Aria

Samson & Dalila

February 2, 4, 6, 2007

by Camille Saint-Saëns
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Saint-Saëns' opera, which began life as an oratorio, presents challenges to a stage director - how does one make this piece dramatically gripping and real without resorting to contrived dramatic devices that neither the score nor text call for?

The answer, I believe, lies in trusting the composer's inherent dramatic bent, which is present in all of his music. If one is familiar with his Organ Symphony or piano concertos, it is immediately apparent that his musical idiom is dramatic at its core. The dancing elements of *Samson* are dramatically gripping, and the opening confrontation with Abimelech, and the doomed temple scene also provide plenty of dramatic possibility. But the "hidden" dramatic possibilities of the score really reside in the tension that exists in scenes where things are about to happen. Dalila's various temptations of Samson are a classic example of how the operatic form freezes a moment in time and then comments and expands upon the situation.

Opera allows for this convention in a way that no other medium does. Because of this device, we as an audience have time to closely observe Samson's struggles between the carnal and the sacred in a most riveting way. In most Biblical epics, the canvas that the dramatic action plays out on is usually quite large, and this opera certainly has those moments as well. But one could make the argument that here (as in Verdi's *Aida*), the most important moments of the opera are quite intimate. Even at the point where Samson, with God's help, brings down the temple around his tormentors, we have the feeling that we are sharing a very private moment for Samson. This point is brought home even stronger with the introduction of the young child who leads him to his and their doom. So, returning to the original point, the stage director merely needs to trust Saint-Saëns and this very timely story to make this piece unfold as the opera that it truly is.
Presented in French with English Supertitles

**CAST**

Samson, leader of the Israelites ........................................... Mark Lundberg
Dalila, priestess of Dagon .................................................... Malgorzata Walewska
Abimelech, satrap of Gaza .................................................... Ethan Herschenfeld
High Priest of Dagon ............................................................ Lawrence Harris
First Philistine ......................................................................... Eric Haines
Second Philistine ...................................................................... Patrick McNichols**
An Old Hebrew .......................................................................... Matt Bohler
A Philistine Messenger ............................................................ Kawika McGuire**
A Boy ........................................................................................ Riley Lynch

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**The Story of Samson & Dalila**

**ACT I.**
Palestine, 1150 B.C.
In a square in Gaza, a group of Hebrews beg Jehovah for relief from their bondage to the Philistines; Samson, their leader, rebukes them for their lack of faith. When the Philistine commander, Abimelech, denounces the Hebrews and their God, Samson kills him and leads the Hebrews away. The High Priest of Dagon comes from the Philistine temple and curses Samson’s prodigious strength, leaving with the slain man’s bier. An Old Hebrew praises the returning Samson. The outer walls of the temple disappear to reveal Samson’s former lover, the Philistine woman Dalila, who invites him to come that night to her nearby dwelling. She and her maidens dance seductively for Samson, who becomes deaf to the Old Hebrew’s dour prophecies.

**ACT II.**
In the vale of Sorek, Dalila calls on her gods to help her ensnare and disarm Samson, promising the High Priest to find a way to render the hero powerless. Samson appears, passionate in spite of himself; when Dalila has him in her power, she feigns disbelief in his constancy and demands that he show his love by confiding in her the secret of his strength, weeping when he refuses. Samson hears rolling thunder as a warning from God but cannot resist following Dalila inside. Not long afterward, having finally learned that the secret of Samson’s strength is his long hair, she calls to hidden Philistine soldiers, who rush in to capture and blind Samson.

**ACT III.**
In a dungeon at Gaza, the sightless Samson pushes a grist mill in a circle, praying for his people, who will suffer for his sin. He hears their voices castigating him. During a bacchanal in the Temple of Dagon, Dalila and the High Priest taunt Samson. When they force him to kneel to Dagon, he asks a boy to lead him to the two main pillars of the temple. Samson prays to Jehovah to restore his strength, and with a mighty effort he pulls down the pillars and the temple, crushing himself and his foes.

by John W. Freeman
-- courtesy of Opera News

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I'm Italian. In style.
Feast for the senses
by Lynne Johnson

It is hard to imagine an opera more interesting from a variety of perspectives than Camille Saint-Saëns’ Samson and Dalila. One can begin with the origin of the work itself. Its birth was painful. Saint-Saëns’ early efforts in 1867 met with such cold reception in Paris that he simply put the work aside. Then in 1870 he ran into Franz Liszt at a Beethoven centennial celebration in Weimar. When Saint-Saëns casually mentioned the opera in hopes the Hungarian might be willing to give him feedback, Liszt declared, “I don’t need to hear it. Finish the work and I will stage it for you.” He was true to his word. Samson and Dalila had its debut at Weimar on December 2, 1877. The opera was a huge hit and has been a favorite with audiences ever since.

For good reason. It has everything: a gripping story, beautiful music, exotic color and depth of symbolism. The opera captures the attention of the audience with its simple but moving plot. Samson, a God-fearing hero of the people, whose physical strength is matched by his sincere devotion and inspiring leadership, incites his people to throw off their chains and rebel against the Philistines, only to fall in love with one of the enemy, who betrays him. Blinded and shorn of his strength, he is taunted by his former lover and his religion mocked. He asks God for a brief return of his former power to seek vengeance against his enemies. With his divinely inspired strength, he brings down the pagan temple, crushing the enemy and sacrificing himself in order to free his people. What could be more dramatic?

Musically, the opera strikes a successful balance between traditional eighteenth-century Italian opera and nineteenth-century Wagnerian music drama. While Saint-Saëns faulted Italian opera for chopping up the action into too many pieces with recitatives and arias, thus stunting the flow of action, he also blamed Wagnerian opera for lacking self-contained melodies. In Samson and Dalila, Saint-Saëns manages to avoid both extremes. With leitmotifs he provides a sense of continuity and, with beautiful melodies, he preserves the tradition of the bel canto. The powerful and angry melody sung by the High Priest in Act I becomes a triumphant opener to Act II, when Samson is brought before his conquerors, blinded and in chains. While Dalila’s beautiful and seductive Mon cœur s’ouvre à ta voix and Réponds à ma tendresse destroy Samson’s will power in Act II, they become the means for taunting the fallen hero in Act III.

The opera abounds in rich symbolism as well as beautiful music. Darkness and night always accompany the Philistines when they have power, while the sun symbolizes the ascendancy of Samson. Samson himself seems to evoke different figures: Moses freeing his people from slavery in Act I, a tragic Greek hero when he falls for Dalila in Act II against his best judgment, and Christ before Pontius Pilate in Act III when he is brought before the people and mocked.

Samson and Dalila might also be viewed as a battle between East and West. The Hebrews, who symbolize the West, are portrayed as god-fearing and noble. The Philistines come across as corrupt, decadent and pagan, but also exotic, and frankly, more interesting. Their music is wonderful, exciting, their dancing erotic, and we would not have them any other way. Samson and Dalila is, in short, a feast for the senses.

Lynne Johnson is currently working on her Ph. D. in Musicology at the University of Hawaii
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Hawaii Opera Theatre dedicates its production of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* to the memory of Sally Aall, one of HOT’s best loved patrons, who passed away in the Fall of 2005. She was also a passionate supporter of the Honolulu Academy of Arts, and a patron of the Honolulu Symphony.

Sally loved Mozart and *bel canto* opera. She was enthusiastic about special projects, such as master classes, to encourage young singers. She personally sponsored residencies with Julianne Baird and Diana Soviero at HOT’s Mae Z. Orvis Opera Studio to prepare young artists in Hawaii for their opera studies. A special Memorial Fund to honor Sally has been established within the Endowment of Hawaii Opera Theatre to perpetuate the strong artistic legacy that Sally enjoyed and shared with our community.

If you are interested in contributing to this fund, please call Suzanne Watanabe at 596-7372 ext. 24 for more information.

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**Mark Lundberg**, Heldentenor (Samson)
Mark Lundberg has been hailed internationally as having "the perfect baritonal Heldentenor colour and immaculate diction" (Guardian, UK).
He made his Brussels debut this season as Tristan in *Tristan und Isolde*. Other future performances include Verdi’s *Otello* with Opera Lyra Ottawa and Manitoba Opera. Recent highlights include his Lyric Opera of Chicago debut as Wagner’s *Siegfried; Otello* in Bilbao, for Opera Ontario, Hawaii Opera Theatre, and Utah Opera; and *Das Lied von der Erde* in Warsaw. Mr. Lundberg has sung multiple performances of Florestan in *Fidelio*, Samson in *Samson and Dalila*, Siegmund in *Die Walküre*, Siegfried in *Gotterdammerung*, Bacchus in *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Canio in *Pagliacci*, with companies including Deutsche Oper Berlin, Opéra de Nice and Staatsoper Stuttgart. Mr. Lundberg can be heard as Siegmund in *Die Walküre* on the Calig recording label with Ivan Törzs conducting.

**Malgorzata Walewska**, Mezzo-Soprano (Dalila)
Walewska made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 2005 as Dalila and returned later in the season as Amneris. This was followed by *Carmen* in Warsaw, performances of *Dalila* with the Met in the Parks, Amneris in *Aida* at the Savonlinna Festival, and Eboli in Tokyo. Upcoming debuts in 2006 and beyond include Azucena in *Il Trovatore* in San Francisco and Geneva, Maddalena in *Rigoletto* in Washington and Fenena in *Nabucco* in Baltimore. In summer 2006 she returned to the Savolinna Festival as *Carmen*. In recent seasons she sang Ulrica in Montpellier, Azucena and Amneris at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Ulrica in Bologna, Eboli at the Finnish National Opera and in Graz, *La Damnation de Faust* in Warsaw, her Dresden debut in *Lady Macbeth of Mtinsk, Dalila* in Palm Beach, and *Carmen* (Maddalena), and Olga in *Eugene Onegin* at the Vienna State Opera.

**Ethan Herschenfeld**, Bass (Abimelech, Satrap of Gaza)
Ethan Herschenfeld has been performing recently in Europe and is thrilled to be back in the US for his debut with HOT. This season he debuted at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in *Die Zauberfloete* singing Sarastro—a role he has sung the last two seasons at Teatro la Fenice in Venice and at the Stuttgart Staatsoper—and he added a new role to his repertoire singing Leporello in *Don Giovanni* in Brescia, Como, and Cremona. Between those performances he returned to the Florentine Opera Milwaukee for the fourth time, singing the Commendatore in their *Don Giovanni*. In April he debuts at Teatro Regio di Torino as King Marke in *Tristan und Isolde*, in July he sings Fafner in Wagner’s *Ring* at the Tiroler Festspiele in Austria, where he spent last summer as King Marke and Gurnemanz, and he begins next season at Teatro Lirico di Cagliari singing Osmin in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

**Lawrence Harris**, Baritone (High Priest of Dagon)
Lawrence Harris is quickly gaining a reputation as an important new Verdi/Puccini baritone. Mr. Harris has received wide critical acclaim for the rich color and unique beauty in his voice as well as being the consummate singing-actor. The New York Times critic, Bernard Holland, hailed
Hawaii Opera Theatre

Lawrence Harris as a “major voice” following his 1993 New York debut. Lawrence has since appeared in leading roles with Opera North, Philadelphia’s Center City Opera Theater, Connecticut Grand Opera, Center for Contemporary Opera, New York Grand Opera, the Wagner Society of Washington DC, the Metropolitan Opera Guild, New Rochelle Opera, Opera East Texas, San Antonio Opera, Tulsa Opera, Michigan Opera, One World Symphony, Manhattan Chamber Sinfonia, Garden State Philharmonic and the Little Orchestra Society in NYC. Recent leading roles include the title role in Rigoletto, Germont in La Traviata, Scarpia in Tosca, Amonasro in Aida, and Tonio in I Pagliacci.

Erik Haines, Tenor (First Philistine)
Mr. Haines holds a Master of Music Degree from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and has taught there as well as at Chaminade University, Windward Community College and Punahou Music School. He has been a National Association of Teachers of Singing State Governor, a board member of the Hawaii Alliance for Arts Education and is currently president of the Waikele Elementary PTSO. He is the Director of Education for Hawaii Opera Theatre.

Patrick McNichols, Baritone (Second Philistine)
Originally from Laguna Beach, California, Mr. McNichols has been raised, educated, and employed in Hawaii since 1970. He has performed locally throughout the years in various venues including the Hawaii Vocal Arts Ensemble, Kawaiolaonapukanileo, Kona Association for the Performing Arts, the Honolulu Symphony and Chorus as well as other HOT performances. Mr. McNichols joined the HOT Chorus in 1998 and made his comprimario debut as the Imperial Commissioner in HOT’s production of Madama Butterfly, 2000 season. He has been a HOT Mae Z. Orvis Opera Studio Scholarship recipient since the year 2000 and has performed as a soloist in the following HOT productions: L’Enfant et les Sortilèges, La Traviata, Amahl and the Night Visitors, The Magic Flute, La Bohême, Otello, The Merry Widow and Susannah.

Matt Boehler, Bass (An Old Hebrew)
This past summer Boehler returned as a guest alumnus to Wolf Trap Opera Company, seen as Pluto (Orpheus), Bartolo (Le Nozze di Figaro) and Frere Laurent (Roméo et Juliette), where previously he had been seen as the title role in Sweeney Todd, Leporello (Don Giovanni) and
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both dance and yoga, a practice she has explored for fifteen years. She currently assists in staging ballets in the United States and abroad and enjoys performing in independent dance projects.

Derek Daniels,
Male Dance Soloist
Derek Daniels, born and raised in Hawaii has traveled, lived and worked around the world for over two decades in places such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London, Tokyo, Vienna, Rome, Barcelona, Switzerland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Vancouver and Sydney, Australia. He has studied in New York City with the Alvin Ailey, Dance Theater of Harlem, Broadway Dance Center, Steps and San Joaquin concert ballet in Stockton, California. His international and national credits include the Broadway musical Cats, West Side Story, A Chorus Line, The Wiz, Grease, Evita, Smokey Joe's Cafe, Radio City Music Hall's Christmas Spectacular, the television Fame, Paris Disney and appeared in numerous commercials, music videos and films. In addition he has worked with internationally acclaimed recording artists such as Grace Jones, The Pet Shop Boys, Salt ‘n’ Pepa, Boy George and Martha Wash. Derek is happy to make his dance debut with Hawaii Opera Theatre.

Riley Lynch,
A Boy
In 2001, my family moved to Hawaii. Since that time, I have developed a passion for dancing and theatre arts. I’ve performed with Diamond Head Theater and Ballet Hawaii. In 2005, I played the part of the Page in HOT’s production of Turandot. Currently, I am a freshman at Punahou School.
Mark D. Flint, Conductor
Conductor Mark D. Flint returns for his thirteenth season with HOT having led last season’s Rigoletto and such recent productions as The Flying Dutchman, The Merry Widow and The Tales of Hoffmann. Currently Artistic Director of the Augusta Opera in Georgia, he has conducted in the leading opera houses in both the United States and Canada, including New York City Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, L’Opera de Montreal, Edmonton Opera, Nashville Opera and Orlando Opera. This season he opened the Orlando Opera’s production of Samson and Dalila starring Denyce Graves, and will close the Nashville Opera season with Madama Butterfly. Recent engagements include La Bohème in Edmonton, Cenerentola in Detroit, and the world premiere of Ned Rorem’s Our Town at the Lake George Opera in Saratoga. He is currently orchestrating the new David DiChiera opera Cyrano, for which he will conduct the world premiere next fall. For his company in Augusta, he will lead both Hansel and Gretel and La Bohème. Upcoming commitments include Romeo et Juliette for Michigan Opera Theatre, Il Trovatore for Nashville Opera, Turandot for the Orlando Opera, and his debut with Florentine Opera conducting The Merry Widow.

William Florescu, Director
Florescu became the General Director of Milwaukee’s Florentine Opera in May of 2005. Prior to coming to the Florentine, he was the General Director of Lake George Opera from 1999 until his appointment to the Florentine Opera. Previously, he had been General Director of the Columbus Light Opera. While in Ohio, he was also Associate Dean and Director of Opera/Musical Theatre at the Capital University Conservatory of Music. On the operatic stage, he has appeared in leading and supporting roles with Opera Columbus, Columbus Light Opera, Dorian Opera, Toledo Opera, and the National Opera Company. As a stage director, he has mounted operas for Lake George Opera, the Columbus Light Opera, and Augusta Opera, as well directing Rigoletto for HOT in 2006. This April, he will make his directing debut with his own company, staging The Barber of Seville. Mr. Florescu serves as both a panelist and on-site reviewer for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Patrick Corbin, Choreogapher
Patrick was born and raised in Potomac, Maryland. In 1989 after being a member of the Joffrey Ballet for four years, Patrick joined the Paul Taylor Dance Company where he became one of its most celebrated members and danced there until 2005. Patrick was featured in five PBS Great Performances between 1988 and 2004 and the 1998 Academy Award nominated documentary Dancemaker. In 2001 Patrick was the recipient of the New York Performance Award (Bessie) for Sustained Achievement with The Paul Taylor Dance Company. Patrick founded his own company CorbinDances in 2003 and stages his own work as well as the work of Paul Taylor in companies throughout the United States. As well as teaching modern dance at the Taylor School and the La Guardia School for the Performing Arts in New York City, Patrick also teaches dance to children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders in Carlstadt, New Jersey.

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Peter Dean Beck, Scenic and Lighting Designer
Beck has designed scenery and/or lighting for over two hundred productions around the country. During his twenty previous seasons with Hawaii Opera Theatre, he has designed the sets for thirty-six productions and the lighting for fifty-six, among them: La Bohème, Eugene Onegin, The Tales of Hoffmann, Tristan and Isolde, Electra, Macbeth, L’italiana in Algeri, and Samson and Dalila. Among his other opera credits are Falstaff, Turandot, Manon, Madama Butterfly, Hansel and Gretel, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and Romeo et Juliette for such companies as Atlanta Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Virginia Opera and Chautauqua Opera. His musical theater credits include West Side Story, Guys and Dolls, Candide, The King and I, and Fiddler on the Roof. In 2004, he designed The Nutcracker for Ballet Hawaii. And recently, he did a double bill of Le Rossignol, and Cavalleria Rusticana for Sakai City Opera in Japan (built and painted by HOT Scene Shop) and The Indigo Girls Project for Atlanta Ballet.

Richard Stead, Wig & Make-up Designer
This season, Mr. Stead celebrates his 25th consecutive season with HOT. He has been Wigmaster at The San Francisco Opera where he won an Emmy Nomination. He has worked with Netherlands Opera, Royal Shakespeare Company, Central City Opera, Utah Opera, Boston Opera, Minnesota Opera, American Conservatory Theatre, Spoleto Festival USA, Bolshoi Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Ballet Hawaii, films and television. He was on the faculty of San Francisco State University and University of California. Mr. Stead operates his own wig and make-up company.

Helen E. Rodgers, Costumer
Rodgers is happy to return to HOT for her sixth season, where she has designed costumes for The King & I, Il Trittico, Susannah, La Bohème and Così fan tutte as well as serving as Costumer for the company. Recent work at other companies includes costume design for Le Nozze di Figaro for Chautauqua Opera, and Il tabarro and Gianni Schicchi for Mannes Opera. She designed costumes for a Wild West Don Pasquale for the San Diego Opera, which has been presented at companies across the US and Canada, and will be presented by Connecticut Opera this spring. Other company credits include former resident costume designer for Opera Memphis, Canadian Opera Company, Virginia Opera, Utah Festival Opera, New York City Opera, Miami City Ballet and Florida Studio Theatre.

Gretchen Mueller, Stage Manager
Ms. Mueller has stage managed for San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, The Washington Opera, Seattle Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, HOT, Wolf Trap, Banff School of Fine Arts, and Tanglewood Music Center. During her career she has worked on two productions of The Ring Cycle, two productions of War and Peace, other Russian epics including Boris Godounov and Khovanshchina, and...
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world premieres written by Osvaldo Golijov, Robert Zuidam, Minoru Miki and Paul Schofield. Although she specializes in opera production, she has also served as Company Manager, Stage Manager and Technical Liaison for International Attractions’ tours of The Rustavi Company of Tbilisi, Georgia and of The Peking Opera of Chongching, China. This year she will be returning “full-time” to San Francisco Opera, but is pleased that she will be able to continue to work with HOT, the wonderful company that it is.

**Beebe Freitas**, Associate Artistic Director/Co-Chorus Director

A graduate of Oberlin College, Ms. Freitas received her Master’s Degree from Boston University and was in the Special Studies Program at Juilliard. She has been soloist with several orchestras including the Boston Pops, the Youngstown and the Honolulu Symphonies. She has performed with such renowned soloists as Yo Yo Ma, Leonard Rose, and David Shifrin; has been rehearsal pianist for many conductors such as Leonard Bernstein, Thomas Schippers, Robert Shaw, and William Steinberg. She has been the recipient of honors bestowed by the National Society of Arts and Letters, the YWCA, a Honpa Hongwanji Mission’s Living Treasure Award, the City and County of Honolulu Commission on Culture and the Arts Award, and the Hawai‘i Arts Alliance’s prestigious Alfred Preis Award.

**Nola A. Nāhulu**, Co-Chorus Director

Ms. Nāhulu has been Choral Director with HOT since 1991 and with Hawaii Youth Opera Chorus since 1986 where she serves as Executive & Artistic Director. A native of Wai‘anae, ‘O‘ahu, she also is Choral Director for the Pearl Harbor Hawaiian Civic Club and the Kawaiha‘o Church. She is a lecturer at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa, in Hawaiian Choral Music and Director of Kawaiolaonapukaileo, an a cappella vocal ensemble whose goal is to perpetuate Hawaiian Choral Music. She is past-president of the Executive Board of the Hawai‘i Chapter of the American Choral Directors’ Association.

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