

# World Premiere of The Secret Garden (<https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/2013/03/world-premiere-of-the-secret-garden.html>)

March 02, 2013 (<https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/2013/03/world-premiere-of-the-secret-garden.html>)



(<https://operatattler.typepad.com/.a/6a00d834b4c13053ef017d41738087970c-popup>)

## \* Notes \*

San Francisco Opera (<http://sfopera.com/>) and Cal Performances (<http://calperfs.berkeley.edu/>) presented the world premiere of Nolan Gasser's *The Secret Garden* (<http://sfopera.com/Season-Tickets/2012-2013-Season/The-Secret-Garden.aspx>) (Act II pictured left, photograph by Betsy Kershner) last

night in Berkeley. The music features a tiny ensemble of ten instrumentalists, lead by conductor Sara Jobin. The rhythms employed are of interest, particularly in the prologue, which is set in India. Carey Harrison's libretto has some awkward moments, somehow the narrative of the book does not always work well as sung text. This is evident in the Cholera scene and when Colin sings about how he will live to adulthood. Other parts are more successful. The letter scene between Susan Sowerby and Archibald Craven is quite beautiful. The production, directed by José Maria Condemí, moves along nicely. The costumes are of the period, and are perfectly serviceable. Naomie Kremer's hallucinatory visual designs range from cartoonish to Impressionistic.

The singing has much to recommend it. Ao Li (Ben Weatherstaff), Erin Johnson (Mrs. Medlock), and Laura Krumm (Martha Sowerby) all made charming contributions to the performance, both vocally and dramatically. Tenor Scott Joiner was a winsome Dickon, but had some trouble with the high notes in his first duet with Mary. Philippe Sly impressed as Archibald Craven, and his aforementioned duet with Marina Harris (Susan Sowerby) was splendid. Boy soprano Michael Kepler Meo convinced as spoiled, sickly Colin Craven. His voice is pretty, but the amplification used was obvious and slightly distracting. Bright-voiced Sarah Shafer deftly portrayed Mary Lennox. Her sound is pleasant and her acting was not overwrought.

## \* Tattling \*

There were many children in attendance, and for the most part, they were more well-behaved than the adults. Two women in Row P Seats 5 and 7 of the Orchestra Level talked repeatedly during the music when there was no singing. Oddly, they knew the maestra, and vehemently cheered her when she took her bow.

One of the boys in Row N was the son of either the composer or the librettist and he was absolutely delighted to see his father during the ovation. His enthusiasm was adorable.

Posted at 08:22 AM in Cal Performances ([https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/cal\\_performances/](https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/cal_performances/)), Opera Review ([https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/opera\\_review/](https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/opera_review/)), San Francisco Opera ([https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/san\\_francisco\\_opera/](https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/san_francisco_opera/)), The Secret Garden (<https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/the-secret-garden/>) | Permalink (<https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/2013/03/world-premiere-of-the-secret-garden.html>) | Comments (1) (<https://operatattler.typepad.com/opera/2013/03/world-premiere-of-the-secret-garden.html#comments>)

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DJ Yee said...

I was also at the premiere performance. I agree that most children were quiet and attentive--when left to themselves. As for the parents...!

I sat next to a family with four young children. Behind me was another family with two young children. I doubt if any of the children were older than 10. The kids, when left alone, were well-behaved and quiet. The PARENTS, however, talked to them regularly and frequently to explain the opera to them. Eventually I asked both sets of parents, back and side, to be quiet so I could enjoy the opera. They complied with my request (more or less).

Sometimes I wondered if they thought they were at home watching a DVD on their home theatre system--not present at a live performance with people around them, strangers who wanted to listen undisturbed to the opera.

I emailed the SF Opera and Cal Performances afterward about my experience. I support the idea of family-oriented opera to encourage more people to try opera. However, while these institutions try to introduce opera to more people, how about also introducing them (or reminding them) about appropriate behavior for a live musical performance?

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