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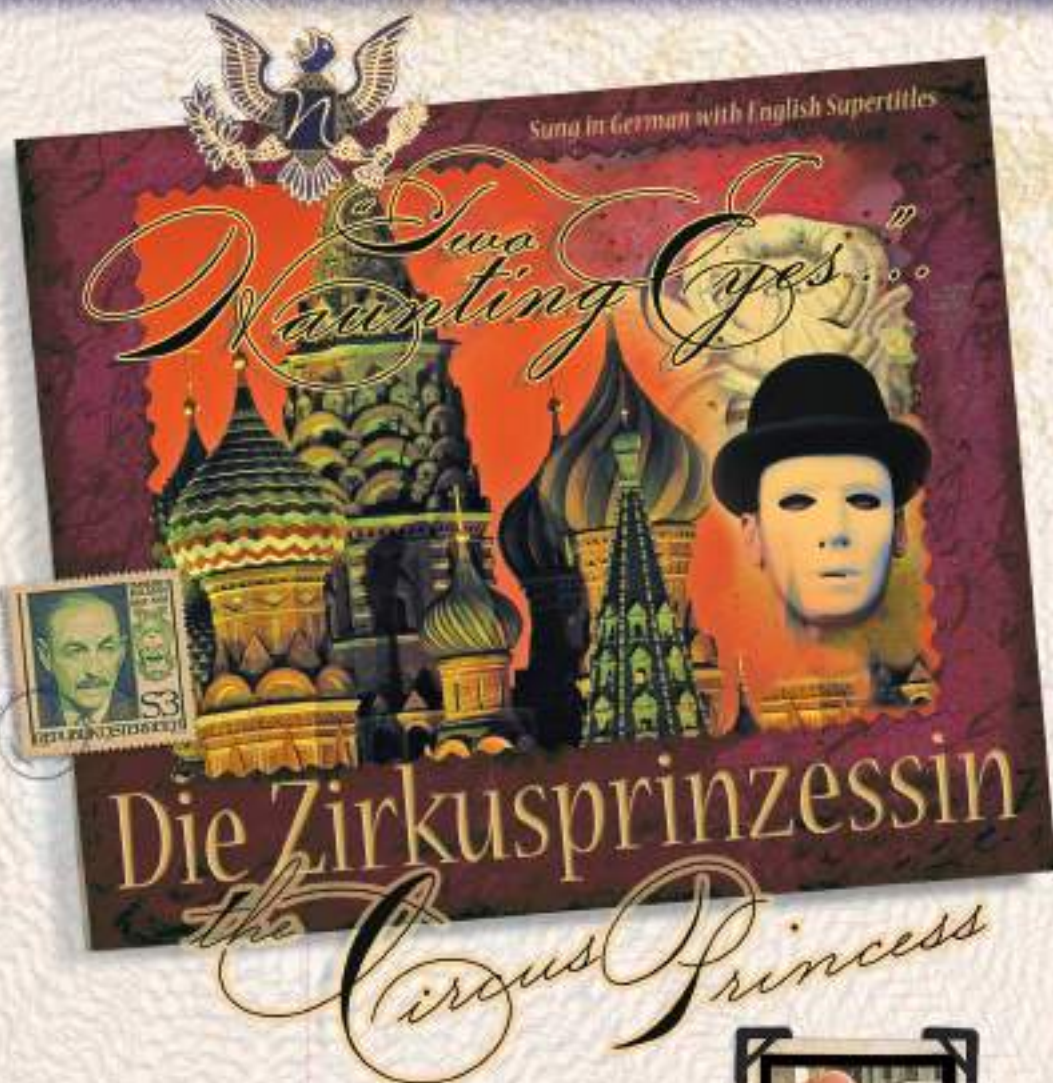


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The magazine of OPERA America — the national service organization for opera, which leads and serves the entire opera community, supporting the creation, presentation and enjoyment of opera.

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publisher

OPERA America

editor

Kelley Rourke

associate editor

Alexa B. Antopol

art director

Katherine Ehle

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Correction: NEA Opera Honoree Carlisle Floyd taught at Florida State University, not South Florida University
(as indicated in the fall 2008 issue).

ON THE COVER: Philip Sheffield as Tom Rakewell in La Monnaie/De Munt's (Brussels) production of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (Robert Lepage, director; François Barbeau, costume designer; Etienne Boucher, lighting designer; Scène Éthique, scenic construction and painting). This is a co-production of Ex Machina, Opéra La Monnaie de Munt Brussels, Opéra National de Lyon, San Francisco Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden London and Teatro Real Madrid. Photo by Johan Jacobs.



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It would have been hard to imagine only six months ago that the winter of 2008 would bring such layered anxiety — anxiety over ticket sales, anxiety over contributions of all types, even anxiety over anxiety itself. While the fall season has seen some good news regarding ticket goals that have been surpassed and performances added, most reports from member companies — some of them covered in major media headlines — are cause for concern.

I recently corrected a reporter who told me I sounded optimistic. I told him I was not optimistic, but determined. We all have to be determined to realize the inherent advantages enjoyed by opera, even during these turbulent times. Most opera companies have the flexibility to reduce the number of productions and performances, and to realize direct savings from such short-term actions. Opera is a multimedia art form that reflects and capitalizes on the multimedia world we live in. Above all, we have to remember that opera lovers are passionate about their art form to a degree that exceeds all other arts audiences. In most cities, there are only one or two professional companies, allowing managers to focus donor and audience passion around the support of their company for the benefit of their community.

Certainly, we learned with regret of the suspension of operations at one company and cancellation of productions at other companies. There has been less media coverage for companies that have substituted less expensive productions for grander ones in order to preserve performances of new works. Some opera companies report that they have advanced local collaborations out of necessity, discovering new potential for increased reach into their communities. Others expect that replacing a mainstage production with several less expensive community programs may actually increase awareness of the company.

Opera is inherently collaborative, from the very co-existence of words and music. This fundamental quality of our art form unites the articles in this issue of *Opera America*, whether the subject is performance practice in relation to early opera, scenic construction or company artistic policies. This same fundamental quality of collaboration has to inform our behavior during this challenging period. Staff members must work collaboratively across departments to identify potential revenue and expense savings. Board members must work collaboratively with staff to ensure that short-term financial decisions are made in the context of established company values and long-term objectives. Looking externally, opera company representatives have to work collaboratively with artists, managers, unions and other partners to ensure that all good ideas are forged into creative solutions and that no one group of colleagues in the opera enterprise is disadvantaged disproportionately by the difficult decisions that will have to be made.

OPERA America strives — in difficult times even more than in boom years — to provide the communication links that enable all members to gain perspective and practical ideas from one another. The staff join me in encouraging every reader to remain in touch with us to share insights and concerns so that creative solutions to common challenges can be shared across the field.

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

“ONE OF THE MOST UNDERRATED CREATIVE COMMUNITIES IN THE COUNTRY.”

“There is a long-standing Alaskan tradition of doing things yourself,” says Torrie Allan, general director of **Anchorage Opera**. “There are people who live here who may not think they like opera, but they like the fact that we’re made in Alaska.”

The company’s “made in Alaska” ethos was born partly of necessity; because of shipping and transportation costs, the company has a full shop to build all productions locally. Local artists are hired whenever possible — Allen estimates that productions are 90% Alaskan. Onstage and off, the company provides full- and part-time employment to hundreds of people each year. “Anchorage is one of the most underrated creative communities in the country,” says Allen. “But if you don’t keep these people employed, they leave, and everyone has to spend more money to bring in artists.” The company regularly partners with artists from Alaska Dance Theatre, Anchorage Concert Chorus, the Alaska Children’s Choir and the Anchorage Festival of Music.

Allen feels that opera “made in Alaska” has the potential to enrich the community in many ways. He believes strongly in working with the tourist bureau to promote Anchorage as a cultural destination. “So many people here are unaware of the bigger picture. If you have an opera company downtown, it benefits hotels, restaurants, everything.”

The company’s isolation brings challenges, to be sure, but Allen also sees tremendous opportunity. “There is such a spirit of independence, such a value in being different. I can do things I might not be able to do in the lower 48, like bring a Harley into the performance hall. There is a lot of support for wild ideas.” 🇺🇸



Kathryn Alllyn as Carmen in Anchorage Opera's production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Photo by Anchorage Opera/Chris Arend Photography.



Fabiana Bravo as Elisabeth de Valois and Warren Mok in the title role of Hawaii Opera Theatre's 2008 co-production of Verdi's *Don Carlo*. Photo by Cory Lum and courtesy of Hawaii Opera Theatre.

“HAWAII HAS A WONDERFUL MUSICAL TRADITION.”

Co-productions and rentals are a normal part of business for most American opera companies — unless a company happens to be located some 2,500 miles from mainland U.S. But **Hawaii Opera Theatre** (HOT) has used its unique geographical position to extend, rather than limit its artistic reach, according Executive Director Karen Tiller: “Asia is as close as the mainland, so we bring a lot of productions and artists from Asia.” The company’s new *Don Carlo* is an international co-production with Vancouver Opera and Opera Hong Kong.

When it comes to mainstage artists, there is no shortage of talented singers willing to make the trip to Hawaii. While these performers come from all over the world, the company’s training program, the Mae Z. Orvis Opera Studio, is emphatically local. “Hawaii has a wonderful musical tradition. People here are singing from the time they’re born.” The Studio provides talented young singers with training and performance experiences that include classes and seminars in movement, musical style, language, repertoire coaching and master classes with guest artists such as Thomas Hampson and Renée Fleming. Some local artists, such as Quinn Kelsey, have gone on to international careers.

The company has a strong base of committed supporters, but it continues to work to extend its reach, particularly to the large local military population. The company was a participant in the first year of Great American Voices, an outreach program to military bases funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. “We were so successful that we received a second year of funding.” HOT now uses the Great American Voices model to continue its outreach at the bases.

The company’s particular geographic circumstances bring both challenges and opportunities. Tiller notes that the area lacks major corporations: “This completely changes the dynamics of how one looks at sponsorships. But the individual support is staggering; people in Hawaii understand that if they don’t support their opera company, it will go away.” The company works hard to make sure its generous support is well-spent; in 2007, it was the only arts organization in the state to receive a four-star rating from Charity Navigator. 🇺🇸

“A REAL FOCAL POINT FOR COMMUNITY ACTIVITY”

Indianapolis Opera recently acquired a new facility that will house the company’s business office and provide space for rehearsals, classes and performances. The 24,000-foot space, the former Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, has been renamed the Frank and Katrina Basile Opera Center in recognition of a major gift made by local philanthropists. The purchase of the church was facilitated by Bill Oesterle, CEO of Angie’s List. According to Executive Director John C. Pickett, “When a challenge grant fell through after we raised the funds the funder required, Bill stepped up and purchased the property with the intent of donating it back to Indianapolis Opera. This move allowed us to take advantage of this opportunity while we had it. He wanted us to succeed as a real focal point for community activity.”

Indianapolis Opera will consolidate its operations and relocate to the Basile Opera Center by mid-2009. The space is already being used for rehearsals, which were formerly held in a building at the state fairgrounds. “It will make a huge difference to have everything under one roof. It is going to give us a greater impact with more programming,” says Pickett. Last month, the company invited a small group of donors to attend a rehearsal and open house. Eventually, the former sanctuary will be converted to an intimate performance space that will allow the company, which presents its mainstage productions in a 2,100-seat theater, to offer a greater range of programs to local audiences.

The company has worked with local historic preservation experts on adaptive reuse plans for the facility. Although the building does not have landmark status, it is seen as an important example of modernist architecture, according to Pickett. “Indianapolis has a strong interest in historic preservation, and people are very excited about adaptive reuse.” Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana provided funding for a feasibility study and offered valuable technical assistance.

In addition, the company has learned from other opera companies that recently opened opera centers, including Opera Memphis and Nashville Opera. “My colleagues have provided some really good models and have been willing to spend time talking with key donors who, in the process of determining their support, visited with them and studied their projects.”

Indianapolis Opera has established a fundraising goal of \$3.5 million dedicated to creating an operating endowment and making structural improvements to the Basile Opera Center. The campaign to date has received more than \$1.6 million in commitments from the community. 📍



Indianapolis Opera's new Basile Opera Center. Photo by Denis Ryan Kelly, Jr.



Scenic design of Opera Memphis's production of Joplin's *Treemonisha*. Design by Kris Stone.

"A WINDOW ON JOPLIN"

In January, **Opera Memphis** will premiere *Scott Joplin and Treemonisha*, a new approach to the ragtime composer's only opera, *Treemonisha*, which was never produced in Joplin's lifetime. Michael Ching, general director of Opera Memphis and a composer himself, has included most of the music of *Treemonisha* in this adaptation, which he describes as "the vision of a dying man as he tries to pitch his opera to yet another producer."

"This framework allowed me to make more drastic changes than one might otherwise," says Ching, "I'm certain Joplin would have addressed some of the piece's dramaturgical issues if he had a chance to see it on the stage." In addition to attempting to create a more compelling theatrical experience, Ching says, "I want to give the audience a window on Joplin himself, as well as a chance to hear more of his music."

Ching feels that the character of Joplin has extraordinary potential to move audiences. "Part of the problem is the fact that the message of the opera — education as a way to pass from poverty and ignorance — is a noncontroversial one by 21st-century standards. It doesn't make for a lot of dramatic impact. I think the idea of an iconic American composer who was not respected during his lifetime could be a more interesting story."

Ching notes that there are precedents for revisiting existing work, ranging from opera adaptations like Peter Brook's *Tragedy of Carmen* to Mahler's reorchestrations of standard symphony rep. And although Mussorgsky's original orchestrations for *Boris Godunov* are back in favor now, Ching says, "We might have ignored the piece entirely if Rimsky-Korsakov had not, at one time, tamed it and contextualized it for contemporary sensibilities."

How would Ching react to someone revisiting one of his compositions after his death? "If it meant the music would be heard by more people, I would say 'Go for it!'" 🎵

GREEN THEATRE: TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Opera companies around the world continue to look for ways to manage rising energy costs and address environmental concerns.

The Greater London Authority has published a green theater program for London in response to concerns about the theater sector's impact on the environment.

A downloadable PDF, available at www.london.gov.uk, provides information on the theater industry's footprint, top tips for going greener, success stories, a carbon calculator and more.

According to the introduction, if all recommended actions are taken, London theaters will reduce their CO2 emissions by almost 60 percent by 2025.

What steps are you and your colleagues taking to reduce energy usage? Please contact MYoung@operaamerica.org to share your stories. 📧

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Dialogues of the Carmelites

Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) welcomes **Dan Duro** as the company's new director of production. Duro's prior positions include production director at The Santa Fe Opera; director of productions for Portland Opera (OR), Opera Pacific (CA), the Williamstown Theatre Festival (MA), The Acting Company (NY) and The Shakespeare Theatre (Washington, D.C.); vice president for operations at the new Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts and Academy of Music in Philadelphia; and production manager at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (NY). Additionally, **Nicholas G. Russell** has been appointed the company's new director of artistic operations, effective December 1. He will consult on hiring and have oversight for the auditioning, logistics and coordinating of all singers and musicians involved in BLO's mainstage and opera for schoolchildren and families productions. Russell's career encompasses artistic administration and education positions in Scotland, France, Italy, Canada and the U.S. Most recently, he served as the interim administrative director for Chautauqua Opera (NY), prior to which he was the director of artistic operations at Glimmerglass Opera.

Glimmerglass Opera (Cooperstown, NY) has appointed **David Angus** as the company's music director. Angus's professional career began when he served as a répétiteur with Opera North; he later became chorus master and staff conductor for Glyndebourne Festival. His operatic career has taken him to companies in Italy, England,

Scotland, Ireland, Canada and the U.S.; he also conducts orchestras and choirs across Europe. Angus was a boy chorister at King's College, Cambridge, under Sir David Willcocks, and specialized as a pianist at the University of Surrey. He finished his training with a Fellowship in Conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. Additionally, **Abby Rodd** has been appointed as director of production. Rodd first joined Glimmerglass Opera in the summer of 1992 as a stage crew intern. She returned seasonally in several capacities, working her way up to the position of technical director in 2001. In addition to her engagements at Glimmerglass Opera, Rodd has also worked as technical director at Hartford Stage and assistant technical director at Long Wharf Theatre.

Lori Burrill has been appointed as **Long Beach Opera's** first executive director. Previously, Burrill served as a management and fundraising consultant working for nonprofit organizations throughout Southern California, such as the Carpenter Performing Arts Center, Chapman University, Pacific Symphony Orchestra and Philharmonic Society of Orange County. She also served over a 12-year period in a myriad of capacities at Orange County's Opera Pacific, from director of production to managing director.

Sir Andrew Davis, Lyric Opera of Chicago's music director, has won *Gramophone* magazine's "Best of Category — Concerto" award for his recording of Elgar's *Violin*

Concerto featuring violinist James Ehnes and London's Philharmonia Orchestra, released on the Onyx Classics label in January 2008. That month the record was also named *Gramophone's* "Editor's Choice." The Classic FM Gramophone Awards, dubbed "the Oscars" of the classical music world, are bestowed upon artists nominated by music industry professionals.

Patricia Kiernan Johnson joined the **OPERA America** staff in October 2008 as the marketing and media manager. Previously, she worked as the marketing manager for Opera New Jersey in Princeton. Johnson earned her B.A. in art history and studio art from Fordham University's Lincoln Center Campus and her M.A. in art history from Rutgers University, where she also earned a museum studies certificate. In the course of her art history studies, Johnson worked for the medieval art department at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and for the development and photography departments at The New-York Historical Society.

Pamela Pantos has been hired as **Opera North's** (Lebanon, NH) new executive director. Pantos brings an understanding of operatic repertoire, financial savvy and commitment to philanthropy. Most recently, she worked in corporate finance at W.R. Grace in Cambridge, MA. Pantos completed her M.B.A. at Babson and received her undergraduate degree at Wellesley College. Fluent in five languages, she also has a Master's in musicology from the University

of Hamburg in Germany. Before receiving her M.B.A., she performed as a mezzo-soprano, singing at many European opera houses and concert halls.

Garnett Bruce has joined **Opera Omaha** as artistic advisor and principal stage director. While his directing debut for the company will not happen until the April 2009 production of *La bohème*, Bruce is already actively involved in the company's fall schedule. Highlights from his past seasons include productions at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chattanooga Symphony and Opera, Opera Pacific, Utah Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Wolf Trap Opera and San Diego Opera, among others. He began his musical training as a choirboy at the Washington National Cathedral and subsequently earned internships with Harold Prince for his 1990 production of *Faust* at the Metropolitan Opera and with Leonard Bernstein for his performances and recording of *Candide*.

Pittsburgh Opera announces several changes to its senior management team: **William Powers**, formerly director of artistic administration, has been promoted to director of administration and artistic operations. **Christina Waddle** has signed on as director of development; she has 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector. **Debra Bell** joined the company as director of marketing and communications; she most recently

worked as marketing director for Glimmerglass Opera and in audience and resource development at the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

Shawn Fertitta, the new Opera Center administrator and facility manager, has been the theater manager for Circle in the Square Theatre for the past 10 years and a company manager for many Broadway productions. **Linda Giebel** has been named education programs associate. Giebel has worked in the visual arts since 1983 and has extensive experience in design, production, advertising, arts education and fine art.

Jon Finck has been appointed as director of communications and public affairs at **San Francisco Opera**. Previously, Finck was president of Encore Communications, a public relations company for nonprofit arts organizations, independent producers and Broadway touring productions. Prior to founding Encore Communications in 1994, he served as director of press and public relations for San Francisco Opera from 1989 to 1993. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from The American University in Washington, D.C.

Peter Mark has renewed his contract as the **Virginia Opera's** artistic director and principal conductor through 2012. 2008 marks the 100th production conducted by Mark since his company debut in 1975, and in March, Mark was named as one of

the "Greatest 20th Century Virginians of the Arts" in a list published by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and Library of Virginia.

Vancouver Opera Music Director **Jonathan Darlington's** appointment has been extended by two years to the 2011-2012 season; he has been the company's music director since May 2005 and was first appointed to the music staff in 2002. Darlington is music director of the Duisburg (Germany) Philharmonic Orchestra. He recently received the prestigious award of Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music.

John McMahon has been appointed to the newly-created position of executive director of digital products at **Meyer Sound**. Additionally, long-time associate **Pablo Espinosa** has been promoted to vice president of research and development.

Schott Music has announced the signing of composer **Stewart Wallace** to its roster. Wallace had his first major opera premiere at Houston Grand Opera with *Where's Dick?*, beginning collaborations with librettist Michael Korie and director Richard Foreman. *Harvey Milk*, Wallace's fifth opera and most widely known score, was commissioned by Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera and San Francisco Opera. Most recently, Wallace returned to San Francisco Opera with the world premiere of *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. 🎭



Houston's downtown skyline at dusk. Photo courtesy of the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau.

OPERA CONFERENCE 2009 — MAKING OPERA MATTER

In a world filled with news and information about the economy, the environment, education, health care, national security and space exploration — to name just a few of the compelling issues shaping our lives — what is opera's place? Is it just another traditional art form competing for attention in an increasingly crowded entertainment marketplace? The works of Mozart and Verdi reflected the pressing political dynamics of their day. Does opera have the capacity to connect meaningfully to contemporary issues and social concerns? Should it? Do opera companies respond effectively to unmet community needs? Can they? These compelling questions and more will be explored at *Opera Conference 2009, Making Opera Matter*, taking place in Houston, TX, from April 29 through May 2, 2009.

At *Opera Conference 2009*, opportunities to network with opera colleagues from around the country and the world will abound. Performances by **Houston Grand Opera** will include the world premiere of *Brief Encounter* (André Previn/John Caird) and Verdi's *Rigoletto*, with Scott Hendricks as Rigoletto, Eric Cutler as the Duke of Mantua and Albina Shagimuratova as Gilda. **Alex Ross**, acclaimed writer, author and commentator, will deliver the keynote address.

What the march of history really has to do with music itself is the subject of sharp debate. In the classical field it has long been fashionable to fence music off from society, to declare it a self-sufficient language. In the hyper-political twentieth century, that barrier crumbles time and again: Béla Bartók writes string quartets inspired by field recordings of Transylvanian folk songs, Shostakovich works on his *Leningrad* Symphony while German guns are firing on his city, John Adams creates an opera starring Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong. Nevertheless, articulating the connection between music and the outer world remains devilishly difficult. Musical meaning is vague, mutable, and, in the end, deeply personal. Still, even if history can never tell us exactly what music means, music can tell us something about history.

— from the Preface to *The Rest is Noise*, by Alex Ross

Opera Conference 2009 Registration!

From networking with friends and colleagues to gaining new ideas and perspectives from experts, the benefits that come from attending *Opera Conference 2009* are invaluable to everyone involved in the world of opera. OPERA America has made it easier than ever to attend this year's conference by freezing the cost of registration at 2008 prices and offering 25-50% discounts for organizations that register multiple attendees.

Register now! Visit <http://www.operaamerica.org/registration> for more information.

SALON SERIES

OPERA America's new *Salon Series: Exploring American Voices* features live performances of American opera and songs in an intimate setting. Presented in collaboration with OPERA America's publisher members, the *Salon Series* showcases the diverse voices of today's most distinguished composers.

The first event, on December 3, 2008, featured soprano Lauren Flanigan performing Thomas Pasatieri's *Lady Macbeth* (text from Shakespeare, selected by the composer) and *Before Breakfast* (libretto by Frank Corsaro). The event was presented in collaboration with the Theodore Presser Company, with the composer in attendance.

Future events in the *Salon Series*, to be held in OPERA America's New York offices, will be announced on www.operaamerica.org.



Lauren Flanigan performs Pasatieri's *Before Breakfast* at OPERA America's *Salon Series*. Photo by Katherine L. Ehle/OPERA America.

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Director-Designer Showcase

In this issue, we feature finalists for OPERA America's first Director-Designer Showcase. As part of a continuing effort to foster emerging opera artists, the bi-annual Showcase seeks to benefit promising stage directors and designers interested in breaking into the world of opera. It is intended to bring new talent to the forefront and connect promising artists with those who are in a position to hire them. Designed to be administered as part of *The Opera Fund*, the inaugural Director-Designer Showcase was supported by a special grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

A total of 41 director-driven teams submitted proposals for consideration. Four finalist teams were selected by a panel that included: Peter Dean Beck, designer; John Duykers, singer/teacher; Christopher Mattaliano, stage director/general director of Portland Opera; Diane Paulus, stage director; and Darren K. Woods, general director of Fort Worth Opera. Each team will be given \$1,000 to be used toward the production of more complete renderings and models. Up to two representatives from each finalist team will be flown to *Opera Conference 2009* in Houston, TX, to present their proposals to general and artistic directors at a special session. Finalists will be available to meet with company representatives at an event to be held immediately after the presentation.

Finalists:

Mourning Becomes Electra

Director: Andrew Eggert
Set and Costume Designer: Anka Lupes
Lighting Designer: Aaron Black

Florencia en el Amazonas

Director: Lawrence Edelson
Set and Costume Designer: Martin T. Lopez
Lighting Designer: Josh Epstein
Choreographer: Lauri Stallings

Ainadamar

Director: Mike Donahue
Set and Costume Designer: Anya Klepikov
Lighting Designer: Ji-Youn Chang
Choreographer: Sara Erde
Projection Designer: Daniel Vatsky

Einstein on the Beach

Director: Elise Sandell
Set and Costume Designer: Liz Freese
Lighting Designer: Gordon W. Olson
Choreographer: Keturah Stickann

In addition, the panel recognized four "noteworthy" applications:

Four Saints in Three Acts

Director: Michael Rau
Set Designer: Sara Walsh
Costume Designer: Jessica Pabst
Lighting Designer: Derek Wright

Einstein on the Beach

Director: Gregory Keller
Set and Lighting Designer: Dipu Gupta
Costume Designer: Melissa Schlactmeyer
Choreographer: Brady Paul

Ainadamar

Director: Joseph Cermatori
Set Designer: Michael Locher
Costume Designer: Paul Carey
Lighting Designer: Burke Brown
Producer: Stephanie Ybarra

X — The Life and Times of Malcolm X

Director: Eric Einhorn
Set Designer: Kathryn Kawecki
Costume Designer: Candida K. Nichols



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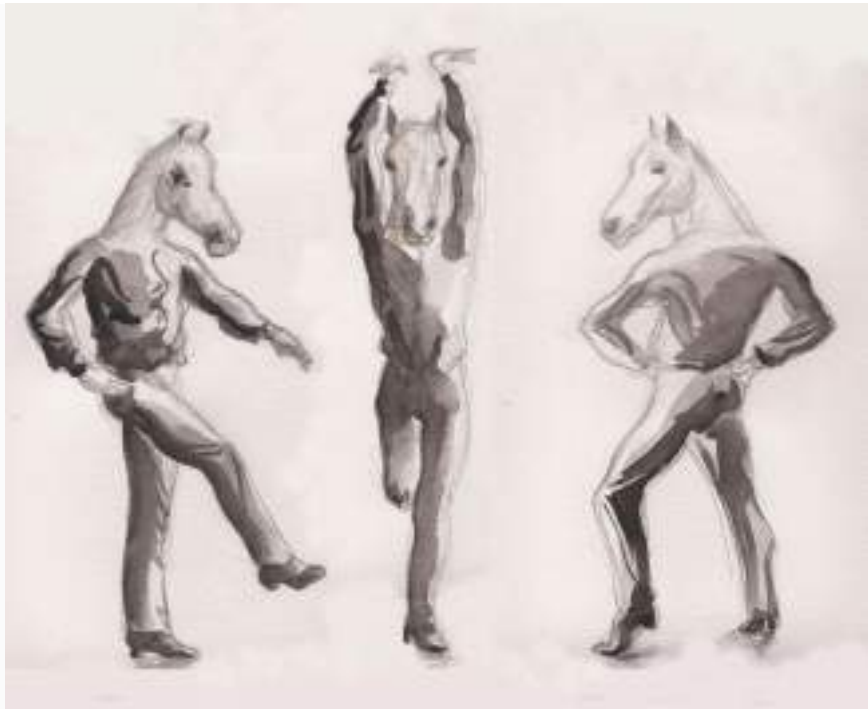
Mourning Becomes Electra

Director: Andrew Eggert

Set and Costume Designer: Anka Lupes

Lighting Designer: Aaron Black

"Mourning Becomes Electra tells the story of a family fighting its own civil war. Eugene O'Neill's epic trilogy of plays is modeled after the *Oresteia* of Eschylus, and the powerful impact of the opera by Marvin David Levy and Henry Butler elevates the characters of the Mannon family even closer to the level of myth. Our production strives to capture the mythic scale of the opera by setting the action in a monumental space. Rather than the traditional Mannon family home, we would like to show a different kind of homecoming — one that underscores the themes of inner struggle that drive the plot. The action begins in the years immediately after the American Civil War, and our setting is based upon the interior of a monument erected to honor and remember the fallen soldiers of that conflict. Our inspiration for this approach came from a site visit to General Grant's Tomb in New York City. The interior of the mausoleum will serve as backdrop for the ceremony of homecoming in the first act, and will add a powerful symbolism to the string of murders and suicides that trace the family's decline and tragic self-destruction. The production team feels that this monumental setting will match the mythic scale of the music drama, and that it will allow contemporary audiences a way to look back in time and remember the events of our own national history, while directly connecting with the personal lives of the characters in this American epic."



Ainadamar

Director: Mike Donahue

Set and Costume Designer: Anya Klepikov

Lighting Designer: Ji-Youn Chang

Choreographer: Sara Erde

Projection Designer: Daniel Vatsky

Producer: Roberta Pereira

“In Golijov and Hwang’s *Ainadamar*, the lives of three people — Federico García Lorca, the actress Margarita Xirgu and Mariana Pineda, the historical heroine and protagonist of one of Lorca’s plays — are woven together as Margarita struggles to accept fate, release herself from guilt and ensure that the dream of freedom lives on in her students. How does the dream of freedom die? Is art capable of fighting such a force of destruction? And can a society move forward from a history of extermination and hate? These are just several of the questions leading our exploration of the piece. Following the *flamenco cuadro* model, with its direct dialogue between singer, dancer and instrumentalist, we are building the piece as a danced opera in which story emerges from the integration of music and movement. A company of opera singers, flamenco singers, flamenco dancers and musicians, all onstage, will create the story in a way that feels simple, spontaneous, raw, communal and vibrant. In order to move fluidly between past and present, living and dead, reality and imagination, we are also integrating projections into the *flamenco cuadro* dialogue. Through projections we will be able to viscerally (and clearly) flesh out the complex layers of voices, ghosts, times, locations, memories and dreams created by Golijov and Hwang, while maintaining the ephemeral simplicity of the piece. From the darkness, from the silence, the watery sounds of *Ainadamar*, the fountain of tears, are conjured by an assembling circle of flamenco singers and dancers, transporting us to a world of trumpets, of Granada, of Moors, Jews, Christians and Gypsies all living together. As the voices, stories, images, people, illusions, fantasies, memories, the flamenco circle itself, all fade in and out of focus, we will share Margarita’s re-living of the events leading first to Lorca’s execution — and then to her own death (and onward).”



Flores en el Amazonas

Director: Lawrence Edelson

Set and Costume Designer: Martin T. Lopez

Lighting Designer: Josh Epstein

Choreographer: Lauri Stallings

"In literature, magical realism calls upon the reader to suppress his or her perception of reality and adopt the reality presented in the text. The reader then becomes engrossed in a world where the text can be properly decoded. As a production team, it is our job to create a world where the audience's perception of reality is consciously altered from the moment that the curtain rises so that the story being told can live in the world in which it belongs; a world where what happens in the plot not only seems possible, but natural. It is our goal to create an Amazon where the mystical and spiritual are not out of place: where river spirits sing, where accepting love can overpower death and where an opera diva can transform into a butterfly. Movement and light will play a crucial role in defining this world. We will use a small number of dancers to help create the opera's environment. A dominant image for me in the opera is water, but what is water in this world? A means for the boat to travel towards Manaus? The vehicle of contagion for the cholera epidemic? Blood in the veins of the Amazon? When one looks at a map of the Amazon, the tree-like branches suggest a maze of capillaries, veins and arteries. The Amazon tells the story as much as it is the setting. Water is not simply the environment, it is part of the action. When Paula and Alvaro fight, the Amazon waters fight back. The river's rebellion, a reaction to the turmoil in the relationship of two people gliding along its surface, propels the story forward, affecting the lives of everyone on the boat. How do we portray the Amazon River? A character? A part of the plot? The setting? A mystical force? The answer is clear to us: it is all of these things."



Einstein on the Beach

Director: Elise Sandell

Set and Costume Designer: Liz Freese

Lighting Designer: Gordon W. Olson

Choreographer: Keturah Stickann

“‘What a piece of work is man.’ The intersection of science, philosophy, progress and art is seen through the eyes and history of Albert Einstein in the context of modern life: Einstein as the Everyman. Beyond his designations as the most famous scientist in history, the ‘man of the century’ and the inventor of the theory of relativity, Einstein was first and foremost a man; a man with big ideas that changed our world and are still changing it today. This will be a personal and narrative approach to Einstein’s life and work. His work was personal, and his personality, story, beliefs and relationships affected his discoveries. This piece is as much a memory play and a cultural portrait as it is a landmark opera. It is from this spot in history where our audience stands now that we view this man and his achievements; we are characters in this opera, too. Modern popular culture elements will interact with and frame Einstein’s story, which will be told by an ensemble of performers comprised of actors, chorus, dancers and children who appear together throughout the piece. Through the use of still projection and video we’ll explore Einstein’s predecessors, his writings, his influence over our culture and even our own future. This production will follow the opera’s lead and explore Einstein’s personality ... equal parts hardworking, cocky, playful and reverent. The concrete narrative story of his life can turn abstract as quickly as an apple dropping from the tree. The ramifications of physics and our views of them from the present can pop up suddenly, both onstage and on screen. Normal action can suddenly turn to dance, just as Einstein’s theories were a form of art in their own right. Instrumentalists will be onstage and involved in the action. Our main character was able to see space and time in a whole new way, and we’ll explore that on the stage, sometimes using live video of the performance itself.”

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Making Early Opera Sing

By James Bash

One of the major recent trends in opera has been the resurgence of operas written before the time of Mozart. The gems of Monteverdi, Gluck, Handel and others are being dusted, polished and displayed, dazzling opera fans across North America. A handful of companies — such as Toronto’s Opera Atelier or Washington, D.C.’s Opera Lafayette — specialize in this repertoire. But just as mainstream opera companies have become more adventurous in programming works of the 20th and 21st centuries, they are also bringing older works to the attention of their audiences.

Any opera production requires a number of decisions. Regardless of whether an opera was written four centuries or four years ago, companies must consider how they wish to approach casting, scenery, costumes, movement and more. Today’s opera audiences can choose from productions ranging from scholarly period recreations to modern interpretations employing cutting-edge technology.

When it comes to realization of scores, early operas present particular challenges for mainstream opera companies. These operas can differ sharply from standard repertoire in terms of size and makeup of ensemble and style of playing. They may call for obsolete instruments and voice types, specialized improvisatory skills, and shifting relationships between singers, instrumentalists and conductor.

The Orchestra

While producing companies, to a certain extent, begin with a blank stage when they think about the physical aspects of a production, the musical scaffolding — in the form of the company’s regular orchestra — is usually already in place.

When Christopher Mattaliano became Portland Opera’s general director, he quickly decided to inject Baroque opera into the company’s repertoire. In 2006, Portland Opera’s Studio Artists performed Monteverdi’s *The Return of Ulysses*. The company produced Handel’s *Rodelinda* on its main stage earlier this year.

“We are fortunate to have the Portland Baroque Orchestra in this city,” noted Mattaliano. “We brought in some of their period experts for *Rodelinda*.

We would’ve used some for *The Return of Ulysses* the previous year but the scheduling didn’t work out, because our production conflicted with their *Messiah* concerts.”

Since the *Rodelinda* production augmented the house orchestra with Baroque instrumentalists, Mattaliano felt it was crucial to have conductor George Manahan on the podium. During his years as music director of New York City Opera, Manahan has led the company’s standard opera orchestra in revivals of a number of Baroque works.



Although Manahan brought significant experience in conveying period style to modern musicians, he advocated the inclusion of Baroque specialists in the continuo section.

Fortunately, Portland Opera's orchestra agreement allowed this. "In the contract with our house orchestra, if there is a need for specialists, we can bring them in," said Mattaliano. "With the right conductor you can make everything seamless."



Hz and period orchestras tune to 415 Hz or 430 Hz. Yet even though strings, harpsichord and chamber organ can be tuned up or down, the woodwinds are centered on a specific key; so period woodwinds won't be able to match up to the higher pitch of a modern orchestra. Even if you transposed the music, people would have to play in awkward keys."

Walker feels one of the best solutions is an orchestra that plays on modern instruments with Baroque bows. Baroque bows are lighter

than modern bows, and with them the string section can approximate a period sound. "With appropriate coaching," he said, "I have found that many modern ensembles are more than willing to change their sound."

The issue of vibrato and non-vibrato is another stylistic question. Michael Beattie, a Boston-based conductor and harpsichordist, has found that most modern ensembles he has worked with have enjoyed exploring new sounds and styles.

"A lot of modern string players are stuck in the idea that their playing must vibrate by default," said Beattie, "rather than using vibrato as a color, or varying the speed of vibrato, which is something that singers might do. It's kind of like asking a violinist to stop thinking about their left hand and to start thinking about their right hand, which is the bow arm. If you can get a modern orchestra excited about rethinking those ideas, then you can have a lot of fun."

Violinist Gregory Ewer is a member of both the Oregon Symphony and of the Portland Baroque Orchestra. Besides his modern violin, Ewer plays a Matthias Kloz that was made in the 1720s, which he keeps strung with gut strings.

"With the heavier, modern conventional violin, you can have more vertical relationship with the strings, so you can press down harder," explained Ewer. "With gut strings, the playing is more horizontal. It's almost as if you are running your finger over the perimeter of a wineglass. If you press down too hard, you won't get a sound. If you have a nice, soft, fast touch, it resonates."

According to Ewer, violinists in modern orchestras use the tip of the bow to play short notes, and they have to be

In March, Portland Opera will present Cavalli's *La Calisto* in a production featuring the company's Young Artists Studio. The performance, which will take place in an alternate venue, will be accompanied by an orchestra consisting entirely of Portland Baroque Orchestra members. PBO's executive director, Thomas Cirillo, who also has a background in opera administration at the Metropolitan Opera and The Santa Fe Opera, has provided invaluable assistance in the planning of the production.

"*La Calisto* presents questions about instrumentation," remarked Cirillo. "It is not set in stone like a Verdi opera. For most operas, you can easily find the instrumentation for a given opera like what the wind counts are and how many percussionists you need. But for 17th-century opera like *Calisto*, that information is not written down anywhere. Then it's best to go to experts."

According to Cirillo, *La Calisto* features a large continuo and requires some instruments that are not used in any other period of music. So, PBO and Portland Opera will import Bruce Dickey, a premier cornetto player who lives in Italy, for this production.

In most cases, opera companies don't have the luxury of assembling an entire period ensemble. Antony Walker, music director of Pittsburgh Opera, has conducted Baroque opera with modern and period ensembles and notes that a hybrid ensemble poses special challenges.

"You can't simply put Baroque players with their period instruments in a modern orchestra without tuning up to the modern pitch," explained Walker. "The resulting sound would be very strange, because modern instruments are tuned to 440

responsible for starting the bow stroke and stopping it, keeping pressure on the string so they don't make extraneous noises.

“But in the Baroque period,” noted Ewer, “in order to achieve shortness, you almost bow in an arc. You start above the string, hit the string and then come off, so it's short and resonant. There's a lot of string crossing.”

Preparing the Performance

Early opera scores are incomplete by design. Singers are expected to ornament vocal lines in a way that both heightens the drama and shows off their particular vocal gifts. Continuo players work from a single line to create a colorful instrumental backdrop that is appropriate for the singer, the production and the venue. Depending on the musicians' comfort level with the style, ornamentation and continuo parts may continue to evolve over the course of rehearsals and even over the course of performances.

According to Walker, the continuo can work with singers in different ways. In a Mozart opera, the rehearsal pianist or harpsichordist usually functions as the continuo, because that person has spent a long time in rehearsal structuring the keyboard improvisations around the dramatic context created in the rehearsals. Things become more complicated when more players come into the continuo mix. For example, some Handel operas may require two harpsichordists, a cello, a bass and a theorbo, and such a continuo would require more coordination from the conductor. It is helpful if these players are able to begin working with the singers during the staging process, in advance of the final orchestral rehearsals.

“What I tend to do with a larger continuo — especially if it isn't a period group — is start rehearsing by conducting the recitatives,” said Walker. “Not every beat, but the gestures: this is a long chord, this a short chord, this is a loud chord,

and so on. After a while I withdraw conducting. Then I can give the first chord of the recit and the continuo players take it from there. Some continuo players like a lot of instruction and help. Others don't want it. So you have to make your rehearsal technique fit accordingly.” Since continuo players often take their cues from the singer, rather than the conductor, it is crucial that they be able to hear the singers. In some cases, this is facilitated by putting the orchestra on the stage; in others, it is possible to raise the level of the pit so that the instrumentalists are closer to the singers.



Walker points out that the more players involved, the trickier it gets to improvise because people begin to step on each other's toes. However, some recitatives are more reliant on theorbo, others on the cello, and others on harpsichord or the bass. In such cases, the instrumentalist featured in the recitative has a license to improvise more freely and the other players take a back seat.

Ornamentation is a subject that fascinates Walker partly because it varied greatly from one country to the next and from century to century. “Although Handel and Rameau wrote at similar times,” he explained, “Rameau doesn't give a lot of room for the florid Italian-styled ornamentation that Handel liked. Rameau's is designed to be graceful and subtle and expressive ornaments. With Handel, large sections of da capos are completely improvised by the singers. And that's a real challenge for conductors.”

Singers

If it is challenging to find a cornetto these days, it is downright impossible to find another important Baroque “instrument” — the castrato voice. Although roles for these artificially-created male sopranos sometimes have been transposed down for modern productions, it is more common for companies

today to cast either countertenors or mezzo-sopranos. Mattaliano has used both countertenors and mezzos, but prefers the mezzo sound.

“There are no recordings of the castrati,” said Mattaliano, “Part of me just doesn’t believe that the countertenor sound is what people heard in the 1700 and 1800s. From the accounts that I’ve read, it’s more like the sound of a dramatic soprano coming out of a male body.”

Brian Dickie, general director of Chicago Opera Theater, takes the opposite tack, preferring countertenors over mezzo-sopranos. “But it depends on the artist and the opera,” said Dickie. “I’ve seen women who are more convincing than men in some of the pants roles. It’s a great mistake to become too pedantic over this issue.”

Collaboration

As opera companies program early opera, they can realize many benefits from working with organizations that have expertise with the period.

Portland has a collaborative environment among administrators, who often see each other through various organizations that hold forums and meetings. “Organizational collaborations really start with people and with administrators sitting down and talking and building relationships with each other, knowing what resources we have to share,” said Cirillo. “I got to know Chris Mattaliano first when we collaborated in 2005 with other arts organizations during a month of Mozart.”

Cirillo and Mattaliano found that they knew many of the same people in the opera world. “Tom’s background made the dialogue between us so smooth because he understands opera,”

said Mattaliano. “We speak a similar language, and that’s especially crucial when it comes to scheduling.”

“If there is a period ensemble in your town, you should meet the people who are involved in it,” said Cirillo. “If not, then you have to do some research about what is available in your community.”



Collaboration also extends to publicity. If a community has an early music scene like Boston’s or Portland’s, the audience for local period ensembles is likely to be intrigued by Baroque opera.

“The Chicago audience is very intelligent and perceptive,” said Dickie. “They are interested in the full range of operatic repertoire, so we’ve had an excellent response to programming Baroque works.”

Final Caueat

While no one suggests that modern approaches should supplant the work of Baroque specialists, productions of early opera by mainstream companies help to acquaint audiences — and artists — with some wonderful masterpieces from the past.

“If you approach Baroque opera from a purist standpoint, it will be difficult to collaborate,” says Mattaliano. “There can be a high level of pretension that can enter discussions when you’re dealing with period music. George Manahan called it ‘Earlier than thou.’ That is, my approach to the Baroque is purer than yours. Some people get too caught up in that sort of thing. Still, you shouldn’t be put off. With the right perspective Baroque opera can be a lot of fun and very rewarding in every way.”



A wide variety of approaches to early opera can be seen on North American stages this season. **Opera Lafayette**, a period ensemble specializing in the French repertoire, will present *Le Déserteur* by Monsigny in early 2009 at both The Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.) and the Frederick P. Rose Hall (New York, NY); their season continues with and Handel’s *L’allegro ed il penseroso* in April. Toronto’s Opera Atelier, a company whose productions draw upon the aesthetics and ideals of the 17th and 18th centuries, will produce Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea* in April.

Last month, **Lyric Opera of Kansas City** presented its first opera by Handel: *Julius Caesar*. Looking ahead, **Florentine Opera** (Milwaukee, WI) will raise the curtain on Handel’s *Semele* in February 2009. **Portland Opera** will present *La Calisto* in March. And this summer, Handel’s *Rinaldo* takes a bow at **Central City Opera**.

Photo credits: Page 22: Chicago Opera Theater’s production of Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea*. Photo by Liz Lauren. Page 23: Jennifer Aylmer as the title character in Portland Opera’s production of Handel’s *Rodelinda*. Photo by Corey Weaver/Portland Opera. Page 24: Countertenor Tai Oney as Athamas and Lisa Saffer as the title character with the ensemble in Opera Boston’s production of Handel’s *Semele*. Photo by Clive Grainger.



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All the World's a Stage Set

By Thomas May



The set for Washington National Opera's production of Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, designed and directed by John Pascoe.

For Shakespeare's audience, an imagination-fueled "Muse of fire" sufficed to transform the bare "wooden O" of his Globe Theatre stage into kingdoms and battlefields. But opera has always had a propensity to rely on striking visual elements to reinforce the overall experience — even before Wagner's grandiose attempt to transport his audience "into the inspired state of clairvoyance in which the visible stage picture becomes the authentic facsimile of life itself."

Where Wotan had the giants Fasolt and Fafner to make his dream castle materialize, today's scene shops perform the amazing alchemy that gives final, physical shape to what the director and design team envision — whether they're aiming to conjure

Verdi's ancient Egypt, the Christmas Eve bustle at Puccini's *Café Momus* or the New Mexico desert in John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*. "What we do," says Bill Burbach, one of the co-owners of Portland-based **ACME Scenic & Display**, "is like the engineering behind an architect's dream that makes it a reality." Some opera companies construct their own scenery, but many rely on external scene shops. Whether these shops work with a broad range of clients across the entertainment industry or specialize in opera, their experience and knowledge regarding the latest construction techniques and materials allows them to offer a number of options for transforming designers' visions into reality. Opera companies that approach these relationships as creative collaborations, rather than vendor/

customer transactions, may be able to realize a more compelling final product, as well as reduced costs over the long term.

Michael Moore, manager of **Seattle Opera's Scenic Studios**, points out that opera scenery has come a long way since he started in the field three decades ago. "We were renting painted-muslin fabric from Italy and would build framing to hang it. I've watched it go from that to computer-controlled hydraulics. Thirty years ago scenery was still suggestive of structures and backgrounds, but the trend has been for far more literal effects and structures, enabled by increased technical complexity."

Now, a significant part of the budget for any new production will be allocated to realizing the scenic

dimension. You get a glimpse of this in the lists of fun facts typically seen in press releases for a premiere. For example, when **Ravenswood Studio**, a commercial scenic fabricator in the Chicago area, constructed a new *Aida* for Florida Grand Opera and various co-producers (designed by Allen Charles Klein), the materials included over 15,000 feet of tube steel, 141 gallons of paint (as well as 27 gallons of gold paint) and 649 sheets of plywood.

And those are only the raw materials, to which the studio gives convincing form in a complex process of detailed carving, painting, sculpture, carpentry, metalwork, engineering and construction. The scenic studio is like a *Gesamtkunstwerk* itself, pooling an extraordinary array of arts and technical skills that must be orchestrated to fulfill the producing company's artistic vision — all the while keeping grounded in the reality of budgetary limits. Just as singers and conductors bring their unique outlooks to bear in performance, the scenic aspect — now more than ever, given the visual saturation of our culture — helps to stamp an audience's experience of a particular production.

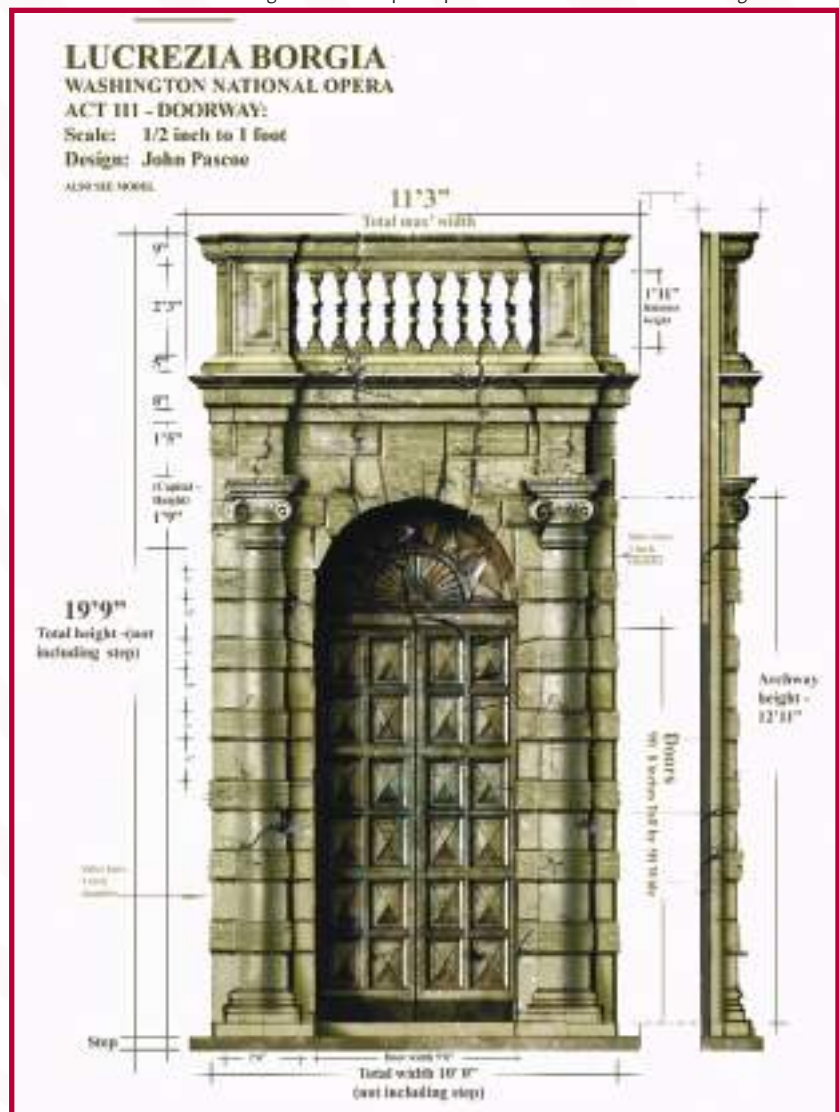
In and Out of House

Seattle Opera's Scenic Studio of course builds sets for the company's own new productions, but it's also heavily involved in constructing designs for other clients. From its large converted warehouse just outside Seattle, the studio does about 60 percent of its work for outside opera companies, as well as ballet and shows ranging from Broadway to regional theater. Some other scene shops that serve as significant vendors beyond handling the needs of their own houses include the scenic studios attached to San Diego Opera, New Orleans Opera and Utah Opera.

The most obvious advantage of using the resources of other company shops is that, as Moore puts it, "We are aware of the kinds of challenges opera companies will face since we're dealing with those all the time on our own sets. If it's a production of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, for example, we know the time constraint of engineering a scene change since music already exists for that. As a performing company, we are actively engaged in solving precisely the same questions and issues as are our client companies."

Moreover, opera company-based scene shops tend to have a guild-like longevity factor among their workers. Many remain for large parts of a career, contributing to a collective pool of practical experience that can build on past solutions. (As the old Sid Caesar joke goes, "The guy who invented the wheel was an idiot. The guy who invented the other three, he was the genius!") Alan Rusnak, who is resident designer at **New Orleans Opera Scenic Studio**, points out that there's literally a "generational history" of workers (including a

John Pascoe's sketch for Washington National Opera's production of Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*.



painter who represents the third generation of his family to work at the shop, which opened in the late 1950s).

At the same time, large commercial scene shops like Ravenswood and ACME typically serve a wildly eclectic client list, with opera and theater as just part of a larger picture that includes exhibit spaces, restaurants, TV show sets and other industrial customers from Nike to Häagen-Dazs ice cream. As opera companies compete for attention in an increasingly crowded cultural marketplace, these shops may bring fresh ideas about materials and technology for the stage. “So much of our work in the corporate world,” according to ACME’s Burbach, “is what we can bring to the opera world. All three of our owners have theatrical experience and have come to see that everyone is an audience. We bring to both our corporate and opera clients the sensibility that it’s not what you see, it’s what you perceive.”

The Montreal-based **Scène Éthique** has developed an expertise in building sets with unusual structural and mechanical requirements through their work for Cirque du Soleil. This in turn has led to a close association with the avant-garde director and designer Robert Lepage’s Ex Machina company. Ronald Morissette, who heads corporate development at Scène Éthique, refers to Lepage’s production of *The Rake’s Progress*, set in Texas, Hollywood and Las Vegas. “We had to build a heavily raked stage that could be set up quickly, since this was a touring production, and that could incorporate large open pits while maintaining its structural integrity to accommodate a big cast.”

Even companies that are accustomed to being entirely self-sufficient, with long traditions of building everything in-house, are finding that new hybrids are becoming the order of the day. San Francisco Opera’s director of

production, Drew Landmesser, explains that the needs of each production are so variable that the house shop is always considering how best to adapt. “We’ve been doing more and more work as hybrids with outside help,” he says. For this season’s world premiere of the Stewart Wallace-Amy Tan opera *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, the special materials required for the unit set (translucent fiberglass that shape-shifted according to the lighting) led the shop to contract out to Adirondack Studios in upstate New York, which has also designed for hotels and even amusement parks.

Setting Budgets

Companies typically send designs to a number of scene shops, which respond with a bid — the amount for which each shop could build the scenery. Moore suggests the process is fundamentally flawed: “The traditional model seldom allows enough time for a thorough examination of a full-stage set, and it separates ‘cost of scenery’ from ‘on-stage costs.’” Moore recommends that opera companies spend a little more in the shop examining all aspects of the scenery. “Instead of hacking down from a menu of scenic items, look at the whole picture from the start of the design process to where the set is sitting in a warehouse after the show. Companies need to establish a relationship of trust and name their budget outright, so everyone can work together to develop a product for that budget.”

In addition to the cost of the scenery itself, producing companies should assess the costs of transportation and storage, as well as the number of crew required for scene changes or changeovers, since savings realized by cutting corners on construction or materials may quickly be lost when extra stagehands are required to wrestle scenery on and off the stage. Companies should also consider the

intended lifespan of the set; while some productions are not intended for long-term use, others are expected to last through many revivals and rentals. In some cases, greater initial construction costs can result in a net gain due to reduced maintenance expenses.

Jared H. Porter, technical director of Utah Opera, has been involved in the work of **Utah Opera’s Scenic Studio**. In terms of costs savings, he points out that, “Quite often when you’re building a show, you get more familiar with it than the company itself is, as you turn the designs into actual constructions. And we can find creative solutions to saving, for example, when we realize there are 13 extra feet of a wall that no one will see. We never want to dictate solutions, but from a shop standpoint are happy to make suggestions that will help keep the set within the client’s budget.”

Often a simple substitution of materials can make a significant difference. Burbach refers to a recent *Aida* that ACME fabricated to Catherine Ferguson’s design for Opera Omaha. The original design called for wooden columns, which would have meant higher transportation costs. “We ended up using stretch fabrics over a metal frame. This is material we’d been introduced to using from our work with Michael Curry [designer of the puppets for Disney’s Epcot Center]. We try to think through the whole process: scenery is just one part, since you also have to include shipping costs, ease of setup (the cost of crews in the theater). Thinking ahead like that is what will save you more in the long run.”

Richard Walthers, marketing director at Ravenswood, emphasizes that “we do everything we can to bring the designer’s vision to life as accurately as we can — so we usually don’t change the design from an aesthetic

viewpoint.” However, in the process of engineering and making computer-aided drawings, “we are always looking for ways to improve how the sets go together to reduce time needed for set-up and scene changes. To address this, we innovated a system of cane pins and hinges that make assembly fast and easy and eliminate the need for bolting set pieces together. During the fabrication process we are always looking for engineering improvements, and we routinely incorporate them into our work.” As an example, he refers to Washington National Opera’s *Lucrezia Borgia* this past November. The new production was designed and directed by John Pascoe — a polymath artist who both directs and designs his productions (including

sets and costumes). “In one scene he wanted the very tall brick walls to crack and bleed,” says Walthers, “so we developed a solution of using transparent thin wall as a substrate for the brick and mortar. This not only facilitated the aesthetic goal but also had the technical benefit of making these huge walls lighter than they normally would have been.”

Sometimes, though, compromises are out of the question. As both director of production for **San Diego Opera** and head of its scenic studio, Ronald Allen is in the unusual position of handling both sides of the equation. Last year the company recreated the old Schneider-Siemssen Met production of *Tannhäuser* — and in the process discovered that cost overruns

would be inevitable. Allen decided that pulling back on the design was not an option. “We needed another \$75,000 beyond what we’d budgeted to get the product we wanted. So I had to look for ways to save in other areas from other productions, but it was well worth the money in terms of the reception we got.”

Designing Success

Ideally, the designer joins the scene shop and the producing company in the collaborative dialogue. Pascoe has become well acquainted, through a long career, with getting exactly what is necessary to bring his vision to the stage. “One needs to always have a very clear idea of what is the most important aspect of a scene and stick to a way of creating that without any

La Monnaie/De Munt’s (Brussels) production of Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*, built by Scène Éthique. Photo by Johan Jacobs.



compromise whatsoever, but let other less important details go. The modern concept of ‘Less is more’ is incredibly helpful in this area.”

Equally important, as far as Pascoe is concerned, is ongoing, clear communication both with the tech department of the producing company and with the scene shop builders. Pascoe refers to highly specific scale models he provided to Ravenswood, whose crew built his sets for last year’s world premiere of David DiChiera’s *Cyrano* at Michigan Opera Theatre and the Washington Opera *Lucrezia*. He gave his colleagues at Ravenswood a

rendering of the spooky doorway from which *Lucrezia* emerges for Donizetti’s gothic climax that explained “in tremendous detail aspects of the half-inch scale model that were impossible to show in the model.”

In turn, Pascoe finds that the expertise and advice of scene shops can inspire new ideas for his own work: “In all areas of my work I am inspired by what other people with whom I am collaborating bring to the table. This is true as much for scene shops as it is in the rehearsal process with both singers and conductor. We all talk about the project continuously

and basically it is safe to say that I continuously feed off other people’s input.”

Going Green

In the past, concerns about toxic paint or junked sets to be carted off to landfill after final stage strike may not have been on the radar. But thanks to expanding environmental awareness, people are beginning to raise questions about standard practices. Ravenswood Studio in particular has been in the vanguard, going to the length of including a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)-certified member on their staff.

Richard Walthers notes that “if people want to build green scenery, it has to be a collaborative effort, starting from the original design. This isn’t like sorting your cans and plastic and paper at home. Building and recycling an entire opera set entails a great level of complexity.”

Indeed, collaboration is just as much a keyword for shifting to more eco-friendly practices as it is in ensuring desired artistic and budgetary results. And in an ever-more-threatening economic climate, the increased cost of some greener choices can weaken their appeal. “Many times the clients don’t care and just want to put the show on,” Burbach says. “The whole world is waking up to this issue, but it isn’t going to happen overnight.” His scenic studio, ACME, has actually built its facility on a brownfield in eco-aware Portland, but systemic changes will require multiple sustained efforts.

Ravenswood Studio’s execution of a design by Allen Moyer for Puccini’s *La bohème*. Photo by Pat Rita Photography.



Greater economic insecurity can actually sensitize decision-makers to the virtues of recycling. “I have sometimes taken old scenery or costumes from shows that can be 30 to 40 years old and found a new way of reusing them so that they look new and exciting,” says Pascoe. “These days with both the economy and green issues being at the top of everyone’s list of worries, my ability to successfully reuse things and basically make a new ‘silk purse’ out of an old ‘sow’s ear’ is considered in the business to be one of my most vital qualities.”

Moore concurs that this sort of recycling is actually an old-fashioned concept as far as the opera world is concerned: “Unlike a regional theater that produces a set and cannibalizes it as best it can, opera companies produce one and then rent it for years — in that sense we recycle in a very useful way.” Even after a production has outlived its own life, according to Utah Opera’s Porter, new potential life can await some sets. “Scenery is hard to recycle as a whole, but you can use parts. Sometimes we’ll look at sets on the East Coast that are being retired and that haven’t spent much time in the West. We can purchase those and repurpose them.”

At Scène Éthique, Morissette says, “We research what is appealing to the recycling market as opposed to trying to find someone to use it afterwards. We can meet with the production designers and technical directors ahead of time to discuss slight changes that might be made to keep the life cycle of the materials in mind and have more easily recycled elements, while still respecting the artistic concept of the design.”

Mutual Benefits

With so much creativity involved in the actual production of opera sets,

all sides involved are in a position to gain from each other. Because of its high-tech background, according to Morissette, Scène Éthique has been able to advance stage engineering in ways that not only save costs but enable artists like Robert Lepage to realize their unconventional ways of using the theater space. John David Peters, lead carpenter for San Diego Scenic Studio, admits that working with a wide range of designers can make things more challenging. “But you need those guys because they are the ones who have the vision and who make you stretch the limits of your own understanding. They all bring something to the table that whets your appetite and makes you want to get involved.”

“This is not a one-way street,” Seattle Scenic Studio’s Moore emphasizes. “The client company also brings direct benefit to the shop’s parent organization, both in the area of greater cumulative experience and, more importantly, in the retention of experienced professional staff by maintaining an ongoing, full-time scenic studio. In short, more work means a better scene shop is available for all those who use it.”

Michael Shapiro, president of Ravenswood, singles out what is essentially fun about building sets. “There may be common elements, but each one tends to be different and plays with space in a different way. We’ll notice when work is happening on a big set, the guys will bring their friends and family over to watch. It becomes a big part of our lives for that period, and we enjoy being made to feel like we’re part of the production.”

— Thomas May writes frequently about music and the arts.



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Image from Gianni - designed by John Pascoe

The NEA Opera Honors

On October 31, 2008, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) recognized the recipients of the NEA Opera Honors, the first individual NEA honorific to be launched in more than a quarter century. Carlisle Floyd, Richard Gaddes, James Levine and Leontyne Price were honored at a special concert at the Harman Center for the Arts in Washington, D.C.

The NEA Opera Honors Awards Concert, produced by OPERA America and Washington National Opera, was hosted by mezzo-soprano Susan Graham. Performances by soprano Sondra Radvanovsky, bass-baritone Richard Bernstein, and members and alumni of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program were accompanied by the Washington National Opera Orchestra. In addition to these performances, video tributes (available online at www.arts.gov) brought the achievements of the honorees to life. Presenters of the awards included NEA Chairman Dana Gioia; Marc A. Scorca, OPERA America president and CEO; Plácido Domingo, Washington National Opera general director; and Ms. Graham.

Members of OPERA America's Ambassador Circle were joined by guests from the boards of The Santa Fe Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Washington National Opera for various events of "The American Singer Weekend," planned by OPERA America in conjunction with the NEA Opera Honors. This multi-day exploration of opera in America included a master class with members of the Maryland Opera Studio, the Washington National Opera production of *Lucrezia Borgia*, and private tours of the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress and the National Portrait Gallery. Following the Awards Concert, a broad spectrum of industry leaders gathered for a celebratory dinner hosted by OPERA America. 🍷

Photo credits from top left: Leontyne Price with Lucky Roosevelt, Betty Sams and Elizabeth Eveillard. Photo by Russell Hirson and courtesy of Washington National Opera. • Lynne Horpedahl, Richard Gaddes and Paul Horpedahl. Photo by Reflections Photography/Washington, D.C. • Erie Mills and Carlisle Floyd. Photo by Reflections Photography/Washington, DC. • Richard Gaddes, Leontyne Price, Carlisle Floyd and members of the Washington National Opera Orchestra at the NEA 2008 Opera Honors. Photo by Henry Grossman. • Washington National Opera Domingo-Cafritz Young Artists. Photo by Russell Hirshon, courtesy of the National Endowment for the Arts. • Soprano Sondra Radvanovsky pays tribute to Leontyne Price. Photo by Russell Hirshon and courtesy of the National Endowment for the Arts. • Soprano Aundi Marie Moore pays tribute to Carlisle Floyd. Photo by Russell Hirshon and courtesy of the National Endowment for the Arts. • Leontyne Price, Carlisle Floyd and Richard Gaddes at the NEA 2008 Opera Honors. Photo by Henry Grossman.







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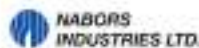
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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2007 ANNUAL FIELD REPORT

BY LARRY BOMBACK AND ANTHONY CEKAY

OPERA America's Annual Field Report (AFR) is based on the Professional Opera Survey (POS) that member opera companies complete each year, submitting details of their annual financial, performance and attendance activity. The 2007 AFR covers the fiscal year that ended during calendar year 2007, and includes data reaching back to 2003, summarizing key facts and trends in the United States and Canada.

OVERVIEW

In most respects, 2007 was an encouraging year for the opera field. Of the companies surveyed, 68% reported balanced budgets or surpluses. Since 2003, revenue growth of the U.S. and Canadian Constant Sample Groups has outpaced that of expenses. In companies with budgets over \$10 million (Level 1) and companies with budgets under \$3 million dollars (Levels 3 and 4), businesses grew at roughly twice the rate of inflation. This appears to be the result of a notable increase in income generated at the box office and significant growth in individual giving, the primary source of contributed revenue for most professional companies.

It must be noted that for most companies, FY07 ended on or before August 31, 2007, essentially coinciding with the culmination of one of the greatest bull markets in recent history. After the market reached an all-time high in early October 2007, a precipitous decline returned the market to inflation-adjusted levels not seen since the late 1990s. FY08 and FY09 Professional Company Member data will likely reveal at least some of the financial and operational effects of the economic turmoil. The 2007 AFR and POS indicate companies' particular strengths and weaknesses as they entered a challenging economy.

UNITED STATES

Across the U.S., the breakdown between contributed and earned revenue remains roughly 50/50. Over the past five seasons, individual giving has remained the largest source of contributed revenue in the U. S., and in general, the smaller the company, the greater the reliance on individual gifts.

Governmental support continues to pale in comparison to Canada. Only 8% of contributed revenue to U.S. companies came from public institutions in FY07, compared to 38% in Canada.

Revenues earned at the box office rose by nearly 10% from 2003 to 2007. Over those five seasons, box office revenues accounted for 37% of all income. Investments and other sources of earned revenue accounted for 11% of income totals.

On the expense side, the only department to see significant budget cuts over the past five years was education, which, on average, saw its direct expenses decline by over 25%. Production costs saw the largest percentage increase, and on the personnel side, more and more companies allocated monies to singer training and young artist development programs.

LEVEL 1

Level 1 companies, excluding the Metropolitan Opera, have seen a 5% increase in attendance over the past five seasons while box office revenues increased by 14%, the significant disparity a result of rising ticket costs. (Given its size, the Met is not included in Level 1 analysis; its operating budget, which accounts for roughly one third of the financial totals in this entire survey, distorts averages and presents trends based largely on its own activity rather than that of the field.)

More than ever, Level 1 companies are relying on income generated from investment portfolios and endowments to support operating expenses. In 2007, 22% of Level 1 earned income came from investment gains, versus 13% in 2003.

Both development and marketing departments have increased their productivity ratios (the number of dollars generated by each dollar spent on revenue-generating activities) over the past three years, a notable achievement. However, with rising production costs, program coverage (the percentage of artistic expenses covered at the box office) has remained consistent for the past five seasons.

LEVEL 2

Since 2003, Level 2 companies, those with budgets ranging between \$3 million and \$10 million, have been growing at a rate that lags behind inflation, and as a group have shown, on average, net losses in each year.

Attendance has dropped 17% in five seasons' time while the average ticket price has risen 32%, contributing to a 7.5% decline in box office revenue from 2003 to 2007. Income from investments more than tripled during this time, and in FY07, the values of the Level 2 companies' investment portfolios surpassed their budgets, a healthy indicator of a greater focus on long-term giving.

On average, Level 2 companies have devoted 12% of their budgets to marketing over the past five seasons, but have seen a 13% decline in that department's productivity. Conversely, the development department has been allocated, on average, approximately 10% of total budgeted expenses, but has shown a productivity *gain* of almost 20%.

LEVEL 3

Level 3 companies reported strong non-box-office earned income, suggesting healthy revenue streams in other categories such as advertising, concessions, merchandise and subleases.

Development departments in Level 3 companies have grown the most over the past five seasons and may be a factor in closing accumulated deficit gaps. On average, net assets are rising for Level 3 companies, but rates of increase are still trailing annual expenses.

LEVEL 4

Negative unrestricted net assets in both FY06 and FY07 reveal that expenses are growing faster than revenues. Attendance, however, has increased by 15% since 2003, despite the largest rise in ticket prices of any level. The fact that ticket prices have not had a negative effect on attendance is promising news; however, Level 4 companies still report,

on average, a nearly 75% reliance on non-box-office income, and core artistic expenses are more than twice that of annual ticket revenue.

Based on departmental expense allocations, Level 4 companies appear to be employing noticeably more marketing and development personnel in 2007 than in 2003.

CANADA

On average, Canadian companies have shown net income in four of the last five seasons, as revenues grew about 1.5 times as fast as expenses. Much of that revenue is the result of significant governmental support at both the provincial and federal levels. In fact, public sector support over the past five seasons has grown at a rate almost three times that of Canadian inflation. (Unfortunately, at the end of this past summer, the Canadian government announced a series of budget cuts for arts and cultural institutions that will likely be reflected in FY09 and FY10 Canadian company data).

Box office revenues have grown at an astounding rate — 79% over five seasons — reflecting increases in single ticket and subscription sales. Subscription renewal rates have increased as well from 2003 to 2007. Indeed, unlike U.S. companies in recent years, Canadian companies have shown greater marketing productivity trends than development productivity trends.

FY08 AND BEYOND

The opera field now finds itself in both exciting and challenging times. A volatile economy has already forced some member companies to lay off staff, cancel performances and, in one case, close down operations altogether. At the same time, *The Metropolitan Opera Live in HD* transmissions and similar projects from other member companies have the combined potential to spread the art form to a broader, younger and more diverse audience than ever before. Future Annual Field Reports will track the financial and operational impacts of these forces. 📊

The Annual Field Report is sent to all members of OPERA America.
To obtain additional copies of the report, please contact Paul Gosselin at PGosselin@operaamerica.org.

GOVERNANCE AND THE ARTISTIC PRODUCT

BY KELLEY ROURKE

Every opera production is a complex machine comprising many moving, delicate and unpredictable parts, so planning a successful opera season is a piece of almost impossibly sophisticated engineering. In addition to encyclopedic knowledge of operatic repertoire and creative and performing artists, season planning requires technical and financial savvy, intimate acquaintance with company strengths and weaknesses, and an understanding of what excites audience members — current and prospective.

What are the appropriate roles for trustees and staff in this complicated process? Kevin Smith, president and CEO of **The Minnesota Opera**, offers a concise formula: “It is the board’s responsibility to hire staff and set policy. If they don’t like what staff members are doing, they fire them.”

This typical scenario, in which the board sets policy and staff make programming decisions within that policy, seems relatively straightforward. In reality, the lines are sometimes blurred as staff and board work together to make opera a vibrant, viable enterprise within their community. How can stakeholders most effectively work together to establish and maintain a company’s artistic identity?

Articulating Artistic Ideals

Artistic policies and philosophies are as different as the companies they guide. In some cases, the only articulated requirement is that season plans present a reasonable, balanced budget. Other companies are bound by statements about company values and/or artistic goals.

“It is not, of course, so simple as applying a formula,” says Evans Mirageas, artistic director of **Cincinnati Opera**. “However, we do have a starting point — a framework for our creative discussions which is: 3 plus 1. Three operas from the standard repertoire and one piece we call a ‘stretch.’ This is an opera that is new or unfamiliar to most in our audience. Last summer, we presented *Florencia en el Amazonas*, our first opera in Spanish.” For the standard repertoire selections, according to Mirageas, the company looks for new ways to present familiar operas. Examples include *Lucie de Lammermoor*, Donizetti’s French version of *Lucia*, or Lyric Opera of Chicago’s Magritte-inspired production of *The Barber of Seville*.

“Once we’ve pulled together a possible season, penciling in artists and productions, we ask ourselves, is the overall

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feel consistent with our brand? Does it speak to our guiding principles of excellence, diversity, education, exploration and fiscal responsibility? Are there opportunities to continue our practice of developing partnerships with local arts and cultural entities?

In conjunction with our 2009 *Spanish Season*, for example, a number of other arts organizations are programming Spanish-themed productions, concerts and exhibits, to help us celebrate Spanish culture and the Hispanic and Latino communities in Cincinnati.

“It is the role of the company’s artistic director to lead the process for determining the company’s repertoire. So, I work alongside a team that includes our general director, production director, marketing director and director of artistic operations. This means we are deliberately embracing an interdisciplinary, holistic approach to artistic planning. The idea that an opera season springs fully-formed from the head of one individual is alien to how we operate.”

The Minnesota Opera does not use an underlying formula when planning seasons; instead, company leaders think in terms of an overarching philosophy. “Opera has a variety of components — musical, dramatic, physical, visual,” says Smith. “Is it your philosophy that you want to raise all of these at an equal rate, or do you begin by focusing on the musical? What is your point of view? What makes you different from any other opera company? What we have discovered over time is that if you have a point of view, you do better work.” Thus, the company’s artistic choices are governed by an artistic philosophy inspired by the idea of *bel canto*, stated as follows: “*Bel canto* values, which emphasize intense emotional expression supported by exquisite technique, inform every aspect of the company’s programs, from repertoire selection, casting and visual design to education and artist training.”

The company’s articulated emphasis on expressive singing provides a context for many other decisions, according to Smith. “We believe the physical components have to be there in a meaningful way to support the singing, but, for instance, you might have to reject a fantastic scenic design because the rake is too steep to allow an effective performance. You don’t put a costume on someone that distracts from their performance, that restricts their ability to breathe, or that makes them look fatter than they are.”

“When it comes time to spend money you don’t have, you need to understand the company perspective,” continues Smith. “If you rent a show and a costume is not working for your principal soprano, you have to do something about it. When producing opera, you are dealing with such an

“The ability to take risks is the lifeblood of any arts organization.”

unwieldy thing. If you know what’s most important to you from the outset, that can guide your decisions.”

Anthony Freud, who became general director of **Houston Grand Opera** in 2005, made sure he fully understood and supported the company’s philosophy before committing to the position. “When I was approached about the job, I was very keen at the interview stage to ask about the board’s ambitions for the company. I was forthcoming about my own ideas, but I was also very concerned to ensure a harmonious match between the board’s ambitions and my own views. It seems such a fundamental, significant issue in which a general director and a board have to be of one mind.”

When Freud took the helm, staff and board worked together on a strategic plan that resulted in a freshly articulated mission statement: “Houston Grand Opera is recognized nationally and internationally for world-beating artistic excellence and innovation. HGO enjoys dynamic, proactive and deepening relationships with the stakeholders, constituencies and communities which it serves. Our company exists to contribute to the cultural enrichment of the city of Houston and the nation by producing and performing world-class opera and creating a diverse, innovative and balanced program of performances, events, community and education projects which reaches the widest possible public.”

The new mission reaffirmed the company’s long-standing emphasis on innovation and community engagement, providing a clear rationale for the commitment of significant company resources to *The Refuge*, a large-scale community oratorio that told the journey stories of immigrants to Houston from Africa, Vietnam, Mexico, Pakistan, India, Central America and the Soviet-era Jewish community.

The mission also grounds initiatives like the company’s five-year series of operas by Benjamin Britten. “When I introduced the idea of a series by Britten, I took a little time to explain to the board why Britten, why these operas, how they relate to the repertory,” says Freud. “We are looking at five-year time spans related to developing the audience, taking them on a journey, finding new ways of engaging them. That, too, is an inherent part of our mission.”

“Those who are responsible for the artistic program need to be free to devise plans to think in terms of long-term

repertoire development, long-term artistic development,” continues Freud. “I am always very conscious of explaining how new proposals relate to the mission and strategic plan.”

Presenting the Season

“There is nothing more complicated or sophisticated than planning a season,” says Smith. In addition to providing a balanced, appealing program for audience members, opera professionals must consider the availability of appropriate singers, strengths and weaknesses of the resident orchestra and chorus, technical capabilities, budgets and more. “There are zillions of reasons to do or not do a particular piece. It is not something that can be done by committee, and definitely not by board committee. That’s what you hire staff to do.”

While all companies represented in this article were clear that professional staff are responsible for season plans, they also emphasized the importance of ongoing consensus-building, dialogue and transparency.

“Dale Johnson, our artistic director, presents the season and articulates the vision to the board,” says Smith. “Afterward, he leads a discussion. We really encourage dialogue in a public setting. Trustees need to know what to expect and why to expect it. They need to be able to talk about the art in a functional way. It is important to give the board an opportunity to know and understand and spend time with the art, because that’s their payoff for service.”

“Dale has been exemplary as far as presenting the current season, as well as sharing plans for a season or two past that,” says Jane Confer, The Minnesota Opera’s board chair. “He is very good at opening a dialogue with trustees and explaining

why he makes choices.” This was particularly important in a challenging season like 2007-2008, which included Verdi’s *A Masked Ball*, Rossini’s *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, Gounod’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Keiser’s *The Fortunes of King Croesus*, and Dvorák’s *Rusalka*. “We did not have one of the top 10 operas to anchor the season, and some of the board members had questions. Dale was very forthcoming about the challenges, but we not only sold our tickets to plan, we ended in the black.”

“Our bylaws actually specify that the general director selects repertoire and artistic programming ‘after consultation with the executive committee,’” says Timothy O’Leary, general director of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. He presented the repertoire, artistic personnel and programming for 2010 at the September 2008 executive committee meeting. While the board does not approve the selections, O’Leary notes, they are responsible for approving the budget, so they might raise questions if artistic plans seemed financially questionable.

“At Cincinnati Opera, Evans presents the season to the artistic planning committee prior to announcing it to the executive committee, full board and the community,” according to trustee Fred Good. “When Evans and his team — who are fully in charge of this process — have prepared a season that they feel is artistically balanced, meets our brand philosophy, is affordable, and will sell tickets, it is brought to the committee. The role of the trustees is two-fold: to act as a sounding board and to assure that the season meets the artistic policy developed by the staff and board. If an opera is unfamiliar, the staff provides musical excerpts, a synopsis and other information, usually in advance of the meeting.

Only once in the last dozen years has there been an objection to a selection, and that was because another local arts organization was doing something similar. Once a season is approved by this committee, the staff prepares a detailed budget for vetting by the finance and executive committees.”

“Cincinnati Opera’s artistic planning committee works because of mutual respect — the board for what the staff does, and the staff for the board’s opinions,” says General Director Patricia Beggs. “The growth and success of Cincinnati Opera in recent years is due to the incredible investment and involvement of our board. When the board feels engaged because they are part of the process, they become our greatest investors and advocates.”

“We are deliberately embracing an interdisciplinary, holistic approach to artistic planning. The idea that an opera season springs fully-formed from the head of one individual is alien to how we operate.”

The Role of Committees

Some companies have committees that guide artistic policy. At Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, the Artistic Excellence Committee provides feedback to staff around important issues, as when the company first began considering the use of projected titles for its English-only productions. “The company not only had to consider the needs and requests of audience members, but also the philosophical question of whether this move would undermine the mission-driven policy of performing in the language of the audience,” says O’Leary. “It was an important discussion, and the committee provided invaluable perspective. Once the decision was made, the committee then helped make sure that the board and various constituencies would understand and support it.” More recently, the committee was convened as the company looked for a new artistic director. “While the general director is empowered to hire the artistic director, the existence of an Artistic Excellence Committee was particularly valuable on such a momentous occasion. They had a clear role to advise the general director — without having the responsibility to make the final decision.”

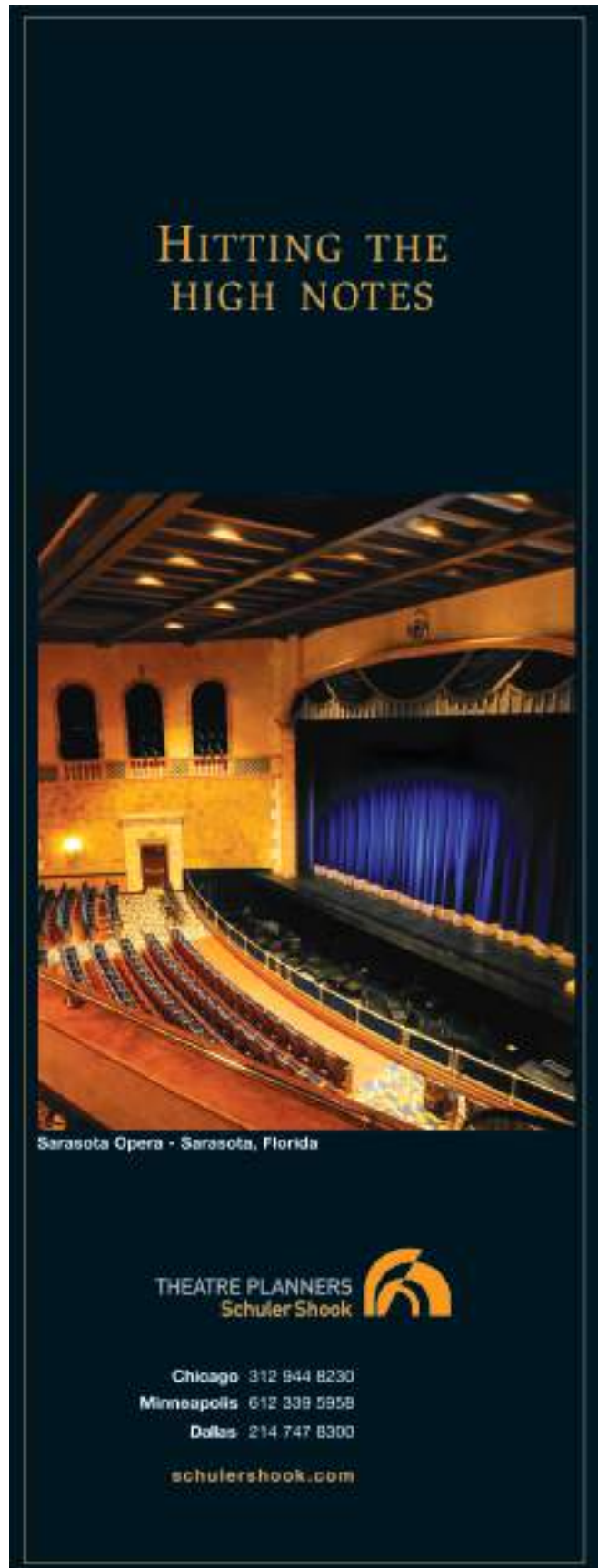
“We have an Artistic Policy Committee, which is a very different thing from a repertoire committee,” says Smith. “The committee does not approve repertoire; instead, they are involved in policy and artistic goals. We have a lot of dialogue about short- and long-term goals, such as the development of the chorus and orchestra, the physical quality of productions.”

The Artistic Planning Committee is considered one of the plum assignments at Cincinnati Opera, according to Good. Although the final season selection is ultimately the job of professional staff, the committee is engaged in ongoing dialogue with the artistic director and members of the planning team. “What adds to the success of this arrangement is the knowledge of the committee members,” Good says. Many have specific training in opera, and in addition to holding season tickets at major opera houses across the country, they travel to see productions all over the world.

“Our trustees are willing to pack their bags and travel to see opera,” says Beggs, who along with Mirageas, accompanies board members on a number of trips each year. “We try to see as many new works as possible. We also go to hear specific singers or see interesting productions. We were the first company outside California to present *Dead Man Walking*, and we were able to do that because we took a group of board members to see the premiere. The travel and discussion helps develop a very sophisticated palate for opera appreciation among board members.”

Building a More Knowledgeable Board

Not every opera board member brings a wealth of knowledge about the art form. “There has always been a two-way stream



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of knowledge and experience,” says Houston’s Freud. “Board members bring immense knowledge, but not necessarily regarding opera. Ownership of the mission — of why we exist — does not require deep opera knowledge.”

That said, as trustees become more knowledgeable about the art form, they can engage more effectively, not only with the professional staff, but with the community at large. In addition to accompanying board members to a wide variety of performances, staff members have found a number of ways to share artistic insights with trustees.

In the 1990s, when The Minnesota Opera adopted the bel canto philosophy, the company’s artistic director wanted to help trustees understand the preparation and technique

grows, we must remind ourselves that our role on the artistic planning committee is to be objective,” says Good. “*Nixon in China* may be considered standard fare elsewhere, but for Cincinnati, it is considered edgy. And, as much as some trustees may like to see four unusual works, we have to recognize that the opera exists not just to entertain us. For example, next summer many people in Cincinnati will be seeing *Carmen* for the first time.”

From the Abstract to the Production

The best-laid plans are just that — plans. In some cases, productions may exceed all expectations, both in terms of artistic quality and audience reception. In others, company stakeholders may have to grapple with negative feedback from any number of sources — trustees, audience members,

“What is your point of view? What makes you different from any other opera company? What we have discovered over time is that if you have a point of view, you do better work.”

required for truly expressive singing. Even after extended discussion, it was clear to Smith that not every board member understood what set truly exceptional performances apart. “Finally, one day, Dale brought in four recordings of ‘Casta Diva.’ He played each one and talked about them. Side by side, you could really hear the nuances, the strengths and weakness of each, the relationship of the words and the music.”

When new seasons are presented to The Minnesota Opera’s trustees, Johnson usually puts together a multimedia presentation that includes recorded excerpts and production imagery. He also creates season preview CDs that feature musical examples and background information. According to Confer: “Not only does the board get their information this way, they also have something to take home with them. I think the board in general feels that Dale does a very good job of keeping us abreast of how an opera fits into the season. That allows us to share the information with other donors.”

Regardless of their level of opera knowledge and passion, trustees must remember their specific role in governing the company: “As our sophistication in opera experience

the press. How can board and staff evaluate and respond to such reactions?

According to Freud, it is less about reacting to problems, and more about an ongoing dialogue. “We have these discussions at every board meeting,” says Freud. “We spend time talking about what we have done, what has been successful, what has been less successful.”

Smith points out that it is important to prepare trustees for potential controversy before it happens: “Our board always knows what to expect. If something is going to challenge our audience, we prepare trustees so that when they hear complaints, they can respond. We want them to know why we have made a particular choice.”

Freud concurs: “If there is a production or a work that is potentially controversial, I would bring that to the attention of the chair of the board in advance and seek buy-in for the way in which we might deal with any repercussions. For example, *The Refugee* dealt with immigration, a potentially divisive issue. If we aspire to be relevant, we must not be afraid of covering the great issues of our time. At the same

time, as a politically impartial nonprofit, we need to present issues in a balanced way.”

While it may be relatively easy to identify controversial repertory or production choices in advance, art-making is unpredictable. When mounting a new production, sometimes, despite the best efforts of all involved, the final product is unsatisfactory. “Our strategic plan deals in a very explicit way with the question of risk,” Freud says. “I’ve been extremely blunt about the fact that the ability to take risks is the lifeblood of any arts organization. Inherent in the taking of risks is the possibility that it may not turn out as you hope. We need to be upfront about the risks. We need to engage the board’s ownership in decisions and the thinking behind the decisions. If something proves unsuccessful, the board nonetheless understands the integrity behind the idea and the decision. Finding the right level of risk for an organization is part of the skill that a general director and board need to get good at. If we are too ready to take risks, it is irresponsible. But if we are too risk-averse, we will never fulfill our potential.”

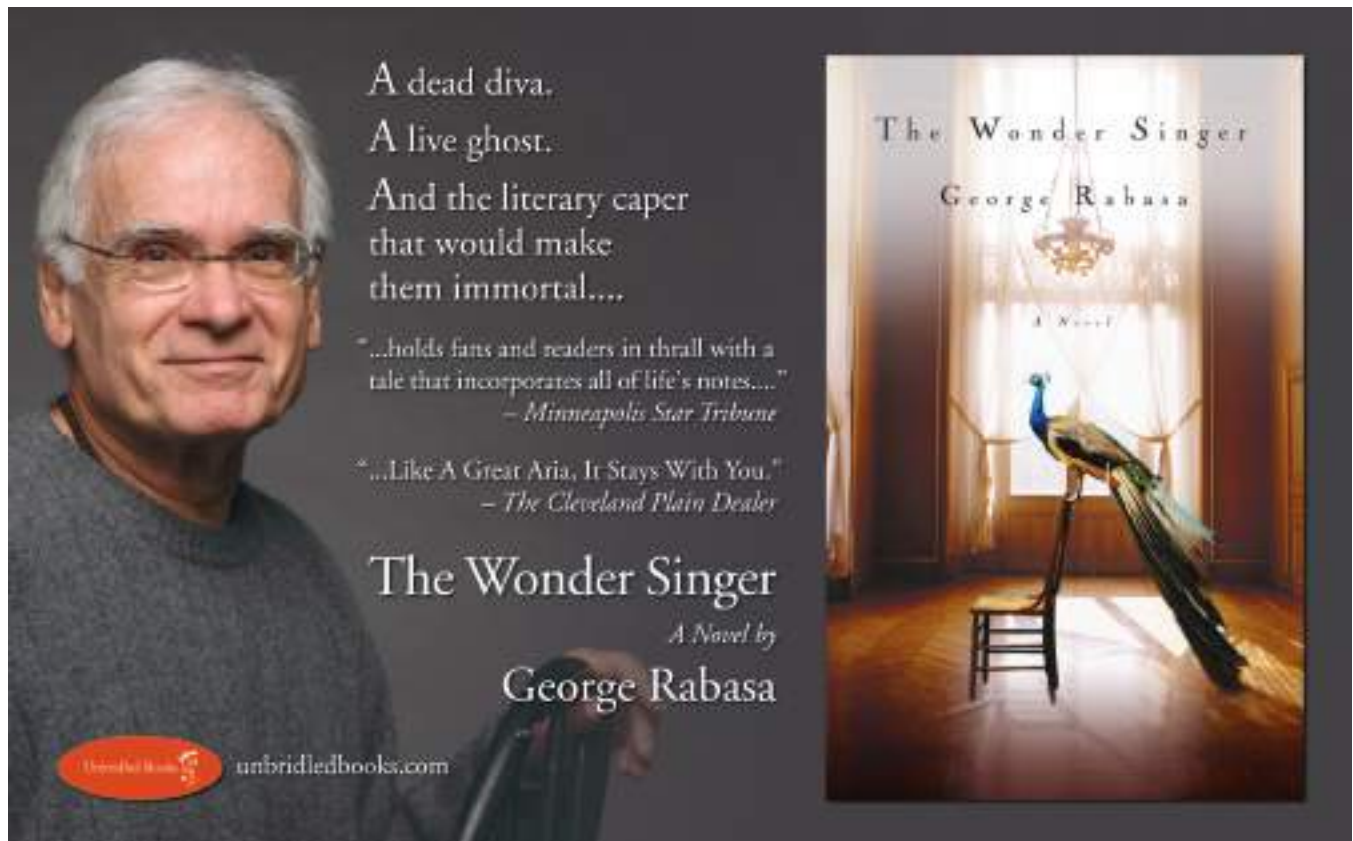
Holding Companies in Trust

In addition to a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, the most successful partnerships between

trustees and staff are built on trust, mutual respect and ongoing dialogue about artistic goals.

“What I’ve seen in the five years I’ve been on the board is that the board has pretty much allowed Dale to exercise his best judgment,” says Confer, who points out that the company’s general director and artistic director have each been with the company for more than 20 years. “Having attended two OPERA America conferences I think that we as a company are extremely lucky to have the working relationship that we have between senior staff and trustees. It is a real blessing to be able to play our fiduciary role and not feel we have to act as a guide artistically, because that’s done so well.”

“Like so many of my fellow board members, I have a vested interest in the opera company, financially as well as personally,” says Good. “We want to see it succeed. We have invested money and personal time, and our board is very, very involved. We don’t just want to sell tickets, we want to be the hottest ticket in town. I am on other boards and there isn’t that same level of time, interest, passion, commitment. I give all that credit to the professional staff. Patty fosters a sense of cooperation, working together and transparency. Transparency is the big word. There is nothing held back.”



PREPPING FOR THE NEW 990

BY LARRY BOMBACK

The IRS Form 990, “Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax,” is submitted by tax-exempt and nonprofit organizations to the Internal Revenue Service on an annual basis. The 990 is used by government agencies and charity watchdog groups to prevent organizations from abusing their tax-exempt status. The IRS also provides Web sites such as Guidestar.org with copies of 990s; often this is the only way such information is made available since many tax-exempt organizations do not otherwise publish their audited financials.

On December 20, 2007, the IRS released a redesigned Form 990 for tax year 2008. The form will be filed in 2009 and in subsequent years. The redesign of Form 990 is based on three guiding principles: enhancing transparency, promoting tax compliance and minimizing the burden on the filing organization. It incorporates comments and suggestions from over 650 e-mails and letters received during the comment period.

Who is affected?

For opera companies with gross receipts totaling more than \$100,000 and assets totaling more than \$250,000, big changes are in store: All organizations above that threshold will be required to file the new Form 990 by tax year 2010.

The new 990 has three sections: An 11-page Core Form, with 11 separate sections that must be filled out by every tax-exempt organization; 16 separate Schedules, at least six of which will likely be required for most opera companies; and an instructions section, which contains a glossary and several appendices.

What are the most important changes to watch for?

The two areas where organizations will notice the most changes in reporting requirements are governance and compensation. Part VI in the Core Form is a new section that asks questions about the organization’s governance structure (such as the size of the board, the number of committees and questions about minutes-keeping), policies (such as whether or not a company has a conflict-of-interest policy, document retention policy and whistle-blower policy) and disclosure

practices (such as who gets to see the 990 once it has been filed).


OPERA America recently created and adopted a number of new formal policies, including: Confidentiality Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy, Document Retention and Destruction Policy, and Signatory Policy. The organization has also developed a comprehensive Emergency Preparedness Plan. These documents are available for review by member companies, which may consider using them as a model for their own materials.

Part VII of the Core Form also contains important changes. While companies have always had to report on compensation of the highest-ranking people within the organization, they must now report on compensation information for all officers, directors and trustees, as well as the five highest-paid employees making over \$100,000. Additionally, a key employee is now defined as anyone who makes over \$150,000 in a calendar year. Companies should also be prepared to report on non-salary compensation provided to these key employees, such as housing subsidies, expense accounts, transportation reimbursements and other benefits.

Where can I go for more information?

The first stop should be the only truly official 990 Web site — the one that belongs to the Internal Revenue Service. The most up-to-date information on the 990 at all times can be found at www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=181089,00.html.

Independent Sector, a leadership forum for charities, foundations and corporate giving programs committed to advancing the common good in America and around the world, has been keeping up with any news related to the 990. Visit this Web site for the latest: www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/Draft_Form_990.htm.

Finally, Public Interest Clearinghouse, a California-based nonprofit, has uploaded the final draft of the Form 990 from December 2007. The IRS has made it clear that the December draft is the same version that nonprofits will be filing in 2009. Visit www.pic.org/resources/Form990/SampleForm.pdf. 

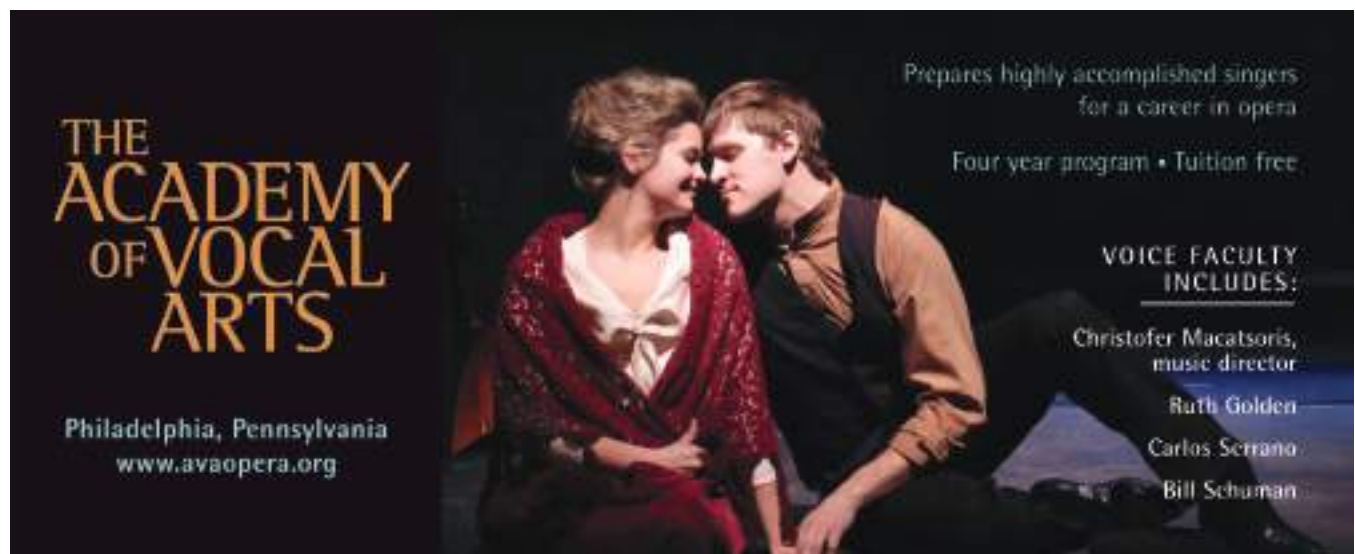
IN MEMORIAM

Opera Colorado founder and stage director **Nathaniel Merrill** died from complications due to Alzheimer's disease on September 9; he was 81. Before coming to Denver in the early 1980s, where he established the company in 1983, Merrill had been resident stage director at the Metropolitan Opera for 28 years. He staged productions in Denver until 1988; at that time, he was given the title of founder and artistic director for life by the board. Merrill was a graduate of Dartmouth College, majoring in music theory and composition with a minor in mathematics. He continued his education at the New England Conservatory of Music under Boris Goldovsky and received an M.A. in musicology under Dr. Karl Geiringer at the Boston University Graduate School. Merrill received many accolades during his time with Opera Colorado, including being recognized by the Colorado General Assembly in 1989 for his artistic contributions to the state.

Miriam Ramaker, a singer and voice teacher who helped to found **Indianapolis Opera**, died October 5 after a long illness; she was 87. Ramaker taught at Indiana Central University during the 1960s and 70s, before it became the University of Indianapolis, and directed the Opera Workshop there. In 1975, she and several others formed Indianapolis Opera; Ramaker stayed on as the company's producer-director for two years.

Soprano **Gail Robinson**, **Metropolitan Opera** star and faculty member at the University of Kentucky, died October 19 after a long battle with rheumatoid arthritis; she was 62. Robinson, a native of Jackson, TN, won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions at 19 and made her company debut at 21 in the title role of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She went on to a distinguished career at the Met, both onstage and offstage as the director of the Met's National Council Auditions and the Young Artist Program. In 1999, she joined the **University of Kentucky School of Music** faculty as a distinguished professor in voice. Robinson was key to helping grow the Kentucky District round of the Met auditions by attracting top-flight judges to preside, as well as give master classes.

Erik Buck Townsend, founder and director of **Townsend Opera Players** (TOP) for 26 years, died of lung cancer at his Modesto home on September 9; he was 71. Born and raised in Modesto, Townsend directed, conducted and built sets for virtually every one of TOP's operas and musicals. He was a passionate advocate for opera who spoke about the art form at schools and service clubs, among other groups. Before founding TOP, Townsend sang professionally as a tenor all over North America and Europe. He has received lifetime achievement honors from both the Stanislaus Arts Council at the Modesto Area Music Association. He graduated from Modesto High School and studied music at University of the Pacific. 🌱



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BY ALEXA B. ANTOPOL

How Operas Are Created by Composers and Librettists: The Life of Jack Beeson, American Composer

Jack Beeson

Edwin Mellen Press

ISBN 13: 9780773449473, hardcover

In this work, Jack Beeson — the composer of 10 operas — recounts his search for subjects and the writing of five of their librettos, his collaboration with the librettists of the other five, and the varied and tangled events leading to their premieres in theaters and on television here and abroad. Beeson showed his talent for music early, and Saturday afternoon Metropolitan Opera broadcasts inspired a passionate interest in opera. While still a teenager, he wrote a five-act libretto, *Beatrice Cenci*, but did not complete the music. He studied composition at the Eastman School, completing Bachelor's and Master's degrees. While teaching at Columbia University, he rediscovered his interest in opera through his involvement with the school's opera workshop. In addition to his work as a composer, Beeson has had a distinguished career as a teacher at Columbia University, where he is the MacDowell Professor Emeritus of Music.

The Verdi Baritone: Studies in the Development of Dramatic Character

Geoffrey Edwards and Ryan Edwards

Indiana University Press

ISBN 13: 9780253220394, softcover

One of the most significant developments in 19th-century Italian opera was the genesis of the Verdi baritone. The authors argue that the composer's baritone characters embody “a quintessential humanity, expressing needs and temptations, confusions and

understandings, griefs and joys that transcend the particulars of time and place.” *The Verdi Baritone*, available in paperback for the first time since its publication in 1994, explores seven roles in the repertory, revealing how they were conceived and executed. This book opens with a discussion of Verdi's *Nabucco*; proceeds with *Ernani*, *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata* and *Simon Boccanegra*; and concludes with *Otello*. Voice students, professional performers, their teachers and coaches, and opera lovers will gain insight into Verdi's masterful use of text, music and staging to portray each character. Geoffrey Edwards is an award-winning author and stage director who received his Ph.D. in theater and drama from Northwestern University. Baritone Ryan Edwards (Geoffrey's father) gained international acclaim as a singing actor during his career with the Metropolitan Opera.

Patronizing the Arts

Marjorie Garber

Princeton University Press

ISBN 13: 9780691124803, hardcover

Today, as in the past, artists need the funding, approval and friendship of patrons whether they are individuals, corporations, governments or nonprofit foundations. These relationships can be problematic, leaving artists “patronized” — both supported with funds and personal interest, while being condescended to for vocations misperceived as play rather than serious work. Marjorie Garber looks at the history of patronage, explains how patronage has elevated and damaged the arts in modern culture and argues for the university as a serious patron of the arts. She supports rethinking

prejudices that oppose art's role in higher education, rejects assumptions of inequality between the sciences and humanities, points to similarities between the making of fine art and the making of good science and examines issues of artistic and monetary value. Garber calls passionately for an increased attention to the arts, not just through government and private support, but as a core aspect of higher education. Garber teaches English at Harvard University, where she also chairs the visual and environmental studies department and directs the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts.

Sarah Caldwell:

The First Woman of Opera

Daniel Kessler

The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

ISBN 13: 9780810861107, hardcover

This biography of Sarah Caldwell — musician, conductor and director — documents her genius as a force for opera in America. Caldwell mounted many U.S. premieres and brought rare editions of standard works to her audiences. At the height of her career, she raised her baton over four of the top five orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. She was the first woman to conduct at the Metropolitan Opera, and she founded the Opera Company of Boston, as well as the outreach effort Opera New England and a nation-wide touring enterprise, the American National Opera Company. Daniel Kessler presents Caldwell's life in flashbacks and explores her 1978 landmark production of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. He describes her personal and professional life, including her experience with the impresario Boris

Goldovsky, her ability to create her own brand of “stage wizardry” and her moments of overreaching and hubris. Kessler is a contributor to *Opera Quarterly* and has served as a lecturer for San Francisco Opera.

The Grove Book of Opera Singers
Laura Macy
Oxford University Press
ISBN 13: 9780195337655, hardcover

Covering over 1,500 singers from the birth of opera to the present day, this volume will be an essential resource for all serious opera lovers and a companion to *The Grove Book of Operas*. This volume offers an alphabetically arranged collection of authoritative biographies that range from Marion Anderson (the first African American to perform at the Met) to Benedict Zak (the classical tenor and close friend and colleague of Mozart). The articles go beyond basic biographical information (birth date, vocal style, first debut, most memorable roles, etc.) to offer colorful portraits of the singer’s personality and vocal style, plus evaluations of their place in operatic history and many other observations; many entries also include suggestions for further reading. In addition, there are indices of singers by voice type and by opera role premieres. The articles are mostly drawn from *Grove Music Online* and have been fully revised. The book is further supplemented by more than 40 specially-commissioned articles on contemporary singers, and beautifully illustrated with color and black-and-white pictures. Laura Macy is editor-in-chief of Grove Music. She has published widely and has given public lectures and radio commentary on the madrigal, female composers and opera.

**The New Music Theater:
Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body**
Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi
Oxford University Press
ISBN 13: 9780195099362, hardcover

Alternatives to grand opera and the popular musical can be traced at least as far back as the 1912 premiere of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*. This book attempts to map out the complex ideas and philosophy of this ongoing history and bring to light contemporary musical and theatrical achievements. It provides a wealth of examples and descriptions not only of the works themselves, but of the concepts, ideas and trends that have gone into the evolution of this performance art form of the post-modern world. The authors consider the subject of music-theater from a social, as well as artistic point of view — exploring how theater works in culture and how music works in the theater. Eric Salzman is a composer, writer, director, producer, dramaturg and performer, and he has been involved in over 50 major productions; he is also the author of *Twentieth Century Music: An Introduction*. Thomas Desi is an Austrian composer, director and writer.

**Money for Art: The Tangled Web
of Art and Politics in American
Democracy**
David A. Smith
Ivan R. Dee, Publisher
ISBN 13: 9781566637688, hardcover

Government funding of the arts in America has never followed an easy course. Whether on a local or national scale, political support for the arts carries with it a sense of exchange — the expectation that in return for money the community will benefit. But this concept is fraught with potential difficulties that touch upon basic tensions between individual creativity and community standards. *Money for Art* traces the history of government funding of the arts in America, with emphasis on developments since the

founding of the National Endowment of the Arts in 1965. Included are examples of issues arising between individual artists and American cultural values at large in the last decades of the 20th century, particularly the heated controversy of the late 1980s and early 1990s over the NEA’s involvement with the photographers Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe. This clash between funding and freedom of speech is a prism through which to view the broad disagreement in America over the meaning, purpose and place of art in a democracy. David A. Smith teaches American cultural history at Baylor University.

**Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*:
A Compositional History**
Ian Woodfield
Boydell Press
ISBN 13: 9781843834069, hardcover

Ian Woodfield suggests that Mozart considered the idea that the pairings in Act II should not be crossed: that each of the two disguised officers should seek to seduce his own woman. Although this alternative plot structure was rejected, signs of it may remain in the final score, in the uneasy co-existence of dramatic duplicity and musical sincerity — and in the ending, in which the easy restitution of the original couples seems not to take account of the new passions that have been aroused. Evidence that several of the singers were re-cast is also presented. In addition to these radically new ideas about the conceptual genesis of *Così*, the book also provides a full account of the work’s compositional history, based on early Viennese and Bohemian copies. Four different versions are identified, including a significant revision in which Mozart removed the Act II finale canon. The composer’s probable involvement in the 1791 Prague production is also discussed. Woodfield is Professor of Historical Musicology, School of Music and Sonic Arts, Queen’s University Belfast. 📖

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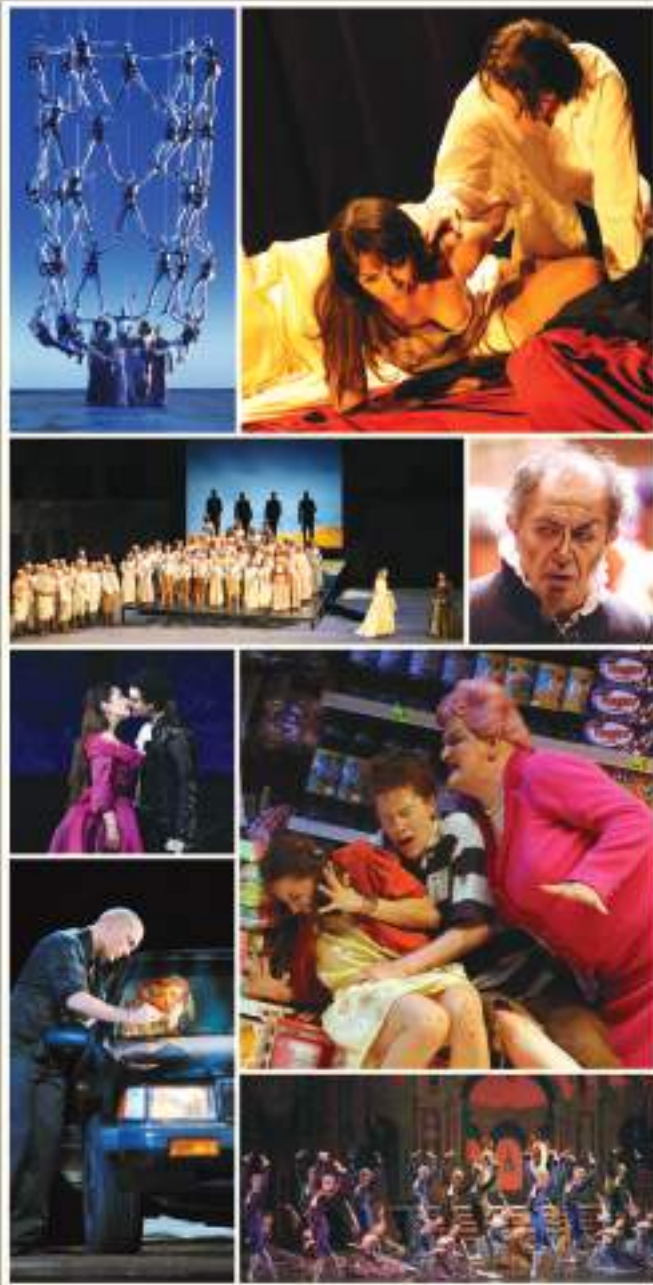
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