

Synopsis

The opera begins with a brief opening chorus introducing the characters, and the Narrator begins the story, set in ancient Persia. Esther and Mordecai, Jews living in Shushan, observe the Sabbath and share their own ritual that reminds Esther of her Jewish heritage. In the second scene King Ahasuerus sings about how powerful he is, and announces an enormous party, but his wife Vashti declines to attend. He is enraged and banishes her. A beauty contest to choose a new Queen is announced and various contestants demonstrate their unique singing and dancing abilities. But it is Esther whose simplicity and beauty win the king's favor. A procession celebrates her coronation.

Time passes and the evil Haman has risen to power as the King's advisor. Mordecai, true to his Jewish beliefs, refuses to bow his head when the tyrannical minister parades by, so Haman vows revenge. Mordecai hears of this and through Esther's maid tries to warn the Queen. The three of them sing about their individual reactions to this predicament. Esther bravely risks her life and goes to the King, but postpones revealing that she is Jewish; instead, she invites him to a banquet with Haman, who gleefully shares the news with his wife Zeresh. Ahasuerus has a sleepless night and calls for his book of records to be read to him. When he hears that Mordecai's loyalty in thwarting an assassination plot has gone unrewarded, he asks Haman how to reward a hero. Haman, thinking himself the beneficiary, revels in the thought, recoiling when the king commands him to carry out the plan with Mordecai.

At the king's banquet table, Esther is very troubled because her people are still in danger from Haman. In an emotional moment she takes the chance to reveal to the king that she is Jewish. Fortunately, the king takes her side, calls for Haman to be hanged, and for the Jews to be allowed to defend themselves. A festive dance and song brings the opera to a rousing conclusion.

Chelsea Friedlander, soprano (*Esther/Parvina*), holds a B. Mus. from Cleveland Institute of Music and will graduate in May 2012 with her M. Mus. from Manhattan School of Music. In August 2012 Ms. Friedlander will sing the role of Susanna in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* with Lyric Opera Studio Weimar, Germany.

Jennifer Barsamian, mezzo-soprano (*Vashti/Shula/Rula/Zeresh*), sang the title role in *Carmen* with Opera Western Reserve in Ohio, with NJ Verismo Opera and with Dell'Arte Opera in NYC. Jennifer recently sang at Asheville Lyric Opera, Opera Company of the Highlands, Utah Festival Opera, The Spoleto Festival USA, and Glimmerglass Opera. She holds music degrees from Westminster Choir College and North Carolina School of the Arts and a Performance Artist Certificate from the A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute in North Carolina.

Victor Khodadad, tenor (*King Ahasuerus*), received his M.F.A. in Acting from A.C.T. in San Francisco and a Graduate Professional Diploma from The Hartt School of Music. Roles include Tamino, Don Ottavio, Ferrando, Belmonte, Nemorino, Sesto, Alfredo, The Duke, Rinuccio, Rodolfo, Pinkerton, Cavaradossi, Roméo, Lensky, Alfred, Eisenstein, Gérald, Des Grieux and The Male Chorus.

Zack Rabin, bass-baritone (*Haman*), is excited to be joining this fabulous *Esther* cast. He has been heard with Winter Opera St. Louis, St. Petersburg Opera, Ohio Light Opera, Opera on Tap, Sarasota Opera, Lyrique en-Mer, and Natchez Festival of Music, to name a few. He will be an Apprentice Artist with Chautauqua Opera this Summer.

Vince Vincent, baritone, is honored to perform the role of *Mordecai*. Mr. Vincent was last seen as Dapertutto in *Les contes d'Hoffman* with Opera Company Brooklyn and *Lelio* in Opera Moderne's production of *Le Donne Curiose*. Mr. Vincent completed his M.M. in Opera Performance at Yale University in May 2010. Upcoming events include a recital in Paris, and a NYC appearance June 8 as the baritone soloist in Opera Moderne's "Red Scare" concert series.

Nick Sosin (*Narrator*) sang the role of Amahl in the Hotchkiss School's 2001 production of the Menotti opera, and Pseudolus in the HVRHS production of *A Funny Thing*. He lived up the RPI campus for three years as a member of the Sheer Idiocy Improv Comedy Troupe. While Nick enjoys acting, he is also managing the filming of *Esther* through his company Am Media Group, a full-service digital media firm based in Manhattan, where he currently lives.

Donald Sosin (*composer, director, producer*) was born in 1951. He grew up in Rye, NY and Munich, and studied composition at the University of Michigan and Columbia University. He was a member of the BMI and ASCAP Music Theater Workshops, and has worked as a theater conductor, arranger and pianist for many years. His cantata *Elizabeth* was commissioned and premiered by the Salisbury Congregational Church in 1992. Other works include a synagogue cantata, psalms for cantor, chorus and orchestra, other choral and chamber music, songs, and music for film, TV and radio. He has acted locally with LOCOS and the Aglet Theatre Company. This production marks his debut as a stage director. His other stage works include *Taxi Tales*, produced by the Berkshire Theater Festival and MoMA, and *Graduation Night*, written with his wife Joanna Seaton, for the UN International School. He and Leslie Elias wrote the mini-opera, *A Parakeet Named Dreidel*. Other works have been commissioned and performed by the Chicago Symphony Chorus, the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. He is the music director of the Falls Village Children's Theater and the Housatonic Barbershop Chorus, teaches piano at Indian Mountain School, and is an Adjunct Asst. Professor at Maharishi University of Management. He has been organist for a number of area churches and synagogues. With his wife, Donald writes and performs silent film music for leading film festivals and archives, and records for the Criterion, Kino and Milestone labels. Visit newmoviemusic.com for his March/April schedule in NYC. He is the proud father of Nick and Mollie and lives in Lakeville.

Sari Fromkin Magaziner (*librettist*) was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1920. She studied viola at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and taught at the Westchester Conservatory of Music for ten years. At age 70, she returned to college and graduated summa cum laude from Manhattanville College as an art major. Sari was record review editor for Liberty Magazine, has been published in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *School Musician* and wrote for *The Secret Storm* for two seasons. She was author and editor for American Book Company. Sari is married to violinist-conductor Elliot Magaziner, They have two daughters, four grandchildren, and a great-grandson.

Program Notes

Esther was commissioned by Opera Theatre of Long Island, received its premiere in Huntington, Long Island in March, 1977, and was last performed in Westchester in 1978. There have been numerous musical adaptations of the Old Testament story, from Handel's 1718 oratorio, the first in the English language, to the recent New York City revival of Hugo Weisgall's 1990 opera, and countless local *Purimshpils* (Purim plays), usually very silly and often satirical.

The holiday of *Purim*, an especially festive time in the Jewish calendar, is marked by singing, dancing, costumes, a special tri-cornered pastry called *Hamantaschen* (Haman's pockets) and *Shalach Manot*, the giving of gifts.

This production is thus offered by the producers as a gift to the community, and celebrates the 100th anniversary of the founding, on Purim 1912, of the Jewish women's charitable organization Hadassah. It also celebrates the 90th birthday, on March 21, of Gloria Donen Sosin, the composer's mother, who will be at both performances. Mazel Tov! A new scene has been added to the 1977 version, cello and horn now augment the original solo piano accompaniment, and children have been added to the production. The score was digitized through the generosity of the Wasserman-Streit Y'DIYAH Memorial Fund, administered by the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. The opera will be repeated on March 4 at 2 p.m. at the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst MA.

Leslie Elias (*children's workshop director*) is a playwright, actress, storyteller and theater director who has been teaching drama in schools, theaters and public venues for over 35 years. In 2011 she was recognized as a Teaching Artist and Solo Performer in the Directory of Connecticut Office for the Arts. Ms. Elias directs an annual theater arts summer camp in Cornwall, CT and has been an Artist-in-Residence in many schools throughout the US. Ms. Elias has written numerous plays based on history, poetry, environmental themes and folklore from around the world. Grumbling Gryphons celebrate 32 years and are the winners of the Connecticut Commission on the Arts Governor's Arts Award.

Ellen Moon (*Set Design*) has made masks, costumes and sets for the Grumbling Gryphons for thirty years. She has led myriad workshops in which thousands of children have made their own masks and costumes. She is also a fiber artist and her embroidered clothing has been shown in galleries throughout the U.S.

Sierra Ryan (*Costume Design*) works in New York City at the Working Theater Company. She has previously designed costumes for *Rocky Horror*, *Clue*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and *Fiddler on the Roof* as well as assisted on dozens of other shows. She has just graduated from UMass Amherst with a Masters in British literature. She sends all her love to her family, Jose, and, of course, her Beloved Aunt Judith; and thanks Mr. Sosin for giving her the opportunity to be involved in his extraordinary opera.

French Horn: Stacey Geneczko

Cello: Beth Craig

Stage Manager: Laura Smith

Choreography: Chelsea Friedlander and Donald Sosin

Poster design and artwork: Ben Hillman

Poster printing: Denise Cohn

Music Copyist: Russel Allyn

Program: Donald Sosin

Video production: Am Media Group, Nick Sosin, producer/editor

Camera: Ionutz Vacar, Americk Lewis, Donald Reed

Many thanks to Leslie Elias, the Grumbling Gryphons workshop participants and their parents!

Associate Producers

Gene Sosin and Gloria Donen Sosin

Joyce Hirschhorn

Peter Breiner

Special thanks to Joanna Seaton for her countless hours of support and advice

Hugs and Hamantaschen to the *Esther* Kickstarter Project Donors:

Bernie and Terry Nevas, Kevin Brine, Deb Rathbun, Mike and Rachel Abram, Elyse and John Harney, Sari and Elliot Magaziner, Edward Nickerson, Don Freedman, Anton and Sunny Kuskin, Susan Harmon, Richard Meyer, Jean Darling, David Robinson, Mary and Ed Maguire, Paul Reisler, Montine Hansl, Rex Harsin, Marcia Roma, Lucille and Charles Plotz, William Perry, Dan and Polly Morgenstern, Lillie Mikesell, Tamsin Saphir, James Weinberg, and more

Our deep thanks also goes to Al Sly, Rev. Diane Monti-Catania, and the members of the Salisbury Congregational Church, Marcus Olson and the Hotchkiss School Drama Department, Laurie Ellington, Debbie Sosin, Ben Hillman, Ben Bernstein, Bob Hirschhorn, Denise Cohn, Lanny Mitchell, Kara Cornell, Falls Village Children's Theater, Marshall Miles, Carole Chazin, Janet Leuchter, Vance Cannon, Laurie Hodgson, Ruth Heuberger, Ellen Masters and Carole Goodman Kaufman (Hadassah), Macey Levin and Gloria Miller, Laura Smith, Arielle Jackson (National Yiddish Book Center); Mark Devey, Tory Jadow (Indian Mountain School).

Please turn off your mobile phones.

No flash photography is permitted during performance.

Salisbury Congregational Church
Salisbury Connecticut
Saturday, March 3, 2012 2:30 p.m.

Farmhouse Window Productions
in collaboration with
Grumbling Gryphons Children's Theater,
the Esther Kickstarter Project,
and the Al Sly Fund

present

ESTHER

an opera for family audiences in one act



libretto by Sari Magaziner

music by Donald Sosin

Produced, directed and conducted by Donald Sosin

Set Design by Ellen Moon

Costume Design by Sierra Ryan