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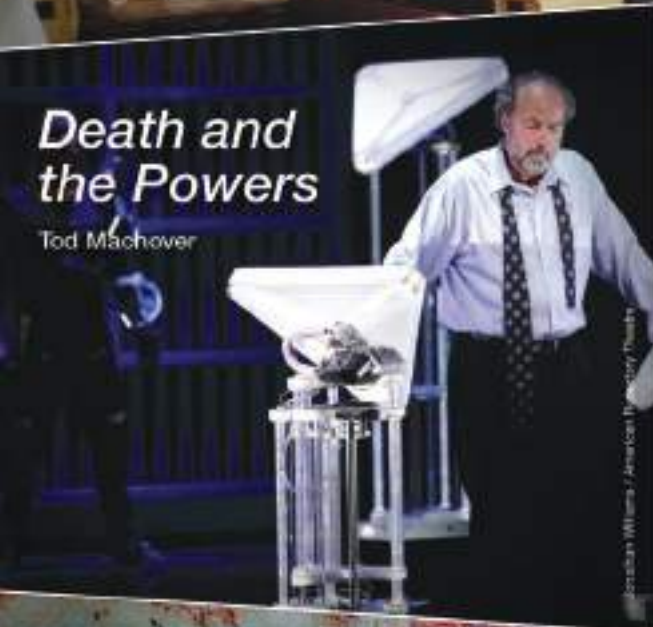
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# OPERA AMERICA

THE MAGAZINE OF OPERA AMERICA — THE NATIONAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION FOR OPERA, WHICH LEADS AND SERVES THE ENTIRE OPERA COMMUNITY, SUPPORTING THE CREATION, PRESENTATION AND ENJOYMENT OF OPERA.

5

Letter from the President/CEO



6

What's New

12

People

16

OA News

20

Of One:  
The Quest for  
Asian Fusion in the  
Opera House

BY BRIAN HINRICHS

28

Building a Strong  
Foundation for the Arts



34

Vancouver:  
Where Nature  
Nurtures Art

BY JANET SMITH



40

Inheriting the Wind

48

Recently Published

BY ALEXA B. ANTOPOL

55

OPERA America Staff

56

Support for  
OPERA America

58

My First Time

BY MATTHEW SIGMAN

## SPRING 2013

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### ON THE COVER:

Haijing Fu as Seikyo, Kelly Kaduce as Lan and Roger Honeywell as the Prince in The Santa Fe Opera's 2007 production of Tan Dun's *Tea: A Mirror of Soul*. The production was directed by Amon Miyamoto with set designs by Rumi Matsui, costume designs by Masatomo Ota and lighting by Rick Fisher. Photo by Ken Howard.

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



OPERA America's Strategy Committee convened at the end of February to review the organization's long-term priorities. With the construction of the National Opera Center complete (the fundraising campaign continues), staff and board members are now able to look beyond what has been a primary focus of our attention for the last eight years.

The Strategy Committee discussed trends and examined data to identify a clear direction for OPERA America, but first, we reviewed our progress. The strategic plan approved in 2010 was built on goals that were outlined in the plan of 1998. Together, these goals directed OPERA America to address the needs of the field with three equally important strategies designed to increase the creativity, excellence, effectiveness and relevance of opera and opera companies.

In the first area, artistic services, OPERA America's continued advocacy for and support of the creation and production of new works has helped generate a rich American opera repertoire.

Thirty years ago, the almost complete absence of American operas from the repertoire stimulated targeted granting programs through OPERA America, the National Endowment for the Arts and other foundations. Today, premieres and existing American operas are produced on a regular basis by almost every opera company.

Secondly, our services to opera companies have grown in both breadth and depth. OPERA America's forums, professional development programs, research projects and web-based informational resources have advanced the organization's position as the action-oriented think tank for the field.

The third strategic area articulated in our plans called for audience and community services to increase all forms of opera appreciation, with emphasis on live performance attendance. When this goal was first approved in 1998, OPERA America had no contact with opera audiences — our members alone communicated with audiences through direct mail and in the opera house. Since then, sadly, paid attendance at mainstage performances has declined across the field, almost without exception. At the same time, Internet-based resources, e-mail and social media have broken down the barriers to communication and opened up tremendous opportunities for enhanced engagement of a broad public with different levels of interest in opera.

A key question shaped the meeting of the Strategy Committee: How can OPERA America, working in partnership with members and other stakeholders, have an impact on audience development that is as profound as the impact we had on the development of an American opera repertoire? Many good ideas were put forward. Members will have numerous opportunities to add to the list of ideas that will establish benchmarks to guide OPERA America to its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 and beyond. At the upcoming conference in Vancouver, *Opera Out of Bounds*, audience engagement will be a primary focus of discussion and attendees will have an opportunity to participate in our shared learning and planning. I hope you will join us.

In this issue of *Opera America Magazine*, we welcome a new editor, Matthew Sigman. Matthew joins the OPERA America staff with more than 20 years of experience in magazine publishing in both the corporate and nonprofit sectors. He succeeds our cherished friend and colleague, Kelley Rourke, whose talent as dramaturg, writer and translator has been in ever greater demand at opera companies across the country and around the world. We wish her great success and look forward to seeing her byline soon and often in our publications.

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

# WHAT'S NEW

## NEW AMERICAN WORKS IN THE WORKS

**Washington National Opera** (WNO) continues its New American Works Project this June with a new hour-long opera, *Approaching Ali*, featuring music by DJ. Sparr and a libretto by Mark Campbell and Davis Miller. The New American Works Project was launched in November 2012 with concert performances of 20-minute operas by three teams of composers and librettists — Douglas Pew and Dara Weinberg; Liam Wade and John Grimmlett; Scott Perkins and Nat Cassidy — each based on a contemporary American story. Next, WNO will commission a full-length opera on a contemporary American theme which will be a fully staged production as part of WNO's subscription season.

Opera of the Americas, a 10-year series of premieres and commissions, has been launched by **Fort Worth Opera**. Works to be featured in the first phase include *A Wrinkle in Time* by Libby Larsen and librettist Bradley Greenwald; the professional world premiere of *With Blood, With Ink* by composer Daniel Crozier and librettist Peter M. Krask; and works by David K. Little and Kevin Puts. The company has also commissioned a new opera based on the life of John F. Kennedy from composer David T. Little and librettist Royce Vavrek.

**Opera Theatre of Saint Louis** has announced New Works, Bold Voices, a three-year cycle of world premieres by American composers beginning in May 2013. The new works are *Champion* by Terence Blanchard with a libretto by Michael Christopher, *Twenty-Seven* by Ricky Ian Gordon with a libretto by Michael Korie and *Shalimar the Clown* by Jack Perla based on the novel by Salman Rushdie. The cycle is underwritten by a \$1 million challenge grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

To reach beyond its traditional New York base, **American Lyric Theater** (ALT) has expanded its Composer Librettist Development Program nationwide through the use of newly acquired HD teleconferencing technology. Young dramatists with an interest in writing for the opera stage will be able to participate regardless of where they live. In addition to ongoing classes and workshops, composers and librettists in the program have the opportunity to take part in observerships at the Metropolitan Opera. Additional networking and membership resources are provided through ALT's partnership with OPERA America.

— Matthew Sigman



"Why Opera?" panel discussion as part of the Composer Librettist Development Program, moderated by ALT dramaturg Cori Ellison, with Michael Korie, Stewart Wallace, Ricky Ian Gordon, Nico Muhly and Stephen Karam. Photo courtesy of American Lyric Theater.

## OPERA LYRA OTTAWA TAKES THE STAGE (AGAIN)

In 2011, tragedy of the wrong kind faced **Opera Lyra Ottawa**: they'd simply run out of funds. The doors were closed, the season canceled. Hope was alive, but fragile. In a November 2011 website post, board member Richard Jenkins cut to the heart of the company's fears: "If the stage goes dark, maybe the audience won't come back."

But in September 2012, back they came, with audiences applauding a sold-out *La bohème*.

"It was a near-death experience," says new General Director John Peter "Jeep" Jeffries, chosen by the company's new board to help guide its renaissance. Canceling the season was a painful blow to Opera Lyra Ottawa audiences, but behind the scenes even tougher sacrifices had to be made. Staff was reduced from 11 full-time and three part-time to three full-time and one part-time. New bylaws sliced the board from 18 to 12 members. The board was reorganized, including new financial oversight procedures and a "rescue committee" tasked with gathering advice and community support.

That support is what Jeffries credits with the company's recovery: "You can't solve an issue like this without the community behind you," he says. When subscribers were offered a refund on their outstanding tickets, 70 percent opted to convert their funds to a charitable donation to the company. The National Arts Center (Opera Lyra Ottawa's home) suspended some rental costs. Both gestures provided respite and allowed the company to pay other outstanding debts.

However, in order for that stage to see opera again, Opera Lyra Ottawa had to do more than clear the books. They had to entice audiences back. McMillan Advertising developed a pro bono campaign that Jeffries credits with a key tone shift — "more about community awareness than about sales." Nine local champions, including Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson, were chosen for an "I'm Going to the Opera" print and online campaign in which they spoke about opera's personal appeal.

One ad was in French, targeted directly to Ottawa's sometimes-overlooked Francophone community. Though the company has always encouraged French-speaking patrons (all productions have dual subtitles), this was a particularly warm welcome with dramatic results: French-speakers jumped from 9.4 percent to 18.4 percent of all tickets sales. When the 2012-2013 season became a real possibility, the company decided to come back with a classic: the run of *La bohème* was a smash, with ticket sales from 80.4 to 99.9 percent capacity throughout.

Opera Lyra Ottawa is revived, but the rebuilding continues. In addition to their performances at the National Arts Centre they are looking ahead to the possibility of smaller-scale productions that could tour other Ottawa venues. Jeffries is quick to stress these are long-term goals; board and staff know they're only just out of the woods. But they remain optimistic. "Things are looking up," he says.

— Genevieve Valentine

*I'm going because I want to feel transported. Watching La Bohème, I feel like Owen Wilson in Midnight in Paris, carried away by gorgeous singing voices and unforgettable music.*

**Eric Friesen**  
Writer, speaker, broadcaster  
Opera Lyra Ottawa supporter since 2004

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OPERA LYRA OTTAWA

To support Opera Lyra Ottawa's return to the stage, McMillan Advertising developed a print and online campaign featuring community leaders.

# WHAT'S NEW

## MAKING AUDIENCE SURVEYS EASIER ON THE iPad

Operagoers at **Palm Beach Opera** (PBO) who enjoyed *La traviata* on January 17 had one more dramatic scene change in store for them after the show: instead of the paper-and-pencil questionnaires typically distributed in the lobby, PBO staff members held iPads loaded with easy-to-administer surveys.

Such a decisive technology initiative may seem like the effect of long deliberation, but the path from conception to implementation was short: “We decided to do it on a Monday, and the show opened on Friday,” says Ceci Dadisman, PBO’s director of marketing and public relations. The company’s modest staff and equally modest budget make speed and flexibility a requirement of their culture.

Quick Tap, a survey-builder that provides exports and licenses for multiple devices, was the software of choice. As for the hardware: the iPads deployed were the staff’s own. Perhaps not a feasible solution for larger organizations, but Dadisman cites it as yet another indication of the staff’s dedication to the project.

PBO has long placed confidence in surveys, not only because of valuable feedback they provide about current productions, but also as a means of engaging opera patrons so that they know their voices are heard, too. However, it can be a challenge to engage even dedicated operagoers at the end of an evening if there’s a perception of extra effort. Among the obstacles that the iPad survey removes is the inevitable fuss for the reading glasses: fonts on the bright, legible iPads are easily adjustable. And because staff members are holding the iPads there’s no need to even put down one’s purse.

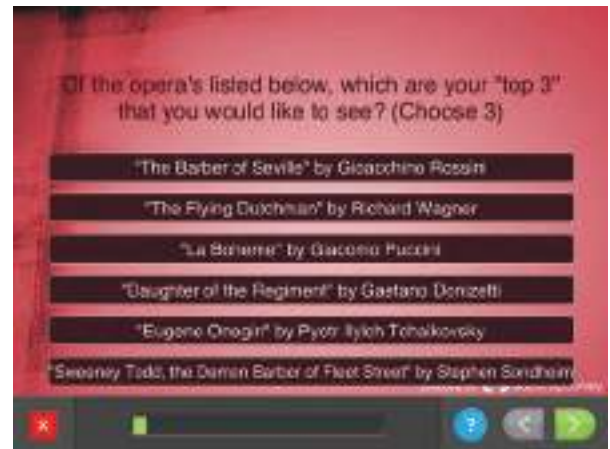
When the iPad surveys were launched in January, Dadisman was excited about the technology but her priority was ensuring that regardless of gadgetry it would be “a more positive experience for our patrons.” Results were even better than expected: survey participation was up sharply from last season — almost 25 percent after the first two productions — and patrons have even expressed enthusiasm about taking the survey. “So many of them say, ‘Oh, I have an iPad,’” says Dadisman.

The survey itself is based on PBO’s traditional audience questionnaire, but the new format (including pictorial answers) and data infrastructure (answer-specific question trees) is not only more ergonomic for audiences, it is faster and easier for management too. Though she had always looked forward to the data that surveys provided, Dadisman admits she did not look forward to collating the responses. With Quick Tap for the iPad, a one-click download provides a 100 percent data return — with no illegible answers.

— Genevieve Valentine



Images provided by Palm Beach Opera.







Des Moines Metro Opera's 2011-2012 production of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Photo by Duane Tinkey.

## DES MOINES RAISES THE BAR FOR ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGNS

**Des Moines Metro Opera** (DMMO) can certainly claim artistic stature among leading American opera companies, but when it comes to endowment fundraising it is without peer: DMMO's endowment ratio — five times its operating budget — is the highest in the opera field.

Cherie Shreck, former DMMO board president and now an honorary board member, attributes the success of the campaign not simply to fundraising acumen, but to fundamentals of excellence that engender support in the community: a tradition of programming that bridges the traditional and innovative, consistent quality of productions and performers, and an intimate of venue of less than 500 seats. "You feel you are on stage," she says.

That dedication to excellence also extends to prudent financial management. Says Jerilee Mace, former DMMO executive director, who served the organization for three decades, "The board had the foresight many years ago to recognize that the future of the company was going to take more funds than a community the size of Des Moines was going to be able to provide and that an endowment would be the only way to sustain this organization well into the future."

One particular board member, Doris Salsbury, a great friend of DMMO co-founder and longtime artistic director Robert Larsen, provided the leadership gift in 1992 that was the catalyst of the initial campaign. Her donation of \$1 million was a challenge grant that yielded \$1 million in cash, plus \$2 million in a variety of financial instruments. Since that campaign, additional unrestricted and restricted endowment campaigns were implemented to support special educational and artistic endeavors.

But prescience in fundraising is only as good as the prudence that follows. "We've grown the endowment successfully both because of management and because, wisely, the company has not always drawn down from it as much as it can. We have allowed the growth to be reinvested." To ensure the long-term integrity of the endowment, DMMO established a separate legal entity, the Des Moines Metro Opera Foundation Board, composed of community representatives with financial expertise, as well as the DMMO board president and president-elect.

Might endowment success inhibit traditional annual fundraising for general operations? According to Shreck it has not: "We make it clear that an endowment gift is not in lieu of their annual gift. The endowment is there to augment the budget." And while there have been plenty of heavy-hitters, DMMO has also been careful to diversify its campaign. "We are lucky to have big donors," Shreck says, "but it's also the small donations that make people feel part of the opera and part of making it better as time goes on."

—Matthew Sigman

# WHAT'S NEW

## FLASH! OPERAGOERS GO VIDEO

Word of mouth has always been the currency of choice for arts marketers, but in this age of ubiquitous social media the words fly faster every day. To capture some of those words **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis** (OTSL) recently launched “Opera Stories Revealed: Share Your Story and Win,” a contest designed to get opera audiences talking — and, ultimately, listening.



Aubrey Allicock from his Opera Story Revealed video. Photo courtesy of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

The rules of the game are simple: upload a video of yourself talking about your favorite opera experience. And though video competitions are not necessarily new in the opera marketing world, OTSL has definitely raised the stakes: in addition to tickets to the world premiere of Terence Blanchard and Michael Cristofer's *Champion* in Saint Louis on June 15, the grand prize also includes a trip to the 2013 New Orleans Jazz Festival, courtesy of Jazz St. Louis.

“If you’ve never been to an opera before, to hear everyone around you talking like an opera expert, it’s easy to forget they weren’t always opera experts,” says OTSL Director of Marketing and Public Relations Joe Gfaller. “We were looking for a way to tell that story in a community-based way.” While opera lovers of all ages were encouraged to submit, Gfaller acknowledges the potential for a generation gap. However, he sees benefits for established audiences from the voices of young operagoers, and is currently highlighting *Champion* with cultural-spotlight events in conjunction with young professional groups. Results from OTSL community engagement initiatives over the past two years have been encouraging — since 2011, attendance through their Young Friends program has increased 132 percent.

The contest was developed in partnership with KMOX radio, a longtime OTSL supporter, which also provided the online infrastructure to handle logistics for the contest at service levels designed to engage a 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience.

Gfaller has been pleasantly surprised by some of the stories revealed so far. “We’re excited that many are simply coming out of the woodwork. They’re opera lovers; they want to tell their stories.” The response from the iPad generation has been encouraging, but so too have those from less-tech savvy patrons. One of Gfaller’s favorite e-mails arrived with the following disclaimer: “I don’t know what Flash player is,” she began, “but here’s my story.”

— Genevieve Valentine

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# PEOPLE

**Florida Grand Opera** (FGO) is proud to announce **Ramon Tebar** as the recipient of the Henry C. Clark Conductor Award. Tebar, FGO's music director, was presented with the award by General Director/CEO Susan T. Danis during the company's annual gala on November 17. The award, which honors one FGO conductor each season, was established by Virginia Hunt Clark in 1997 to honor the legacy of philanthropy of her late husband, Henry Cauley Clark and his late mother Elise Adams. Additionally, FGO has appointed **Amy Funk** as director of development. Funk will be mapping out the fundraising program as the company approaches its 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary. Most recently, she served as the senior associate director of annual giving for the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. Funk began her nonprofit career as campaign manager for the public phase of Sarasota Opera's \$20 million capital campaign.

**Lyric Opera of Chicago** has announced promotions for two senior staff members: **Drew Landmesser**, production and technical director, will become the company's deputy general director, and **Brent Fisher**, controller, will take over as director of finance. Both appointments became effective January 1, and are being instituted as a result of the retirement of Richard Dowsek, director of administration and finance, as well as expanded activities inherent in the company's future plans. Landmesser's background includes planning and overseeing a state-of-the-art production facility at San Francisco Opera that allows the company to produce high-definition audio and video content for web distribution and streaming. Fisher, the company's controller since 1982, is an accountant with a master's degree. Among other duties, Fisher has worked with Dowsek and the board's investment committee in managing the company's \$150-million investment portfolio. Fisher will oversee all budgeting for Lyric Opera of Chicago, a \$65 million company.

**Michigan Opera Theatre** (MOT) announced that Founding General Director **David DiChiera** will remain in his position for at least another year before transitioning to the position of full-time artistic director. DiChiera founded MOT and two years later spearheaded the establishment of the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts and the restoration of the abandoned Grand Circus Theater, now named the Detroit Opera House. The Detroit Opera House not only serves as the home to the opera company, but also presents the world's great dance companies, touring Broadway presentations and myriad special events. DiChiera is also a prolific composer:

among his most critically-acclaimed works is the opera *Cyrano*, which premiered in 2007.

**Kate Place** joined **OPERA America** in December 2012 as research manager. She is a recent graduate of the M.A. program in arts administration at Columbia University, where she worked as the internship and alumni relations coordinator for the arts administration department. While at Columbia, Place acted as a panel manager for the art and culture panel at the 2011 Columbia Business School Social Enterprise Conference: Social Enterprise in a Networked World, and was a graduate intern with the associate producer's office at the Public Theater. **Audrey Saccone** joined OPERA America full-time in December 2012 as digital and social media manager. Prior to that, she completed a marketing internship with OPERA America as the final project towards her B.M. from the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam. She spent the past three summers working for the College Light Opera Company on Cape Cod in the publicity and box offices. **Jackie Schiffer** joined OPERA America as audience development project coordinator in December 2012. Prior to joining OPERA America, Schiffer served as an educational research assistant for the COBALT project with the Center for Music-in-Education and the Metropolitan Opera Guild. She has interned with Lyric Opera of Chicago and Light Opera Works. She holds a B.M. in voice performance with a minor in Italian from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**Opera Memphis** is pleased to announce the establishment of the Marguerite Piazza Fund for Public Outreach, a new fund designed to support the advancement of Piazza's lifelong passion for sharing opera with new audiences. Piazza, an American soprano, entertainer and philanthropist, died in Memphis on August 2, 2012. The fund, established through a generous \$50,000 gift from an anonymous donor, will support Opera Memphis' numerous innovative and vibrant community-engagement programs, reaching over 25,000 people per year at public schools, social clubs, libraries and other community organizations.

**Timothy O'Leary**, general director of **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis** (OTSL), has been named a Rising Star of the Performing Arts Business by Musical America. He was recognized for expanding audiences for opera, commissioning new works, and keeping the OTSL budget in the black. O'Leary has held artistic and administrative positions at New York City Opera,

Gotham Chamber Opera (New York, NY) and Opera Colorado. He apprenticed in San Francisco Opera's Merola Program and studied theater management at Columbia University.

**San Francisco Opera** honored long-time Medallion Society members **Christine Miller** and **Gary Glaser** with the Spirit of the Opera Award, the company's highest honor. The award was created in 1995 as a tribute to those who go above and beyond contributions by giving back in unique and meaningful ways that advance the success of the company and the art form. Miller and Glaser have been involved with San Francisco Opera for more than three decades. Serving as opera "ambassadors," they routinely introduce newcomers to the operatic art form and refer new subscribers and donors to the company. They escort visiting singers and creative team artists and, on occasion, have also welcomed and aided artists'

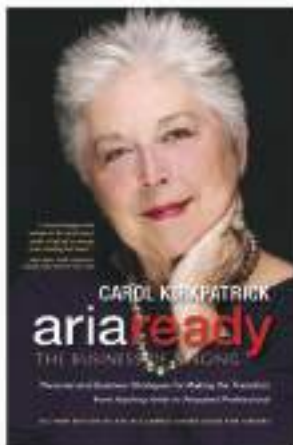
families and even pets as they settle into their schedules in San Francisco.

**John Keene** will be the **Seattle Opera's** new chorusmaster beginning with the 2013-2014 season. Keene made his company debut in October as guest chorusmaster for *Fidelio*. He has been chorusmaster at Florida Grand Opera (FGO) since 2008 and head of Young Artist Studio there since 2011. Before joining FGO, he acted as music director of LSU Opera at Louisiana State University, founded the Elysian Opera Group in New York City, served as a faculty member of San Francisco Opera's Merola program and has been affiliated with Sarasota Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, New Orleans Opera, Virginia Opera, Lake George Opera, Caramoor Festival and the Chautauqua Opera.

## IN MEMORIAM

American lyric tenor **DAVID LLOYD** passed away on February 8 at age 92. Lloyd sang leading roles at New York City Opera (NYCO) in the 1950s, as well as performing recitals at Judson Hall. A graduate of Minneapolis College of Music and Curtis Institute of Music, Lloyd debuted at NYCO in 1950 in the role of David (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*). Over the next 13 seasons, he sang roles including Filipeto (Wolf-Ferrari's *The Four Ruffians*), Andrès (Berg's *Wozzeck*), Gonzalve (Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*), Pedrillo (Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*), Flamand (R. Strauss' *Capriccio*), Eumete (Monteverdi's *Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria*), Pinkerton (Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*), the Prince (Rossini's *Cenerentola*) and Alfred

(J. Strauss' *Fledermaus*). In 1949, he sang the title role in the U.S. premiere of Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring* at Tanglewood. Lloyd's talents were evident in his second career: From 1962-1965 he was the artistic director and from 1965-1980 he was the general director of Lake George Opera Festival (now Opera Saratoga). There, he promoted English-language performances of opera and founded the Contemporary American Opera Studio for young artists. Lloyd graduated from Minneapolis College of Music and the Curtis Institute of Music. He is survived by his son, David Thomas; his second wife, Barbara Wilson Lloyd; and a grandson.



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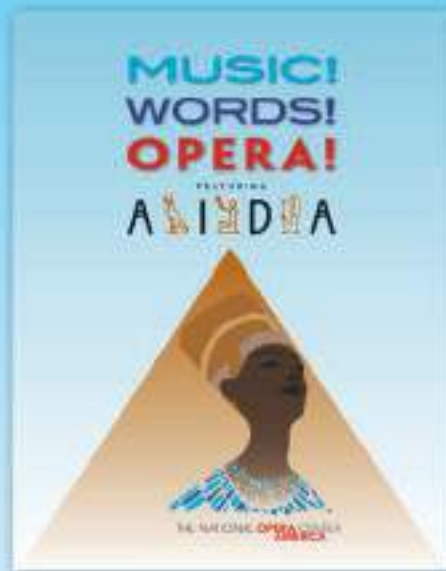
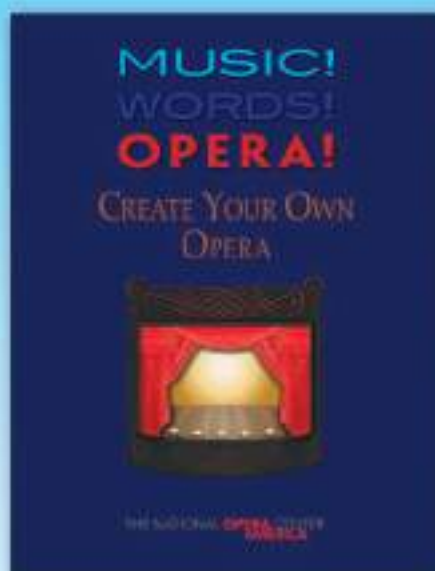
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# OPA NEWS

## PAKLEDINAZ TRIBUTE AT THE OPERA CENTER

"I love the theater. I love the opera. I love the ballet. And I have been loved by many. I am a lucky man."

These words of Martin Pakledinaz, the distinguished costume designer who died of brain cancer July 8 at age 58, were quoted by stage director Robin Guarino at the opening reception for a retrospective of Pakledinaz's work at the National Opera Center's Production Design Gallery on February 20. Opera companies from around the country contributed costumes, sketches, costume bibles and production photographs for the exhibit, which was curated by costume designer Daniel James Cole.

Long associated with Seattle Opera, in his three-decade career Pakledinaz also designed for more than a dozen other American opera companies, as well as for ballet, film and Broadway. Despite multiple surgeries in the last two years of his life, Pakledinaz designed two opera productions, five Broadway shows and a full-length ballet.

The Production Design Gallery is a dedicated space at the National Opera Center featuring the work of scenic, costume, lighting, wig and make-up, and projection designers. Exhibitions rotate quarterly to feature different luminaries in the field.



Viewing the Martin Pakledinaz exhibit in the Ardis Krainik Research and Reference Library of the National Opera Center. Photo by Audrey Saccone.



Production Design Gallery exhibit featuring the work of Martin Pakledinaz. Photo by Audrey Saccone.





Rena M. De Sisto of Bank of America Foundation giving welcome remarks. | Lindemann Young Artist Development Program members Lei Xu, soprano and Mario Chang, tenor, in performance during the dinner. | Recipients of the 2013 National Opera Trustee Recognition Program Award: Timothy J. Wagg (Opera North), Lisa Erdberg (San Francisco Opera), Patricia A. Richards (Utah Symphony | Utah Opera) and Cherie Shreck (Des Moines Metro Opera). (Not pictured: Arthur R.A. Scace, Q.C., Canadian Opera Company.) Photos by Jeff Reeder.

## TRUSTEES HONORED AT ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER

More than 100 board, artistic and administrative leaders representing 43 Professional Company Members convened in New York City from February 20-23 for meetings, including frank discussions on the future of the field, celebrations of excellence in leadership, and performances of traditional and contemporary repertoire. The highlight was the National Opera Trustee Recognition Program Award Dinner at which five individuals were recognized for exemplary leadership:

- Lisa Erdberg has held a number of leadership roles on San Francisco Opera's board and has been personally responsible for the Next Generation Task Force, aimed at developing future audiences and donors, as well as the Engagement Initiative, which increased board financial contributions. She has made significant contributions to board governance by streamlining the election process and creating a smoother transition process for new leaders.
- Patricia A. Richards, chair of the Utah Symphony | Utah Opera board, has been an integral force in the combined organizations since the inception of the merger in 2002 and continues to be engaged in the assessment and continual improvement of internal operations. She has helped lead the search for a new CEO and music director, and aided the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements with musicians.
- Cherie Shreck, a longstanding board member and past president of Des Moines Metro Opera (DMMO), organized DMMO's first endowment campaign, the Salisbury Challenge, 20 years ago. She went on to lead the Apprentice Artist Endowment Campaign, a second Salisbury Challenge and the Robert L. Larsen Legacy Campaign. As a result of her leadership the DMMO's endowment disburses nearly 25 percent of the company's annual operating costs.
- Timothy J. Wagg has been an Opera North (Lebanon, NH) volunteer continuously since 1996. He has created new revenue sources, worked to make opera more accessible to larger audiences and has helped increase ticket sales through demographic analysis. He has revolutionized the accounting and financial practices of Opera North by updating protocols, securing a payroll system and managing reporting networks.
- Arthur R.A. Scace, Q.C., a long-time volunteer leader and past president and chairman of the board of directors of the Canadian Opera Company and recipient of Opera.ca's 2013 National Opera Directors Recognition Award.

The National Opera Trustee Recognition Program, in its sixth year, is led by OPERA America board member Carol F. Henry, a founding board member of Los Angeles Opera who also serves as chairman of the company's executive committee. Since

# OA NEWS

its inception, the program has been generously sponsored by Bank of America, which was represented at this year's awards dinner by Rena M. De Sisto, international corporate social responsibility and global arts & culture executive at Bank of America Foundation. De Sisto is also an OPERA America board member. In her opening remarks De Sisto said, "We may not have the oldest culture in the world but I believe the United States has an example to set for many other cultures: our long tradition of private and public funding, our embrace (if not always comfort with) artistic freedom of expression, and our spreading the word that the arts are necessary nourishment for individuals, as well as economic development. And as the guard changes at the State Department I remain confident that our foreign relations efforts will continue to focus on the arts as a tool for diplomacy."

## OPERA MARKETING SURVEYS EXPAND SCOPE

OPERA America recently released an expanded version of its annual Marketing Benchmarking Survey of Professional Company Members. "In addition to examining traditional trends in sales and marketing we took this opportunity to learn how our members are exploring technology, particularly the use of digital and social media" says OPERA America Director of Research/CIO Kevin M. Sobczyk. "The response to this year's survey yielded highly useful information, but we are eager to hear from more of our constituents. The more data we get, the more effective the survey becomes as a tool for helping opera companies make wise decisions on strategy and expenditures."

Among the takeaways from the survey:

- Opera companies now spend an average of nine percent of their annual operating budgets on marketing.
- Subscription renewals across the field are trending between 60 and 80 percent.
- Approximately half of responding companies are now using dynamic pricing to maximize revenue in tandem with full and mini-subscription packages.
- Though several members indicated the possibility of transitioning some printed marketing collateral to a digital-only format, fully 88 percent of respondents still print a full season brochure.
- Posters remain a solid symbol of brand awareness, with 82 percent of responding companies using printed posters as advertising.

Title recognition, the presence of local singers and premieres remain the top three indicators of successful ticket sales campaigns.

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# Of One: The Quest For Asian Fusion in the Opera House

By Brian Hinrichs

In 1904, an opera premiered at La Scala with a score by an Italian composer based on a story by an American lawyer. Set in Nagasaki, it featured authentic Japanese melodies, as well as motifs drawn from the “Star Spangled Banner.”

In 2007, the Bangkok Opera presented *Die Walküre* set in World War II-era Thailand. The production featured a Taiwanese Brünnhilde, a Welsh Wotan and an orchestra of Thai, German, American and Chinese musicians under the baton of the Cambridge-educated Thai conductor Sontow Sucharitkul.

In the decade since its 2004 premiere, Tan Dun’s *Tea: A Mirror of Soul* has been staged in Japan and the Netherlands by the French-Lebanese director Pierre Audi, in Sweden by the Chinese director Chiang Ching, in Vienna by the Venezuelan-born British-educated director Carlos Wagner and in Santa Fe — and soon Vancouver, during OPERA America’s annual conference — by the Japanese director Amon Miyamoto.

The exoticism of Asia has long been portrayed on the Western operatic stage: when Orientalist fads swept 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, opera audiences were transported by Bizet to Sri Lanka with *Les pêcheurs de perles*, by Delibes to Colonial India with *Lakmé* and, of course, by Puccini to Japan and China with *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*. And 100 years later, with China having emerged from the Cultural Revolution, productions of traditional European operatic repertoire are now staples of the musical landscape. *La traviata* and *Eugene Onegin* are performed alongside traditional Chinese opera at Beijing’s National Centre for the Performing Arts, derisively (or affectionately) known as “The Egg” for its modernist shape.

But now, a new Asian fusion has emerged that is not just a cross-cultural exchange of aesthetics, but a true blend of musical cultures. This new fusion raises compelling questions about identity and authenticity for creators and observers both, as four recent operas in the contemporary repertoire exemplify.

### STRIKING A CHORD WITH TEA

Before the American premiere of *Tea: A Mirror of Soul* at The Santa Fe Opera in 2007, Tan Dun told *The Santa Fe New Mexican* that the opera followed what he calls a “one plus one format,” a phrase that captures his belief that outwardly disparate elements are capable of coming together in supportive, inseparable harmony. That belief also reflects his compositional style, influenced as it is by his childhood immersion in traditional Chinese music during the Cultural Revolution and his later exposure to Western music and training beginning at age 19. As he said in Frank Scheffer’s documentary about the making of *Tea*, “I cannot escape my little village, but meanwhile, I cannot escape Manhattan.”

*Tea: A Mirror of Soul* blends history, religion, nature and myth to tell the story of Seikyo, a Japanese Prince turned Monk whose tragic quest for the love of the Chinese Princess Lan and the true *Book of Tea* is told in a deliberate, contemplative style. East and West, Japan and China, water and fire: duality permeates the work, lending it an epic, mystical quality that Dun’s music fuels. Monks chant, the singers bend pitches and deploy eerie trills, and three percussionists use the sounds of water, paper and ceramics to mark each act of the opera. The Western orchestra punctuates the action with soaring melodies one moment and percussion-heavy climaxes the next. Despite the seemingly arcane premise, the traditional plot markers of a tragedy, the visually opulent staging suggested by the libretto and the combination of musical novelties with cinematic writing makes for moving and accessible music-drama.

It’s not surprising, then, that *Tea* is one of the well-travelled new operas of the past decade. And despite the unique requirements of the orchestration and the challenges Tan creates for his singers (high-sitting vocal lines, pitch bending, fast changing rhythms), the fact that *Tea* is sung in English and relies neither on the recreation of the Peking opera vocal style nor artist-specific casting works to its benefit.

According to his program notes, his first priority in composing *Tea* was to structure it using “a mélange of ‘organic music,’ song, words and fable.” His second priority was melody, his vocal lines inspired by sources ranging from Japanese and Tibetan chant, Chinese poetry, Noh, Kyogen and classical Chinese opera, and even, he says, from Puccini.

### BANNED IN BEIJING, BOUND FOR SANTA FE

Huang Ruo was born in 1976, the year Mao Zedong died and the Cultural Revolution ended, when Tan was already beginning his formal education as a composer. As Tan eventually headed to Columbia University to study composition, so Huang completed degrees at Oberlin and Juilliard. But whereas Tan’s relationship with Chinese music was cemented as a child working as a traditional musician and arranger for a local opera troupe, Huang grew up in a more Western-centric musical universe and is self-taught on Chinese instruments. Still, he says, “the experience has inspired my style in an unconscious way. I focus more on the color and timbre of every sound, especially those traveling between pitches.”

His approach to the opera *Dr. Sun Yat-Sen*, set for its American premiere at The Santa Fe Opera in 2014, reveals that Chinese music, despite its unconscious influence on his overall style, is also a tool in a toolbox, something to deploy and withhold as the drama (or audience) dictates. The opera delves into the personal history of Sun Yat-Sen, a figure better

“A NEW ASIAN FUSION HAS EMERGED THAT IS NOT JUST A CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGE OF AESTHETICS, BUT A TRUE BLEND OF MUSICAL CULTURES.”



Sreytov Pheun as Cambodian smot singer in HGOco's world premiere production of John Glover's *New Arrivals*. Photo by Felix Sanchez.

known for his role in overthrowing the Qing dynasty and founding the Republic of China. According to Huang, the story is “not well-known and this is the first time it’s being told in operatic form,” with a libretto that centers on “four types of love: love of marriage, love of friendship, love of parents and love of country.” Originally slated for a premiere in Beijing to commemorate the centennial of the 1911 revolution, the production was cancelled for “logistical reasons” and picked up by Opera Hong Kong amid speculation that the personal angle on Sun Yat-Sen’s life was deemed inappropriate by government censors.

When asked to expand on the stylistic influences in the work, Huang talks of intentionally manipulating different musical traditions for dramatic ends, writing in a more Chinese

style for traditional characters, like Sun Yat-Sen’s first wife, and in a more Western style for Soong Ching-ling, his more progressive third wife. Despite painting such distinctions for the sake of the drama, he says the music in *Dr. Sun Yat-Sen* is about “going beyond the purely Western or Chinese,” echoing sentiments expressed by Tan. Indeed, Huang Ruo has written two versions of *Dr. Sun Yat-Sen*: one for an orchestra of Chinese instruments, as heard at the 2011 premiere in Hong Kong, and one for Western orchestra with three Chinese instruments, which will be unveiled at the Santa Fe premiere. The libretto is in Chinese for both versions.

Charles MacKay, general director of The Santa Fe Opera, is tackling the challenges head on. He and Huang will not be using an all-Chinese cast for the Santa Fe production,



Opera Philadelphia's 2010 production of Tan Dun's *Tea: A Mirror of Soul*. Photo by Kelly & Massa Photography.

“because they thought it would convey the wrong message to producers in the future,” he says. MacKay also expressed that the singers, accustomed to learning phonetically, would be fine as long as they have a “crackerjack Mandarin coach.” As far as incorporating Chinese instruments into the Santa Fe pit, he pointed to their previous experience with *Tea* as good preparation. In fact, Santa Fe now has something of a track record of producing new works by Asian American composers. The company premiered Bright Sheng's *Madame Mao* in 2003, followed by *Tea*. Soon, *Dr. Sun Yat-Sen* will follow.

#### GETTING IT RIGHT

Whereas Tan and Huang can draw on their personal experiences with two different cultures, questions about

influence and authenticity become more explicit when the composer mixing traditions has Western musical training alone. Composer John Glover felt enormous pressure to “get it right” when asked by HGOco, Houston Grand Opera's initiative that builds new and lasting community relationships by telling stories with words and music, to write a chamber opera about Cambodian immigrant and Houston resident Yani Rose Keo for HGOco's East + West series.

Two weeks before Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge in 1975, with a clear sense that her family was in danger, Keo caught a flight to Bangkok. Eventually settling in Houston, she established the Alliance for Multicultural Community Services to support other refugees and is something of a local hero.

## “QUESTIONS ABOUT INFLUENCE AND AUTHENTICITY BECOME MORE EXPLICIT WHEN THE COMPOSER MIXING TRADITIONS HAS WESTERN MUSICAL TRAINING ALONE.”

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Glover knew he had to “build a ‘sound’ world” that represented Keo’s experience, but wondered, “how do you do that in a way that is sensitive, that is thoughtful, that does not come across as tourism?” And so he went to Cambodia for two weeks, immersing himself in Cambodian music and art, with the aim of being completely open to the sounds and influences around him. After experiencing the highly elaborate form of Buddhist chanting known as *smot* in an intimate setting with revered teacher Koet Ran, he knew it was pivotal. “It was one of those moments, it hit me like a wall. And in Houston, I began thinking, what if we incorporate a *smot* singer, as sort of a shadow of the character of Yani, maybe an echo of what she lost?”

And so the resulting opera, *New Arrivals*, features Yani on a plane with three other refugees, reflecting on the trauma and hope of their experiences. The young Cambodian *smot* singer Pheun Sreyppov weaves in two dramatically poignant pieces from her traditional repertoire, acting as a reflection of Yani’s past. It sounds simple, but the reality is more complex, as *smot* is historically sung without any other individuals or accompaniment, let alone Western accompaniment under the baton of a conductor. Glover estimated those pitches around which Sreyppov would center and created sketches for the instrumentalists. But the rehearsal process required flexibility of the entire creative team, with Sreyppov often intuitively shifting her line to fit the Western quartet of singers. The result is a powerful mixture, one that very consciously incorporates a Cambodian musical element but allows it to thrive in a new setting.

Glover’s experience echoed that of Stewart Wallace’s in creating *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* for San Francisco Opera in 2008. Set to a libretto by Chinese American author Amy Tan, based on her novel of the same title, for Wallace the idea of mixing non-Western elements came from the novelist’s narrative. “It all started with the book. We never had any goal of creating an Asian-American or American-Asian opera.” With a story that traverses generations and shifts between China and San Francisco, he made numerous musically immersive trips to China before starting the composition process, sometimes with Amy Tan as his guide.

As Glover would later approach his journey to Cambodia, Wallace went to China with an open mind and ears. Like Debussy and the Canadian composer Colin McPhee, who were both deeply affected upon hearing the Javanese gamelan, Wallace became smitten with the *suona* and Chinese percussion, and later realized this combination comprised a traditional funeral band, a perfect fit for the opera. “The reason I wanted that combination was because it provided texture,” said Wallace. “It was never about scales à la Puccini. It was

about texture and sonority, using them in my own language but with a texture from another place. Through those textures, I could create the character of place.”

In the end, *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* would incorporate four percussionists and two *suonas*, numerous Chinese acrobats, a Peking opera singer and a Beijing rock star. When everyone was finally in one room for rehearsals in San Francisco, the full collaborative nature of the project became evident, as did the diverse approaches to music and inevitable communication problems. Like Sreyppov in *New Arrivals*, Chen Yi, a traditional Chinese opera singer, had never worked with a conductor. Wallace remembers her saying, “When I do Chinese opera, when I stop and take a drink of tea, they wait for me. The conductor made her crazy.” He also emphasizes that the musical success of the project was in large part due to the luck he had in finding a Chinese teacher and band leader early on who was “interested and enthusiastic about deploying his traditional techniques in new ways.”

The premiere production went on to sell out and attract large Asian American audiences to the War Memorial Opera House. When asked whether such a large-scale work so dependent on specific Chinese singers, musicians and artists had a future on the road, he acknowledged that a replication of the San Francisco production would be daunting but says that he is in talks for creating a scaled-down version of the work.

Regardless of their ethnicity or upbringing or training, there is agreement among these composers that the surest sign of success for an opera derived from two worlds is that, in the words of Tan Dun, it feels “of one.” The other sign, of course, is that opera companies and audiences are embracing the fusion, as well. Is this a result of growing interest in Asian composers specifically, or simply a symptom of the globalized nature of classical music today? “Both,” says MacKay: there is more awareness of things Asian in general, and a heightened interest in China in particular as it increasingly becomes a dominant cultural and economic force in the world.

But ultimately, MacKay believes that regardless of the exoticism or the curiosity, the fundamentals of operatic story telling remain the same. “We can look at an opera and say yes, this is a great story of Chinese history, but in the end it’s about the human story, the human point of view.”

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*Brian Hinrichs is currently completing his M.B.A. at the Bolz Center for Arts Administration at the University of Wisconsin. A cellist, he was formerly director of marketing for the Madison Opera. He was a Fulbright U.S. Student Fellow to Thailand in 2007.*



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# Building a Strong Foundation for the Arts



*During his six years as president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation the distinguished music scholar Don M. Randel elevated the stature of the arts within the foundation and, by example, within the national philanthropic community. On the eve of his retirement Randel, who will deliver the Opening Keynote Address at Opera Conference 2013 in Vancouver, spoke with OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca about the imperative role of the arts in our national life.*

**MAS:** *The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has maintained a strong portfolio of national initiatives at a time when many foundations have migrated toward regional or local models. What has motivated The Mellon Foundation to hold out against the movement toward such localization?*

**DMR:** We felt the need to continue to take some modest responsibility for the quality of the national intellectual and artistic life. Given the fact that the federal government devotes fewer and fewer resources to it, and because so many other foundations have withdrawn from it as well, it seemed to me that it was important for us to show the flag nationally. We do, of course, make substantial grants in our own area, namely New York, and we are grateful that many other philanthropists attend to their own particular geographical locations. But there is a national statement to be made about the importance of the arts and we'd like to help make that.

**MAS:** *Many foundations are reducing the actual dollars they give to the arts or are reducing the proportion of what they give to the arts by leaving the allocation stable in a growing environment. What is it that has motivated The Mellon Foundation to intensify its support of the arts at this time?*

**DMR:** I have grown the foundation's arts allocation somewhat faster than other sectors simply because the need seems to me to be so very great. With the National Endowment for the Arts threatened with extinction — and in any case not very large compared with the national need — it seemed to me that the

arts were a domain in which we were the only foundation of any consequence engaged to a significant degree, and that we needed to keep that up as our resources permit. Fortunately, we have been able to do this by allocating dollars that derive from growing assets, so I haven't cut anybody's budget in order to put more money into the arts.

**MAS:** *Is your investment a response to the needs of the arts community or recognition of the contribution the arts community makes to national life?*

**DMR:** I believe that the humanities and the arts are crucial to our national life. What is it that we as a country would like to be known for and remembered for? It can't only be about economic prowess and the defense industry. We really have to make it clear that we are a nation that cares about ideas and the arts, which I don't distinguish from one another. Since we are more and more isolated in this business, it's incumbent upon us to keep demonstrating our own commitment in the hope of stimulating a greater commitment to the arts on the part of the nation as a whole.

**MAS:** *How do your colleagues in the foundation world respond to your belief in the importance of arts and ideas?*

**DMR:** I think we're all of a mind here at The Mellon Foundation. We are a relatively small group and we have come together because we do share certain values and beliefs. It's not a hard sell around here. But I don't necessarily think

of the foundation community as being an audience for us. I would be grateful if they would imitate us, but I don't devote much energy to trying to persuade the other big foundations that they ought to be more like us. Many of them have other concerns which are perfectly noble and valuable.

**MAS:** *The foundation is strongly identified with supporting new works. What is it philosophically that leads the foundation to support creativity as much as it does?*

**DMR:** We're a nation that prides itself on being innovative and entrepreneurial in many domains, mostly economic

**MAS:** *Even arts organizations, as creative as they are, can become very rooted in the way they have done things historically or in the history of the art form itself. Have you been frustrated at the rate of change either leading an institution like the University of Chicago or The Mellon Foundation? Do you wish you could accelerate change more dramatically given the levers you have?*

**DMR:** I think change for its own sake is much overrated. There is a kind of fashionable discourse about change in our time, especially in the business world where you hear often the refrain, "If you don't change your way of doing business

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**"WHAT IS IT THAT WE AS A COUNTRY WOULD LIKE TO BE KNOWN FOR AND REMEMBERED FOR? IT CAN'T ONLY BE ABOUT ECONOMIC PROWESS AND THE DEFENSE INDUSTRY. WE REALLY HAVE TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WE ARE A NATION THAT CARES ABOUT IDEAS AND THE ARTS, WHICH I DON'T DISTINGUISH FROM ONE ANOTHER."**

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ones. I think it's equally crucial that we be seen to be leaders in the exercise of the imagination and the arts. Economically speaking, putting on new work is often a difficult matter. But it's crucial to the national life that we get to hear new works and not just the same old pieces that we've already heard.

**MAS:** *Universities have laboratories for research and development in the sciences. Should we be encouraging music departments to look at the development of new works as an R&D equivalent?*

**DMR:** It's an analogy that suits me. Scientists exercise their imagination looking for new and interesting ways of interpreting data, making new things out of the raw material of the physical world. There's every reason why artists and writers and thinkers should be equally engaged in the exercise of stretching the bounds of our imagination.

**MAS:** *You were president of the University of Chicago prior to leading The Mellon Foundation, so you certainly know the fundraising side of the equation. Now that you have experienced the contributing side of the equation has it proven different than you imagined it would be?*

**DMR:** I was probably an outlier among university presidents just as I am among foundation presidents. I didn't really expect to be a university president and I never had any particular wish to move into the foundation world. I tell all of my students "Life is a pile of accidents." But the fact is I've always thought of the two jobs as being fundamentally the same. As both a university president and as a foundation president I have thought it was my job to listen for other people's good ideas and then try to give them the resources with which to realize those ideas. Neither the president of a foundation or the president of a university can possibly have all of the good ideas. You try to assemble people around you and listen very carefully so as to try to identify good ideas and then back the people who have those ideas.

you're going to be out of business." Universities and cultural institutions of the kinds that we support have been in business for a long time, and it's not in the nature of those businesses to want to change in radical ways. These are not businesses in which you say the equivalent of "we're getting out of toasters and we're going into financial services."

We have a commitment to the past by our very nature. We don't get to say what might matter about the past and whether the past is worth remembering or not. Change is a very different sort of notion in cultural institutions than in the entrepreneurial world. That said, we do have to adapt to new circumstances, and certainly economic circumstances are among those most pressing upon us. We have to figure out how we're going to survive in new environments because we believe in the underlying and unchanging value of these activities. It's important to figure out what are the things that might need changing and what are the things that you wouldn't be willing to change no matter what. It's not about the value proposition. It's about the *values* proposition. What are the things you are committed to in the way of values? What are the things you believe are important in the life of the nation and of thoughtful people everywhere? How do you stick to those things while necessarily adapting to changing circumstances that you can't escape?

**MAS:** *If an arts organization had to choose between sticking with core values and going out of business, or sacrificing core values in order to continue delivering services, what would you propose as a strategy?*

**DMR:** There are many things about American society and culture to which we might object rather strongly. There are lots of things going on in society that we don't have to approve of, and we should have the courage to say that we don't approve of some of these things. It's true in higher education and it's true in the world of cultural organizations, as well. So at a minimum we have to be willing to lean in the direction of

“IT’S IMPORTANT TO FIGURE OUT WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT MIGHT NEED CHANGING AND WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT YOU WOULDN’T BE WILLING TO CHANGE NO MATTER WHAT. IT’S NOT ABOUT THE VALUE PROPOSITION. IT’S ABOUT THE VALUES PROPOSITION.”

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our values and press against those forces that might try to overwhelm them.

One can’t minimize the severe economic pressure put upon some of these organizations, but one can nevertheless try to rally people to the cause. Higher education has many things in common with the worlds of music and dance and opera and theater: We need to continue to try to stretch people’s imaginations and not only cater to what seems like a shrinking attention span, an inability to absorb new and bigger ideas than we might have previously had in our heads. It’s a struggle and it will continue to be a struggle, and we have to be willing to engage in that struggle, not naively supposing that given good ideas people will naturally adopt them.

The classic liberal intellectual mistake is to suppose that somehow the truth and ideas have their own leavening power, and if the facts are pointed out to people they will come to believe them. There are many things conspiring against that, and we have to go into this with our eyes wide open knowing that we are swimming against a tide that frankly we don’t

necessarily approve of. But it’s precisely because we don’t approve of it that we have to swim against it.

**MAS:** *Educational dropout rates are measurable, as are cure rates of diseases. But in the arts, where you are hoping to build equity in inspiration and creativity, it’s much harder to measure outcomes. I believe I once heard you quoted as saying “If life was about measurable outcomes we’d never fall in love.” After heading one of the great foundations in the country, do you retain the same skeptical view of measurable outcomes in terms of investment in the arts?*

**DMR:** Absolutely. If anything I have become steadily more skeptical of the thrall in which so many organizations find themselves of insisting on quantifiable outcomes. If you engage only those things that can be measured you won’t do some of the most important things in life. Assessment and outcomes are part of what we all do in a certain respect, but that can’t be the only thing we do. Most of what matters most is not easily measurable.

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# Vancouver: Where Nature Nurtures Art

By Janet Smith

***Perched between mountains and sea, between America and Asia, between a frontier past and a thoroughly modern present, Vancouver, site of Opera Conference 2013, offers its creative community diverse audiences and imaginative venues for opera, theater, music and dance.***

To understand how geography plays a major supporting role in Vancouver's arts scene, start by heading to Bard on the Beach's candy-striped tents on a summer evening. In Vanier Park, Shakespeare's masterworks are brought to a stage that opens up to the rolling waters of English Bay and the snow-capped mountains in the distance. The landscape forms a stunning backdrop for 15<sup>th</sup>-century kings and star-crossed lovers, the odd passing luxury yacht or buzzing seaplane adding the occasional quirkily anachronistic detail.

All of Vancouver's arts organizations are intensely aware of the unique location of Canada's eighth-largest, and arguably most beautiful, city; many even see the spectacular natural surroundings as their biggest competition for audiences. But few have been lucky enough to incorporate this scenery into their work quite as directly as Bard on the Beach's artistic director and founder Christopher Gaze. He set out to literally bring the rugged outdoors to the fine arts.

"I could definitely see the sea with the mountains and the sun going down as part of this theatrical experience," Gaze says of his original vision for a Shakespeare festival almost 25 years ago. "It just mixes together everything that British Columbians love. Bard on the Beach celebrates being here and being a part of an accessible culture in an exquisite location."

The landscape, which made the area a thriving settlement for Coastal First Nations thousands of years ago, is what continues to lure people here today — to the point where it seems like every second person you meet is originally from somewhere else — and continues to drive the cultural scene in this mid-sized city of 600,000. The mountains that surround Vancouver physically and symbolically cut the seaport town off from the rest of the country, while the ocean opens up to strong influences from neighbors in the Pacific Rim. "Here there's such a rich culture to draw upon," says Vancouver Opera's general director Jim Wright.

"I have found it a climate and a place that's exciting to be a part of — you have all the Asian and First Nations influences, mixed with the traditional British and colonial."

Vancouver is the kind of eclectic cultural hub where you're as likely to find a First Nations-inspired rendition of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Magic Flute* as you are a Peking Opera version of *King Lear*, where the Vancouver International Film Festival has far more movies in its Asian series than anything hailing from Hollywood, and where the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra has been known to ride the gondolas up to play on the ski slopes of nearby Grouse Mountain. Amid the rich smorgasbord of arts choices are some fascinating fusions: there's the 24-member Vancouver Inter-Cultural Orchestra's spicy mix of Chinese, Persian and European instruments; acclaimed artist Brian Jungen's Coastal masks fashioned out of Nike running shoes at the Vancouver Art Gallery; and rising choreographer Wen Wei Wang's artful blending of traditional Chinese movement and martial arts with ballet and coolly contemporary dance.

Settled in the 1860s as a rough-and-tumble logging and fishing town, Vancouver grew to thrive as a port of trade, and yet it is still a relatively new city that retains a bit of its frontier-like attitude. Just talk to Bing Thom, the renowned Hong Kong-born, Vancouver-raised architect who designed the cylindrical, zinc-clad and acoustically stellar concert hall known as the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at the University of British Columbia. "The interesting thing about Vancouver is we don't see ourselves as the centre of the world; we see ourselves as the edge of the world — and that makes us much more approachable," says Thom. "It's deeper than appearances here; it's got something to do with inner strength." Thom is currently working on the massive new Xique Centre in Hong Kong, the massive new home for Chinese opera in the West Kowloon Cultural District.

“WE DON’T SEE OURSELVES AS THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD;  
WE SEE OURSELVES AS THE EDGE OF THE WORLD.”

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### EQUIPPED FOR ADVENTURE

The running joke is that Vancouverites go everywhere in their Gore-Tex. While that doesn’t mean you’ll find folks showing up in hiking boots and toting bags of trail mix, you’ll definitely find a casual, West Coast vibe to a night out to opera, ballet, symphony or theater — and a muted disdain for elitism or showiness.

At weeknight performances at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver Opera’s Jim Wright can usually be found sporting a jacket and an open shirt. “I wear my tux to the opera, well, practically never. And I don’t want to send that signal,” he says.

Over at Bard on the Beach, you actually will find Gore-Tex — and maybe even rubber boots — on theatergoers on rainy nights, of which Vancouver famously has more than a few. “It’s casual here and we don’t have to put on airs,” says the British-born founder Gaze. “We don’t have to feel that oppression of perhaps not knowing as much as we should about that play. It’s accepting and open and easy. I think it’s this notion of the temperate climate; this is an easy place to live — and that’s wonderfully pleasant and freeing.”

That openness and sense of living on the “edge” has a direct effect on the arts being created here. Forward-thinking acts like the Turning Point Ensemble and Standing Wave are known for pushing contemporary orchestral music to dizzying new heights, and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra cultivates bold new music through a composer-in-residence program that has raised the profile of such Canadian composers as Rodney Sharman and Jeffrey Ryan.

One of the most prominent examples of local risk-taking is Ballet British Columbia, a sleek company that’s about as far from Swan Lake as you can get. A couple of years ago, the group ran a promotional campaign called “Take Our Tutus,” in which its members hung pink, poofy skirts on hangers all over the downtown. The message was loud and clear: this troupe was proudly not about the classics, which was a good thing — every tutu disappeared within hours.

Under the artistic direction of young firebrand Emily Molnar, a choreographer and former star dancer at Ballet B.C., the company now showcases the edgy work of local stars like Crystal Pite and Wen Wei Wang alongside hot international names like



*Anthony and Cleopatra* at Bard on the Beach, 2010. Photo by David Blue and courtesy of Tourism Vancouver.



A woman dancing at the Powell Street Festival. Photo courtesy of Tourism Vancouver.

William Forsythe and Johan Inger. An astonishing 80 percent of its repertoire is new creations.

“Just the fact that between 2009 and now we’ve done 28 new works and the fact that we can do that in Vancouver says something about this city,” says Molnar. “I don’t think that Ballet B.C. could so easily sit in other cities. Audiences here seem to be more open to contemporary work. They like the new; they like innovation. They’re curious about the idea of a new creation rather than hesitant.”

#### **CONTENDING WITH ISOLATION**

Vancouver’s relatively remote and isolated location does, however, make it more difficult to take new productions elsewhere in Canada, let alone the world.

At Vancouver Opera, it is a priority to put on productions that reflect the diversity of its hometown, but sometimes those

culturally specific works are a hard sell elsewhere in North America. *The Magic Flute*, three years in the making with a First Nations advisory group, has yet to see a staging outside of this town. Despite that, Wright sees the approach as the key to survival.

“It’s the constant question: How do we make things meaningful to the folks who live here?” he explains. “You can go to the Cineplex and see the Met put on arguably the best production of *Magic Flute* in the world. But you come to see Vancouver Opera’s *Magic Flute*, and you hear something about this place, you see a design reflective of where you live... and that’s a whole different experience.”

While not all of the original productions being created in Vancouver get out of town, some of the names behind them are gaining a big audience abroad. Visionary dance renegade Crystal Pite works steadily in the U.S. and Europe’s major companies, and

**“YOU CAN GO TO THE CINEPLEX AND SEE THE MET PUT ON ARGUABLY THE BEST PRODUCTION OF *MAGIC FLUTE* IN THE WORLD. BUT YOU COME TO SEE VANCOUVER OPERA’S *MAGIC FLUTE*, AND YOU HEAR SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PLACE, YOU SEE A DESIGN REFLECTIVE OF WHERE YOU LIVE.”**

recently choreographed *The Tempest* at the Metropolitan Opera with iconic Canadian theater director Robert Lepage. In the realm of visual art, photo-conceptualist stars like Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace and Stan Douglas are arguably even more in demand in Europe than they are in Vancouver. And events like Expo 86 and the Cultural Olympiad during the 2010 Winter Olympics here have helped put the city's art on an international stage.

Still, as Vancouver artists strive to reach viewers abroad, they must also pay close attention to the culturally diverse audiences at home. Here's where geography, and Vancouver's perch on the Pacific Rim, again plays a strong role. This is a city where the last census showed about 25 percent of the population had Chinese as a first language, and the numbers of immigrants from Korea, Japan, the Philippines and India are growing steadily.

Most arts organizations try whenever possible to reflect those segments of Vancouver's culture in their programming. The last time Vancouver Opera presented *Madame Butterfly*, it set up a "Views of Japan" community engagement series that included everything from traditional tea services to a cross-dressing Japanese artist from Toronto. This year, Ballet B.C. is bringing in the National Ballet of China for performances of *Swan Lake* as part of its subscription series. And last September's Vancouver International Film Festival opened with Deepa Mehta's India-set *Midnight's Children*, followed by a gala party that featured gourmet vindaloes and bhangra dancing.

Meanwhile, a new wave of Asian-Canadian artists, many second or third generation, are creating work that melds East and West, traditional and contemporary. You can see and hear these new voices at places like the Japanese Powell Street Festival, with its taiko drumming and electric guitar acts and contemporary renga poetry readings, or at the Indian Summer Festival, with its unexpected masala of cuisine demonstrations, Bollywood stars and high-profile writers like *Life of Pi's* Yann Martel.

"If you take another 20 or 30 years, Vancouver is probably going to be one of the most racially mixed cities in the world," predicts architect Thom. "It really, truly is a melting pot. We've got people from everywhere but we've created a situation where they all feel welcome."

Most arts organizations will tell you that bringing out those newcomers to the theatres and galleries in town is still a work in progress. Yes, if Vancouver has anything in common with the less picturesque cities of North America, it's that its arts groups are always struggling to build audiences, all while facing stagnant government funding and a slow-to-recover economy. In an added challenge, the skyrocketing real estate — Vancouver was recently ranked by *The Economist* as the most expensive place to live in North America — has meant that purpose-built arts institutions are hard to come by. The space-crunched Vancouver Art Gallery is currently trying to secure a site for a major new landmark structure downtown; the symphony, opera and ballet use city-owned stages, while the numerous smaller theater companies are always scrambling to rent space.

Yet talk to anyone in the arts, and you will hear a sense of optimism. There's a feeling that this city wedged between towering mountains and rolling sea is just starting to find its voice. "I think it's got a phenomenal future," Thom says. "It's just at the beginning of what we can be. Yes, we are still finding out who we are; I don't think it will, or should, ever stop."

And what about those gorgeous mountains and rolling seas? Will they always be a source of competition for Vancouver arts programmers? Many of the cultural scene's movers and shakers are come to terms with the dichotomy.

"I say, 'Let's embrace the beauty and nature,'" Molnar says resolutely. "People can go up the mountain in the daytime and go out to see the theater at night."

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Janet Smith is arts editor of Vancouver's *Georgia Straight*, and writes regularly about opera, dance and theater. A member of the Vancouver Film Critics Circle, she has covered Vancouver's cultural scene for more than two decades.



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# Inheriting the Wind

***For 35 years, legendary conductor Julius Rudel challenged New York City Opera audiences with new and unusual repertoire. In this excerpt from his new memoir, First and Lasting Impressions: Julius Rudel Looks Back on a Life in Music, Rudel, who turned 92 in March, recalls the politics and people who forged City Opera's early years.***

In December 1956, following the failure of New York City Opera's fall season, Erich Leinsdorf resigned as general director. It looked very much like the end of the company. Committees were formed, and there were many phone calls and desperate meetings. Clearly, I was part of management, yet my sympathy was very much with the members of the company. Mostly I stayed away from the activities.

A group of singers including Norman Treigle, Phyllis Curtin, Cornell MacNeil, Michael Pollock and David Lloyd enlisted the efforts of other City Opera members and pleaded with the board to hire a director from within the company's ranks. They wrote a letter to the board members, imploring them to not abandon such an important cultural asset as City Opera, and sent a copy of the letter to *The New York Times*. In addition, they met with City Center's board chairman, Newbold Morris, and finance chairman, Morton Baum, and presented a strong case for the appointment of an insider: "Why look for an outsider to take over the company when you could have Julius — who has risen through the ranks and could run it better than anyone else?" (Or as Morris himself later quipped: "We were tired of prima donna conductors, and Rudel was the only one who knew where the scenery was buried.")

On the evening of January 17, 1957, my wife Rita and I were home getting dressed to attend a performance of a Broadway play. The phone rang, and it was Newbold Morris, casually asking me what I was doing that evening. "I'm going to *Inherit the Wind*," I told him, to which Morris replied, "You just have!"

I received the appointment to the general directorship of New York City Opera less than two months before my 36<sup>th</sup> birthday. After I got over the initial shock, my appointment

to the top seemed like a natural thing to me. I had no hubris, perhaps because I had no idea what the future held.

Morton Baum sat me down and gave me the grim financial facts. He also told me this was the "final try" the board would make to save the company. The spring 1957 season had already been canceled; the fall season was scheduled to open on October 9 and to run for five weeks, with approximately 35 performances. What this meant was that I had nine months to put together a five-week season and get City Opera back on its feet. Coincidentally, Rita and I were preparing for the birth of our third child.

The next few weeks were a blur of feverish activity as I made a list of works and performances and came up with a budget for our "make-or-break season." I was positively consumed by the challenge, spending every waking hour and even my alleged sleeping hours planning each detail of my first season. (I kept a notebook on my nightstand for jotting down an endless to-do list.) There was never enough time — which, over the years, has been a motto of City Opera. I agonized over repertory and casting, ultimately deciding on 12 operas and 41 performances.





The first hammer blow came a few days later. John White, with whom I had worked so closely for more than a decade on all day-to-day administrative tasks, had suffered a nervous breakdown; he blamed himself for bringing on the Leinsdorf disaster and causing the demise of the company. John was hospitalized at St. Vincent's in Greenwich Village, where he received electric shock treatments. I went to visit him now and then, but he was in absolutely no condition to work. Morton Baum urged me to replace him, but I refused. John was the person at City Opera who was closest to me and we worked well together. I was used to his idiosyncrasies; his acerbic wit didn't bother me. Rather than replace him, I made the choice to go it alone until he was well enough to return to work.

My first order of business was to get rid of the ridiculous single-unit "Lazy Susan" set and retrieve some of our old but serviceable scenery from storage. Morton Baum and I met several times in February and March to discuss the repertory. I knew that we needed to make a bold statement during my first season, yet I had no real budget to speak of. I considered two operas for opening night: *Turandot* (a favorite of mine from childhood) and *Eugene Onegin*. I finally decided on *Turandot*, which I had conducted once before — a single performance Halasz gave to me in spring 1950 (another bone thrown my way for having prepared the production for him flawlessly).

In the midst of all this I was pulled in yet another direction: in March and April there were rehearsals and performances of the City Center Light Opera production of Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon*. The producer, Jean Dalrymple, had taken over the company when Bill

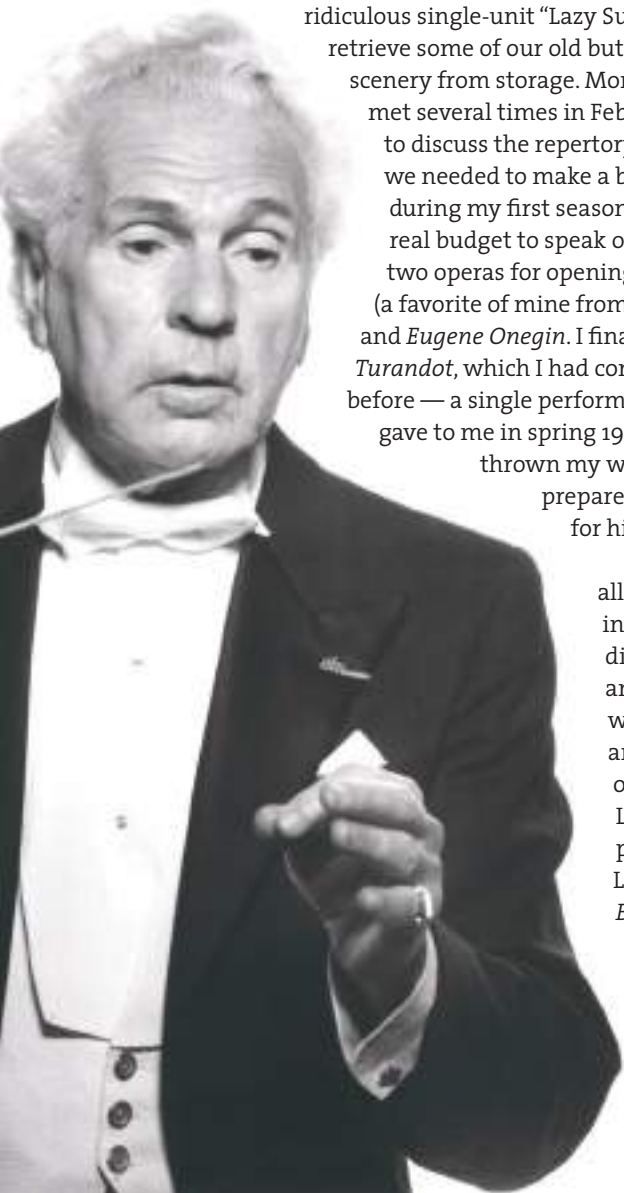
Hammerstein left, and now she asked me to be the Light Opera's musical director. I agreed, as a goodwill gesture from one department head to another. *Brigadoon* opened on March 27, 1957, to tumultuous acclaim, with Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times* praising the production, the "uniformly excellent" cast (including David Atkinson, Virginia Bosler, Helen Gallagher and Robert Rounseville); Agnes de Mille's choreography; and my own contribution: "[The score] is played with color and conviction by an excellent orchestra of 32 instrumentalists, conducted with obvious authority by Julius Rudel."

*Brigadoon* was a bona fide hit, and though we had to close on schedule after two weeks, we were able to transfer the production lock, stock and barrel to Broadway's Adelphi Theatre for an additional four-week run. (Subsequently, the Light Opera was to revive the Lerner and Loewe show *four* more times over the next decade — in 1961, 62, 64 and 67, with New York City Ballet's Edward Villella joining the cast and becoming the star of the show with his breathtaking "Sword Dance." As a completely unexpected bonus, I was pleased to receive a Tony Award nomination for Best Conductor for the 1962 revival.)

I still hadn't filled all the positions for the fall 1957 season. I wanted to get an Italian conductor — as knowledgeable of the Italian performance style as Morel and Rosenstock were with the French and German styles. I booked a trip to Milan. Morton Baum told me in no uncertain terms that City Center didn't have the money to reimburse me, so I decided to pay for the trip myself. It was money well spent. During my 10-day journey, I met with several conductors and was quite impressed with one in particular — Arturo Basile — to whom I offered a contract. He was the real deal: an authentic maestro who was familiar with the traditions of Italian opera. He had a successful track record with the public and with the press. The trip to Italy was even more rewarding than I had expected. Among the promising singers I heard there was a young tenor who so impressed me that I engaged him for the leading role of Calaf in *Turandot*. His name was Giuseppe Gismondo; he was handsome, with an exotic, noble face and a dark, seductive voice.

While I was in Italy, *The New York Times* got hold of some of my plans and published an article that took the wind out of my sails — disclosing that the new productions for the fall season would include Verdi's *Macbeth*, which had never been performed in New York, and Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. No casting was listed, and the final paragraph ominously stated, "Whether the City Opera has a spring season will depend on the success of the fall season."

The heat was on for me to make a miracle.



Julius Rudel. Photo by J. Henry.

The *Abduction from the Seraglio*, one of our new productions, was a gift from Lincoln Kirstein, the co-founder and general director of Balanchine's New York City Ballet. In February, he had called and offered me the sets and costumes for a production of *Abduction* that he had produced the previous May in Stratford, CT. I knew that Lincoln had once fancied the directorship of City Opera for himself, and I needed to know he was offering me this gift in a spirit of friendship, without strings attached. He made it clear that he was doing just that, and I happily accepted the gift. The costumes and sets were simple but stylish; the production was successful, and we revived it many times.

Another gift came by way of Jean Dalrymple. She offered me a double bill of Manuel de Falla operas to be conducted by José Iturbi, the flashy pianist best known for his appearances in a number of Hollywood musicals. Jean and Iturbi had been romantically involved for several years while she was his publicist, and she wanted to show the world that he was a "serious" conductor. I proposed a concert version of a De Falla double bill, but Iturbi and Jean demanded a full-scale production and would settle for nothing less. There ensued a search for scenery. We ended up borrowing the sets for the two one-act operas, *La vida breve* and *El amor brujo*, from the Barcelona Opera Company, whose general director at the time was none other than Laszlo Halasz. (I'm not certain how Jean managed this feat; Halasz was still bitter over his firing from the directorship of City Opera in 1951 — he had sued City Center following his dismissal — and he had no great love for me, either.) My budget had no provision for a stage director, and in a moment of temporary insanity I agreed to let Jean herself direct the double bill. Little did I know she would spend a small fortune on costumes and a guest lighting director (when our own resident lighting director, Hans Sondheimer, could have done a much better job). The production, though musically first-rate, was a dramatic shambles. I had to jump in and direct the chorus at the final dress rehearsal, as Jean had apparently not told them where to be (or what to do) onstage.

To balance the repertory I also planned our first production of Lehar's *The Merry Widow* (with Beverly Sills and Robert Rounseville in the leading roles), keeping projected costs at a minimum by agreeing to share the Light Opera Company's scenery and costumes. During my trip, I had made a stop in Paris. My *Fair Lady* composer Frederick Loewe was living the high life in Paris, now that his show was the hottest ticket on Broadway. I paid a visit to his lavish suite at the Plaza Athenee to ask his permission to let My *Fair Lady* conductor Franz Allers take some nights off from that show to conduct our *Merry Widow*. When Fritz Loewe finally emerged from the

.....  
 "I HAD NO HUBRIS,  
 PERHAPS BECAUSE I HAD NO IDEA  
 WHAT THE FUTURE HELD."  
 .....

hotel gambling room, where he had lost a good deal of money (which didn't seem to faze him one iota), he graciously agreed to my request.

Although I very much wanted to include *Macbeth* in my first season, I didn't put it on my initial proposal to the board. There was simply no money to produce it properly. I showed Morton Baum the lineup prior to the board meeting, and he said, "Julius, you need something more. It's not enough yet. Go ahead, do the *Macbeth*. I'll get you the money."

These were words that I heard more than once from Morton: "Don't worry, I'll get you the money." And somehow he always did. When Baum okayed *Macbeth*, I was ready for it and knew I could cast it strongly. We had within our ranks the perfect baritone for the title role: Cornell MacNeil. "Mac" had it all — a large baritone voice of unending power from bottom to top, a wonderful stage presence and good theatrical instincts. I was certain he would create a sensation, and I could surround

him with a well-nigh ideal cast led by Irene Jordan as a steely-voiced Lady Macbeth.

On my return from Europe I was overjoyed to see our small staff working so intensely. The

singers were being coached, and chorus rehearsals began in due course during the summer.

I've always felt the title role in *Turandot*, Puccini's final opera, should be sung, not screamed; just because *Turandot* is an "ice princess" doesn't mean she needs to sing piercingly. I wanted Frances Yeend to do the role. It took a lot of convincing, but she finally accepted the part and ultimately delivered a very beautiful performance. Adele Addison was a touching, heartbreaking Liu and Joshua Hecht a noble Timur. For the role of Calaf one needs a real Italianate tenor. The totally unknown Giuseppe Gismondo made a strong impression as Calaf; his voice was ravishing and he had thrilling top notes, to boot. I believe he would have had a major career — but after two seasons with us, he mysteriously disappeared.

*Turandot* opened October 9. The night before I managed to get some sleep, but Rita was wide awake nervously tossing and turning all night. The next morning, when I walked into City Center, I was struck by a certain air of exuberance in the building, even in the administrative offices on the seventh floor. The day flew by as I tended to various administrative tasks, rehearsed *Susannah* and looked in on other rehearsals and meetings.

A few minutes before the performance began, I went backstage to talk to the choristers. "Make the first five minutes sensational," I told them. They did — and then maintained that intensity until the final curtain. The next day's *New York Times* review, written by Howard Taubman, tells the story:

The New York City Opera Company began its new season at City Center last night with a remarkably fine *Turandot*. Puccini's last opera is a challenge to the greatest opera houses, and one shuddered in advance at this company's temerity. But under the guidance of its new general director, Julius Rudel, the City Center troupe carried it off with high honors. The feat was all the more notable because the company was rising from the ashes of grave artistic and economic troubles, which caused the cancellation of the last spring season. If this *Turandot* is any indication, morale has been reestablished and the new season will be lively.

The second night of the season, I conducted *Susannah*, the only opera left over from Leinsdorf's season, with Phyllis Curtin and Norman Treigle. Since we had gotten rid of the turntable set, I asked our house designer Andreas Nomikos to design a new set and brought in Marcella Cisney to direct the opera. Though I was not pleased with the resulting production, Curtin and Treigle once again gave definitive performances and Carlisle Floyd's opera was fast becoming one of our company's staples.

Less than two months before *Macbeth* was scheduled to open, Cornell MacNeil's manager called me, appealing to our friendship and the importance of "career building" — Mac's career, that is. Mac had been offered a contract by Lyric Opera of Chicago, which then, as now, had a star-studded roster and paid its artists handsomely. Mac wanted a release from his contract. I was very angry about this turn of events, but I wasn't going to hold Mac captive.

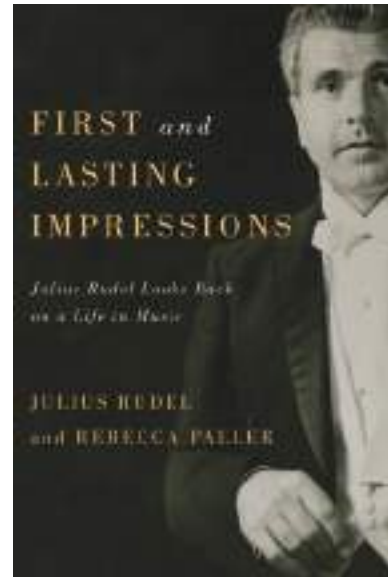
I had to find a *Macbeth* quickly — no easy task, as precious few baritones know the part.

In the course of our regular auditions, we had heard William Chapman and we liked him very much. I had conducted him in the summer of 1956 in *The King and I* at the Cape Cod Melody Tent in Hyannis. That had turned out very well — he had impressed me with his powerful baritone voice and charismatic stage presence — so we had signed him at City Opera for a couple of Escamillos. When he came to sign his contract, Bill casually asked if he could understudy MacNeil in *Macbeth*. Just as casually, I replied, "Sure." He was indeed sent from heaven. Now I had to persuade the conductor, Basile — who at first was dubious — that Bill could pull off the role of the Scottish king. But Margaret Webster, the director, had no doubts.

There was good chemistry between Bill and Irene Jordan — and during rehearsals, when he needed a bit of support, Peggy Webster instilled confidence in Bill by sitting down next to him and soothingly reassuring him how perfect his voice was for the role.

Bill Chapman was eager to absorb, to learn, to do. He epitomized the New York City Opera ideal. Those were the days when the challenge was extended to everybody. The vibes were good. My days were exhilarating, filled with artistic and administrative activities, and no fixed boundaries between the two. Within five minutes I might have two meetings: one with a stage director and another with our chorus master. Then I would coach a small group or ensemble for an hour, and go straight into an orchestra rehearsal. It was a crazy existence, yet we all seemed to thrive on it.

*Macbeth* received excellent reviews and caused a stir. Apparently the great baritone Leonard Warren came to one of our performances and then went to see Rudolf Bing — and the next thing we knew *Macbeth* was on the Met schedule for the 1958-59 season. Bill Chapman did such a fine job on 55<sup>th</sup> Street that he was invited to sing *Macbeth* at the opening of Menotti's Spoleto Festival in Italy in June 1958. Audiences and critics turned out in good numbers, and we finished on budget. We were already in close discussions with the Ford Foundation about plans for our first American season. We had returned and we could do no wrong.



*Julius Rudel was born in Vienna in 1921 and emigrated to the United States at the age of 17. After studies at the Mannes College of Music, he went on to an illustrious career as general director of New York City Opera, music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, and music director of the Kennedy Center, the Wolf Trap Festival, and the Caramoor Festival. First and Lasting Impressions, published by*

*University of Rochester Press as part of the Eastman Studies in Music series, was co-authored with Rebecca Paller, who writes for a variety of arts publications, including Opera News and Opera.*

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—Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, reviewing the January 2013 staged premiere in the Prototype Festival.



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# RECENTLY PUBLISHED

By Alexa B. Antopol

## A HISTORY OF OPERA

Carolyn Abbate, Roger Parker  
W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.  
ISBN13: 9780393057218

Why does opera continue to attract new audiences at a time when the stream of original works that was once its lifeblood has dried to a trickle? Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker answer this question in their modern retelling of the history of opera, examining its evolution over several centuries and its continued appeal to generations of audiences. Integral to this nuanced and engaging narrative is the ongoing exploration of the tensions that have sustained opera over four hundred years: between words and music, character and singer, the surreal and the believable. As this pair of experts argue, though the genre's most popular and enduring works were almost all written in a distant European past, opera continues to change the viewer — physically, emotionally and intellectually — with its enduring power.

## VERDI'S *IL TROVATORE*:

**THE QUINTESSENTIAL ITALIAN MELODRAMA**  
Martin Chusid  
University of Rochester Press  
ISBN13: 9781580464222

This full-length study on *Il trovatore* by one of the world's great Verdi authorities provides a comprehensive look at the masterpiece, from its genesis and structure to its early performance history and critical reception. Starting with the background of the opera, the volume traces the origins of the original play by Antonio García Gutiérrez, *El trovador*, and offers a new source for the drama. In addition, it examines the evolution of the libretto, the music and the arrangement of the narrative, revealing innovative musical and dramatic features. The book also

includes a discussion of contemporary reviews and a section on some of the important performers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (for example, Toscanini and Caruso), as well as a consideration of several of the more unusual stagings of the work mounted during the final decades of the century. Martin Chusid is professor emeritus of music at New York University and founding director of the American Institute for Verdi Studies.

## THE TEACHER'S EGO:

**WHEN SINGERS BECOME VOICE TEACHERS**  
Lynn Eustis  
GIA Publications  
ISBN13: 978157999093

Many voice teachers begin as professional singers themselves but, when facing the loss of their own performing identities, work to build and support their students in every way possible. In *The Teacher's Ego*, author Lynn Eustis grapples with these two distinct egos, those of both singer and teacher, and reveals practical implications for any professional voice teacher. Ultimately, the relationship between a singer and a voice teacher is complex. As Eustis states, "Voice teachers who understand their own motivations are infinitely more effective in the studio than those who don't." In this practical and thought-provoking companion to *The Singer's Ego*, Eustis covers such topics as one's identity as a singer, allowing one's students to be their own artists, relations with colleagues and life beyond the teaching studio. This volume opens a new dialog between teacher and student — one where each party will benefit.

## ROBERT ASHLEY

Kyle Gann  
University of Illinois Press  
ISBN13: 9780252078873

This book explores the life and works of Robert Ashley, one of the leading American composers of the post-Cage generation. Ashley's innovations began in the 1960s when he, along with Alvin Lucier, Gordon Mumma and David Behrman, formed the Sonic Arts Union, a group that turned conceptualism toward electronics. Particularly known for his development of television operas beginning with *Perfect Lives*, Ashley spun a long series of similar text/music works, sometimes termed "performance novels." Drawing on extensive research into Ashley's early years in Ann Arbor and interviews with Ashley and his collaborators, Kyle Gann chronicles the life and work of this musical innovator and provides an overview of the avant-garde milieu of the 1960s and 1970s to which he was so central. Gann examines all nine of Ashley's major operas to date in detail, along with many minor works, revealing the fanatical structures that underlie Ashley's music, as well as private references hidden in his opera librettos.

## OPERA LIVELY: THE INTERVIEWS

Luiz Gazzola  
Opera Lively Press  
ISBN13: 9780615729183

This volume contains the best of one year of journalism from Opera Lively. Singers, conductors, stage and video directors, scholars, educators, opera company managers and composers describe the entire gamut of the operatic experience. Insights about characters and works are side by side with discussions of controversial topics such as Regietheater, critical



editions, the cult of image and the future of the art form. Among the 39 interviewees are singers Anna Netrebko, Joyce DiDonato, Deborah Voigt, Anna Caterina Antonacci, Piotr Beczala, Matthew Polenzani and Thomas Hampson; conductors Daniele Gatti, Leon Botstein and Sir John Eliot Gardiner; stage director Thaddeus Strassberger; musicologist Philip Gossett and composer Robert Ward. Luiz Gazzola, senior editor at Opera Lively, uses his three decades of experience as a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and opera lover to engage with the artists while asking musically well-informed and intellectually challenging questions.

**OPENING WINDOWS:**

**CONFESSIONS OF A CANADIAN VOCAL COACH**

Stuart Hamilton

Dundurn Press

ISBN13: 9781459705128

Stuart Hamilton is a well-known Canadian musician who has been at the forefront of music in Canada for more than 60 years. Here, in his memoir, he recounts his sometimes hectic assault on the Canadian music world. Along the way, Hamilton encountered, as a vocal coach and accompanist, most of the great Canadian singers of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and some international ones, as well. For 27 years, Hamilton was an erudite and funny personality on CBC's *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera*. He has appeared across Canada with such artists as Lois Marshall, Maureen Forrester, Richard Margison and Isabel Bayrakdarian. In *Opening Windows*, Hamilton takes the reader into his confidence on numerous matters that have influenced musical life in Canada for decades.

**FALLING UP:**

**THE DAYS AND NIGHTS OF CARLISLE FLOYD**

Thomas Holliday

Syracuse University Press

ISBN13: 9780815610038

Actors know about "falling up": a split-second ignition from the wings, propelling entrance as a new character, an unwilling ascent to a different mode of being, an in-body experience that overlays preparation, opportunity,

choice or chance. *Falling Up*, the full-length study of Carlisle Floyd, is a metaphor for humanity's uncanny ability to rise from seeming disaster into rebirth. Floyd's consistent succession of soars, stumbles, slides or wrenches sings of triumph over odds. A modern Renaissance man, Floyd is an opera composer and librettist, a trained concert pianist, a master stage director and a teacher. In *Falling Up*, Thomas Holliday offers an intimate account of the life that shaped the words and music. Combining insights from hundreds of interviews with Floyd, his family and many of the last half-century's greatest singers, conductors and opera administrators, *Falling Up* traces Floyd's Southern roots and the struggles and sacrifices that accompanied his rise to operatic stardom.

**THE PERFECT AMERICAN**

Peter Stephan Jungk; translated by

Michael Hofmann

Other Press

ISBN13: 9781590515778

This volume, the basis for Philip Glass' new work of the same title, is a fictionalized biography of Walt Disney's final months, as narrated by Wilhelm Dantine, an Austrian cartoonist who worked for Disney in the 1940s and 50s, illustrating sequences for *Sleeping Beauty*. It is also the story of Dantine himself, who desperately seeks Disney's recognition at the risk of his own ruin. Peter Stephan Jungk has infused a new energy into the genre of fictionalized biography. Dantine, imbued with a sense of European superiority, first refuses to submit to Disney's rule, but is nevertheless fascinated by the childlike omnipotence of a man who identifies with Mickey Mouse. We discover Disney's delusions of immortality via cryogenic preservation, his tirades alongside his Abraham Lincoln talking robot, his invitation of Nikita Khrushchev to Disneyland once he learns that the Soviet Premier wants to visit the park, his utopian visions of his EPCOT project and his backyard labyrinth of toy trains. Yet, if at first Disney seems to have a magic wand granting him all his wishes, we soon discover that he is as tortured as the man who tells his story.

**MARC BLITZSTEIN:**

**HIS LIFE, HIS WORK, HIS WORLD**

Howard Pollack

Oxford University Press

ISBN13: 9780199791590

Marc Blitzstein remains one of the most versatile and fascinating figures in the history of American music, his creative output running the gamut from films scores and Broadway operas to art songs and chamber pieces. A prominent leftist and social maverick, Blitzstein constantly pushed the boundaries of convention in mid-century America in both his work and his life. Award-winning music historian Howard Pollack's biography covers Blitzstein's life in full, from his childhood in Philadelphia to his violent death in Martinique at age 58. The author describes how this student of contemporary luminaries Nadia Boulanger and Arnold Schoenberg became swept up in the stormy political atmosphere of the 1920s and 30s, and throughout his career walked the fine line between his formal training and his populist principles. Pollack captures the astonishing breadth of Blitzstein's work — from provocative operas like *The Cradle Will Rock*, *No for an Answer* and *Regina*, to the wartime *Airborne Symphony* composed during his years in service, to lesser known ballets, film scores and stage works. Drawing on new interviews with friends and family of the composer, and making extensive use of new archival and secondary sources, this volume presents a comprehensive biography of this important American artist.

**LETTERS FROM A LIFE:**

**THE SELECTED LETTERS OF BENJAMIN**

**BRITTEN, 1913-1976 (VOLUME SIX: 1966-1976)**

Philip Reed, Mervyn Cooke, ed.s

Boydell & Brewer

ISBN13: 9781843837251

The sixth and final volume of the annotated selected letters of Benjamin Britten covers the composer's last decade. The genesis, composition and premieres of major stage works such as *Owen Wingrave* and *Death in Venice* are fully documented, as are the church parables, *The Burning Fiery Furnace* and *The Prodigal Son*. Important concert

works from this period include the powerful setting of Brecht's *Children's Crusade*, the Third Cello Suite (for Rostropovich), Canticles IV and V (both settings of poetry by T. S. Eliot), *Phaedra* (for Janet Baker) and the Third String Quartet, with its echoes of *Death in Venice*. As in previous volumes, Britten's letters to his life partner and principal interpreter, the tenor Peter Pears, remain central. Other significant correspondents include the Queen and Queen Mother; librettists William Plomer and Myfanwy Piper; artistic collaborators Frederick Ashton, Colin Graham and John Piper; musicians Janet Baker, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Mstislav Rostropovich; and composers Oliver Knussen, Dmitri Shostakovich and William Walton. The volume also traces the conversion of Snape Maltings into the Aldeburgh Festival's principal concert venue, its destruction by fire on the opening night of the 1969 Festival and its miraculous rebuilding in time for the following year's Festival, as well as major concert tours by Britten and Pears.

**BRITTEN IN PICTURES**

Lucy Walker  
 Boydell & Brewer  
 ISBN13: 9781843837497

Behind his public face, Benjamin Britten was an intensely private man who valued perhaps more than anything the time he spent at home on the Suffolk coast, composing and enjoying a settled domestic life. *Britten in Pictures* celebrates the many facets of Britten's life in a major new photographic treatment timed to coincide with the composer's centenary this year. Using the wealth of images housed in the collections of The Britten-Pears Foundation at Aldeburgh, the book charts the curve of Britten's life, using a selection of rare and previously unpublished images to reveal him anew in all phases of his career, catching a multitude of informal glimpses of the man "behind the scenes" at work and play, as well as in more familiar formal settings. The result is a new and often surprising portrait of this major musical genius.

**THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO OPERA STUDIES**

Nicholas Till, ed.  
 Cambridge University Press  
 ISBN13: 9780521671699

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# MY FIRST TIME

By Matthew Sigman



Gilligan had me at “To be or not to be.” Balefully singing Hamlet’s soliloquy to *Carmen*’s Habanera, the hapless castaway initiated me into the world of opera. That and the Skipper’s Toreador song (“Neither a borrower nor a lender be.”) have haunted

me ever since. Gilligan’s *Carmen* will always be (dare I say it?) my ultimate desert island disc.

My first live opera performance, coincidentally, was also *Carmen*. I was a teenage violinist with musical hormones raging from Beethoven’s Violin Concerto to Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody* when a friend’s mother, keenly aware of my eclectic cultural proclivities, had an extra ticket to a performance of *Carmen* produced by our local troupe, The Toledo Opera. The music was magnificent and I particularly enjoyed using my hostess’s opera glasses to pick out schoolmates in the children’s chorus, but I confess I was completely lost. My high school French was woefully insufficient for the libretto.

Cut to D.C., where I was a college student and attended Washington National Opera productions of *L’elisir d’amore* and *Rigoletto*, and New York City Opera’s touring *Tosca* at Wolf Trap. Cut to New York City, where an ultra-orthodox aficionado insisted I could not miss *Dialogues of the Carmelites* at the Metropolitan Opera with Regine Crespin and Mignon Dunn. I regret I did not yet have a fine enough ear to appreciate the voices, but John Dexter’s tilted cruciform platform and Poulenc’s score awakened me to the realization that the art form could be at once modern and classic.

Slowly, with each production, my comprehension evolved and my appreciation deepened, all the more so with the advent of supertitles. I was no longer lost in translation. I learned the difference between *bis* and *boo*. I wept at *La bohème*. I was traumatized by *Of Mice and Men*. At one particularly impeccable production of *La traviata* I had to suppress the urge to leap on the stage and strangle Alfredo’s father. So gripped was I in suspense at a performance of *La Juive*, a nail-biter if ever there was one, that at the climactic moment I bolted out of my seat as if tasered. The handsome young composer beside me was appalled at my loss of decorum; our date ended early and I never heard from him again. I will remember Halevy’s score forever. I cannot even remember my date’s name.

To paraphrase an ancient Chinese saying: to grow crops you need a year, to grow trees you need 20 years, to grow minds you need a century. It took three decades to

forge this red-blooded opera fan. If you don’t want to hear weeping or gasping or the sound and fury of passionate engagement, well, don’t sit by me at the opera.

So often when we hear “First Time at the Opera” tales they are of the love-at-first-note variety. But I’d like to think that my experience is no less exemplary, bearing as it does many of the hallmarks of opera awakening: the lure of melody from popular culture, the generosity of a guide who took me to my first live performance, the opportunity for exposure to professional productions in a variety of venues, the privilege of a public school system that inculcated the arts alongside math and science, and most importantly, parents who enriched that foundation not only with subscription concerts and private lessons, but by providing a home in which the imagination roamed free and curiosity trumped convention any old day.

It helps that I was born at the right time, when the private sector and the public sector were aligned in their commitment to the arts and education. Our schools were flush with tax dollars from burgeoning suburbs and highly profitable corporations. Appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts were growing exponentially. Government funding for the arts was considered a virtue.

I have also been extraordinarily fortunate in my professional life to explore the backstage world of the arts: governance, audience development, artistic planning, fundraising, marketing, media, technology and the creative process by which new works come to life. Each time I write I learn, and I learn best from those committed professionals, board members and artistic leaders who dedicate their lives to the performing arts and to the organizations that serve them. How privileged I am to carry on Kelley Rourke’s fine legacy and to have this “First Time” to serve the members of OPERA America. I look forward to learning from you.

---

*Matthew Sigman was appointed editor of Opera America Magazine in January. A three-time winner of the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for Excellence in Music Journalism, he is a former editor-in-chief of Symphony and a regular contributor to The Voice of Chorus America. His comments and commentaries have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and on NPR’s Performance Today.*

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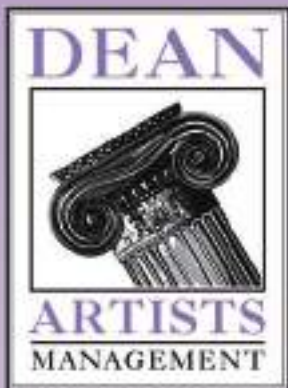


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