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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.

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## SUMMER 2013

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Audrey Saccone, OPERA America's digital and social media manager, designed this imaginative postcard collage of destination festivals for devout operagoers, as featured in Philip Kennicott's "The Power of Pilgrimage" on page 16.

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Kara Cornell as Carmen, 2012 Photo: Patti Brahim

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



It was wonderful to see so many OPERA America members in beautiful Vancouver for *Opera Conference 2013*. We owe special thanks to Jim Wright and the board and staff of Vancouver Opera for their help in planning the conference throughout the past year and for their gracious hospitality during our visit. Our colleagues at San Francisco Opera recognize that a high standard was set, but are committed to building on the success of Vancouver when they host *Opera Conference 2014* from June 20-23.

Opera Europa's spring meeting in Vienna anticipated OPERA America's conference theme by addressing the issue of increasing the impact of their member companies in their communities. Many are faced with decreased government funding and, in the absence of support from the private sector, must make creating and communicating public value a high priority. Budget cuts have already resulted in cancelled performances and reduced seasons in Greece, Spain and Italy. More European opera companies are threatened.

Even in Berlin, where the government's generous support still stuns visiting Americans, companies are making repertoire choices that have intense civic resonance. OPERA America's Ambassadors, who provide us generous support, recently returned from Germany's wonderfully reconstructed capitol, where they attended opera performances, toured the city's astonishing museums and met with local cultural leaders. Barrie Kosky, general director of the Komische Oper Berlin, explained his decision to produce the jazz operetta, *Bal im Savoy*, a work that had been prohibited by the Nazis soon after its 1933 premiere. In a touching speech, he welcomed composer Paul Abraham's spirit back to Berlin.

A presenter at the Opera Europa conference cited research that revealed that buyers of luxury goods — and he places opera patrons within this group — appear willing to spend more money on experiences than on objects. He wondered how opera performances could be optimized to offer audience members a memorable overall experience rather than just an ephemeral performance. Many festival companies have thrived as a result of offering a more intense cultural experience to local and visiting audiences. In this issue, Philip Kennicott, fresh off the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Music Criticism, reflects on the lasting impact of festival attendance, even while appreciating the year-round cultural service provided by traditional opera companies.

Not every opera company can follow Fort Worth Opera's example of transitioning from a traditional opera company to a festival. Nor can all companies erect a magnificent tent on a garden-lined lawn, as does Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. And alas, the mountains of Santa Fe and Central City cannot be moved to the Great Plains. But none of these attributes eliminate the need to think creativity about enhancing the live performance experience in every venue. Whether at home via YouTube or in a theater via HD transmissions, aficionados and audiences new to the art form can enjoy opera for free or at low cost. Leaders of companies today are working hard to build their constituent bases through electronic media. Success in this realm brings a corresponding challenge: How do we make the live performance experience sufficiently compelling to motivate audiences to spend five or ten times more on a ticket that offers the thrill of live performance, but perhaps not the close-ups or conveniences? Amanda Kiel's article and my conversation with Long Beach Opera's and Chicago Opera Theater's Andreas Mitisek explore the artistic and civic impact of performances in alternative venues as one strategy to create unique audience experiences.

Conferences concentrate and accelerate creative thinking. The excitement of seeing friends and colleagues, visiting an unfamiliar city and being isolated for just a few days from the demands of day-to-day operations increases our receptivity to new ideas. Sustaining the inventive energy generated at an annual meeting after we're returned to hundreds of emails and phone messages can be a challenge. Helping maintain creative momentum is a central role for OPERA America and informs our schedule of Forums that begins in the fall with the Singer Training Forum (September in San Francisco), the Marketing, Education and Audience Development Forums (October in New York) and the Technical/Production Forum (October in Washington, D.C.). The development of new strategies is an iterative process that requires cycles of idea generation, experimentation and reports of findings. As we seek to address pressing issues in various areas of operation, member participation in this process is central to our progress as a field.

My opera experiences this summer will be made more memorable by seeing many of you in our annual "pilgrimages," to borrow an expression from Philip Kennicott, to Cincinnati, Cooperstown or Des Moines. Travel safely, enjoy the smiles of summer nights and take notes!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc A. Scorca". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Marc A. Scorca  
President/CEO



# INNOVATIONS

## A CATALOG OF MEMORIES

There's a building in Memphis that everybody knows: the Sears Crosstown Building, an art deco fixture of the city's landscape since the 1927. Officially closed since 1993, the building has recently been designated for refurbishment as a mixed-use "urban village" for educators, artists, health care, offices and shops. For Ned Canty, general director of **Opera Memphis**, there was no better place to stage an opera about Memphis than in a building rooted in its past and to create an opera rooted in the present.

Canty had been hoping to develop a site-specific opera that would welcome the Memphis community and still have appeal beyond. "My feeling was that there was a way to create a story that was at once incredibly local and specific," he says, "and yet also iconic in the way that Memphis is." That story has evolved into *Ghosts of Crosstown*, slated for debut in 2014.



Sears Crosstown Building, Memphis, TN.

In concert with Jerre Dye, artistic director of Voices of the South, a Memphis-based theater company that creates, produces and performs theater from diverse Southern perspectives, Canty spent time "reading, watching interviews and speaking" with Memphians about their Crosstown stories. Eighteen abstracts were created, five of which will be developed by various composers into short opera works. The other 13 will be, in essence, given back to the community: Voices of the South will develop some into pieces for the stage, but local artists of all disciplines — actors, storytellers, dancers — will be invited to make the stories their own. The goal, says Canty, is to make *Ghosts of Crosstown* "a crossroads and meeting grounds for art forms."

The various narratives tell the building's history from its heyday to its current renaissance. Each story, while not directly biographical, is inspired by the people who made Crosstown what it was, with real-life events giving the stories a personal poignance. One of Canty's favorites involves the search for a lost engagement diamond amid the chaos of an enormous Sears shipment.

There's a risk, Canty recognizes, in tying an opera so closely to a single landmark, but he is confident that there is more universality to the opera than immediately appears. The location will echo many urban mainstreets that were centers of American commerce and that have experienced deterioration and rebuilding. "Sears was an iconic American company that grew up with the nation," says Canty, "and every city that had one has dealt with the impact of being abandoned."

But first and foremost, Opera Memphis wants to get the community invested — both in the development of this work, and in opera as a whole. Says Canty: "We're going to be bringing in all the people who worked there and know it. We want to show that the lives of the people you grew up with, that you know, who live around the corner from you — their lives are as worthy of an opera as anyone else an opera's ever been written about."

— Genevieve Valentine

## NEW YORK COMPANIES LAUNCH REGIONAL ALLIANCE

To heighten awareness of the depth and diversity of opera activity in New York City, a collaboration of 20 independent companies and producers was officially launched in April.

The concept for the **New York Opera Alliance** (NYOA) arose during conversations between conductor Peter Szep, host of Indie Opera Podcast, and Gina Crusco, artistic director of Underworld Productions Opera. Subsequent meetings with other company leaders in the metropolitan area advanced the concept, both as a means of communication among companies, as well as a shared resource for communicating with current and potential audiences.

Conversations rapidly advanced to organization: “It was as simple as inviting the companies that we know of into one room and that got the ball rolling,” says Szep. “It has been exciting learning that there are so many companies that I didn’t even know existed, each with their own agendas and passions, and each with a unique way of connecting with their audiences.” Says Crusco, “Eccentric approaches to opera create the shifts that eventually move opera’s tectonic plates.”



Cori Ellison, core faculty of American Lyric Theater and dramaturg at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, hopes that the coalition will promote each company’s artistic profile, helping New York opera fans navigate the sometimes bewildering embarrassment of riches available to them. Also, she says, “The internal sharing of plans and resources among the companies strengthens everyone, and everyone’s audiences can be widened through cross-publicizing and marketing. And who knows what creative fruits such a meeting of minds might also bear?”

Current NYOA participants are: American Lyric Theater, American Opera Projects, Beth Morrison Projects, Bronx Opera Company, Chelsea Opera, Citywide Youth Opera, Encompass New Opera Theatre, Gotham Chamber Opera, The Indie Opera Podcast, Liederkrantz Opera Theater, the little OPERA Theatre of NY, Manhattan School of Music, Morningside Opera, On Site Opera, Opera Moderne, Opera Omnia, Opera on Tap, operamission, OperaOGGI New York, Underworld Productions Opera and Vertical Player Repertory.

“We have seen a number of exciting developments in the field in recent years, especially an increased number of smaller, innovative opera producers and presenters,” stated Marc A. Scorca, president/CEO of OPERA America. “The many constituents of the New York Opera Alliance offer unique styles of production, repertoires and opportunities to engage audiences across the city. We are eager to see new creative energy fostered by this cooperative effort and for more people in this city to discover these remarkable organizations.”

OPERA America has served as NYOA’s fiscal sponsor and has supported its development, including the design of NYOA’s website ([nyoperaalliance.org](http://nyoperaalliance.org)), which will serve as a calendar and clearinghouse for NYOA members. The site will also enable local and visiting opera fans a tool to discover new companies. “We see this website as a model for other communities exploring similar local alliances, and we will be pleased to make this service available to them,” says Scorca. OPERA America will also include NYOA participants in a wide array of its professional development activities, and will host NYOA meetings, auditions, rehearsals and events at the National Opera Center.

— Patricia Kiernan Johnson

# INNOVATIONS

## NIGHTS AT THE MUSEUM

When Limor Tomer, the general manager of the Metropolitan Museum's concerts and lectures program, first approached **Gotham Chamber Opera** (GCO) Artistic Director Neal Goren about a potential collaboration, her first request, says Goren, was that they *not* use the Met's well-regarded Grace Rainey Rogers auditorium. What she wanted, and Goren readily agreed, was the opportunity to forge a cross-genre experience that would blend objects, ideas and, of course, music. As he and Tomer toured the museum and entered the Met's Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Arms and Armour Court, with its rows of resplendently bedecked noblemen and horses, he immediately thought of Monteverdi's *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, the classic 17<sup>th</sup>-century tale of two knights in battle.

With a brief running time of 20 minutes, the Monteverdi work required a companion piece to complete the evening. Goren wanted a work that would not only complement the Monteverdi but equally match the objectives of the museum collaboration. The result will be the world premiere of *I Have No Stories to Tell You* by GCO composer-in-residence Lembit Beecher and librettist Hannah Moscovitch. "Both pieces are about the emotional fallout of war and battle," says Goren. And both focus on the role of women in war: the Monteverdi cloaks a woman under armor while the Beecher work explores the emotional journey an American journalist must take as she returns from war to civilian life. The performances, directed by Robin Guarino and conducted by Goren, are scheduled for February 26 and 27, 2014.

Museum collaborations are not new to GCO, which previously presented Haydn's *Il mondo della luna* in the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History. The challenge in both situations was time, space and technical limitations: finding rehearsal time after hours, lack of storage and enormous sensitivity to objects and architecture when installing lighting. "When you do anything in someone else's space you have to know what the parameters are, what their expectations are and what you have to work around," says Goren. But such challenges are easily worked out, even with large institutions. "We've gotten to know the curators and they are delightful," says Goren. "They are all on our side and want to make it happen."

Creating such an *in situ* synergy between music and art, in this case architecture, was the objective of **Opera Theater of Pittsburgh** (OTP), which on June 7 and 8 performed *Shining Brow* at Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's masterful house in southwestern Pennsylvania. The opera, by composer Daron Hagen and librettist Paul Muldoon, reveals torrid and tragic events in the life of the celebrated architect. This two-act work, which features five performers and seven musicians, was conducted by Robert Frankenberry.

"The story is a very intimate household drama with personal thoughts about art and architecture in our society," says OTP Artistic Director Jonathon Eaton, who commissioned a chamber version of the work with the idea of making it available for other Frank Lloyd Wright



The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Arms and Armour Court. Photo courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Soprano Elizabeth Bogner Ingram at an antique switchboard at The Telephone Museum in Maitland, FL. Photo by Michael Milano.



buildings, such as Taliesen and Taliesen West, Wright's summer and winter homes, and New York's Guggenheim Museum. Like Gotham Chamber Opera, OTP is no stranger to museum collaborations, having performed at Pittsburgh's Andy Warhol Museum and the Carnegie Museum of Art.

The *Shining Brow* production, packaged with a reception and dinner, was marketed to both the architecture and opera communities. Audiences were seated on pathways around the house, with performers placed on cascading terraces, which also served as surfaces for projections. OTP worked closely with Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which owns and operates Fallingwater, to ensure not only the safety of the house, but the shrubbery and trees used for positioning projectors and lighting.

Like all museums and historic sites, tours and attendance at Fallingwater are a vital source of income. According to Eaton, tours are offered every six minutes and had

to be substantially reduced to allow for rehearsal and performance schedules. "We really need to compliment them for their imagination and commitment," he says. Live performances at Fallingwater are rare, according to Lynda Waggoner, vice president of the conservancy, but, she says "the house is the quintessential example of architecture melding with nature, so it's a great setting for an exercise of live performance coalescing with architecture."

As part of its three-season celebration of Gian Carlo Menotti, Florida Opera Theatre (FOT) decided to present three of the composer's works, including *The Telephone*, which found an ideal connection in January at The Telephone Museum at the Maitland Art Center. Directed by Eric Pinder and led by FOT Music Director Robin Stamper, the Menotti classic was performed among early switchboards and phones collected by the original owners of the local exchange, a family of grocers who installed the system to connect with their customers. According to FOT Board President Judy Lee, the opera sold out three performances in the 70-seat venue. FOT, based in Orlando, was formed by ardent opera lovers in the wake of the dissolution of Orlando Opera in 2009.

In addition to site-specific presentations, opera/museum collaboration also presents opportunities for auditorium-based cultural explorations. Nicholas G. Russell, director of artistic operations for **Boston Lyric Opera** (BLO), says its Signature Series, presented on Sunday afternoons in the Remis Auditorium at the Museum of Fine Arts, was carefully designed to be differentiated from its pre-performance lectures. "We wanted something that would illuminate a particular piece, but do so tangentially," he says. BLO Artistic Advisor John Conklin authors each program, scripting a rich musical, literary and visual narrative that informs upcoming productions.

This expansive approach allows for exploration of contemporary, as well as traditional works. For the 2012-2013 season, the series examined the women in Mozart's life in connection with *Così fan tutti* and biblical imagery for James Macmillan's *Clemency*. The coming season will offer variations on cultural themes from *The Magic Flute* and a dramatic recreation of the infamous murders in Jack Beeson's *Lizzie Borden*.

Because of what Russell calls Conklin's "vivid and conceptually dramatic mind," each program requires an intricate logistical weaving of materials and a significant investment of staff resources: slides, readings and performances must be carefully rehearsed, right down to each key change and transposition. "The easiest thing in the world is doing *La bohème*," he says, "but an event that has a number of excerpts is always more labor intensive. Where do you start, where do you stop?" Though the performances are only minimally staged, he says, "sometimes the things that look the most simple are not."



Fallingwater, designed in 1935 by Frank Lloyd Wright for the Kaufmann family of Pittsburgh. Photo courtesy of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

—Matthew Sigman

# INNOVATIONS

## SING-ALONG RING

To celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Richard Wagner, **Seattle Opera** invited singers of all ages and abilities to a free community sing-along on May 22 at the Seattle Center Armory. More than 250 people attended the event, which also included a costume contest — participants were asked to show up dressed as a favorite character from *Der Ring des Nibelungen* — as well as a sing-off: men and women of all abilities were encouraged to share their most creative rendition of Brünnhilde’s famous “Hojotoho” war cry.

Though British audiences are familiar with sing-alongs — the English National Opera presented a sing-along *Carmen* this season, and the Royal Opera will offer a sing-along *Tosca* this summer — according to Seattle Opera Director of Education Sue Elliott, the notion is fresh in the United States. Seattle tested the concept last season in a limited public sing-along with the Seattle Opera chorus in conjunction of its production of *Fidelio*. Members of the public were carefully seated among choristers to enhance the participatory experience. “We didn’t know what to expect,” says Elliott, “but it was clear when they opened their mouths they had prepared.” Contrary to expectations, little time was required on language or rhythm. The event was held in a rehearsal hall with piano accompaniment.

With Wagner’s birthday approaching, as well as Seattle Opera’s esteemed *Ring* Cycle, the company decided to repeat the event this year, but this time inviting a larger audience and adding contest elements to enhance market penetration and encourage non-singers to participate. Getting die-hard Wagner fans to dress up was not exactly a challenge: “They are like Trekkies,” Elliott says, referring to *Star Trek* aficionados famous for portraying their favorite characters at cult gatherings.

Seattle Opera Chorusmaster Beth Kirchhoff lead sing-along participants in the “Wedding March” from *Lohengrin*, the Entrance of the Guests from *Tannhäuser*, the “Carnevals-Lied” from *Das Liebesverbot* and — in honor of Verdi’s bicentennial, also this year — the “Libiamo” from *La traviata*. Due to contractual and budget limitations the chorus was not available to join the event this time, but several chorus members did volunteer their time to participate. Participants were required to register online in advance to enable the opera to collect contact information. Printed music, as well as audio samples and pronunciation guides, were downloadable from the company’s website.



General Director Speight Jenkins introduces soprano Alwyn Mellor after her surprise appearance to sing Brünnhilde’s famous “Hojotoho” war cry at the community sing-along. Mellor will sing the role for Seattle Opera’s 2013 *Ring* Cycle. | Chorus Master Beth Kirchhoff leads sing-along participants. Photos by Alan Alabastro.



The costume contest required creativity, but, says Elliott, the “Hojotoho” singing contest required immense courage. Entrants included two teenage girls from the company’s youth chorus, as well as older and more experienced members of the community. As an unexpected — and temporarily cruel — surprise, one of the contestants, dressed simply and announced as “Betty Smith,” delivered a jaw-dropping rendition. The mystery contestant, soon revealed, was British soprano Alwyn Mellor, who is making her Seattle Opera debut as Brünnhilde in this summer’s *Ring* performances.

Elliott’s most important advice to other companies who wish to produce a sing-along event: “It has to be fun,” she says. “When I introduced the program I said ‘I hope we are going to learn a little and laugh a lot.’” Elliott also advises that promotions should clearly welcome one and all: “We got great singers, some not-great singers and some people who sat in just to listen along.” (An “Applause Expert” section was designated for those whose talent is appreciation, and awards included “Best Shower Singing.”) Judges were Kirchhoff, Seattle Opera General Director Speight Jenkins and local classical music radio host Marta Zekan. Prizes included highly coveted dress rehearsal passes for the *Ring* Cycle.

Elliott says the company plans to make sing-alongs an annual event, not just because of their promotional potential, but because they adhere to the company’s mission of fostering lifelong learning. The company is currently building a youth chorus program and, based on the success of the sing-alongs, is considering developing a chorus for what Elliott affectionately calls “tall children” — which is to say, adults who love to sing opera and have a good time.

—Matthew Sigman



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# PEOPLE

**Tomer Zvulun** has been appointed **The Atlanta Opera's** new general and artistic director. Zvulun, a native of Israel, has conducted the opera companies of Seattle, Cleveland, Dallas, Cincinnati, Buenos Aires, as well as Wolf Trap and the Metropolitan Opera, and is already familiar to Atlanta audiences, having previously directed productions of *The Flying Dutchman*, *The Magic Flute* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Zvulun succeeds Dennis Hanthorn, who departed in July 2012 after serving as The Atlanta Opera's general director for eight years.

The **Canadian Opera Company (COC)** has hired **Peter W. Lamb** as director of production and promoted director of development **Christie Darville** to chief advancement officer. The two new positions reflect the increased emphasis the COC is placing on both its artistic output and fundraising efforts. Lamb's 40-year theatrical career includes serving as a technical director and production manager for the Stratford Festival and Livent, theater consultant and planner for Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, Toronto's Roy Thomson Hall and Jazz at Lincoln Center. Darville is charged with fulfilling the company's mandate to meet significant financial goals that the artistic objectives entail, as well as to enhance the COC's engagement and stewardship with new and existing patrons.

**Central City Opera** General/Artistic Director **Pelham "Pat" Pearce** has received the 2013 Bonfils-Stanton Award for his contributions to the arts and humanities. Often referred to as "Colorado's Nobel Prizes," the Bonfils-Stanton Annual Awards have honored prominent Coloradans for excellence in a broad range of pursuits. Under Pearce's leadership since 1996, Central City Opera has received critical praise locally, nationally and internationally for premiering new operas, presenting neglected works and staging traditional operas in innovative ways.

**The Dallas Opera** has appointed as its new music director the French-born conductor **Emmanuel Villaume**. The third person ever to be named to lead The Dallas Opera in its 56-year history, Villaume has appeared at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera and The Santa Fe Opera. Villaume began his musical education at the Strasbourg Conservatory and continued his studies in Paris, where he received degrees in literature, philosophy and musicology.

**Florida Grand Opera (FGO)** welcomes **Julie Maykowski** as director of artistic administration and head of the young artist program, overseeing all aspects of the company's music department. She has spent the last seven years in the field of development, most recently as director of development at Sarasota Opera and Arizona Opera. Maykowski received her B.M. from Drake University and completed her M.M. at Wichita State University, where she performed the roles of Papagena in *The Magic Flute* and Nannetta in *Falstaff*, among others.

**Opera San José** general manager **Larry Hancock** will succeed General Director **Irene Dalis** upon her retirement on July 1. Hancock was initially a graduate assistant to Dalis at the opera workshop at San José State University, and has since worked in many capacities, from PR and marketing, to artistic administration and production. He is a music and opera scholar, and lectures frequently in the community. He is responsible for the creative teams for each production, scenic and costume development, and is the main contact with the City of San José and Team San José for the California Theatre.

**Lesley Koenig** has joined **Arts Consulting Group (ACG)** as a senior consultant based in its New York office. Koenig will focus on interim management, strategic planning, organizational assessment and operational efficiencies, labor relations, capital projects, financial management and the creation of new business models. Koenig comes to ACG with over 10 years of executive management in performing arts organizations, and a 20-year career as an opera director and producer. **Bill R. DeWalt** has also joined ACG as a senior consultant and will be based in its newly established Pittsburgh office. DeWalt will work throughout North America to strengthen ACG's museum practice with a particular focus on leadership and governance, interim management, institutional capacity building, as well as strategic, facilities and program planning.

**Cal Performances** has appointed **Rob Bailis** as director of external relations and artistic initiatives. A professional clarinetist, Bailis has consulted with a wide range of arts institutions and foundations, including Z Space, Pacific Mozart Ensemble, Chamber Music America, Dance/USA, the MAP Fund and the New England Foundation for the Arts. For eight years, he served as director of ODC Theater, where he was responsible for programming and artistic curation.



Composer and former OPERA America board member **Michael Ching** recently succeeded James Stepleton as the new chair of the Douglas Moore Fund. The Fund provides an annual fellowship to an emerging American composer or librettist. These composers learn about the craft of opera and musical

theater composition through residencies at American opera companies. The Fund is named in honor of composer Douglas Moore and the circle of composers around him, including Jack Beeson and John Kander. The current fellow is Zach Wadsworth.

## IN MEMORIAM



Mezzo-soprano **ZHENG CAO**, age 46, an alumna of the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship Program (1995-1996) and Merola Opera Program (1994), died on February 21. The Bay Area singer performed in 16 San Francisco Opera productions, most notably in the title role of the world premiere of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* in 2008, as well as Idamante (*Idomeneo*), Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Baba the Turk (*The Rake's Progress*) and Suzuki (*Madama Butterfly*). She also appeared regularly with leading companies in the U.S. and abroad.



**RICHARD MCKEE**, bass-baritone, stage director and former artistic director of Syracuse Opera for 16 seasons, died at age of 71 on April 14. McKee began his association with Syracuse Opera in 1988 by both directing Rossini's *The*

*Barber of Seville* and singing the role of Don Basilio. He became artistic director of Syracuse in 1990 and served in that capacity until his retirement in 2007. Throughout his remarkable tenure as artistic director, McKee also managed to perform in or direct numerous Syracuse Opera productions, as well as with several other professional opera companies throughout the country, which included Connecticut Concert Opera, Shubert Theater, Opera Roanoke, Lake George Opera, Baton Rouge Opera, the New York City Opera touring company and Augusta Opera.



**RISÉ STEVENS**, the internationally renowned mezzo-soprano who veritabily defined the role of Carmen during her 23-year career at the Metropolitan Opera, died at age 99 on March 20 at her home in Manhattan. Stevens made her Met debut

in 1938, retiring in 1961 after 353 performances. In 1964, she inaugurated the Music Theater of Lincoln Center as

Anna in a revival of *The King and I*, and assumed several important roles in developing the future of opera in the U.S. In 1964, she was named co-director of the Met's National Company, which was dedicated to taking opera on tour to dozens of American cities where opera was not available. She also served as president of the Mannes College of Music (1975-1978) and rejoined the Met as advisor on the Young Artist Development Program and executive director of its National Council Auditions (1980-1988). A 1990 recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors and the 2011 National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honors, a tribute to Stevens can be found at [nea.gov/honors/opera](http://nea.gov/honors/opera).



American composer **ROBERT WARD**, whose operatic setting of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* won both the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for music and the New York Music Critics' Circle Citation Award, died on April 3 at age 95. Born in Cleveland, he

began composing in high school. He studied composition with Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers at the Eastman School of Music (1935-1939). His postgraduate study included composition with Frederick Jacobi and conducting with Albert Stoessel and Edgar Schenkman at The Juilliard School (1939-1941). He continued to study with Aaron Copland at the Tanglewood Music Festival (1940). In 1946, Ward earned his artist certificate from Juilliard and also gained a teaching position at that institution (1947-1956). Additionally, he taught at Columbia University (1946-1958) and also served as the director of the Third Street Music Settlement (1952-1955). He was appointed as chancellor of the North Carolina School of the Arts in 1967 and in 1974, Ward stepped down as chancellor to become a professor. From 1979 until his retirement in 1989, he was a music professor at Duke University. In addition to the 2011 National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honors, Ward was awarded three Guggenheim Fellowships (1950, 1954 and 1966). A tribute to Ward can be found at [nea.gov/honors/opera](http://nea.gov/honors/opera).

# The Power of Pilgrimage

*Devoted audiences and adventuresome programming make summer festivals a spiritual destination for opera lovers. PHILIP KENNICOTT, winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Criticism, explores the mystique of experiential immersion.*





Call the stout but sturdy older man in the trim European suit “Franz Josef” because of his exuberant mustache and curiously old-fashioned beard. And I dub the beautiful young couple, all in black, “Pierre et Sabine,” because they both speak French and wear their sunglasses well after dusk. I’ve seen all three at intermission now four nights running, and I’ve passed the French lovebirds on the Plaza in Santa Fe at least once. I don’t know their actual names, but I feel a sense of communion with them. Like me, they have come to **The Santa Fe Opera** in mid-August, when the company presents its full season over five consecutive nights, making it an attractive time to visit for the national and international opera crowd.

If I think back over the past decade of opera experiences,

the listening more attentive, the singing more engaged. You structure the day to be in the right disposition for opera, and the evening curtain approaches with none of the sense of inconvenience that often afflicts the opera lover during the ordinary season. If this intangible sense of collective engagement and personal devotion could be transplanted from these seasonal ventures into the mainstream of the repertory opera world, it might radically transform an often troubled and financially precarious art form.

Wagner certainly seemed aware of the phenomenon. Although Bayreuth morphed over the years into the ultimate establishment organization, a virtual reflection in operatic terms of German politics and culture, Wagner originally imagined something very different, something much more



Cincinnati Opera's productions of Adams' *A Flowering Tree* and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Photos by Philip Groshong.

a disproportionate number of the most memorable nights have come from visits to summer or seasonal festivals such as Santa Fe. It's hard to be entirely objective about why this is the case, whether it's the sunsets and clean mountain air in New Mexico, or the dark green forests and shimmering lakes of upstate New York that make **The Glimmerglass Festival** so attractive or the lazy, low-key, country club atmosphere at **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis** that simply makes one receptive to listening and enjoyment. Relaxation and natural beauty are powerful enticements, to be sure. But to some degree, it also has a lot to do with Franz Josef, Pierre and the elegant Sabine.

There is something about the community that forms at an opera festival, the sense of pilgrimage, of seriousness and devotion to the art form that elevates the listener. It makes us better operagoers, and that, in turn, allows opera festivals to be better at what they do. The repertoire is more interesting,

ephemeral and communal. The *Ring*, he hoped, would be performed in a temporary theater, to an audience that gathered especially for the event, and then, when it was all over, the theater would be demolished and the score burned. "To the people who enjoyed it I shall then say: 'Now go away and do it yourself.'" This is key: The greatest impresario (or self-promoter) of the past half millennium stressed how important it is for the audience to feel an almost religious sense of obligation and involvement.

Like so many Wagnerian ideals, that plan was abandoned for something more practical, permanent and vainglorious. But the spirit of Wagner's first conception is intoxicating, and when it flourishes among latter-day audiences, when you sense yourself part of a temporary community fanatically devoted to the art form and its possibilities, there is nothing more thrilling.

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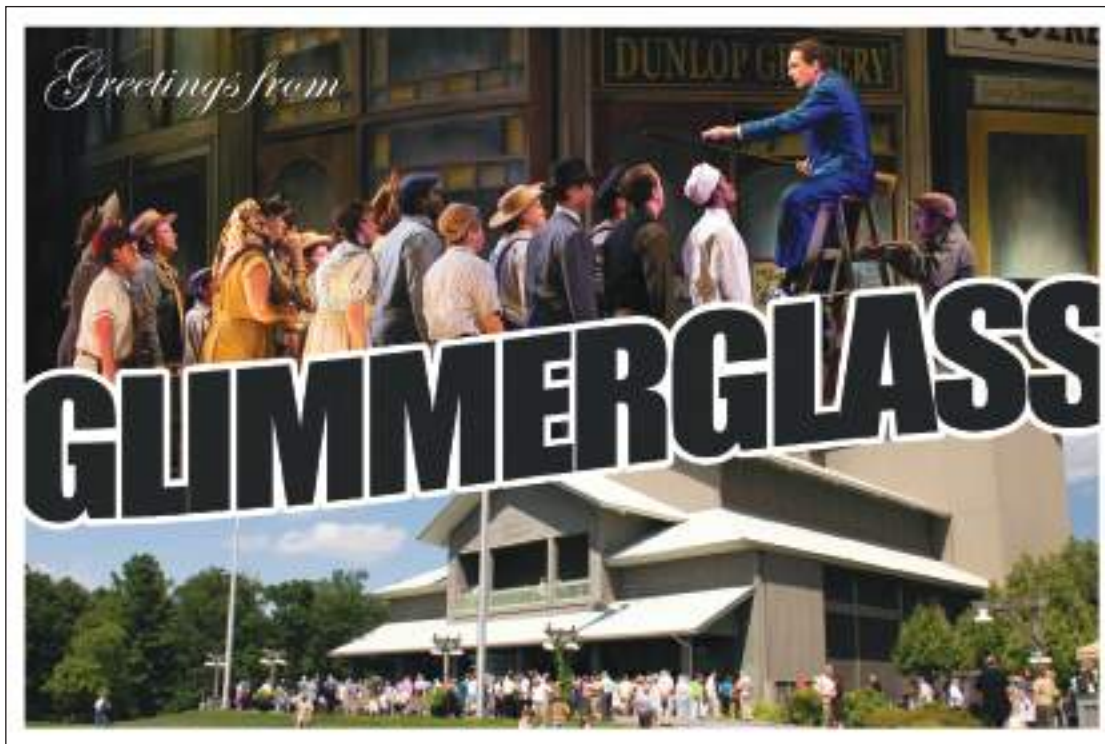
“THE FESTIVAL COMPANY, IT SEEMS, IS MORE LIKE A TECH START-UP THAN A FORTUNE 500 COMPANY. IT BURNS BRIGHTLY, INTENSELY AND MAKES EXTRAORDINARY AND UNSUSTAINABLE DEMANDS ON ALL INVOLVED.”

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Bounce this thought off people who actually run summer festivals, and they are of mixed minds, happy to acknowledge the enthusiasm of their audiences, but reticent to define it in anything like spiritual terms. They understand what they do more pragmatically. There is indeed a different spirit in a

Jemez Mountains, this backdrop provided for us by nature,” he says. Festivals don’t have to maintain what one opera leader calls “the huge infrastructure” of more traditional companies, which makes them more nimble and amenable to risk.

Evans Mirageas, the Harry T. Wilks Artistic Director of



The Alice Busch Opera Theater at The Glimmerglass Festival. Photo by William Brown. The Glimmerglass Festival’s production of Willson’s *The Music Man*. Photo by Karli Cadel.

company that works intensively for a few months every year to present a concentrated season of opera, but much of that spirit is attributable to purely structural phenomena. The festival company, it seems, is more like a tech start-up than a Fortune 500 company. It burns brightly, intensely and makes extraordinary and unsustainable demands on all involved.

“There is a kind of magic to having a somewhat against-the-odds proposition” says Timothy O’Leary, general director of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. “Nothing encourages creativity and excellence like the presence of risk.”

Charles MacKay, general director of The Santa Fe Opera, points to other factors that make the seasonal company a different beast: lower fixed costs, an orchestra that doesn’t have a year-round contract and an environment that already attracts a well-to-do tourist class. “We have the luxury of this magnificent setting, overlooking the Sangre de Cristo and

**Cincinnati Opera**, the second oldest opera company in the country, points to two fundamental advantages he has over other cultural and musical organizations. Founded as a summer seasonal company in 1920, Cincinnati Opera uses the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra as its regular pit band, giving it a powerful professional musical base. Like Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, which also uses the local orchestra, it doesn’t compete with the other principal musical organization in town. And that means that it gets to burn all the available cultural oxygen for a few weeks every year.

“It becomes opera season,” Mirageas says. “So we step front and center, we build a buzz and over the course of the eight weeks of our performances, it is on billboards, it is on radio, it is all over the Internet.”

The temporary nature of the public face a festival puts to the world makes it easier to control all aspects of the



experience. The ticket-takers and box office personnel are as fired up as the singers on stage. Volunteers have inexhaustible energy and high spirits. At The Glimmerglass Festival, general and artistic director Francesca Zambello says she spends “as much time as a travel director as an artistic director,” by which she means she devotes remarkable energies to crafting a whole experience for festival goers, rather than simply assure them of a good show once the curtain goes up. That means collaborative efforts with other cultural organizations in the Cooperstown area, encouraging a local brewery to craft a special beer for the festival, making the opera grounds kid- and picnic-friendly, and loading the season with popular matinee performances and evenings with an early curtain.

She also embraces the continual churn of the seasonal company.

productions,” says MacKay. This year, to help sustain the company as it gives the world premiere of *Wilde*, a new opera by Theodore Morrison, the company is reviving productions of *The Marriage of Figaro* and *La traviata*. But that’s a rarity, and the hallmark of the Santa Fe audience is its appetite for new work and rare works by familiar composers. The company, says MacKay, is well aware of its audience, which includes an ample slice of the international opera cognoscenti, who won’t travel all the way to the high desert of New Mexico to revisit something they saw three years ago.

For companies fortunate enough to attract the itinerant opera crowd, the presence of outsiders is seen as part of the galvanizing force that makes the festival approach unique. Local audiences are proud of the visitors, and that somehow impacts the general esprit de corps of all involved.



Opera Theatre of Saint Louis’ productions of Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance*, Leoncavallo’s *I Pagliacci* and Puccini’s *Il tabarro*. Photos by Ken Howard.

“At Glimmerglass, we do not revive anything,” says Zambello. In that, Glimmerglass is similar to Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, which rarely revives productions, and Santa Fe, which only revives occasionally. From a purely financial point of view, it is an inefficient way to make opera. It also introduces yet more risk into the seasonal venture. The payoff, however, comes in innovation, creativity and audience loyalty.

“Our audience is very receptive to the idea of new

“We are understood to be a destination for people who love opera,” says O’Leary. “Saint Louisans see the cultural life of Saint Louis as being nationally significant, and really place a premium on that.” The company, he says, was founded by a group of opera lovers who intended from the beginning for the company to matter on the international stage, and over the years that has created an audience which expects the company to take chances and stress innovation. The local and

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international audience, he says, “cross fertilize,” the former welcoming the latter, and the latter giving the former a sense that the project of sustaining top-tier opera in Saint Louis is worth the effort.

“When we did focus groups with subscribers, we asked ‘What would it take for you to stop subscribing?’” he says. “What we heard was: ‘If you stop surprising us.’”

Of course, life for opera lovers is rather dull in Saint Louis through 11 months of the year. If you live in Santa Fe and your whole opera diet is the summer season, you’ll never see a truly grand spectacle opera — an oversized *Meistersinger* or *Turandot* with all the budget-busting trimmings. And the

and steady access to the whole canon of opera, over a period of years and decades.

If one were creating an opera company from scratch today, the wise impresario would likely look to the festival model. Would you rather run the local utility company, with an obligation to serve an enormous and diverse customer base, and consumers who take you for granted unless something goes wrong, then complain without mercy? Or would you start something new, with young, hungry, energetic employees and an audience that feels engaged, and wants surprise and novelty? Would you be in the newspaper business or online publishing?



The Santa Fe Opera's productions of Szymanowski's *King Roger*, Bononcini's *Griselda* and Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*. Photos by Ken Howard.

challenge for companies such as Cincinnati Opera, says Mirageas, is how to maintain a public profile during the 10 months his company is dark. Out of sight, out of mind, which can have a negative impact on fundraising efforts. Off-season concerts, lectures and social events become a kind of proxy whereby a company asserts its presence during the long silent season, but that can seem a pale substitute for the luxury that audiences in New York, Chicago and San Francisco enjoy: ready

It isn't, of course, that simple. Old institutions are capable of reinvention, and opera festivals are just as prone to complacency and routine as repertory companies. There is no place more thrilling than the Metropolitan Opera when an understudy steps on stage and announces his or her brilliant talent to the world. The community that forms night after night in a repertory house can be just as visceral and intense as the temporary communities that gather for a seasonal festival.

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“THE COMMUNITY THAT FORMS NIGHT AFTER NIGHT IN A REPERTORY HOUSE CAN BE JUST AS VISCERAL AND INTENSE AS THE TEMPORARY COMMUNITIES THAT GATHER FOR A SEASONAL FESTIVAL.”

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But MacKay uses a word — pilgrimage — that even the leaders of seasonal companies seem to underestimate.

“People are put together sort of randomly,” he says of my Franz Josef and my French cohorts. “They’ve made the pilgrimage together to experience the art.”

A pilgrimage is more than just a trip or a journey. It is fraught with moral or spiritual purpose, it is made collectively and it creates a community devoted to something beyond mere entertainment. From Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* to Wagner’s abortive dream of a temporary theater on the banks of the Rhine, the pilgrimage has been a goad to creativity and community building, and to the power of art to make connections among people. It speaks to a desire of audiences not just to be amused or diverted, but transformed by art.


And yet opera companies hesitate to market this. No one wants to tell potential new audiences what serious old ones already know: that opera requires devotion, attention and spiritual submission. Yes, it is easier to do all these things where the sunsets are spectacular, the air pristine and the days uncluttered with routine obligations. But for once, I’d love to hear an opera leader acknowledge this powerful driving motivation that helps keep our best festivals burning so brightly. Which is: Many of their most devoted patrons come simply because they must. ■

Philip Kennicott is the art and architecture critic of *The Washington Post*, where he previously served as classical music critic. He has also served as music critic for the *Detroit News* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and is a frequent contributor to *Gramophone* and *Opera News*. His blog can be found at philipkennicott.com.

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# Off the Mainstage and Out of the Box

*Opera companies large and small continue to perform outside traditional theaters. AMANDA KEIL explores how performances in alternative venues present challenges to professionals and choices for audiences.*

Keith Klassen as The Pilot, Peter McGillivray as Thomas, Christine Duncan as Claire and Maghan McPhee as Hope in Edmonton Opera's world premiere production of Juliet Kiri Palmer's *Shelter*, which was co-produced with Tapestry. Photo by Catherine Szabo.



“We believe opera has many faces,” says **Opera Philadelphia** General Director David B. Devan, who has diversified the company’s “product lines” to broaden its appeal. When the company started the Aurora Series for Chamber Opera at the 650-seat Perelman Theater in 2009, it was considered an alternative venue, but the effort has successfully appealed to subscribers and other markets, especially new music aficionados. In other departures from standard operating procedures, Philadelphia collaborates with New York’s **Gotham Chamber Opera** and **Music-Theatre Group** to co-host two composers-in-residence — Lembit Beecher and Missy Mazzoli — and produces an American work each season in partnership with **The Santa Fe Opera**. The company is perhaps most famous for its Random Acts of Culture, pop-up performances such as the 2010 *Hallelujah* chorus at Macy’s in downtown Philadelphia, the video of which became a viral hit.

This may be a far cry from standard repertory productions, but it increases the company’s community footprint and offers a broad menu of musical experiences to choose from. Activities away from the mainstage are not an afterthought. “We ask, ‘What is this opera? Who is going to enjoy it? And how do we do it at the highest quality?’” says Devan. The collaborative partners in Opera Philadelphia’s programs for American works ensure multiple performances for new operas, and a work that originated on the Aurora Series will be presented on the mainstage the following season.

creating a black box within the space, says Koo. The resulting design for *The Lighthouse* turned the audience into the ocean, placing seats in concentric circles around a raised structure in the center, with a giant light sweeping through the windows and across the performers. The production was stunning in the library, but, “If we were to do a remount [elsewhere], are we going to build windows? That would be kind of lame,” says Koo. Work that is site-specific may only work in one specific site.

That said, occasionally a versatile production can find many homes. Queen of Puddings Music Theatre created just such a show with *Svadba - Wedding*, by Serbian-Canadian composer Ana Sokolović. Scored for six a cappella women’s voices, it was a hit at its premiere in the company’s hometown of Toronto in 2011, and was immediately snapped up for touring. The hour-long work employs the close harmony and bright vocalism of Eastern European choral traditions to depict a bride-to-be as her friends prepare her for her wedding. Opera Philadelphia will present its own version of *Svadba* in what Devan describes as “Serbian folk music meets extended vocal techniques meets *Tony and Tina’s Wedding*.” For Act II of the Philadelphia production, which will be held in a warehouse, guests will enjoy a real wedding reception, complete with dinner, dancing and a Serbian folk band.

One of the first to host the Queen of Puddings production for a touring performance of *Svadba* was **Edmonton Opera**, which was a departure from the standard repertoire presented

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## “UNLIKE ADAPTING FIGARO FROM ONE MAINSTAGE TO ANOTHER, SITE-SPECIFIC WORKS CAN POSE CHALLENGES FOR ENCORE APPEARANCES.”

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### **Repetition: Risks and Rewards**

With all the resources being invested in second-stage operas, one hope might be for repeat productions with other companies. The prospect yields winners all around: another company shares the risk and success of the venture, the composer receives another performance credit and the work takes one more step toward entering the repertoire. But unlike adapting *Figaro* from one mainstage to another, site-specific works can pose challenges for encore appearances.

“When designing for a particular space, it is hard to make it work in a different space,” says scenic designer Camellia Koo. She created the 2012 production of Peter Maxwell Davies’ *The Lighthouse* as part of the **Boston Lyric Opera**’s Annex program, which presents an annual run of new and unusual works in a found space in the city. *The Lighthouse* performances took place at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, which brought restrictions and opportunities that influenced the design. Koo’s set had to create entrance, egress and sightlines for the audience, and “take advantage of the charm of the space,” such as its whopping views of the Boston Harbor.

When deciding how to best use a non-traditional space, “We’re not just going to make it into another theater” by

in its 2,500-seat house. Edmonton also drew attention this season for its co-production with Toronto’s **Tapestry** for the world premiere of *Shelter*, by Juliet Kiri Palmer, which juxtaposed the problems of a nuclear family with the atomic age. The black box production was part of a series of opportunities to explore nuclear issues, including a film screening, panel discussion and art exhibit. This type of multi-media approach is part of a broader trend. Now that print media finds itself producing extras like video and live events, opera institutions are creating multiple points of entry for the public to find their way to the art form.

### **Voices Beyond the Proscenium**

If new operas lend themselves more to the black box than the proscenium, the reason lies with the music itself, well before production decisions are made. “When I left school, the most lucrative thing to do was write band music,” says composer Justine Chen, “definitely not opera.” Given that reality, Chen describes a composer’s education that barely touches on writing for voice, much less the complexities of a full-scale opera. Chen is a current resident artist with **American Lyric Theater** (ALT) in New York, which boasts the



Nathan Gunn and William Burden in Opera Philadelphia's production of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. Photo by Kelly & Massa Photography.



Fort Worth Opera Young Artists and members of the 2013 Festival Chorus perform a selection during the company's *Frontiers* showcase. Photo by Kris Robertson.

only full-time mentoring program in the country for emerging composers and librettists. Chen credits the workshops and training at ALT with giving her a “better understanding of the different beasts,” such as the difference between dramatic and lyric voices. ALT’s Composer Librettist Development Program presents workshop performances of operas in progress, and introduces these new works to perspective companies.

A similar concept guides the new *Frontiers* initiative at **Fort Worth Opera**. In an annual competition, composers residing in the Americas are invited to submit unproduced operas, from which up to eight are selected for a showcase performance. Composers and librettists participate in rehearsals, and members of the broader opera community are invited to performances, with the goal of further development and a full-scale production at partner opera companies or with Fort Worth Opera. This effort dovetails with the company’s commitment to presenting more contemporary American works, either through commissions or remounts. While these efforts are still young, they have been received with excitement in the press and by enthusiastic crowds.

Alternative programming, in addition to mainstage productions, enables the public to feel in control of how they participate. Audience members do not need to decide if they identify themselves as bona fide operagoers, but can choose from a diverse menu of interesting experiences. After all, “We’ve gone from watching movies in theaters to watching them on our phones,” says stage director Kevin Newbury, illustrating how personalized we want our cultural experiences to be.

Newbury has become a go-to director for non-traditional operas, such as next season’s *Salome*, which he will stage in collaborative productions between **Utah Symphony | Utah Opera** and the Philadelphia Orchestra and Opera Philadelphia. For creative leaders and audiences alike, “The mainstage and alternative productions each exercise different muscles,” says Newbury. “It’s important to have a varied diet.”

Opera in alternative spaces is often heralded as “smaller and cheaper” in the press, a reputation that couldn’t be farther from the truth. By the time companies finish paying for insurance, seating and design in a new venue, not to mention

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“OPERA IN ALTERNATIVE SPACES IS OFTEN HERALDED AS “SMALLER AND CHEAPER” IN THE PRESS, A REPUTATION THAT COULDN’T BE FARTHER FROM THE TRUTH.”

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Christopher Burchett, David Cushing and John Bellemer in Boston Lyric Opera's 2012 world premiere production of Peter Maxwell Davies' *The Lighthouse*. Photo by Erik Jacobs.



Shannon Mercer, Krisztina Szabó, Jacqueline Woodley, Carla Huhtanen, Laura Albino and Andrea Ludwig in The Queen of Puddings Music Theatre world premiere production of *Svadba - Wedding*. Photo by John Lauener.

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## “OFFERING CHOICES MATCHES THE ON-DEMAND EXPECTATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER CULTURE.”

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the heavier marketing needed to reach the new audiences these productions are intended for, they might as well have remounted another *La bohème*. And a million YouTube views do not translate into a million dollars in ticket sales or donations.

But that's not the point, says Opera Philadelphia's Devan, whose strategy is not about forcing die-hard opera lovers to support unfamiliar music, nor is it based on the hope that someone who has never set foot in an opera house will hear “Vissi d'arte” in a deserted steel mill and suddenly subscribe. “The people coming to the warehouse are not necessarily going to come to *Carmen*. And that's okay,” says Devan. The range of offerings — from flash mob to *The Ring* — all bring heightened awareness of singing and opera to the broader public.

To address the issue of attracting new audience members without alienating the existing base, Philadelphia structured its subscription packages so that subscribers could add new works or chamber operas to their season — or not. Offering choices matches the on-demand expectations of contemporary consumer culture.

But departing from the longstanding subscription model means that each production must sell tickets on its own

merits: selective experiences generally mean fewer seats available and fewer tickets sold. But contributed income sources are often eager to fill the gaps created by innovation, most notably The Knight Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Devan describes a venture capital approach to a diversified season. The last five years have been intended as “proof of concept,” with early investors supporting the work. The next five years will see what can be supported by the market on a larger scale. But as each company vigorously seeks out compelling works and finds the best ways to nurture and present them, the art form will advance and the audience will follow. “People are creating content all the time,” says Devan. “If we connect to it in a meaningful way, future generations will appreciate it as much as *La traviata*.” ■

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Amanda Keil writes for *Classical Singer* and *Bachtrack*, and blogs at [thousandfoldecho.com](http://thousandfoldecho.com). She is founder and artistic director of the Baroque music company *Musica Nuova*.

# Before & Beyond: Shaping the Complete Audience Experience



*With adventuresome programming in unusual venues, ANDREAS MITISEK, artistic and general director of Long Beach Opera and Chicago Opera Theater, has shaped opera experiences that foster audience anticipation and lasting impressions. In conversation with OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca, Mitisek discusses the elements that generate audience engagement.*

**MAS:** You're someone who thinks about the entire audience experience -- before, during and after the opera. What is your philosophy about when the performance begins and when it ends?"

**AM:** The process begins with programming. It takes faith in the curiosity of people and in producing repertoire that nobody knows. And it also requires educating and captivating an audience beyond its expectations. Our audiences have learned over the years to take these journeys.

**MAS:** We have two kinds of audiences: those who like to go to the theater to recognize what they already know and those who go to the theater to discover something they don't know. Are you programming for that "discovery" audience?

**AM:** I agree there are two audiences, but even those people who go to museums to revisit familiar paintings also come to us. In the production we did of Stewart Copland's *Tell Tale Heart* the story is familiar, but the opera is not known, and the way we did the opera certainly was very different from anyone who would know the story. They love these operas but I think they have a curiosity for knowing more. Those are the best audiences: they have no perception about what things should be, so they just go in there and experience something. They don't know what opera is "supposed to be."

**MAS:** Site-specific productions have really helped you amplify the sense of discovery. How does site specificity add to the experience for you?

**AM:** The journey starts each time they get in the car. "Where are we going, what will it look like?" Each time they sit in a different place, they sit next to different people in anticipation of things they don't know. Once you take away the familiarity of a regular theater it is a little unsettling, but it's also exciting. People discover new places with these new works. And they are curious where they will go next.

**MAS:** These aren't theaters with acoustical properties: you have to bring entire sound and lighting systems. So, it is challenging.

**AM:** It is certainly challenging, but it's something you figure out with experience. We have done so many of these things that we balance the cost of doing it on-site versus in a theater. But we are also inspired by the limitations and I think that's important. You're not trying to turn the place into a theater. You are trying to create an environment, to respect the environment and to integrate the environment. That has advantages as it has challenges.

**MAS:** Is your audience disappointed when they go back into a traditional proscenium theater or is it now part of the mix they've come to expect?

**AM:** This season we have a movie theater, a big proscenium theater, a former furniture warehouse and the beach. And sometimes we use the proscenium stage in a different way, with the audience sitting on the stage and the artists in the auditorium for the performance. We look at all these things and ask, "How do we want to use this space to make it creative and not just passive?" I think an audience is more invested and has more enjoyment instead of just sitting in the same seat, the same view, the same kind of configuration.

**MAS:** A research report presented at the recent Opera Europa meeting indicated that high-end retail customers are more willing to spend a sizeable amount of money on experiences rather than objects because an object can be lost, go out of style or lose interest, but an experience is something that exists in the memory for a lifetime. Do you have a sense of your audience's valuation of the experience over just the performance?

**AM:** It is about the opera, but we are also promoting a lifestyle, much in the way Apple doesn't sell computers, it sells a lifestyle. At some of our locations sometimes the seating is



uncomfortable, sometimes it's too warm, parking is a pain. Still, people take all these obstacles as part of the experience. It's part of the opera lifestyle that our audiences choose to be a part of.

**MAS:** *We've focused on the audiences that enjoy discovering new works and new venues. Do you have an audience that just loves traditional repertoire produced in a traditional way?*

**AM:** No, because we don't do traditional repertoire produced in a traditional way. We do unusual repertoire in unusual ways. And these things linger longer. People talk about it all the way home, so that "before" the "after" is also part of the experience, with the performance itself as the center point. How do you get there, what do you experience and then how do you remember? How do you experience a performance as part of your life?

**MAS:** *I get the impression that you started this adventure with a smaller audience and then built a larger audience, and that the audience you have has progressed with you, that they may have been surprised by your early adventures but are now prepared for even greater adventures. Do you feel that your audience has grown both in size and in depth with you?*

I see every single ticket buyer as someone who can become a subscriber.

**MAS:** *Some opera companies have audiences who say, "Oh you know, I loved what you've been doing for the last five years but I hated last night."*

**AM:** It's like saying, "I saw a shitty movie last night, I'm never going to watch a movie again." Or, "I guess I'll stop reading because I really didn't like that book or that author." Well maybe that book by him wasn't the best, but there are other ones.

**MAS:** *Do venue managers approach you saying, "Please produce an opera here." Or are you still knocking on doors to get people to let you use their venues?*

**AM:** It's both. We even have audience members tell us about spaces! They think about spaces and start imagining operas there. It's another point to what we discussed earlier about engaging an audience before, throughout and beyond. They keep thinking about us.

But yes, it can be challenging to find locations. I'm exploring Chicago right now. It's a fascinating city with lots of locations,

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**"IT IS ABOUT THE OPERA, BUT WE ARE ALSO PROMOTING A LIFESTYLE, MUCH IN THE WAY APPLE DOESN'T SELL COMPUTERS, IT SELLS A LIFESTYLE."**

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**AM:** There are always people who want to be the first of something, people who want to be right there with something that is new, that is interesting. And then the next group is early followers who are inspired by those people. Going back to the Apple analogy, anyone who owns an Apple product is basically a spokesperson for it, they are passionate about what their experience is, even if it has faults and failures along the way. But they're always the first to sign up for whatever is new. In opera audiences we have equally passionate people who go out and bring their friends because they're committed to what we're doing. They convince them to come and join, even if they are not opera fans at all.

**MAS:** *Marketing becomes different when you have an audience that is talking about your work in a way that they wouldn't talk about standard productions of standard repertoire. Does your audience come to everything you do or do you find that given the nature of your adventures you have selective buyers?*

**AM:** We have seen increases in subscriptions every year since 2008, despite the recession. Even with our "you won't know any of these operas" brand. But that's the point. We have built a trust such that people say "I might not like everything, but it's going to be interesting. I will be challenged. I will see something I can't see most likely anywhere else." That is a big attraction. There are, of course, people who pick and choose, they come to a production because it's attractive, maybe for the title or the composer, or because it's in the pool. And that's an opportunity to introduce ourselves to them, to invite them in a personal way.

but getting my feet on the ground to find the richness and finding out how you master the challenges can be discouraging to those who haven't done it. Within the next five years my goal is to solidify Chicago Opera Theater, to grow and add Harris Theater performances and other events in the community. I have talked to a lot of people there, audience members, and it seems that everyone is really interested in that. I think you also have to trust the audiences; sometimes they are maybe more adventurous than we are.

**MAS:** *Most audiences don't go up to their general director and talk about venues. I think that is just a wonderful sign of how engaging and collaborative your adventures can be.*

**AM:** It's also about being accessible for all. You know, this is my family — all our ticket buyers, our supporters — in some ways I see this as a big family where we can have an ongoing conversation. People can reach me through e-mail and talk to me at the performances, so there's a lot of information I get. I take home ideas about performances that people saw somewhere else — they bring programs from operas they have seen. It's fascinating to make them part of our decision. People like to bring something to the performance. They bring their curiosity, but they also bring their imagination. It's not that everyone always likes what we do. We have people who say, "I did not get that, I didn't like that," but they come back because they know it's not one work that defines us. ■

# OPERA NEWS

## GETTY FOUNDATION FUNDS PROGRAM TO BUILD OPERA AUDIENCES

The Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation has funded a new OPERA America grant program that will advance the efforts of North American opera companies to build informed, enthusiastic audiences for opera through innovative marketing projects. Developed and managed by OPERA America, the Building Opera Audiences program will award \$300,000 to 13 companies in its first year.

“As cultural and entertainment options continue to grow, opera companies face increased competition for audiences,” says Marc A. Scorca, president/CEO of OPERA America. “The Building Opera Audiences grant program provides funding to support innovative projects that have the potential to engage new and retain current audiences, helping to provide viable models for companies of all sizes across the country.”

A total of 67 applications were received for the program, revealing a diverse range of initiatives that seek to increase first-time attendance and improve audience retention. These projects harness technology and social media, increase two-way conversations with audiences about perceived barriers, and offer special events and performances in theaters and other community venues. They are designed to reach young professionals and families, as well as general audiences, and employ solid research, incentives and collaborations. Each project will be documented and evaluated, with the results shared with the opera field, so that other organizations can learn from and replicate projects in their communities.

Recipients of Building Opera Audiences grants were selected by a panel of industry leaders, including Jim Atkinson of the ArtPride New Jersey Foundation, Colleen Flanagan of Roosevelt University Auditorium Theatre, Claire Hopkinson of the Toronto Arts Council, Laura Johnson of New York City Ballet and Jenifer Thomas, formerly of The Pricing Institute.

### American Opera Projects

Brooklyn, NY

\$12,600

American Opera Projects (AOP) will create a mobile application called Have A Voice to engage and expand opera audiences. By utilizing technology to foster feedback and discourse, the new platform will attract a technologically savvy audience to the art form, while providing useful feedback to creative artists. This cross-platform app will allow audiences to share their feedback with a network of performing arts organizations while simultaneously sharing content on a partner website and popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. An achievement system will encourage users to remain active in the program in order to attain electronic or physical rewards, such as badges, discounts and tickets.

### Arizona Opera

Phoenix and Tucson, AZ

\$30,000

In partnership with Univision Arizona, Arizona Opera's *jViva Opera!* project will build upon the opera company's foundation of outreach and education in the Hispanic community that has included in-school programming and Spanish-language marketing. Arizona Opera seeks to lead the state's cultural and artistic institutions in cultivating a welcoming, inclusive and broad-based relationship with Arizona's Spanish-speaking Hispanic community. Specific activities funded by the grant include: short Spanish-language TV and radio spots for the Phoenix and Tucson markets, events for young Hispanic professionals and Hispanic-owned businesses, free family events for Hispanic audiences and tourism incentives for northern Mexico communities.



## Florentine Opera Company

Milwaukee, WI

\$30,000

Florentine Opera Company will launch a new Young Professionals Group, the Bohème Society, to identify, engage, foster and involve the next generation of opera aficionados in the life of the opera company. Using information gained through focus group sessions with young community leaders, and in consultation with the Bohème Society Advisory Board, Florentine Opera will create a series of value-added experiences and events for young audiences, such as scene showcases, film screenings combined with performances, backstage tours and receptions. Florentine Opera will also design a mobile app providing information about the opera company, its productions and artists; social media content; and Bohème Society event news and audio pieces. To maximize visibility for this project, Florentine Opera will work with a range of strategic media partners to run a media campaign that will include digital marketing, radio spots, print, guerrilla marketing and more.

## Los Angeles Opera

\$30,000

In an effort to introduce new audiences to opera, Los Angeles Opera's Newcomer Project is designed to demystify opera and bring it back to its roots as a popular and ubiquitous art form that is an integral part of the Los Angeles community. Creating a safe and approachable environment for people to experiment with a new art form, the project shepherds newcomers through every step of the opera experience, from discounted ticket pages and preparatory resources to informational programs and social events. The major effort is to cultivate a community of culturally curious newcomers who together can share in the process of a new experience, learn collectively and, most importantly, have a fun and engaging encounter with opera.

## Madison Opera

Madison, WI

\$25,000

This summer, Madison Opera will open its new home, the Madison Opera Center, which includes a rehearsal hall that can be used for expanded community programming. In order to understand how to best use this asset, Madison Opera will work with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center to conduct an extensive survey of the audience at the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Opera in the Park in July. Over 14,000 people attend Opera in the Park, but as it is a free and unticketed event, it is difficult to capture information about who is attending. The Survey Center will use its staff to gather data to determine what activities will engage those audiences in the life of the Opera

Center and increase attendance at all opera performances and events, encouraging this large summer audience to become year-round attendees.

## Opera on the James

Lynchburg, VA

\$7,500

With its GET REAL project, Opera on the James seeks to create an innovative model for changing attitudes of urban youth concerning opera and its value as a uniquely powerful form of musical story telling. A short mixed-genre opera, GET REAL will meld updated portions of the plots from operas that are part of its mainstage season in new orchestrations with hip hop rhythms, percussion and brass, hip hop dance and spoken word. Videography will create fresh, urban visuals that are vibrant and easily portable. GET REAL will feature two duet scenes, each with an emerging opera professional and a regional actor/dancer.

## Opera Memphis

\$30,000

In September, Opera Memphis will present 30 Days of Opera — a month-long program aimed at breaking down the perceived barriers that prevent many people from experiencing the power of opera. Over the course of 30 consecutive days, the company will offer over 50 free performances at more than 40 different locations, all across the Memphis region. These events will introduce opera into the daily routines of local residents — at farmers markets, restaurants, schools and street corners. In the process, they will create a trail of breadcrumbs that leads to the opera house. In this second year of the program, Opera Memphis will expand its roster of singers, which will significantly increase the number of free performances it can deliver.

## Opera Theater of Pittsburgh

\$22,500

Through its new My First Time initiative, Opera Theater of Pittsburgh plans to break down opera stereotypes to make the opera experience feel more approachable and relevant. My First Time will target young professionals and opera newcomers in an attempt to attract and engage those who might not initially consider themselves opera fans. This new campaign will experiment with creative engagement solutions including blog and vlog entries created by opera newcomers, using social media tools to let users capture and share short looping videos on Twitter, generous discounts and welcome bags with fun treats for new ticket buyers, red carpet-style photo ops as first timers arrive at performances, video booths during performance intermissions to capture feedback and post-performance focus groups.

# OA NEWS

## San Francisco Opera

**\$25,000**

San Francisco Opera will present its second Community Open House event this fall, designed to reach and engage those who are new to the organization, especially families with children and people ages 21-40. Virtually every square inch of the historic War Memorial Opera House will be transformed into event space. Free to all, the day-long event will feature included technical and musical demonstrations, a self-guided tour, an Opera in an Hour movie, workshops with young resident artists, arts and crafts and an opportunity to meet the general director. Following the conclusion of the Community Open House, San Francisco Opera will continue to engage attendees with its full range of year-round activities through tailored packages, special ticket offers, newsletters, workshops and more.

## Sarasota Opera

**\$18,000**

Sarasota Opera, with a performance season occurring in the fall and winter, will expand its offerings to include a Summer Screening Series of European opera productions broadcast to the Sarasota Opera House. Tickets for the broadcast series will be bundled into subscription packages that will include Sarasota Opera's live performances, providing an incentive to existing subscribers who live in Sarasota year-round. Sarasota Opera will enrich the broadcast experience by providing pre- and post-performance activities, such as performances by local artists, Q&A with artistic staff, behind-the-scenes opportunities and casual receptions with artists and staff. By launching this broadcast, Sarasota Opera is able to expand its programming into the summer season while also encouraging attendance to its mainstage season by bundling the tickets into a subscription package.

## Seattle Opera

**\$30,000**

Through two initiatives, the Preferred Subscriber Program and Select Your Own Seat web module, Seattle Opera will enhance patron experiences, inspire earlier purchase and encourage more frequent attendance. The Preferred Subscriber Program will enhance the patron experience at McCaw Hall with a dedicated concierge service that allows

subscribers to exchange or purchase additional tickets, pre-order intermission food and drinks, pick up program books and pose for commemorative photos. Subscribers will also be invited to a new Subscriber Appreciation Day at Seattle Opera's rehearsal studios and costume shop to learn about each production's preparations. Improvements to the Select Your Own Seat module include the ability to purchase tickets on mobile devices and incentivize add-on purchases within the same transaction, which will increase Seattle Opera's ticket sales from online users.

## Syracuse Opera

**\$13,500**

Syracuse Opera will broaden its audience by participating in the IDEAS Collaborative, a new community-wide database comprising of ticket buyers from 43 arts, cultural and heritage organizations. With geographic and demographic analysis conducted by a specialized consultant, Syracuse Opera will identify a list of 4,500 households new to the organization who have the highest likelihood of purchasing opera tickets. Four direct mail pieces featuring Buy One Get One Free offers will be sent to these targeted households to encourage them to purchase tickets to Syracuse Opera productions.

## Vancouver Opera

**\$25,000**

Vancouver Opera's Transporting Opera Audiences project will engage prospective patrons in outlying municipalities that are home to diverse cultural enclaves which currently encounter attendance barriers, including distance, price and unfamiliarity with opera. Vancouver Opera will engage these communities in two phases: first, by producing affordable sampler concerts that will introduce opera to audiences in their communities; and second, by partnering with British Columbia's transit authorities to transport these audiences downtown to a mainstage performance. Designated "Opera Trains" will take passengers to the opera house, entertaining them along the way with programming about the performance they are about to experience. Participants will travel for free and will receive a discount on their mainstage ticket that is equivalent to the cost of their initial concert ticket.



## OPERA AMERICA: THE SOCIAL NETWORK

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OPERA America continues to implement advances in digital broadcasting and social media in order to expand access to individual members and organizations unable to attend its annual conference. Increased access via various media channels offers opportunities for new audiences to share knowledge, even as such an expanded digital presence requires enhancements in technology platforms, organization and content. This year's conference, held in Vancouver May 7-11, engaged the largest audience to date: the Robert L.B. Tobin *Director-Designer Showcase*, long a highlight of the gathering, was watched by 18,000 unique visitors across the globe.

Patricia Kiernan Johnson, director of marketing and communications for OPERA America, outlined several key factors essential for any organization eager to grow its digital audience, beginning with a technology partnership. She credits the success of the conference's streaming content to its partnership with OperaMusicBroadcast.com (formerly SoundQue), an arts-specialist company, which was able to provide an advanced hardware and software platform. "They are capable of reaching a much larger audience than we can when we stream on our own," she says.

Defining access is another factor in determining the scope of a digital initiative. In previous years, conference sessions were available only to members. This year's general sessions, including the presentation by Douglas McLennan, *ArtsJournal* founder and editor, will be available to the public on YouTube.

The decision to expand access was not taken lightly, as conference fees are an essential component of OPERA America's operating budget. "There was a concern that when we provided so much free content we might diminish the incentive to attend the conference," says Johnson, reflecting a common concern for nonprofit and commercial content providers alike. But, the organization's leadership concluded that engaging a wider audience provided both value to members and the opera community at large, without detracting from the conference's unique opportunities, most notably the value derived from live networking and peer discussion sessions. Confidential closed-door professional sessions are strictly protected from recording or broadcasting.

The new flexibility of social media technology can also be used to enhance, not just replace, personal communication. In a pilot program at the National Opera Center, this year's conference featured a symposium in its New York auditorium, combining key broadcasts from the conference with in-person roundtables to address issues particular to opera in New York, while participating in the conference's social media initiatives a continent away. Says OPERA America CIO Kevin M. Sobczyk, "It allowed the New York participants to add to the conversation in a way that hadn't been possible for previous OPERA America conferences. The conversation expanded beyond just those attendees gathered in the host city."

In addition to digital broadcasting, Facebook and Twitter initiatives help track news and sound bites from the conference, but also introduced the challenge of capturing transient content for archiving. To meet this challenge, OPERA America curated conference social media content via the Storify service. "It's not the entire conversation," says Johnson, "but it preserves the heart of a discussion."

While a digital presence is now essential for any organization hoping to engage wider audiences, Johnson encourages prudence: "Don't overextend yourself. If we'd tried some of these things a couple of years ago, it might not have been as successful — and it might have discouraged us from doing it again." In addition to technology, a well-managed social media presence is also enhanced with by a human interface: OPERA America recently hired Audrey Saccone as its digital and social media manager to optimize the organization's communication infrastructure.

The proliferation of inexpensive social media tools make it easier than ever for arts organizations to connect with even the least tech-savvy audiences, but Johnson advises that organizations back-up their communication tools with a coordinated strategy. "Know what kind of conversation you're trying to start, who will be talking and who you're trying to talk to," she says.

— Genevieve Valentine

## OPERA CONFERENCE 2013: OPERA OUT OF BOUNDS

More than 500 individuals representing 150 opera companies, exhibitors and other arts organizations attended *Opera Conference 2013: Opera Out of Bounds* held in Vancouver, May 7-11. Hosted by the Vancouver Opera, featured speakers included Don M. Randel, former president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Douglas McLennan, founder and editor of *ArtsJournal*; and San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley. General Sessions explored community engagement and how adaptive changes can foster innovation and build customer loyalty.



Ryan Rybolt (left) and Charmaine Moore of Infintech, LLC share a toast with Jamie Andrews of Minnesota Opera during the Welcome Cruise, hosted by Vancouver Opera. Photo by Tim Matheson.



Cherry Duke as Mary Magdalene (left) and Sara Gartland as Miriam with pianist Jeanne-Minette Cilliers performing an excerpt from Mark Adamo's *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* during OPERA America's *New Works Sampler*. The work was commissioned by San Francisco Opera and presented here by G. Schirmer, Inc. Photo by Tim Matheson.



Pierre Dufour (left), Christine Krebs and Guillaume Thérien of Opéra de Montréal enjoying the Welcome Cruise, hosted by Vancouver Opera. Photo by Tim Matheson.





Walker Lewis (left), director; Grace Trimble, costume designer and David Meyer, set designer, presenting their production concept for *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* during the Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Showcase. Photo by Tim Matheson.



Joe Cremona of Palm Beach Opera, Kim Mattice Wanat of Opera NUOVA and other conference attendees explore the innovative projects from the Achieving Boundless Impact General Session. Photo by Patricia K. Johnson.

## OPERA CONFERENCE 2013 SPONSORS

OPERA America acknowledges the generous contributions of the following businesses and corporations who sponsored events and sessions for *Opera Conference 2013: Opera Out of Bounds*, that was held in Vancouver, May 7-11, 2013.



## OPERA AMERICA PARTNERS WITH NEW YORK'S HAMILTON SENIOR CENTER FOR "STORIES AND SONG"



Teaching artist and music director Mary Feinsinger, far left, and Jackie Schiffer, program coordinator, OPERA America, far right, with participants in "Stories and Song" at their June 11 performance at the National Opera Center. Photo by Audrey Saccone.

Eleven singers drawn from the Hamilton Senior Center on New York's Upper West Side participated in a 10-week opera learning experience for older adults culminating with a performance at the National Opera Center on June 11. Music director Mary Feinsinger led the concert, which featured choruses and choral arrangements of well-known arias from operas by Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti and Bizet.

The program, developed and produced by OPERA America, is supported by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council and Councilmember Gale Brewer. OPERA America's "Stories and Song" program allows participants to study various aspects of opera through vocal instruction, creative projects and discussion. "Stories and Song" welcomed visits from guest artists, including a librettist, artistic director and singers.

To produce this program OPERA America partnered with Project FIND, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide low- to moderate-income and

homeless seniors with opportunities to enrich their lives and live independently. Project FIND operates three supportive housing residences that are home to approximately 600 people and four senior centers with over 3,000 members. Hamilton Senior Center, which opened in 1973, provides meals, classes and a variety of social and cultural activities.

Included in the program were in-depth conversations, summaries of librettos, screenings of filmed productions and a "field trip" to a performance of *La bohème* by Bronx Opera Company. Foreign language repertoire was explored through diction instruction and translation.

Though many participants had previous interest or training in music, the program was designed to appeal equally to non-singers. Guest presenters were an integral part of the program and provided a comprehensive inside look into the opera industry. Among the guests were librettist Erin Hunsader, costume designer Sydney Maresca, artistic director Ben Spierman, mezzo-soprano Sarah Heltzel and soprano Rachel Rosenberg

Drawing on previous experience with a similar participatory learning engagement initiative, Leah D. Wilson, OPERA America's director of learning and engagement, wanted to ensure that participants "were not just witnessing or observing, but learning the craft as well." Now in its second year, OPERA America's partnership with Hamilton Senior Center previously focused on storytelling and composition. Advancing to vocal technique was a logical evolution, says Wilson. "Their proudest moment was the final performance at the National Opera Center when they sang in original languages," she says. "They truly owned the performance."

Jackie Schiffer, program coordinator for OPERA America, said the success of such programs for seniors requires certain logistical considerations, most importantly allowing sufficient time for each event. "Challenges inevitably arrive on the day of the program," she says, weather and transportation chief among them. Whether presented in urban locations with public transportation or suburban areas where private transportation must be arranged, she advises consideration be made for participants with health issues or those requiring assistance with mobility. Which is not to say that presenters of creative aging programs for older adults should stumble onto stereotypes. According to Schiffer, participants in "Stories and Song" ranged from those in their 60s to those in their 90s.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. "I never dreamed I would have a chance to sing some of the most beloved songs in all of opera," said Connie Bartusis. "It was a rare and deep and joyful experience." Dolores Ranghelli, whose mother was born in Italy, never spoke or understood the language but found singing Italian repertoire enlightening. "When singing, I feel like a bird let out of its cage," she says. "It's a glorious feeling."



## LISTENING COVE DEDICATED TO BILLINGHURST

The Sarah Billinghamurst Listening Cove at the National Opera Center, dedicated to her by friends and colleagues, houses OPERA America's growing collection of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century North American opera recordings. The Listening Cove serves as valuable resource for repertoire research and role preparation.

Born in Wanganui, New Zealand, Billinghamurst moved to San Francisco in her 20s and soon started as a volunteer with San Francisco Opera. In 1972, she became assistant to the artistic administrator and, in 1982, was named artistic administrator. In 1994, Joseph Volpe invited Billinghamurst to join the Metropolitan Opera as assistant manager. At the Met she has nurtured the creation of several contemporary American operas, including works by John Adams, Tan Dun, John Harbison, Tobias Picker, Conrad Susa and Stewart Wallace. Working with Valery Gergiev she advanced the presentation of the Kirov Opera and Kirov Ballet of the Mariinsky Theatre Festivals at the Metropolitan Opera. In her 40 years of dedication to singers, conductors, directors, composers and the opera art form itself, Billinghamurst has become one of the most beloved and admired professionals. In May 2009, she was awarded an honorary doctorate of music from Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand.

"Sarah is one of the loveliest guardian angels of artists that I have ever known," says mezzo-soprano and OPERA America board member Frederica von Stade. "She has been giving her talents and her heart to this world of opera in the most generous, humorous and kindest of ways for many years now. It is a joy to be with her always." Baritone Thomas Hampson says, "Sarah is far more than an administrator in the opera world, she is a curator of talented personalities. Being one of the most well-read people I know, she engages colleagues in a world richer and deeper — that far exceeds the professional responsibilities of our industry — and encourages all of us to embrace a wider and more meaningful world from which the arts resonate."



Marc A. Scorca, president/CEO of OPERA America, and Sarah Billinghamurst, at a reception in her honor at the National Opera Center on February 11. Photo by Audrey Saccone.



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# PUBLICATIONS

By Alexa B. Antopol



## LOTTE LEHMANN IN AMERICA

Kathy H. Brown  
The College Music Society

Kathy H. Brown focuses on the teaching career of Lotte Lehmann (1888-1976) — with an emphasis on interpretation of the text — after her immigration to the United States. Advice culled from the transcripts of voice lessons and master classes, as well as from questionnaires from students, is provided for 223 art songs by 26 composers and 25 arias by 12 composers. This is preceded by summaries of Lehmann's careers in the opera house and on the recital stage in Europe and America. The volume is illustrated with 50 photographs and reproductions of 38 paintings by Lehmann herself in response to specific lieder by Schubert and Schumann.

## WERTHER: A PERFORMANCE GUIDE

Mary Dibbern  
Pendragon Press

Mary Dibbern, music director of education and family programs at The Dallas Opera and adjunct faculty member at the University of North Texas, has created a performance guide for Massenet's *Werther*. Her sixth contribution to the Vox Musicae series presents a word-by-word translation and IPA transcription of the French libretto, and traces its development

from the short novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe. Additional insights into *Werther* are offered in essays by tenor James Valenti, conductor Christoph Campestrini and stage director Kevin Newbury. Original illustrations have been created by artist Mike Reed. This well-rounded volume is designed for use by singers, vocal coaches, conductors, producers and directors, as well as opera lovers.



## BEL CANTO BULLY: THE LIFE OF THE LEGENDARY OPERA IMPRESARIO DOMENICO BARBAJA

Philip Eisenbeiss  
Haus Publishing

Philip Eisenbeiss pieces together the forgotten story of a tyrant who became the most important opera impresario of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Napoleon and the Bourbons were fighting for control of Italy and when singers and composers were the pop stars of their day. An uneducated coffee waiter, Domenico Barbaja made a fortune running gambling concessions and soon took over opera houses in Naples, Milan and Vienna, launching the careers of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti. The foul-mouthed, womanizing and hustling impresario had an irrevocable impact on the history of Italian opera: determined to create a lucrative

business, he cultivated an energetic environment of new artists producing innovative, exciting opera that people would flock to hear.



## LES TROYENS (THE OPERA LIVELY GUIDES)

Luiz Gazzola  
Opera Lively

An introduction to the circumstances of composition of Berlioz's masterpiece, this initial volume in a series of guides published by Opera Lively Press includes Berlioz's biography, a list of characters and musical sections in *Les Troyens*, a detailed synopsis and the full libretto with English translation. See how Virgil's *Aeneid* was adapted for the libretto, read about the opening night and subsequent performance history, and explore the real Troy and the real Carthage. Musical aspects of the piece are discussed in terms of the score and the voice types (and singers) for the roles, with links to video clips. Recordings are listed and reviewed, as are historical and modern productions. Interviews with recent performers of the work, Anna Caterina Antonacci and Bryan Hymel, are also included.





### **"ON MY WAY": THE UNTOLD STORY OF ROUBEN MAHOULIAN, GEORGE GERSHWIN, AND PORGY AND BESS**

Joseph Horowitz  
W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

This volume is a history of the operatic masterpiece that both "made" and "destroyed" Rouben Mamoulian, its director and unsung hero. Culling new information from the recently opened Mamoulian Archives at the Library of Congress, Joseph Horowitz shows that, more than anyone else, Mamoulian took DuBose Heyward's vignette of a regional African-American subculture and transformed it into an epic theater work, a universal parable of suffering and redemption. *On My Way* re-creates Mamoulian's visionary style on stage and screen, his collaboration with George Gershwin and the genesis of the opera that changed the face of American musical life.

### **ARIA READY: THE BUSINESS OF SINGING**

Carol Kirkpatrick  
Bancroft Publications

Kirkpatrick takes the second-person singular voice to advise young singers on career choices: "You are the product, the company and the person who manages your business, so it is your responsibility to learn how to weave these parts together into a successful venture, learning how best to utilize your time, energy and money in building your career. Developing a solid foundation, the performer — is the first and most important part of the process. Because no two people

are internally wired in exactly the same way, it follows that there is no one particular method or specific path towards building a professional singing career. Figuring out how you work best, as you tackle what lies ahead on your career path, increases your chances of successfully reaching your goals and liberating the artist within. Presenting and representing your personal brand transforms both your professional and personal life, allowing you to become a passionate communicator both on- and offstage."



### **DANCE IN HANDEL'S LONDON OPERAS**

Sarah McCleave  
University of Rochester Press

George Frideric Handel set himself apart from his contemporaries by employing choreographed instrumental music to complement and reinforce the emotional impact of his operas. Of his 53 operas, no fewer than 14 — including 10 written for the London stage — feature dances. This volume explores the relationship between music, drama and dance in these London works, dispelling the notion that dance was a largely peripheral element in Italian-language operas prior to those of Gluck. Taking a chronological approach, the author examines operas written throughout various periods in Handel's life, beginning with his early London operas, including his time at the Royal Music Academy and the "Sallé" operas of the 1730s, and concluding with his unstaged dramatic opera *Alceste* (1750).

### **DIARY OF A REDNECK OPERA ZINGER**

Jay Hunter Morris  
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Meet opera "zinger" (yes, with a "z") — GRAMMY Award-winning tenor Jay Hunter Morris, the Metropolitan Opera's *Siegfried* in Wagner's *Ring*. Born in Paris, TX, Morris was propelled to international fame after his big break in October 2011, when Peter Gelb brought him in at short notice to substitute for an ailing colleague, and he sang superbly in front of a Met Live in HD worldwide audience. This gifted singer has a phenomenal talent for self-deprecating black humor (and linguistic acrobatics — all spelling and grammar idiosyncrasies are printed on purpose for a true Texan feel), but is also touching and admirable in his love for the art form, his family and his values. This book will not only make you laugh (hard!) but will also inform you about the joys and hardships of the operatic singing profession.

### **THE MUSICIAN'S JOURNEY: CRAFTING YOUR CAREER VISION AND PLAN**

Jill Timmons  
Oxford University Press

*The Musician's Journey* escorts musicians, performing artists, music teachers and advanced music students along the road toward a successful career, offering an array of resources to guide them from envisioning the process to achieving the practical details. Jill Timmons provides sources as diverse as the world of myth and current brain research, which illuminate real-world examples of music entrepreneurs who forged their own paths to success. Included are chapters on careers in higher education; guidance in how to develop a business plan; general tips on grant writing and financial development; a separate section exploring the stories of other successful musicians; and personal narrative taken from the author's work as a professional musician and consultant. The book includes an extensive bibliography of additional resources, and the companion website offers downloadable worksheets and questionnaires to help readers along their way.

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# MY FIRST TIME

By Robert Marx

My 11<sup>th</sup> birthday present was the New York City subway system. From that day forward, I was free to go anywhere I wanted — alone — so long as I returned in time for dinner.

Such childhood independence was important to my refugee parents, who were raised in pre-War rural Germany, where most children left home and school at age 13 to begin work as apprentices. (My father apprenticed in a hardware store; my mother in a tobacco factory.) Years later, having reached the safety of New York, they understood that in America their young sons would not be leaving home at 13. But they still believed that all children should approach adult maturity and confidence by that age. Traveling the subway by oneself was required preparation.

And what did I do with this gift of independence? Matinees.

That's not as crazy as it sounds. Until the 1970s, theater tickets in New York were cheap. Upper Balcony seats at Broadway shows were the same price as a movie, and working-class people were still a habitual, even fundamental part of the arts in New York City (perhaps for the last time). A large segment of Broadway ticket-buyers rode the subway to Times Square from Brooklyn and The Bronx. My parents were of that audience. The *Playbills* they brought home fascinated me.

I saw my first show, *The Music Man*, with my family. The second, a revival of *Showboat* at New York City Center, was with a friend's family. The third, *My Fair Lady*, I saw with my older brother. After that, I was on my own. I had to budget my allowance very carefully, but I could afford to see a Broadway matinee once a month. The total cost of the theater ticket, subway fare and maybe a sandwich would come in under \$4.

Refugee households are emotionally complicated places, and mine was no exception. At home, I had to be as contained as possible. But letting my emotions fly while sitting in those Broadway balconies, with all the safe joy of being part of an audience, made me whole. There *is* safety in numbers. And I was not isolated at those performances. Many theater-obsessed urban teenagers just like me were also darting from play to play, without parents or school groups in sight. It was a scene out of Moss Hart's classic autobiography, *Act One*.

Every Broadway theater became an intimate friend. But at the southern edge of Times Square there was an old building I didn't know, even though it was integral to the theater district: the Metropolitan Opera House at Broadway and 39<sup>th</sup> Street. This was uncharted territory, even to a self-aware Broadway "veteran" of 15.

One Saturday afternoon, I walked past it just as a matinee audience was leaving. Theater security was non-existent then, so I ran inside, heading upstream against the departing crowd. The exterior of the building

was extremely plain and grimy — it really *did* look like its moniker, "the yellow brick brewery." Once past the front door, I was surprised that there was only a modest Box Office lobby, decorated with singer's headshots. Beyond that, there was no "opera house" lobby, just a wide staircase up to the balconies and a narrow circulation corridor that descended directly into a huge auditorium: red, gold and old, with five perfectly parallel horseshoe rings. The atmosphere was very grand 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I sensed that I shouldn't linger, but the aged beauty of the room made me want to see an opera there before the Met moved to Lincoln Center. I forget how this became a family event with my parents — the first time I'd go to a performance with them since that matinee of *The Music Man* in 1961. We knew nothing about opera, but for one night my parents were willing to follow their theater-obsessed teen. It was the first opera for all three of us: *The Barber of Seville*, Saturday evening March 26, 1966, just a month before the "Old Met" shuttered.

We sat close to the proscenium, in the last of three steeply raked side-Balcony rows. From those nosebleed seats there was a wonderful panorama of the auditorium, but to see much of the stage you had to stand up — not a problem from the last row — and that was how we watched the production. I remember Reri Grist's charm as Rosina (and how unexpected it was to see an African-American singer from New York City), as well as Eugene Berman's painterly stage designs. (Who knew that pastel colors could be used to such effect?) But did the overall performance have an impact on any of us? No. However exciting it was to be in that legendary space, as a theater experience *The Barber* was a dud.

In subsequent years, my parents tried two other Met performances before giving up. No more opera for them. But my own obsessions only grew. Something about the scope of opera, the theatrical ambition of both the art and the Met, kept pulling my teenage self back to the "new house" to explore productions both good and bad. I was patient, and in those years it was easy to sneak in to "second act" Met performances. Then three singers came my way: Leontyne Price, Leonie Rysanek and Jon Vickers. They took hold of me and never let go.

---

*Robert Marx is president of the Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation in New York City. He has been executive director of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, director of the Theatre Program at the National Endowment for the Arts and for the past 18 seasons has been heard on the intermission features of the Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts. This is the first in an ongoing series in which distinguished members of the opera community are invited to share their introduction to the art form.*



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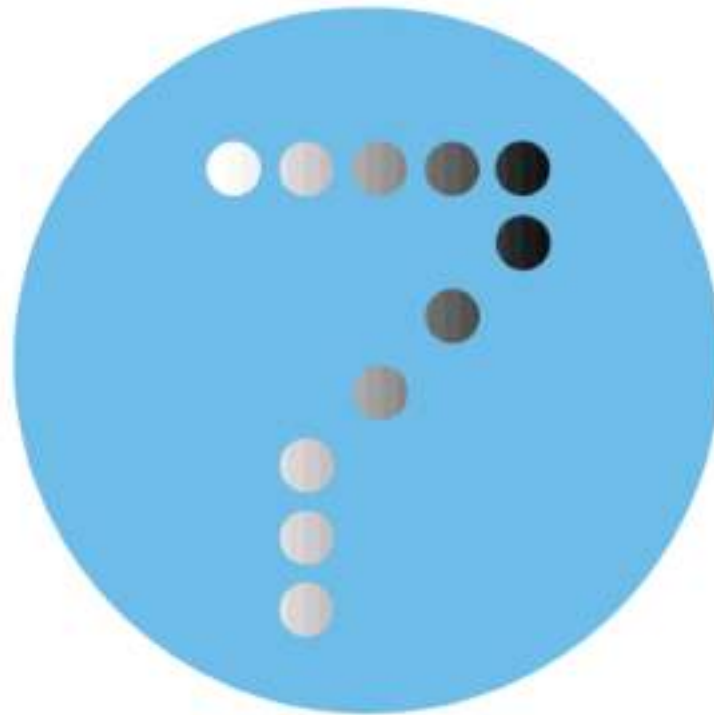
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