



## STANDING ROOM ONLY

Canadian troubadour **Gordon Lightfoot** serenades fans with his treasure trove of hits, including "Sundown" and "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" at 8 p.m. Saturday. **Info:** Wolf Trap Filene Center; \$40 in-house, \$22 lawn; 877-965-3872; wolfftrap.org.

## THEATER

# If you like camp, you'll love the zany 'Irma Vep'

By **Barbara Mackay**  
Special to The Examiner

If the word "camp" hadn't already existed in 1984 when "The Mystery of Irma Vep" first appeared, someone undoubtedly would have invented it. For "Irma Vep" is a camp classic if ever there was one.

Written by the brilliant actor/director Charles Ludlam, "Irma Vep" was hailed first for its many hilarious social and literary references, especially its satire of everything from Shakespeare to Ibsen, Poe, Oscar Wilde and Scarlett O'Hara, to name a few targets.

Second, in two dizzying hours it parodied melodrama, vaudeville, Egyptology, Gothic novels, reincarnation, the horror films and the paranormal. The story starts at Mandacrest on the moors (think "Rebecca") then moves on to Egypt (think "The Mummy's

Curse"), with many references to vampires, werewolves and mummies along the way.

Most impressive was the fact that the play's seven roles were played by two men, who kept the action sizzling through lightning-fast costume changes.

The production of "Irma Vep" play-

ing at the Arena Stage has lost none of the vigor or appeal of that original production. Director Rebecca Bayla Taichman has directed skillfully, with obvious sensitivity to the play's lovable lunacy, adding a few updated touches that would probably

make Ludlam smile.

The actor who plays Lady Enid/Nicodemus/Alcazar/Pev Amri is Brad Oscar, who is delightfully over-the-top in each role. J. Fred Shiffman plays Lord Edgar Hillcrest with a chilly fanaticism; as housekeeper Jane Twisden, he exhibits a restrained evil Agnes Moorehead would have admired. Together Oscar and Shiffman make a marvelously zany, exaggerated pair, just the match needed to make "Irma Vep" fly.

James Noone's eclectic set includes a gray Gothic background dominated by the portrait of the first Lady Hillcrest, mounted animal heads with glowing eyes, and an elaborate Egyptian tomb complete with crystal-clear hieroglyphics. The costumes, by David Zinn, are lavish, phantasmagorical concoctions, from his insta-werewolf to Lady Enid's mountains of flounces and ruffles.

Since this show depends so much on timing, credit is owed to choreographer Parker Esse and the eight backstage crew members/dressers who make an amazingly complicated script into an apparently effortless, carefree romp.



### If you go

"The Mystery of Irma Vep," through July 13

- **Venue:** Arena Stage, 1800 S. Bell St., Arlington
- **Performances:** 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Sundays (no evening show June 24), 6 p.m. curtain July 6; 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays (no matinee June 22 and July 6; noon June 18, June 24 and July 2)
- **Tickets:** \$47 to \$66
- **More info:** 202-488-3300; arenastage.org

Brad Oscar as Lady Enid Hillcrest and J. Fred Shiffman as Lord Edgar Hillcrest star in "The Mystery of Irma Vep" at Arena Stage in Arlington through July 13. - photo by Scott Suchman

## MUSIC

# Mason Festival features visual arts, music for the family

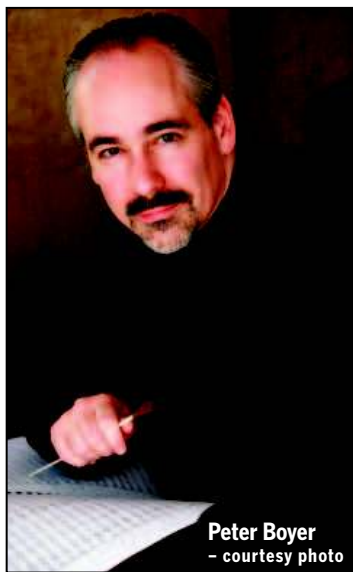
By **Emily Cary**  
Special to The Examiner

George Mason University launches The Mason Festival of the Arts, three weekends of music, opera, visual arts, and educational and family-oriented events.

One of the most compelling presentations is "Ellis Island: The Dream of America" by composer Peter Boyer. He will be on hand for a talk preceding the multimedia performance by the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra and Theater of the First Amendment, GMU's professional theater group.

Boyer received a Grammy nomination for "Ellis Island" for the Best Classical Contemporary Composition of 2006. The Naxos CD boasts a cast of notable actors, among them Barry Bostwick, Olympia Dukakis, Anne Jackson, Bebe Neuwirth and Eli Wallach. After recording the narration in New York, Boyer headed to London to conduct and record the Philharmonia Orchestra playing his composition.

He put it all together in Califor-



Peter Boyer  
- courtesy photo

nia, where he is on the faculty of Claremont Graduate University, runs his own publishing company and composes, orchestrates and conducts in the film and television industry. Recent projects include scoring the TV series "Engineering an Empire" for The History Channel and orchestrating "Mission: Im-

### If you go

The Fairfax Symphony Orchestra and Theater of the First Amendment perform "Ellis Island: The Dream of America" by Peter Boyer

- **When:** 8 p.m. Saturday
- **Where:** George Mason University Center for the Arts
- **Cost:** \$15 to \$45
- **More info:** 888-945-2468; tickets.com or fairfaxsymphony.org

possible III" for Paramount films.

Boyer wrote both music and narrations for "Ellis Island," basing the latter on interviews he researched at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Although none of the material he utilized represents his own family history, he was thrilled to stumble across the records of his grandfather, who immigrated to America from Italy in 1912.

"Their Oral History Project is excellent, so I made a couple of trips there to begin my research," he says. "Since the immigrant interviews took place over a 30-year period, some of those were already in their 80s when interviewed. From the first hundred or so interviews I looked at, I chose 20 semifi-

nalists, then purchased their transcripts on cassette recordings to study at home.

"Certain things immediate-

ly spoke to me, and I found seven representative people from seven different countries. Three are men and four are women who arrived at Ellis Island from the early 1900s to the 1940s. There's a wonderful mix of experiences, from the shattering heartbreak of a woman whose entire family was wiped out in Auschwitz to an Irish ham, or raconteur, whose joie de vivre is irresistible.

"This piece makes people appreciate that we are a nation of immigrants who welcome others with dissimilar backgrounds."



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