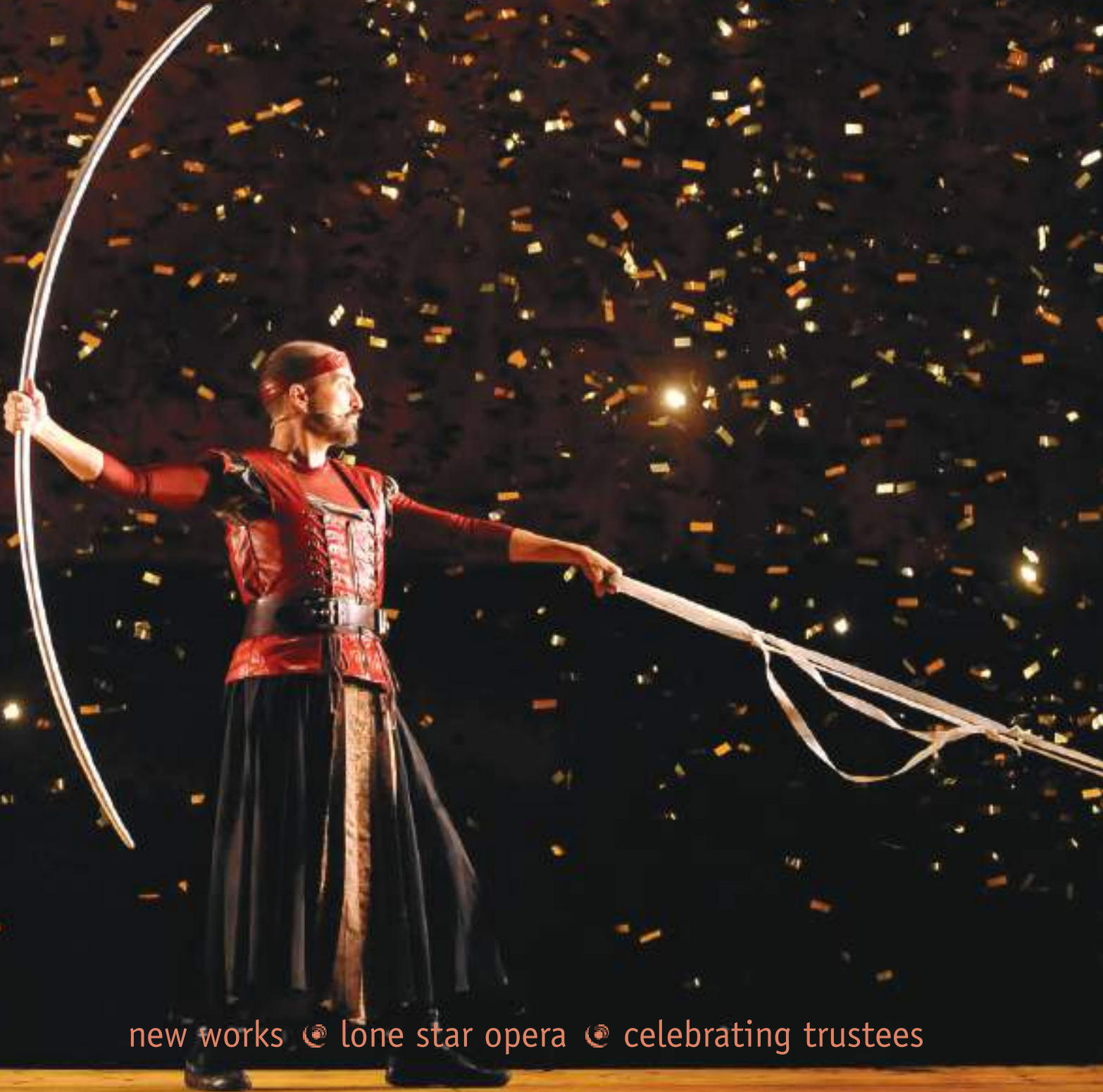


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ON THE COVER: Tony Boulté as Arjuna in Music-Theatre Group's production of Douglas Cuomo's *Arjuna's Dilemma*, directed by Robin Guarino with choreography by John Kelly and design by Donald Eastman (scenery), Gabriel Berry (costumes), Robert Wierzel (lighting) and William Cusick (projections). World premiere production presented as part of Brooklyn Academy of Music's 2008 Next Wave Festival. Photo by Stephanie Berger.



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This new works issue of *Opera America* is an important testimonial to the continued creative vitality of the field despite the economic challenges all companies are facing. Creativity, along with strong communication across the field, are two essential responses to the current crisis, and OPERA America members are displaying characteristic commitment to both.

Over the last three months, OPERA America has convened regular telephone conference calls for the general directors of our professional company members. These conversations have revealed that virtually every opera company, confronted with declines in earned and contributed revenue, is seeking ways to lower costs. At many companies, savings are being realized through reductions in the numbers of productions and performances. But contrary to suspicions, opera companies are not uniformly substituting traditional operas for more adventuresome programming. Indeed, many opera leaders realize that maintaining opera's creative edge is the way to capture media and audience attention at a time when another production of a standard work would go unnoticed. Our continued commitment to American opera and unusual pieces is evidence of the field's progress since the last serious downturn in the economy 25 years ago. We've come a long way!

The conference calls for general directors — in which more than 75 percent of our company members have participated — have been an important reminder of the importance of communication. Participants have learned that all companies are experiencing the same tremendous pressure and that curtailed seasons and staff reductions are not isolated incidents. Difficult choices are not the result of missteps, but are the consequences of external forces that have an impact on every one of our members. We are responsible now, however, for making the correct short-term decisions, and the conference calls have been an important source of ideas.

The ideas have been far-ranging. Some companies are experimenting with alternative venues that are less expensive and that also present creative interpretive possibilities for current and prospective audiences. Alternative styles of production are also being explored, with emphasis on the potential of semi-staged performances to deliver theatrically compelling music-theater without costly, fully-realized sets. Collaborations are growing, too, as evidenced by new co-commissions between opera companies and new works laboratories, co-productions among opera companies, collaboration with local performing arts organizations and partnerships between opera companies and nearby universities.

The exchange of ideas is the primary benefit of attending *Opera Conference 2009*, taking place from April 29 to May 2 in Houston, TX. *Making Opera Matter* is the theme, and OPERA America staff have been working hard with our wonderful colleagues at Houston Grand Opera to explore the many facets of this challenge, considering everything from mainstage productions, to community programs, to communication strategies. We will devote time to exploring new policies and proposals from the Obama administration, including the \$50 million in economic stimulus being channeled through the NEA, and the potential impact of higher tax rates and caps on charitable deductions. We will also turn the spotlight on new works, culminating in the world premiere of André Previn and John Caird's *Brief Encounter*.

Creativity and communication are central to our successful emergence from the current turbulence. We encourage all members to join together in the exchange of new ideas at *Opera Conference 2009*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc A. Scorca". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Marc A. Scorca  
President/CEO

**Center for Contemporary Opera** kicked off its 2008-2009 season with a new leader and a new home. The Cell, a 100-seat theater in New York's Chelsea district, will become the company's nucleus and serve as a gathering place for those invested in the creation of new opera and music-theater. Jim Schaeffer, who succeeds Founding General Director Richard Marshall, has scheduled a busy season that includes panel discussions, readings and full productions.

A libretto reading in January 2009 featured two different treatments of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, juxtaposing the Broadway idiom of Annie Pasqua with the more traditional operatic approach of Matthew Harris. The Center's "Prima le Parole (First, the Words)" series is one of a handful of programs that give librettists and lyricists an opportunity to hear their work read by professional actors. (For more on libretto readings, see the story on page 42.)

*The Letter*, a new opera by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec, will be the 11<sup>th</sup> world premiere production for **The Santa Fe Opera**. Somerset Maugham's 1927 play provides the source material for the opera, which has a libretto Terry Teachout, a critic and biographer. Teachout, an active blogger, has chronicled the making of the opera for the past two years at Artsjournal.com.



The Cell, Center for Contemporary Opera's new space. Photo by Katherine L. Ehle/OPERA America.

**New York City Opera's VOX: Showcasing American Opera** series marks its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary on May 1-2, 2009. The annual series demonstrates the company's commitment to the development of American opera, giving a platform to new or previously unperformed works. The final excerpt presented on Saturday, May 2, will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> opera presented by VOX.

From animation films to politics and musical theater, VOX 2009 brings together composers and librettists from highly diverse musical and cultural backgrounds. In addition to readings of excerpts from 10 operas by New York City Opera soloists, chorus and orchestra, VOX 2009 will feature two panel discussions. All events will take place at the Skirball Center for the Performing Arts; admission is free of charge. For more information and to reserve tickets, visit [www.vox-nyco.com](http://www.vox-nyco.com).

**Opéra de Québec** and **Opéra de Montréal** will celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Quebec City this spring with a co-production of *Starmania, ou la passion de Johnny Rockfort selon les évangiles télévisés* (*Starmania, or the Passion of Johnny Rockfort According to the Televised Gospels*), billed as the first French-language rock opera. Created in 1977 by composer Michel Berger and lyricist Luc Plamondon, *Starmania* went on from its Paris premiere to performances in Canada, Russia and Germany.



The MET/LCT Opera/Theater Commissions, a collaboration between the **Metropolitan Opera** and **Lincoln Center Theater**, was designed to provide composers and librettists with flexibility and support for the development of new works in a workshop setting. The initiative allows for the possibility of one or two workshops, after which the two companies will determine whether, if they move forward, the works are best suited to be expanded musically for the grand stage of the Met or the more intimate setting of the Vivian Beaumont Theater.

The first workshop, for a piece by Nico Muhly and Craig Lucas based on a true story of Internet intrigue, will take place in October 2009, with Bartlett Sher directing. A project by Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie will consider the daughter of Victor Hugo and her emotional, romantic and mental travails. Michael John LaChiusa and Sybille Pearson will base their work, which incorporates tango music, on the Scheherazade tale, but reset in 1970s Central America. An Irish legend is at the center of Bill Whelan and Paul Muldoon's work in progress. Jeanine Tesori and Tony Kushner will base their work on an original idea of Kushner's that spans several centuries. Michael Torke, working with Michael Korie and Des McAnuff, will begin work in the spring on a project about a champion racecar driver.

**The Atlanta Opera** co-presented Philip Glass's *Akhnaten* with Emory University's Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts in January. The opera, which tells the story of the pharaoh who overthrew the old order, was staged in conjunction with an exhibition: "Tutankhamun: The Golden King and the Great Pharaohs." *Akhnaten* was presented in a concert staging, using costumes, lighting and some props. (Principal singers were off book.) The performance was offered to The Atlanta Opera subscribers as an add-on; General Director Dennis Hanthorn estimates that about 20 percent took advantage of the opportunity, but notes that the piece received tremendous publicity, selling out both performances and a dress rehearsal well in advance. "It's great for opera companies to explore this kind of collaboration," says Hanthorn, who has been working to gradually diversify the opera offerings in Atlanta.

Theresa Schambach dances in The Atlanta Opera's production of Glass's *Akhnaten*. Photo by Tim Wilkerson.



**Music-Theatre Group** introduced the music of Chinese composer Wang Jie earlier this year at MTG 10 JAY, the company's new space in Brooklyn. The work, *Flown*, is inspired by a poem written by Steven Ross Smith and features an ensemble of singers and instrumentalists "playing the game of love in four parts." In April and May, performance artist John Kelly will be in residence at MTG 10 JAY, developing new work that combines music, digital media and extant paintings.

Based on the beloved ancient Chinese legend, *Madame White Snake* marks **Opera Boston's** first-ever commissioned work, produced in collaboration with the Beijing Music Festival. The opera tells the story of a powerful white snake demon who transforms into a beautiful woman to experience love. The world premiere, which will be directed by Robert Woodruff, is scheduled for February 2010, with performances in Beijing in fall of that same year.

**Encompass New Opera Theatre** celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts* last month. The schedule of events began with a screening of Steven Watson's documentary *Prepare for Saints*, with an introduction by Watson, followed by discussions with poet and librettist Karren Lalonde Alerier, American art historian Wanda M. Corn, composer Charles Fussell of the Virgil Thomson Foundation and Nancy Rhodes, artistic director of Encompass. The afternoon activities were followed by a performance of the oratorio version of *Four Saints in Three Acts*.

**Tapestry New Opera Works** (Toronto) announced its first-ever subscription series for 2008-2009. In addition to the subscription season, Tapestry premiered *Get Stuffed*, a new opera for children by Alexis Diamond and Richard Payne that promotes healthy food choices. A co-production with the Canadian Diabetes Association and Words in Motion, *Get Stuffed* was showcased at the Ontario Contact conference in October 2008. With support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, *Get Stuffed* will tour Ontario, including northern communities, in 2009.

*Séance on a Wet Afternoon*, a new opera with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, will have its world premiere at **Opera Santa Barbara** in September 2009. **American Opera Projects** (Brooklyn, NY), has been working with Schwartz to develop the piece, his first opera, through a series of workshops.



Michael Zegarski as Bill, Matthew Curran as Inspector Watts, Hila Plitmann as Rita Clayton, Lauren Flanigan as Myra and John Kimberling as Charles Clayton. In background: Garrett McClenahan as Arthur and Madeline Marquis as Adriana in American Opera Projects's reading of Schwartz's *Séance on a Wet Afternoon*. Photo by Michael Chadwick.



**The Queen of Puddings Music Theatre Company**, in association with Harbourfront Centre, presented the world premiere of their new chamber opera *Inês* in February at the Enwave Theatre in Toronto. The opera was composed by James Rolfe and written by Paul Bentley with Portuguese translations from Anna Camara and Rui Mota. *Inês* is based on the medieval Portuguese legend of Inês de Castro and has been adapted to depict life within Toronto's Portuguese community in the 1960s.



Shannon Mercer, Elizabeth Turnbull, Giles Tomkins and Tom Goerz in The Queen of Puddings Music Theatre Company's world premiere production of Rolfe's *Inês*. Photo by John Lauener.

This summer, **Long Leaf Opera** will showcase a variety of new works in a 10-day festival, which takes place from June 12 through 21. *Mercury Falling* (Chandler Carter/Daniel Neer), a 45-minute monodrama for tenor, solo dancer and chamber ensemble, is based on the death of French sculptor Jean-Louis Brian. *A Tree—A Rock—A Cloud* (Mark Scarce), a chamber opera for three singers and three instrumentalists, is based on a Carson McCullers short story. *Review* (Jeremy Beck/Patricia Marx) is a comic opera in one act based on an original work of fiction originally found in *The New Yorker*. In addition, the company will present scenes from a number of works in progress.

In early March, **Nautilus Music-Theater** will produce the Midwest premiere of *Alice Unwrapped* (Jenny Giering/Laura Harrington) during the Spirit in the House Festival. The company will present a collection of operatic commissions this summer under the name *Sister Stories*, with work by writers Anne Dimock, James Payne, Ari Hoptman and Dominic Orlando, and composers Becky Dale, Leslie Ball, George Maurer and Robert Elhai. Nautilus also continues its busy Rough Cuts series; upcoming programs include a reading of *My End* (Joy Tomasko/Andrew Lynch), *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (Marya Hart) and a selection of new cabaret songs by local composers and writers.

Designer and New York University faculty member **John Conklin** has been named artistic advisor at **Boston Lyric Opera**, effective January 1. Conklin, who worked as a set designer with the company for productions in the early 1990s and again in 2005, will consult on interpretations of the company's mainstage and educational productions, and help develop new supplemental performances, lecture series and community events that will enrich audiences' experiences and strengthen the presence of opera in Boston's arts community. He has designed sets on and off-Broadway, and for opera companies all over the world, including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Seattle Opera, San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Bastille Opera in Paris, the Royal Opera and the opera houses of Munich, Amsterdam and Bologna, among many others.

The **Canadian Opera Company's** new music director will be conductor **Johannes Debus**. Debus made his debut with the company in the fall of 2008 conducting *War and Peace*; his appointment will begin with the 2009-2010 season and will extend through the 2012-2013 season. As the former resident conductor for the Frankfurt Opera, where he also worked as pianist, coach, assistant conductor and conductor over 10 years, Debus gained a wide-ranging conducting repertoire. He has been guest conductor at festivals such as the Venice Biennale, the Festival d'Automne in Paris and the Lincoln Center Festival, and has been engaged at opera houses including the Vienna Volksoper, Cologne Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, English

National Opera, Bavarian State Opera in Munich and Opéra National de Lyon.

**Los Angeles Opera** Music Director **James Conlon** won two Grammy Awards for Best Classical Album and Best Opera Recording for the company's recording of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's music-theater piece *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Filmed in high-definition, the video recording of the production was produced by EuroArts home video. Conlon has recorded extensively for EMI, SONY Classical, ERATO, CAPRICCIO and TELARC. He has been featured on DVDs for DECCA, and has appeared in several television programs on PBS, including the documentary "Shadows in Paradise" (2008), "Encore" (2006) and "Cincinnati May Festival 2000."

**Lyric Opera San Diego** directors **Leon Natker** and **J. Sherwood Montgomery** were honored with the Shiley Lifetime Achievement Award at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Patte Awards for Theater Excellence on January 19. The Shiley Lifetime Achievement Award, underwritten by local philanthropists and long-time Patte supporters Donald and Darlene Shiley, was presented in recognition of Natker and Montgomery's decades of making quality musical theater together at Lyric Opera San Diego and overseeing the award-winning resurrection of the Birch North Park Theatre.

**Mississippi Opera** has announced **Sherry Harfst** as the company's new director of marketing and public relations. Previously a member of Mississippi Opera's board of directors and current volunteer member of

the opera chorus, Harfst is a veteran of the opera scene. Her passion for the vocal arts, combined with her marketing and administrative experience, will bring a new face to the company. She and her husband owned a communications/marketing firm and worked with several Fortune 500 companies prior to moving to the Jackson area. As a published author, public speaker, meeting facilitator, administrator and artist, Harfst will blend her talents with those of Executive Director Elizabeth Buyan as plans take shape for the company's upcoming 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

**Susan McIntyre** has joined the staff at **Nashville Opera** as the development director — major gifts. McIntyre's responsibilities include managing the company's elite patron program, the Impresario Council, and cultivating current and future opera patrons. Most recently, she worked with Saint Joseph Ballet in Orange County, CA, where she was the senior development officer; she has also worked on capital campaigns for the Aquarium of the Pacific and the Mattress Factory. She holds a degree in art history from Southern Methodist University and a Master's in arts management from Carnegie Mellon University.

**George Steel** has been appointed as **New York City Opera's** general manager and artistic director. Steel is best known for his 11-year tenure as executive director of the Miller Theatre at Columbia University, from 1997 to 2008. Under his leadership, the theater became known as one of New York City's leading showcases for early and modern music and multi-disciplinary programming.



Steel took primary responsibility for fundraising, financial and personnel management, marketing, publicity and facility planning at the Miller Theatre, while programming 60 to 80 events a year. He also initiated commissioning projects and developed collaborations with national and international cultural institutions. The company has also announced a new director of artistic planning, **Edward Yim**, who played an integral role in multidisciplinary programming at the Los Angeles Philharmonic before going on to manage a diverse roster of composers, conductors and instrumentalists at IMG Artists North America. Pianist and vocal coach **Steven Blier**, who joins the company as casting advisor, is a faculty member at the Juilliard School and co-founder and artistic director of New York Festival of Song.

**Opera Cleveland** has appointed **Steven R. Borstein** as director of development. Most recently, he was a partner with Cedar Brook Financial Partners and currently serves on the executive committee of the United Way of Greater Cleveland. Prior, he served as CEO of Metro Chemical Environmental Products and as president of Seaway Food Services. Since first volunteering with various nonprofits in the 1980s, Borstein has been personally involved in raising several million dollars from private and public sources.

**Greg Wagland** has joined **Opera.ca** as membership and communications coordinator. Wagland recently received his Bachelor of Musical Arts from the University of Western Ontario (London, ON) where he developed his interest in both opera

performance and arts administration. His recent singing experiences have taken him across Canada from Edmonton, Alberta, to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

**Daniel Biaggi** has been named general director of **Palm Beach Opera**. For more than three years, Biaggi has collaborated with Bruno Aprea, artistic director and principal conductor, in casting and contracting the company's seasons. As interim managing director since last August, he has been overseeing all staff activities and organizational events, including the Palm Beach Opera Resident Artists Program and the annual Palm Beach Opera Vocal Competition. Previously, Biaggi was associate director at Guy Barzilay International Artist Management, and he has served on the faculties of Manhattan School of Music, Mannes College of Music and Sarah Lawrence College. A classically trained singer, Biaggi has performed operatic roles and recitals in America and Europe. He holds a Post-Graduate and Master's Degree in vocal performance from the Manhattan School of Music, a Bachelor of Music from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and a certificate of musicology from the University of Berne, Switzerland.

**Frank Dickerson** has been appointed as the new executive director of **Piedmont Opera**. Dickerson will assume the duties held by Bonnie Poindexter, who has been the director since 2007. Dickerson has worked throughout the country in upper level management and as an attorney. Dickerson came to Winston-Salem three years ago on a short-term assignment as the interim CEO of Arc One, LLC. He decided to retire

after completing the assignment in early 2006. Dickerson and his wife Susan, both long-time patrons of the arts, were impressed by the quantity and quality of arts that Winston-Salem offered and decided to make it their permanent home.

Following the death of **Townsend Opera Players** founder Erik Buck Townsend, his widow, **Erika Townsend**, business manager for the company since its founding in 1983, has retired from the organization. She was the business manager for the Modesto, CA troupe since its founding. With her departure, no one with the Townsend name remains at the company. Townsend was responsible for bookkeeping, marketing, public relations and general business matters; her duties will be parceled out among several staff members. She plans to continue teaching ballet at Modesto's Dance Academy, where she has worked more than 18 years, and to spend more time with her family.

**Meyer Sound** has hired **Chimène Stewart** as public relations manager. Stewart comes to the company with 15 years of experience in high-tech public relations. She previously worked as head of product public relations for SAP and Oracle, and spent several years at a leading Silicon Valley PR agency driving results for a variety of startup and enterprise technology companies. Through close collaboration with the company's global marketing team, she will help develop and execute integrated communications campaigns targeting current and new markets worldwide. 📍

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**CO-PRODUCTION HANDBOOK NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE**

OPERA America’s *Co-Production Handbook* is designed to help co-producers identify and consider the important details involved in co-production. Over the course of 2008, OPERA America’s Artistic Services Department and Technical/Production Committee reviewed, revised and expanded a draft of this document, created in 1997. Especially in light of the shifting economy, this document will serve as a valuable tool for those companies interested in conserving resources as they create new productions. The *Co-Production Handbook* is available to members on the OPERA America Web site. 





### THE MUSIC OF DARON HAGEN

On March 18, 2009, OPERA America's *Salon Series: Exploring American Voices* will feature the music of Daron Hagen, performed by baritone Robert Orth with the composer at the piano. The performance will coincide with the Naxos release of Hagen's opera *Shining Brow*.

The composer, whose other operas include *Bandanna*, *New York Stories*, *The Antient Concert* and *Vera of Las Vegas*, will introduce a new work, *Amelia*, as part of Seattle Opera's 2009-2010 season. The new opera, with libretto by Gardner McFall and story by Stephen Wadsworth, interweaves one woman's emotional journey, the American experience in Vietnam and elements of the Icarus myth to explore man's fascination with flight.

Robert Orth (in the foreground) as Frank Lloyd Wright and Barry Busse as Louis Sullivan in Chicago Opera Theater's revival of Hagen's *Shining Brow*. Photo by Dan Rest.

OPERA America's *Salon Series* features live performances of American opera and songs in the intimate setting of OPERA America's New York office. Presented in collaboration with OPERA America's publisher members, the *Salon Series* showcases the diverse voices of today's most distinguished composers. The March event is presented in collaboration with E.C. Schirmer. OPERA America will partner with G. Schirmer for the next event, which will take place on May 27.



New productions available for rent at [mnopera.org/rentals](http://mnopera.org/rentals)

# Brief Encounter



Set designs for Previn's *Brief Encounter* by Bunny Christie. Photos courtesy of Houston Grand Opera.

On May 1, 2009, **Houston Grand Opera** will present the world premiere of *Brief Encounter*, a new opera by André Previn and John Caird, based on David Lean's classic film adaptation of a play by Noël Coward. In this sensitive story of emotional infidelity, Laura Jesson (Elizabeth Futral) meets the handsome Alec Harvey (Nathan Gunn) in the refreshment room of a train station. Though both are married, they are drawn to each other, and — despite their better intentions — continue to meet. The cast also includes Kim Josephson (Fred Jesson), Rebekah Camm (Dolly Messiter), Meredith Arwady (Myrtle Bagot), Robert Orth (Albert Godby) and Alicia Gianni (Beryl). John Caird will direct; Patrick Summers will conduct; and designs are by Bunny Christie (set and costumes) and Paul Pyant (lighting). *Brief Encounter* is published by G. Schirmer, Inc. For more information, visit [www.schirmer.com](http://www.schirmer.com).



“The story moves quickly from public space to domestic space, interior to exterior. It’s almost a dreamscape,” says Christie. “Since the story is a flashback, a memory of Laura’s, strict realism is not essential. That gave us license to have things like trees, or a chintz armchair, inside the station. It is a surreal playground, but it is also a place that is ruled by the clock. Which train do you choose to get on? Which do you miss and then watch it chug away? The refreshment room is somewhere you have a moment before you have to make a decision.

“Lighting will be absolutely crucial. It is nice to be able to provide as much opportunity as possible with streetlights, lamps, windows. We will also be able to open up the set to bring in the outdoors and the night sky.

“The design is quite monochromatic. The movie is black and white, and there is something about how we imagine that era — shafts of light coming in, the shadows as people move about. The film has a strong atmosphere, and that’s what makes it lovely to work on. It starts in autumn and moves to winter. There are moments where it feels like a shudder moves through the score. There is a real sense of melancholy and longing. It is a story that everyone relates to because everyone has had the experience of an impossible love.”



# G. Schirmer Opera

## NEXT

Mark Adamo  
**THE GOSPEL OF MARY MAGDALENE**  
San Francisco Opera – June 2012

Daniel Catán **IL POSTINO**  
Los Angeles Opera – September 2010

John Corigliano  
**THE GHOSTS OF VERSAILLES**  
new orchestration  
Opera Theater of St. Louis – June 2009  
Wexford Opera Festival – October 2009  
Vancouver Opera – 2011

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies  
**KOMMILITONEN**  
Royal Academy Opera – February 2010  
Juilliard Opera – April 2010

Michael Nyman **HEAD OF STATE**  
Teatro Massimo Bellini – December 2009

André Previn **BRIEF ENCOUNTER**  
Houston Grand Opera – May 2009

Poul Ruders **DANCER IN THE DARK**  
Royal Danish Opera – 2010

## NEW

Mark Adamo **LYSISTRATA**  
Houston Grand Opera – March 2005

Richard Danielpour  
**MARGARET GARNER**  
Michigan Opera Theater – May 2005

Hans Werner Henze **L'UPUPA**  
Salzburg Festival – June 2003  
**PHAEDRA**  
Ensemble Modern – September 2007

Lee Hoiby **THE TEMPEST**  
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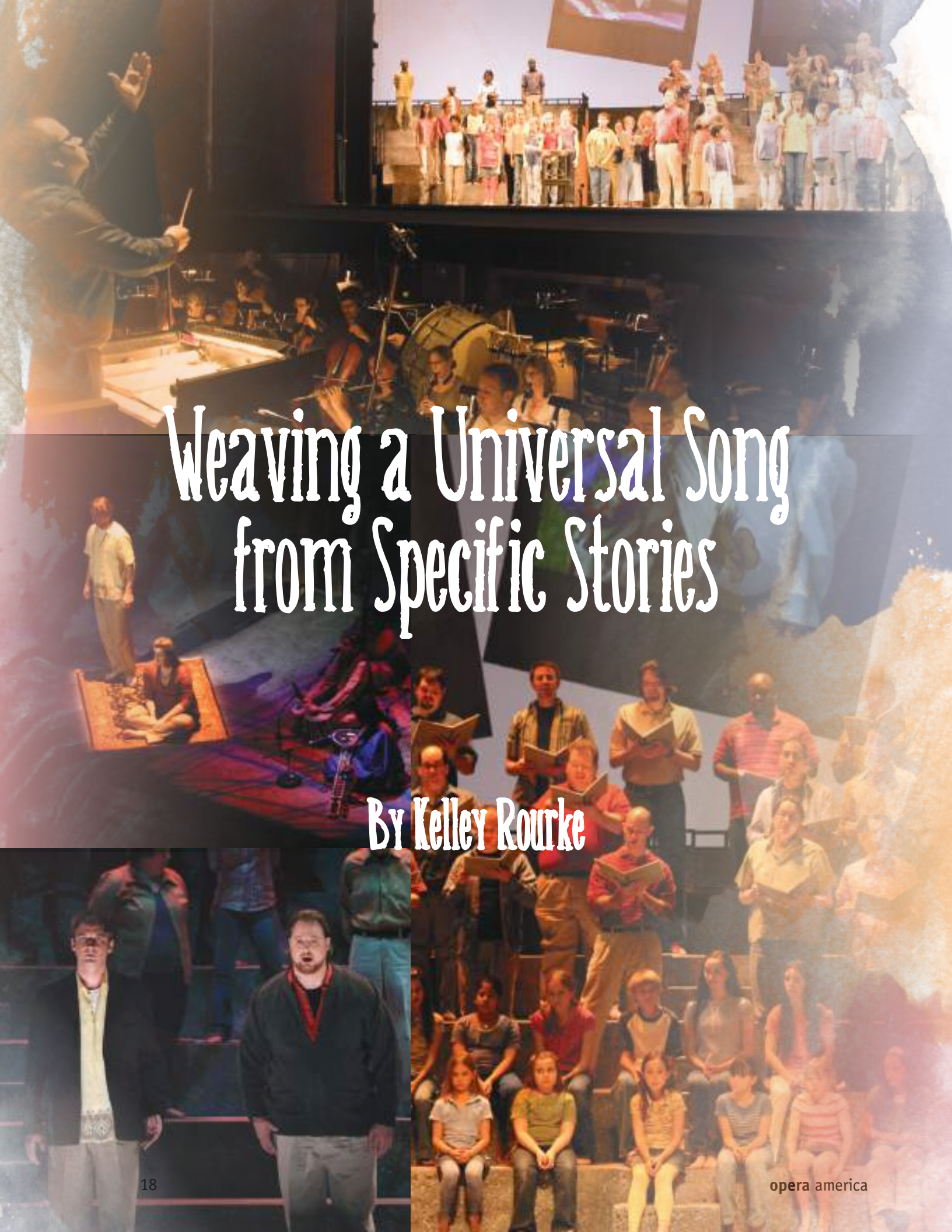
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# Weaving a Universal Song from Specific Stories

By Kelley Rourke



In November 2007, Houston Grand Opera presented the world premiere of *The Refuge*, a large-scale oratorio in which community performers joined the Houston Grand Opera chorus, orchestra, children's chorus and members of the HGO Studio in a musical portrait of Houston's rich cultural diversity. The project was not only a continuation of the company's commitment to creating new work for the stage; it marked the beginning of a new effort to establish Houston Grand Opera as a vital cultural resource for the people of Houston. HGOco is the name given to a diversified menu of community programs, ranging from teacher workshops to a high school voice studio. Within HGOco, Song of Houston is a series of collaborative artistic projects — beginning with *The Refuge* — designed to explore the stories of Houston and the people who live and work there.

Shirin Herman, who handles refugee services for the Houston Independent School District, began working with HGOco during the development process for *The Refuge*. "They were collecting refugee stories, and I told them about this family from the Congo." Herman accompanied Leah Lax, the librettist, on a visit to the family. "It was a very difficult conversation. Recounting that kind of horrendous story is depressing. Then we were leaving and I asked the kids what they wanted to be, and one said a singer, so I asked if they could sing for us." The performance was so impressive that the family was invited to be a part of the production.

*The Refuge* tells the stories of different ethnic communities in Houston. While cultural diversity is a subject on the minds of many arts organizations, HGOco Manager Sue Elliott is careful to point out that Song of Houston has an even broader agenda. "I think it is really important that we look at all of the different kinds of stories we can tell. For us to limit it to ethnic exploration is in itself a kind of tokenism." So, for example, HGOco plans to present a work in partnership with Emergency Services to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of September 11. "We want to artistically celebrate the wonderful work the people of Emergency Services do every day in Houston."

"No project happens without a lot of research and one-on-one contact," says Sandra Bernhard, director of HGOco. "We meet with people to learn what is happening. What is the story? Who are the important people? We are invested in hearing the story and then telling the story."

Elliott spends a much of her time speaking with a wide range of Houstonians, from representatives of underserved communities to academics. "I have to know a lot before I begin these conversations. We are asking people to share their personal stories. So if I am speaking to a member of the Taiwanese community, I would lose a lot of credibility if I didn't know anything about their political history and, in this instance, Chiang Kai-shek. I need to do my homework before I expect anyone to trust me."

This season, Song of Houston is exploring the development of the blues through several parallel projects. Graduate students in creative writing at University of Houston worked with senior citizens in Houston's Third Ward, a historic African-American community, to help the seniors write lyrics. The lyrics are being set by composers from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. HGOco also hired a writer and composer to interview community builders from the African-American community. The material gathered by this creative team will form the basis of musical portraits that will be performed in concert, along with the songs written by the composition students and seniors.

For the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht, HGOco will create songs and song cycles that talk about state-sponsored prejudice of all kinds, such as segregation and apartheid. "I like the idea of songs and song cycles, partially because they are more portable. We can take them into hundreds of venues around the city," says Elliott.

Performances outside the opera house are key feature of Song of Houston. Herman, who notes that there was some initial skepticism about the opera company's motivation for reaching out, says that the community performances helped demonstrate the company's "genuineness and sincerity. Before *The Refuge* was complete, there were performances at an African restaurant, in homes, in party halls. This led to a general feeling that they genuinely wanted to hear and then tell our stories, that is not just a commercial endeavor."

"Our investment in HGOco has almost nothing to do with generating future ticket income — though, naturally, we try to interest everyone we encounter in coming to our performances," says General Director and CEO Anthony Freud. "If we try to justify our investment in HGOco in that way, we will fail. There are more cost-efficient ways to generate new ticket buyers. This investment has to do with redefining why we exist. To be relevant to our multi-cultural city, we must do more than put on great performances in our opera house. We must take our company out of the opera house into the community. But we are not simply arriving in a Pakistani or a Vietnamese community, for example, saying we think you should like opera. We have to think about the way we can use our art form to build bridges. The essence of opera is the telling of stories through words and music. That is utterly universal."

HGOco staff have learned that it is important not to make assumptions as they plan projects. The company is currently developing a Mariachi piece, working with members of the local Mexican and Mexican-American community. As with other projects, they wanted to go beyond the opera house and present performances in venues familiar to those communities. "When we asked them where they went to see concerts, they all said, 'The Wortham Center, the Toyota Center,'" says Elliott. "I was working really hard to find alternate venues, but we feel



it will be appropriate to premiere this project in the Cullen Theater at the Wortham.”

Leonard Foglia will write the book, design and direct the project, working in collaboration José “Pepe” Martínez, music director of the famed Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. While the 113-year-old Mariachi band is firmly rooted in tradition, the tradition is an evolving one, according to Elliott. “When Pepe took over as music director, he introduced the idea of individual solos, like those in a jazz concert.” The piece will employ a traditional 13-piece Mariachi band, which will be integrated into the action onstage. “In Mexico, mariachi music accompanies every important event, from birth to courtship, from a wedding to a funeral. We don’t have the equivalent in the U.S., a kind of music that is part of your whole life.”

As HGOco began working with Foglia to develop the piece, they sought out stories from the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living in Houston. “We have three women in our costume shop from Guadalajara, and Lenny wanted to spend time with them. They talked about the difficulty of living in two worlds and not belonging to either.”

While Foglia will create the overall narrative structure, Martínez will write both music and lyrics. “It seems like the logical thing,” says Foglia. “I think the essential voice of the piece has to be Mexican. Mariachi music has to be sung in Spanish. That doesn’t mean there won’t be some English at

some point, but I wanted two-thirds — if not more — of actual voice of piece to be authentically Mexican. My job is to create a story that is specific to the Mexican-American experience, but also universal. That is hopefully what all drama does — by getting specific, you are universal. My family came over from Italy, so I also feel like it is my family’s story, in a way. The difference is that there are laws that keep their choices and movements limited. My parents may have had financial limitations keeping them from traveling, but there were no laws and walls in their way. Mexico is so close and so far away. You can drive right across the border, but it could be another planet as far as some people are concerned. I live part of the year in Mexico. I also live in New York, the land of immigrants. So these kinds of stories have been swirling around me.”

Even as Elliott and Bernhard work with Foglia and Martínez on the large-scale Mariachi project, they are dreaming up new models for exploring the rich stories of Houston’s people. Another project in development, *East + West*, will involve several small commissions — works of 50 minutes or less — that will be produced over a three-year period. “This will allow us to work with a number of composers and librettists who may not have written a full opera,” says Elliott. “It will allow us to cover a greater range of stories and give us greater flexibility when it comes to performing them.”

“Songs are where it all starts,” says Bernhard. “The idea of telling stories in song is the key element in what we do.”



Photo credits: Page 18: Patrick Summers conducts Houston Grand Opera’s (HGO) world premiere production of Theofanidis’s *The Refugee*. Photo by Janice Rubin. • HGO Studio artists Liam Bonner (standing) and Faith Sherman, with Chandrakantha Courtney (sitar) and David Courtney (tabla). Photo by Andrew Cloud. • Members of the HGO Chorus and Childrens Chorus. Photo by Andrew Cloud. • HGO Studio artists Liam Bonner and Beau Gibson. Photo by Andrew Cloud. Page 20: HGO’s world premiere production of Theofanidis’s *The Refugee*. Photo by Andrew Cloud. • Rebekah Camm. Photo by Janice Rubin.



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# Refreshing the Repertory

By Patrick J. Smith

The English opera director Nicholas Hytner said it best: “The problem for opera is that its conventions haven’t been refreshed by a constantly evolving repertory.” This situation, endemic and almost rusted into opera, had existed from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but had become acute in the United States by the end of the 1970s. It was a product of several factors, not least the immense pull of the standard repertory and its box-office stars, but it could also have been the result of what could be termed “The Wagner Curse” — that is, the controlling idea that an opera, once commissioned or set on a course for performance, would be created by composer and librettist and presented with only limited adjustments during the rehearsal period to the public. The prime example of this kind of creative work, other than that of Wagner himself, was the image of the composer Olivier Messaien arriving at the Palais Garnier opera house in Paris, entering the office of then-General Director Rolf Liebermann and plunking down 20 pounds of the full score of *Saint Francois d’Assise*. It had been commissioned; it was delivered. End of story.

The sad tale of Samuel Barber’s *Antony and Cleopatra* is analogous, for, after the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera House with that work, it took

many years for the composer to decide to rethink the opera so that it could be reassessed, in critic Peter G. Davis’s words, as “a noble effort full of many arresting moments” — certainly not the gist of the many opening night opinions.

By the end of the 1970s in the United States, however, the truth of Hytner’s statement had been proven beyond doubt. There were few if any new American operas being written, and almost no American operas being performed by leading — or other — American opera companies. The art form itself, as regards new work, was moribund. Impresarios led by Michigan Opera Theatre’s David DiChiera became alarmed, and he and others generated a wave of funding, underwritten by the Rockefeller Foundation and other groups, for the commissioning of new work from the field.

By 1986, a series of operas began to be written and performed, and OPERA America’s *Opera Fund* expanded and continued the program in the next decades. The result has been dramatic. In the years since 1986, over 250 works of all kinds had received funding from OPERA America, and that’s only the tip of the iceberg. The works that have been created and put on stage have ranged from grand operas with





double choruses to chamber operas, as well as music-theater works. The list of American composers, young and old, who have been attracted to writing opera continues to grow, and unlike Messiaen many of these composers have written and had produced more than one opera. Every major United States opera company has presented new work, as well as many smaller companies (in addition to music conservatories and schools around the United States). Recently, San Francisco Opera announced three new commissions for future years.

There are several points to be made about this astonishing growth. One — not so obvious — is that for opera to be viable as a contemporary artistic discipline there has to be a great number of new works premiered. In part this is because a very low percentage of new work can ever make it into even the fringes of the repertory, and also in part it is because only with constant exposure to new, rather than tried-and-true traditional, opera will audiences learn to accept new work not as something to be endured but as a formative part of the program of their company, and — what do you know! — an enjoyable experience.

What is often too little recognized is that, even in that heyday of rich operatic activity in Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nine out of 10 operas premiered disappeared in short order. Between the death of Donizetti in 1848 and the advent of Puccini and the verismo composers in the 1890s, if you take away Verdi almost nothing but *La Gioconda* remains.

Such a lively market for new opera meant that composers had the opportunity to hone their craft. Few composers mastered the unwieldy art form on their first — or even second — attempt. Puccini's *Le Villi* and *Edgar* may be all but unheard today, but these early efforts, in addition to providing diversion for opera-hungry audiences,

allowed the composer to refine his approach to writing for the lyric stage. (The same could be said for Verdi's *Oberto*, or Mozart's *La finta semplice*.) At the same time, producers and publishers practiced the essential collaborative skills needed to bring a work to the stage.

Just as it is vital to continue to provide the suppliers of opera with opportunities to rehearse their roles, it is also vital to wean today's opera audience from the idea of a boom (smash hit) or bust (fiasco) mentality based on a work's perceived "staying power." Many new operas were popular in their time, and afforded their audiences a good deal of pleasure, without lasting forever, and the same is true of other popular genres, such as the Broadway musical. An opera that has this kind of reception can be deemed a success no matter what its long-term history.

This definition raises another point. As more and more American operas were produced by American opera companies, they typically disappeared after the publicity-generating "world premiere," which attracted audiences, critics, and newspaper, television and

magazine commentary. Therefore, as new works initiatives developed over the years, significant efforts were made to include funding for second and third productions of these works. Composers were likewise encouraged to rescore their operas for smaller forces, so that they could be performed in local venues not the size of major opera houses.

The current opera scene in the United States, therefore, displays a variety of ways of thinking about new and contemporary work, which not only reflect how opera companies view their own continuing existences but also how they are attempting to bring their audiences into fruitful contact with new opera. Depending on the company itself, the answers sought are different in orientation and in result, and thus point up the ways in which a company can serve new and contemporary work without waiting for the 20-pound score to hit the desk of the general director. Let us consider several of these differing approaches.

The Minnesota Opera has one of the most far-ranging plans, which centers on mainstage activity. Titled "Minnesota OperaWorks," it is budgeted at 5.5 million dollars, covers





seven years of performances, and consists of a series of works, presented one a season, including not only commissions but important revivals. In this way the repertory is both renewed and refreshed.

Minnesota General Director Kevin Smith says: "The success of our commission of Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie to write *The Grapes of Wrath* led us to thinking of how we could build on that success by expanding our mission as an opera company — an opera company that has had a long history of doing new work."

He and his associates felt that the company had a strong enough infrastructure to be able to handle a multi-year effort, which would in turn generate a vitality for the rest of the annual repertory, and even lead to digital and electronic recordings, which would take the events far beyond the opera house. The Mellon Foundation became a major donor to the project, which begins this season with the American premiere of Jonathan Dove

and Alasdair Middleton's version of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (seen originally at England's Opera North). The 2009–2010 season includes a revival of Minnesota composer Dominick Argento's *Casanova's Homecoming* — this being the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its first performance, which opened in the first season of Minnesota's Ordway Center.

Three commissions follow in the subsequent seasons, from composers Gordon, Kevin Puts and Jack Perla, and thereafter two revivals, one of Bernard Herrmann's neglected *Wuthering Heights*. Puts's enthusiasm for the venture is expressed in his arresting statement: "My mission in composing is to keep my audience absolutely riveted with wonderment and compelled to keep listening, and I will use whatever means necessary to do this." Depending on the success of the seven-year venture, Smith hopes to be able to expand it, since he feels that the mix of new work and targeted revivals is exactly in line with the company's mission.

Opera Theatre of Saint Louis likewise has had an excellent record for commissions and performances of new work, and has in addition taken the lead in reviving important older American operas, often in editions that allow for revival by smaller companies. For its 22<sup>nd</sup> world premiere production, Opera Theatre is working with a New York organization, the American Lyric Theater, in developing *The Golden Ticket*, a piece written by the American composer Peter Ash and the British librettist Donald Sturrock, based on the Roald Dahl children's book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

The American Lyric Theater (ALT), founded in 2005 by Lawrence Edelson, exists "to build a new body of operatic repertoire for new audiences by nurturing composers and librettists and developing sustainable artistic collaborations." Its entire operations are structured to accomplish these goals, so that, in Edelson's words, "We shift the developmental risk away from the opera companies" by undertaking the important but time-



consuming and secondary tasks of acquiring intellectual property rights, paying commission fees, holding developmental workshops and seeking appropriate potential producing partners.

“You have to realize,” states Opera Theatre’s General Director Timothy O’Leary, “that we did not initiate this commission. The commission is that of ALT, who then sought a company to produce the opera.” ALT is continuing to develop the piece, working together with Opera Theatre to find other producers, and producing workshops in New York City as the opera progresses. “It’s a new model for developing opera,” says O’Leary.

Edelson, for his part, emphasizes the mentoring aspect of his organization, which is involved with several such possible projects. ALT also works extensively with young composers and librettists wishing to create opera in workshops of opera scenes mentored by established composers and librettists. In this way, Edelson feels, a valuable layer of expertise can underpin the always-difficult task of bringing new work to the stage in an effective way, and in so doing can relieve some of the burden on opera companies wishing to develop new operas for their audiences.

Houston Grand Opera, of course, is a granddaddy of new opera genesis, under its long-time General Director David Gockley and continuing under Anthony Freud. It produced, in the early years of what could



be termed the “New American opera boom,” one of the strongest such works, John Adams’s *Nixon in China*. Although the company is of course continuing its mainstage commissioning, it has recently been concentrating on an entirely new direction of operatic — one might say musical theatrical — exploration. As Sandra Bernhard, the person in charge of the initiative, puts it, “We are exploding the walls of the Wortham Theater and taking opera to the community.”

In a melting-pot environment such as Houston the idea of focusing on the diverse backgrounds of many peoples has immense impact, and can produce a wealth of stories, music and dramatic punch. This in turn can serve to energize the mainstage company itself, both as a vital adjunct and as a dynamic force in its own right.

What is evident in looking at the continuing development of the idea of doing new work is that the old ideas, which continue to exist but in reduced form, have been refreshed and renewed by a variety of newer approaches to skinning the operatic cat. All of these approaches, additionally, can lead not only to more new work being performed by more companies, but, because of that, more audiences learning to accept new work not as a duty but as a pleasure. With the range of music and styles represented by today’s many gifted composers, there is no question but that more operas worthy of revival will be written and presented, and that opera will be, in Hytner’s words, “refreshed by an evolving repertory.”

Patrick J. Smith is retired. He was director of the Opera/Musical Theater Program at the National Endowment for the Arts (1985-1989) and editor of *Opera News* (1989-2000). He is the author of a history of the opera libretto, *The Tenth Muse*.

Photo credits: Page 22: Lauren Flanigan in New York City Opera’s concert performance of Barber’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. Photo by Carol Rosegg. • Baritone Christopher Burchett, who will be singing the role of Willy Wonka in the upcoming workshop of *The Golden Ticket*. Photo courtesy of American Lyric Theater. Page 23: Julian Patrick as Casanova as Susanne Marsee as Bellino/Teresa in The Minnesota Opera’s 1985 production of Argento’s *Casanova’s Homecoming*. Photo courtesy of The Minnesota Opera. Page 24: Adriana Zabala as Pinocchio in The Minnesota Opera’s production of Dove’s *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Photo by Michal Daniel. Page 25: Frederica von Stade as Madeline Mitchell in Houston Grand Opera’s world premiere production of Heggie’s *Last Acts (Three Decembers)*. Photo by Brett Coomer.

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# CREATIVITY AMID THE CRASH



BY ADAM GUSTAFSON

**A**tough economy can inspire both individuals and organizations to take a back to basics stance. But during the Great Depression, opera companies did anything but; they produced opera in new venues (ranging from a skyscraper to a zoo), expanded their reach with the help of technology, commissioned operas and introduced new stars to the stage.

The 1930s may not offer an exact parallel to our current situation, either in terms of the economy at large or in terms of the American cultural landscape; at that time, only a handful of professional opera companies were in operation. However, for those companies, the Great Depression was a time of great creativity despite the economic turmoil.

### Heading for a Crash

The years leading up to 1929 showed tremendous promise for opera in the U.S. On November 4, 1929, the 42-story Civic Opera House in Chicago opened as the crowning jewel in Samuel Insull's attack on what he considered to be the privileged nature of America's operagoing public. The building was more than an architectural feat; it was the culmination of a new set of fundraising tactics that are still in use today. Rather than relying on large donations from the few wealthy Chicagoans with whom he was uncomfortable, Insull garnered financial support for the building by selling a large number of small shares in the building to anyone who could afford it. Upon seeing the

space, Edward C. Moore wrote of the building, "In reality, they have written an enormous civic poem, conceived, developed, made manifest in terms of beauty and imagination, going to the mental, emotional, spiritual well-being of their own generation and generations to come. No greater work of art was ever imagined, and they were the artists." *The New York Times* reported, "Its advertising and publicity have been correctly described as an effort to 'take the high hat out of grand opera.' It has 3,200 guarantors, of whom 80 percent pay \$100 a year or less." The Chicago Civic Opera would close its doors just three years later, but Insull's innovative fundraising tactics and his ability to envision opera as something for the community at-large are concepts that form a central part of the identity of North American opera.

Other communities began to see the importance of investing in a venue for opera. Beginning in 1929, the Chautauqua Institution saw a building boom of its own, albeit on a much smaller scale than Chicago. On July 15, opening ceremonies for Norton Memorial Hall, built to provide a regular venue for opera, took place. Chautauqua Opera Association has since become the oldest company in the country to continuously produce a summer season. (The Metropolitan Opera, Cincinnati Opera and San Francisco Opera were formed prior to this time.) Like Chicago, Chautauqua took its own strides toward producing opera for an American audience that was increasingly seeing itself as just that: American. As part of the company's mission, Chautauqua sought to produce operas using quality English translations, and it positioned





itself as an institution where talented young American singers could gain valuable experience.

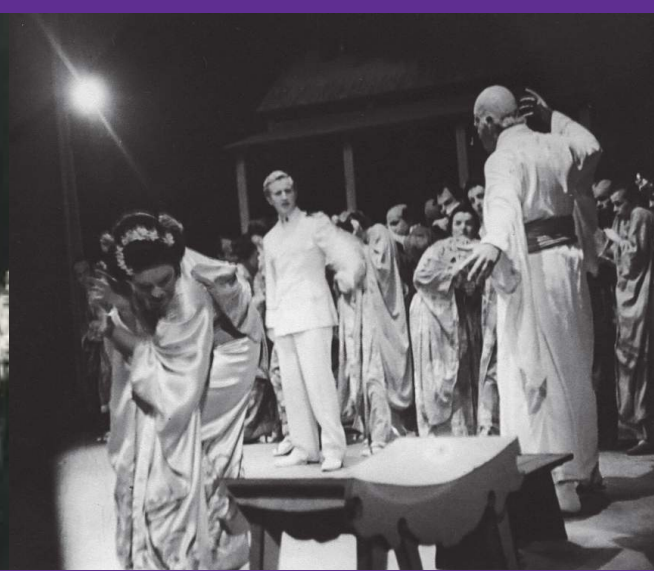
On the west coast, San Francisco Opera was also making gains just before the crash. The company began performing in the city's Civic Auditorium in 1923. By August of 1929, more aggressive efforts to move forward on the building plans for the War Memorial Opera House had begun and would be completed in 1932.

### **In the Midst of a Depression**

The Metropolitan Opera began its 1929-1930 season on Monday, October 28, the eve of Black Tuesday. The season opened amidst excitement that the Met might be moving to a new home, a move that Otto Kahn had been pursuing for several years. As in Chicago, Kahn wanted to ensure a space where opera could be enjoyed by both the average operagoer and by the ever-powerful boxholders. The headline of *The New York Times* 1929-1930 Met season preview read, "Metropolitan Season of 1929-1930 Possibly Last in Present Theatre," lending weight to the idea that a move from its theater at Broadway and 39<sup>th</sup> Street was imminent. The reality, however, was that several prominent board members and boxholders had ended Kahn's mission in 1928 by challenging his chosen location for the new opera house (Ninth Avenue, between 56<sup>th</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup> streets). Kahn would later make good on his promise to retire from the Met if it remained in the old opera house. He resigned as chairman of the Metropolitan Opera Company board just before the 1931-1932 season.

By many accounts, the Met had reached a low point in the early 1930s both financially and artistically — a dramatic pause before renewal. The turnaround for the Met took three forms. First, the organization began to recognize that the support of a few wealthy boxholders would not be enough to support the company. In 1935, the Metropolitan Opera Guild was founded in an attempt to create a broader subscription base among the general public. Second, new technologies were adopted; on Christmas of 1931, the first NBC broadcast of a Metropolitan performance aired with commentary by Milton Cross. Third, as one generation of singers began to fade, the next generation of opera stars needed to be discovered. Most notable was Lily Pons's debut in the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* on January 3, 1931. Within each of these moves, we see some of the same strategies employed by companies today, a combination of broad public support, adventurous use of technology and the discovery and promotion of talented artists.

Other companies experimented with new ways to draw crowds. Cincinnati Opera, for example, sought to create works that would have local appeal. Cincinnati Opera maintained a unique position within its community during the 1930s. The company was founded as a means of added entertainment for patrons of the city's zoo. Known as the Zoo Opera, the company produced a 10-week season, eight weeks of grand opera and two weeks of light opera. On any given night, visitors to the pavilion could witness the sounds of opera alongside the sounds of the zoo's inhabitants. At the zoo, opera was one part of a diverse



schedule of recitals, ballets and orchestral concerts. Beyond the diversity of its offerings, Cincinnati also invested in creating works that appealed to the local populace during the 1930s. In 1931, the "Zoo Opera Presentation," an evening of performances by the ballet, the orchestra and the opera singers, established itself as a successful attraction. Part of its appeal was due to presentations that dealt with local topics, such as "Baby in der Bar," the story of a baby who runs amok in Cincinnati; "Pas de Susie," which featured a dancer dressed as Susie, the zoo's famous gorilla; and "A Night on the Rhine," an extravaganza featuring the ballet and singers from the opera company. In 1929, the company produced its second world premiere, *Enter Pauline*, an operetta about the opera scene in Cincinnati. Fittingly, one of the most popular songs from the work was "That's when the Lion Roared."

### The Crash Takes its Toll

In spite of the innovative programming choices, opera companies struggled to navigate their way through the Great Depression. Several, including Cincinnati and the Metropolitan, had to restructure in order to stay afloat. In 1932, the Metropolitan Opera Company became the Metropolitan Opera Association, a move that transplanted the company into the nonprofit sector. Cincinnati's change came in 1934 with the founding of the Cincinnati Civic Opera Association, a body that was initially opposed to maintaining the resources to produce opera locally. Things weren't going much better for Chautauqua. By the end of the 1933 season, the company had a deficit of nearly three-quarters of a million dollars.

There were bright spots, however. New companies sprang up in Wisconsin and Colorado. Milwaukee's Italian Opera Chorus, a group dedicated to performing scenes and arias from Italian operas, later became Florentine Opera. (The name change occurred just after the United States declared war on Italy in 1942.) In Central City, the intimate opera house presented a diverse schedule, producing both opera and straight theater.

San Francisco Opera came into its own during the 1930s. It continually sought bigger projects, culminating in a 1935 production of the *Ring* cycle. Beyond Wagner, the company's season expanded to an impressive 14 productions in 1937.

### Laying the Foundation

The efforts of a handful of intrepid companies, even through the dark days of the Great Depression, laid the cornerstone for the massive growth of the field following World War II. At every level, from the smaller summer festivals such as Chautauqua that insisted upon being a proving ground for budding American singers to the larger companies that invested in new repertoire, the seeds of a distinct American operatic culture were being planted. All told, professional company members premiered eight productions by American composers and librettists, including Edna St. Vincent Millay, the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry; and Howard Hanson and Richard L. Stokes, whose opera *Merry Mount* was perhaps the most well-received American work in the 1930s. The 1933-1934 season marked the first time in the history of





the Met that an American opera, *Peter Ibbetson* by Deems Taylor and Constance Collier, officially began a season. While none of these operas remains in the active repertory, their commission signaled opera stakeholders' adventurous spirit, even in a time when the future was uncertain.


### Legacy Defined

By 1932, the unemployment rate in the U.S. had reached almost 30 percent, and nearly half of the nation's 25,000 banks would be closed just one year later in 1933. To put this into perspective, the current outlook for unemployment in 2010 is slightly over 10 percent, a number that is still lower than the 15 percent unemployment that existed in 1939 as the U.S. began to climb out of the depression.


The opera industry is very different today than it was during the Great Depression. In most ways, North American opera is better equipped as a field because of the experience of those six companies that struggled to root themselves to the cultural landscape in the 1930s. Today, the existence of a variety of media allows for any number of ways to produce opera and compete for audience members, and the choices for participation with opera are seemingly limitless for the potential audience member. Learning from the professional company members that survived the Great Depression, we have gained a great deal of insight concerning times of financial uncertainty. Across all companies, four commonalities saw opera through the Great Depression: creativity, adaptability, forward thinking and, most importantly, a passion for maintaining opera's presence in North America. 📖

Photo credits: Page 27: Norton Hall Frontal View. 1929-1946. Photo by Harold Wagner and courtesy of the Chautauqua Opera Archives. • *Peter Ibbetson*. Photo by Wide World Studio and courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera Archives. • Tibbett: Carlo Edwards. Photo courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera Archives. • Cincinnati Opera's 1930 production of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Photo courtesy of Cincinnati Opera. Page 28: *King's Henchman*. Photo by The New York Times Studio and courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera Archives. • Chautauqua Opera's 1932 production of Flotow's *Martha*. Photo courtesy of the Chautauqua Opera Archives. • Cincinnati Opera's 1931 Program Book, courtesy of Cincinnati Opera. Page 29: *Merry Mount*. Photo by Wide World Studio and courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera Archives. • 1939 opera performance. Photo courtesy of the Chautauqua Opera Archives. Page 30: The Metropolitan Opera's production of Damrosch's *Man Without a Country*. Photo by The New York Times Studio and courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera Archives. • 1939 opera performance. Photo courtesy of the Chautauqua Opera Archives.

## HITTING THE HIGH NOTES



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# LONE STAR OPERA



Fort Worth Opera's production of Eötvös's *Angels in America*. Photo by Ellen Appel.

BY KELLEY ROURKE



# A

certain tall-hatted swagger is often associated with residents of the Lone Star State — and why not? Texans have much to be proud of. Their home state is one of the top producers of oil, beef and cotton, as well as a leading player in the space and technology industries. Texas is also home to eight professional company members of OPERA America — only New York and California have more.

But don't conflate pride with prickliness. While there is no shortage of swag bearing the confrontational slogan — "Don't Mess with Texas" — created for a 1986 anti-litter campaign, "Texas" is derived from a Native American word meaning "Hello, friend." The state began welcoming assorted traveling opera troupes in the 1860s; the Metropolitan Opera first visited in 1901, bringing performances of *Lohengrin* to Houston and San Antonio, followed by 1905 performances of *Parsifal* in Dallas and Houston. The Met went on to present just over 200 performances across the state, 176 of which were in Dallas. In the 1970s and 1980s, **Houston Grand Opera's** Texas Opera Theatre, a national touring company, logged performances in more than 80 Texas cities, from Abilene to Waco.

Today's Texan companies are a diverse lot, with annual budgets ranging from just under half a million dollars to \$24 million. Their total attendance for the 2006-2007 season was more than 185,000. In addition to the professional companies featured in this article, the thriving opera ecology in Texas also includes a handful of associate producing members: The Living Opera (Garland), Opera Vista (Houston) and Sugar Land Opera; opera programs at Baylor University (Waco), Houston Baptist University, Rice University (Houston), Southern Methodist University (Dallas), Southwestern University (Georgetown), Texas Christian University (Fort Worth), Texas State University (San Marcos) and University of Houston; and the firms of Schuler Shook and Tessitura Network, both with offices in Dallas.



Olga Perez as Carmen, Mela Dailey as Frasquita, Paul Bower as El Dancaïro and Michael-Paul Krubitzer as El Remendado in Amarillo Opera's production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Photo by Carroll M. Forrester.

Just as each Texan city has its own unique character, so does each opera company. When Mila Gibson launched **Amarillo Opera** just over 20 years ago, people told her she wouldn't be able to find five people interested in attending. "The local PBS station was

getting started at about the same time we did, so people didn't even have the experience of opera on TV," she says. "I booked Houston Grand Opera's touring company in 1982, and we started doing some lectures and showing videos. After six years of that, Amarillo Opera started performing in a 247-seat house at a community college."

When that venue closed for remodeling, the company moved to the 2,400-seat Civic Center, which was less than ideal. Gibson, along with other arts leaders, began to agitate for the creation of a new performing arts center. "The mother of a long-time friend came to an opera at our old venue, and there was a hockey game going on next door. We had to mic the singers to be heard. She said, 'What is going on?' I said, 'That's why I haven't shut up all these years.' She stepped up and initiated a private fund drive to build the building."

The Globe-News Center, which houses a 1,250-seat auditorium with splendid acoustics, opened in 2006. The building

has become a focal point for the city and has served as a catalyst for downtown development, according to Gibson. "The Texas Panhandle, which includes Amarillo, is such a different animal than any other part of the state. It's very rural. It's closer to state capitols in five other states than to Austin. Because it is so remote, there is a tremendous sense of community, a sense of pride and a willingness to support."

Gibson will retire at the end of this season. "Founders can stay too long. It is the Amarillo Opera, not the Mila Gibson Opera. I wanted to leave at a good time. We have a strong board. We have a pretty full staff, and I've been training them to do some of the things I used to do." Gibson is not only leaving the company, she is moving away from Amarillo. "I think it is the most fair thing for the company and the next director. It can be hard for people in the community to let go of leaders, whether of the symphony or the ballet, or even the successful football coach or preacher. I think it's better if the founder just gets out of town."





Sandra Piques Eddy as Cinderella and Michele Angelini as Don Ramiro in Austin Lyric Opera's production of Rossini's *Cinderella*. Photo by Mark Matson.

All across the country, opera companies are revisiting season plans, looking for works they hope will draw crowds to the box office. In many cases, that means "top 10" repertoire — but not at **Austin Lyric Opera**. "Every time we do the old chestnuts, they sell less," says General Director Kevin Patterson, who just announced a three-opera season that includes two company premieres: Chabrier's *L'Etoile* and Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*. "The motto here is 'Keep Austin Weird.' People are moving here from New York, Boston, Washington and Seattle to be part of the high-tech and biotech industry. Forty-six percent of the population is between the ages of 18-44 — and that's not counting the students of University of Texas at Austin. They are not your typical conservative lot."

While Austin is a vibrant city, Patterson says the company still faces significant fundraising challenges. "Younger people are not conditioned to be philanthropic. Even though there is a concentration of youth and wealth, that doesn't translate into people giving significant amounts of money," says Patterson. "We are a mid-sized city, but we are 72<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in philanthropy. We don't have big foundations or corporations. With

the exception of IBM, we have no Fortune 500 companies."

Austin Lyric Opera works hard to be seen as a vital and vibrant part of the community. The company welcomes 12,000 students each week at The Armstrong Community Music Center, which is part of the opera company. "The philosophy is that music education should be open to all, regardless of race, sex, belief or ability to pay. We offer all music, not just opera. There are group classes for children as young as six weeks. Our oldest student is 84 years old. There are private and group lessons, a pretty intensive curriculum, and we integrate as much opera as we can. We rehearse in the same building, so there is opportunity for our artists to interact with the students at the school. We are the community's opera company."



Stephen Costello as Essex and Hasmik Papian as Queen Elizabeth I in The Dallas Opera's production of Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*. Photo by Karen Almond.

**The Dallas Opera**, which celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> season last year, will move into the new Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House in fall 2009. "The new house is extraordinary," says Director of Artistic Administration Jonathan Pell. "It is going to change everything about the company. In the Music Hall, where

we have performed for over 50 years, we have 3,420 seats. The new house has 2,200. To put it into perspective, the back wall of the new theater is the same distance from the stage as the front of the balcony in Music Hall. The pit is also substantially larger. It can accommodate 110 players, and it is all open, as opposed to being under the stage, so the sound will be cleaner, clearer and crisper."

The company will also be able to perform in rotating repertory for the first time. Pell expects the new schedule to attract more people from out of town. Initially, the company will stage two productions at one time, but as the company gains experience with a repertory production format, there is the potential to do more.

The 2009-2010 will see the world premiere of *Moby-Dick*, a new opera by Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer. "We felt it was very important to celebrate the new house with a new opera commissioned for the occasion," says Pell. However, *Moby-Dick* will not be the first production to grace the stage of the Winspear Opera House: "We wanted to get in and become familiar with the new facility, so we are opening with *Otello*. If technical problems arise with a standard piece, we will be able to solve them more readily."

Area audiences will get a preview of Heggie's style this summer, when nearby Fort Worth Opera stages *Dead Man Walking*. Fort Worth Opera recently moved to a summer festival format, which Pell calls "a brilliant idea." The schedules of the two companies now complement each other. "By removing the direct competition, we're able to have a Metroplex opera company that is operating year-round. It is beneficial to both companies. We have collaborated on marketing, creating a kind of atmosphere where the public is made more aware of options in the area."



El Paso Opera's 2008 production of Puccini's *Suor Angelica*. Photo by Marcela Cowen.

Although El Paso Opera has seen significant drops in donations and ticket sales of late, the company has been more successful than most local organizations in attracting members of the large Hispanic community. According to General Director William Dickinson, the audience is remarkably young and diverse, especially compared to audiences at other local performing arts organizations. "The opera is only 15 years old, making it the newest thing in town," he says. "It's a great date night."

That said, the company faces challenges, exacerbated by the dismal economy. "We are a poor border community, and there is no culture of giving to the arts." The company's proximity to Juárez, Mexico is a mixed blessing. According to Dickinson, the opera company there attracts many local residents. "El Paso goes over the river to play. They sell out every performance. The idea of opera is just not as daunting to people who live here." At the same time, because opera across the border is subsidized by the government, the tickets are considerably less expensive.

El Paso Opera makes a concerted effort to connect with Spanish speakers. In addition to advertising in the local Spanish newspaper and television

station, the company prints materials such as postcards with both languages. It has expanded outreach programs into Juárez and Las Cruces, N.M. In fall 2008, the company celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a "quinceañera" gala, borrowing the title from a traditional Hispanic celebration of a young woman's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday.



Fort Worth Opera's production of Eötvös's *Angels in America*. Photo by Ellen Appel.

Three years ago, Fort Worth Opera changed to a festival format, and they've never looked back. "Fort Worth loves to gather," says General Director Darren Keith Woods. "There is a joke that if you put a glass of wine and a cracker on the sidewalk in a rainstorm and call it a festival, people will show up. Locally, the idea of the festival has allowed us to create partnerships with groups we've never worked with before."

The festival concept represents more than a compacted schedule for the three mainstage operas. The festival season includes events like seminars and young artists recitals. Inspired by the legendary hospitality of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Woods also created an opportunity for audience and artists to mingle following each performance. "We don't have a tent, but we have a mezzanine. During the last act we set up

a cash bar. We have volunteers prepare dinner for the artists to eat in their dressing rooms. They then come out to join the crowd, and people stay until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning."

Fort Worth Opera has made new works a priority, commissioning a new opera by Thomas Pasatieri, *Frau Margot*, for the first festival season. "New works are a little bit of a harder sell, so you always have to explain what you're doing and why," says Woods. "We did a lot of preparation before *Angels in America*. We told people that if you think it isn't for you, it probably isn't. We think it is important and exceptional, but it is not for everybody. You are going to have to meet it more than halfway. Afterwards, we heard from people who said, 'We didn't like it, but we were never so prepared for the experience we were going to have.' We've always been very up-front with our audience."



Brian Carter as Macbeth and Courtney Ames as Lady Macbeth in Opera in the Heights' production of Verdi's *Macbeth*. Photo by Gwen Turner Juarez.

Hurricane Ike struck less than two weeks before *Opera in the Heights* was to open its 13<sup>th</sup> season with a production of *Madama Butterfly*. "It was tough, but we had a dedicated group of singers who showed up the day after the storm to rehearse," says Chairman



and Managing Director William Haase. Because there was no power, the artists rehearsed during the day, with no air-conditioning. Meanwhile, board members found generators and pumped out the basement. The company's regular performance venue was closed temporarily for repair, but artists, staff and board were determined that the show would go on. "We played in five venues for the first two months of our season. The performances and reviews were great, and by closing night we were operating at 101% of our capacity."

As one of several opera providers in Houston's lively arts scene, Opera in the Heights has been cognizant of the need to establish its own identity. "The thing that makes us unique is that we perform in a very intimate space," says Haase, referring to the 316-seat Lambert Hall. "You see opera in a different way here. Don Giovanni can communicate more emotion with a raised eyebrow in our hall than he can with two raised arms in a larger venue."

The company exists, in part, to give emerging singers an opportunity to appear in major roles. The company receives about 500 audition requests each season. Some 200 singers are heard in live auditions in Houston and New York City; from those auditions, about 40 singers are selected. Many of these singers go on to perform in major companies across the United States.

Haase, who also serves on the board of the Houston Grand Opera Guild, is happy to be in a city with a vibrant opera ecology. "There is a lot of opera going on," he says, noting that in late January opera fans had their choice of *Chorus!* and Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Houston Grand Opera);

Verdi's *Macbeth* (Opera in the Heights); Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas* and Mozart's *Lucio Silla* (University of Houston); a scenes program at Rice University; and performances of Dvorák's *Little Mermaid* presented as part of Houston Grand Opera's "Opera to Go" program. "Houston is a town that does a lot of opera and does it well. The companies are all finding their own place."



Audrey Babcock as Carmen and Franco Pomponi as Escamillo in San Antonio Opera's production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Photo courtesy of San Antonio Opera.

Mark A. Richter founded **San Antonio Opera** in 1996. "I jumped right in with fully-staged operas," said Richter. "The company started with \$6,000 and a performance of *The Impresario* in a 400-seat playhouse. In those days, we performed on the backdrop of whatever show had just closed at the playhouse — we did *The Impresario* on the set for *The Wizard of Oz*. I said to audience members, 'If you come back, I promise you will see one noticeable improvement from one production to the next.'"

The opera company, now one of the largest performing arts organizations in the city, produces three full productions each season. This season also includes a concert performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* featuring Andrea Bocelli. Richter has found that such events can help raise significant funds for the company, which is especially important given the expected decrease in foundation and corporate income. Both performances sold out, with more than 10,000 attending. According to Richter, the \$500 tickets were the first to go. "People won't give a donation of that size, but we can always attract them with this kind of event."

The company is working hard to make connections with the significant local Hispanic population. "Of our 31 trustees, 12 are Hispanic. We allot much of our print marketing to Hispanic press, and we've had supertitles in Spanish for two years. Eventually, we would like to add zarzuelas to our schedule."

Although Richter has plans to keep expanding the company, perhaps introducing a professional ballet corps, he is adopting a "wait and see" attitude. "Even though our unemployment rate is below the national, there is no company that is recession-proof," he says. "But I'm not afraid. I think this will strengthen us. It will bring together board and staff and force us to be more creative. We need to push the envelope and collaborate more with the opera companies across this great state. Texas has a very particular mentality, a strong sense of worth and value, of who we are. It is a place like nowhere else on earth." 🇺🇸



# MAKING OPERA MATTER

OPERA CONFERENCE 2009 • HOUSTON, APRIL 29 - MAY 2, 2009



When the staff at OPERA America began planning for *Opera Conference 2009*, companies were wrapping up a banner season that saw the world premiere of 14 new mainstage operas, the establishment of the *NEA Opera Honors* and the large-scale success of a number of technological and community engagement initiatives that had been in the works for several years. Fast forward to today and the entire landscape of the field has changed.

OPERA America has been swift to provide as much assistance as possible. In the fall, a series of conference calls began with general directors from across the U.S. and Canada in order to assess the state of the field and provide a forum for sharing strategies for navigating through these uncertain times.

*Opera Conference 2009: Making Opera Matter* presents an invaluable opportunity to extend the conversation begun in these conference calls. Ensuring opera's continued strength and growth is a task that will require the involvement of the entire North American opera community, and the experience and advice of participants across every network will strengthen what promises to be a stimulating weekend full of networking and learning opportunities.



The conference will begin with a series of seminars devoted to providing expert advice for navigating through uncertain economic times. In the **Governance** seminar, John McCann, principal of Partners in Performance, will lead trustees and senior staff in a workshop devoted to improving the performance of boards and trustees. The two-part **Government Affairs** seminar will cover important information about various funding opportunities, both state and federal, and it will outline current advocacy initiatives, including several issues, such as tax-exempt status, that have a direct impact upon the field. Other seminars will include: the **Leadership Advance**, a conference-long forum for up-and-coming leaders in the field; **Donor Cultivation and Stewardship**, a seminar considering how strategies might be adjusted in the face of an uncertain economy; and the **Electronic Media Forum**, which will begin with a discussion of marketing issues, including defining value, outcomes and measurements, and social networking, followed by information about rights and clearances necessary to forge ahead with new media projects.



The conference will officially kick off with a Keynote Address by **Alex Ross**, acclaimed author and music critic for *The New Yorker*. From there, attendees will be able to select from a number of open and roundtable sessions on a variety of topics pertinent to the state of North American opera today. Open session topics will include:

**How Corporations and Foundations Make Decisions in a Down Economy, Rethinking Your Company's Investment Strategy, Attracting and Retaining Talented Employees Without Breaking the Bank, Maintaining High Artistic Quality While Controlling Budget, (Re)Defining Education at Your Company** and many more.

A variety of opera-specific events, performances, workshops and speakers will be offered throughout the week. Highlights will include Houston Grand Opera's world premiere of *Brief Encounter* by André Previn and John Caird; a newly-formatted, cabaret-style *New Works Sampler*, and the addition of **OPERA America Lounge**, an attendees-only cash bar that will provide the perfect atmosphere for discussion and networking at the end of each day of the conference.

On Saturday, *Opera Conference 2009* will be on location at the Dow School with HGOco, Houston Grand Opera's initiative to reposition the company as a resource for the greater Houston community. Through performances, a panel discussion and roundtable sessions featuring prominent collaborators and community leaders, this general session will offer a new model for community engagement. Forget what you're thinking; it's not outreach.

**Because of the state of the economy, OPERA America is freezing the cost of registration at 2008 pricing and offering savings of between 25-50% for companies that register multiple attendees.**

More information, including session descriptions and speakers, is available online now.  
**Register today at [www.operaamerica.org/conference](http://www.operaamerica.org/conference)!**



Photo credits: Page 38: Houston Grand Opera's production of *Chorus!* Photo by Felix Sanchez and courtesy of Houston Grand Opera. • Houston's downtown skyline at dusk. Photo courtesy of the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau. • Keith Phares as Charlie and Frederica von Stade as Madeline Mitchell in Houston Grand Opera's production of *Heggie's Last Acts (Three Decembers)*. Photo by Brett Coomer. Page 39: Buffalo Bayou Park near downtown. Photo by Jim Olive for the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau.



# OPERA America Supports and Celebrates Trustee Leadership

In good times and bad, trustees play a vital role in leading opera companies. OPERA America supports good governance through assistance in strategic planning and other customized consulting services. The national service organization for opera also offers several opportunities for leading trustees to gather with their peers to share best practices and celebrate excellence.

The National Trustee Forum, which met in New York City in February, helps to define governance issues facing opera companies nationwide, to identify and share best practices, and to shape OPERA America's programmatic response to pressing governance issues. Members attended a workshop led by John McCann, principal of Partners in Performance. The Winter Forum focused on three priorities as a means of improving the performance of individual trustees and the capacity of boards as a whole, with special emphasis on adaptability as a means of survival and vitality:

- Building the capacity to remand, interpret and act on vital organizational information and relevant field-wide data
- Strengthening the relationship between the board chair and the chief executive and/or chief artistic officer of the organization
- Increasing trustee effectiveness in two critical domains: strategic thinking and stakeholder engagement

Forum members also celebrated the recipients of the second annual National Opera Trustee Recognition Awards, which honor opera company trustees for exemplary leadership, support and audience-building efforts on behalf of their respective opera companies within their communities. The program, which is chaired by OPERA America Vice Chair Frayda Lindemann, is made possible by the generous sponsorship of Bank of America.

The National Opera Trustee Recognition Awards were presented as part of a celebratory dinner and reception in New York City. A performance presented by American Opera Projects featured the work of three American composers: Lee Hoiby, Jack Perla and Stephen Schwartz.

"Bank of America is a leading supporter of the arts and believes that these institutions are critical to ensuring the

cultural and economic vitality of our communities," said Keith Banks, head of Bank of America Global Private Client, Institutional and Investment Management. "We are pleased to sponsor this noble initiative as the trustees play an important role in developing their local opera company as cultural pillars in their community."

Each year, OPERA America member companies are invited to nominate one of their trustees for this award. A single honoree from each of the four OPERA America budget levels is chosen by an adjudication committee through a competitive selection process. This year's committee included Dr. Ruth Orth (board president, Pensacola Opera); Fred Good (officer, Cincinnati Opera); and Fillmore Wood (former trustee, Opera Pacific).

OPERA America's commitment to recognizing excellence in governance is shared by its sister organization Opera.ca, the Canadian national association for opera, which also honored a trustee for exemplary leadership this year.

After 14 seasons with **The Dallas Opera, John T. Cody, Jr.**, held the top administrative position for a year while the company searched for its new general director. He has resumed the position in the wake of the brief tenure of George Steel. Cody is the retired president and COO of J.C. Penney with more than 35 years of executive experience. He joined the board of directors of The Dallas Opera in 1993 and has served on the development, finance and marketing committees, as well as on the board of The Dallas Opera Foundation. Cody became president of the company in June 2004 and guided a two-year project to develop a strategic positioning statement and roadmap designed to take The Dallas Opera through its historic move into the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House. He served as chairman of the board of directors from 2006-2008 and as interim general director from June through September 2008. He resumed the position of interim general director as of January 2009.

Native Omahan and retired advertising executive **Richard Holland** has been a tireless advocate of **Opera Omaha**. Shortly after its 1958 founding, Holland joined other community leaders in helping them grow from a community enterprise to a budding professional regional company. He served as board president from 1966 to 1970 and, over the past 40 years, has remained a constant supporter, both in



J. Rob Collins, Frayda Lindemann, Beth Ingram, C. Guy Rudisill, III and John T. Cody, Jr. Photo by Jon Simon.

a governance capacity and as a donor. In his foreword for the book *Opera Omaha: The First Fifty Years*, Holland wrote "...we believe we have helped make Omaha a better place to live and work." While maintaining and expanding his leadership giving to Opera Omaha, Holland is a major supporter of many social service organizations. He called on the Peter Kiewit Foundation to co-commission a study on the economic impact of performing arts in Omaha, which proved the high value these groups bring to the region.

**Beth Ingram** is an enthusiastic promoter and generous patron of the **Lyric Opera of Kansas City**. As a 42-year member of the board of directors, she has held the officer positions of secretary, treasurer, vice-president, president, vice-chairman and chairman. She was the first woman president on the Lyric Opera Board and continued in her leading role by serving on the executive committee for the majority of those years. Ingram was the lead donor and honorary chairman for the company's 2003 Endowment Campaign that raised \$11.5 million to establish a fund to enhance the artistic quality of productions and twice has served as honorary chairman for the company's major fundraising event, the Lyric Opera Ball. The Golden Anniversary Ball held last season raised a record-breaking \$1.4 million for the company and ensured adequate funding for their ambitious 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

**C. Guy Rudisill, III**, has been involved with **Piedmont Opera** for more than 10 years, serving as president of the board from 2000 to 2002. A member of Piedmont Opera's major gifts committee, Rudisill is highly involved with fundraising for the company and last year helped raise \$200,000 over and above the company's budget. For a period of time during his tenure as board president, Piedmont Opera was without a general manager. Until a successor could be identified, Rudisill assumed many of the general manager's duties. Rudisill also serves on the advocacy committee of the local Arts Council and takes an active role in reminding the local, state and national elected officials of the importance of the arts to the community, state and nation.

The inaugural recipient of Opera.ca's National Opera Directors Recognition Program, sponsored by BMO Financial Group, is **J. Rob Collins**. For 16 years, Collins served as a **Canadian Opera Company (COC)** director, including as chair and president of the board of directors, and chair of the Canadian Opera House Company's (COHC) Building Committee. A successful lawyer in his own right with the firm Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP, Collins dedicated an unprecedented amount of time and leadership to the COC in ensuring that the vision of a world-class opera house for the COC, now the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, became a reality. 🇨🇦



# REFINING THE DRAMATIC RHYTHM

BY KELLEY ROURKE



The London premiere of Weisman's *Fade*. Photo courtesy of American Opera Projects.

In an interview for *Opera Canada*, author and librettist Margaret Atwood likened the writing of a libretto to the construction of a coat-hanger: “If it’s a bad coat-hanger, that will be unfortunate, but if it’s a good coat-hanger, nobody will notice it.”

Is it possible for librettists to assess the sturdiness of their creation before entrusting the extravagant weight of an opera score to its delicate structure? Can words meant for music be evaluated in the absence of that essential element?

The Libretto Reading Series at Brooklyn’s American Opera Projects attempts to do just that, giving artists opportunity to hear a work read aloud and then discuss its structure, characters, themes and pacing. “While obviously spoken theater and opera are two very different art forms, you can look at the dramatic rhythm in a particular way, figuring out where the important beats are before the composer spends months writing music,” says Ned Canty, who is director of the series. “It is useful for a composer to think about beats from a performance perspective, to make sense of where you need a big shift in emotion, to see the amount of time an actor needs to get from one beat to the next.”

The process is fairly straightforward: a group of actors rehearses the libretto — ideally before any music has been written — then reads it as if it were a play. “I encourage the composer and librettist not to come on the first day of rehearsals,” says Canty. “That allows everyone to read through

once, to ask the silly questions, to speak openly about the problems and get that out of the way.”

Composer and librettist typically do attend the later rehearsals, and that time can be even more revealing than the reading itself. “It allows them to hear from actors who are used to thinking about character and asking questions about motivation. Usually we have some time where a composer can interact and ask for things to be read differently. If, for instance, he had imagined a scene faster or angrier, we can do it that way. It also allows composers to hear different voices, to hear a line read in a way that might not immediately occur to them.”

The company tends to use actors, rather than singers, for several reasons. “There are so few new operas that the experience of working on a new opera is something most singers don’t have. On the other hand, there are hundreds if not thousands of new plays, and actors are always workshopping them. Actors also tend to be more confrontational. They don’t just ask, ‘What do you want me to do?’ but ‘Why would I do that?’ They are possessive of roles in a way that a singer often is not.”

The use of actors also helps avoid assumptions — on the part of creators, performers or producers — at an early stage of the process. “There is no chance we are going to start seeing them in this role,” says Canty. “They’re not there to audition. It keeps things simple.”

Stefan Weisman first worked with American Opera Projects as part of its Composers and the Voice program, and then went on to be commissioned, with librettist Anna Rabinowitz, for his first opera, *Darkling* (2006). Weisman benefited from a libretto reading prior to writing music for his latest opera, *Fade*, with a libretto by David Cote. *Fade* was commissioned by London's Second Movement to form a triple-bill with Samuel Barber's *A Hand of Bridge* and Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*.

"It was very nerve-racking for me," says Cote, who has worked in the theater for many years as a critic, playwright and actor. "I was convinced that the libretto was going to sound terrible. It was not written to be performed without music. But the reading was incredibly important to find out if my text worked as drama, if it had consistency and internal logic. Without the development process, *Fade* would have been a much weaker piece."

"When we were given an opportunity to have actors play those parts, it was eye-opening," says Weisman. "We discovered all kinds of things we needed to revise and clarify. The actors were able to tell us when things felt awkward, or when they were moving too quickly. One actress in particular had a very distinctive voice, and it was inspiring to hear her speak the words before setting them to music."

"Stefan and I showed up in the morning and the actors asked some very pointed stylistic questions, like 'How Pinter-esque is this supposed to be?'" says Cote. "Certainly I'm a huge fan and Pinter informed part of what I was doing — as did Albee and others — but no one wants to be derivative."

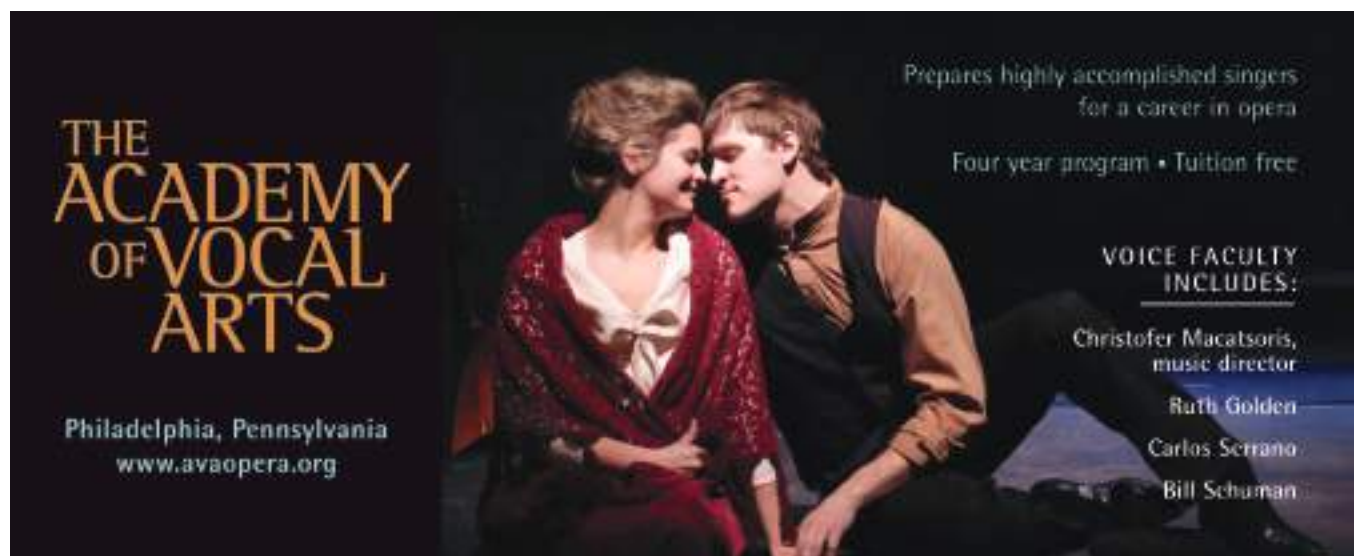
While some changes were minor, others involved altering the structure of the piece, says Weisman. "It originally started with a long solo aria, but we realized it needed a different introduction. We found that people in the audience had

questions about things we had thought were pretty clear. We were able to insert lines to clarify information and relationships."

Audience members also asked for clarification regarding the workings of the "green" house in which the story takes place. A power failure is central to the plot, but wouldn't such a house have a generator for emergencies? "It made me do a bit more research about the house and how it could fail," says Cote. "You have to do all that backstory work. You have to know every inch of the house, even if you don't use it in the piece."

Perhaps the toughest part of the process for creators is sifting through criticism and deciding what is relevant to their goals: "There is an element of satire in the piece," says Cote. "While we were really careful not to make these ridiculous stereotypes, one audience member implied our portrait was naïve and condescending. I took that into consideration; you want the characters to be as complex as possible. But you also don't want to take out all the satire or humor just to protect someone's feelings."

In a time when fewer new operas are being produced, such opportunities for librettists to hone their skills are more important than ever. "In the golden age of Italian opera, there were professional librettists — this is what they did," says Canty. "Today we have just a handful of people who are writing a lot of libretti. In general that mentality of taking a 49 percent share in the creative process, that willingness to collaborate, to edit and re-edit — these things do not come as naturally to playwrights and poets. We are trying to help recover that skill set. *Giocosa* and *Illica* sliced a whole act of *Bohème* because it just wasn't working. You have to have that kind of ruthlessness. And it's best and most cost-effective if it can happen before the composer has written music." 🍷



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# SUPPORT FOR NEW WORKS IN CANADA

**O**pera.ca recently awarded a total of \$185,000 for the development and production of seven new Canadian operas through the *Canadian Opera Creation Fund*. Funding decisions are made by an independent panel of Canadians; the most recent panel met in Toronto in November and consisted of Mel Braun, baritone and educator, University of Manitoba; Sophie Galaise, general director of Orchestre symphonique de Québec; Morris Panych, playwright and dramaturge; and Canadian composers Abigail Richardson and James Rolfe.

Toronto's **Queen of Puddings Music Theatre** received \$10,000 toward the development of *Svadba*, to be composed by Ana Sokolovic with a libretto by Antoine Laprise.

**Vancouver Opera** received \$15,000 for *Lillian Alling*, by composer John Estacio and librettist John Murrell.

**Chants libres** received \$10,000 toward *Alexandra*, to be composed by Zack Settel with a libretto by Yan Muckle.


**Pacific Opera Victoria** received \$15,000 for the development of *Mary's Wedding*, by composer Andrew P. Macdonald and librettist Stephen Massicotte.

**Soundstreams Canada** of Toronto received \$30,000 toward the June 2009 production of *The Children's Crusade* by R. Murray Schafer, in partnership with Luminato and The Toronto Consort.

Toronto's **Tapestry New Opera Works** received \$30,000 for its May 2009 production of *The Shadow*, by Omar Daniel and librettist Alex Poch-Goldin.

Montreal's **Chants libres** received \$75,000 for their November 2009 production of *Opéra Féerie, L'oiseau qui dit la vérité*, by Gilles Tremblay, in partnership with Nouvel Ensemble Moderne (NEM).

"Supporting our members in the development and production of new operas is a priority for us," says Christina Loewen, Opera.ca's director of operations. "Through the *Canadian Opera Creation Fund*, we enhance the quality, quantity and creativity of new opera works, ensuring our art form remains vibrant, engaging and on the leading edge of creativity."

Additionally, Opera.ca has launched a new initiative, *Creative Connections*, in collaboration with **The Banff Centre** and the **Banff Opera Colloquium**. *Creative Connections* is designed to foster team-building and shared learning in the sustained development of full-length Canadian operas. Four composer/librettist/producer teams will be selected to participate in round-table and panel discussions; a one-week workshop process in Banff in summer 2009; and a final showcase presentation in February 2010 in which excerpts from the works in progress will be performed with orchestra. *Creative Connections* is made possible by funding from the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation. 



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# IN THE WORKS

BY MEGAN YOUNG

## A Listing of New Works and Works in Progress

Twice each year, OPERA America seeks out new works to add to its listings of recent premieres and works in progress. Submissions from OPERA America's organizational and individual members are highlighted in the fall and spring issues of *Opera America* magazine.

### *Before Night Falls*

**By Jorge Martín and Delores M. Koch**

**Fort Worth Opera** will present the world premiere of this piece as part of its 2010 festival season. *Before Night Falls* is based on the autobiography of the same name by Reinaldo Arenas, a Cuban writer who was an outspoken critic of Fidel Castro's regime. In addition to composing the music, Cuban-American composer Jorge Martín also penned the libretto with the help of Dolores M. Koch, a personal friend of Arenas and the Spanish-to-English translator for several of his books, including *Before Night Falls*. Previous workshops and readings of the opera have taken place at **American Opera Projects** and **Seagle Music Colony**.

### *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*

**By Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie**

**The Minnesota Opera** will premiere *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* in the 2010-2011 season as part of its new Minnesota OperaWorks initiative. The piece is based on the historical novel of the same name and chronicles the Finzi-Continis family, northern Italian Jews, during the rise of Mussolini in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Minnesota Opera has engaged its successful *Grapes of Wrath* creative team — composer Ricky Ian Gordon and librettist Michael Korie — to bring the opera to fruition.

### *Joyeux Noël* (working title)

**By Kevin Puts and Mark Campbell**

**The Minnesota Opera** will continue its Minnesota OperaWorks program through the 2011-2012 season with the world premiere of *Joyeux Noël* (*Merry Christmas*), an opera based on the award-winning 2005 film and screenplay by Christian Carion. A true story, *Joyeux Noël* tells of a World War One cease-fire between the regiments of three warring countries — Scotland, France and Germany — on Christmas Eve 1914. Librettist Mark Campbell (*Volpone*, *Later the Same Evening*) and composer Kevin Puts, who makes his operatic debut with the work, lead the creative team.

### *The Letter*

**By Paul Moravec and Terry Teachout**

*The Letter* has been commissioned by **The Santa Fe Opera**, and will receive its world premiere performance during the company's 2009 summer festival season. Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec (*The Blizzard Voices*) and librettist and *Wall Street Journal* critic Terry Teachout are the driving creative forces behind the piece. Patricia Racette will star in this lust-, adultery- and revenge-filled opera noir based on the 1927 play of the same name by W. Somerset Maugham.

### *Madame White Snake*

**By Zhou Long and Cerise Lim Jacobs**

As part of a co-commission with the Beijing Music Festival, **Opera Boston**

will premiere *Madame White Snake* in February 2010. Based on an ancient Chinese legend, the story centers on a young man who has fallen in love with a beautiful young woman. Unbeknownst to him, the woman is actually a female snake demon that has taken on human form. Chinese-American composer Zhou Long and Chinese-American librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs are the creative forces behind the project.

### *Mary's Wedding*

**By Andrew P. Macdonald and Stephen Massicotte**

Based on librettist Stephen Massicotte's award-winning play of the same name, *Mary's Wedding* follows the trials of two young lovers tested by the "dark clouds" of World War One. **Pacific Opera Victoria** commissioned the piece and has planned the first workshop for May 2009 in Victoria, BC. Subsequent workshops and other development activities will follow in fall 2009 and spring 2010.

### *Mercury Falling*

**By Chandler Carter and Daniel Neer**

This monodrama for tenor, solo dance and chamber ensemble is set to premiere in Raleigh, NC during **Long Leaf Opera's** 2009 festival season. A one-act, *Mercury Falling* is based on the death of French sculptor Jean-Louis Brian. The work is a fanciful interpretation of the last night of the artist's life. In the winter of early 1864,

Brian attempted to protect his clay statue of *Mercury in Repose* from the bitter cold by covering it with his only blankets — and subsequently froze to death beside it.

#### **Review**

##### **By Jeremy Beck and Patricia Marx**

This new opera has been commissioned by **Long Leaf Opera** and is scheduled to premiere during the company's June 2009 festival season. *Review* is a comic opera that draws from a 2003 *New Yorker* column by librettist and former *Saturday Night Live* writer Patricia Marx. This one-act chamber piece is composed by Jeremy Beck for a cast of seven unnamed singers plus chorus — “a gathering of friends and acquaintances.”

#### **Ruth**

##### **By Jeffrey Ryan and Michael Lewis MacLennan**

**Tapestry New Opera Works**, in collaboration with the Vancouver Cantata Singers, has commissioned the creative team of Ryan and MacLennan to compose *Ruth* for a premiere during the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. With a cast of five principals, chorus and chamber orchestra, *Ruth* takes the basic story from the smallest book in the Old Testament and applies the moral to contemporary Canadian society and its immigrant experiences: “For your people shall be my people.”

#### **Strange Fruit**

##### **By Chandler Carter and Joan Ross Sorkin**

Premiered at **Long Leaf Opera** in June 2007, *Strange Fruit* is based on Lillian

Smith's 1944 novel of the same name. The opera received additional concert performances in February 2009 by **New York City Opera** in collaboration with The Harlem School of the Arts as a celebration of Black History Month. *Strange Fruit* revolves around an interracial love affair between a young black woman, Nonnie Anderson, and a white man, Tracy Deen, in a segregated Georgia town in the early 1920s.

#### **Svadba (working title)**

**By Ana Sokolovic and Antoine Laprise**  
**Queen of Puddings Music Theatre** has commissioned *Svadba*, Russian for “The Wedding,” from composer Ana Sokolovic and librettist Antoine Laprise. Written for six singers and one instrumentalist, the opera takes place the night before a wedding. Utilizing Slavic peasant texts and Balkan folk music as the sources of inspiration, “a type of *Sex in the City* girl talk” unfolds through the course of the piece. Existing textual sources will be framed by original work from the librettist.

#### **The Three Astronauts**

**By Grethe Barrett Holby with additional text by Nikki Giovanni**  
*The Three Astronauts* (composer TBA) is a new opera-musical based on the picture book of the same name by Umberto Eco and Eugenio Carmi. A story told for family audiences using music, dance and visuals, *The Three Astronauts* is a thoughtful piece about enemies, friendships and alliances. In it, astronauts from three different countries each want to be the first to land on the moon. The story unfolds as

they all land at the same time. The piece is in development at New York City-based **Family Opera Initiative**.

#### **A Tree—A Rock—A Cloud** **By Mark Scarce**

*A Tree—A Rock—A Cloud* is a jazz-influenced chamber work in one act written for soprano, tenor, baritone, alto sax, trombone and cello. Originally produced at North Carolina State University in 2007, it will receive its second production during **Long Leaf Opera's** upcoming festival season. The music and libretto were penned by Mark Scarce, director of the music department at North Carolina State University. *A Tree—A Rock—A Cloud* is adapted from the short story by Carson McCullers originally printed in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1942.

#### **Voicing Emily**

##### **By Eddie Perfect, Greg Mason, and Jane Hammond and Helen Noonan**

*Voicing Emily*, with a libretto and concept by Helen Noonan, is a theatrical and moving image presentation recounting the life and art of Emily Dickinson. The poems and letters of Dickinson have been set to music by three Australian composers: Jane Hammond, Greg Mason and Eddie Perfect. *Voicing Emily* is an ensemble work for three sopranos/actresses and four instrumental musicians. The work takes an unusual form that uses art song in combination with the theatricality and drama of opera. The piece was premiered November 14, 2008 at Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre. 📺

In addition to the magazine's coverage of new works, OPERA America is delighted to announce plans to launch the new *North American Works Directory* on its Web site later this year. This Web resource will house in-depth information on North American operas, including performance dates, data on works' creative forces, performance specifications, recording availability and publisher information, among other interesting tidbits. Works that have received awards from OPERA America's *Opera Fund* or Opera.ca's *Canadian Opera Creation Fund* will be highlighted in the *Directory* with images, audio files and/or video files to accompany their listings.



# RECENTLY PUBLISHED

BY ALEXA B. ANTOPOL

## **Wagner and Venice**

John W. Barker

University of Rochester Press

ISBN 13: 9781580462884, hardcover

In this volume, John Barker examines the connections between the composer and the city by tracing patterns of Wagner's visits to Venice during his lifetime, considering what the city came to mean to Wagner and investigating the details surrounding his death. Barker also examines how Venice viewed Wagner by analyzing the landmark presentation of Wagner's *Ring* cycle two months after the composer's death, and by considering Venice's subsequent extensive Wagner celebrations and commemorations. Biographical detail from new and previously unavailable sources provides readers with a fresh interpretation of this seminal figure. Barker is emeritus professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, specializing in medieval (including Venetian) history.

## **The Music Teaching Artist's Bible: Becoming a Virtuoso Educator**

Eric Booth

Oxford University Press

ISBN 13: 9780195368468, softcover

When the artist moves into the classroom or community to educate and inspire students and audience members, this is Teaching Artistry. It is a proven means for practicing professional musicians to create a successful career in music, providing not only necessary income but also satisfaction through engaging people in learning experiences about the arts. This volume helps practicing and aspiring teaching artists

gain the skills they need to build new audiences, improve the presence of music in schools, expand the possibilities of traditional and educational performances, and ultimately make their lives as artists even more satisfying and fulfilling. The book also includes critical information on becoming a mentor, succeeding in school environments, partnering with other teaching artists, advocating for music and arts education and teaching private lessons. Eric Booth has taught at the Leonard Bernstein Center, Tanglewood and Lincoln Center Institute. He currently teaches at the Kennedy Center and is also the artistic director of the mentoring program at the Juilliard School.

## **Magic Flutes and Enchanted Forests: The Supernatural in Eighteenth- Century Musical Theater**

David J. Buch

University of Chicago Press

ISBN 13: 9780226078090, hardcover

Drawing on operas, singspiels, ballets and plays with supernatural themes, David J. Buch argues that the tension between fantasy and Enlightenment-era rationality shaped works of 18<sup>th</sup>-century musical theater and influenced how audiences and critics responded to them. Despite — and perhaps even because of — their fundamental irrationality, fantastic and exotic themes acquired extraordinary force and popularity during this period, pervading theatrical works with music in the French, German and Italian mainstream. Considering compositions by Gluck, Rameau and Haydn, as well as many contributions by lesser-known artists, Buch locates the origins of these magical elements in such

historical sources as ancient mythology, European fairy tales, the Arabian Nights and the occult. He concludes with an excavation of the supernatural roots of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and *Don Giovanni*, building a new foundation for our understanding of the magical themes that proliferated in Mozart's wake.

## **Verdi and the French Aesthetic: Verse, Stanza, and Melody in Nineteenth-Century Opera**

Andreas Giger

Cambridge University Press

ISBN 13: 9780521878432

Focusing on Verdi's French operas, Andreas Giger shows how the composer acquired a better understanding of the various approaches to French versification while bringing his works in line with French melodic aesthetic. In his first French opera, *Jérusalem*, Verdi treated the text in an overly cautious manner, trying to avoid prosodic mistakes; in *Les Vêpres siciliennes* he began to apply more freedom, scanning the verses against some prosodic accents to convey the lightheartedness of a melody; and in *Don Carlos* he finally drew on the entire palette of prosodic interpretations. Most of Verdi's melodic accomplishments in the French operas carried over into the subsequent Italian ones, setting the stage for what later would be called operatic verismo. Drawing attention to the significance of the libretto for the development of 19<sup>th</sup>-century French and Italian opera, Giger illustrates Verdi's gradual mastery of the challenges he faced and their historical significance.

**Mozart's Operas: A Companion**  
Mary Hunter  
Yale University Press  
ISBN 13: 9780300118339, hardcover

Mary Hunter provides an introduction to Mozart's operas for any listener who has enjoyed a performance, either on the stage or in a video recording, and who wishes to understand the opera more fully. This volume includes a synopsis and commentary on each work, as well as background information on the three main genres in which Mozart wrote: opera seria, opera buffa and Singspiel. An essay on the anatomy of a Mozart opera points out the musical conventions with which the composer worked and suggests nontechnical ways to think about his musical choices. The book also places modern productions of the operas in historical context and explores how modern directors, producers and conductors present Mozart's works today. Hunter is A. Leroy Greason Professor of Music, Bowdoin College, and author of *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna*.

**Backstage at the Revolution:  
How the Royal Paris Opera Survived  
the End of the Old Regime**  
Victoria Johnson  
University of Chicago Press  
ISBN 13: 9780226401959, hardcover

On July 14, 1789, a crowd of French citizens en route to the Bastille broke into the Paris Opera and helped themselves to any sturdy weapon they could find. Despite its long association with the royal court, its special privileges and the splendor of its performances, the opera itself was spared, even protected, by Revolutionary officials. This volume tells the story of how the opera house, while being a lightning rod for charges of tyranny and waste, weathered the most dramatic political upheaval in European history. Sifting through royal edicts, private letters and Revolutionary records of all kinds, Victoria Johnson uncovers the roots of the Paris Opera's survival in its identity as a uniquely

privileged icon of French culture — an identity established by the conditions of its founding 100 years earlier under Louis XIV.

**Ancient Rome in Early Opera**  
Robert C. Ketterer  
University of Illinois Press  
ISBN 13: 9780252033780, hardcover

Rome provided settings and subject matter for many librettists and composers in the Baroque period, and as opera spread to England and Germany, the treatment of Roman subjects changed to reflect national differences. In this volume, Robert C. Ketterer tracks the changes as operas' Roman subjects crossed generations and national boundaries. He also pays close attention to the composers' individual approaches to developing their librettos; Monteverdi, Handel, Mozart and Cimarosa were only the most renowned of the many composers drawn to Roman subjects. Following opera from its origins in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Venice to Napoleon's invasion of Italy, Ketterer shows how opera was preoccupied with Roman historical figures as heroes, lovers and fools. Ketterer is a professor of classics at the University of Iowa.

**Engaging Classrooms and  
Communities through Art:  
The Guide to Designing and  
Implementing Community-Based  
Art Education**  
Beth Krensky and Seana Lowe Steffen  
AltaMira Press  
ISBN 13: 9780759110670, hardcover

Even as arts funding and programming in schools have declined, community-based art programs have successfully been able to foster change and enrich children's lives. This volume provides a guide to the design and implementation of community-based art programs for educators, community leaders and artists. The book focuses on case studies with diverse groups across the country that are using different media — including mural arts, dance and video

— with an informed introduction to the theory and history of community-based art. Beth Krensky is an assistant professor of art education and the Area Head of Art Teaching at the University of Utah. Seana Lowe Steffen works with Mapleton Public Schools as an instructional guide training and coaching teachers.

**Chinese Street Opera in Singapore**  
Tong Soon Lee  
University of Illinois Press  
ISBN 13: 9780252032462, hardcover

Since Singapore declared independence from Malaysia in 1965, Chinese street opera has played a significant role in defining Singaporean identity. By tracing the history of amateur and professional performances in Singapore, Tong Soon Lee reflects on the role of street performance in fostering cultural nationalism and entrepreneurship by underscoring the Confucian mindset that a learned person engages in the arts for moral and unselfish purposes. The government welcomes Chinese street opera performances because they combine tradition and modernism and promote a national culture that brings together Singapore's four main ethnic groups — Eurasian, Malay, Chinese and South Asian. This volume documents the ways in which this politically-motivated art form continues to be influenced and transformed by Singaporean politics, ideology and context in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lee is an associate professor of ethnomusicology at Emory University.

**Pavarotti Up Close**  
Leone Magiera  
Ricordi Books  
ISBN 10: 8875927820, softcover

This volume is a portrait of one of the greatest tenors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, told through the eyes of his longtime musical coach and accompanist Leone Magiera. The secrets of the legendary voice are revealed, written by the one person who was there throughout the singer's career and witnessed it all firsthand,



making *Pavarotti Up Close* different from any other biography. Magiera discusses Luciano's humble beginnings, his early years of study, his debut, his international operatic triumphs, the most successful recording career in the history of opera, the arena concerts, his personal and medical struggles, and his status as a cultural icon recognized around the world.

**American Muse:  
The Life and Times of William Schuman**  
Joseph W. Polisi  
Amadeus Press  
ISBN 13: 9781574671735, hardcover

William Schuman was instrumental in shaping how America perceived and supported music, dance and drama in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His influence as an administrator, educator and composer made him known during

this period as "the most powerful person in the arts in the United States." He composed more than 100 works for chamber ensemble, orchestra and chorus, as well as operas. His music has been characterized as "full of American directness in its vibrant rhythms and brilliant orchestrations." This biography of Schuman will bring the many threads of his life together within the context of the personalities and events that shaped how we experience the arts in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Polisi is president of the Juilliard School.

**Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana's Lyric Stage**  
Susan Thomas  
University of Illinois Press  
ISBN 13: 9780252033315, hardcover

This volume is a comprehensive study of Cuban zarzuela, a Spanish-language

light opera with spoken dialogue that originated in Spain but flourished in Havana during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Created by musicians and managers to fill a growing demand for family entertainment, the zarzuela evidenced the emerging economic and cultural power of Cuba's white female bourgeoisie to influence the entertainment industry. Susan Thomas explores zarzuela's function as a pedagogical tool, through which composers, librettists and business managers hoped to control their troupes and audiences by presenting desirable and problematic images of both feminine and masculine identities. Focusing on character types such as the *mulata*, the *negrito* and the *ingénue*, Thomas uncovers the zarzuela's richly textured relationship to social constructs of race, class and gender. Thomas is an assistant professor of music and women's studies at the University of Georgia. 📖

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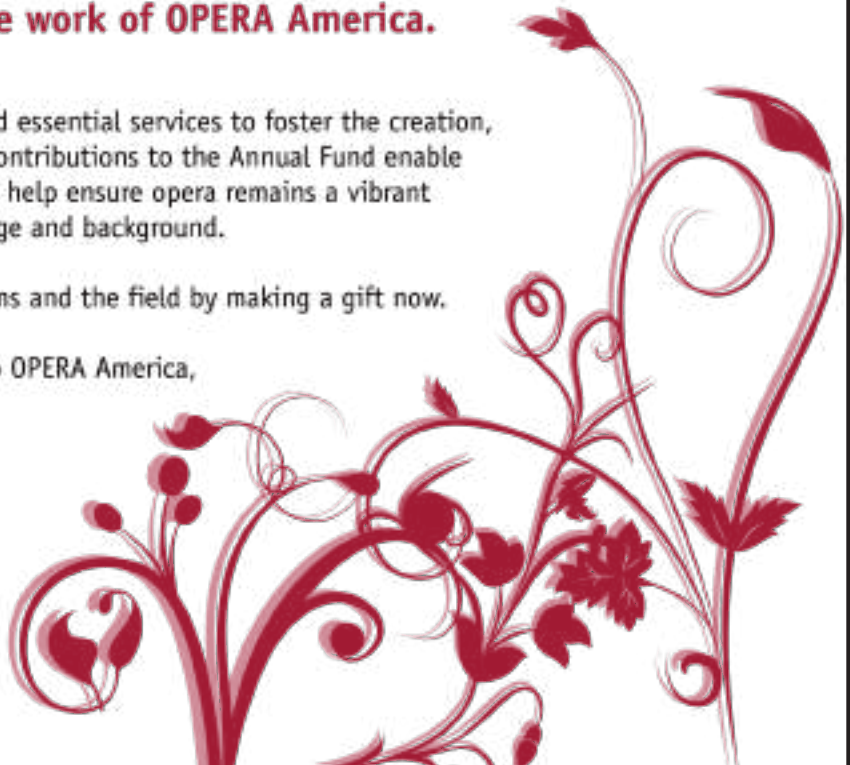
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