

## At Green Mountain Opera, young singers are full of passion



Green Mountain Opera Festival concerts are at the Joslyn Round Barn in Waitsfield.

Stefan Hard/Times Argus file

By **Jim Lowe** Staff Writer - Published: June 17, 2007

WAITSFIELD — The Green Mountain Opera Festival's Young Artists' Program, new this year, is already showing success. At Saturday's operatic recital at the Joslyn Round Barn, the four young singers not only showed marked improvement since their arrival two weeks ago, they delivered some very satisfying performances.

The two sopranos, one mezzo and a baritone have been working with veteran bass-baritone Kristopher Irmiter for two weeks, as well as participating in master classes, including last week's with the great soprano Phyllis Curtin. They will be appearing in minor roles in the festival's culminating performances of Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," June 22 and 24 at the Barre Opera House.

Although all four offered both potential and beautiful singing, it was baritone Marc-Antoine D'Aragon who sang with the sophistication of a performing artist. With a light but rich voice, he plied the yearning line of Eletsky's aria from Tchaikovsky's "Pique Dame" with a beautiful, longing passion by virtue of some most expressive singing. Conversely, he delivered Papageno's "Der Vögelfänger bin ich ya" from Mozart's "Magic Flute" with a deft wit and charm.

Krista Kiefski has a large and brilliant soprano which she used with a depth of passion, joined by D'Aragon, in "Silvio! A quest'ora" from Leoncavallo's "I Pagliacci." Although it lacked nuance in "Quando m'en vo" from Puccini's "La Bohème," Kiefski had a rich, full sound which she delivered with passion.

Soprano Allison Leaheey has a lovely voice that she used to advantage in a truly impassioned and convincing performance of "Dearest Mama" from Douglas Moore's "The Ballad of Baby Doe." In Pamina's "Ach ich füh'l's" from Mozart's "Magic Flute," she missed the expressive changes Mozart cues in the accompaniment, but the sound was beautiful.

Mezzo-soprano Rachel Helgeson had some trouble corralling her voice, but she has a big and dark lower register that is truly gorgeous.

She employed that particularly well in "Va! Laisse couler" from Massenet's "Werther." And she collaborated in perhaps the most beautiful moment in the program, the "Prayer" from Humperdinck's "Hansel and Gretel" with Leaheey.

The able accompanist was Montpelier pianist and vocal coach Mary Jane Austin-Reynolds, who has been working with these singers throughout the festival.

This was an auspicious beginning for the festival's new Young Artists Program, and Friday's substantial audience clearly agreed.