

# At Large

BEHIND THE CAMERA  
WITH BRIAN LARGE

by Brian Large and Jane Scovell

# Table of Contents

Foreword by Renée Fleming	8
Introduction by Mary Lou Falcone	10

## OVERTURE

1. War and Peace	15
2. Small Screen/Big Picture	33
3. The Food of Life	41

## ACT I

4. Czechpoints	55
5. The Propeller Girl	77
6. Czechmates	91
7. The Beeb and I	103
8. Back to School	111
9. Close-ups	117
10. American Idol	131
11. Upbeats	143
12. A Shining Hour	155
13. The Melody Lingers on	159
14. Rule Britten-nia!	167
15. In a Kingdom by the Sea	183

## ACT II

16. Adventures with Auntie	195
17. Feet of Clay	207
18. The Pilgrimage	213
19. Busy in the Beeb	223
20. Yankee Doodling	237
21. A Dream Come True	243
22. A Confluence of Commitments	257
23. Bye-bye Auntie/Hello, Uncle Sam	265

## ACT III

24. Be It Ever so Hectic ...	279
25. ... There's no Place Like the Met	287
26. Hoi Jo to Ho!	293
27. Non Cacio Così	299
28. The Nightingale and the Lark	313
29. The Emperor of Salzburg	323
30. The Return of the Native	333
31. The Elusive Maestro	345
32. Many Happy New Years	353
33. A Harrowing Night at the Opera	357

## ACT IV

34. Crossroads	365
35. Dealing with Divas	375
36. An Incomparable Prima Donna	391
37. How a Star Was Born	397
38. Happy Birthday, Peter Ilyich	409
39. Three Musketeers	417
40. Tremava Tutta Roma	435
41. An Exception to the Rule	443
42. Ave Atque Vale/California, Here I Come	449

## CURTAIN CALLS

43. Et Alia	461
44. The World Is My Oyster	489

Acknowledgements	490
About the Authors	492
Photo Credits	494



On the left side, a wedding photo of my parents, John Large and Ruby Willis, 1931. Both my grandfathers were bakers. On the right, grandfather Willis and his horse-drawn delivery cart; grandmother Large in front of the bakery; a wedding photo of my maternal grandparents



15.

## In a Kingdom by the Sea

The BBC rented a tiny shoreline cottage, installed a piano, set up a telephone line, and I moved in. My sole function was to be available for Ben. Other than that, I was free to work on projects of my own. He might simply wish to chat on the phone, in which case I would listen, or he might call and ask me to come to The Red House and confer with him. To be in on the creative process excited me, though I must admit, because of the time of year, it was a weird existence. A typical seaside resort, Aldeburgh shone brightly during the summer months. October through May, however, bitterly cold temperatures with heavy low-hanging clouds, rough seas, and biting winds prevailed. Also, Aldeburgh had but one cinema and a couple of small hotels, empty for the most part. As for dining, I can't recall any restaurants open other than in one of the hotels. Most days, I'd go down to the beach, buy fish directly from the fishermen, purchase veggies from the greengrocer, go home, and cook. I spent a good deal of time waiting for the phone to ring, all alone by the telephone, as Irving Berlin put it. Whenever he felt the need, Ben would call and either we'd chat on the phone or he'd invite me over. If the latter, I'd immediately get into my car and drive to The Red House. The vicious dog alerts on the gate no longer troubled me, little danger lurked in the loveable dachshund now in residence. Each time I arrived she scrambled all over me licking my face with complete abandon. Ben and I spent our time together in the library where he'd sit at the piano and talk about this scene or that



## About the Authors

### BRIAN LARGE

Television director of more than 800 opera and concert performances, Brian Large began his career as a producer for BBCTV (1965 to 1980). From 1980 to 2010 he served as director of television productions for the Metropolitan Opera. For his telecasts, he won many awards including two Emmys. Among numerous international productions, Large directed the telecast of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the first complete video recording of Wagner's epic tetralogy (Bayreuth, 1980), the original Three Tenors Concert (Rome, 1990), Vladimir Horowitz's historic *Return to Moscow* (1986), and nineteen New Year's Concerts in Vienna's Golden Musikvereinsaal (1989–2011). In addition, he is the author of definitive biographies of the Czech composers Bedřich Smetana (1970) and Bohuslav Martinů (1976).



### JANE SCOVELL

Jane Scovell has collaborated on autobiographies with major figures in the entertainment world including Marilyn Horne, Elizabeth Taylor, Ginger Rogers, and Maureen Stapleton and has written biographies of Samuel Ramey and Oona O'Neill Chaplin. Four of her books were on the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* Best Seller Lists.