

A Brief Biography of Gary Burgess, Tenor

The long and distinguished career of tenor Gary Burgess has spanned many decades and several continents. He has performed with some of the most iconic artists of the twentieth century, in major opera houses and on concert stages around the world. Burgess made his American debut in 1973 with the San Francisco Opera Company singing seven roles in the same season; *Die Zauberflöte*, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, *La Bohème*, *Electra*, *Pique Dame* and *Boris Godunow*, followed by debuts at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Houston Grand Opera, and many other companies in the United States. In 1973 he also made his European debut with the Greek National Opera singing "Tom Rakewell" in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, "Bacchus" in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and the tenor lead in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. During his operatic career he appeared frequently alongside household names like Dame Joan Sutherland, Katia Ricciarelli and Leontyne Price, and sang under the batons of a virtual "Who's Who" of conductors, including among others Kurt Herbert Adler, Richard Bonyngé, Raymond Leppard, Mstislav Rostropovich, Julius Rudel, Leonard Bernstein, Maximiano Valdes, Eugene Ormandy, David Effron, and Cristopher Macatsouris.

During his active performing career, Burgess portrayed over 45 roles in opera alone, including almost all of the major tenor roles in the standard repertoire. He also has to his credit over 30 major oratorios and masses, which he performed with many of the leading orchestras in North America, including the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra (under Ormandy), the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, and the Long Island and New Haven Symphonies. He also performed on a number of occasions at the prestigious Marlboro Festival in Vermont under the direction of Rudolph Serkin, with colleagues including well-known American soprano Benita Valente. When the National Public Broadcasting System and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (U.S.) filmed black American composer William Grant Still's opera *A Bayou Legend*, Burgess was cast in the lead role of "Bazil". This production was broadcast internationally to widespread acclaim. Burgess was also featured on recordings of Bellini's *Norma* with Cristina Deutekom and Tatyana Troyanos and Verdi's *Il Trovatore* with Joan Sutherland and conducted by Richard Bonyngé, among other recordings. He also performed the world premiere and subsequently recorded John Cage's *Europa 5*.

In the later part of his career, Burgess has become more active as an operatic stage director and conductor, and has staged or conducted over 35 different operas for companies around the world, including the Beijing, China production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* that was part of the 2008 Olympic Opening Festivities, and the opening season of the new performing arts centre in Beijing.

As an internationally recognized instructor and clinician, Dr. Burgess has been engaged as a Master Teacher at the Eastman School of Music (where he taught soprano Renée Fleming), the Conservatoire Francis Poulenc in France, the Beijing System of Higher Education (university system), the Bratislava Music Festival in the Czech Republic, and The International School, among other programs. He was an award-winning member of the voice faculty and Director of Opera at The State University of New York at Buffalo for many years. Among the many singers he launched into international careers are

coloratura Laura Aikin, soprano Leslie Delk, mezzo-sopranos Eva Garajova and Cynthia Przybyl, tenors Vinson Cole and Jeffrey Halili, baritone Brian Zunner, and bass Valerian Ruminski. Burgess served for a number of years as a panelist on the New York State Council for the Arts, and with the National Endowment for the Arts (U.S.).

In addition to the companies already mentioned above, some of the others that Mr. Burgess performed with include the Bulgarian State Opera, Warsaw State Opera, Bratislav National Opera, Hong Kong Opera and Bayerische Staatsoper. In Asia, he has also performed in concert in the National Center for the Performing Arts (Beijing, China), Beijing Concert Hall, Ningbo Concert Hall, Shanghai Conservatory, and Beijing Central Conservatory. Festivals he has been featured in include the Marlboro Music Festival, Athens Festival, Corfu Festival, Central City Opera Festival, ArtPark (Lewiston, NY), and contemporary music festivals in the United States and Europe.

Aside from his many opera performances, Burgess has always kept his love for lieder and chamber music alive, having performed many seasons with the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont under the leadership of the late Rudolf Serkin, and in concert all over the world. He recorded most of the major song cycles of Schubert and Schumann, along with recordings of Mahler and other composers. Through the years Burgess has been the recipient of many awards including the Prix Claude Debussy in 1984 at the Concours Henri Duparc in Paris, the Distinguished Service Award from Opera America, the Legacy Award from the National Opera Association (U.S.), the Eugene Ormandy Award, and the Philadelphia Foundation Award (twice), to name but a few of the many honors and accolades he has received.

Gary Burgess benefited from a superlative education and formation. Following completion of his Baccalaureate degree, he was a Special Student at the Juilliard School of Music for two years, where he studied with the renowned Sergius Kagen. He later studied with Georgio Favoretto and Mario Boriello at the Academia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, before moving on to the temple of voice in North America, Indiana University at Bloomington for his Master's Degree, where he held a vocal assistantship and studied under the legendary vocal pedagogue Margaret Harshaw. Subsequently he completed an Artist Diploma in Opera at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, PA, where he also studied under full scholarship. He later returned to Indiana University to complete his education by obtaining his Doctor of Musical Arts degree. During his education he also studied Stage Direction with Dino Yannopoulos and Rhoda Levine, and conducting with Max Rudolf and Eugene Ormandy. He sang in masterclasses with many luminaries of the vocal arts, including Maria Callas and Gérard Souzay.

Currently semi-retired, Burgess is the **Music Director** of the Bermuda Philharmonic Society and the **Principal** of the Bermuda School of Music, and also remains active as a teacher, clinician, stage director, and concert performer.

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TYPICAL CRITICAL COMMENTARIES:

The New Yorker - Nov. 19, 1979

Philadelphia Lyric Opera [now the Opera Company of Philadelphia]

...I made it a point to attend this rarely performed Rossini *Otello*. Three weeks before I [had] heard the Verdi *Otello* in Wilmington, Del., with Gary Burgess in the title role. I was anxious to see if Burgess could pull this one off, as Verdi is most dramatic, and Rossini is very lyrical and melismatic. I am happy to report that Burgess' [Rossini] *Otello* was vividly declaimed!

Andrew Porter

Translation - Bratislava

...last week we were treated to Schubert's *Schwanengesang* lieder in the beautiful Koenig Salle, Mr. Burgess sang all fourteen songs from memory, capturing the mood of each song. This concert was the highlight of this year's concert season. Mr. Burgess has a beautiful voice with many changing colors and an interpretation skill that is unequalled...This week I was on an opera assignment to hear Verdi's *Otello* at the Bratislava Opera House. I was shocked when I sat and read the program to see Burgess' name as "Otello". I thought that it would be a disappointment after the beautiful Schubert, but there was no mistake after his grand entrance of "*Esultate*"...

Eriik Ovasova.

Translation - Athens Daily Post

Lyriki Skini - Athens

Ariadne auf naxos, Strauss

...The role of Bacchus was sung by **Gary Burgess** opposite Ariadne sung by Antigone Sguada...Burgess was an excellent Bacchus, his entrance from back stage was audible through the theatre. His high voice was brilliant in the role that has many high notes...A beautiful voice and a very musical way of singing.

Evgenia Syriotis