



THE ASSOCIATES

## Fletcher Director Nicholas Muni

### Visits The Associates

The guest speaker at The Associates' January meeting was Nicholas Muni, the Director of the A. J. Fletcher Opera Institute here at UNCSA. The Institute trains singers and collaborative pianists at the graduate and post-graduate levels. Mr. Muni came to UNCSA in August, 2015, after former Director James Allbritten left to become General Director of Piedmont Opera.

Mr. Muni brought one of his faculty members, Angela Ward (voice coach and, on this occasion, pianist), and one of the fellows, Jenny Schuler, with him. They talked about the opera they will be doing next month, *Florencia en el Amazonas*. He is the stage director for the show.

He began by giving us a synopsis of the plot. Set mostly on a ship traveling up the Amazon, the story tells of Florencia's return to the Amazon to sing at the opera house in Manaus after being an operatic star on the European stage.

He also talked about the choices he has made about the production. The show will open with Florencia (Jenny Schuler) singing at La Scala surrounded by the grand opulence of that theater. With lighting and special effects, that scene will dissolve into a boat steaming up the Amazon. The stage becomes the boat, and light projections will give the effect of movement.

You can also look for six other "Florencias" who, with the wizardry of our mask-making experts in the School of Design and Production, will look like Jenny and will portray her as she was in various female leads she played in Europe.

Muni's enthusiasm for this opera and its production was infectious. His broad knowledge of his art undergirded his presentation. More than thirty years in the opera business began with his studying vocal performance, conducting, and theater at

Oberlin Conservatory of Music. He has had a rich and varied career as artistic director of Tulsa Opera and Cincinnati Opera, as a freelance stage director for more than 200 productions around the world, and working in other capacities with most major opera companies here in the United States. He was Director of Drama with the Metropolitan Opera Young Artist Development Program for two years.

Most recently, the Fletcher Opera Institute received first place in Division Five from The National Opera Association for its April 2016 production of *La tragédie de Carmen* which Mr. Muni directed.

### *Florencia en el Amazonas*

Soprano Jenny Schuler sang two arias for The Associates at the January 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. The first began “Where is Cristobal?” and the second ended with the answer, “Here, here, here in the song.” Jenny is a post-graduate student in the A. J. Fletcher Opera Institute and will sing the title role in *Florencia en el Amazonas*. She is a student of Marilyn Taylor who, with her colleagues in the Fletcher Institute, keeps churning out stars.

*Florencia en el Amazonas* is the story of Florencia, an opera singer who leaves her home (Brazil) and love (Cristobal) to pursue her career in Europe. She leaves with his encouragement and blessing, and their love fuels the passion with which she sings. She achieves great success and sings all the great operatic roles (Carmen, Mimi, Tosca, Turandot, Cio-cio-san, Manon) in the major opera houses of Europe. Her heart, throughout, is with Cristobal. The opera’s physical journey, then, is her returning to him as she travels up the Amazon in hopes of reuniting with him when she sings at the great opera house in Manaus. (Manaus, a center of the rubber trade in Brazil, built the venue in the nineteenth century—a real place for the setting of a magical story!) That physical journey is layered by the emotional and psychological journey and by similar journeys of others aboard the boat.

Jenny’s opening and closing lines in the two arias are a better, more concise summary of the opera.

*Florencia* was written by Mexican composer, Daniel Catan (*Rappaccini’s Daughter, Il Postino*) and opened at Houston Grand Opera in October, 1996. It had been co-commissioned by the Houston, Los Angeles, and Seattle Operas. While it has since been performed at other major opera houses in both the Americas and Europe, this production is its premiere in the Southeast.

Heavily influenced by Nobelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Catan's use of magical realism makes this trip up the Amazon both fraught and exhilarating. (When asked about the magical realism that permeates his work, Garcia Marquez told about his story-telling grandmother. He said that, in a story, she said, "500 elephants flew over that day." He added that he didn't think, "Elephants don't fly." He thought, instead, "How did she count them.") Expect to suspend disbelief.

Director Nicholas Muni describes the music as Puccini-esque, lush, and passionate. It will be in Spanish with English supertitles.

The opera will be performed at the Stevens Center Friday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> and Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 and on Sunday, February 5<sup>th</sup> at 2:00. Don't miss it. Not only will you get to hear/see a wonderful opera, you will be made proud, yet again, of our school. Call the box office at **336-721-1945** to buy your tickets.

## **Board Meeting**

President Susan Melville began the January meeting by announcing the need for two ad hoc committees. Nancy Wareham-Gordon has resigned from leading the Social Media Team. Bob McNair will chair a committee to study the ways Facebook and other social media can help us achieve our mission. Mindy Bloom will chair a committee including Carolyn Bailey and Jean Davis who will set up procedures for The Associates to contribute to the Pickle Pantry.

The reports at the January meeting of The Associates Board reflected busy December events and plans for January and the spring semester. President Susan Melville moved gracefully through the reports from the teams.

Carloyn Peddycord reported that the *Nutcracker Feed* team served 145 meals to the dancers and technicians (sound and light designers, dressers, makeup artists—all those behind-the-scenes folks who make the magic happen) on December 10<sup>th</sup> between the matinee and evening performances. Associates were on hand to decorate and serve.

Carloyn expressed gratitude to all Associates who made cookies for the event and especially to **John and Cheryl Weaver** who delivered four hundred cookies! **Sherwood Restaurant, o'So's, Lowes Food, Jimmy Johns, and Mindy Bloom** also made significant contributions.

Bob McNair, one of the volunteers, praised Carloyn for her careful planning.

In addition to the nearly one thousand cookies prepared for the Nutcracker Feed, Associates also made 640 cookies for the high school students during their exam time.

Judy Watson reported that **The Associates Endowed Scholarship** has provided aid for ten students this year. She read the students' names and their discipline here at UNCSA:

Alexander J. Nelson, Winston-Salem, college sophomore, guitar  
Algernon N. Robinson, Wilmington, college freshman, music composition  
Dylan B. Cain, King, college freshman, clarinet  
Hosanna M. Gourley, Walnut Cove, college sophomore, film animation  
Jordan A. Speas, Winston-Salem, college sophomore, voice, music  
Pablo L Bobadilla, Winston-Salem, college senior, film producing  
Sarah I. Giordano, Charlotte, college sophomore, scenic technology, film  
Skyler C. Davidson, Wilmington, college freshman, voice, music  
William M. Lynch, Troutman, college freshman, film animation  
Zachary P. Doerfer, Winston-Salem, college senior, directing, film

Your contributions to the Endowment Fund make these scholarships possible. Thank you.

**Host Family** Chair Anna Goodman gave a particularly heart-warming report that one of our students from Vietnam spent the entire three weeks of winter break with her and two other Associates, Jean Davis and Martha Albertson, who split the time with him. Jean reported that he is a guitarist who performed and even cooked some Vietnamese food for them!

Susan Melville expressed appreciation for the generosity of these hosts, saying "You've put us on the map in Vietnam!"

In other business, Karen Robertson reported that our **membership** is now at 324. Any new member who joins now will be a member until June, 2018. It is a good time to encourage your friends to join us. Bob McNair said the **Helpmates and Board members** contributed 530.5 hours to the school in December. Howard Skillington, **Film Liaison**, reported that the School of Filmmaking is sponsoring the

winter screening of “The Best of the School of Filmmaking” on February 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 in the Main Theatre. The short films (total of about ninety minutes) are from the 2015-2016 school year. Howard expressed appreciation to The Associates who gave feedback to the students in the December preview session.

The **Hospitality** team is preparing for the reception following the **Mozart Birthday Concert** on January 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 in Watson Hall. This event is often sold out. Get your tickets soon. Drama Dean and chief conjurer Carl Forsman has promised us that Wolfgang Amadeus and Constanze Mozart will grace the reception.

Linda Bettis, Associates Vice President, announced that the February meeting will feature information about Winter Dance from The School of Dance.

## CALENDAR

Saturday, January 28	Mozart Birthday Concert. 7:30, Watson Hall. <i>Get your tickets early. This one sells out.</i>
February 3, 5, 7	<i>Florencia en el Amazonas</i> . Stevens Center. 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> , 7:30; 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2:00
Tuesday, February 7	Board Meeting. 11:30, Fourth Floor Conference Room, Library. Speaker TBA
Saturday, February 25	<i>NextNow</i> . 6:30, Winter Dance at Stevens Center to be followed by <i>NextNow</i> after-party at the Embassy Suites. For more information go to <a href="mailto:NextNow@uncsa.edu">NextNow@uncsa.edu</a> or call 336-770-3332
Tuesday, March 7	Board Meeting. 11:30 Fourth Floor Conference Room, Library. Speaker TBA

## General Information—Important Links

The Associates Website:

<http://www.uncsa.edu/development/volunteeropportunities.htm>

At our website, you will find the Board members listed, the calendar of Associates events and Associates-sponsored events, and other general information.

Email Address: [uncsaassociates@gmail.com](mailto:uncsaassociates@gmail.com)

The Performance Calendar Website:

<http://www.uncsa.edu/performances/>

Student Performances Website:

[www.uncsa.edu/music/FormShare/StudentRecitals.pdf](http://www.uncsa.edu/music/FormShare/StudentRecitals.pdf)

Our Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/uncsaassociates>

Newsletter: [beckybrown65@gmail.com](mailto:beckybrown65@gmail.com)