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A new start for city opera Showtime

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THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR



It's been a long wait for fans of Opera Hamilton. But thanks to their patience, goodwill and generosity -- as well as a successful bid to seek protection from bankruptcy -- the company has resurfaced with a new lease on musical life.

That new lease will come to fruition next Thursday night at 8 at Hamilton Place when the company stages Mozart's singspiel, *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), directed by Michael Cavanagh with the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, the Opera Hamilton Chorus and singers from the Hamilton Children's Choir all under the baton of Opera Hamilton's general director, David Speers.

Flute was to be staged last October were it not for the company's crippling financial state -- which led to the board's decision to run a severely limited season.

Opera Hamilton filed for protection from creditors in January. The productions that didn't play last season were moved to 2008-09; Massenet's *Werther* eventually being cast out of the mix into 2009-10.

Among the artists who were moved into this season was Toronto-based soprano Shannon Mercer.

Opera Hamilton's subscribers will remember Mercer from her portrayal of Rosina in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, as well as a *Liederabend* held with other cast members in the fall of 2003.

That year, Mercer made history of sorts with *The Spectator* -- she was on the cover of the first GO section.

Mercer cut her teeth with the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio in Toronto from 2000-02. There, she first met vocal coach Margaret Singer, with whom she would eventually study in Europe on two occasions thanks to a Canada Council grant.

Singer took Mercer through the paces of seven operatic roles, one of which was Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*.

"Oh, it's so perfect for you," Mercer recalls Singer telling her back in those study sessions.

Opera Hamilton's production, which is using sets and costumes from the Opera Company of Philadelphia, will be sung in German, though the spoken dialogue will be in English.

The cast includes Colin Ainsworth (Tamino), Alex Dobson (Papageno), Audrey Elizabeth Luna (Queen of the Night) and Kevin Langan (Sarastro).

"I'm really happy that it all panned out for Opera Hamilton," says Mercer. "It's an important company for young singers. Opera Hamilton was always such a younger company that would embrace younger singers with less experience.

"It was always nice to have that company that would give you the chance to perform that role to get your foot in the door."

But Opera Hamilton isn't the only local entity with a new lease on life.

So, too, is the organ at Central Presbyterian Church, 165 Charlton Ave. W. -- its console recently underwent a \$65,000 refurbishment.

Huw Williams, formerly sub-organist at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, England, and currently music director at the Church of the Redeemer in Bryn Mawr, Penn., will inaugurate Central's refurbished instrument with a recital tomorrow at 8 p.m.

On the bill are selections from Williams's CD, *Organ Spectacular*, plus some Bach and Mozart.

Tickets are \$15 (students \$10) and are available at the door or by calling 905-522-9098.