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THE COVER

The spirit of concert opera is captured in a digital collage by James Ty Cumbie. Images: Rinde Eckert in *Aging Magician*, by Paola Prestini, Rinde Eckert and Julian Crouch, photo by Jill Steinberg (left). Charles Castronovo and John Relyea in *Faust*, photo by Don Lassell (center); Blythe Gaissert and Christopher Dylan Herbert in an excerpt from *As One*, by Laura Kaminsky, Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed, photo by Jeff Reeder (right); The Cleveland Orchestra, photo by Roger Mastroianni (bottom).

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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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INNOVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION



Bringing our members together to draw on their collective experience and creativity for the benefit of the entire field is one of OPERA America's most important roles. The last two months have been filled with vibrant examples of this unique and important service.

Our conference in May engaged more than 500 members in the nation's capital for an extended discussion about the value of opera companies in the lives of our communities. We were stimulated to think in new ways about our role as cultural citizens by a range of dynamic presenters. Keynote speaker Roberto Bedoya introduced the concept of "belonging" and encouraged all of us to consider ways we can tap opera's power to tell human stories that make people feel they belong in our art form and our opera houses — and that opera belongs to them. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg inspired us with her mastery of the American opera repertoire and her wonderful humor. She has earned her right to be an Honorary Life Member of OPERA America! (For those of you unable to attend, these sessions can be viewed on our YouTube channel.)

We are grateful to the board and staff of Washington National Opera and the Kennedy Center for welcoming us so graciously to their beautiful city. Congratulations go to our own Brandon Gryde, director of government affairs, who organized our first-ever Opera Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill. More than 50 OPERA America members visited 45 congressional offices to make the case for arts education, for continued support of the National Endowment for the Arts and for the deductibility of contributions to arts organizations.

OPERA America's role as convener continued in early June when, thanks to the generosity of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, member companies from "Knight Cities" gathered in Charlotte to examine the challenges and opportunities for collaborating on new productions of the standard repertoire. In a certain bittersweet irony, the field's remarkable success in cultivating contemporary American repertoire in the past decade has reduced the resources available to develop high-quality co-productions of the 18th- and 19th-century canon. Participants inspired OPERA America to help rebalance support of the *entire* repertoire. The subject will be examined further in the coming months by members of OPERA America's Technical/Production Forum, Artistic Services Committee and Board of Directors, and will be explored in sessions at *Opera Conference 2016* in Montréal.

Following the Charlotte gathering, San Francisco was the site of the first meeting of OPERA America's Civic Action Group, a collection of members and experts from outside the field who are at the forefront of building opera companies' capacity to increase civic impact. The group, which will expand over the next year, will provide a range of program ideas that can be implemented by members, as well as techniques for assessing the impact of such programs and other resources that will help members integrate opera more fully into the lives of their communities.

That opera embraces every corner of our society was made particularly evident to me when complications from routine surgery recently landed me in the hospital for several days. From the diverse and caring staff of nurses I learned so much: Carol in the emergency room was the grand-niece of an important Cuban opera and zarzuela singer; Eva from Warsaw asked me if I liked Callas' recording of *Norma*; Olga, formerly a journalist in Moscow, is a great fan of Netrebko. Regrettably, despite their love of the art form, they do not attend performances: they have children who need to be fed, dogs that need to be walked and husbands who don't like music. This wonderful focus group proved the validity of more scientific reports on the health of the field: Interest in opera is strong, but barriers to attendance are stronger yet.

Lowering these barriers is a mission we all share, and we as a field are best able to accomplish this through collective thinking. We will convene many times between now and our next conference to learn from one another and, together, develop opportunities for strengthening the art form, our audiences and our companies. Please join us in this work.

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

Marc A. Scorca
President/CEO



Performers in the world premiere of *Wading Home*, an opera by Mary Alice Rich and Rosalyn Story that describes a family's survival of Hurricane Katrina.

THE OPERA HOUSE AS HOME

The experiences of immigrants and refugees have increasingly emerged as sources of powerful operatic narratives that deal with displacement, homecoming and the search for community. By examining these stories, artists and companies have expanded their repertoire to embrace contemporary issues that resonate in their communities and engage new audiences.

In the past year, two notable productions addressed the experience of people displaced by political unrest: **MANITOBA OPERA** invited 100 refugees living in the Winnipeg area to act as supers in *Fidelio*. For **SEATTLE OPERA**, composer Jack Perla and librettist Jessica Murphy Moo developed *An American Dream*, to premiere this August, which is based on two present-day Seattle women who lived through profound displacement — one a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, the other a Japanese-American placed in an internment camp during World War II.

In the months leading up to its production of Menotti's *The Consul* this past season, **FLORIDA GRAND OPERA** presented *Community Conversations*, a series exploring the opera's themes of freedom and exile as they relate to contemporary Miamians. "We have people in our community who, like Magda, have dealt with totalitarian regimes," explains FGO General Director and CEO Susan T. Danis, referring to the heroine of *The Consul*. "They have not been able to articulate their own pain because they have lived with it." A panel discussion including Holocaust survivors, Haitian refugees and Cuban immigrants presented several of these painful stories, which were interspersed with excerpts from the opera.

Julie Maykowski, FGO's director of artistic administration and the director of *The Consul*, believes that *Community Conversations* reduced barriers to attendance while also providing a deeper experience for operagoers: "They took a journey

with us — talking about Menotti and his music, seeing propaganda art, hearing the stories and then seeing the opera. That experience was far more extraordinary than if they had only seen the opera. People got over their fear of contemporary music."

A new opera *Wading Home*, which narrates one family's struggles to endure Hurricane Katrina, was premiered this spring in Dallas and accompanied by a discussion moderated by Darren K. Woods, general director of **FORT WORTH OPERA**. Dallas, home to some 25,000 people who fled New Orleans during Katrina, was an appropriate testing ground for the opera, developed by composer Mary Alice Rich and librettist Rosalyn Story with funding from the Sphinx Organization. Rich and Story aimed to channel the stories of many who fled the storm and to portray their experiences authentically. "New Orleanians want to see their culture represented in a way that is true," says Story. "People want to see themselves onstage. We are still trying to reflect them in a more honest way — not just what they have gone through, but who they are."

At the premiere, presented in collaboration with The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, the creators received feedback from audience members, some of whom were Katrina survivors, that suggested the opera struck the correct emotional chords: "We had a mix of people — black and white, young and old, rich and poor, opera savvy and not," says Story, "and the most vocal reactions came from people who had never seen an opera but felt how relevant the story was to their own experiences."

In response to the Pacific Northwest's growing Hispanic community, which includes many first- and second-generation

immigrants, **PORTLAND OPERA**'s Opera To Go program recently produced an English-Spanish version of *The Barber of Seville* set in 1830s California, which was created by stage director Kristine McIntyre. The bilingual aspect of the production and its modified plot addressed real interests and needs of the Hispanic community. "I don't want to feel like we are just grafting Spanish language onto something," says Alexis Hamilton, Portland Opera's manager of education and outreach. "If we really want to honor and connect

to a culture, we have to do it well." This project involved meeting with consulting groups that examine Hispanic issues, attending Hispanic chamber of commerce meetings and speaking with Portland's bilingual Milagro Theater Group.

In the Opera To Go version of Rossini's opera, Figaro acts as a translator for an English-speaking Almaviva and a Spanish-speaking Susanna — a role analogous to that played by many bilingual children in their own homes. "Figaro is a stand-in for all of those kids who are navigating two

worlds," says Hamilton. "One of the beautiful things that [baritone José Ramirez-Solano] does during Figaro's aria is that, as he's singing 'Figaro here, Figaro there,' he's pointing at all these different kids in the audiences as if to say, 'You are the Figaro — you are the one who does all these things.'" It is the company's hope that, by seeing themselves reflected onstage, children will feel ownership of the art form — a sense that they belong in opera, and that opera belongs to them. ●

— Nicholas Wise

"The most vocal reactions came from people who had never seen an opera but felt how relevant the story was to their own experiences."

MAJOR GIFTS, MAJOR IMPACT

BOSTON LYRIC OPERA has received a \$5 million gift from The Calderwood Charitable Foundation to endow the general and artistic director position, currently held by Esther Nelson. It is the single largest institutional gift in BLO's 39-year history.

The Edward H. Benenson Foundation has made a \$1 million gift to **PALM BEACH OPERA** to fund PBO's Young Artist Program for the next four years.

A \$1 million grant from the Partridge Foundation has been awarded to **THE GLIMMERGLASS FESTIVAL**. The funds will support school-based initiatives, enrichment for adults and families, and programs for special constituencies.

An anonymous donor pledged a \$100,000 matching grant to **OPERA ROANOKE**. The grant stipulated that the company bring in new or increased gifts of up to \$100,000 by June 30, and further specified

that the total funds raised be divided equally between operating expenses and the company's endowment.

OPERA DELAWARE has been awarded two years of production support totaling \$450,000 from The Longwood Foundation. The grant helps support the company's spring 2016 festival. ●

NEXT STOP, OPERA

In May, **HOUSTON GRAND OPERA** staff and artists decked out in costumes celebrated the opening of a new light-rail stop in Houston's Theater District, which will provide easy access to the Wortham Theater Center and, to the delight of many patrons, relief from parking headaches. The Queen of the Night, Papageno, a Valkyrie and others joined straphangers in testing out the rail line. ●



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WALLACE GRANTS TO EXPLORE AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The Wallace Foundation has launched a new six-year, \$52 million initiative aimed at developing practical insights into how arts organizations can successfully expand their audiences. Grant recipients will design and implement programs to attract new audiences while retaining current ones, measuring whether and how this contributes to their overall financial health.

Representing a spectrum of organizations — from dance and opera companies to orchestras, theaters and multidisciplinary arts institutions — the selected partners will receive financial and technical support from the foundation to develop, implement and learn from their audience-building work. The evidence gathered from these organizations will be documented and analyzed by an independent team of researchers, providing valuable insights, ideas and information

for the entire field. Among the organizations selected were **LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO, OPERA PHILADELPHIA, OPERA THEATRE OF SAINT LOUIS** and **SEATTLE OPERA**.

“The arts are essential on both a personal level, providing us with experiences that open us to new perspectives, and on a community level, helping us to find common ground,” said Will Miller, president of The Wallace Foundation, in announcing the grants. “However, attracting and engaging new audiences is challenging for arts organizations because, even as the number of arts groups has grown, national rates of participation in the arts have declined, arts education has waned, and competition for ways to spend leisure time has increased. We are confident that the 26 organizations selected from a pool of more than 300 identified by leaders in the arts nationwide will provide new insights that will benefit the field

at large, helping to bring the arts to a broader and more diverse group of people.”

The projects to be carried out by the arts organizations are designed to reach a variety of diverse audiences, including racial and ethnic groups, age cohorts (primarily young people) and people working in specific sectors. Participating organizations will receive grant support from Wallace to fund at least two “continuous learning cycles” of work over the course of four years. They will develop and implement a new audience-building program in the first cycle, study the results, and then use the findings to implement a second cycle of programs. They will also receive funding for audience research to inform their work. Wallace will commission research to capture the arts organizations’ experiences and accomplishments for a series of public reports. ●

The selected partners will receive financial and technical support from the foundation to develop, implement and learn from their audience-building work.

SPIRITED PROMOTIONS

In its 2014–2015 season, **UTAH SYMPHONY | UTAH OPERA** teamed up with local restaurants for “Libretti & Libations,” a partnership in which mixologists crafted cocktails based on the company’s current opera productions, providing patrons who ordered the drinks with snippets of the operas’ libretti. The cocktails ranged from a *Butterfly*-inspired “Pinkerton Interpretation B,” a bourbon drink incorporating plum and ginger, to “The Friendship Duet,” a vodka, fig and citrus concoction infused with the exoticism of *Les Pêcheurs de perles*.

FLORENTINE OPERA’s recent production of *L’elisir d’amore*, set in 1930s California wine country, led the company to create its very own vintage — The Florentine Reserve, a Bordeaux blend produced by The Wine Foundry in Napa, California. But, unlike the duplicitous Doctor Dulcamara’s brew, Florentine’s wine promises no special powers — besides enticing both oenophiles and opera buffs alike. ●



THE WINE FOUNDRY

The Florentine Reserve, a Bordeaux blend created for Florentine Opera, is bottled at The Wine Foundry in Napa, California.

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For More Information, Visit www.midatlanticopera.org or call Stephen Lasher, 973-204-6684.

PEOPLE

David Bennett, formerly executive director of Gotham Chamber Opera, has been appointed general director of San Diego Opera.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music has announced that **Katy Clark** will be its new president, succeeding Karen Brooks Hopkins. Clark previously served as president and executive director of Orchestra of St. Luke's and The DiMenna Center for Classical Music.

Seattle Opera has named **Barbara Lynne Jamison**, formerly the company's youth programs manager, as its new director of education and

community engagement. She succeeds **Sue Elliott**, who was appointed director of teacher certification at The Royal Conservatory of Music, Ontario.

The Metropolitan Opera Guild has named **Thomas M. Martin**, director of finance and administration, as managing director. Martin succeeds Stewart Pearce, who will retire after 39 years with the Met.

At Pensacola Opera, **Chandra McKern**, former director of education at Nashville Opera, was named managing director. **Jerome Shannon** was appointed the company's executive director.

Opera Colorado has appointed **Ari Pelto** as its first-ever music director. Pelto has served as artistic advisor for the company since 2013.

Nancy E. Petrisko has left her position as executive director of Washington Concert Opera to become director of development at the Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts. **Ursula Kuhar**, director of the arts administration program at Sweet Briar College, will succeed her.

Christopher Powell has joined The Glimmerglass Festival as director of administration and community engagement. He formerly served as music

administrator of Pittsburgh Opera.

Melia P. Tourangeau, president and CEO of Utah Symphony | Utah Opera, has accepted the position of president and CEO of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

Vancouver Opera has announced that General Director **James W. Wright** will retire at the end of the 2015–2016 season.

Washington National Opera has extended **Francesca Zambello's** contract for three years, through September 2018. She has served as the company's artistic director since January 2013. ●

KUDOS



Jamie Barton

Mezzo-soprano **Jamie Barton** has received the 2015 Richard Tucker Award, which carries a prize of \$50,000. The award is conferred annually on an American singer on the threshold of a major career. Barton will be featured at the Richard Tucker Music Foundation's annual gala on November 1 at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall.

Anthony Freud, general director of Lyric Opera of



Anthony Freud

Chicago, received Dominican University's 2015 Bravo Award at a gala in March. The award recognizes Freud's positive impact on Lyric and the Chicago-area arts scene, particularly his ability to engage new audiences for opera.

Composer **Philip Glass** was chosen to be the 11th Glenn Gould Prize Laureate in recognition of his musical, artistic and intellectual

contributions. This biennial award of \$100,000 also entitles Glass to choose a young artist to receive a City of Toronto Glenn Gould Protégé Prize of \$15,000.

The Sarah and Ernest Butler School of Music at the University of Texas has named composer **Jake Heggie** the recipient of its 2015–2016 Eddie Medora King Award. This \$40,000 award, given every two years, includes a residency at the Butler School of Music, where Heggie will give master classes and attend rehearsals of his operas.

In honor of his contributions to French opera, **Speight Jenkins**, former general director of Seattle Opera, was named a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government. Pauline Carmona, consul general of France, presented the insignia to Jenkins at a ceremony on March 19.

The University of South Florida conferred an Honorary Doctor of the Arts on **Sherrill**

Milnes. The famed baritone is the co-founder of the Sherrill Milnes VOICE Programs in Savannah, Georgia.

Yale School of Music has granted Music Education Partnership Awards to five opera companies that have partnered with local school districts: **FLORIDA GRAND OPERA, PENSACOLA OPERA, SAN DIEGO OPERA, THE SANTA FE OPERA** and **SAN FRANCISCO OPERA**. Representatives from the opera companies and their partner schools attended a Yale symposium in early June.

Among the honorees of the 2015 International Opera Awards were **Ann Ziff**, chairman of the Metropolitan Opera board of directors, who received the Philanthropist Award, and **Speight Jenkins**, former general director of Seattle Opera, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award. The awards were presented at a ceremony in London on April 26. ●



PROSCENIUM UNBOUNDED

THE EVOLUTION OF CONCERT OPERA

Concert opera has evolved into a diverse spectrum of performance practices offering innovative opportunities for repertoire and staging. **DAVID SHENGOLD** examines how opera companies and symphony orchestras are redefining the visual and emotional experience.

Above: The Cleveland Orchestra's May 2014 presentation of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, with Martina Janková as the Vixen (l) and Jennifer Johnson Cano as the Fox (r). Conducted by Franz Welser-Möst and directed by Yuval Sharon. Animation by Bill Barminski and Christopher Louie of Walter Robot Studios. Projection and lighting design by Jason Thompson. Costume design by Ann Closs-Farley and Cristina Waltz.

There was a time when the dividing line between “staged” opera and “concert” opera was clear. In the former, the orchestra was hidden below in the pit of an opera house, with the attendant glory going to the artists in the *mise-en-scène* above. In the latter, a full orchestra took to the concert hall stage, sharing, if not upstaging, great singers clad in formal attire.

Not so anymore. Die-hards can still find the traditional concert experience with dedicated concert opera companies in major cities, but increasingly the genre is being presented with enhanced theatrical values by opera companies and symphony orchestras in various forms of collaboration. There may be the simplest of props for the singers, or elaborate scenic installations surrounding the orchestra. Even the nomenclature has also evolved to include the term “semi-staged.”

But for those involved there is no halfway.

“I hate the term ‘semi-staged’ and think it should be abolished,” says Yuval Sharon, the Los Angeles-based director and founder of **THE INDUSTRY**, who has built a reputation for innovative and collaborative work across genres. “It comes across as an apology at best and an excuse at worst. I do not consider the works I have done with orchestras ‘semi-staged.’ They are *fully* staged; they just happen to give a lot of space to the orchestra, where the musical drama is made entirely transparent and visible. Every moment, every gesture, every aspect of design is dramatically articulated the way you would expect from a normal staging.”

Last year, Sharon’s video- and animation-driven *Cunning Little Vixen* lit up the Cleveland Orchestra’s Severance Hall. Under the enthusiastic leadership of the orchestra’s music director, Franz Welser-Möst, the orchestra initiated staged opera several years ago with productions of the Mozart–Da Ponte operas and *Salome*, but the orchestra’s chief marketing officer, Ross Binnie, says *Vixen* was a “game changer” for the orchestra and its audiences. “The combination of the technology and the singing and the music was just so innovative it made for a wild experience.” The performances were a sell-out and received critical acclaim. This season the orchestra continued the tradition with *Daphne*, directed by James Darrah. Serendipitously, the performance occurred during the League of American

Orchestras’ annual conference, further sowing innovative ideas for successful opera-orchestra collaboration.

Growing the presence of opera for the Cleveland Orchestra’s audience is strategically, as well as artistically, important. Although the orchestra’s sales have been robust in recent years, this past season single tickets surpassed subscriptions for the first time. But Binnie sees an upside to this transformation: “We have more households engaging in our concerts than we’ve ever had in our history. And

Die-hards can still find the traditional concert experience with dedicated concert opera companies in major cities, but increasingly the genre is being presented with enhanced theatrical values by opera companies and symphony orchestras in various forms of collaboration.

opera is adding to that.”

With its sophisticated marketing database, Cleveland can, to some degree, pinpoint opera fans outside regular symphony-goers and identify their demographic characteristics, including geographic footprint. “We are beginning to discover that with the right opera and the right cast, the opera community has a far wider tolerance for travel,” says Binnie. “We’re not at the stage where people are planning vacations in Cleveland in the spring, but we are developing a storytelling capacity so that the opera community around the country knows we are taking it very seriously.”

Concert opera has a distinguished past. In post-World War II musical life, particularly in New York, organizations like the American Opera Society, The Little Orchestra Society and the Friends of French Opera presented repertoire beyond the tried-and-true core canon. *Les Troyens*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Rossini’s *Otello* and many other works received first or fresh hearings in concert form. Major stars showcased roles they’d perfected elsewhere: Maria Callas in *Il pirata*, Joan Sutherland and Marilyn Horne in *Semiramide*, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in *Doktor Faust*. Successor organizations, such as Eve Queler’s **OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK** and Leon Botstein’s American Symphony Orchestra, unearthed and

validated works later taken up by major companies: Queler with *Francesca da Rimini* and *Kát’a Kabanová*, Botstein with *Die ägyptische Helena* and *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*. They also introduced singers new to the United States, including Montserrat Caballé and Gabriela Beňačková.

Such opera companies devoted to traditional concert performance now dot North America from New Haven to Calgary to Puget Sound. Among the most acclaimed has been Washington, D.C.’s **WASHINGTON CONCERT OPERA**, founded by Stephen Crout and Peter Russell in 1988. From Renée Fleming’s 1991 *Thais* to Michael Fabiano’s 2014 *Il corsaro*, WCO has allowed rising singers to try out new roles in front of a musically sophisticated public. Antony Walker, artistic director and conductor since 2002, and himself a trained tenor, has led 27 works but has a wish list of 75 more under consideration, preferably ones never previously staged locally, or at least not heard in recent memory.

From Walker’s perspective, concert opera has its own specific vocal requirements, often begging the question: Which comes first, the artist or the opera? “Sometimes I program a work I particularly want to do, like Mercadante’s *Il giuramento*, and then build a cast,” says Walker. “But mostly I have singers in mind, and present and discuss new roles with them and their managers. In casting, expressivity is key; but as the rehearsal process is so short, I like to cast singers I know are musically very astute.”

Nancy Petrisko, WCO’s executive director, describes the company’s audience as “extremely dedicated to the art form.” A majority of the audience, which fills Washington’s Lisner Auditorium at close to its 1,500-seat capacity for each of WCO’s two annual presentations, are subscribers — and a majority of those subscribers stretch back for more than a decade. They are typically regulars at **WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA** and frequent travelers to destinations such as **THE SANTA FE OPERA** and **THE METROPOLITAN OPERA**.

One such die-hard is retired orthopedic surgeon Steven Mazer, a WCO board member who has followed the company since its founding. A passionate devotee of the vocal arts who often travels to hear his favorite singers, he has also been a subscriber to Washington National Opera for more than 35 years. “They really are different animals,” he says, but for him the primary differential is focus, with fully staged works offering “an intense focus on the experience” and concert opera offering “an intense



DOMINIC M. MERCIER



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Top: Opera Philadelphia and The Philadelphia Orchestra's May 2014 performance of *Salome* with Alan Held as Jochanaan (center). Conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin and directed by Kevin Newbury. Production design by Vita Tzykun. Bottom: Michael Fabiano as Oronte and Angela Meade as Giselda in Opera Orchestra of New York's 2013 presentation of Verdi's *I Lombardi*. Conducted by Eve Queler. Opposite: Joyce El-Khoury in the title role of North Carolina Opera's 2014 *Rusalka*. Conducted by Timothy Myers and directed by Crystal Manich. Lighting design by Ross Kolman.

theatrical experiences without the full expense of traditionally produced work, but less expensive does not necessarily mean less complex. In April, Chuck Hudson directed Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* for Kentucky's Lexington Philharmonic. He says taking an opera down to its basic elements "doesn't mean easy or cheap; it means finding what is essential." With multiple parties operating on different schedules, the challenges of the Kentucky production were as much logistical as artistic: In addition to the orchestra, the production included **KENTUCKY OPERA** Studio Artists, University of Kentucky Opera Theatre students, and flamenco singer Jesús Montoya, reprising the role he performed for the Grammy Award-winning 2006 Deutsche Grammophon recording.

The challenges of working with so many players — and only two weeks of rehearsal time — were counterbalanced by the potential to broaden existing patrons' musical palettes and attract new audiences. Lexington's executive director, Allison Kaiser, describes *Ainadamar* as part of the company's "trajectory to increase the community's comfort level and enthusiasm for more diverse repertoire that might be outside the traditional orchestral world." The production succeeded in attracting many people who were new to the company: 77 percent of *Ainadamar* attendees were single-ticket buyers (up from the company's usual 50 percent), and those who attended were far more diverse in terms of age and ethnicity than typical orchestral concert crowds. Music director Scott Terrell attributes this success to the strategic selection of partners, such as Kentucky Opera, that allowed the orchestra to tap into new audiences: "We built in success through the collaborative partners we chose to work with."

The Philadelphia Orchestra's operatic tradition stretches back to *Wozzeck*'s staged American premiere in 1931, but in 2014, the orchestra launched a collaboration with **OPERA PHILADELPHIA**. The inaugural work, *Salome*, was led by the orchestra's music director, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and staged by Kevin Newbury. A frequent director for major opera companies, Newbury has also staged operas with the orchestras of Baltimore, San Francisco and Utah. "You want simplicity of gesture and directness," says Newbury. "When you eliminate scene changes or dance numbers, the orchestra and conductor become part of the audience's visual and aural experience, which can be very stimulating, especially in a site-specific event." But, he notes, the

focus on the singer." He does not view it as a matter of either/or, or of more or less. Indeed, he has often been fortunate to enjoy both staged and concert versions of the same operas, such as *Les Pêcheurs des perles*, *Roméo et Juliette* and *La Cenerentola*.

Washington Concert Opera has occasionally added visual elements to its performances, such as a couch for Amina in *La sonnambula*, and there have been discussions among leadership of exploring further enhancements, but budget limits experimentation. "We would do more," says Petrisko, "but

adding to the process requires a longer rehearsal period and a director and lighting. The way we are set up right now, we don't have that luxury."

The company's investment in musical values remains steadfast. In addition to engaging top-tier soloists, WCO's orchestra and chorus are drawn from Washington's professional elite. Many have a long history with the organization. "It's almost like our own orchestra and chorus," says Petrisko.

Staged concert performances can provide profound musical and

shortened production schedule accelerates the pace: "It's like a film set, with limited time, so it's vital to come in knowing exactly who is going to provide what, who has what systems in place."

Opera Philadelphia's general director, David Devan, says *Salome* was a "beta test" of the collaborative process with The Philadelphia Orchestra, but with the sell-out success of what he likes to call "a theater-concert mash-up," the partnership is moving forward. Connections were formed across all levels of the respective organizations — executive, artistic, operational, marketing and fundraising. And the initiative is consonant with the opera company's "multiple-product platform" strategy, which encompasses traditional productions at the Academy of Music, chamber opera at the intimate Perelman Theater and avant-garde fare for its *Opera in the City* series at a local warehouse. Says Devan, "In each case, the repertoire we do in these spaces can only be done in those spaces. Extending to the concert hall is a natural thing for us."

The orchestral collaboration also enables the company to explore repertoire that requires musical forces beyond the capacity of the Academy's 68-musician pit, such as the Wagner canon. And, with the 110 musicians of The Philadelphia Orchestra, Devan says the "sound world" is fundamentally different: "You experienced *Salome* in a way you've never experienced *Salome* before."

The orchestra and opera company were also able to collaborate on fundraising, leading to full underwriting of the initiative from both traditional and new sources. This success, Devan believes, is partly driven by benefits beyond the artistic: "Running an opera company is hard and running an orchestra is hard, and if we can create a bigger civic footprint by working together, we are serving the entire community in a better way."

In 2014, **NORTH CAROLINA OPERA** capped its season with Crystal Manich's staging of *Rusalka* and opened the following season with the Prelude and Act II of *Tristan und Isolde* in concert. Both earned high praise — and strong ticket sales. General Director Eric Mitchko says the concerts expanded his audience's repertory while featuring rising international stars (Joyce El-Khoury, Russell Thomas, Heidi Melton) whom the company might not have secured for a fully staged run. "The shorter rehearsal framework makes it easier to secure time in multipurpose theaters, as well," Mitchko explains. "Many regional

companies face serious competition for stage time from touring Broadway shows, plus the local ballet and theater companies."

Bruce Loving, North Carolina's public relations and marketing consultant, says the concert format adds an essential product diversification, especially for its most ardent devotees. "You can fill the season with all the *Bohèmes* and *Butterflies* you like, but the core opera audience wants to see something different." The difference must, however, be clearly communicated. Says Loving, "It's important to convey to ticket-buyers what they are going to see so that the people who come expecting a fully staged production aren't disappointed, and that the people expecting an orchestra on stage know that they will get more."

Collaboration, imagination and flexibility, with assured artistic, technical and administrative follow-through, are essential components for

concert opera in all of its various iterations. But are there limits? Some works clearly lend themselves to simpler staging; some, frankly, do not. Prop-reliant plots like *Tosca* and dialogue-heavy shows like *Candide* (which require maximal cast rehearsal) work less than ideally in concert; inwardly focused pieces can be far more inviting: *Dido and Aeneas*, *Der Freischütz*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, *Daphne*, *Il prigioniero* and *Pelléas et Mélisande* (prop list: one letter, one ring).

Yet, even with the most spirited fusion of staging and repertoire, the egos of organizations, conductors, directors and divas must always be muted. You can cast the finest singers and add the most arresting visual elements, but for concert opera, in any and all of its varied forms, the orchestra always plays a starring role. ●

David Shengold has written for *Opera News*, *Opera*, *Opernwelt*, *Playbill* and *Time Out New York*.



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Tansy Davies, Between Worlds
English National Opera, April 2013

Gerald Barry, The Importance of Being Earnest
Los Angeles Philharmonic, April 2011 (concert premiere)
Opéra National de Lorraine, March 2013 (staged premiere)

Kamran Ince, Judgment of Midas
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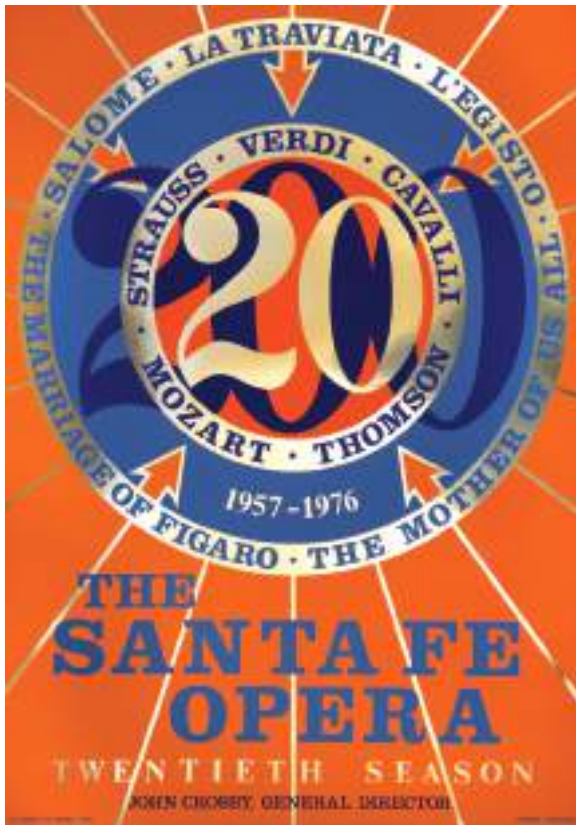
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Poster for The Santa Fe Opera's 1976 season by Robert Indiana.

With its unique integration of music, words and image, opera has long inspired the graphic arts, from posters for kiosks to pop-up ads on the Internet. **JAMES TY CUMBIE** looks at the history of opera and design, and how contemporary applications advance the branding and awareness of professional opera companies.

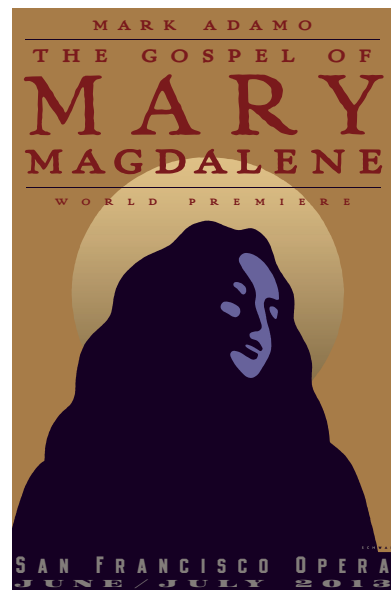
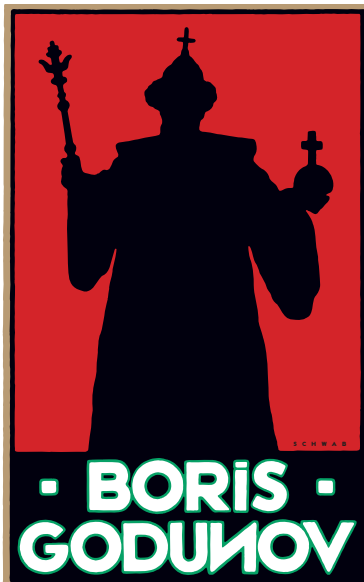
In 19th-century Paris, the poster blossomed from a simple tool for proclamations and promotions to an art form unto itself, and opera planted some of the earliest seeds. With multiple houses competing for sophisticated audiences, Parisian artists set the benchmark high with imagery that mirrored the grand stage, offering companies a public canvas to promote their productions.

Other European and American opera houses followed suit, engaging leading artists to create arresting images. With the Art Nouveau movement, poster art in America reached a technical and creative peak, not just in opera, but in numerous fields of art and commerce. The modern poster also achieved respect as a legitimate art form, becoming the subject of major exhibitions and monographs.

The Great Depression and World War II diverted talent to more essential national needs (although graphic artists certainly made their contribution to the war effort), but the poster as icon saw a major resurgence in the 1960s. **THE METROPOLITAN OPERA** commissioned posters from Marc Chagall, Larry Rivers, André

Posters old and new show that simple elegance and strong typography are timeless elements for success.

Left: Richard Strauss-Woche, festival poster, 1910, by Ludwig Hohlwein. Middle and right: Modern posters by San Francisco graphic artist Michael Schwab.



Masson and David Hockney, often in conjunction with scenic design for productions.

Of course, today's opera audiences are still highly sophisticated arts patrons, but opera marketers now face more complex challenges. Since the 1980s, technology has reshaped the role of graphics in promoting the arts. The computer screen has replaced the kiosk and the billboard; the town square is now a MacBook. Whether the vehicle is a poster or an e-mail blast, opera marketers take their design art seriously.

"The world we live in is incredibly visual, and we see the influence of technology on everything," says Natalia Schvien, director of communications for **VISION INTO ART**, an interdisciplinary production company founded by composer Paola Prestini. "There's a lot of stimulation and a lot more competing for the eye, and it has to be up to date, too. Our audience will not click on it if it looks like 1998."

OPERA EBONY, operating on a modest budget, has nonetheless produced marketing materials that stand out. "We made our 2012–2013 season into an opportunity to renew our commitment to good design," says Fabrizio La Rocca, the company's creative director. "We believe the rich visual tradition of opera should not stop at the edge of the stage."

Opera Ebony understands that the graphic arts position the company in a larger cultural context. "Our graphics are

inspired by early and mid-century opera posters and LP covers," says La Rocca. "We aim for a reinterpretation of the classic illustrative form that interpolates the great traditions of opera, American soul music, jazz and other cultures relevant to our audience."

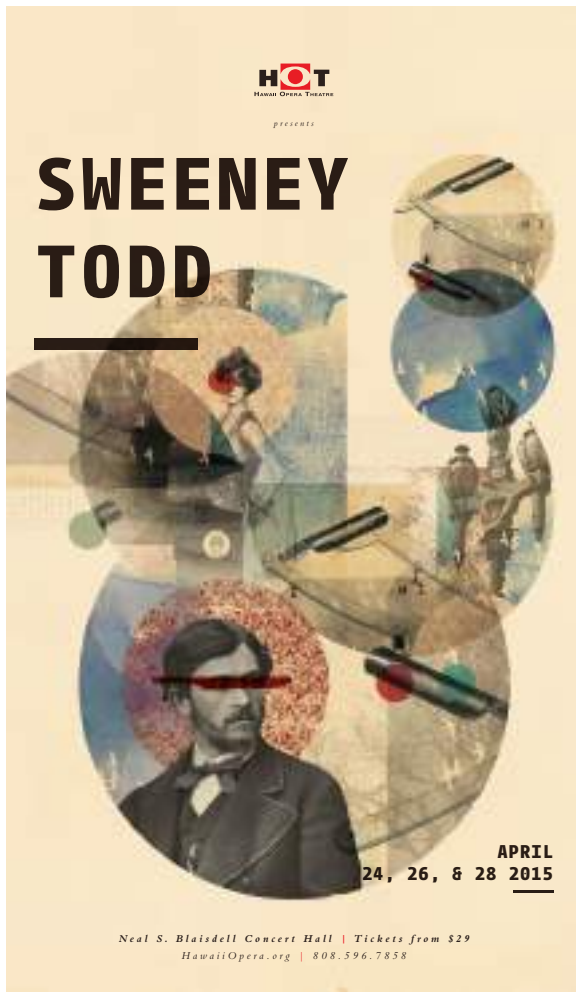
Katherine Castille, marketing director of **MINNESOTA OPERA**, says that working on art for the company's season has always been her favorite part of the job: "I love the excitement of working on creating an image that fits into the overall plan for the season. We try to encapsulate the emotional content of the productions." Castille has tried a number of approaches, from "cerebral" illustrated posters by the artist Viet Do, to simple images of operatic performances. "With our illustrated posters we wanted to create frameable art that people would put on their walls," she explains. "Later, we went to production photos because we felt the posters needed to get back to the emotional content of the works. We felt it was okay to just show what we do."

At **CINCINNATI OPERA**, three words are the mantra of the company's brand: beautiful, magical and thrilling. "If I could add two words of my own," says Katie Syroney, director of marketing, "they would be 'approachability' and 'freshness.'" Cincinnati has a longstanding tradition of engaging fine artists and graphic designers to create original works that serve as the centerpieces of their promotional

campaigns. Among the artists included have been Rafal Olbinski, Mary GrandPré, René Milot and the company's own staff designer, Aimee Sposito Martini. Last season, the company launched a relationship with Swiss-based artist Catrin Welz-Stein, who works primarily in digital illustration. "All of these artists' styles are very different from one another," says Syroney, "but they're connected by a visual language that has key elements: It tells a story, it inspires imagination, and, we hope, it offers a sense of welcome to the viewer."

Now in his second season as marketing director of **HAWAII OPERA THEATRE**, Jason Walter has been working with Executive Director Simon Crookall toward graphic designs that are recognizable and appealing to a broad demographic of operagoers. He includes high-quality design, along with consistent community engagement, new partnerships and adaptability, among the main factors that have driven a 31 percent year-over-year increase in ticket sales.

"Beautiful design is a tool that bridges the gap between generations — it brings people together and helps in communicating the very human appeal of the art form," says Walter. Print collateral in the form of leaflets and posters is also distributed around the island at businesses, coffee shops and other high-traffic areas. They are also given out at events and to supporters



Top: Posters for Hawaii Opera Theatre by Onward Creative (Noa Emberson, design and art direction; Jeff Mull, copy).

Below and inset: Opera Ebony's *Così fan tutte* poster and 2012 Gala Concert program, by Fabrizio La Rocca, art director, and Gregory Sheppard, artistic director. Gala concert program photo by James Heffernan/Metropolitan Opera.



who wish to place them in their apartment complexes, gyms, churches and offices. "These pieces are an important element in creating a high frequency of exposure and aid in capturing the attention of patrons, whether a previous operagoer or brand-new," Walter explains.

Last year, **OPERA SARATOGA** underwent a significant rebranding, and its approach to collateral print materials continues to evolve. Lawrence Edelson, the company's artistic and general director, aims to sync marketing materials with the diversification of the company's programming. Edelson believes the most effective collateral materials are evocative rather than representative. With that in mind, he began seeking out art that reflected each of Opera Saratoga's productions. He discovered a Finnish photographer, Christoffer



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Illustration by Olimpia Zagnoli



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Far left: One of a series of eye-catching posters for Vancouver Opera created by the Italian graphic artist Olimpia Zagnoli.

Top right: An example of the youth-oriented, “edgy” approach to posters San Diego Opera has taken. Design by R. Black.



Bottom right: Pittsburgh Opera’s Debra Bell says, of this poster for *Carmen*, by Crème Fraîche Design, “The image we used this season has appeal on several levels. It has striking color, motion and emotion, while being extraordinarily simple, communicating much about the opera with a single impression.”

Relander, who creates multiple-exposure images, many of which incorporate nature. Together, they selected a series of images that has become the focal point of Saratoga’s 2015 season. “The response has been overwhelmingly positive,” says Edelson, “both from our patrons and from press in the region who have made a point of complimenting our efforts.”

When Risè Walter took over as director of audience development at **SAN DIEGO OPERA**, she introduced edgy graphics created by R. Black and got a strong response, including press stories and social

media postings. “A conversation started,” says Walter. “I wanted to speak to the audience that didn’t know or like opera. I wanted to change the perception that opera is for the older and the elite. R. Black’s powerful graphic art did just that.”

Though there’s no clear data to connect design with ticket sales, Walter suggests that graphics have certainly created buzz. “There is so much advertising out there. Telling the story is not enough — we have to be seen! And we have to do it in a way that makes people stop and, even if just for a moment, think, ‘That’s opera?’

What better way than eye-catching, exciting visual marketing.”

And Walter points to evidence that design can in fact penetrate the visual noise of our digital world: Thanks to San Diego Opera’s posters, local framing shops are reporting a surge in business. ●

James Ty Cumbie is *OPERA America’s art director*, and has spent more than 30 years designing for music organizations.

THE

Tech

Effect

SEATTLE FORGES A
CULTURE OF LEARNING

With support from The Wallace Foundation, Seattle Opera developed technological resources to help build and retain audiences. Valuable lessons were learned from failure as well as success, and a healthy process of innovation and evaluation evolved. An abridged version of the case study by **BOB HARLOW** appears below. The full case study, *Extending Reach with Technology*, can be found at thrivingarts.org.

In 2008, **SEATTLE OPERA** felt a sense of urgency and uncertainty about how best to make use of digital technologies to both deepen relationships with existing patrons and attract newcomers. While nothing suggested they were losing touch with audiences, staff members suspected that being absent from online spaces could erode the company's visibility. Moreover, digital technologies could provide ways to enhance and extend the experience of attending a live performance. But, while senior staff saw multiple opportunities, they resisted the pressure to try everything at once. Instead, they tested out technologies systematically in a series of four yearlong experiments. They began by tapping audience research and local expertise to identify the greatest opportunities, and then deployed audience surveys and analyzed web-based metrics to evaluate their individual efforts, regarding each one as an educational experiment with useful lessons.

These were more than just a series of

experiments; Seattle Opera transformed how it related to audience members, letting them in on the creative process and inviting their comments. Over the course of the four years, the company also found ways to satisfy internal concerns about exposing too much to the public and built broad support for the initiative inside the organization, as well as strong cross-departmental collaboration.

Seattle Opera began in 2008 by tapping into the most savvy expertise available, assembling a task force that included company staff and board members, as well as professionals from local technology companies recruited specifically for this purpose — and motivated by their love of opera. The objective: to learn as much as possible before deciding which technologies to adopt. Over the course of nearly a year, the task force examined topics ranging from social media — at that point in its infancy — and various forms of e-mail distribution, photography and digitized formatting, to the intricacies of capturing and disseminating intellectual

property and using technology to create a commercial revenue stream.

In mid-2008, the task force delivered recommendations for the use of digital technologies to engage audiences: Create virtual communities where audience members could interact with the company and each other; provide opportunities for people to learn more about opera and Seattle Opera productions; and make opera more accessible outside the opera hall. Staff believed these initiatives could enhance the performance experience while boosting retention efforts and the potential to attract newcomers.

Seattle Opera's marketing staff applied for and received a four-year, \$750,000 Wallace Excellence Award from The Wallace Foundation. Each year, they produced technology-based engagement tools, complemented in some instances by in-person activities designed to give audience members new ways to experience the art form both inside and outside the opera house. They also conducted regular evaluations to identify



Behind-the-scenes footage of Rhinemaidens rehearsing their flying routines was featured in Seattle Opera's online series of *Ring* cycle videos. © BILL MOHN PHOTO

the impact each tool had on particular audiences. Deployment was spread across three sub-initiatives during the four years:

- **Storytelling Through Technology:** A *Ring*-specific interactive website shared the broader story of how the opera cycle was produced and included forums for patrons and bloggers who wished to share commentary with the company and each other.
- **Community Connections Through Technology:** In year two, the company used a mix of podcasts, in-person symposia and online experiences to introduce audiences to the story behind *Amelia*, a commissioned work by composer Daron Aric Hagen and librettist Gardner McFall.
- **Experiencing Place Through Technology:** In years three and four, the company used technology to bring opera to new places and spaces, including producing a free simulcast to introduce opera to novices and to reconnect with audiences that had drifted away.

Each year, Seattle Opera used the lessons learned to develop the next year's activities, refining successful programs and retooling or jettisoning those that were less effective, as measured by survey research and online metrics. Seattle Opera saw the four years as an opportunity to create a "Petri dish" in which some experiments would flourish and others would not, with each providing lessons that would inform the company's technology strategy moving forward. "We were all open to trying some things that wouldn't work," says Executive Director Kelly Tweeddale.

STORYTELLING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

For year one of the initiative, Seattle Opera saw its 2008–2009 *Ring* cycle as an ideal opportunity to go behind the scenes and into the lives of operagoers by creating forums where *Ring* devotees and new attendees could interact with each other in virtual communities. The choice struck some as odd: *Ring* patrons are generally an older audience, leading skeptics to wonder whether this was

the right target for technology-based engagement. Audience research indicated it was worth doing.

By mid-2008, the technology task force had provided a long list of ideas for using technology. To identify those with the greatest chance of success, marketing staff conducted an informal survey in mid-2009, sending e-mail invitations to 2,300 households of patrons whose e-mail addresses had been captured when purchasing *Ring* tickets. Thirty-five percent responded. The survey did detect an older audience — a third were at least age 66 — but 70 percent watched YouTube occasionally, more than 50 percent used an iPod, iPod touch or iPhone, and many were engaged in podcasts, blogs and Facebook. Asked to indicate what content they preferred to see, respondents most often mentioned behind-the-scenes information from the artists and from the technical and production staff.

But there was a hitch: The company wasn't accustomed to showing work in progress to the public. As a result, artists and creative staff were reluctant to reveal

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a less-than-perfect product that might remove the opera's mystique. Working through those fears, the company developed *Road to Valhalla*, an online series showing the making of the *Ring* cycle in five separate 5- to 10-minute videos.

In addition to the videos, Seattle Opera developed other technology-driven engagement tools, including preview podcasts, a video series following an opera novice as she learns about producing the *Ring* cycle, a video feed of between-act backstage activity, a Caption of the Day Contest, and a Share and Review Program that allowed patrons to share clips online. The Seattle Opera blog was turned over almost entirely to covering the *Ring*. Media and blog entries were also published on Seattle Opera's Facebook page and via Twitter. The content was sent via e-mail to *Ring* ticketholders and to other patrons in Seattle Opera's database. The intention was not only to engage *Ring* attendees, but also to build interest and a following among non-*Ring* audiences.

To further refine technology engagement tools, Seattle Opera tested ideas in four focus groups of patrons. Participants echoed what the company had heard in its earlier patron surveys: a strong interest in tactics that reveal what goes into making an opera. Accordingly, the staff shifted its focus to those tools.

Seattle Opera presented three full cycles of the *Ring* between August 9, 2009, and August 30, 2009. In addition, it hosted symposia with Wagner scholars and pre- and post-performance lectures and conversations, among other ancillary programs. And, of course, during that time, the opera deployed the technology-based engagement applications connected to the *Ring*, as described above. To gauge their effectiveness, Seattle Opera surveyed three discrete patron groups in September 2009 and a fourth group of prospective patrons. The surveys asked about awareness, use and experience of the different technology-based tools. Results were consistent with what Seattle Opera had heard in the focus groups and earlier research, suggesting audience members want both to see and to understand what goes on behind the scenes. In fact, the two most popular and impactful tools by far were those that did just that: the backstage video feed and *Road to Valhalla* videos.

As for the other tools, relatively few people used the pre-performance podcasts, and as a result, they were phased out and replaced with previews that were lighter on discourse and heavier on musical excerpts. The Caption of the Day Contest and the Share and Review Program were used by few. The blog was

The success of the behind-the-scenes and "making of" videos sharpened the company's focus on engagement initiatives involving self-directed learning. In particular, the staff set out to make behind-the-scenes videos a central component of their strategy.

moderately successful, but social media was little used.

The success of the behind-the-scenes and "making of" videos sharpened the company's focus on engagement initiatives involving self-directed learning. In particular, the staff set out to make behind-the-scenes videos a central component of their strategy. Facebook, Twitter and other interactive media were still under consideration because they were growing platforms, but planning focused less on social media and more on determining the audiovisual content that would work best with particular operas.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Year two of the technology initiative coincided with the premiere of Seattle Opera's first commissioned work in 25 years, *Amelia*. The opera tells the story of a woman haunted by the disappearance of her father, a Navy pilot shot down in the Vietnam War when she was a child. Alvin Alexander Henry, Seattle's director of marketing and communications, believed it would be essential to create interest in the production with both Seattle Opera's core audience and potential new viewers. He and his team proposed two strategies to accomplish this: Forge relationships with community groups having potential connections to *Amelia* or its production, and, building upon lessons learned from the *Ring*, use technology to create interest and provide context.

In the two months prior to the *Amelia* premiere, several events were created in partnership with organizations whose missions dovetailed with Seattle Opera's strategy. Two panel discussions of approximately 90 minutes each with three Vietnam veteran pilots were hosted in conjunction with Seattle's Museum of Flight. Seattle Opera board member and Vietnam War veteran Karl Ege moderated the first, and the executive director of a local arts and sciences foundation facilitated the second. A discussion series called *Creating Amelia* took place at a local

bookstore on three Mondays in April. The 60- to 90-minute discussions featured the *Amelia* creative team and were moderated by General Director Speight Jenkins. And there was a lecture titled "Autobiographical Writing: From Life to Text" given by librettist McFall at the Richard Hugo House, a center for local writers, in late April.

For the run of *Amelia* itself, Seattle Opera again partnered with The Museum of Flight to produce a full-scale exhibit

exploring the theme of "flight in one's life" through historical photographs, Vietnam War memorabilia and *Amelia* set sketches. The exhibit was displayed on all four lobby levels throughout the opera hall. Audience members could browse through the exhibit pre-curtain, during the intermission or post-show, and also could take a guided, prerecorded audio tour (designed by The Museum of Flight) by calling a provided number on their mobile phones.

In reaching out to different organizations, Henry found two common misconceptions about *Amelia*. First, many people assumed the production was about the aviator Amelia Earhart, and second, that it focused on the Vietnam War itself. This discovery increased the urgency of providing vivid context. Inspired by the popularity of the *Road to Valhalla* videos, the staff created a similar seven-part series about the creation of *Amelia*. Each video would focus on one aspect of the production and be hosted by a department or production head. Marketing staff created twice the amount of audio and visual material they had for the *Ring*. In addition to showing how the work onstage was produced (completely from scratch), they also had another behind-the-scenes avenue to explore — the commission itself — and turned to the development of the book, libretto and music.

Amelia was linked to the Seattle Opera blog with content that differed in both frequency and tone from material created for the *Ring*. Entries were updated more often, and content included introductions to the cast members, information about how the opera was commissioned and developed, and a FAQ explaining the opera's plot.

To measure the use and impact of tools created for *Amelia*, Seattle Opera conducted an online survey just after its final performance. Invitations were sent to e-mail addresses in the company's database. The survey yielded responses from 1,238 patrons who had seen a performance (86 percent of whom had

attended it as part of a subscription) and an additional 717 who had attended Seattle Opera in the 2009–2010 season but had not seen *Amelia*. Not surprisingly given the ease of access, more *Amelia* patrons participated in online than in-person activities. Moreover, the online pursuits — particularly those providing a context for the new opera — had the greatest impact. However, usage rates were generally lower than for the *Ring*. The *Ring* “making of” series was seen by 34 percent of audience members, and the *Amelia* series by just 19 percent. The survey results did suggest the activities helped audiences become familiar with *Amelia*, with nearly half of single-ticket buyers saying a driving reason they went to see the opera was their interest in the story line or themes, and 16 percent attending because they had participated in an *Amelia*-related event or activity.

EXPERIENCING PLACE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

During the 2010–2011 season, the third year of the initiative, Seattle Opera experimented with additional in-person and technology-driven engagement tactics. Unlike the first two years, when suites of activities were built around particular productions, in years three and four, the company developed technology-based tools across multiple productions. Considerably fewer tools were produced so that staff could devote time and resources to their first-ever public simulcast, to be presented in year four.

Working with Microsoft, the opera company built touch-screen tabletop kiosks that included over 1,000 archival images from Seattle Opera productions performed during its nearly 50-year history, organized by season and by show. The kiosks were designed on wheels, allowing for mobility, and the large surfaces allowed simultaneous viewing by multiple patrons. Seattle Opera also experimented with Amazon’s Kindle to develop a tablet version of the *Spotlight Guide*, the educational booklet that accompanies every performance, but audience interest was low. Meanwhile, the company created a free iPad app that made the *Spotlight Guide* available to audience members. The iPad was more visually vibrant and also proved to be an easier platform for integrating multimedia content and for providing free access to patrons. The Kindle was dropped.

AN ARENA SIMULCAST

During its 2011–2012 season, the final year of grant activity, Seattle Opera took opera outside of the hall.



Opera attendees view photos from previous Seattle Opera productions on a touch-screen kiosk.

A free simulcast of *Madama Butterfly* at a major arena would show the complete opera in a different context to thousands, attracting newcomers, many of whom might decide to attend for reasons only tangentially connected to the performance itself, such as the opportunity to enjoy an unusual social occasion. Because there was no charge, the event also had the potential to attract audiences who might be hesitant to pay for tickets or intimidated by the opera-going experience.

Madama Butterfly was deemed an ideal choice for the event, given its recognizable story line and broad appeal. Seattle Opera held the event at KeyArena, an enclosed stadium that hosts entertainment and sporting events. The City of Seattle donated the space for the simulcast, although Seattle Opera paid to prepare the stadium for the event and for arena staff time. Admission was free. Seattle Opera encouraged advance registration for priority seating. More than 3,000 individuals made reservations. (The capacity of KeyArena for that evening was 8,300.)

Seattle Opera lacked the technology required to record and broadcast HD sound and video on a large scale, so it hired an outside studio and an experienced opera simulcast producer. The performance was captured with seven HD cameras and projected onto a 50-by-80-foot screen (usually used as a backdrop at the opera hall) at one end of the stadium. All told, the budget for producing the event was \$500,000. To help defray the expense, Seattle Opera found additional sponsors. It also negotiated with all of the creative

and artistic unions to project the opera for that one evening free of royalties. To protect subscription or single-ticket sales for *Madama Butterfly*, the company waited until the month before the simulcast to begin marketing the event.

In addition to traditional print advertising in local media outlets and e-mail blasts to its patron database, the broadcast was heavily promoted on social media. Staff identified influential bloggers and “tweeters” in the community by using tools such as Followerwonk and reached out to them directly, asking that they promote the event and become part of the company’s “social press” for the broadcast. The Seattle Opera blog was turned over almost entirely to *Madama Butterfly* for the month leading up to the simulcast. The iPad app was updated and made available.

The simulcast was attended by 5,126 individuals. Two weeks later, surveys were e-mailed to Seattle Opera patrons from the 2011–2012 season and the 3,075 individuals who had not purchased tickets for the season but had registered for and attended the simulcast.

The survey revealed three main categories: loyal patrons (28 percent), infrequent patrons (39 percent) and newcomers (27 percent). Seventy-one percent of the newcomers (19 percent of the total audience) had not seen an opera anywhere in the past two years. The newcomers were younger than both the infrequent and loyal patrons — 37 percent were younger than age 35. For newcomers and infrequent patrons, the largest motivating factor was that the performance was offered free of charge. Large numbers of newcomers also said

they were interested in seeing something “unique and interesting.”

TECH INVESTMENT: THE RESULTS

Seattle Opera began by asking how best to use technology to deepen the engagement of current patrons and reach out to new audiences. Wallace Foundation funding provided the latitude to experiment with a variety of engagement tools. Some were met with success, while others failed to justify the effort and resources expended.

The results show that audience engagement with technology grew over each season, from the *Ring* to *Amelia* to *Madama Butterfly*. That growth was likely the result of two factors: First, Seattle Opera learned how to be more effective, with each year of implementation followed by evaluation research. Second, it takes time for audiences to get used to (and find) online content; they had a learning curve, as well.

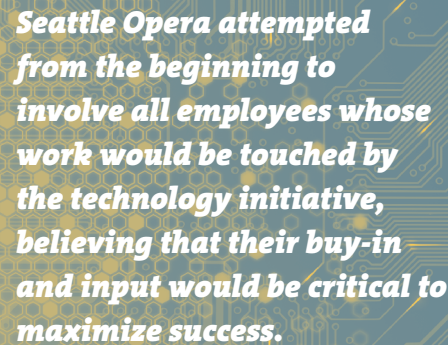
Engagement tactics that took audiences behind the scenes were the most effective, though not just any videos would do. Audio-only podcasts taking audiences behind the scenes were not as popular. Audiences responded to written content and visuals that took them inside productions. Large majorities (approximately 85 percent) of those connecting with Seattle Opera on social media in the later years of the initiative — when more content bringing audiences behind the scenes was being delivered — said it enhanced their experience. Audiences were more likely to access Seattle Opera content on the website versus on social media, but the material had an equal impact no matter how people got to it. Interactive forums such as contests, reviewing and sharing were used by fewer people and had less of an impact. *Spotlight Guides* presented logistical issues on the Kindle, but they found a new home on the iPad platform. Seattle Opera continues to watch as simulcast technology changes in ways that may make the approach more attractive to viewers.

Seattle Opera's results need to be understood in the context of its older, highly educated audience. Learning-focused videos, for example, may not have the same appeal for other groups. In fact, Seattle Opera found that even within its usual audience, different segments responded differently: While interactive tools fell flat with older audiences, younger viewers in particular may be more responsive to them. Research consistently shows that younger users of social media are much more interactive than older social media users. Younger Facebook users, for example, are several

times more likely than older Facebook users to update their status, like content and comment on others' posts and photos.

The stadium simulcast brought many new audience members to Seattle Opera, in addition to attracting both frequent and occasional patrons. It also drew a younger audience, which is a challenge for most opera companies. The event removed the price barrier and placed the experience in a casual environment. While Seattle Opera has started to see a small amount of ticket purchases from follow-up marketing efforts, it does not regard the simulcast as a revenue generator. Executive Director Kelly Tweeddale calls the effort a relationship-building tool more than anything else — a “welcome mat” that is the first step in engagement.

A number of factors boosted Seattle



Seattle Opera attempted from the beginning to involve all employees whose work would be touched by the technology initiative, believing that their buy-in and input would be critical to maximize success.

Opera's effectiveness. The company approached each year with a willingness not only to try new things, but also to make changes and to use research to determine when such modifications were necessary. The company's approach demonstrates the hallmarks of successful learning organizations — institutions that are suited to adapting to change.

The Wallace Foundation grant gave staff room to experiment and made them more comfortable with ambiguity about how a particular initiative might pan out. Ongoing assessment of patron engagement and its impact gave Seattle Opera the ability to evaluate and improve tactics. Staff learned to shift resources when surveys revealed considerably less interest in, engagement with and impact from certain tools. As they got a better understanding of what was effective, the staff modified their approach, focusing on self-directed and learning-oriented technology. Each year they had at least some winning engagement tools, driven in large part by their strategy of gathering intelligence before determining which applications to deploy.

Seattle Opera attempted from the beginning to involve all employees whose

work would be touched by the technology initiative, believing that their buy-in and input would be critical to maximize success. Union representatives sat on the technology task force, ensuring that they understood the uses of and goals for digital content, and set the tone for continual give-and-take.

These early conversations helped avoid potential stumbling blocks. Says Tweeddale, “There were a lot of our unions that at the end really thought the end product was great. But when they came in, it was more, ‘Oh, no, this is a whole world that we’re not comfortable with,’ and for a lot of the right reasons.” Seattle Opera's strong relationships with its unions and the mutual understanding they developed ultimately made it easier to produce and share high-quality digital content, providing the company with a flexibility not all artistic organizations enjoy.

As the technology initiative stretched further and touched the work of individual artistic and creative staff members, conversations were required sooner rather than later to identify sensitivities. Over time, creative and technical staff members have taken a more active role in the process. They now curate many of the videos, allowing the opera company to take greater advantage of their expertise. They have become drivers of the process.

Perhaps the most important lesson learned was validating that technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Deploying technology means understanding what tools are likely to be accessed, by whom and with what impact. What Seattle Opera found is that the key to unlocking technology's potential lay just as much in understanding internal culture and collaboration as it did in designing tactics and understanding their effect. ●

Bob Harlow, a market research expert, leads *The Wallace Foundation's case study project*.

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A NEW VOICE FOR HIGDON



KARLI CADEL

One of the most frequently performed composers today, Pulitzer Prize winner **JENNIFER HIGDON** tackles her first opera, *Cold Mountain*, based on the best-selling novel by Charles Frazier. On the eve of the opera's premiere at The Santa Fe Opera in August, Higdon spoke with OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca about the challenges of bringing the story to the stage.

MAS: Were you eager to write your first opera, or did somebody have to persuade you?

JH: Two conductors I am close with, Robert Spano and Donald Runnicles, had to persuade me. Robert, who has always been a mentor, is music director of the Atlanta Symphony, and Donald is the orchestra's principal guest conductor. They summoned me to Atlanta and I remember thinking on the plane, "Good grief, if Donald and Robert are asking me to write something, I'm not going to be able to say no." And I knew I was in trouble because the first thing they asked was if I wanted a drink. And then they both said, "We think it's time for you to write an opera." I said, "No!"

MAS: Why were you resistant?

JH: I was too unfamiliar with the form, so I didn't feel I had the right to write an opera. Up until that point, I was writing between 10 and 12 pieces a year. That's a lot, but opera is a completely different thing, and I knew I would have to set aside several years to write one. I already had a pretty full commission schedule, so I was going to have to ask some of the commissioners to wait, and, much to my surprise, they were willing to do so — as much as three years! I cleared my schedule, I restricted travel, and I just stopped going to things so I could concentrate and focus. It was an instinctive thing to do, but it turned out that it was very necessary because what I didn't realize was how the characters were going to stay in my head once I started the process of writing.

MAS: What were some of the biggest challenges?

JH: Opera stretches your brain in a completely different way than instrumental music. You're not just responsible for the music, you're responsible for the characters and to the author, in this case Charles Frazier. You want to take care of his characters and do your best to give them the world he imagined. One of the reasons I chose *Cold Mountain* is because I grew up in that area of the South. These characters are very recognizable to me.

The composer is also responsible for creating the drama, for pulling an audience along from the first note to the very end. You want it to be constantly engaging. For me, I'm always weighing textures: how many people are singing, how much instrumental versus vocal music, how to balance the voices. You're constantly weighing all of these different factors trying to figure out what is communicative and what will work for the performers and the singers. That overall unfolding — the drama — is a totally different thing than writing a violin concerto.

MAS: But certainly in writing a violin concerto, you still want people to be engaged from first note to last note.

JH: That's true, but I'm not trying to get their attention for two and a half hours. That's a different thing from 30 minutes.

MAS: Was it a continuous learning process? Did you have to go back and start again because you were gaining insight as you went along?

JH: Before I actually put a note on a page, I started studying how great operas were put together. I've been so busy in my instrumental career with orchestras, chamber music and choirs that I had not regularly attended opera because I just hadn't had time. So I started learning about opera and just talking to people about what they like in opera and what they wished might be different in their opera experiences. I looked at scores to figure out how Mozart handled something versus Britten.

MAS: Mozart and Britten are absolute masters of the form. Were there other composers from the canon that inspired you?

JH: Stravinsky. I'm always blown away by Stravinsky. I'm also a big fan of Puccini; I'm a real sap at heart. But I also travelled to see a lot of different operas. I saw Stewart Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*; I saw the premiere of John Adams' *A Flowering Tree*. When *Doctor Atomic* went to **LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO**, I saw it there, and then I saw it when it went to **THE METROPOLITAN OPERA**. So, I was trying to catch standard

rep and new pieces, everything from chamber operas to Peter Maxwell Davies' *The Lighthouse* at **THE DALLAS OPERA**.

MAS: Do you find after your experience with *Cold Mountain* that you could write another opera?

JH: I won't know until we've gotten through Santa Fe. I won't be convinced until we actually see it go up. But I've found the process incredibly enjoyable, and it really stretched different muscles for me. I think a second opera would be a little easier for me to pull off because there was such a steep learning curve. I learned so much from the workshop process at Curtis and **OPERA PHILADELPHIA**.

MAS: What did you get out of the workshop experience?

JH: I thought I knew quite a bit about the voice, but I learned so much from hearing my musical lines come out of the singers' mouths and then being able to talk to them about what they were experiencing: what felt like a stretch, what was a strain, what was too much, what was too low, where they were in their tessitura, where their problems were. I don't think I've learned that much in any one of the degrees I've gotten in school. I also got a sense of pacing. And surprisingly, the pacing seemed to work, but that was actually dumb luck. We'll see if that still works when it's actually on a stage with people moving around and doing things.

MAS: We have found that at most conservatories, young composers, even the most talented of them, are rarely exposed to opera composition. How has your experience with *Cold Mountain* influenced how you teach at the Curtis Institute?

JH: It's been quite a learning experience for all of us. Curtis is very good about adjusting the curriculum so that if a student has a particular interest, such as opera, they can actually do it. This year I had a student, Rene Orth, who had written a mini opera for **WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA**'s American Opera Initiative. Curtis then commissioned Mark Campbell to write a libretto for her, and we put up her new 50-minute opera

at Curtis in concert form. So yes, if there are students there who are interested, we have figured out a way to do it in the context of the school.

MAS: Gathering the forces required to create an opera for the benefit of one student must have been quite a challenge.

JH: You're right. At the same time we were doing Rene's opera, there was a full orchestral concert going on, as well as another opera production going up in the actual opera department. So she had a small instrumental ensemble of about eight instruments and three singers, but writing a chamber opera is still an amazing learning experience. Rene really got a lot out of it. *I* got a lot out of it. I think if you can empower students to get their feet wet in it and experience what it's like to put drama together and to make it work, it's the best learning experience you can have.

MAS: Composition is a fairly solitary activity, but with *Cold Mountain*, you have a real partner in librettist Gene Scheer. What was it like having this creative partner?

JH: Very cool. It was neat to sit down with Gene, and eventually we had [director] Lenny Foglia in on it to shape the story, because it is a huge novel. You could easily make the *Ring* out of it. Gene and I concentrated on figuring out what would be the most interesting parts of the story to show the action among Inman, Ada and Ruby, the three main characters. We were able to come up with an outline in which we cut certain scenes. We had to adjust other scenes because, while you can have description in a book or a close-up in a movie, in opera you have to convey that information in a very different way. My rule from the beginning, and I heard this from everyone, was to make sure the opera was not too long. So I kept saying to Gene, "Only the essential things we need, only the essential."

MAS: How did you have to change the libretto in order to make it fit your sense of the music? Was it the length of lines? Was it using certain words?



Jennifer Higdon (r) speaks with composer and pianist Katerina Kramarchuk at the December 2013 workshop of *Cold Mountain* at the Curtis Institute of Music.

JH: First of all, Gene is from New York, and I grew up in the South, so I had to kind of "Southernize" the libretto. I knew that certain characters would be more likely to use double negatives, depending on their level of education. So, I worked on making sure the libretto was "Southern-accurate," you might say. Then, as I started writing the music, I began changing the libretto to get the music to work optimally. It was a little bit the length of the lines, but it was also changes that helped the music move over the bar line to make it more musical. Gene and I had a lot of discussions about melismas. I'm not a big fan, just personally, of melismas unless there is a very specific musical reason. Sometimes a repetition didn't work. Sometimes I would have to shorten a line.

I totally respect creative artists, and when I was first talking to Gene about this I said, "Are you sure you're okay with me changing things, Gene?" And he said, "Change as much as you need." That actually made it easier for me to compose and try to shape the musical lines so they'd be optimal for the voice and for the audience.

MAS: Imagine such a collaboration in the 19th century, before there were phones or e-mail! How would you have done it?

JH: I can't even conceive how that was done. I think the composer would have to just go ahead and make the adjustments. It's stunning

how much is achieved by e-mail!

MAS: After having dealt with collaboration and the aesthetic complexity of opera — where suddenly you're responsible for characters and for theatrical pacing, and you see sets and costumes engendered from your creative ideas — is it a relief to get back to an instrumental piece, or do you miss all the moving pieces of opera?

JH: It was hard leaving the opera. It was such a big undertaking. I did something I've never done with instrumental music: I actually wrote seven days a week. It took me 28 months. I had a few breaks when I travelled for short residencies, but having lived seven days a week with these characters and the music, it was shocking when I got to the last bar and suddenly the music stopped. Because it had been playing pretty much nonstop day and night, even in my sleep, the silence that ensued when I got to the end was very startling, and I felt a little bereft.

MAS: When we began our Opera Grants for Female Composers last year, with the Toulmin Foundation, we reviewed all of the grants that OPERA America had made over nearly 30 years. We were a bit shocked to discover that only five percent of the operas that received grants were by women. As one of the most frequently performed composers

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"It was hard leaving the opera. It was such a big undertaking. I did something I've never done with instrumental music: I actually wrote seven days a week. It took me 28 months. It was shocking when I got to the last bar and suddenly the music stopped."



JATI LINDSAY



PATRICIA K. JOHNSON



JATI LINDSAY



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Clockwise from top left: Viswa Subbaraman, artistic director and music director, Skylight Music Theatre; Francesca Zambello, artistic director, Washington National Opera; and Perryn Leech, managing director, Houston Grand Opera, at the Host Company Reception. Brandon Gryde, OPERA America's director of government affairs, welcomes attendees at Opera Advocacy Day. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, at the Saturday Keynote. Roberto Bedoya, executive director, Tucson Pima Arts Council, delivers keynote remarks at the Opening Session. Conference attendees peruse the exhibitor booths.

OPERA CONFERENCE 2015: INCREASING CIVIC IMPACT

From May 6 to 9, more than 550 representatives of 200 organizations converged on Washington, D.C. for *Opera Conference 2015: Increasing Civic Impact*, hosted by Washington National Opera in association with Opera Volunteers International. Discussions at this year's conference focused on ways the field can address the needs of communities and make opera a valued civic asset.

The nation's capital provided an ideal stage to address these issues and demonstrate opera's importance to government leaders. On May 6, OPERA America hosted the first-ever Opera Advocacy Day, which provided participants with advocacy training, as well as the opportunity to meet face-to-face with representatives

on Capitol Hill. Fifty participants from 20 states visited 45 congressional offices, speaking with their representatives about how opera enhances their hometowns.

For the following three days, speakers from across the arts discussed how the field can make the case for opera on a national level, as well as produce art that matters to communities and engages new audiences. At the conference's Opening Session, mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves-Montgomery discussed the importance of socially resonant operas, particularly the world premiere of *Champion* at **OPERA THEATRE OF SAINT LOUIS**, in which she participated. She was followed by Roberto Bedoya, executive director of the Tucson Pima

Arts Council, who discussed his organization's PLACE (People, Land, Art, Culture and Engagement) program, an initiative supporting artists' projects that address critical community issues and engender a sense of belonging for all members of society. "How does opera give form to belonging through engagement practices that shape the civic, the plural, the 'we'?" Bedoya asked. "I believe the story of belonging is tethered to ethics, aesthetics and the social contract between artists, arts organizations and audiences."

These issues were explored further at a general session moderated by Philip Kennicott, art and architecture critic of *The Washington Post*, titled "Reshaping Arts Organizations," which brought together leaders

from a variety of cultural fields to discuss how their institutions have expanded their missions and adapted their organizational structures to increase civic impact. This was followed by "Civic Health: The Intersection of Art and Society," a general session moderated by OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scora that examined definitions of community and means of measuring civic impact. At this session, Ilir Zherka, executive director of the National Conference on Citizenship, presented his organization's research on measuring civic health, which shows that people's attachments to their communities are driven largely by aesthetics, social offerings and openness to diversity of ideas and people — concepts that are closely associated

with opera. David Fraher, president and CEO of Arts Midwest, showed ways in which his organization has built public will for the arts, while Jason Schupbach, director of design programs at the National Endowment for the Arts, discussed how the NEA has funded placemaking partnerships that raise the quality of life in communities throughout the country.

Conference attendees also had the opportunity to experience and assess some of the field's newest works and up-and-coming talent. This year's *New Works Sampler*, held at The Barns at Wolf Trap, displayed the broad range of subject matter and musical

idioms employed by today's composers and librettists, from Hector Armienta's *Cuentos de Peregrinación*, which describes the arduous journey faced by immigrants from Mexico to the United States, to Mohammed Fairouz and Mohammed Hanif's *Bhutto*, about the first woman to lead a modern Muslim state. Production talent was highlighted at the Robert L.B. Tobin *Director-Designer Showcase* session, during which four teams of young directors and designers presented production prototypes for contemporary American operas.

At its Annual Business Meeting, held during conference, OPERA America elected Perryn Leech as vice

chairman and welcomed to its board of directors five new members who will serve three-year terms: John E. Baumgardner, Jr., attorney and former board member of New York City Opera; Wayne S. Brown, president and CEO of **MICHIGAN OPERA THEATRE**; Matthew Buckman, general director of **FRESNO GRAND OPERA** and **TOWNSEND OPERA**; Barbara Glauber, board member of **BOSTON LYRIC OPERA**; and Evan J. Hazell, chair of the board at **CALGARY OPERA**.

The conference concluded with a Saturday Keynote featuring Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Justice Ginsburg reflected on her lifelong experience with the art form, the intersection of opera with social issues and the law, and her interest in new American opera, particularly Derrick Wang's *Scalia/Ginsburg*, which will premiere this July at the Castleton Festival. In honor of Justice Ginsburg's advocacy for the art form, she was presented with an honorary life membership to OPERA America.

To watch videos of select conference sessions, visit OPERA America's YouTube channel at youtube.com/OPERAAmerica. Resources from *Opera Conference 2015* are available at conference.operaamerica.org. ●

EXHIBITION OF DIRECTOR-DESIGNER SHOWCASE FINALISTS ON DISPLAY AT THE OPERA CENTER

Finalists of OPERA America's Robert L.B. Tobin *Director-Designer Showcase*, a biennial program supported by the Tobin Theatre Arts Fund that advances the careers of emerging directors and designers, were chosen to present their designs at *Opera Conference 2015*. Over the next two years, each of the four finalist teams will also have their production prototypes exhibited at the National Opera Center.

The first exhibition of designs, on view through December, is a production concept for Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Three Decembers* as envisioned by director Joshua Miller, set designer William Anderson, costume designer Hope Bennett and projection designer Stephanie Busing. This team of self-described "Gen Xers" said that they connected emotionally to the three decades represented in the opera — the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s — and that they sought to re-envision and highlight the small details of the work's plot, which describes the strained relationships between a stage actress,

Maddie, and her two adult children.

In addressing an opera that spans multiple decades and locations, the team settled upon a scenic aesthetic evoked from memory rather than physical reality. Scenic designer William Anderson noted, "We knew immediately that we wanted to work with projections so that the spaces were hinting at what the location was rather than realistically, physically showing it, which then allowed us to create more of a psychological environment for the scenery." The scenery took form as large, grey monoliths inspired by the aesthetic of the late American artist Donald Judd.

The specificity of the opera's timeline provided a rich environment for costume designer Hope Bennett, who conceived of ensembles that precisely evoke each of the opera's titular "three Decembers" — December of 1986, 1996 and 2006. For example, in a scene that takes place in Maddie's closet before the 1996 Tony Awards, Bennett drew upon the libretto's references to Dior



The finalist team's proposal for Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *Three Decembers*.

and created dresses that reflect that specific moment for the fashion house, which had recently changed designers and undergone a major shift in silhouette and color.

While projections are used throughout the production to evoke both physical space and psychological atmosphere, in the final scene of the opera, designer Stephanie Busing employs projections to achieve a coup de théâtre: During Maddie's funeral, which takes place on a Broadway stage, a digital "curtain" located at the back of the stage is lifted

to reveal a live-streaming projection of the actual audience watching the opera.

The exhibition of *Three Decembers* is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. in the Robert L.B. Tobin *Director-Designer Showcase* Gallery, located on the eighth floor of the National Opera Center. The remaining three finalist teams will be featured in rotating six-month exhibitions from December 2015 through June 2017. ●

CAREER BLUEPRINTS FOR SINGERS RETURNS THIS FALL

This September at the National Opera Center, OPERA America will host Career Blueprints for Singers, a five-day intensive workshop that helps singers revamp their audition packages and provides them with practical advice on a wide range of topics — from audition etiquette and attire to personal branding and the business of being a professional singer. Each participant will finish the program with new headshots, recordings, a website, a revised resume, feedback from an audition panel, advice from industry experts and the confidence to take on the upcoming audition season.

Opera America Magazine recently caught up with mezzo-soprano Raehann Bryce-Davis to discuss her experience at last year's Career Blueprints for Singers.

OPERA America: What role do presentation and marketing play in your career?

Raehann Bryce-Davis:

Most singers hate the term “marketing” and hate being told that our instrument, which is ourselves, is a product. We are artists from different backgrounds who create beauty and strive for honesty and meaning in our art, which cannot fit into a box. Having started as a business major, I have always thought that marketing is just another creative aspect of expressing oneself artistically to the world. Our product is not something we have to manufacture — it is something we are — and we can have fun changing the packaging and changing the usage and knowing that at the end of the day, what makes you peculiar can make you special.

OA: How can you present yourself in a way that is authentic to who you are as an artist while also making a good first impression?

RBD: Agents, casting directors and donors, in this world of technology, will spend just a few moments trying to find out who an artist is, and we only have one chance to make an impression. So effective marketing is finding out who we are and what things we naturally do well

and emphasizing those things. The headshots and photos that are displayed when a viewer opens your website sometimes form their very first opinion. Is he professional? Is she friendly? Does he look like that role? Is she a winning performer?

OA: What challenges do young or emerging singers face in developing the complete package — not just vocal mastery, but also effective presentation?

RBD: My biggest challenge is updating video and audio recordings so that they are reflective of my current technical abilities. I did a recording in November, for example, and sent it out to several agents in January. One who declined me for an audition subsequently heard me and said, “Your recordings do NOT serve you justice,” and offered to represent me. My recordings were absolutely representative in November, but not in January, and recording every two months is not always feasible.

OA: What have been the reactions to the new materials you created last year during Career Blueprints or as a result of the program?

RBD: I have had several compliments on the website that I made with the help of Career Blueprints from agents, intendants and fellow



AUDREY N. SACCONI

Mezzo-soprano Raehann Bryce-Davis in a photoshoot during last year's Career Blueprints for Singers.

singers. A lot of the success of a website, I think, is due to the photos, and a lot of the great photos that I have were taken during my session at Career Blueprints, as well.

OA: One component of Career Blueprints is a Feedback Audition in front of a panel of industry experts. What is the value of this sort of feedback for you, and how does it help to shape your career?

RBD: It is always helpful to get input from industry experts. At the time that I did it, I was in the middle of a big technical shift, so I was happy to hear the opinions of what was working and what wasn't and what milestones along the road I needed to be looking for.

OA: Over the course of Career Blueprints, you received career advice from several experts in the field. What are a few of the key takeaways that you gleaned from that experience?

RBD: One of the things that stuck with me was the amount of e-mails per day that a lot of these industry professionals get. This only further emphasized the importance of differentiating and presenting yourself in an interesting and honest way to save yourself from getting lost in the crowd. Also important was the idea of getting an introduction. An e-mail from a singer raving about themselves is of less value than an e-mail from a friend of the expert telling her about new talent she should hear. ●

Visit operaamerica.org/CareerBlueprints for more information and to register for this year's Career Blueprints for Singers, which will take place September 17–20 and 26 at the National Opera Center.

BUILDING OPERA AUDIENCES GRANTS

Generously funded by the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, OPERA America's Building Opera Audiences program recently awarded \$300,000 in grants to nine Professional Company Members. This program, now in its third cycle of granting, funds innovative marketing projects that seek to build and retain informed, enthusiastic audiences for opera. Each funded project will be documented and evaluated throughout its lifespan so that results can be shared with the entire field.

The nine organizations that received 2015 Building Opera Audiences grants are:

FLORIDA GRAND OPERA *Opera in Hialeah*

Florida Grand Opera will expand its cultural alliance with the City of Hialeah, which has a large population of low- and moderate-income households, most of which are Hispanic. In addition to providing a wide range of social and educational activities in Hialeah, the company will now offer residents of the city free transportation to its 2015–2016 productions of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Don Pasquale* in an effort to increase mainstage attendance.

LOS ANGELES OPERA *Re-branding Opera for the 21st Century*

Last year, with support from a Building Opera Audiences grant, Los Angeles Opera launched a campaign to place opera and opera-related stories in television, film and other entertainment media. Now, the company will develop long-term sustainability for the project by investigating how

consultant efforts can be accomplished by in-house staff, identifying funding sources and exploring partnerships with other opera companies.

LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO *Audience Loyalty Development*

In response to a recent influx of new audience members, Lyric Opera of Chicago will implement strategic audience development research to determine what factors drive loyalty within new populations of audiences and how the company can develop relevant and appealing loyalty programs. Lyric will study how new audiences interact with the company and develop activities and marketing tools to appeal to different segments of its entire audience.

OPERA LANCASTER *Generation Next: A Young Artist and Young Audiences Program*

Through Generation Next, Opera Lancaster will engage more than 10,000 South-Central Pennsylvania school children and young adults in personal opera experiences. For elementary-aged children, the company will offer *Opera Tales: The Three Little Pigs*; for high school students, it will create a program featuring highlights from *Carmen*; and for families, it will create a Come to the Show program, which will offer free children's tickets to opera events.

OPERA MEMPHIS *Deepening the 30 Days of Opera Experience*

Opera Memphis will increase the scope of its 30 Days of

Opera program, a month-long series of free performances, by embedding a documentary filmmaker with the 30 Days performers. The resulting footage will provide content for a new website that will be updated daily with customized links and video segments. The website's targeted content will encourage 30 Days attendees to become mainstage ticket buyers.

OPERA SARATOGA *Saratoga Sings!*

Opera Saratoga will offer free monthly performance events leading up to its summer festival in order to build awareness of the company and increase mainstage attendance. The free performances will take place at locations unique to the region that provide opportunities for the public to connect to opera in familiar settings. A customized loyalty app will allow the company to collect market research and motivate new and expanded paid participation at the summer festival.

PORTLAND OPERA *Opera a la Cart*

Inspired by Portland's celebrated food cart culture, Portland Opera will create a traveling performance cart inspired by the food truck aesthetic. The cart's foldout platform will be a performance stage, and its chalkboard menu items will be the operatic specials du jour, performed live. Attendees will be provided with a "takeout menu" highlighting upcoming activities, discounts on tickets, a rehearsal invitation, introductory materials and a preview CD.

TAPESTRY OPERA *Indie Opera T.O. — Up-rising*

Twelve independent opera companies will forge collaboration and cross-promotion driven by emerging opera leaders in Toronto. Participating companies will promote their activities to a wider audience base, primarily via the web and social media. The participating companies are Against the Grain Theatre, Bicycle Opera Project, Essential Opera, The Friends of Gravity, FAWN, Loose TEA Music Theatre, Liederwölf, Metro Youth Opera, Opera 5, Opera After Hours and Urbanvessel.

UTAH SYMPHONY | **UTAH OPERA** *Creative Community*

Utah Opera will collaborate with local artists to host events that celebrate the various creative disciplines united by opera. The initiative targets leaders in Utah's creative class who may not be aware of the natural alignments between opera and other forms of creative expression. Attendance at these events will be analyzed to determine which segments of the creative community are most likely to attend opera and which collaborations were most effective in increasing opera attendance. ●

Applications for the next round of Building Opera Audience grants will be available this fall. Visit operaamerica.org/Grants for more information.

OPERA GRANTS FOR FEMALE COMPOSERS: DISCOVERY GRANTS

This spring, OPERA America administered the second round of Discovery Grants from the Opera Grants for Female Composers program, which is generously supported by The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation. Discovery Grants aim to identify, support and help develop the work of female composers writing for the operatic medium, raising their visibility and promoting awareness of their compositions. Seven composers were selected to receive a total of \$100,000 to fund their new operas. The next round of grants, to be awarded in spring 2016, will be Commissioning Grants, which help Professional Company Members to commission works by women composers.

The recipients of the 2015 Discovery Grants are:

KITTY BRAZELTON

Composer, *The Art of Memory*
Libretto by Miriam Seidel



This opera reimagines two early Christians, Augustine and Ambrose, in fourth-century

Milan. The struggles of these two men (sung by women) mirror issues of the present day, from Ambrose's nonviolent resistance to intolerance to Augustine's yearning for spiritual absolution.

PATRICIA LEONARD

Composer and librettist,
My Dearest Friend



The correspondence of John and Abigail Adams, comprising over 1,100 letters from 1762 to 1801, forms the basis of this work's libretto. Their accounts of political tensions between America and Great Britain are underscored by Abigail's personal sacrifices to support her husband's political career.

ODALINE DE LA MARTINEZ

Composer, *Imoinda*
Libretto by Joan Anim-Addo



This opera, very loosely based on a 17th-century novella by Aphra Behn, examines slavery through the eyes of two lovers, Oko and Imoinda. The story takes place in Africa and unfolds over a 24-hour period, beginning with a ball in a palace and ending with the two lovers being sent to slavery in the Americas.

SU LIAN TAN

Composer, *Lotus Lives*
Libretto by Anne Babson



This chamber opera for singers and brass ensemble explores themes of growth, discovery and crossing cultures. A shifting panorama of singers, dancers, instrumentalists and shadow puppets partake in an exuberant musical romp that blends rap, Chinese folk songs and dance-club music. ●

LAURA KARPMAN

Composer, *Balls*
Libretto by Gail Collins



This multimedia opera dramatizes the famed September 20, 1973, tennis game between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs. The match, dubbed "The Battle of the Sexes," changed not only the perception and treatment of women in sports, but significantly advanced the women's rights movement.

JING JING LUO

Composer, *Ashima*



Based on a narrative poem of the Yi minority in China, this 50-minute opera describes a dead female soul with rare beauty and a loving heart. In a surreal and haunting multisensory experience, the three main characters are all sung by one countertenor, with the accompanying musicians also playing roles onstage.

KAMALA SANKARAM

Composer, *The Privacy Show*
Libretto by Rob Handel



This 75-minute techno-noir opera confronts the issue of privacy in an increasingly digitized society. Its music, based on data mined in real time from the audience, questions how much of an individual's right to privacy society is willing to relinquish in the name of security.



JEFF REIDER

COSTUME DESIGN EXHIBITION

Now on view in the National Opera Center’s seventh-floor Design Gallery is an exhibition of costume designs by Jessica Jahn, who has worked extensively in opera, theater and dance for more than a decade. The show, which runs through September 20, features costumes and photographs from productions at Bard SummerScape, **THE GLIMMERGLASS FESTIVAL, MINNESOTA OPERA, SAN FRANCISCO OPERA, THE SANTA FE OPERA** and Virginia Opera. This showcase of Jahn’s work is the latest in a series of annual exhibitions designed to highlight production leaders in the field. The Design Gallery is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. ●

A New Voice for Higdon (continued from page 28)

on the planet, why do you think women are still so underrepresented as composers in general and as composers of opera in particular?

JH: This is a big question in the orchestra world and I get it all the time. Why aren’t there more women on orchestra programs? There are a couple thousand orchestras of all different budget levels in the United States, and yet in a given year, maybe four or five women get works performed, and minimally at that. Part of it is that there still haven’t been many role models. Women composers have always been there, and there are more now, but I think what happens is a lot of times people just don’t know their worth. There’s not a great mechanism for getting their works in front of artistic administrators or music directors. I suspect it’s much the same in the opera

world, although I also think maybe women haven’t thought about writing opera. I’m hearing from more and more women that they are interested in writing an opera, but it’s a huge commitment for anyone, male or female. So you really have to have the time and the ability and the resources to be able to write and to get your music in front of someone. But I’m so impressed by the opera world, and I move through a lot of worlds — the orchestra world, the band world, the chamber world. Opera looks to me like it’s in one of the healthier states.

MAS: I would agree. There are so many composer-in-residence programs and laboratories that are developing works. It’s a very fertile time.

JH: I feel like we’re going to get a lot of amazing repertoire out of this time period. Sometimes you hit these creative

cauldrons when there is so much going on. It’s been so inspiring.

MAS: We are all looking forward to the premiere of *Cold Mountain* in Santa Fe. I try to maintain complete neutrality, because I think the worst thing you can do going into a new opera is to have huge expectations.

JH: I absolutely agree. I have been warning people. I say, “Look, this is my first opera.” I don’t know. Does any composer ever have a successful first opera, really?

MAS: The answer is yes. But I’m staying stone-faced and neutral even as I hear really good buzz about the piece.

JH: Believe me, Marc, the composer appreciates that. ●

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CROSSWORD

BY DAVID J. KAHN

ACROSS

- 1 Opera composer Mark
- 6 Place for a pint
- 9 Title for Sabah al-Sabah
- 13 Uproar
- 14 It sounds like 27-Across
- 15 “___ Lisa”
- 16 José Bautista, for one
- 19 Holiday tune
- 20 With regard to
- 22 Flower named after a snowy mountain
- 26 Press coverage
- 27 Racing crew member
- 28 Boot one
- 29 ___ Verde National Park
- 30 Uses a recliner, say
- 34 Shell game object
- 36 The Devil
- 37 Song on the Led Zeppelin album “Coda”
- 41 With 48-Across, when mammoths roamed
- 42 What it’s good to know
- 43 Light bulb unit
- 46 Theater/opera director van Hove
- 47 Early seventh-century date
- 48 See 41-Across
- 49 Mideast capital of 4 million
- 54 Hovel
- 56 Wexford Opera House’s home
- 57 1999 Harbison opera whose main characters end of each of the answers to 16-, 22-, 36-, 37- and 49-Across
- 62 Tenor’s role, often
- 63 Paternity suit evidence
- 64 Pageant wear
- 65 Kind of race
- 66 Frittata component
- 67 Fund

DOWN

- 1 In the back, nautically
- 2 Twosome
- 3 Sheet music abbr.
- 4 Responds to “Bottoms up!”?
- 5 “... but maybe I’m wrong”
- 6 Lounging area on a cruise ship
- 7 Metro area
- 8 Ritzy Los Angeles neighborhood
- 9 Filing material
- 10 Magic charm
- 11 Where to find baked blackbirds
- 12 Synthetic fabrics
- 17 Cause of a service break at Wimbledon?
- 18 Grown-___
- 21 Cousin of calypso
- 22 Aria, usually
- 23 Salute
- 24 Wave ___ flag (warn)
- 25 Couples retreat?
- 29 Opera’s Scorca
- 31 Hissy fit
- 32 Pen name
- 33 Star pitcher
- 34 *The Black Cat* writer
- 35 Dawn goddess
- 37 Game “played” without communicating
- 38 Verdi baritone ___ Thomas
- 39 Ocean predator
- 40 “Count ___!”
- 42 Dam-building agcy.
- 43 Subtext of Tippet’s 1962 opera *King Priam*
- 44 First name in mystery
- 45 Tie up
- 46 Hinder
- 49 Enemy of ancient Sparta
- 50 Cause damage to
- 51 Energetic dance
- 52 Provide an address?
- 53 ___-A (wrinkle-reducing brand)
- 55 Political stretch
- 58 *Life of Pi* director Lee
- 59 Like many operas
- 60 Pal
- 61 Go a little off course

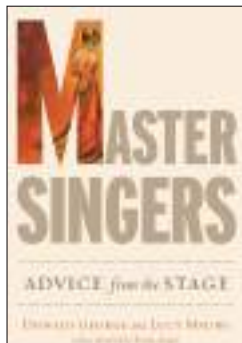
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The solution to this issue’s crossword puzzle can be found on page 38.

David J. Kahn is a nationally known crossword puzzle maker and opera aficionado whose puzzles have appeared in *The New York Times*. He is the author of *The Metropolitan Opera: Crosswords for Opera Lovers*.

MASTER SINGERS: ADVICE FROM THE STAGE

Donald George and Lucy Mauro
Oxford University Press

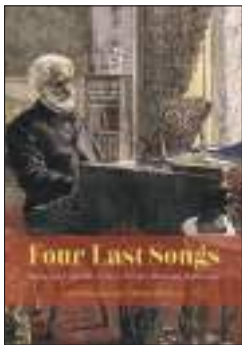


This guidebook for emerging singers reconciles the academic approach to singing with the realities of performing onstage. Drawing upon interviews with renowned singers, including

Stephanie Blythe, David Daniels, Joyce DiDonato, Denyce Graves, Thomas Hampson, Jonas Kaufmann, Simon Keenlyside and Ewa Podles, the authors present practical advice to help singers establish and sustain their careers. Topics include technique and its practical application for effective stage projection, vocal hygiene and longevity in singing, and the practicalities of the business of professional singing.

FOUR LAST SONGS: AGING AND CREATIVITY IN VERDI, STRAUSS, MESSIAEN AND BRITTEN

Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon
University of Chicago Press

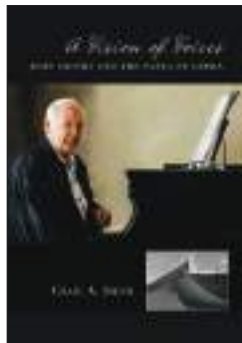


Creativity, aging and late style are examined in relation to four operas — Verdi's *Falstaff*, Strauss' *Capriccio*, Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise* and Britten's *Death in Venice* — each written

late in its respective composer's life. This study aims to show that old age and creativity are by no means mutually exclusive, and that the various challenges of aging, initially seen as a threat, ultimately stimulated the creativity of these composers. In addition to exploring the specific ways that old age informed these operas, the authors also look at the attitude and cultural discourse surrounding aging in each composer's era.

A VISION OF VOICES: JOHN CROSBY AND THE SANTA FE OPERA

Craig A. Smith
University of New Mexico Press



This biography, the first devoted to John Crosby, founding director of **THE SANTA FE OPERA**, details his multifaceted career as an impresario, conductor, tough-minded businessman and artistic explorer. After creating The Santa Fe Opera when he was only 30 years old, Crosby went on to guide the company's fortunes for next 45 years, building its international profile, cultivating homegrown talent and exploring diverse repertoire. The author, a longtime observer of the Santa Fe arts scene, describes the immense cultural impact that The Santa Fe Opera has had on its home city, as well as on the state of New Mexico as a whole.

THE 21ST-CENTURY SINGER: MAKING THE LEAP FROM THE UNIVERSITY INTO THE WORLD

Susan Mohini Kane
Oxford University Press



The author, a classical singer and voice professor, seeks to redress the unemployment and under-employment of young singers through this user-friendly guide for recent graduates. Combining elements of both an instructional manual and a self-reflective workbook, the volume provides emerging classical singers with practical and inspirational advice on pursuing a variety of career paths, including singing, teaching, consulting and other alternatives to stage careers. Instruction on how to develop support systems, train oneself holistically and take advantage of the newest technology for professional self-promotion is provided.

WAGNER'S RING IN 1848

Edward R. Haymes
Camden House

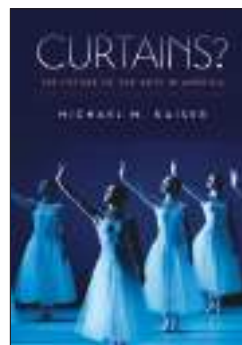


Now available in paperback, this volume provides modern English translations of two 1848 texts by Richard Wagner — a summary of the Nibelung myth and a verse "libretto"

called *Siegfried's Death*. Though the composer abandoned a single Siegfried opera in favor of the monumental *Ring* cycle, he included both of these texts in his collected works. Accompanying the translations is an overview of scholarship that was available to Wagner and others who worked on the Nibelung legend in the first half of the 19th century. A bibliography of further sources for English-speaking readers is also included.

CURTAINS?: THE FUTURE OF THE ARTS IN AMERICA

Michael M. Kaiser
Brandeis University Press



This book assesses the current state of performing arts institutions and how they have been affected by 21st-century developments, including the Internet explosion,

decreased subscription sales, economic instability, shifting priorities in education and an aging donor base. The author, a longtime arts administrator, argues that midsize performing arts institution are particularly vulnerable. Yet, he proposes that the performing arts can be sustained for generations to come by building strong donor bases, creating effective boards, taking risks in programming and pursuing creative marketing. ●



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CROSSWORD SOLUTION

Crossword puzzle can be found on page 36.

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OPERA America acknowledges the generous contributions of the following businesses and corporations that sponsored events and sessions at *Opera Conference 2015: Increasing Civic Impact*, which was held from May 6 to 9 in Washington, D.C.



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MY FIRST OPERA

BY ANN MEIER BAKER



CHORUS AMERICA

I grew up in Cincinnati, where my mother, a high school choral director, firmly believed that the opportunity to make music was essential for children. My four siblings and I were all expected to take piano lessons, study a second instrument, sing in the school choir, and play in the orchestra, concert band and, yes, the marching band, too. We sang in four-part harmony at family celebrations and had a special repertoire of songs specifically for car trips, which explains why for years my father saw no need to invest in a car radio. With my mother, I regularly attended symphony concerts and the famed May Festival performances. For some reason, however, I didn't see an opera until the summer before my senior year in high school, when a family friend invited me to join her.

My first opera was **CINCINNATI OPERA**'s production of *Così fan tutte* in the summer of 1976. Kathleen Battle, who was making her company debut, sang Despina. I absolutely loved her voice — but that wasn't the first time I heard Miss Battle in performance. My mother often drew soloists for her school performances of major choral-orchestral works from the pool of talented singers who were studying just a few miles away at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Kathleen Battle, who was studying at CCM, came to sing Handel's *Messiah* in the

auditorium of my mother's high school one snowy Sunday afternoon.

The performance was just a few years after the Ohio State Board of Education merged two neighboring high schools — one with a predominantly white student body, the other predominantly black — so it was especially powerful to have an African-American soprano bring that audience to its feet. I was awestruck by her singing, and, to this day, I remember how beautiful she looked and sounded.

I think I would have enjoyed the performance of *Così* even if I didn't recognize Kathleen Battle from that earlier school performance, but it definitely made the experience more meaningful for me. Miss Battle grew up in nearby Portsmouth, Ohio, and I came to think of her as a hometown hero. I followed her career as closely as Cincinnati baseball fans followed the career of Johnny Bench.

My husband is a professional singer so, unlike me, my daughter was introduced to opera right from the start. When Madeline was just three and a half years old, I took her to hear her dad sing in a production of Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All* at Baltimore Opera. We arrived at the theater early so we could walk her around the stage and help her know what to expect. Not surprisingly, she was particularly enamored with the pink bicycle that her dad would be riding during the performance. Madeline and I sat near the door leading to the lobby just in case she got restless and we needed a quick exit, but that turned out to be unnecessary, as she was completely riveted by the experience. She has been my favorite opera companion ever since.

When she was eight years old, we went to see her dad in *War and Peace* at **THE METROPOLITAN OPERA**, and, as she settled into her seat, the woman seated next to her gave me a glance, as if to say I was surely crazy to take a young child to such a long opera. When intermission

came, the woman seemed amazed by my daughter's good behavior and she leaned down to ask her if this was her very first opera. "No," Madeline replied curiously, "is it yours?"

For a while, I began to worry my daughter would grow up to be a harsh opera critic, for she could be quite opinionated. Once when she did not approve of the appearance of a particularly skinny tenor with a big, bushy shock of curly hair who had been

cast as Don José in a production of *Carmen*, she leaned over and whispered, "Mom, that guy looks like he needs a hamburger and a haircut!"

My favorite first-opera experience was with my mother-in-law, the wife of a dairy farmer whose agrarian life didn't offer many opportunities to get away for performances. She sang loyally in her church choir, but the staple of her musical diet was the Saturday afternoon Metropolitan Opera broadcast. After she and her husband retired from farming,

and while my husband was studying in New York, we took my in-laws on their first trip to the Met for a production of *Die Fledermaus* on New Year's Eve. The cast was full of the great singers of the day, including Kiri Te Kanawa, Håkan Hagegård, Judith Blegen and Tatiana Troyanos. I admit that I don't actually remember much about the performance, because for me it was a distant second to witnessing my mother-in-law's overwhelming delight in the entire experience.

As the lights dimmed she turned to me. "Look at me, Ann," she said. "Who would have ever thought that I would get to the Metropolitan Opera!" ●

Ann Meier Baker is director of music and opera for the National Endowment for the Arts. She previously served as president and CEO of Chorus America, the national association of professional and volunteer choruses.

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