera singers of color

By MARK SWED | MUSIC CRITIC | APR 05, 2018 |



Julia Bullock in recital at Hahn Hall, Santa Barbara, with pianist John Arida (Kimberly Citro/UCSB Arts & Lectures)

A year from now we will celebrate the 80th anniversary of one of the most important concerts in American history. Richard Powers set the scene in his epic novel, "The Time of Our Singing," by noting that democracy had not been on the program when, in 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow one of the greatest classical singers of her era, Marian Anderson, to sing at Constitution Hall in our nation's segregated capital because she was African American.

A huge protest followed, and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt spearheaded a recital by Anderson on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, attracting a crowd of 75,000 on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939.

Even so, opera was not integrated overnight. It took an additional 16 years for Anderson to break the color barrier at American's most important opera company. That finally happened when she starred in Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera" at the Metropolitan Opera.

It was her only appearance at the Met, but the breakthrough of singers of color had begun. A year earlier, the 27-year-old Leontyne Price, who would become one of the most celebrated sopranos of her generation, made her recital debut at New York's Town Hall singing Samuel Barber's "Hermit Songs."

The rest pretty much is history. But is it?

(over)

Tuesday night at Hahn Hall in Santa Barbara, a young African American singer happened to sing "Hermit Songs" in what is the first major recital program of her career. Julia Bullock is being hailed as the rising star of her generation.

You only need look around you to understand there is nothing post-racial about our society. Nor, it turns out, is Bullock even close to rising anymore. She has risen, and to dizzying heights. She's completely aware of and making exceptional use of her identity.

John Adams wrote a starring role for her in his new opera, "Girls of the Golden West," about the California Gold Rush, and she is its radiant center. But this recital Tuesday proved something beyond even that.

Note for note, the singing was sensational. Bullock's voice is deeply rich and richly deep, with both the qualities of Anderson's expressive contralto and Price's electrifying climaxes. Meaning was, word for word, expressed through not only her exacting vocal inflection and her precise facial expression, but even the slightest movement of her hands. Her eyes made contact. Communication was on every level direct.

Beyond this was a sense of artistic identity, Bullock's awareness, as a singer and woman of color, of the music world she comes from and the one she lives in.

Bullock is a complete, empowered singer who has been able to take advantage of all who have struggled before her and to remind us of what the struggle has meant. Her recital was on some levels autobiographical. It was also very much about the empowerment of women, whether in songs by Schubert or Nina Simone.

She made a personal selection from Fauré's cycle "La Chanson d'Ève" where she just wanted the songs of Eve's voice, the flowering of a woman, not those of a narrator or God. She sang of the black experience, through songs sung (and written by) Billie Holiday, Cora "Lovie" Austin, Alberta Hunter and Pat Castleton. She turned Simone's "Revolution" into a kind of a cappella protest spiritual of intense anger and her "Four Women" into the most powerful expression of black women mattering imaginable. But she did all this with love, not anger. She warmly put her hand on the back of her fine pianist, John Arida. She addressed the audience with laughter. She graciously invited us into her world and then showed how there was no one way of interpreting anything. On a single word, her face could show several emotions — sly, happy, sad, disturbed, OK, not OK. She made, to a degree that I think is new in classical music, the black experience a universal one.

Democracy was, exceptionally, on the program.



Julia Bullock, soprano

Santa Barbara
Independent WHO. WHAT. NOW.

Opera Singer Julia Bullock Finds Her Voice **Acclaimed Young Soprano Sings Music by and for Powerful Women**

Monday, March 26, 2018
BY TOM JACOBS

Run down the set list for soprano Julia Bullock's April 3 recital at the Music Academy of the West, and you'll see some familiar names. Schubert, of course. Gabriel Fauré. Samuel Barber. But keep reading, and you may be a bit startled to find Billie Holiday, Alberta Hunter, and Nina Simone.

Yes, Bullock will be singing the blues, as well as song cycles by classical masters. Like so many performers of her age (she's in her early thirties), she isn't all that confined by genre boundaries. What's important to her is that those songs were all cowritten and originally performed by powerful women. "One overarching theme in this program highlights the complex journey towards self-actualization, and releasing your unbridled voice," she said in a recent email interview with the *Independent*.

Widely acclaimed for her gorgeous voice and emotionally charged performances — *Opera News* compared her to Dawn Upshaw, declaring "every note Bullock sings is charged with meaning" — the biracial St. Louis native is no stranger to this area. She sang with the New York Philharmonic during a 2015 concert at the Santa Barbara Bowl and performed a new work by jazz composer Tyshawn Sorey at last year's Ojai Music Festival.

Her Santa Barbara recital debut, which is presented by UCSB Arts & Lectures, was programmed well before the #MeToo movement, but it fits perfectly into this particular moment, starting with the very first song she sings. "The poetry for Schubert's *Suleika* was originally credited to one of the greatest German poets and intellectuals, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe," she said. "In actuality it was written by [Goethe's] close confidant Marianne von Willemer. That got me thinking about how historically women often aren't credited for their work, even if culturally, we greatly value what the voices of women offer."

With that in mind, she decided to follow her Schubert set with Fauré's *La chanson d'Eve*, "which looks at the story of Eve, but without the voice of God or Adam interjecting." Then come the Barber songs — inspired and originally sung by pioneering African-American soprano Leontyne Price — capped off by the contemporary blues.

(continues)

“Several years ago, I researched the writing of blues singers and musicians,” she said. “I was surprised to find how many fierce songs and how much lyrical wit had been contributed by black women, several of whom are largely not celebrated or even remembered today. This is in part because of their ‘risqué’ content. These women were socially and sexually liberated within themselves and wrote unabashedly about it!”

Bullock was introduced to Holiday and Simone in her early teens by the man who would become her stepfather. “The more I listened, the more I fell in love with her sound, her delivery, and her musicianship,” she recalled. “Most amazing is that two years later, when I started to become interested in classical vocal music and I went back to listen to Simone, I was delighted because I could hear Bach and Mozart in her piano improvisations. I was simply hooked. Still am.” She continued, “I choreographed a dance to Simone’s ‘Four Women’ in high school for myself and three other unique and beautiful black students. After seeing the dance, my mom said, ‘Maybe you should sing this too.’ A rush of fear raced through me. Oh, no. I’d never! No one can sing Simone but Simone. But here we are,” she added. “I’ve got some things I want to express through her material, and a bit more courage to do it.”

Soprano Julia Bullock and pianist John Arida perform Tuesday, April 3, at 7 p.m. at the Music Academy of the West’s Hahn Hall (1070 Fairway Rd.). Tickets are \$37 (\$10 for UCSB students). Call (805) 893-3535 or see artsandlectures.ucsb.edu.

<https://www.independent.com/news/2018/mar/26/opera-singer-julia-bullock-finds-her-voice/>



Julia Bullock, soprano

The New York Times

At Ojai, Peter Sellars Has a Personal Yet Global Playlist

Zachary Woolfe | *The New York Times* | June 16, 2016



Julia Bullock in "Josephine Baker: A Portrait."

Credit: David Bazemore/Ojai Music Festival

As the music director of this year's Ojai Music Festival, which ended Sunday, June 12, Peter Sellars included both Carnatic singing from southern India and French Spectralism, voices from Cairo and from Mexico, a toy piano and a block party. Most striking about the program he created was that almost all of the music was by women. For Mr. Sellars, this was clearly not a matter of meeting quotas or checking demographic boxes. He has been promoting the full diversity of world music for decades. His Ojai wasn't set up to prove the influence of, say, classical Indian singing on contemporary American a cappella vocalism; the weekend's performances and styles seemed to inform one another without imposing themselves on one another.

With the premiere of Julia Bullock and Tyshawn Sorey's "Josephine Baker: A Portrait," the festival produced something with the heart — if not quite yet the proportions — of a masterpiece. Mr. Sorey, a brilliant avant-jazz composer and musician, has arranged a set of songs once performed by Baker, the celebrated singer, dancer, French Resistance operative and civil rights activist, as if he's channeling the composer Morton Feldman. It's a landscape of glacial melancholy, shot through with glinting fragments from an ensemble of six players, solemn resonances in the piano and shudders of drums.

This is a ritual of mourning, not a gay-Paree nostalgia trip, and it is one of the most important works of art yet to emerge from the era of Black Lives Matter. "Si j'Étais Blanche" ("If I Were White"), a suavely swinging two and a half minutes as Baker recorded it, is here a haunting quarter-hour dirge, as harrowing as "Strange Fruit."

Her soprano mellow and flexible, somber yet with a crucial undercurrent of youthful hopefulness, Ms. Bullock was a magnetically still presence — until a sensational climactic break into sinuous Baker-esque choreography (by Michael Schumacher). The pitiless words of "Bye Bye Blackbird" and "Terre Sèche" were caressed, yet starkly clear.

One problem, however, is the interstitial spoken text, newly written by the poet Claudia Rankine ("Citizen") and recited by Ms. Bullock. Dully underlining points about Baker's relationship with race, it's more obvious and stolid than the ambiguous music. And it keeps pulling us out of Mr. Sorey's hypnotic textures and tempos, making the piece — at 90 minutes already too long, with a particularly unwieldy, cloying late instrumental interlude — feel even longer.

It might be advisable, in what I hope will be many future performances, to flesh out the visual element. Perhaps fractured or slowed footage of Baker dancing could convey her artistry without sacrificing Mr. Sorey and Ms. Bullock's elegantly spare stylization. But "A Portrait" is already, in this early form, a work that demands to be heard and wrestled with, a space of pain and contemplation.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*



Ojai Music Festival impressive on opening night

Rita Moran | *Ventura County News* | June 10, 2016



JOSEPH A. GARCIA/THE STAR An audience takes in an afternoon performance at the Ojai Music Festival at Libbey Bowl on Friday.

Ojai Music Festival audiences gather each June with an unspoken expectation: Impress me.

The festival, now in its 70th year, never fails to respond to that anticipation, as it demonstrated once again Thursday night at the opening concert of a weekend of fascinating music planned by this year's music director Peter Sellars.

In an afternoon, on-stage discussion with the evening's featured composer, Finland's Kaija Saariaho, Sellars emphasized that in a "culture of permanent distraction" it was bracing to open the festival with "something that is so tremendously serious."

It is not only Saariaho's work that is gripping, but the entire array of composers on "the front edge" of the next generation that Sellars celebrates. As it happens, most of those brought together for the festival are women, a disparate group with distinctive ideas for the future of music. They, and many of the performers, also represent many countries and multiple continents, brought together to illuminate musical possibilities for the 21st century.

Saariaho's "La Passion de Simone," based on the short life of Simone Weil, an activist Sellars described as the "modern equivalent of Jeremiah," revolves through a "Musical Journey in Fifteen Stations" and is the U.S. premier of the chamber version of Saariaho's densely haunting music.



Julia Bullock, soprano



Ojai Music Festival impressive on opening night

Rita Moran | Ventura County News | June 10, 2016

The libretto by Amin Maalouf allowed soprano soloist Julia Bullock to draw the audience into Weil's riveting world of protest and despair culminating in her death in 1943 as she refused to eat while others were being starved. She was 34.

The forces gathered to deliver "La Passion" along with Bullock, and Sellars as director, were formidable: ICE (International Contemporary Ensemble), returning to Ojai with its strong and diverse talents; four voices from Roomful of Teeth; and conductor Joana Carneiro, music director of the Berkeley Symphony since 2009, succeeding Kent Nagano, music director at the festival in previous years.

Saariaho's music has an elemental quality of rising organically from its textured base while able to respond to the searing text as Simone's tortured path is passionately portrayed by Bullock as a "sister" of Simone trying to follow, and fathom, her chiaroscuro path. Supporting and accentuating the struggle was an array of lighting effects keyed to the emotional moments. But it was Bullock's exceptional voice and vivid portrayal of the forces Simone battled, in the world and within herself, that held the audience's fascination.

ICE's ensemble, slightly compressed toward one side of the stage but performing with stellar commitment to the emerging waves of sound, and the quartet of Roomful of Teeth singers merged impressively with Bullock's remarkable performance.

Lucky for the rest of the festival audiences, Bullock, ICE and Roomful of Teeth will be seen and heard again, along with more works by Saariaho and others including Caroline Shaw, Carla Kihlstedt, Dina el Wedidi, Leila Adu, Christine Southworth, Du Yun, Aruna Sairam, Tyshawn Sorey and Claude Vivier, among others.

If most of those names sound like women to you, and of diverse origins, you'll understand the musical world that Sellars plans to introduce to audiences during the rest of the concerts and events. This is the Ojai Musical Festival: Fasten your seat belts.



Julia Bullock, soprano

The New York Times

Young Concert Artists Gala Offers Stars in the Making

James R. Oestreich | *The New York Times* | May 11, 2016



The soprano Julia Bullock performing Samuel Barber's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, led by Michael Stern, on Tuesday at Alice Tully Hall. Credit: Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

With gratifying predictability, Young Concert Artists once again showcased three performers clearly bound for stardom in its annual gala concert on Tuesday evening at Alice Tully Hall. Over 55 years, the organization's track record in fostering the careers of rising performers has been remarkable, and it only distinguished itself further here.

By far the safest bet was Julia Bullock, 29, an American soprano who won first prize in the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, among several other awards. She has already established a career that many a veteran might envy, having recently sung the lead in Peter Sellars's production of Kaija Saariaho's "La Passion de Simone" for the Berlin Philharmonic's Orchestra Academy, a role she will repeat next month at the Ojai Festival in California.

Here Ms. Bullock sang Samuel Barber's masterpiece from 1947, "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," based on a highly atmospheric text from the prologue to James Agee's novel "A Death in the Family." She rendered the gorgeous yet not oversweet melodies beautifully, but there was much more than mere vocal allure: superb diction and a compelling stage manner that would have communicated much of the meaning even if the words had not registered so clearly.



Julia Bullock, soprano

The Millbrook Independent

Julia Bullock at the YCA Gala

Stephen Kaye | *The Millbrook Independent* | May 11, 2016

Knoxville: summer of 1915 by William Agee

...who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of night. May god bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away. After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

Expressing that sorrow of being on this earth, as in a poem by William Agee, written in 1938 about a summer evening in Knoxville in 1915 to music by Samuel Barber written in 1948 was what Julia Bullock did on the evening of May 10, 2016. Her song was filled with nostalgia of a time and place long ago kept alive and made memorable in prose, in song and in a performance so memorable it too will become part of that legend. Agee's prose and Barber's music are both related to the death of their fathers. For Agee, that became the subject of his life's finest work, *A Death in the Family*. The prose poem whose last few lines are above was made part of that work.

Julia Bullock sang at the Young Concert Artist Gala at Alice Tully Hall Tuesday night in a performance that transcended all that went before and foretold a level of singing at a new, finer, deeper and richer level. I was taken by the smoothness and control of her voice and her emotive ability. She reaches more than our ears; she reaches our own emotive sensibility. Dawn Upshaw, one of Julia's teachers at the Bard Music Conservatory, recorded this same work with David Zinman and the Baltimore Symphony. Julia has acquired a similar ability to reach her audience with not just sound but with that extra something that has to do with communication of feelings.

Julia Bullock followed Aleksey Semenenko playing solo violin in Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major with the Orchestra of St. Luke's brilliantly conducted by Michael Stern. His playing was crystal clear, with lovely tone, a treat in every way. He could have been more dramatic, but that will come. His career is well-launched.

The final work of the evening was Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Major with Yun-Chin Zhou as the piano soloist. This wonderful piece of showcase music is a gem for both orchestra and pianist, and both played it to maximum speed and excitement. Zhou's playing was astonishing. His tall, spare frame belied the energy and brilliance he gave this music. When he let loose the sparks did fly – Stern and the orchestra responded and together they made joyous sounds most fitting for a gala. Zhou is well on his way. He is exciting, exacting and plays well to an audience.

Ms. Bullock's future engagements include appearances with Peter Sellars in the Ojai Music Festival in June, the LA Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel in July, Mostly Mozart in August and and Roulette in Brooklyn in September.





Julia Bullock, soprano



Young Concert Artists ~ Gala ~ 2016

Philip Gardner | Oberon's Grove | May 11, 2016



*Aleksey Semenenko, Michael Stern, Julia Bullock,
and Yun-Chin Zhou after tonight's exhilarating concert*

Music by three of my favorite composers - and an opportunity to hear three gifted young musicians in solo turns with the Orchestra of St. Luke's - drew me to the Young Concert Artists' annual gala at Alice Tully Hall in a state of eager anticipation. It was a wonderful evening, with a raptly attentive audience, and it ended with a full-house standing ovation following a magnificent performance of the Prokofiev third piano concerto.

Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* is an atmospheric melding of poetry and music, redolent of still, perfumed evenings in the South a century ago. It is an especially appealing piece, and I wish it was performed more frequently; this was only my second experience of hearing it in a *live* concert, the previous opportunity being at Tanglewood in 1984 when Edith Wiens sang it with the BSO.

Julia Bullock, a strikingly attractive woman who looked elegant in a deep-charcoal-grey gown, established a lovely rapport both with Maestro Stern and his excellent players as well as with her audience. She managed to make an intimate connection with us, drawing us into the wonderment of the world of a young child just beginning to discover a wider world.

Ms. Bullock's voice seems to me a high-sitting lyric mezzo-soprano of true clarity and warmth. The highest notes of the vocal line had a slightly metallic tinge, whilst in the lower octave an enchanting violet resonance emerges. The sheer sound of her voice is poignantly expressive, and the orchestra - especially the horns, clarinet, and flute - added lovely hues to the musical palette. The audience were clearly very taken with the singer; there is so much music I want to hear her sing - starting with Chausson's *Poeme de l'amour et de la Mer*, the *Nuits d'Ete* of Berlioz, and Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*: music that singers like Dame Janet Baker and Frederica von Stade found so cordial.



Julia Bullock, soprano

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Soprano Julia Bullock Gives a Virtuoso Recital

Sarah Bryan Miller | St. Louis Post-Dispatch | March 31, 2016



Photo: Dario Acosta

Soprano Julia Bullock returned to her hometown on Wednesday to give one of the finest vocal recitals heard here in years.

The main auditorium at the Sheldon Concert Hall was filled with an enthusiastic audience. They weren't disappointed. Bullock is the complete package, with a lovely rich voice that's well-trained and intelligently used; commanding stage presence and consistent connection with the audience; rock-solid languages and musicality; an attractive person; a thoughtfully chosen program that consistently entertained and, at times, challenged the listener; and a clear passion for what she does.

The program opened with a setting by Henry Cowell (1897-1943), "How Old Is Song," an unusual but captivating piece that had the excellent accompanist, Renate Rohlfing, playing the piano's strings as if it were a zither.

From there, they moved on to "Cinq melodies populaires grecques (Five Popular Greek Melodies)," a varied group of songs by Ravel (1875-1937); a two-song Scandinavian group by the Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927) and the Norwegian Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), with texts by Hans Christian Andersen and Henrik Ibsen; and a group of four songs by Kurt Weill (1900-1950), two in German, two in English, and all quite different from what went before.

After intermission, the pair returned with "She Is Asleep," a nifty piece by John Cage (1912-1992),



Julia Bullock, soprano

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Soprano Julia Bullock returns to her hometown with a recital

Sarah Bryan Miller | St. Louis Post-Dispatch | March 27, 2016

After intermission, the pair returned with "She Is Asleep," a nifty piece by John Cage (1912-1992), in which Bullock sang on vowels and Rohlfing played percussion on the piano. A set of songs by Samuel Barber (1910-1981) and Cowell that ranged from the slightly surreal (Barber's "Nuvoletta," setting a portion of James Joyce's "Finnegans Wake," called on the soprano to sing into the piano, to exceedingly cool effect) to the touching (Cowell's "Where She Lies") to the hilarious (Cowell's "Because the Cat").

The last official group was a powerful one, devoted to two settings of poems by Langston Hughes (1902-1967), by William Grant Still and Ricky Ian Gordon, and a pair of deeply felt spirituals, "City Called Heaven" and "Deep River."

Bullock provided witty, informative spoken program notes. If an operatic role allows an artist to cover a broad canvas, a song recital is like a series of miniatures, each different, each demanding detail. Bullock is a remarkable recitalist, investing all her gifts in every song, limning each stroke for its best effect. She is an artist on the cusp of a great career.

This is the part of the review where the accompanist usually gets a few words about her sensitivity and support. Rohlfing is much more than supportive, a true collaborator in the joint venture that is a recital. She stepped out and faded back as appropriate to each piece, shone in a variety of styles, and displayed a ready musical wit in songs like "Because the Cat" and easy virtuosity throughout.



Julia Bullock, soprano

South Florida
CLASSICAL REVIEW

Young Soprano Sparks New World's French and Spanish Program

Lawrence Budman | South Florida Classical Review | February 29, 2016

Music from Spain and France conveying impressions of the Iberian peninsula dominated the New World Symphony's chamber program on Sunday but the thrilling singing of a young American soprano was the afternoon's major event.

Ravel's *Three Poems of Stéphane Mallarmé* is one of the French impressionist's most strikingly original works. Scored for a similar chamber ensemble as Schoenberg's groundbreaking *Pierrot Lunaire*, Ravel set three of the elliptical writings of the French poet. Filled with adventurous harmonies and jagged melodic lines, the songs are a formidable test of the singer's vocal range and communicative powers.



Credit: Christian Steiner

Julia Bullock is a rising star who counts Dawn Upshaw, Jessye Norman, Eric Owens and José Van Dam among her mentors. Bullock's large, deep-textured instrument easily filled the New World Center. Her refined sonority, flexibility and ethereal high register took flight in "Sigh." In "Futile Petition," her voice blended almost as an orchestral instrument with the tonal warmth of the strings.

The angular melodies of "Rising Up from its Haunch and Flank" (which pictures an empty vase) were imbued with edgy intensity and sheer beauty of sound. Bullock's lower voice almost had the depth of a mezzo. New World conducting fellow Christian Reif brought out Ravel's subtly detailed instrumental colors in a well balanced reading.

Bullock returned, in the program's second half, for Manuel de Falla's *Psyche* which sets the myth of Psyche and Eros in Granada, the music reflecting both French and Spanish influences. Bullock brought great emotion to the alternately lyrical and astringent writing while maintaining purity of tone. Flutist Masha Popova and harpist Julia Coronelli exhibited firm control, articulating the long, high-pitched writing reminiscent of Ravel's Introduction and Allegro.



Julia Bullock, soprano

THE NEW YORKER

The Artistry of the Soprano Julia Bullock

Russell Platt | *The New Yorker* | November 16, 2015

It is rare to find a classical singer who can truly project an aura onstage. Julia Bullock, a young soprano who performed her Naumburg Foundation recital last Tuesday at the Metropolitan Museum, definitely has it, and she is off to a fine career.

Bullock, an African-American singer from St. Louis who trained at Eastman, Bard, and Juilliard, won first prize last year in the Naumburg International Vocal Competition. Over the years, the Naumburg, through its various awards, has had a penchant for honoring interesting singers who don't fit easily into the standard operatic categories: trailblazers such as Regina Sarfaty, Dawn Upshaw, Barbara Hendricks, and Lucy Shelton, for example. I can't yet imagine Bullock walking the boards as Tosca or Violetta, but she has made several strategic forays into opera — such as the title role in Purcell's "The Indian Queen" at Madrid's Teatro Real and at the English National Opera, and, later this month, she will appear in Saariaho's "La Passion de Simone," at the Deutsche Oper Berlin (directed by Peter Sellars). But her recital had its own kind of drama, not the less effective for being so refined.



Julia Bullock combines a rare onstage aura with a style that is exacting but not fussy, with hardly an unturned phrase.

CREDIT: HIROYUKI ITO/GETTY

The first half found her aura on the cool side, displayed in French songs by Ravel, Pierre Revel (she discovered his songs by mistake while at school, looking for work by his more famous semi-namesake), and Poulenc. Advising the audience in comprehending the Louise de Vilmorin texts used by Poulenc in "Metamorphoses," Bullock was firm yet funny: "They are erotic, they are sensual, and they are completely surreal — so, good luck." Her style was equally assured: exacting but not fussy, with hardly an unturned phrase.

That style warmed up in her second half, devoted to Scandinavian and American music. If singers are going to talk to the audience between songs (and God knows, not every singer should), then the speech has to have an expressive point. She precluded her rendition of Grieg's "En Svane" ("A Swan") by telling the story behind the Ibsen poem that forms the lyric: Ibsen wrote it after being summoned to the deathbed of a female friend, who then confessed that she had been secretly in love with him for decades. At the song's fortissimo climax — the moment of the silent swan's sound, the woman's confession —



Julia Bullock, soprano

THE NEW YORKER

The Artistry of the Soprano Julia Bullock

Russell Platt | *The New Yorker* | November 16, 2015

Bullock's timbre took on a miraculous hue, merging with the color of the pianist Renate Rohlfing's harmony. She actually sang into the soundboard of the piano in the mystical middle section of Barber's "Nuvoletta" – something which, I assure you, is not requested in the score – lending a tragic cast to this virtuosic setting of a fragment from Joyce's "Finnegans Wake," a song which possesses, within its gaiety, a somber tinge. (Nuvoletta, the daughter of the water goddess Anna Livia Plurabelle, commits a kind of transformational suicide by turning her cloudy being into water drops, in the most delightfully girlish language imaginable.) But the gesture suited the concert's modernist undertone – not many singers would pair Barber with a percussive provocation by Cage ("She Is Asleep") and delightful Americana oddities by the unclassifiable Henry Cowell ("Where She Lies" and "Because the Cat"). Her second Barber item was the composer's first published song, "The Daisies" (another smart selection, as the text is by Joyce's friend James Stephens), a sweet and wistful trifle about a romantic encounter, which Bullock turned into a moment of chastened reflection.

By the time she arrived at her valedictory group of Kurt Weill songs – including selections from two of his American musicals, "Lost in the Stars" and "Lady in the Dark" – her voice and temperament were in full flower, so much so that in her encore, a charmingly astringent treatment of the "Princess and the Pea" story by Robert Mann (in which the performers were joined by the violinist Nicholas Mann), she could narrate rather than sing and still maintain her hard-won connection with the audience.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

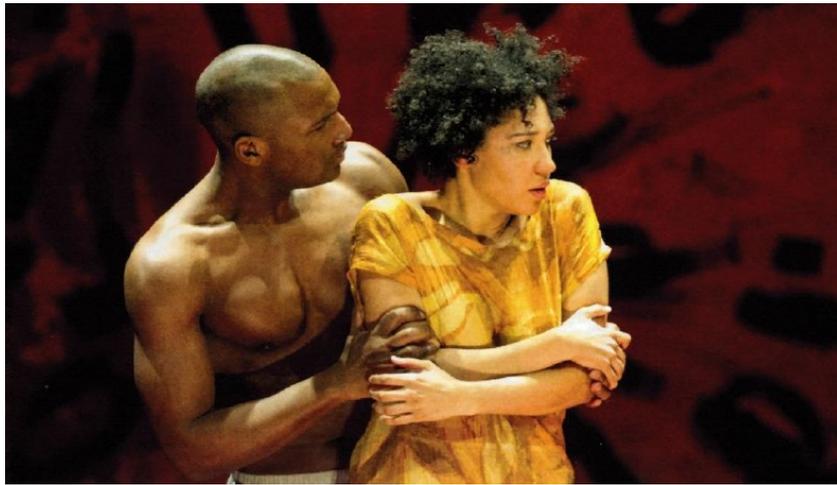
Opera

The world's leading opera magazine

The Indian Queen

English National Opera at the London Coliseum, February 26

-Russ McDonald | *Opera Magazine* | April, 2015



Noah Steward and Julia Bullock in Peter Sellars' 'The Indian Queen' at ENO

"The central role, the Indian princess, was impressively taken in her London debut by the young American soprano Julia Bullock, still officially a student at Juilliard. At first her part is mainly histrionic, as she comes to terms with her arranged marriage and her unexpected feelings for her captor, and she was so convincing, so quietly charismatic, that one would have been forgiven for thinking her mainly an actress and thus for doubting her vocal gifts. But after the interval she did most of the musical heavy lifting, displaying a clear, light soprano that blended beautifully with the voices of her colleagues."



Julia Bullock, soprano

The Boston Globe

Julia Bullock brings worldly voice to Boston

-Emily Wright | *The Boston Globe* | January 3, 2015

Age: 28

Hometown: St. Louis

Think of: Steven Blier, who runs the New York Festival of Song, once told Bullock that if “Shirley Verrett and Dawn Upshaw were to have a child, I would be their hybrid.”

What caught our eye: On Sunday, Jan. 18, Bullock, a seasoned soprano, is set to perform at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum as part of its Sunday Concert Series and Young Artist Showcase in Calderwood Hall. The program, which she says she has wanted to do for a long time, is centered on race and gender in classical music.

Light bulb moment: “I knew I always wanted to perform, but I would say the light bulb moment to studying classical music would be when I was 18, I guess,” Bullock said. “I met a man named Scott Schoonover, and he runs a small opera company in St. Louis called Union Avenue Opera, but at the time he was coaching for the Artists in Training program for Opera Theatre [of] St. Louis.” With his guidance, she gained a new appreciation of the close relationship between text and music: “It was something that I just hadn’t really tapped into fully, and hadn’t hit me in a hard way and in a deep way.”

Biggest thrill: Bullock admitted there have been “so many wonderful scenes” so far in her career. “There have been so many wonderful experiences and I’ve worked with great people. Every step has been clear.”

Inspired by: “One artist that I turn to is Lorraine Hunt Lieberson,” Bullock said. Hunt Lieberson — who worked often in Boston, where she met and collaborated with director Peter Sellars — was a trained violist who began singing at age 26. Bullock calls her a “tremendous musician” who she admires for her integrity, her approach to music, and her careful examination of each project she took on. “She was really careful with every project she chose to do,” Bullock said. “She wanted to make sure it was with great purpose.”

‘I just want to keep finding freedom of expression . . . I have a fair number of things I want to say through music.

I don’t view art as purely decorative.’

Aspires to: “I think I’m living into it now,” Bullock said of her aspirations. “I guess I just want to keep finding freedom of expression and getting over whatever fears I have.” She added that she hopes to be able to express herself through her music. “I think I have a fair number of things I want to say through music,” Bullock said. “I don’t view art as purely decorative.”

For good luck: “I try to sleep. I usually don’t eat very much before performing. I just drink a lot of water, and I often drink green tea and eat a few bananas,” Bullock said. “I try to stay grounded and connected with the pianist that I’m working with, so I’m not floating away in the music.”

What people should know: “I will certainly be making a visit to the rest of the museum,” Bullock said, calling the Gardner one of the best in the world. She added that visiting museums while she tours the world for performances is a favorite perk.

Coming soon: Two days after the Gardner performance, Bullock will fly to London to do Purcell’s “The Indian Queen,” which she’s previously performed in Spain and Russia, directed by Sellars at the English National Opera. She added that there are many other performances on the rise in 2015 that she is excited about.





Julia Bullock, soprano

The New York Times

Harlem Classics, Presented With New Force

New York Festival of Song at Merkin Concert Hall

Vivien Schweitzer | *The New York Times* | December 12, 2014

Before the tenor Darius de Haas sang Fats Waller's "Black and Blue" at Merkin Concert Hall with the New York Festival of Song on Tuesday evening, the pianist Steven Blier noted that the program, "Harlem Renaissance," was last performed one month after Sept. 11, 2001. In light of the recent events in Ferguson, Mo., and Staten Island, it seemed ironic timing, he said, that the program was being heard anew now.

Mr. de Haas sang with commitment throughout the song, imbuing the final line with palpable emotion: "My only sin is in my skin/What did I do to be so black and blue?" The program explored the vocal and literary contributions of black artists during the Harlem Renaissance, interspersing poems by Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston with vocal selections traversing a range of styles, from jazz and blues to art song.

The program highlighted the impressive gifts of the soprano Julia Bullock – a mesmerizing performer who combines an alluring voice with a natural theatricality. During recitals, singers often stand uneasily onstage, their movements appearing calculated. But Ms. Bullock imbued every song with myriad physical nuances that seemed natural and spontaneous; subtly unclenching a fist, arching her eyebrows, pointing a finger, or narrowing her gaze.

Her vocal technique is equally refined. During "The Breath of a Rose," by William Grant Still, set to a poem by Hughes, she shaped the final phrase – "Love is no more than the breath of a rose/No more/Than the breath of a rose" – with gorgeous simplicity, the final word dissolving with the delicacy of a falling petal. Another highlight was "I've Heard of a City Called Heaven," in which she sang with both dramatic fervor and quiet poignancy.

Mr. Blier and Michael Barrett were the able accompanists; Mr. Blier provided engaging commentary about the historical background of the pieces and the artists involved. He described Billy Strayhorn's "Day Dream," expressively sung by Mr. de Haas, as the "most beautiful, intricate chord progression of any popular song I know."

Mr. de Haas and the baritone James Martin didn't always sing with the polish and sophistication of Ms. Bullock, though both made worthy contributions – including Mr. Martin's lively rendition of Luckey Roberts's "Mo' Lasses." The lineup also included selections by Eubie Blake, Cecil Cohen, Duke Ellington, William Weldon and Florence Price.

Mr. Blier paid homage to the contributions of Andy Razaf, a prolific lyricist who, in addition to the words to "Black and Blue," wrote the words to Russell Wooding and Paul Denniker's "What Harlem Is to Me," which the three singers offered as a fitting conclusion to the evening.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

A PUBLICATION OF THE METROPOLITAN OPERA GUILD
OPERA NEWS

New York Debut Review: Julia Bullock and Renate Rohlfing

Young Concert Artists | Merkin Concert Hall

Joshua Rosenblum | Opera News | June 2014

Julia Bullock, a 2012 Young Concert Artists winner, demonstrated both profound artistry and impressive originality in her New York debut recital at Merkin Hall on March 11. Both qualities were obvious in her first set, which alternated early Berio folk song arrangements with late Rossini songs. Bullock's radiant soprano shines brightly and unflinchingly. She also summons a rich, earthy, mezzo-ish quality in her low register. Most compellingly, however, she communicates intense, authentic feeling, as if she were singing right from her soul. The two Rossini selections were contrasting settings of the same short text; the Berio pieces were from the composer's early *Quattro Canzoni Popolari*. These brief, similarly themed songs by two Italians from different centuries illuminated each other in unexpected ways, and Bullock sang them with a fervent sincerity, leavened with a dash of knowing humor.

A new piece by the opulently gifted twenty-three-year-old David Hertzberg, the Young Concert Artists' Composer-in-Residence, used two Wallace Stevens poems as his text, and overflowed with a refreshingly explorative harmonic language that was an intriguing match for Stevens' dense, eloquent imagery. Bullock, for her part, sang as if in a state of unfolding amazement at the otherworldly musical and visual universe she herself was evoking. She sang this difficult but mesmerizing work from memory, as if it were a familiar repertory item, and pianist Renate Rohlfing showed similar mastery of the richly cascading, often cataclysmically dissonant accompaniment.

This premiere was followed by five characteristically stark and powerful songs of Messiaen, a composer who has clearly had an influence on Hertzberg. In "R surrection," Bullock sang climactic phrases like "I sing: for you, my Father, for you, my God" with a shattering intensity, her ringing, resplendent tone demonstrating the heights of artistry that can be attained at this level of emotional rawness.

Bullock's second half opened with a tribute to Josephine Baker, an artist whom Bullock, as she related in spoken remarks, has long admired and identified with. (Both were born in St. Louis, for starters.) Bullock has the right vocal stylings and even some of the moves to evoke Baker and her era; she had the audience eating out of her hand. Of the six Baker-associated songs, all in delectable jazzy arrangements by Jeremy Siskind, the most memorable was "Si j' tais blanche" ("If I were white"). Bullock's performance was girlishly tongue-in-cheek, a playful presentation of a serious issue, but the knowledge that Baker left New York for Paris after realizing the U.S. at the time "was a country only for white people" offset the number's lightheartedness. Bullock segued without pause into three songs from Xavier Montsalvatge's *Cinco Canciones Negras*, whose vivid characters took on enhanced dimensionality in the context of Baker's racial struggles. "Cradle Song for a Little Black Boy," in particular, was heartbreaking.

Once again without pause, Bullock segued right into a set of three spirituals, also in arrangements by Siskind. At this point it was no surprise that Bullock could sing these with as much soulfulness and authenticity as anyone. In these sometimes pain-filled renditions, she summoned a mournful, occasionally raspy quality that she layered naturally onto her already multi-hued timbral palette. In the same spirit, she rendered her encore, Bernstein's "Somewhere," with an emphatic, deep-seated yearning, as if the present were almost unbearable.



Julia Bullock, soprano

The New York Times

What a Life: Bus Tables, Buss Prince 'Cendrillon,' From Massenet, Is Playing at Juilliard

Anthony Tommasini | *The New York Times* | April 24, 2014

Perhaps it's just coincidence. Or maybe, with the recent public discourse about the struggling middle class, this seems an apt moment to revisit a fairy tale about a good-hearted young woman, miserably oppressed by her family, who finds an unlikely soul mate in a loving prince.

On Wednesday night at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater, Juilliard Opera joined the Cinderella sweepstakes with an imaginative and affecting production of Massenet's "Cendrillon," another operatic version of the tale, first performed in Paris in 1899. A winning cast of gifted Juilliard students was led by the impressive, fast-rising American soprano Julia Bullock, who brought melting beauty and wistful elegance to the role of Cinderella. Ms. Bullock is already a Juilliard star, having sung the title role in the school's enchanting production of Janacek's "The Cunning Little Vixen" last spring. She seems poised for a significant career.

"Cendrillon" has some of Massenet's most delicate, sweet and refined music. The opera teases out the story's mysterious elements: During the scenes with the Prince, Massenet's Cinderella never knows whether this turn in her life is all just a dream until the opera's final, triumphant episode.

This production, directed by Peter Kazaras, revels in the dreamlike strands of "Cendrillon." To focus on the private story of Cinderella, Mr. Kazaras, with the support of the veteran French-born conductor Emmanuel Villaume, "pared down" the score, as he put it, cutting some of the public scenes with courtiers and such, along with most of the dance music.



Lacey Jo Benter, left, and Julia Bullock as the Prince and Cinderella in "Cendrillon."
Ruby Washington / *The New York Times*

her fairy godmother has come. This production suggests that Cinderella has wandered into the realm of the movie house next door. Lights from the "Cinema" sign just outside fill the cafe. Films, after all, are the world of dreams and fantasies, and the metaphor works beautifully.



Julia Bullock, center, at the Juilliard School
Ruby Washington / *The New York Times*

To lend the tale immediacy, he sets the story in 1947 Paris. In the original libretto, Lucette, known as Cinderella, is the only child of a kindly, weak-willed father, Pandolfe, who, after the death of his first wife, has foolishly married an imperious countess, Madame de la Haltière, who has two spoiled daughters. In this Juilliard version, the countess becomes the owner of a Paris cafe; the henpecked Pandolfe is the establishment's bartender; Cinderella, naturally, buses tables, cleans the place and tends to her patronizing stepmother and mean stepsisters.

And when Ms. Bullock's Cinderella appears, it is almost unbearable to see her in a servant's plain dress, surveying the dirty dishes that must be cleared away. Sitting down at a table to rest, Ms. Bullock wins the audience from the start with her achingly lovely account of the forlorn, folklike song of remorse that Cinderella sings.

At this moment, Cinderella falls asleep and dreams that



Julia Bullock, soprano

The New York Times

Personal Mix of Familiar and Fresh, With a Show-Tune Encore Julia Bullock Gives New York Recital Debut at Merkin Concert Hall

Anthony Tommasini | *The New York Times* | March 12, 2014

The young American soprano Julia Bullock won lots of fans in New York last spring for her endearing, vocally radiant performance of the title role in Janacek's "The Cunning Little Vixen," presented by Juilliard Opera in an enchanting production. Clearly Ms. Bullock is still faring well in her studies at Juilliard, for late next month, she will sing the title role in the school's production of Massenet's "Cendrillon."

On Tuesday night, Ms. Bullock showed another dimension of her impressive artistry when she made her New York recital debut, as part of the Young Concert Artists series at Merkin Concert Hall. Accompanied sensitively by the fine pianist Renate Rohlfing, Ms. Bullock presented a musically fresh and personal program.

She began with an Italian group, boldly alternating early Berio songs with late Rossini works, dealing in various ways with the pangs of love and the ruminations on the ideal woman. The Berio works were based on folk songs, though the composer, then a student, folded the tunes into milky modern harmonic textures. The Rossini songs, written during his decades of official retirement from the opera business, are charming and clever. The title of the first song in this group, Berio's "Dolce Cominciamento," translates as "sweet beginning." The sentiment applied equally well to Ms. Bullock's recital because, from the first phrases, her singing was plush, full and nuanced.

She then presented the premiere of "Ablutions of Oblivion," written for her by David Hertzberg, this year's Young Concert Artists composer in residence. The piece is a 15-minute, through-composed setting of two elusive yet compelling poems by Wallace Stevens: "Banal Sojourn" and "The Snow Man." The music unfolds in mostly slow-moving vocal lines that emerge from a subdued piano part thick with cluster chords in the style of Messiaen. At one point during the "Banal Sojourn" setting, the mood intensifies and takes the singer into powerful outbursts in the high register, an extreme and terrifying passage.

It was an intriguing idea to go from this piece to actual Messiaen. Ms. Bullock gave ravishing, impassioned accounts of four mystical Messiaen songs.

For the second half of the program, in a gesture to her African-American heritage, Ms. Bullock sang "Homage à Josephine Baker" — six songs, here arranged by Jeremy Siskind, that are associated with that great American-born black singer. Baker, fleeing discrimination at home — including in New York, as Ms. Bullock explained — went to Paris, where she had a triumphant debut in 1925 and became a sensation, and eventually a French citizen.

Continuing that theme, Ms. Bullock sang three of the "Five Black Songs" by the Spanish composer Xavier Montsalvatge; "Brown Baby" by Oscar Brown Jr., with lyrics by Nina Simone, who recorded the song memorably; "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free" by Billy Taylor; and "Little David" by Harry T. Burleigh.

For an encore, Ms. Bullock gave a direct and sensitive performance of "Somewhere" from "West Side Story." She recently sang that song in a concert of the musical with the San Francisco Symphony. Ms. Bullock is on her way.



Julia Bullock, with the pianist Renate Rohlfing in the Young Concert Artists Series at Merkin Concert Hall
Ruby Washington / The New York Times



Julia Bullock, soprano

The Washington Post

Soprano Julia Bullock delivers performance both beautiful and meaningful

Anne Midgette | *The Washington Post* | March 3, 2014

I found myself tearing up during soprano Julia Bullock's recital on Sunday afternoon.

It happened several times. It happened when she started singing in a luminous full voice, round and shining and shifting and elusive as a ball of mercury, simply because the sound she was making was so beautiful.

But this wasn't the sound of a singer who is focused only on beauty: This sound was beautiful because it meant something. Bullock is such a communicator that it was impossible to divorce the beauty of the notes from the content of what they were conveying. And there was plenty in that content to touch the heart.

This was not your routine recital program. The first set wove together three of Luciano Berio's folk song arrangements, which premiered in 1964, with two little wisps of song by the elderly Gioachino Rossini, all about love and loss and infatuation. The second set was the world premiere of a two-song cycle by the 23-year-old composer David Hertzberg called "Ablutions of Oblivion," earnest and slightly overlong settings by a young, undeniably talented composer of two poems by Wallace Stevens: "Banal Sojourn," heavy with summer somnolence, and "The Snow Man," limned in icy piano tones by the accompanist Renate Rohlfing.

The third set, four songs by Olivier Messaien, juxtaposed the wild, folk-like frenzy of two songs from the cycle "Harawi: Songs of Love and Death" with the ecstatic celestial serenity of "Songs of Earth and Heaven," concluding, at the end of "R surrection," with the sound of a literal ascent into a realm higher than a human voice can attain. The song ended with a little pop and fell back to Earth; the sense of spiritual elevation remained.

And having left one wondering how she could top this ethereal, brilliant first half, Bullock followed it with a second half that was even more deeply personal: an examination of African American identity, delivered, improbable as it may sound, with the same light, deft, pithy touch.

Bullock opened with an homage to the iconic Josephine Baker (after joking about their common ground, starting with their hair, she said). This consisted of six songs arranged by Jeremy Siskind, from "Mon coeur est un oiseau des iles" by Vincent Scotto to "Dis-moi Jos phine" by Leo Lili vre, in which Bullock gently and unobtrusively went back and forth across the stylistic line between popular and classical styles of singing: focusing on delivering the texts, but with the extra opulence of that shining vocal beauty.

Ending this set with "Si j' tais blanche," in which the singer coquettishly, rhetorically, poignantly asks, "Must I be white to please you better?" Bullock and Rohlfing moved without pause into "Punto de Habanera," one of Xavier Montsalvatge's "Cinco Canciones Negros," which gave a different perspective: It's a sensual description of a "Creole girl," her white dress contrasting with her dark skin, walking down the street scrutinized by sailors, an object of simmering, even salacious, desire.

And concluding that set of three Montsalvatge songs with "Cradle song for a little black boy," Bullock moved equally seamlessly into Oscar Brown Jr.'s "Brown Baby," shifting her voice easily from the light, clear, seeming artlessness of the Montsalvatge to a heavier, even more poignant depth. (It's nominally a jazz song, but such categories made little difference here.) There followed "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free," an aching anthem by Billy Taylor, and finally, as a pendant to Messaien's ecstatic "R surrection" at the end of the first half, an arrangement of the spiritual "Little David, Play on Your Harp," by Harry T. Burleigh.

Rohlfing was a worthy partner, particularly during a first half that called for her to do some heavy lifting. She found a common thread of silver running through both the Hertzberg songs and the Messaien. And her delicacy of touch supported the high expressive goals of a program — jointly presented by the Washington Performing Arts Society and Young Concert Artists, whose competition Bullock won in 2012 — that showed a gifted and committed artist stepping outside the norm with a fiercely personal statement that transcended questions of "familiar" and "unfamiliar" and was able to touch everyone lucky enough to be at the Terrace Theater.

The encore was "Somewhere," from Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story." I am sure I was not the only one whose eyelids prickled.

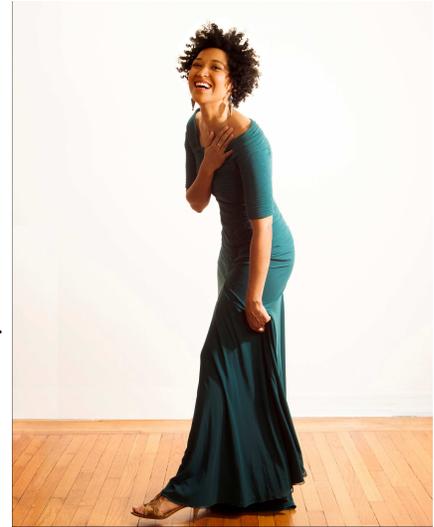


Photo: Christian Steiner



Julia Bullock, *soprano*



CD Review: *San Francisco Symphony's WEST SIDE STORY is a Triumph*

David Clarke | *Broadway World* | June 23, 2014

San Francisco Symphony, with Michael Tilson Thomas as conductor, presented an enthralling staged concert version of WEST SIDE STORY in the summer of 2013. With an immense knowledge of the musical and the man who created the score, Michael Tilson Thomas has expertly lead the opulent San Francisco Orchestra and a cast of brilliant talent through the score. Recorded live from June 27 to July 2, 2013 at the Davies Symphony Hall at the San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center, the dual disc album is definitely one of the loveliest recordings of the score you'll ever hear.

Using the original Broadway orchestrations as his basis, Michael Tilson Thomas states that for this recording audiences will hear those original orchestrations "beefed up" because the San Francisco Symphony was able to remove the doubling that the original score required for the musicians in the pit. Listening to the album, the lushness of the full orchestra adds a distinctive emotional depth to this recording, making the music we all know and cherish all the more grand and utterly breathtaking. The 1984 Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft recording conducted by Leonard Bernstein will probably always be remembered and revered as the definitive recording of WEST SIDE STORY's score, but the San Francisco Symphony's recording is definitely a close second. The largest difference between the two recordings is that Michael Tilson Thomas gives us a more Broadway sound. The operatic nature of the 1984 album has been contemporized, with the cast utilizing the more pop/jazz vocalizations audiences associate with Broadway musicals.

As Maria, Alexandra Silber sings with all the sweetness that one would expect. Her impeccable soprano instrument and vocal skills show a certain maturity of artistry while still conveying the youthfulness of the character. With an operatic sensibility and all the control required for quality arias, her Maria shimmers on the recording.

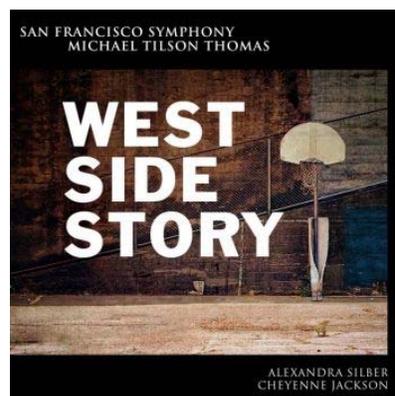
Cheyenne Jackson gives listeners everything they want from the charismatic and youthful Tony. His wistful and breathy longing on "Something's Coming" and "Maria" makes his yearning for a better life and for the girl all the more tangible. Moreover, he sings with impressive control, allowing the well-known numbers to grow from their quiet moments to their louder segments with fantastic flourish. Most impressively, he sings with a youthfulness that makes the listener believe he is a young boy in his late teens.

The role of Anita, made legendary by Rita Moreno, is sung to perfection by Jessica Vosk. With brassy attitude and indefatigable gusto, Jessica Vosk performs each and every moment written for Anita with electrifying pizzazz. We quickly come to love her during her solos on the snappy "America" and the whimsical "Tonight." However, it is on "A Boy Like That" where she elevates her performance to the realm of unforgettable.

Julia Bullock's evocative rendition of "Somewhere (A Girl)" is also a true standout on the recording. With a sensitive and keen ear for operatic tonality, she makes the absolute most of the solo. You'll be hard-pressed to find a better recording of this number anywhere in the world. Likewise, the energetic ensemble makes the familiar hits like "Jet Song," "America," "Cool," and especially "Gee, Officer Krupke" toe tapping, fun delights as well.

Lastly, the packaging for San Francisco Symphony's WEST SIDE STORY is worthy of mentioning. The 104 page booklet that comes with the two discs is filled with interesting information about the musical itself, this production, quotes from the cast, the complete lyrics, archival photographs, gorgeous full-color photos from the performances, and more. It is a treasure trove of well-researched and well-articulated information about one of America's most cherished musicals. Therefore, it is truly a collector's dream and something that even a casual fan of musicals will enjoy and appreciate.

The San Francisco Symphony released their phenomenal and altogether triumphant recording of WEST SIDE STORY on June 10, 2014. The album can be purchased from the San Francisco Symphony's online store, iTunes, and Amazon.





Julia Bullock, soprano

Washington Performing Arts Society/Young Concert Artists: Julia Bullock, soprano, with Renate Roling, piano

Leslie Weisman | DC Metro Theater Arts | March 4, 2014

Sunday afternoon's recital at The Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater, the Alexander Kasza-Kasser Concert in the Young Concert Artists Series, was a musically and intellectually adventurous expedition that testified absorbingly to the qualifications of the prize's recipient, Julia Bullock. Bullock, who in "A Note from the Artist" wrote that "when developing a new program, I consider its content reaching beyond the concert hall," proved herself not only an accomplished vocalist and insightful interpreter, but an astute and engaging commentator on twenty-three songs by fourteen composers spanning three centuries. (Seven, counting one of the songs' text).

In a program ranging from an anonymous 14th Century Sicilian poem set to self-described "quirkily chaotic" music by a 20th Century composer; to a piece written for and inspired by the soprano by a celebrated, multiple-award-winning Millennial; to American spirituals and French chansons—Bullock brought it all off, with finesse, panache, tenderness, reverence . . . or slinky sass.

YCA Composer-in-Residence David Hertzberg wrote Ablutions of Oblivion (having its world premiere here) for her, Bullock told us, then added that the "time of solitude" soon to be upon us with the approaching storm was "a wonderful time to meditate," with "sun glistening on the snow." The lyrics for the two songs, wrote Hertzberg in a program note, were taken from two poems in Wallace Stevens' 1923 collection "Harmonium"—the first, *Sur les rives du léthé*, after "Banal Sojourn"; the second, *Oubli céleste*, after "The Snow Man"—that "express dichotomous states of sensory oblivion."

Bullock penetrated their denseness intelligently and intuitively, her tonal variety and modulatory richness evoking the "languid . . . hallucinatory metaphor" of the first, her icily pinpointed shrieks and closing, lightly mournful yet unsurprised tone and mien the "landscape, barren and stoic" of the second. Roling was an able collaborator, her pinky finger picking out with frigid precision the icicles on the keyboard in a chillingly tuneless, lugubrious conclusion. With an enthusiastic reception from the audience as the last note died away, the composer leapt upon the stage, and the three happily embraced.

The three selections from Luciano Berio's *Quattro canzoni popolari* ("Four Popular Songs") could not have been more different, and in some cases, more difficult. *Dolce cominciamiento* ("Sweet Beginning") was dolce indeed, Bullock's easy, creamy, focused tone a sheer pleasure to listen to. *La donna ideale* ("The Ideal Woman") allowed the singer to playfully play both suitor and sought-after, assuming the two characters and relishing each role both vocally and dramatically with equal verve and enjoyment. *Ballo* ("Dance") was a ululating lament on the lunacy of love, skillfully studded with puppy-like yaps and yelps.

The first of the (Gioacchino) Rossini selections, the "Stabat mater," from his *Mi lagnerò tacendo*, was similarly surprising; here, though, both for the abrupt shift in tone, and because it flew in the face of the popular perception of the "bubbly champagne" the music of Rossini is often compared to, and almost irresistibly evokes. A reflective piece composed in the aftermath of nearly two decades of illness and depression, Bullock brought to it a dark richness, a technical facility, and an impressive command of dynamics. The section concluded with his *Sorzico* ("I Complain But in Silence"), whose grindingly but hilariously congenial contradiction Bullock clearly enjoyed exploiting.

Introducing Olivier Messaien's *Chants de terre et de ciel* ("Songs of Earth and Heaven"), Bullock became your favorite teacher as she gave her attentive audience some background on the song: friendly; patient; eager to see that you got it; hoping that you'd remember it. *Bail avec Mi* ("Lease with Mi")—"Mi" being Messaien's nickname for his first wife, "lease" a teasing reference to togetherness—was lovely and warm, with a gentle and affectionate tone. Fittingly, the next one up was a sharp, well-nigh eviscerating contrast, from the composer's *Harawi*, *chants d'amour et de la mort* ("Harawi, Songs of Love and Death").



NEWS *from Young Concert Artists, Inc.*

Bullock lit into *Katchikatchi les étoiles* (“Katchikatchi the Stars”) with the martially merciless aggressiveness it demands (“ . . . Ionized laughter, clock’s fury/to murder absent/Chop off my head,/its figure rolls in blood! . . .”; here again, Messaien was his own lyricist). Roling’s deft fingers followed with preternatural responsiveness as she navigated the fiendishly difficult musical equivalent of the childhood challenge to pat your head with one hand while rubbing your tummy with the other, the right hand following the singer maniacally while the left strummed soothing chords.

L’amour de Piroutcha (“The Love of Piroutcha”), a poetic exchange at once contemplative and terrifying between a Young Girl and a Young Man, showed Bullock at her most electrifying, the top notes thrillingly explosive with an undercurrent of eerie control, the song’s ending “amour, la mort” (love, death) an incomplete rasp, broken off. The final Messaien, *Résurrection* (pour le jour de Pâques) (“Resurrection, for Easter Day”) was stirring and declamatory, as befits the event it celebrates (“ . . . ‘I am risen, I am risen./I rise: towards you, my God, Alleluia. From earth to heaven I go.’ . . .”), Bullock’s eyes on fire, her voice and demeanor filled with spiritual fervor.

But now, as before, suddenly the artistic and emotional winds would shift; this time, from the spiritual to the spirited, from the fervent to the fevered: to Josephine Baker, the iconic African American singer and dancer whose shimmering star burst upon the stages of 1920s Paris and left a lasting legacy that Bullock evocatively recalled, with six songs arranged by jazz pianist Jeremy Siskind.

Mon coeur est un oiseau des îles (“My Heart Is an Island Bird”), by Marseilles-born composer Vincent Scotto, who wrote several scores for French New Wave film master Alain Resnais (whom we lost on Saturday, at the age of 91), was rendered by Bullock with warmth and delicacy, and an intimate understanding of song and singer. “She and I have a lot in common,” Bullock said, giving us a précis of Baker’s bio along with her own. For the great black diva, singing as a bird in a cage on stage was “a moment of great liberation,” because she was confiding something that could have been seen as embarrassing, but instead, owning it, and flinging it in the faces of those who would marginalize her. It was, in effect, Bullock declared, “a liberation for all people. Not just black people.”

The singer visibly reveled in the rhythms of Cuban composer Armando Oréfiche’s *La conga blicoti* (“The Blicoti Conga”), which he recorded with Baker (it can be heard in Woody Allen’s *Midnight in Paris*), caressing the notes with a sweet but sly flirtatiousness that captured Baker’s appeal. Other Baker favorites included Scotto’s *J’ai deux amours* (“I Have Two Loves”), Mairiotte Almaby’s *Madiana*, and Léo Lelièvre’s *Dis-moi Josephine* (“Tell Me, Josephine”) and *Si j’étais blanche* (“If I Were White”), in which Bullock foot-stompingly played an imaginary mouth harmonica, bringing two people in the front row to spring up from their seats and applaud.

Spanish composer Xavier Montsalvatge was represented with three of the songs in his cycle *Cinco canciones negras* (“Five Black Songs”): *Punto de Habanera* (Siglo XVIII)(“Habanera Point (18th Century)”), *Chévere*(“Cavalier”), and *Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito*(“Cradle Song for a Little Black Boy”), with whose gently rocking syncopation Bullock created a lullaby of almost corporeal tenderness.

Turning to African American composers, Bullock turned her vocal style, tone, and even production to that of the traditional black spiritual, letting the tones vibrate visibly on her upper lip and ending the song with a delayed, exquisitely decrescendoing hum. Oscar Brown, Jr.’s *Brown Baby*, a mother’s proud, strong, loving invocation of the possibilities and expectations for her son, made famous by Nina Simone, was sung with quiet determination by Bullock, whose shining eyes and unyielding gaze bespoke the mother’s abiding faith, in the face of dispiriting odds.

Billy Taylor’s *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free*, a civil rights anthem whose 1967 recording by Simone was arguably the apex of its popularity, was seized by Bullock but, rather than flinging it out to the audience, held it intensely close, her arms thrust skyward at the end with aching deliberate slowness.



NEWS *from Young Concert Artists, Inc.*

The last piece, Harry T. Burleigh's arrangement of the 19th-century Sunday school favorite Little David (Play on Your Harp), concluded the concert in a rousing spirit of bonhomie and, somehow, mutual accomplishment. Which may have been behind Bullock's surprising choice, at least at first glance, for an encore: Somewhere, from Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story. And yet—perhaps not.

“When you're an artist you're searching for freedom,” Bullock quotes American portrait artist Alice Neel in “A Note from the Artist.” But “You'll never find it, because there ain't any freedom. But at least you search for it. In fact,” said Neel, “art could be called ‘The Search.’ ” There's a place for us,/Somewhere a place for us/Peace and quiet and open air/Wait for us /Somewhere.

Whether Julia Bullock believes, along with Alice Neel, that “there ain't any freedom,” or still hopes, along with Maria, that “Peace and quiet and open air” are out there somewhere, her commitment to using her “creative and interpretive abilities to contribute to society” offers audiences the opportunity to explore the question with her, and seek their own answers to it. Or just enjoy a stimulating, musically and intellectually enriching, thoroughly satisfying concert.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

Los Angeles Times

A Sleek and Polished 'West Side Story' for the West Coast

Mark Swed

Los Angeles Times

July 2, 2013

"West Side Story," West Coast style, may seem oxymoronic. Certainly, the context for a colorful and wondrous, historic "West Side Story," given in concert by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony here Sunday afternoon, was radically exotic for a quintessential New York musical.

Moreover, Bernstein's magnificent 1982 recording of the "West Side Story" Symphonic Dances, the first to reveal the full extent of the score's operatic grandeur, happened to be with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. It was made, coincidentally, here at Davies Hall when the orchestra was on tour.

Now Tilson Thomas — a protégé of Bernstein and a musician with a Bernsteinian command of the classics and popular music — is simply the most appropriate conductor to take on "West Side Story." Finally, he has in a series of concert performances to close out the San Francisco Symphony's season. The last one will be Tuesday, but something more is coming: a live recording on the orchestra's own label to be released next year.

Elizabeth A. Wells' recent academic study of "West Side Story" brilliantly illuminates all this. Another recent book on the musical by Misha Berson notes that there have been more than 40,000 different productions of the show. You'd think there would be nothing left to learn.

There is, and this is where Tilson Thomas comes in. As with Bernstein, Tilson Thomas waited until he became 68 to conduct his first full "West Side Story." He has, however, steered clear of Bernstein's excessively operatic approach. The San Francisco cast consists of Broadway singers, and quite classy ones. But they can wait.

The real revelation Sunday was the orchestra. There is, for a Broadway show of its era, an unprecedented amount of purely orchestral and important orchestra writing in "West Side Story." This is where much of the music's greatness lies, and Tilson Thomas brought that out through exquisite instrumental details and nuances.

He conveyed the dance soul in the score. And its Ravelian color. The playing was sleek and polished. Dynamic contrasts, impossible to achieve on a Broadway stage, made "One Hand, One Heart" stop time. The Ballet Sequence, with "Somewhere" as the centerpiece, became a grand occasion, showing off startlingly impressive percussion writing on the level of Varèse and even Cage.

Under these circumstances, the cast couldn't convey much sense of theater. Tony and Maria sang facing the audience, politely holding hands. But Cheyenne Jackson's Tony was suave and sure and Alexandra Silber's Maria, tremulously excitable. Kevin Vortmann was a smoothly cool Riff. Jessica Vosk's Anita brought needed heat.

And then there was a young soprano Julia Bullock, who sang "Somewhere." She comes from somewhere other than Broadway, namely opera and the concert stage, and in this performance a place of transcendence. Still a student, she stood out at the Ojai Festival two years ago. She's arrived.

Tilson Thomas now heads south next week to conduct the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Mahler and Tchaikovsky at the Hollywood Bowl. It's a shame he isn't also bringing this West Coast "West Side Story" as well. The recording can't come out a minute too soon.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

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OPERA NEWS

In Review: *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Juilliard Opera

Joshua Rosenblum

Opera News

July 2013

The recent Juilliard production of Janacek's ravishing opera *The Cunning Little Vixen* (seen Apr. 28) didn't try to compete with the elaborate woodland costumes and pastoral backdrops featured in the New York Philharmonic's concert staging of the same work just two years ago, across the street at Avery Fisher Hall. Juilliard's version, under the direction of Emma Griffin, took place entirely inside one large room of a sleek contemporary house (designed by Laura Jellinek), with splotches of color seen through the windows indicating the changing of the seasons. The denizens of the forest were clearly exuberant young people, not animals, playing games; they wore only animal ears, or, in some cases, masks on the backs of their heads. Thus freed from the constraints of depicting wildlife, the cast was liberated to emphasize the humanistic qualities of the relationships in Janacek's opera (the composer wrote his own libretto), as well as his resonant themes of unity and renewal.

Also helpful in emphasizing this realism was the English translation, by Yvera Synek Graff (a pioneer in bringing Czech opera to English-speaking audiences) and Robert T. Jones. Janacek famously tried to capture the distinctive contours and rhythms of the Czech language in his music, making credible singing translations even harder to create than usual, but these English phrases seemed perfectly natural and well set. This authentic quality was enhanced by generally excellent diction from the exceptionally talented student cast.

Julia Bullock, as Sharp-Ears, the titular vixen, led the way in terms of clarity of delivery and beauty of sound. Her broad range of expression allowed her to be impetuous and demonstrative in her early scenes, then appealingly self-dramatizing later when relating the story of her life to the Fox. In this beautiful courtship scene, Bullock's sound was especially opulent and glorious in her upper register. Later, when she sang "Can it be that I am beautiful?" her voice and face both lit up vibrantly. Her bold, seemingly invulnerable defiance of Harasta, the menacing poacher, was such that her death by gunfire came as a complete shock, even to those who already knew the plot.

Soprano Karen Vuong, as the Fox, deployed a slightly weightier voice than Bullock's but sang with similar beauty of tone, if slightly less precise consonants. Aubrey Allicock, as the Forester who attempts to domesticate the Vixen, was a welcome presence both vocally and dramatically. The steel-edged confidence of his bassbaritone was perfect for delivering the message of rejuvenation in the Forester's big aria near the end.

Anne Manson led the Juilliard Orchestra with firm, decisive command. The strings sounded a tad scrappy at the start, but they achieved much better integration of sound as the afternoon progressed. Jeanne Slater provided the joyful choreography, which verged on the balletic during the Act I dream sequence. Some adorable young members of the Juilliard Pre-College Division struck a very moving tableau after the death of Sharp-Ears, more wonderstruck at the falling snow than grief-ridden over their mother's demise. This, as much as anything, crystallized Janacek's case for the inexorability of the circle of life. And we didn't even need to be outside.



Animal magnetism:
Vuong and Bullock in Juilliard's *Vixen*



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

The Mercury News

West Side Story Score is Center Stage at San Francisco Symphony

Richard Scheinin

The Mercury News

June 28, 2013

Few musicals enjoy the name-brand status of Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story," what with all its stage revivals and the film version with Natalie Wood and a gazillion renditions of its hit tunes by everyone from Dave Brubeck to Aretha Franklin -- and the band Yes, which once recorded "Something's Coming" as the B side of a single.

But while Bernstein once recorded his 1957 Broadway score in its entirety with orchestra and singers, that particular variation of the package has never happened live on stage -- until this week at Davies Symphony Hall. That's where Michael Tilson Thomas (Bernstein's old friend and protégé) is conducting the San Francisco Symphony and a bubbling cast of young Broadway-style singers in the first live, concert-hall performances of the full score with orchestra. The run, through Tuesday, is being recorded for CD release next spring.

Opening night was Thursday: The production is stripped down (simple costumes, no choreography, no sets) and yet snazzy (that music!), with the singers on risers behind the orchestra and one matinee idol in a leading role. That's Cheyenne Jackson -- of TV's "30 Rock" (Danny Baker) and "Glee" (Dustin Goolsby) -- as Tony, leader of the Jets. He's got the bright, clean Broadway dazzle element going (though his top register got a little shaky), and his Maria (soprano Alexandra Silber) was creamy-voiced and appealing as the other star-crossed lover. She is a touching actor, too.

The real star of the production, however, is the score: nothing but bulls-eyes. Bernstein's music "has a right-guy, right-place, right-time quality that says even tough things with breezy confidence," Tilson Thomas writes in the program notes. Add in Stephen Sondheim's lyrics -- so caustic, funny and on-the-money about gang rivalries and young love -- and you have something that's proven timeless. Even the lingo hasn't changed all that much: "cool, easy, sweet."

The hits are hard to sing. Bernstein's lines leap across unusual intervals and cover wide distances: Jackson found himself climbing from sub-basement notes to a falsetto; first he's the tough guy, then the prayerful lover. "One Hand, One Heart," his duet with Silber, was pretty exquisite. And what a tune that is, with its slow Baroque motion and intertwining lines, conjuring moonlit Shakespeare. ("West Side Story" moves "Romeo and Juliet" to Manhattan's Upper West Side.)

Two singers best pulled off the Bernstein challenge. One was Jessica Vosk (as Anita, one of the "Shark girls"), who was brassy, sexy and loaded with personality. The other was soprano Julia Bullock, who walked out as A Girl (that's the name of her role) in order to sing one number: "Somewhere." Wow. Still studying at Juilliard, she was the most expressive and luscious-voiced member of the cast, and will be heard from again.

There were some terrific ensemble numbers: "America," "Tonight," "Gee, Office Krupke." (Among the standouts in the latter was San Jose-bred Justin Keyes, as Action, one of the Jets.) The score is drenched in '50s vernacular: jazz, mambo, cha-cha; Bernstein must have been in the clubs, listening to Machito and Dizzy Gillespie. But he raised the ante, inserting his own brand of incessant rhythmic complexity, which the orchestra mostly handled well. If there were some draggy moments -- "Mambo" didn't rock out -- that ought to improve with more performances.

Hats off to Tilson Thomas who, by all accounts, made this production happen, requesting permissions from Sondheim and the estates of Bernstein, Arthur Laurents (who wrote the book) and choreographer Jerome Robbins. He's going for Broadway sparkle here; Bernstein's 1984 recording with tenor José Carreras (as Tony) and Kiri Te Kanawa (as Maria) was more on the operatic side. Paying respects to his late friend, Tilson Thomas is making history this week in San Francisco.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

San Francisco Chronicle

***West Side Story* review: San Francisco Symphony Inspires**

Joshua Kosman

San Francisco Chronicle

June 28, 2013

"West Side Story" is such a miraculous fusion of theatrical elements that any one of them can be hard to assess clearly on its own. One of the great revelations of Thursday's dynamic concert performance by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony was just how remarkable the score sounds in isolation.

In casting the performance, the Symphony turned - with one notable and glorious exception - to veterans of the Broadway stage, whose experience is most relevant to this musical idiom. Vocal amplification, tinny and flattening as always, was the price to be paid for that.

But the vocalists, who sang from a raised stage behind the orchestra, did a superb job of conveying the wit and emotional urgency of Bernstein's writing.

The evening's luminary was Cheyenne Jackson, who brought elegance and romantic ardor to the role of Tony. Jackson's singing - expansive and gorgeously phrased in "Maria," more restrained and supportive in the duet "One Hand, One Heart" - was a beacon of sweetness and grace throughout.

Stunning 'Somewhere'

Alexandra Silber was a fine Maria, reaching up to securely placed high notes and delivering the bubbly strains of "I Feel Pretty" with infectious charm. Jessica Vosk was a formidable vocal powerhouse as Anita, and there were vibrant contributions from Justin Keyes (Action), Kelly Markgraf (Bernardo) and Kevin Vortmann (Riff). Members of Ragnar Bohlin's Symphony Chorus helped out as various gang members and their girls.

Yet perhaps the evening's most remarkable showstopper came midway through the second half, when Julia Bullock, a conservatory-trained operatic soprano, appeared out of nowhere to deliver a full-voiced, stunningly paced account of "Somewhere." The entire score of "West Side Story" is full of musical treasures, but for just a moment it seemed as though nothing Bernstein ever wrote was quite as magical as that one song.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE

West Side Story: A Dream Realized

Jason Victor Serinus

San Francisco Classical Voice

June 27, 2013

It's hardly hyperbole to postulate that San Francisco Symphony's first-ever complete concert version of *West Side Story* represents the first time since Bernstein's death that his glorious music is presented as he might have wished. Not only does SFS's groundbreaking rendition, which has four more performances in Davies Symphony Hall through July 2, allow us to hear Bernstein's final 1984 revision of Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal's orchestration, played by a great orchestra that does it full justice, but it also presents the music in a far more satisfying manner than in Bernstein's 1984 studio recording.

Not all of Jay Binder's casting choices for San Francisco are ideal, but they sure beat what Bernstein's operatic and linguistic mish-mash of José Carreras' Latin-sounding Tony (the Polish-American Anton) and Kiri Te Kanawa's quasi-Puerto Rican Maria did to Stephen Sondheim's lyrics.

It is unreliably rumored that red-clad Jessica Vosk's Anita was so hot that the air conditioning had to be turned up in intermission. Hers is the role that helped put Chita Rivera (Broadway, 1957) and Rita Moreno (film, 1961) on the map, and she is absolutely up to the task. Vosk belts, gyrates, and throws voice, hips, and you know what around like nobody's business. Her three compatriots (Juliana Hansen, Cassie Simone, and Louise Marie Cornillez) may have looked and sounded better than they moved, but that made Vosk's portrayal all the more potent.

There were other major finds. Kevin Vortmann's mean-visaged Riff, complete with a high climax in the "Jet Song" ("When you're a Jet ...") that would have made Al Jolson proud, was near-ideal. Justin Keyes' rendition of Action's part in "Gee, Officer Krupke" was super, and Michael Taylor's cop was lots of fun. Kelly Markgraf didn't have much to sing as Bernardo, but his dark voice seemed tailor-made for the part. Other small roles were sung ably, and the select San Francisco Symphony choristers who stood in for the Jets, Sharks, and Girls appeared to have a ball with the opportunity to do more than stare into printed scores.

In 1984, the great Marilyn Horne sang "Somewhere" for Bernstein's studio effort. Here, Juilliard student Julia Bullock, winner of the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, performed with equal beauty but far less of an operatic flavoring. I loved her. If Bullock does not rise to prominence in short order, and make it back the Bay Area real soon, something is very wrong in the world.

Bottom line. Not every tempo or singer was ideal, and no one can mine this score for nuance and detail better than Bernstein himself (abetted, on record, by multi-miking and post-production rebalancing). But the sound – the absolutely incredible sound – of the San Francisco Symphony, and the spirit that musicians, singers, and MTT brought to the evening made for the finest sounding *West Side Story* you are likely to hear. Even if tickets are sold out, it's worth showing up at Davies in hopes of snaring one. It's that good.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

Superconductor

Opera Review: *Fur is Murder*

Juilliard Opera presents *The Cunning Little Vixen*

Paul J. Pelkonen

Superconductor

May 1, 2013



The Vixen Sharp-Ears (left, standing center) instructs her brood as the Fox (Karen Vuong, right) looks on.

Photo by Nan Melville © 2013 The Juilliard School.

The unexpected renaissance of Czech opera at Juilliard continues with the Juilliard Opera's energetic, season-ending production of Leoš Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, seen April 30 at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater. This production, combining some of the best singers from the conservatory's upper and lower divisions, offers a fresh take on this beloved opera. The opera was performed in English and without intermissions.

The cast takes center stage. And they're a strong bunch, led by the live-wire soprano Julia Bullock in the title role. She takes on the difficult role of the Vixen Sharp-Ears fearlessly, singing at the absolute top of her range her confrontations with the Chickens and the Badger. She shifts gears in Act II engaging in a warm, cooing duet when she meets Fox Golden-Stripe (Karen Vuong.) The chaotic sex and wedding scenes that follow are played with brisk, bright energy.

Ms. Bullock is matched in the lead by Aubrey Allicock, in the longer (and less gratifying) role of the Forester. This guardian of the woods emerges as the opera's other protagonist, from the opening scene (where he violates man's covenant with nature by capturing the Vixen) to the final scene of the opera where he gains a new understanding of man's relationship to nature. Mr. Allicock sang with a gruff, paternal baritone, making nothing of the fact that he is a good deal younger than most singers who tackle this role.

Ms. Vuong made an exceptional Fox, cocky and athletic. Mezzo Raquel Gonzáles was a very funny butch Rooster, commandeering a flock of Chickens in white negligees and blonde wigs. (The moment when the last chicken makes a point to willingly step into the Vixen's snare was a comic highlight.) Laura Mixter was strong as the Forester's Dog, proudly declaring "I'm a composer!" before admitting that her compositional efforts led to beatings and exile. Finally, a slew of promising young men and women made up the swarming animals of Janacek's imaginary forest, contributing life and vitality to a classic story that is, at it's heart, all about the passage of time.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

The New York Times

Where Foxes Are Wise and Humans Are Troubled

'The Cunning Little Vixen,' at Peter Jay Sharp Theater

Anthony Tommasini

The New York Times

April 30, 2013

A majority of characters in Janacek's enchanting "Cunning Little Vixen" are animals. In presenting this great Czech opera, first performed in Brno in 1924, most companies seize on the chance to create fanciful animal costumes and beguiling sets that evoke leafy forests. The director Emma Griffin dispenses with all that for the Juilliard Opera's affecting production that opened at the school's Peter Jay Sharp Theater on Sunday afternoon. Instead, the young Juilliard singers look like, well, young Juilliard singers, wearing casual summer outfits designed by Jessica Trejos.

In an interview with *The Juilliard Journal*, Ms. Griffin explains that animal costumes inevitably look "cutesy." Her aim was to reveal the "philosophical core" of the opera, which has a libretto by Janacek. Erik Chisholm, the author of a book on the Janacek operas, aptly describes this work as "an almost Buddhist hymn in praise of the basic unity of all living creatures." Ms. Griffin's concept is deeply resonant. Janacek wanted us to see ourselves in these animal characters.

It is a joy to watch these splendid young cast members embracing their inner animals, leaping about the stage while also looking so natural. In one scene Ms. Griffin presents a rooster (Raquel González) as a strutting, slick-haired man in black slacks and suspenders, and his hens as a bevy of cackling blondes in short white slips.

There is depth and complexity beneath the surface whimsy of Janacek's score. Forest creatures are restless sorts, a quality captured in shifting, harmonically elusive music. In writing vocal lines, Janacek hewed closely to the patterns of the Czech words. There is a strong argument for performing his operas in the original language. But this production uses a wonderful English translation by Yveta Synek Graff and Robert T. Jones, which the well-coached cast sings, over all, with clear diction.

The captivating soprano Julia Bullock brings a rosy, agile voice and light-footed grace to her performance as the impish Vixen. The compelling bass-baritone Aubrey Allicock is excellent as the Forester, a man with a dreamy side, who takes the Vixen cub captive and rears her in his home, causing no end of trouble.

Much later, when the Vixen escapes, she meets a seductive male Fox (a plush soprano, Karen Vuong). Before the Vixen knows it she is pregnant and the couple must get married, joined by forest friends. Janacek gives us one of the most jubilant wedding choruses in all of opera.



Juilliard Opera Julia Bullock, far right, as Vixen; Raquel González, in glasses, as Rooster; and others in "The Cunning Little Vixen," at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

NEW YORK ARTS

Orientalism in France

Leon Botstein and the ASO play Saint-Saëns, Franck, Ravel, Delage, and Bizet's one-act opera *Djamileh* at Carnegie Hall

Michael Miller

New York Arts

March 3, 2012

What was most palpably present in Carnegie Hall that night was some supremely imaginative and enjoyable music, much of it more substantial than one might have expected.

César Franck's *Les Djinns* (1884) is an elaborate tone poem with something more than a piano obbligato—the solo is concerto-like in importance and virtuosity. It is a fairly literal treatment of Victor Hugo's famous poem, even to approximating its "pyramidal" shape, in which each stanza of the poem, beginning with a trisyllabic line, grows to full twelve-syllable alexandrines and diminishes again to two syllables as the djinns pass away. A very rare work, it covers a great variety of passing moods and sensations over its course. Pianist Julia Zilberquit gave a virtuosic and expressive performance, which, much to the delight of the audience, did full justice to the work's more introspective moods, and Botstein gave Ms. Zilberquit an evocative, full-bodied accompaniment.

Maurice Delage, who was inspired to become a composer by hearing Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and became a pupil of Ravel's, composed his *Quatre poèmes hindous* between 1912–13 after a visit to India with his parents, who owned shoe polish factories there. Meticulous in everything he did, Delage went beyond the usual methods of Western exoticism in transcribing and studying closely recordings he collected in his travels, producing imitations of traditional Indian tuning, techniques of pizzicato and close-mouthed singing, and microtonal effects which presage the methods of the contemporary westerners who explore non-western musical traditions, above all, in the haunting second song in this group, "Lahore." Soprano Julia Bullock, currently a Juilliard student and a graduate of the Bard College's Vocal Arts Program (who already distinguished herself as an undergraduate at the Eastman School of Music, I hear), sang Delage's exquisite songs with a vivid presence, total dramatic involvement, a full, very beautiful voice, and technical precision. Given her assurance—actually real charisma—on stage and the maturity of her interpretation, it was hard to believe that this was her Carnegie Hall debut. She brought the house down with full justification. Seeing and hearing her in the songs was quite unforgettable.

Those of us who are looking forward to this summer's Bard Music Festival, Saint-Saëns and his World, will feel that the festival has already begun. Orientalism in France was not only a foretaste of what should be an extraordinary exploration of French music in the later nineteenth century, but an integral part of it, since I could easily envision this concert included within the festival itself. In fact, festival-goers who missed this concert will be missing something important, since the well-packed schedule seems not to include a session exclusively devoted to orientalism, and there is no understanding French music without it.



Julia Bullock, *soprano*

The New York Times

Travels to the Far Corners of the Canon

Steve Smith

The New York Times

February 13, 2012

The classical repertory is endowed with enough masterpieces to provide a lifetime's worth of listening. But how safe, predictable and dull life would be if we couldn't occasionally stray from the tried and true for a bit of offbeat enlightenment. Fortunately, we have the American Symphony Orchestra, whose music director and principal conductor, Leon Botstein, specializes in unearthing the fascinating and often edifying also-rans that cluster around the outskirts of the canon.

In a way, the concert the orchestra presented at Carnegie Hall on Friday night also served as a prelude to this year's Bard Music Festival, Saint-Saëns and His World, to be presented in August under Mr. Botstein's stewardship. The program here, "Orientalism in France," opened with a Saint-Saëns rarity: "Orient et Occident," composed for an 1870 gala and probably forgotten soon after.

Initially scored for military band and later revised in the orchestral version heard here, the piece ably represents the kind of merry utility and colorful charm that typifies much of Saint-Saëns's output: a characterization Mr. Botstein and his festival colleagues presumably mean to challenge in August. Anything is possible.

Two works benefited from outstanding soloists. Julia Bullock, a striking soprano, gave a ravishingly visceral account of Maurice Delage's seductive "Poèmes Hindous," abetted by Ah Ling Neu's throaty viola obbligato. And the pianist Julia Zilberquit marshaled playing of steely brilliance in "Les Djinns," a teapot-scale tempest by Franck.

The second half of the program brought the evening's most tantalizing obscurity: Bizet's "Djamileh," a one-act opéra-comique from 1872. The libretto, by Louis Gallet, tells of Haroun, an Egyptian playboy who demands a new consort each month, and Djamileh, a harem girl who contrives with Splendiano, Haroun's right-hand man, to linger past her expiration date. Complicating matters, Splendiano wants Djamileh for himself.

The Collegiate Chorale Singers, prepared by James Bagwell, were consistently outstanding, and Mr. Botstein drew playing of alluring effervescence from the orchestra. If no one is likely to argue that "Djamileh" deserves the same regard as "Carmen" or even Bizet's second-tier gem "The Pearl Fishers," this account proved a succinct charmer well worth excavating.



American Symphony Orchestra The soprano Julia Bullock in Delage's "Poèmes Hindous" at Carnegie Hall.

Photo: Hiroyuki Ito