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## Henri Temianka Correspondence; (lte)

Paul Goldberger

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## Henri Temianka Correspondence; (Ite)

### Description

This collection contains material pertaining to the life, career, and activities of Henri Temianka, violin virtuoso, conductor, music teacher, and author. Materials include correspondence, concert programs and flyers, music scores, photographs, and books.

### Keywords

Henri Temianka, culture, virtuosity in musical performance, violinist, chamber music, press, February 18, 1992, California Chamber Symphony Society

**The New York Times**

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PAUL GOLDBERGER  
Cultural News Editor

February 18, 1992

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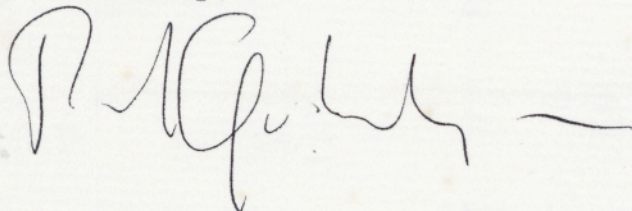
Dear Mr. Temianka:

Thank you for your letter regarding Bernard Holland's Notebook on "The Ghosts of Versailles."

We don't expect -- or even want -- all of our readers to agree with all of our critics all of the time. But we respect your views, and are grateful to you for taking the time to share them with us.

I've passed along your letter to Mr. Holland in the hope that he will want to reply to your comments in more detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "P. Goldberg", followed by a horizontal line.



### Critic's Notebook

# 'The Ghosts of Versailles' Fills The Tumbrels With Conventions

By BERNARD HOLLAND

I have a word for "The Ghosts of Versailles": subversive. Subversion happens when one goes to the bottom of a thing and turns it on its head. The Metropolitan Opera's premiere performances of the new opera by John Corigliano, with libretto by William Hoffman, give opera a salutary kick in the pants by denying our expectations, by making us see them upside down. Opera's implicit advertising has not been honored. I would be surprised if the Better Business Bureau hasn't had a phone call or two.

Specifically, "The Ghosts of Versailles" is an exercise in bait-and-switch. The plot involves the playwright Beaumarchais, who entertains the ghosts of a decapitated French court and enters his own play in an attempt to change history and save his love, Marie Antoinette. Frilly costumes and Baroque interiors promise Richard Strauss, the Turkish scene advertises continuations of Mozart's "Abduction From the Seraglio." Icy instrumental glissandos threaten sober post-Romantic drama.

Vaudeville and Saturday-cartoon humor are not what the Met's steady customers are expecting, but that's what Mr. Corigliano and Mr. Hoffman think will do them good. There are more uncomfortable surprises. One is a teary dungeon scene in which the highborn prepare for execution. It lures our sympathies out into the open; a manic escape sequence breaks in without warning and slaps us in the face. This is tough medicine to take.

Mortal sword wounds are nullified; the combatants after all are already dead. Are we being made fun of? Just when we have bought the premise of



Winnie Klotz/Metropolitan Opera

Marilyn Horne in "The Ghosts of Versailles."

transaction goes like this: I, the listener, will swallow whole the impossible convolutions at the end of "The

built to last, creation striving for immortality. Mr. Corigliano's music, clever and sincere as it is, is as cheerfully disposable as Kleenex, which is the way all music used to be until a certain Beethoven got us on the posterity kick. In "The Ghosts of Versailles" nothing is where it should be. Ignoring the pressures of accumulated tradition, it relentlessly "degenerates" into a kazoo orchestra and Marilyn Horne doing the hootchy-kootchy.

Beaumarchais's servants have taken over the palace in more ways than one. For in "The Ghosts of Versailles," sociological wars between lower and higher orders are being refought in terms of style. Classical and pop have long waged wars of encroachment: the crossover genre, jazz transfused into Ravel's piano concertos, Paul McCartney's balladeering encased in the oratorio format. But there exists an even more violent revolutionary strategy: put things where they don't belong. This opera does it mercilessly: moods spin on a dime; Broadway's sores exsanguinate. A rawer, newer culture has been parachuted into an old and protected bastion.

In ways that would make Beaumarchais smile, "The Ghosts of Versailles" upsets decorum and ridicules rules of civilized discourse. Mr. Corigliano's straight-faced imitations of the Rococo and Mr. Hoffman's egregious interruptions of the loftiest sentiments call to mind Figaro, lolling in his master's chair. Figaro is the same, the chair is the same, but the juxtaposition is devastating. It's like giving Lyle Lovett a tailcoat and sitting him in the middle of Carnegie Hall or putting a cowboy hat on Alfred Brendel and asking him to play the piano at a rodeo.