

## Musical Treasure Chest #42

One of my particular pleasures on Saturday afternoons is to listen to the **Metropolitan Opera** broadcasts. Sometimes I am doing other activities, such as driving or cleaning, and I am not entirely focused on the broadcast, but this past weekend the presentation was so stellar that I stopped what I was doing, sat down and just enjoyed.

Since the pandemic shut the MET down, the Saturday afternoon broadcasts have been replays of old performances, and this past weekend they offered **Gounod's Faust**. Originally aired in 2011, this production featured Jonas Kaufman as Faust and Marina Poplavskaya as Marguerite, along with bass René Pape as Méphistofélès; Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducted. I cannot say enough about the musical quality of this line-up. Kaufman sang with compelling dramatic intent and gorgeous vocal resonance; the same with Poplavskaya, who was simply thrilling in the final duet with Faust. Nézet-Séguin directed with a commanding vision of the musical line. The colors he wrought from the orchestra were glorious and the virtuosity of the instrumental playing was astounding; his love of the piece evident in the shaping of the phrases he created. Perhaps I was in just the right mood to hear this performance, but I reveled in it and, frankly, found it inspiring. There is a wonderful interview with Nézet-Séguin in the broadcast, one that was made just a few weeks ago, ten years after the production. His insights and discussion are quite interesting.

I think I have a warm affinity with *Faust* because I first got to know it from the ballet music which was added to the first scene of the final act to satisfy the Parisian audiences. My parents had an old Columbia LP of this ballet music (along with the ballet music from *La Gioconda*); I listened to it a lot as a child. Later when I was in the summer opera program in Graz, Austria they programmed an opera aria night and featured "Le veau d'or," Méphistofélès big second act aria. The bass was Samuel Ramey. He was incredible and very demonic, so much so that a little girl in the front row was terrified and begin to cry at the end of the aria. He was very kind and winked at her, but this just made her more upset; the audience chuckled in

empathy. I always think about that moment when I hear the piece.

I see this Saturday's broadcast will be a *Lucia di Lammermoor* from 1956 with one of the greatest Lucias of modern times: Maria Callas. This should be another incredible listening experience. Having access to these legendary performances is a great gift, and though it cannot replace live opera, it is still a wonderful way to get one's opera "fix."

Because Gounod's *Faust* is such a big piece with five acts, a large chorus, the ballet, many set changes, etc productions have been limited to the largest opera houses. But it is such a masterpiece, I hope that if you are not familiar with it, you will seek out a performance. Here is one from 2005 in Zurich with Kaufman. It's set non-traditionally, (it's tolerable!) but the singing is really first-rate. Enjoy.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MlaOx\\_GaEbw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MlaOx_GaEbw)