



SPOLETO FESTIVAL U.S.A. 1986

LORD BYRON'S LOVE LETTER

# Lord Byron's Love Letter

An Opera in One Act

Music by Raffaello de Banfield  
Libretto by Tennessee Williams

and

# Renard

A Burlesque for the Stage in One Act

Music and Libretto by Igor Stravinsky

Dock Street Theatre  
May 24, 30, June 1 at 3:30 p.m.  
May 26, June 4, 6 at 8:30 p.m.  
June 8 at 2:30 p.m.

## Lord Byron's Love Letter

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The Mississippi Opera Production

Franklin Choset  
Conductor

Raffaello de Banfield  
Director

Ercole Sormani  
Set Designer

Mark Horton  
Costume Designer

Bill Kickbush  
Lighting Designer

Charles Elsen Associates  
Make-up and Wigs

Robert Wallace  
Assistant Conductor

### The Cast

The Old Woman .....	Janice Meyerson
The Spinster .....	Evelyn de la Rosa
The Matron .....	Lester Senter
The Husband .....	Leonard Eagleson
A Young Girl .....	Chan Clover Thompson
A Middle Aged Woman .....	Connie Kossen
Lord Byron .....	Francis Menotti

Spoletto Festival Orchestra

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## Renard

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A Spoleto Festival USA Production

Mark Stringer  
Conductor

David Gordon  
Director

Beni Montresor  
Puppets, Costumes and Lighting Design

Marie Barrett  
Lighting Realization

Christopher Mattaliano  
Assistant Director

Diane Richardson  
Musical Preparation

### The Cast

Tenor I .....	Peter Gillis
Tenor II .....	Reuben Broitman
Bass I .....	David Barrell
Bass II .....	Stephan Kirchgraber

Spoletto Festival Orchestra

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These performances are made possible in part by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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## Lord Byron's Love Letter

In the town of my birth, Columbus, Mississippi, an aristocratic spinster of "reduced circumstances" possessed an authentic letter of Lord Byron's written to a female ancestor of hers and preserved thereafter in a glass case in a parlor. But in the libretto for this opera, and the short play it is based on, the letter is a love letter and the recipient is living and it is exhibited, at a prudent distance, for money, and the setting is transferred to New Orleans and the time turned back almost a century.

Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams completed the libretto for *Lord Byron's Love Letter* in 1953 and composer Raffaello de Banfield's autograph on the musical score bears the date of 1954. The one-act work was premiered in New Orleans (the locale of the opera) in January, 1955, and during November of the same year, it was produced by Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Although 30 years passed prior to *Lord Byron's Love Letter's* noted revival at the Mississippi Opera in April, 1985, European audiences had ample opportunity to appreciate Tennessee Williams' only operatic libretto and Raffaello de Banfield's post-romantic musical setting. Beginning with the Paris Opera premiere in 1959, *Lord Byron's Love Letter* was subsequently performed throughout Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain, and Yugoslavia. The opera was also filmed for Canadian Television (C.B.C.) and was recorded by R.C.A. Victor Records (LM-2258 REO Seal).

## Renard

The original title of my barnyard fable *Renard* was *Shaska o Petuhyeh, Leesyeh, Kotyeh y Baranyeh*, "Tale about the Cock, the Fox, the Cat, and the Ram." I finished the libretto early in 1915, and the music by the end of the year.

*Renard* was also inspired by the *guzla*, an instrument carried by the goat in the last part of the play and imitated in the orchestra with good but imperfect success by the cimbalom. The *guzla* is a museum piece now, and it was rare even in my childhood in St. Petersburg. A kind of fine, metal-stringed balalaika, it is strapped over the player's head like the tray of a cigarette girl in a nightclub. The sound produced is deliciously live and bright, but it is preciously tiny, too, and who, alas, now plays the *guzla*? "Guzli" means "string music played by human touch." Part of the fun in *Renard* is that this extremely nimble-fingered instrument should be played by the cloven-hooved goat. The *guzla* music - "plinc, plinc..." - was the first part of *Renard* to be composed, incidentally.

The outward career of *Renard* is quickly told. In April 1915 the Princess Edmond de Polignac commissioned me to compose a work for performance in her salon. This was at the time of my visit to Paris to conduct *The Firebird* for the Red Cross; I had already begun to compose *Renard*. The circumstances of the commission helped to determine the size of the performing ensemble, but even that requirement was loose.

Igor Stravinsky

**Synopsis** - The hungry fox, disguised as a nun, persuades the cock to come down from its perch and attacks. The cat and the goat come to the aid of the cock and rout the fox. They celebrate and the cock resumes its perch. The fox lures the cock down again and plucks its feathers. The cat and the goat come once more to the cock's rescue and kill the fox.

## The Artists - Lord Byron's Love Letter



Raffaello de Banfield (Composer and Director), former Artistic Director of the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, and now its Vice President, first became known to American audiences in 1949 when his ballet, *Le Combat*, or *The Duel*, was given its New York premiere by Les Ballets de Paris. In 1950 he requested permission to create an opera based on Tennessee Williams' one-act play, *Lord Byron's Love Letter*. So impressed was Williams by *The Duel* that he agreed, and the work bowed in 1955 in New Orleans, where its action takes place. Maestro de Banfield's subsequent operas were *Colloquio Col Tango* and *Alissa*. His dramatic concert piece for soprano and orchestra, *For Ophelia*, premiered in 1977 with Kiri Te Kanawa and the London Philharmonic. He has also set to music for soprano and orchestra four poems by Rilke. He has composed incidental music for numerous classical and modern plays and is an opera director of international repute. Since 1972 he has acted as Artistic Director of the Ente Autonomo of the Teatro Comunale G. Verdi in Trieste, where he makes his home.



Franklin Choset (Conductor) has conducted opera and symphony orchestras on four continents. He is well known for his recording of the entire Corelli *Opus 6* for Radio Israel. Recipient of a Fulbright-Hays Advanced Research Grant for operatic study in Vienna, as well as numerous U. S. State Department grants, he was awarded the key to the City of New York when he made his hometown conducting debut with the New York City Opera in 1974. Former Artistic Director of the Opera Metropolitana in Caracas, he is presently Artistic Director and General Manager of The Mississippi Opera and a consultant to the National Endowment for the Arts.



Evelyn de la Rosa (The Spinster) made her professional debut with the San Francisco Opera in 1979 as the Celestial Voice in *Don Carlos*. Subsequent roles there include Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Chloe in *Pique Dame* and Clorinda in *La Cenerentola*. Miss de la Rosa sings frequently with the Nevada Opera, and for her Marguerite in *Faust* was named Entertainer of the Year in Reno, selected over dozens of casino headliners. She made her Houston Grand Opera debut in 1983 in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and is much in demand as a soloist with symphony orchestras throughout the West.



**Leonard Egelson** (The Husband), with a repertoire of over sixty roles actually performed, has appeared before with The Mississippi Opera as Normanno in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and as Gastone in *La Traviata*. In a previous engagement at Spoleto, he appeared in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. He recently performed in *Turandot* with the Portland Opera, where he has also sung Don Basilio in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. He made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in a concert version of *Tristan und Isolde* under Zubin Mehta and his St. Louis Symphony debut in a concert version of *Salome* under Leonard Slatkin.



**Connie Kossen** (A Middle Aged Woman), born in Jackson, Mississippi, was awarded first place in the Metropolitan Opera regional auditions. She has appeared with The Mississippi Opera as Annina in *La Traviata*, Frasquita in *Carmen*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto* and Kate Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*.



**Francis Menotti** (Lord Byron), adopted son of Gian Carlo Menotti, studied at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago and later with Lee Strasberg. He made his professional debut with the Opéra Comique and his New York debut narrating Beethoven's *Egmont* for the Beethoven Society at Alice Tully Hall. In 1982 he appeared in the premiere of his father's play, *The Leper*. He has also performed as a mime in *The Saint of Bleecker Street* and *The Egg*. *Lord Byron's Love Letter* marks his fourth appearance at Spoleto Festival U.S.A.



**Janice Meyerson** (The Old Woman) appeared previously with The Mississippi Opera as Herodias in *Salome* and Amneris in *Aida*, a role she has also sung at Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires. Last year marked her third season as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic. In 1983 she made her New York City Opera debut as *Carmen*, the part in which she also made her European bow. Among countless other engagements, she has sung the title role in Menotti's *The Medium* at the Aspen Music Festival and Brangaene in *Tristan und Isolde* both at Tanglewood and with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leonard Bernstein.



**Lester Senter** (The Matron) sang the role of Hermia in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Iowa ETV in 1979, and in 1980 starred as Eleanor of Aquitaine in Carlyle Floyd's one-character opera, *Flower and Hawk*, for Mississippi ETV. For The Mississippi Opera she appeared in the title role of *La Cenerentola* and as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*, just two of over twenty roles to date with regional companies throughout the United States, including the New Orleans Opera, Asolo Opera and the Des Moines Metro Opera, where she appeared as the Composer in *Ariadne Auf Naxos*.



**Chan Clover Thompson** (A Young Girl), a native of Jackson, Mississippi, has appeared with The Mississippi Opera as Emily in *Help, Help, the Globolinks!*, as the Fairy Queen in *Babes in Toyland*, as Dew Fairy in *Hansel and Gretel* and as the Shepherd in *Tosca*. Miss Thompson is a voice instructor at Mississippi College.



**Mark Horton** (Costume Designer) was educated at Belhaven College and the University of Texas at Austin. While in Texas, he designed costumes for the world premiere production of Aurand Harris' adaptation of C. S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*. More recently he has designed for Jackson's Capital Theatre, New Stage Theatre and Ballet Mississippi, as well as The Mississippi Opera. His credits include *A Christmas Carol*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* and *Chicago*.



**Bill Kickbush** (Lighting Designer) is Technical Director for Ballet Mississippi and Lighting Designer for the Mississippi Opera, where this past season he lit productions of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La Traviata*. Other companies Mr. Kickbush has designed for include Ballet Hawaii, Hawaii Opera Theatre and the Southern Regional Opera. His repertoire ranges from *The Nutcracker* and *Giselle* to *Showboat*, *South Pacific*, *The Student Prince*, *Rigoletto*, *Salome* and *La Boheme*.

**Ercle Sormani** (Set Designer) is a second generation owner of the Sormani Scenic Studios in Milan. The Sormanis have been designers and suppliers of operatic scenery to the majority of Italian opera houses for many years. Their designs and realizations have also been exported to France, Portugal and Spain. Sormani designs in the U.S. have included *Un Ballo In Maschera* for the New Orleans Opera and *L'Elisir D'Amore* for the Seattle Opera.

## The Artists - Renard



**David Gordon** (Director) performed in the 1960's as a dancer in the companies of James Waring and Yvonne Rainer. Later he helped found the Grand Union, an improvisational ensemble. In 1978 he established the Pick Up Co., formalizing the process by which he creates works for groups as diverse as American Ballet Theatre, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Groupe de Recherche Choreographique de l'Opera de Paris, Workcentrum Dans of Holland and Extemporary Dance Theatre of London. One of seven artists featured in the film, *Making Dances*, in 1984 Mr. Gordon received a New York Performance Award ("Bessie") for sustained Choreographic Achievement.



**Mark Stringer** (Conductor) frequently conducts with dance ensembles, most recently giving performances of Paul Taylor's *Esplanade* and *Aureole* at The Juilliard School, his alma mater. He has led orchestral concerts here at Spoleto, at the Aspen Music Festival and with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute, where his repertoire ranged from Bach to the present minimalists. Operatic productions have included Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Aspen and Hindemith's *Hin und Zurück* with The American Opera Center. Later this summer, in addition to his performances of *Renard* in Charleston, he will conduct Rameau's *Platee* at the Festival dei Due Mondi.



**David Barrell** (Bass I) studied at London University and at the Royal Academy of Music. He has sung extensively in opera and oratorio in Europe in the title roles in *Don Giovanni* and *Eugene Onegin* and as the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Renato in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, among other roles. He has also made appearances at the Windsor and Edinburgh Festivals. In 1985 he became the first recipient of the London Symphony Orchestra American Foundation Scholarship and was accepted into the American Opera Center at Juilliard, where he has sung in Gounod's *Mireille* and as *Don Giovanni*.



**Ruben Broitman** (Tenor II), a native of Mexico City, was three times district winner from Puerto Rico in the Metropolitan Opera auditions and was regional winner again in 1981 in New Orleans. He has appeared with the Opera of San Juan as Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* and at the Casals Festival as a soloist in Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*. A degree candidate at Juilliard, he has sung there in *La Vie Parisienne*, *Così Fan Tutte* and *I Quattro Rustegui*. Recent appearances have been in Strauss' *Capriccio* at Carnegie Hall in January and in Gounod's *Mireille* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.



**Peter Gillis** (Tenor I) made his Spoleto Festival debut last year in Charleston and Italy as Joe in *La Fanciulla del West*. While an undergraduate, he toured and recorded as a soloist with the Westminster Choir. He earned his Master's Degree at the Indiana University School of Music, where his roles with its Opera Theatre included Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* and Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*. His most recent appearance at Alice Tully Hall was in the title role in Britten's *St. Nicholas*, and in April he appeared as Don Ottavio in the American Opera Center production of *Don Giovanni*.



**Stephan Kirchgraber** (Bass II) made his Carnegie Hall debut in April in the concert, "In Celebration of Youth." In 1985 he created roles in two world premieres for Opera Theatre of St. Louis: Minoru Miki's *Joruri* and Stephen Paulus' *The Woodlanders*. A district winner of the Metropolitan Opera auditions, Mr. Kirchgraber is a charter member of the Greater Miami Opera Apprentice Program and has performed with that company in *La Gioconda*, *Ernani*, *Rigoletto* and *La Boheme*, among other operas. He has also appeared with the St. Louis Municipal Opera, the Banff Festival of Fine Arts in Canada and the Palm Beach Opera.



**Beni Montresor** (Production Designer), knighted in 1980 by the Italian Government for his contributions to the arts, has created sets, costumes and lighting for La Scala, the San Francisco Opera and the Metropolitan Opera, among many others. His Broadway designs have earned him two Tony Award nominations. Also a screenwriter and director, Mr. Montresor has shown *Pilgrimage* at the Cannes Film Festival and will soon make his picture, *Daybreak*, with Jeanne Moreau and Vittorio Gassman. Winner of the Leonide Massine Prize for his ballet designs, he has also just had published his illustrated version of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Nightingale*.



**Marie Barrett** (Lighting Realization) has been a resident in lighting design for the Houston Grand Opera, Chautauqua Opera and Texas Opera Theatre. For Houston Grand, she has designed *Eugene Onegin*, *La Traviata*, *Peter Grimes* and *Elixir of Love*. Marie has also designed for Netherlands Opera, Long Beach Opera and Virginia Opera. Last April she designed *Song of the Wayfarers* for Rudolf Nureyev. Ms. Barrett has several Off-Broadway theater credits as well, and has designed for Hildegard Behrens, Kiri Te Kanawa, Placido Domingo, Leontyne Price and Marilyn Horne in recital.

## The Spoleto Festival Orchestra

Christian Badea, Music Director

Each year, over nine hundred young American instrumentalists from colleges, universities and music conservatories throughout the United States are auditioned in seven metropolitan cities by Spoleto's Music Director, Christian Badea. The finest musicians are selected to join the Spoleto Festival Orchestra. In 1986, 83 young artists have been chosen to perform operatic, dance, symphonic and choral works, and play chamber music throughout Charleston. Through these opportunities, they will work with some of the world's most talented conductors and directors.

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### Viola

Karen Bair  
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Liana Mount  
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Stacia Spencer  
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### Cello

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### Double Bass

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Barbara Bashor  
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