Larkin

Ariel Bybee

January 9, 1943 ~ March 20, 2018

Ariel Bybee died peacefully at her home in Salt Lake City, Utah, on March 20, 2018, at the age of 75. A renowned opera singer,ÄîaccordingÂ to Opera News, "a prominent mezzo at the Metropolitan Opera for eighteen seasons",ÄîAriel was also distinguished as a soloist, voice teacher, and university professor and opera director.

After receiving a bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University, Ariel won the San Francisco Opera National Auditions, leading to five seasons at the San Francisco Opera in such roles as Musetta in La Boh√®me, Inez in La favorite, and the title role in Carmen ("Hats off, gentlemen, a Carmen! Her name is Ariel Bybee," Martin Bernheimer, Los Angeles Times).

Ariel moved on to the Metropolitan Opera in 1977, where she would sing over 450 performances as a principal artist. She first earned accolades as Jenny in Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny ("From now on, the role of Jenny will have to be judged against her definitive interpretation," Barton Wimble, New York Daily News). Ariel's numerous roles at the Met included Annio in La clemenza di Tito, H√§nsel in H√§nsel and Gretel, Niclausse in Les contes d'Hoffman, and Suzuki in Madama Butterfly.

In 1985, Ariel appeared on stage with the New York City Ballet in its production of Songs of the Auvergne, and she debuted at the Ravinia Festival in Electra. She made her highly successful debut with the Washington, D.C., Opera in Menotti's The Consul and her European opera debut as Melisande at the Sofia, Bulgaria, Music Weeks Festival. One of her favorite performing experiences was with the Vienna Philharmonic (Lorin Maazel conducting) in a concert performance of Elektra at Carnegie Hall.

In 1972, Ariel married John Neylan McBaine in San Francisco, California. Their daughter, Neylan (whom Ariel always referred to as "my perfect child"), was born in 1977. The couple divorced in 1996.

In 1998, after retiring from the Met, Ariel moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, to marry English professor Dr. James E. Ford. Having dated as teenagers, the couple were reunited forty years later. Ariel joined Jim on the faculty of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as Artist-in-Residence and Associate Professor in the School of Music. Ariel and Jim were able to blend their interests in the creation of dozens of programs combining music and literature, which they performed in scores of venues around the world. During her time in Lincoln, Ariel taught voice and directed operas. In 2007, her production of Frank Loesser's The Most Happy Fella won the Grand Prize at the Waterford (Ireland) International Festival of Light Opera. When she left UNL as an emerita professor, the University honored her by endowing the Ariel Bybee Chair of Opera Performance.

In 2006, Ariel was diagnosed with Myelodysplastic Syndrome, a rare blood disease. In 2008, she moved to Salt Lake City, where she taught voice at the University of Utah. She benefitted from being under the care of the doctors and nurses of the Huntsman Cancer Center.

Most important to Ariel were the contributions she made as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She devoted herself to using her musical ability to build up her church community by inviting the spirit into their lives. Some of her most treasured experiences were when she sang hymns and other sacred music, including a performance of "How Great Thou Art" for President Bill Clinton and other guest at the National Prayer Breakfast in 1996. She regularly performed at the Visitor's Center of the Washington, DC, Temple for ambassadors and other dignitaries. She soloed several times with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and sang for LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinkley at his 90th birthday party. Ariel recorded two albums of sacred music, O Divine Redeemer and Eternal Day. Hearing her bear her testimony through music will remain a treasured experience for many.

Ariel is survived by her husband, James E. Ford; and her daughter, Neylan McBaine (Elliot Smith). She has three granddaughters, Esme Smith Auden Smith, and Dalloway smith. She is also survived by her older sister, Diana Anderson; younger brother, David Bybee (Doria); and younger sister, Stephanie Percival (Mike). Ariel is preceded in death by her brother Richard Bybee.

Funeral services will be held on Friday, March 30, 2018, at 11:00 am, at the Ensign Stake Center at 135 A Street east (between 2nd and 3rd Avenues). Interment will take place at the Salt Lake Cemetery after the service. Flowers may be sent to Larkin Mortuary on South Temple, or donations may be made in Ariel's honor to the Ariel Bybee Vocal Scholarship in the School of Music at BYU or to Friends of Opera of the School of Music at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.