

Globe Arts

ARTS EDITOR: ANDREW GORHAM

OPERA



From Toe Jam in B.C. to a global Siegfried

Lance Ryan, famous for performing the demanding Wagnerian role, finally comes home

Ryan has performed on the world's most prestigious stages, including the Met this year. But he got his start in music with a garage band in White Rock, B.C.

MARY ALTAFFER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

MARSHA LEDERMAN
VANCOUVER

When Lance Ryan was about the age of Siegfried in *Siegfried*, the role for which he has become famous, he had virtually no exposure to opera.

He came of age near White Rock, B.C., listening to the Beach Boys, the Beatles, Supertramp, Led Zeppelin.

"I kind of knew who Pavarotti was," Ryan, 39, said this week during his annual(ish) trip home to see his family. "The Three Tenors phenomenon was ... huge."

Now a sought-after Wagnerian heldentenor who has played some of the most prestigious houses and festivals in the world to rave reviews ("outstanding," "phenomenal"), Ryan was already in college when he came to opera, you could say by accident.

He was late to music altogether, beginning classical-guitar lessons when he was 12. In high school, he got his rock 'n' roll fix in the barn behind his house, where his band, Toe Jam, rehearsed. He played guitar; he didn't sing a note.

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CULTURE

How Martin's book lost out to the cult of Steve

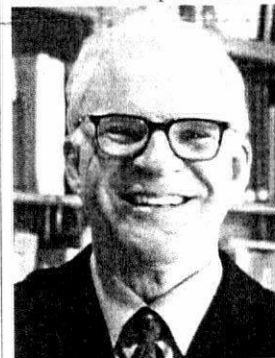


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Last week's story about a public interview gone horribly wrong during actor/writer Steve Martin's recent book tour was typical of current confusion about what culture is.

Martin has a new novel called *An Object of Beauty*, a satirical thriller of sorts, set against the elite art-trade world of Manhattan. As part of promoting it, Martin agreed to do an onstage interview last week at New York 92nd Street Y. His interviewer was the New York Times reporter Deborah Solomon. The tickets cost \$50 (U.S.) each.

A blogger who attended the event has written that Solomon made the interview boring by concentrating on plot details of the book - a just-released book that most of the audience would not have read. (This is always a danger in public book discussions, and one that's hard for even the most experienced inte-



Steve Martin.
RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

viewer to avoid.) According to the blogger, generally Solomon was overly talkative. Apparently Martin seemed uncomfortable

THEATRE REVIEW

WikiLeaks meets the melancholy Dane

FROM PAGE 1

Ryan: Singing Siegfried was 'a risky gamble. But it paid off'

» They booked, as he recalls, a single gig. "There was this amateur night in a pub, but of course we were underage so we just kind of sneaked in, played our set and got the hell out of there," says Ryan, who back then still went by the name Lance Ryan Clinker.

With no real career ambitions (beyond leaving his job washing cars at a local auto lot), Ryan was intrigued by a music program at Douglas College in New Westminster, B.C. He loved music; maybe he could teach for a living, he thought.

The curriculum included a mandatory choir course. To help him navigate the unfamiliar territory, he took some voice lessons and Ryan triumphed in a quest he did not know he was on. His shiny ring was a vocal talent he had never even considered.

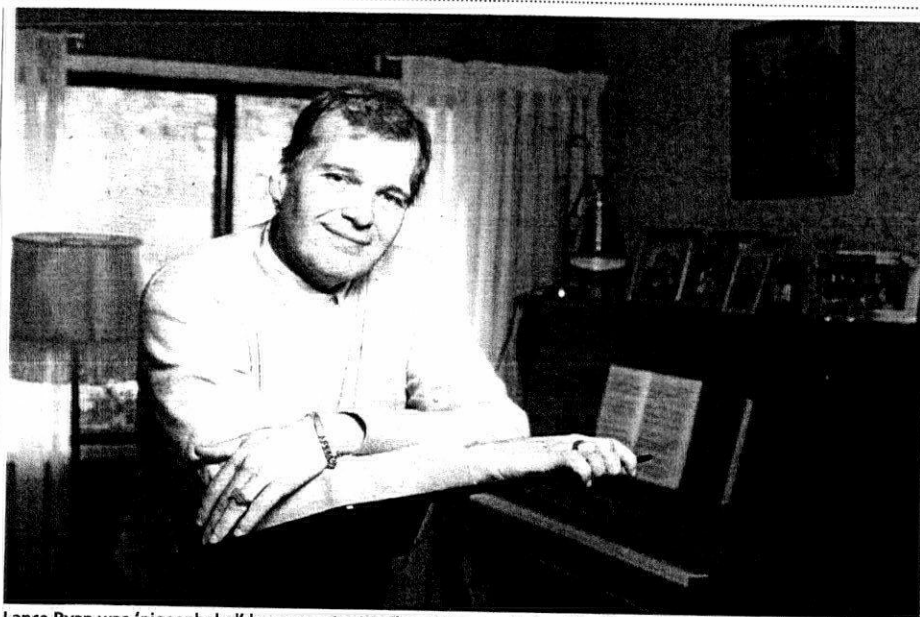
He ultimately finished his bachelor of music degree, majoring in music history, at the University of British Columbia, got a vocal coach and got serious. He went to Santa Barbara, Calif., to study with the great opera star Marilyn Horne, who immediately recognized him as a future Siegfried — something his first vocal coach, back in B.C., had suggested as well.

"She kind of pigeonholed me almost right away. Maybe it was the way I looked or the way I sounded," says Ryan, a 6-foot-1 National Football League fan who was recently compared to a linebacker in a glowing Opera News review, which also referred to his "million-dollar smile" and "James Cagney eyes."

In 1999, Ryan left for Italy (he held a concert in White Rock to raise the airfare), where he got more training, some experience and a wife; he married mezzo soprano Viviana Maria di Carlo. In 2005, they moved to Germany, where Ryan became a permanent member of the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe. Shortly after, he had his *Siegfried* debut.

"It was a huge challenge," says Ryan, in slippers, sitting by the fire in the living room where he grew up. "There were a couple of points where I thought, 'Boy, this is really putting me to the test.' I thought it was something that was going to go well or not. And it went well. Right away, I got really great reviews ... and a lot of people lifted their head and took notice."

For that success, Ryan credits both experience (with a lengthy *The Tales of Hoffmann*, which taught him endurance) and inexperience. "I think there's a certain youthfulness that needs to be exhibited because usually [Siegfried



Lance Ryan was 'pigeonholed' by opera star Marilyn Horne as a future Siegfried. BRETT BEADLE FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

RYAN: A CRITIC'S TAKE

Singing Richard Wagner's big heldentenor roles is a tough job. Imagine doing it in a visually riotous production, surrounded by video cameras ready to catch your every move. Lance Ryan did it, in performances of the *Ring* cycle at Valencia's Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia recorded on four Unitel DVD sets.

Ryan, who is singing both Siegfried roles all over Europe these days, is a performer of power and stamina. His voice has the heft and steely resonance needed to carry over an outsized Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana (conducted by Zubin Mehta), even allowing for a little help from the recording engineers.

His performance isn't the most subtle I've heard, especially when the orchestration thins and the character's vulnerability or tenderness shows through. For instance, his final quiet farewell to Brunhilde sounds a bit gnarly. On the other hand, the hero is taking his last breath at that point, so maybe Ryan is just a realist.

Either way, it's no fantasy to imagine his schedule filling up with more *Ring* cycles, well beyond his next performances at Wagner's own Bayreuth Festival theatre in 2013.

Robert Everett-Green

tain amount of experience. But because I was almost, shall we say, foolish to attempt it at, I guess, I was 34, 35 at the time, it was a bit of a risky gamble. But it paid off. So I was able to kind of bring an energy to it, which is difficult to do because it asks a lot of energy."

In 2009, Ryan was asked to replace fellow Canadian tenor Ben Heppner in the role of Siegfried at Austria's Salzburg Easter Festival. He was in Berlin when he got the call and heading for rehearsals for *Gotterdammerung* in Florence, but he agreed to do it, arriving in time for one staging rehearsal and the dress. The performance, under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle, was a turning point.

"There was a lot of positive feedback," he says. "The write-ups were good and I felt good about it too. And from that, things started to go forward on the international scene."

This past summer, Ryan became the first Canadian to sing *Siegfried* at the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, spurred in part by the admiration of the composer's great-granddaughter, festival co-director Eva Wagner. Again, success: a rare extended solo ovation, and good reviews.

In the past two years, Ryan has performed at the Met (Bacchus in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*), La Scala (Don Jose in Bizet's *Carmen*), the Shanghai World Expo with the Cologne Opera (Siegfried in *Die Walkure* and Siegfried in *Gotterdammerung*) and on various other prestigious stages.

But he has never performed in a

lack of interest — on either part — but schedules have not allowed for it.

"We talked about some things in Toronto and there was something we talked about in Vancouver, but the thing is that in Europe I've got stuff scheduled up until [20]15, [20]16 and things seem to be not prepared with such foresight here," says Ryan, who adds that he understands that something has been lined up for Toronto in 2015 (he won't provide details).

"I have talked to my American agent and said I will be prepared to make certain sacrifices in order to do a few things over here."

This month, audiences in B.C. will have a rare opportunity to hear Ryan in person. Three concerts — at UBC, Douglas College and White Rock — will mark his first performances in Canada since making it big in Europe.

This time, he will be raising money not for airfare but for students and arts groups. "At that time, [my concerts were] something to build on: to give me experience, maybe make some money. But now I'm doing them as benefit concerts to help artists who are trying to do what I did," Ryan says. "I feel really good about it because I'm able to give back. I understand the situation they're in."

Lance Ryan performs at the University of British Columbia on Thursday, at Douglas College in New Westminster, B.C., on Dec. 13, and at the First United Church in White Rock, B.C., on Dec. 15 (the White

FROM PAGE 1

Hamlet: You won't ever forget Kinnear in this role

» Alas — and maybe this is inevitable — the production as a whole fails to live up to this gold standard. Kinnear's authenticity in the role only shows up the production for the busy, tricky thing it is. The conceit of a surveillance society is wonderful, and timely, but much of the business makes no sense: Why is Ophelia (a valiant Ruth Negga) pushing a shopping cart? And why is she giving out a Babar doll instead of rue — is it because elephants have excellent memories? Are we expected to believe that her death isn't really a suicide, but murder at the hands of Claudius's cronies? I was left wondering about all this and more, and every time Kinnear left the stage my mind drifted off to ponder these questions, and only snapped back to attention when he returned.

Yet Nicholas Hytner's production is astonishingly timely, in a way he couldn't have imagined when it was being rehearsed months ago. Or is just timeless? In his notes on the play, Hytner points out that an Elizabethan audience would absolutely have recognized all the trappings of a society where spycraft prevailed and authorities ruled by terror or subterfuge; they lived in such a society themselves. *Plus ça change.*

Hamlet is at the National Theatre in London until Jan. 26, and in selected movie theatres in Canada Thursday.



Rory Kinnear: A Hamlet of remarkable authenticity