

The Pittsburg Press – Dec. 7, 1975

By Carl Apone

“‘Lucia’ to Follow Sister at Met”

On March 20, the Welting sisters of Memphis make Metropolitan Opera history.

On that date, soprano Ruth Welting will make her debut as Zerbinetta in “Ariadne auf Naxos” and become part of only the second sister team in Met history. The first: Rosa and Carmella Ponselle.

Ruth’s sister, Patricia, was the first Welting to sing with the company. Now she is married, the mother of two and studying for a master’s in music at West Virginia University. Patricia is remembered here for Civic Light Opera performances in “The Student Prince” and “Guys and Dolls” at the Civic Arena in the middle 1960s.

This week, the diminutive Ruth Welting, who at 5-foot-2 is an inch taller than her sister, makes her local debut in Pittsburgh Opera’s “*Lucia di Lammermoor*” at Heinz Hall.



Ruth Welting's career is very much on the rise. She has been a New York City Opera regular since 1971 and has performed with the Philadelphia and San Francisco symphony orchestras, as well as the Santa Fe Opera. This season, in addition to the Met, she debuts at the Chicago Lyric and Covent Garden.

Despite her operatic success, Miss Welting sometimes regrets not having pursued a promising career as a pianist. The petite singer began her musical training on the piano at age 3 and in high school won the Paderewski Gold Medal from the National Guild of Piano Teachers. For three years she studied piano on scholarship at Memphis State.

“SOMETIMES I REGRET not going on with the piano,” she says. “I have a special feeling for it, and it's very dear to me. I miss it a lot. I still play for my own enjoyment but do not study.”

For Miss Welting, the tug of war between piano and voice started in high school where she sang leads in “Sound of Music” and “Carnival.” She also studied with Pablo Casals for a summer, and he told her voice “had remarkable purity and flexibility.”

In college, although a piano major, she sang leads in the opera workshop productions. After three years at Memphis State, voice studies won out and she went to Juilliard to become part of the American Opera Center.

When students of the American Opera Center, directed by Tito Capobianco, a frequent stage director here, went to the summer Spoleto Festival in Italy, Miss Welting went along. She did not return for three years.

“I fell in love with Italy, and although I didn't know a soul, I stayed behind to study with Luigi Ricci of Rome Opera,” she said. “I learned 20 operas in the Italian repertoire, and if I climb the ladder of success, I owe it all to him.”

“He’s 83 now, still going strong and something of a little Mussolini in his ways. But what a teacher. He worked for many years with Toscanini, and Puccini wrote ‘Il Tabarro’ in Ricci’s parlor. He has an original copy of the opera with Puccini’s own markings on it.”

Miss Welting has a strong Southern accent, but it does not come through in her singing. As for her thoughts on Lucia which she will play here:

“SHE IS NOT mentally ill from the start, but much that happens in the opera drives her toward insanity. But it isn’t a wild madness; she suppresses her feelings, and even in the Mad Scene she is almost sane, expressing many sensitive qualities. This role is an actor’s paradise, and there are always new interpretations to be found.”

Miss Welting, a close friend of Barbara Karp, daughter of general director Richard Karp, worked out some of her ideas on Lucia with Miss Karp, New York City Opera stage director.

Other members of the cast will include three regulars here, Pierre Duval, Cesare Bardella and Claude Corbeil, and two Pittsburgh singers, Mimi Lerner and Rosendo Dacal.

Thomas Michalak, associate conductor of the Pittsburgh Opera and assistant conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony, fills in as conductor for the ailing Dr. Karp.

If you hear rebel yells at Heinz Hall after the opera, Patricia Welting will likely be leading them. She is coming from Morgantown to hear her sister perform.

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