



OPERA America's 40th Anniversary Strategic Plan

NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW CAPACITIES: 2010-2015

A more dynamic OPERA America partnering with members to increase the creativity, excellence, effectiveness and relevance of opera and opera companies.

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2010 comes at the end of a tumultuous decade. Two significant recessions shook the financial underpinnings of the nation and, by extension, the field of opera. The first was marked by an unprecedented terrorist attack and the second was the worst recorded since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Concurrently, the expansion of the Internet and introduction of electronic media altered public behavior forever. Some of these developments challenge traditional opera industry practices, while others offer exciting new opportunities to create and disseminate productions and engage audiences. Despite the proliferation of entertainment options and reported declines in arts attendance, opera remains the art form that resonates most powerfully with the multi-media world of the 21st century and demonstrates unrealized potential to inspire new and diverse audiences.

The year 2010 also marks the 40th anniversary of OPERA America's evolving service to the field. In comparison to an art form that recently marked its 400th anniversary, the history of OPERA America is short. Yet, in the last four decades, the progress of the field in this country has yielded a new American opera repertoire, a vast network of producing companies and training programs, and an audience that has grown larger and more diverse. OPERA America has played an important role in supporting the emergence of opera as a North American art form.

The confluence of important world events and the organization's anniversary defines an appropriate moment to anticipate the dynamics that will shape the next decade and to make specific plans that prepare the field and OPERA America to respond to the most important trends and issues.

Four Decades of Progress

In 1970, when 17 opera companies met in Seattle to launch OPERA America, fewer than 50 companies existed in the United States. Today, OPERA America serves hundreds of companies, large and small; conservatories and universities with dynamic opera programs; a variety of related businesses and service providers; and thousands of individuals invested in the vitality of the art form and growth of the field.

At the time of OPERA America's inaugural meeting, held in conjunction with the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men*, productions of new operas were rare. Over 1,000 American operas have premiered since then. The creation and production of new work has become regular practice at many companies. Other companies have been formed specifically to develop new pieces and nurture creative artists.

The first young artist training program associated with an American opera company was launched by The Santa Fe Opera in the 1950s. Young artist programs inspired by that model have been established at many opera companies and now are part of a larger network of educational and training opportunities that allow thousands of aspiring singers each year to express themselves through opera.

OPERA America has served a unique function in facilitating and encouraging this progress by providing a meeting ground for industry leaders, a conduit for the exchange of information, as well as granting programs, professional development initiatives and learning resources. Through this service, OPERA America has gained recognition as a leader in the field among opera company staff and trustees. At the same time, OPERA America has emerged as a recognized, authoritative representative of the field to funders and the media, both nationally and internationally. OPERA America has earned the respect of the other performing arts fields through its leadership of two National Performing Arts Conventions and is a highly-regarded resource for information, perspective and leadership by various government agencies, most notably by the National Endowment for the Arts.

OPERA America's last strategic plan, approved in 1998, was central to the expansion of the association's artistic and educational services. It affirmed, too, a core commitment to providing direct value to member opera companies in a variety of administrative areas. The establishment of the *The Opera Fund* — a permanent endowment to support the creation and production of new opera, the formation of an Artistic Services department and the relocation of OPERA America's office from Washington, D.C. to New York City are a few of the accomplishments that emerged from the vision of the 1998 plan. These achievements build confidence that the objectives articulated in this new plan can be realized for the benefit of the entire field.

Changing and Challenging Times

The rate of change in the creation, production and enjoyment of opera has accelerated over the last 10 years. At the same time, OPERA America's ability to serve members with comparative data analysis, professional development, grants and general assistance has continued to strengthen.

Changing and challenging times require increased capacities for creative thinking and problem solving. The vision, strategic objectives and recommended actions described in the following pages renew OPERA America's mandate as the national service organization for the field to forge a unity of purpose among a diverse membership and to engage all members in the generation of resources that are beyond the ability of any one person or organization to develop. Such resources will build OPERA America's capacity to deliver a broad range of programs that deliver tangible benefits to organizations and individuals.

OPERA America's ability to serve the field derives from the active participation of members as contributors to a growing body of resources, and as users of those resources. The process associated with the development of this plan exemplifies the mutually beneficial compact that unites OPERA America and its stakeholders in a partnership that will help develop and promote opera as a vital cultural expression in the 21st century.

— Marc A. Scorca, President and CEO

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The FY2010 strategic planning process takes place during the most severe economic recession since the 1930s — what has come to be called the “Great Recession.” Observations about the field and suggestions of future directions reflect the financial limitations and related frustration of the moment. While it is difficult to escape the gravitational force of immediate challenges, long-term planning encourages consideration of larger, over-arching issues.

Members of a Strategy Committee and 10 working groups (see Appendix C) confirmed many trends and issues already familiar to leaders in the field. Some of the trends appear to be accelerating and have taken on new urgency in light of ever-changing technologies; increased competition from the expanding arts, entertainment and nonprofit sectors; and economic uncertainty. At the same time, these same trends are seen to offer new opportunities for creativity and audience development. The Strategic Objectives and Recommended Actions enumerated in this plan are designed to respond to both the challenges and opportunities that grow from the current forces of change.

“The scientific mind does not so much provide the right answers as ask the right questions.”

— Claude Levi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked

Artistic Creativity and Excellence

Whether in relation to the standard repertoire or new works, artistic excellence must be the highest priority for all opera stakeholders. Excellence reinforces opera's relevance and motivates ticket buyers and donors to renew and increase their participation in and support of opera companies.

The creation and production of new work continues to be essential to the vitality of the art form. Some new works may expand the definition of opera and benefit from productions in alternative venues. Subsequent productions of works that have already premiered, innovative producing partnerships, extended workshops and improved training for producers, composers, librettists and dramaturgs are among the strategies that should be used to increase the frequency and quality of the North American opera repertoire.

Investment in the development and training of artists and their inclusion in all facets of the industry should increase. Artists themselves should be encouraged to become more skilled and active as producers, teachers and advocates. Partnerships between opera companies and universities/conservatories can help overcome the barriers that inhibit career development. These same partnerships can also enhance the artistic scope of both opera companies and educational institutions, and increase the potential for audience development.

New approaches to producing opera that offer the potential to heighten the impact of performances and contain costs should be explored fully. Such strategies might include increased co-production, re-purposing of existing production materials, alternative venues, and semi-staged and concert opera.

Relevance

The need to sustain and increase opera's relevance is of paramount importance. This challenge is intensified by the relatively small number of performances offered each year by most opera companies, limiting their visible presence in the community. Despite measurable progress in creating an American opera tradition, stereotypes persist about the art form as being old-fashioned and foreign. The image of elitism is reinforced by high ticket prices and fundraising strategies that promote the visibility of social events and major donors.

Finding new and effective ways to communicate opera's relevance is even more urgent in an ever more crowded environment. A growing array of live and electronic arts and entertainment options are competing for public attention. The entire nonprofit sector continues to expand in response to pressing civic issues, making it more important than ever to convey the case for support of the arts in general and opera in particular. The traditional communication infrastructure represented by newspapers and classical radio stations has been reduced severely, increasing the difficulty of transmitting the value of opera and opera companies to communities.

A nationally coordinated, locally implemented effort to increase community presence and value through work on the mainstage, education programs and community service will help position opera and opera companies in the marketplace.

Audience Behavior and Attitudes

There is no single audience for opera. As opera companies have matured, opera audiences have become more varied. Every community is now home to sophisticated audiences who want to attend performances of new and unfamiliar works, long-time attendees who enjoy traditional productions of the standard repertoire and newcomers to the art form, some of whom want to see the most popular operas for the first time and others who are attracted by the works of contemporary composers. With a limited number of productions in any single season, opera companies are challenged to respond to the divergent tastes of these audiences.

Outside the opera house, audiences have become accustomed to new forms of entertainment that involve them more actively as participants. Opera companies should examine ways to supplement the passive delivery of performances with more interactive strategies that encourage participation in the creation and enjoyment of the art form. All audiences appear to be increasingly interested in an expanded cultural experience that extends before and after performances. Engaging people with opera must be as high a priority as producing opera.

Regardless of their aesthetic sensibilities, audiences are less likely than ever to subscribe and more likely to purchase single tickets at the last minute from a broader spectrum of arts and entertainment options. Marketing specialists have to identify new ways to make opera appealing to newcomers. Opera companies need new strategies to encourage customer enthusiasm in a marketplace where fewer people identify themselves as devoted opera fans and attendance comes in patterns that do not conform to current labels. At the same time, opera companies have to revive and revise techniques for engaging current patrons to serve as advocates for the art form and for attendance.

Education and Adult Learning

Education and audience cultivation programs are central to broadening and diversifying opera audiences, and deepening their relationship with opera companies. These programs also expand opera companies' civic impact, beyond the limited number of performances that can be offered in a single season.

The staff of opera companies who deliver education, adult learning and community programs are often the first points of contact between opera companies and populations who are new to the art form. Such programs are at the vanguard of establishing and expanding the awareness and appreciation of opera and opera companies.

For some audiences, education and enrichment activities are a necessary precursor to the understanding and enjoyment of the art form. Enrichment activities should become more varied to reach adults and engage them actively as participants in learning rather than as just passive recipients of traditional lecture/demonstration materials.

Education priorities and related legislation shift constantly. In the K-12 school setting, opera education programs offer a variety of learning connections among the arts and other subjects that must be linked to current learning priorities.

Opera companies should capitalize on other resources to expand service and visibility. In some communities, the local opera company has created special activities around The Met's HD transmissions to increase the frequency of contact with opera lovers. In other communities, local university performances are the centerpiece of learning programs throughout the year.

In light of the importance of enhancing the perceived value of opera, the position of education and community programs within opera companies should be re-examined and, where appropriate, enhanced. Nomenclature may need to be revised; the range of activities offered by opera companies suggests that 'education' is a term that may be too narrow.

Fundraising

Contributions will continue to represent the majority of income for most opera companies. The recession has reduced corporate and foundation giving which, in light of shifting philanthropic priorities, may not rebound quickly or substantially. Individual giving will increasingly be the most important source of contributed income. Despite the passion of opera lovers and the resilience of their giving during the recession, dependence on individual donors underscores the importance of demonstrating opera's relevance, especially among the next generation of donors. For younger donors, new fundraising techniques will emerge, including giving on the Internet, which may attract more donors at lower levels of support.

Opera leaders will have to intensify their attention to building endowments, cash reserves, facility reserves, working capital and risk capital in order to increase their ability to generate earned income, sustain cash flow throughout the year, maintain infrastructure and invest in new projects. As the expense of producing on the mainstage continues to increase, companies will be challenged to raise additional funds for community programs which return value over a longer horizon.

New Business Practices

The same business model has shaped opera company operations for nearly a century. Earned and contributed income combine to cover expenses, the majority of which represent salaries and fees for performing artists, technical specialists and administrators. While this model has been refined over the years, questions arise as to whether a new business model, perhaps in relation to a new type(s) of business activity, can help companies achieve a higher level of effectiveness in increasing relevance, artistic excellence and the repertoire of new works.

Alternative sources of earned income should be explored. New departmental/staff structures may reflect the ways new technologies are altering job descriptions and established procedures. Producing strategies should be examined to find new opportunities for collaboration with local arts organizations, as well as nationally among opera companies.

Electronic media will continue to change the way opera companies create and distribute performances, promotional messages and educational materials. More companies, including smaller companies, are now able to participate in the development and distribution of electronic resources. Beyond the distribution of materials (a one-way flow of information), opera companies should use new media to establish interactive relationships with their communities.

Exchange of Information and Professional Development

Many opera companies are protective of ideas and data. Central to the advancement of the field must be a broader unity of purpose that will make members more willing to share information and best practices. The failure to cooperate across the field presents a greater risk to opera companies than competition among them. The accelerated pace of innovation has intensified the need for a continuous cycle of learning that includes the sharing of ideas, experimentation, documentation and analysis of results, dissemination of findings and professional development. While OPERA America's annual conferences and various committees are a good basis on which to build, the need for connection among peer opera companies throughout the year is essential. Experts from outside the field should be recruited to enrich discussion and generate new ideas.

The importance of the exchange of information is not limited to opera company staff. Artists will gain from the increased exchange of information and sharing of best practices. Opera companies, too, can benefit from the creative involvement of artists in planning and evaluating programs.

The training of current staff is an urgent need in light of opportunities made possible by new technologies and the pressure to generate contributed and earned income. Leadership training is equally important as the number and complexity of opera companies grows, requiring mastery of a growing list of skills. Adapting to new technologies and new business models requires organizational change. Opera leaders must learn how to manage change. Companies must commit to the professional development of staff in order to reap the benefit of increased creativity and productivity, and improve the prospects for retention of staff who seek to grow in their work. Some leadership training methods are very expensive, but others require only cooperation and coordination among members.

Concurrently, OPERA America's commitment to professional development among artists must be expanded to be fully reflective of a greater variety of career opportunities and strategies for achieving artistic goals.

Governance and Volunteerism

The success of opera companies depends on the leadership and support of board members who understand and fulfill their unique roles and responsibilities. Good trustees master a set of specific skills. Although they already contribute time and resources to their opera companies, trustees must make an additional commitment to learn how best to work with professional staff and represent the opera company in the community. Opera company trustees who benefit from exposure to field-wide trends and best practices will be better able to make local decisions that are informed by a deeper understanding of industry norms.

At the same time, company staff need to take full advantage of board member skills and ensure that their involvement is effective and rewarding. Strategies are needed to harness the enthusiasm of community leaders with connections and resources who are willing to make them available, but do not wish to serve as trustees.

New technologies and a higher level of professionalism across the field have not replaced the need for the active involvement of opera enthusiasts, although volunteer practices have evolved. Individuals are more likely to dedicate their time and talent to specific tasks rather than to traditional volunteer 'guilds' built on a membership model. Still, volunteers will continue to be critical to the fundraising effort of opera companies. Companies need to identify ways to turn current patrons into advocates for the art form and for attendance, and to ensure that the volunteer base reflects the diversity of the community.

Collaboration

Organizational and artistic collaboration should continue to be a dynamic aspect of the art form and the industry. Opera companies exist in a complex environment populated by other arts organizations, performing arts venues, and state and local arts agencies, to name just a few. Many of the trends and issues noted in the course of OPERA America's planning process are shared by most if not all the other disciplines and support organizations. Perhaps it is because opera is inherently collaborative in virtually every artistic and administrative dimension that opera companies are frequently at the center of collaborative projects in their cities. Opera leaders should embrace opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to advancing the larger arts community.

On stage, too, opera creators are increasingly integrating other arts into the tapestry of opera and should be encouraged to do so. The fusion of new ideas and styles with the honored traditions of the art form holds promise for the art form and the industry.

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Over the last two decades, guided by successive strategic plans, OPERA America has broadened its service to the field. The plan of 1990 established membership categories for individuals, university opera programs and conservatories, and related businesses, building on the incorporation into OPERA America of the resources of the National Opera Institute and Central Opera Service. The plan of 1998 articulated a bold dedication to artistic and educational programs in conjunction with continued administrative services to opera companies. As a result of these efforts, OPERA America programs offer direct benefit to artists, educators, administrators, trustees and other stakeholders who are committed to the advancement of opera and opera companies in North America.

Deeper Service Relationship

Having succeeded in achieving a breadth of service that now spans the field, this new strategic plan charts a course for OPERA America to deepen its relationship with institutional and individual members. In light of the accelerating rate of technological innovation, shifting civic priorities and changed audience behavior, a new level of collaborative effort is needed to respond effectively to challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, the objectives and actions articulated in the following pages are designed to engender a stronger community of purpose among members in which as much value is placed on contributing to the attainment of common goals as on the tangible benefits that can be derived from membership. Ultimately, members will come to view themselves as equal partners in building resources that benefit the entire field.

Enhanced Leadership

Concurrent with the development of a stronger partnership with members, OPERA America will enhance its leadership role on behalf of members and the field. Through convenings and facilitated discussion, new physical resources in a national Opera Center, increased financial support for artistic projects through *The Opera Fund*, stronger collaborations and coordinated national communications, OPERA America will increase its effectiveness as an agent for innovation and progress.

Mission Statement

The vision and strategic objectives described in this plan adhere to OPERA America's stated mission:

1. To promote the growth and expansion of the art form in North America;
2. To encourage and assist in the improvement of the quality of productions, performances, education programs and community services;
3. To assist in the development of professional opera companies, opera ensembles, educational institutions and related businesses through cooperative artistic and management services;
4. To foster and improve the education, training and development of opera composers, singers and allied talents.
5. To encourage greater appreciation of opera and opera companies by all segments of society.

Core Service Commitment

The recommended actions associated with each of the strategic objectives in the pages that follow are consistent with OPERA America's core service commitment:

OPERA America is committed to improving the quality and growth of the creation, production and enjoyment of opera through three equally important strategies:

1. Design and implement artistic services that help opera companies and artists improve the quality of productions and increase the creation and presentation of North American works.
2. Improve and extend services that return value to member organizations, with special attention to the need for strengthened leadership among staff, trustees and volunteers.
3. Develop and integrate education, audience development and community services that increase all forms of opera appreciation and deepen the relevance of opera and opera companies to communities throughout North America.

VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Value to Members

The vitality of a service organization is based on the tangible benefit members derive from programs and services. Fulfilling the objectives articulated in this plan will help all members to advance the art form, build stronger organizations and individual skills, and regard OPERA America as an essential ally in the realization of mutual goals.

Vision

Opera is a creative form that combines all the arts, and draws on the cultural traditions and talent of nations from around the world. With the human voice as the central instrument, opera is both the most natural and the richest reflection of the multi-media, global community of the 21st century. Opera and opera companies have the power to inspire diverse audiences and enhance the cultural, educational and economic vitality of communities. In its unique position as the national service organization, and in order to realize the power of the art form in North America more fully, OPERA America will enhance its leadership role as a champion and catalyst for opera by forging a dynamic partnership with members to increase creativity, excellence, effectiveness and relevance across the field.

Strategic Objectives

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #1 | Develop OPERA America's capacity and identity as the leading action-oriented think tank for opera by working with members as full partners to develop ideas and strategies that will advance their work and strengthen the field as a whole.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #2 | Establish an Opera Center in New York City that will provide members with space and support services that are essential to the efficient conduct of business, strengthen the identity of the art form and industry, and engender a greater sense of common purpose.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #3 | Build *The Opera Fund* and other artistic services to increase support of new and existing American works, co-productions and artist training.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #4 | Strengthen the membership by increasing direct contact with current and new members to ensure they derive the full benefit of managerial and artistic services available to them.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #5 | Address OPERA AMERICA governance, partnership, staffing and related budget issues in order to ensure that expertise and resources are available to fulfill the objectives and actions articulated in this plan.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #1 | *Develop OPERA America’s capacity and identity as the leading action-oriented think tank for opera by working with members as full partners to develop ideas and strategies that will advance their work and strengthen the field as a whole.*

“[Success] depends on the courage to practice long-term thinking and to make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems have become perceptible, but before they reach crisis proportions.”

— *Jared Diamond, Collapse*

Jared Diamond, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and MacArthur Fellowship recipient, noted in his best-selling book, *Collapse*, that the greatest challenge to fragile societies is that of “deciding which of a society’s deeply held core values are compatible with the society’s survival and which ones instead have to be given up.”

Many opera companies are like the fragile societies Diamond studied. Organizational vulnerability makes board and staff members reluctant to risk change when there is a strong possibility that failure will result in severe crisis for the company. Yet, innovation and experimentation are essential to the advancement of the art form and the field. Vital opera companies must test new strategies to succeed as community resources, demographics, behaviors and tastes change.

Long-term trend analysis and planning are often thwarted by immediate pressures. Strategic thinking frequently gives way to tactical behavior in order to meet short-term goals. OPERA America is uniquely equipped to lead the field in discussion of broad trends, the generation of ideas that respond to challenges and opportunities, the coordination of experiments by members and the documentation and circulation of findings.

► **Recommended Action #1** | *Establish a Strategy Council as a permanent resource for the field to stimulate creative thinking about overarching trends and related challenges and opportunities.*

Like the Strategy Committee that developed this plan, the Strategy Council will be comprised of a wide range of members, including artists, drawn from all functional and creative areas of the field. Annual meetings of the Strategy Council will be enriched by presentations from outside experts in various professional specialties and their active inclusion in discussion and creative thinking. The composition and procedures of the Strategy Council will be guided by a charter that will be approved by the Board of Directors.

Findings and recommendations of the Strategy Council will be circulated internally to inform decision-making by the Board of Directors and to fuel the discussion and planning of the various forums, described below. Summaries of the work of the Strategy Council will be a resource for all members and will be available to an even broader audience on the OPERA America Web site, in *Opera America* magazine and at annual conferences.

The Strategy Council will be charged, too, with reviewing progress toward the goals articulated in this plan, consistent with an implementation timetable and evaluation criteria that will be developed. Toward the completion of this plan, in 2015, members of the Strategy Council will lay the groundwork for a 50th anniversary planning process.

OPERA America conferences, occurring once each year, are general by design. Numerous sessions are designed to be relevant to the widest possible audience. While effective in promoting awareness of many topics, the complexity of the art form and the industry requires greater examination of specific trends and issues in distinct areas of management, including artistic, education, finance, fundraising, governance, marketing and production. Cross-departmental initiatives such as electronic media, new works development and singer training also must be addressed.

In certain areas, network forums have been established to increase the breadth and depth of member participation in discussion of critical issues and actions OPERA America can take to respond to them. These forums can serve as the basis for broader and more diverse, engaged networks of members working to address shared issues.

► ***Recommended Action #2*** | *Formalize existing forums and establish new forums for other networks and interest areas to help develop specific new strategies that strengthen the entire opera community.*

Each forum will have an operating charter that articulates a specific mandate, frequency and timing of meetings, membership criteria and leadership. All will follow a format that provides for the exchange of information, presentations by experts from within and outside the field, and facilitated discussion around previously identified challenges and opportunities that will benefit from the collective experience and insight.

Current forums will be formalized and strengthened:

- a. Electronic Media Forum
- b. Singer Training Forum
- c. Technical/Production Forum
- d. National Trustee Forum

New forums will be introduced gradually in order to ensure effective management by OPERA America staff.

- a. Artistic Forum
- b. Development Forum
- c. Education Forum
- d. Finance/Administration Forum
- e. General Directors Forum
- f. Marketing/PR Forum
- g. New Works Forum

OPERA America will document and circulate the work of the forums in order to create a constant flow of creative thinking and analysis that will inform the work of the Strategy Council, Board of Directors and members. The recommendations of the forums will contribute to the further development of all OPERA America services and programs.

Communication and learning are most readily advanced in meetings of colleagues. Successful collaborations — central to the artistic and managerial health of the field — are built on personal trust that can only be established when members meet members in person. Meetings conducted via conference call, videoconference and the Internet do not engender the spontaneous discussions that emerge when people are interacting face-to-face around a table. Co-productions, the exchange of information and the establishment of mutually-supportive relationships depend on the trust that is only established through personal contact.

OPERA America has relied on members to cover the expenses associated with their participation in OPERA America programs. In relation to programs from which they derive direct and tangible benefit, such as the annual conference, this policy is appropriate. Where members are joining together in creative partnership to generate new ideas and solutions to problems, travel assistance will ensure broader and more diverse participation, especially on the part of outside experts. The need for travel assistance is especially acute in the wake of the recession and reduced budgets.

► **Recommended Action #3** | *Provide travel assistance for members participating in forums and other special committees.*

The policies for awarding such travel subsidies will be determined by appropriate committees of the OPERA America Board of Directors.

Professional development has been a high priority, although a challenging one, at OPERA America for nearly four decades. The evolution of opera company administrative structures into highly specialized departments has reduced the number of professional development opportunities available to aspiring managers who used to hold positions as ‘deputies’ to general directors. Advanced seminars, based on the participation of experts from within and outside the field, are very expensive in light of the small size of the opera field. As a result, OPERA America will develop a suite of professional development services designed to supplement the annual conference, attract maximum participation and contain expenses.

► **Recommended Action #4** | *Establish a Professional Development Committee to expand and improve training and leadership programs.*

Current programs will be reviewed with special attention to increased standards of achievement and will be extended to other specialty areas.

The annual conference will continue to be the primary yearly point of convening for all stakeholders. General Sessions, Open Sessions and Network Roundtables will be enriched by the work of the Strategy Council and forums to provide a combination of broad discussion of issues, specific examination of strategies that can improve effectiveness in all areas of production and administration, and networking opportunities. Additional emphasis will be placed on securing the participation of experts from outside the field who can enrich the discussion of trends and development of new ideas.

Professional development activities that are more targeted to specific beneficiaries will be enhanced and extended. The Leadership Advance for artists and administrators seeking to move into senior positions in the field will include activities throughout the year. The New General Directors Roundtable for chief staff officers serving in the leadership position for the first time will be enhanced with more formal, faculty-led sessions. At the same time, OPERA America will continue and refine its Singer Training, Technical/ Production and Composer/Librettist Workshops across the country, and *Making Connections* seminar series in New York City. Other learning programs will be established, as appropriate. All learning programs will be informed by the exchange of information and best practices from within and outside the field, supported by robust research.

OPERA America will increase the tracking and evaluation of additional professional development opportunities offered by other national, regional and local providers in order to extend these resources to members, as appropriate.

In today's volatile environment, challenges and opportunities must be addressed in a timely fashion. Changes in the economy and technology may not coincide with the timing of annual conferences or even semi-annual meetings. OPERA America must be nimble in providing members with the most up-to-date information and practical advice that can be put to use immediately.

Attending annual conferences requires advance planning and a commitment of time. OPERA America needs to build its capacity to deliver topical content through a universal platform that does not require advance commitment to multi-day meetings. More regular interaction with colleagues will help to create and sustain a stronger sense of community among members.

▶ ***Recommended Action #5 | Develop and implement an electronic media program to extend access to all OPERA America learning resources throughout the year.***

OPERA America will develop and deliver learning content using online seminars, Webcasts, podcasts and telephone conference calls throughout the year. A regular schedule of professional development activities will take place in real-time and will be archived on the OPERA America Web site for 24/7 accessibility to the broadest possible audience.

High cost and lack of opera-specific expertise inhibit members from engaging consultants, despite the need for outside assistance. The opera field, however, is filled with expert practitioners employed by opera companies who have the knowledge and willingness to help their colleagues. OPERA America has the capacity to identify individuals interested in participating in a coordinated effort to make expertise available at relatively low cost.

▶ ***Recommended Action #6 | Develop a roster of consultants, mentors and coaches who are available to provide direct assistance to companies.***

OPERA America will secure support to help defray the expenses associated with meetings among members providing and receiving such assistance. Participating consultants will participate in the forums and other committees in order to create a robust connection between strategy and practice in the field.

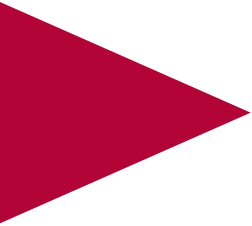
Research and comparative analysis are the basis for testing assumption, understanding trends and identifying best practices across the field. Reliable data can also advance arguments about the dimension of opera company education programs, community service and economic impact, nationally and locally.

OPERA America has built a body of data over the course of its history that results in a unique research capacity. Comparative analysis of opera companies over 10 and 20 years is designed to identify changes in operating dynamics and highlight the implementation of successful strategies. Additional sources of information contribute to comparative city profiles and repertoire analysis that enable companies to measure their own performance against industry norms. Good research yields more good questions, especially as OPERA America's data confirms and/or contradicts findings from other research projects.

Member opera companies have also conducted research — usually audience research — over many years, with increasing sophistication. In addition, university faculty and graduate students have written extensively about the field using a variety of data sources. Uncoordinated, this research is of limited value. Managed, however, this research has the potential to yield insight that can benefit the field.

▶ **Recommended Action #7** | *Establish a Research Advisory Committee to increase OPERA America's research capacity.*

Comprised of academics, consultants and interested members, the committee will assess OPERA America's current research capacity, increase access to and understanding of existing research in the field, generate ideas for new research and interest potential researchers in working with OPERA America.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #2 | *Establish an Opera Center in New York City that will provide members with space and support services that are essential to the efficient conduct of business, strengthen the identity of the art form and industry, and engender a greater sense of common purpose.*

“The whole business of e-mail is death to collaboration. It has to be face-to-face conversation over an extended period of time if you’re going to get to the real work.”

— John Conklin, designer and teacher

As OPERA America’s relationship with members becomes more engaged, and as learning and networking services are more equitably distributed using electronic media, creating a geographic center for a dispersed field becomes an essential parallel and complimentary component of strengthening the field. The Opera Center will become the physical heart for an art form and an industry that are inherently collaborative.

With the expiration of OPERA America’s office lease in D.C. in 2005, members of the Board of Directors re-examined the association’s location and determined that the organization would be better positioned to pursue its mission in New York City, the crossroads of opera in North America. New York City alone is home to the nation’s largest concentration of performing and creative artists, professional training institutions and music businesses; a majority of professional company members hold or attend auditions in New York City annually; and opera leaders from Europe and around the world are regular visitors.

An Opera Center will make possible more frequent and direct contact between members and OPERA America staff, encourage greater involvement of members in the work of OPERA America, create the potential for broader and deeper collaboration among members and facilitate endeavors with traditional partners and a host of new allies. It will result in the complete integration of artistic services — as well as of individual artists — in the work of the organization.

The Opera Center will enable OPERA America to provide its constituents with a range and level of services never before possible. The facility will include:

- An acoustically excellent hall designed primarily for member auditions that can also be used for master classes, readings of new works, workshops and rehearsals, seminars and press conferences, and informal performances by local and national constituents.
- Support studios that can be used for coproduction meetings and design presentations, as well as practice and coaching rooms for visiting artists.
- A library that includes a reference and research collection, the Central Opera Service and OPERA America archives, a score library and listening room, and a reading room with an extensive collection of industry periodicals.
- Meeting space for board meetings, committee meetings and panels for OPERA America and OPERA America members.
- An Administrative Center that includes staff offices and work stations for visiting members.
- Technology that permits recording, streaming and teleconferencing.
- Hospitality space that can accommodate donor receptions and special events, with adequate kitchen facilities.

The Opera Center will become a center of gravity for the field, supporting the artistic and economic vitality of the field:

- A locus for the conduct of industry business, the Opera Center will bring together administrators creative artists, professionals and patrons from across the country and around the world.
- An intellectual laboratory, it will promote network-building and cross-fertilization of ideas that will result in new projects and creative collaborations.
- A business center, it will provide operational efficiencies that will improve the opera community's position in the competitive international arts marketplace.
- A showcase for OPERA America programs, especially those associated with the encouragement of new work and artist training, the Opera Center will demonstrate the value of a variety of programs and advance the case for building *The Opera Fund*.
- The field's informal headquarters, it will provide new opportunities to host and cultivate individual and institutional patrons of the art form.

The Opera Center will advance OPERA America's core service commitments:

1. *Develop and implement artistic services that help companies improve the quality of productions and increase the creation and presentation of North American works.* The Opera Center's facilities will accommodate workshops, rehearsals and readings of new works; give composers and librettists access to "laboratory" space; enable singers to work with leading voice teachers and coaches; and provide artistic directors and artists ready access to a high quality audition space. In all these ways the Opera Center will support and encourage the activities and connections essential to the creation of new work and the presentation of high-quality productions.
2. *Improve and extend services that return value to opera companies.* OPERA America members will be able to use Opera Center facilities to conduct a wide range of essential business and artistic functions, including coproduction meetings among collaborating members; production design presentations; convenings of publishers, managers and other service providers (both those based in New York and others who travel to the city on business); and member press conferences, donor cultivation events and networking activities.
3. *Develop and integrate education, audience development, and community services.* The Opera Center will provide space for public presentations that highlight the creative process and the work of leading artists, including composers, librettists, designers and choreographers. The Opera Center will host workshops for educators and teaching artists and will serve as a venue for seminars for adult audiences at various levels of expertise.

OPERA America is committed to ensuring a sound financial footing for the Opera Center. Accordingly, OPERA America created an Opera Center endowment in 2005 and will build that endowment to generate income to offset leasing and operating costs. Significant grants and pledges must be in place prior to making any lease or construction commitments to avoid burdening the organization with long-term debt. The operating model will be optimized to ensure that revenue from user fees supplements endowment income to offset operating costs.

► **Recommended Action #8** | *Build the Opera Center endowment to offset long-term leasing and operating expenses, and secure funding for construction.*

Combined with the revenue generated by user fees, an operating endowment of \$5 million will generate income sufficient to defray costs. Additional expenses of \$5 million to retrofit a space to OPERA America's specific needs bring the total campaign to approximately \$10 million.

OPERA America will continue to work with Denham Wolf Real Estate Service, Inc., New York’s leading real estate broker and project manager for nonprofit organizations, to negotiate leasing options that conform to financial models and programmatic goals. Once a space is secured, OPERA America staff will work with architect Andrew Berman and acoustician Robert Mahoney Associates, to design the space. Denham Wolf will serve as project managers.

▶ ***Recommended Action #9 | Identify a site for the Opera Center that will realize as many of the intended uses for the space as possible.***

The West Side of Manhattan has been identified as the optimal location for the Opera Center in light of the proximity to the West Side travel corridor, as well as airport and train connections, proximity to leading performance venues, related business and hotels.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #3 | *Build The Opera Fund and other artistic services to increase support of new and existing American works, co-productions and artist training.*

If you've only had 100 new operas in North America over the last decade, I would increase that number. I don't know what it should be. Two hundred? Five hundred for the next decade? If you get it up to 500 new operas for the next decade, you would have a greater probability of a mutation of a successful new opera sticking and hitting the top twenty chart. Then you'd get some vitality in your field vitality that's upstream in the creation end."

— Stan Davis, Ph.D., from the Keynote Address at Opera Conference 1998.

An examination of opera's rich history reveals that from the time of opera's 'invention' in Florence in 1597 through the first quarter of the 20th century, the art form was animated by a steady flow of new works. Most of these works failed to make a lasting impression — only the greatest achievements were accepted into the canon that forms today's core repertoire. The tens of thousands of operas that have been created in opera's four-century history have yielded a group of masterpieces that numbers fewer than one hundred.

Preserving the heritage of the art form is part of the mission of most opera companies. But preservation alone is neither consistent with the creative energy that characterized opera's 'Golden Age' nor with the need of today's opera companies to demonstrate relevance to their communities. Balanced with preservation is a parallel responsibility to create new works that tell new stories using a contemporary musical and dramatic vocabulary that can appeal to today's diverse audiences. Using history as a guide, the field must invest in thousands of premieres in order to generate a rich repertoire of North American masterpieces.

Central to OPERA America's strategy for ensuring the art form's vitality in the future are interrelated and reinforcing commitments to supporting the creation and production of new and existing operas; the training of creative artists who will compose and interpret these works along with works from across the entire opera literature; and the development of a deeper and broader appreciation on the part of the general public for American opera.

New operas and productions of existing American operas can result in higher expenses and, sometimes, lower box office revenue than works from the standard repertoire. Accordingly,

The Opera Fund was established to mitigate the financial risks associated with producing new and existing American operas. Since the inauguration of its granting programs in 1984, OPERA America has awarded nearly \$11 million to opera companies and their collaborators. *The Opera Fund* was designed to build on and extend the success of *Opera for the 80s and Beyond*, *Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Opera for a New America* and *The Next Stage* to:

- Build the canon of North American opera with new works and existing works by North American creative artists that resonate with audiences in contemporary musical and theatrical terms;
- Identify and develop North American artists who are able to translate the European opera tradition into a contemporary cultural expression for American audiences; and

- Develop new and more informed audiences for opera and increase the general public's appreciation for the contributions made by opera companies to the quality of civic life.

The unique granting program combines national coordination with local project implementation to create a cycle of creative experimentation and learning that involves producers, artist and audiences:

- **Repertoire Development** grants stimulate and sustain the creation and production of new, North American operas, assisting OPERA America Professional Company Members (PCMs) and their partners in meeting the special costs incurred by developing and producing new North American opera and music-theater, allow the creators and/or producers to assess and refine a work in progress and provide financial assistance for the development of the work and the creative process.
- **Artist Development** grants support the training of creative artists who will compose and interpret these works and are intended to provide professional development opportunities for creative artists through fellowships, residencies, study grants, regional training and peer-mentor networks.
- **Audience Development** grants encourage deeper and broader appreciation on the part of the general public for American opera, through financial assistance to PCMs and their partners for planning and implementing specific activities that strengthen relationships between audiences, the art form and the company.

The creation and production of new works is tremendously expensive. OPERA America has long recognized that opera companies can be harmed by receiving small grants that commit them to projects but do not actually cover the costs of those projects. In order to be of significant assistance to members and encourage an increase in new works activity, grants from OPERA America must be large in relation to the total cost of such activity.

► ***Recommended Action #10 | Increase The Opera Fund from approximately \$6 million to \$10 million by 2015 in order to increase the size of grants awarded.***

The attainment of this goal will require collaboration with members and select funders. Success will serve as a prelude to mounting a larger campaign for *The Opera Fund* in association with OPERA America's 50th anniversary in 2020. While the short-term fundraising emphasis will be placed on completing the Opera Center, the facility will provide a focal point in which to showcase OPERA America's support of new works and advance the case for support for *The Opera Fund*.

Over 1,000 operas have premiered over the last 25 years, but few of these works have been reviewed, revised and produced again. Composers and librettists are reluctant to revise and improve new operas without the prospect of another production. The full development of these pieces — and the emergence of an American repertoire — depends on second and subsequent productions of promising pieces that offer the creative artists an opportunity to adjust the works and provide them with additional exposure to audiences, critics and potential producers.

▶ **Recommended Action #11** | *Re-establish grants in support of second and subsequent productions of existing North American operas.*

OPERA America's *Next Stage* program, funded for three years by the Pew Charitable Trusts in the late 1990s, can serve as a model on which to build. Grants that help offset the cost or reviving or re-mounting productions will also support additional workshops, score changes and other expenses associated with revising the works.

Many artists with advanced training in their areas of specialty — including composers, conductors, directors and designers — do not receive adequate exposure to the unique imperatives of opera production and performance. Support for the development of artists' skills, independent of any specific project, is important for the advancement of the art form.

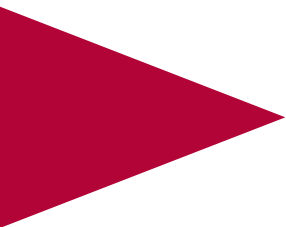
▶ **Recommended Action #12** | *Administer the Director-Designer Showcase and create programs for opera conductors, and composers and librettists.*

The inaugural Director-Designer Showcase, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, demonstrated the tremendous interest among artists to work in opera. Forty-one director-designer teams submitted production concepts. Artists who were selected to make presentations at *Opera Conference 2009* have been hired by member organizations; two of the four final design concepts have been scheduled for production. This Showcase will be used as a model for designing parallel showcase programs for other artists.

Increased co-production among members was an early benefit of OPERA America. Co-productions provide participants with the means to present new or rarely-performed repertoire, to create sets and costumes that are more complex than might otherwise be possible and, in some instances, to save money. Successful co-productions depend on trusting relationships built over time among participants. Although they offer various rewards, co-production partnerships require advance planning, additional oversight and technical expertise not associated with stand-alone productions. The challenges of co-production frequently overwhelm the advantages they offer, reducing the chance to leverage resources among companies.

▶ **Recommended Action #13** | *Provide direct assistance to members to create co-production partnerships.*

In relation to productions of new works, subsequent productions of existing works, or productions of the standard repertoire, OPERA America will become more active in helping members build production partnerships through direct communication with partners; organization, facilitation and documentation of meetings; and the identification of consultants, as needed.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #4 | *Strengthen the membership by increasing direct contact with current and new members to ensure they derive the full benefit of managerial and artistic services available to them.*

“If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

— African Proverb

OPERA America places responsiveness to members as its top operating imperative. Member requests for research, assistance and consultation receive immediate attention. Utilization of and participation in services and programs is a major indication of OPERA America’s health.

Limited staff time makes it difficult for OPERA America to reach out to members who do not express specific needs. Members of the Strategy Committee, however, called for a more dynamic relationship between members and OPERA America staff, who will actively promote specific co-productions, research projects, professional development activities and other resources they believe could assist members. When necessary, OPERA America will oversee management of special projects that are beneficial to members or groups of members, but which are beyond the capacity of members to manage on their own.

Building the visibility of opera across the country can only be achieved through the combined effort of all members in an effort that is coordinated nationally and implemented locally. Few opera companies are able to generate national media coverage. Working together, OPERA America members have the potential to communicate a unified message about the allure, accessibility and relevance of opera. Such a campaign can also increase local media for opera companies that are participating in a national program.

▶ ***Recommended Action #14 | Develop National Opera Week in order to increase the visibility and appreciation of opera, opera companies and opera artists.***

The idea of a National Opera Week was tested in 2009, in conjunction with the presentation of the 2009 NEA Opera Honors. Over 100 member organizations offered a wide variety of free programs to the public in opera houses and locations throughout their communities. Research indicates that a significant percentage of program attendees were new to opera. Participating companies and many that were not able to join the program in its inaugural year expressed enthusiasm for developing the initiative as a focal point of a national communication strategy. In coming years, the place of National Opera Week will be firmly set on the fall calendar in order to maximize the advantage of advance planning. Media strategies will be developed to ensure the highest possible benefit to members. OPERA America will recruit member participation, where necessary, to ensure national reach and highlight all aspects of production. Sponsors will be secured to provide additional resources to members to enrich public programming and increase attendance. OPERA America will develop a template to improve measurement of attendance at community programs and learn more about attendees.

OPERA America's member enrollment is unique among national arts service organizations. Over 90 percent of eligible organizations are Professional Company Members. OPERA America's data analysis describes the field rather than just a fraction of the field that belongs to the association, enabling OPERA America to speak with authority about issues and trends. Further, OPERA America's market penetration ensures access to the broadest possible range of expertise and creative endeavor. This level of market penetration should be maintained even as the field grows and diversifies.

While the number of professional opera companies in the United States has remained relatively constant over the last 10 years, the field has documented a tremendous increase in the number of smaller opera ensembles that have little or no staff. Frequently led by artists, they offer performances of alternative repertoires in new and unusual venues, generally employing local talent. These ensembles add to opera's vitality and creativity, provide early professional experience for aspiring artists and serve audiences who may not enjoy grand opera. At the same time, these ensembles do not need — and may never need — many of the institutional services developed by OPERA America for larger, traditional opera companies. Important in the recruitment and retention of these members will be a commitment to learn and respect the operating dynamics of small ensembles and to support them in the realization of their unique organizational and artistic visions.

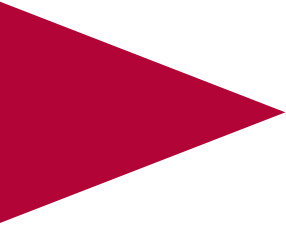
▶ ***Recommended Action #15 | Increase member recruitment and retention in partnership with current members.***

OPERA America is skilled at identifying and communicating with potential members, but endorsement from current members will increase the chances for building the OPERA America network, especially among smaller organizations. Current members from all levels of membership will be invited to participate in a coordinated effort to increase recruitment. These same members will be asked to encourage new members to avail themselves of services and to assist OPERA America in evaluating these services (see below).

Staff currently maintain an informal tracking system that generates annual reports of member utilization of services. These reports reveal that a majority of opera companies turn each year to OPERA America for assistance, but only a few companies are fully engaged in multiple programs. Participation rates reflect only half the challenge. Once engaged, members must have a positive experience through which they and their organizations can derive positive benefit.

▶ ***Recommended Action #16 | Develop a formal tracking and evaluation process to increase the level and satisfaction of member involvement in programs and services.***

OPERA America will institute regular evaluation of member services to assess satisfaction levels and derive suggestions for improvement. Working with the Membership Committee, goals for participation and satisfaction will be established and monitored. Annual reports to members will inform them of their use of services and promote the potential for increased benefit from membership.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #5 | Address OPERA AMERICA governance, partnership, staffing and related budget issues in order to ensure that expertise and resources are available to fulfill the objectives and actions articulated in this plan.

“Look at a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without so much as a crack showing in it. Yet, at the hundred-and-first blow, it will split in two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it, but all that had gone before.”

— Jacob Riis, journalist, photographer and social reformer

A strong nonprofit organization depends for its success on board members who understand and fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Like any board, OPERA America relies on the varied skills of members to advance the work of the organization. Core programs and services are now firmly established. As the work of the association becomes more complicated, additional skills and resources are needed.

The composition of OPERA America’s Board of Directors has changed over the years from one comprised exclusively of Professional Company Member General Directors to one that is more reflective of the breadth and diversity of the field. At the same time, the establishment of active forums and committees has further broadened the participation of members in the work of the association. The composition and structure of OPERA America’s Board of Directors should continue to evolve to meet the needs of the organization, to be broadly inclusive of many artistic and administrative perspectives, and to ensure the rewarding involvement of members.

▶ **Recommended Action #17 | Review and revise OPERA America’s leadership structure in order to ensure enthusiastic engagement, effectiveness in decision making and success in fundraising.**

Leaders of the Strategy Council and network forums will participate in board discussions of programs and priorities. The number and mandates of board and non-board committees will be adjusted, as needed, to provide appropriate input to the design and oversight of all programs. When necessary, OPERA America will invite outside experts to participate on committees and/or task forces to ensure that expertise is available. Individuals with specific skills and resources, or access to them, will be recruited to join the board.

OPERA America has been the fortunate beneficiary of extraordinary support from a number of individuals who have served on the OPERA America Board of Directors and others who enjoy a less formal affiliation with the organization. The commitment of effort, expertise and resources by these exceptional individuals should be recognized and affirmed more formally.

► **Recommended Action #18** | *Establish a President's Council to honor and encourage the continued involvement of individuals who have made a significant contribution to OPERA America.*

The structure and procedures of the Council will be reviewed by the Governance Committee and Board of Directors.

OPERA America's experience with philanthropy parallels that of member organizations. While support from foundations and corporations has been stable at best, contributions from individuals have become increasingly important. OPERA America's annual fund has grown over the last 10 years into the second largest source of general operating support for the organization thanks to the generosity of select trustees and patrons who value the unique work of the national service organization. OPERA America staff have worked to preserve trust among member companies by adhering to a pledge to do nothing that will diminish the support of donors for their local opera companies. Based on this trust, members have suggested that more could be done to build OPERA America's resource base in order to support service to members as outlined in this plan.

The total increased annual cost for the staff, travel, meeting and other expenses associated with the full implementation of the programmatic elements of this plan (excluding capital projects such as the Opera Center and *The Opera Fund*) will be approximately \$600,000 per year by 2015, representing an increase in OPERA America's operating budget of approximately 20 percent. Programs and services will be implemented only as funding becomes available.

► **Recommended Action #19** | *Establish a Development Committee to design strategies and assist with fundraising on behalf of member services delivered through OPERA America.*

Members will help access support from local and regional foundations that may be interested in supporting regional activities, corporations that would benefit from national affiliation with opera, and individuals who understand the unique role of OPERA America in supporting the entire field.

OPERA America has employed a strategy of comprehensive dues since its establishment. Professional Company Members pay a single fee each year to gain access to the full portfolio of services offered by OPERA America, with the exception of the annual conference. The dues structure itself has not been changed since the mid-1990s, although company annual fees increase or decrease with the size of operating budgets. In the future, it may be preferable to charge for certain services so basic membership fees can be held as stable as possible while companies that avail themselves fully of new services increase payments to OPERA America.

► **Recommended Action #20** | *Review the structure of membership benefits and related dues.*

The Membership and Finance Committees of OPERA America will evaluate options for a new dues structure that combines a basic fee with additional payments for enhanced services. The structure and benefits for individual, associate and business members will also be reviewed.

OPERA America's commitment to international cooperation is reflective of the character of the industry itself in which artists from many countries come together to perform an international repertoire that is performed by opera companies around the world. Co-productions frequently include partners from several countries and the issues of new works, audience development and fundraising cross borders.

In the mid-1990s, OPERA America's International Associate Membership included more than 20 European companies. Working with leaders of several opera associations in Europe, OPERA America was instrumental in establishing Opera Europa. At the same time, OPERA America's Canadian members established Opera.ca in order to supplement OPERA America's core member services with advocacy, new works and professional development efforts that were responsive to unique Canadian circumstances.

OPERA Europa and Opera.ca have grown and thrived in recent years. While each organization has unique imperatives that will shape programs and policies, communication across the world of opera will benefit all companies.

▶ ***Recommended Action #21 | Establish regular leadership meetings with Opera Europa and Opera.ca, as well as other international service organizations to ensure the highest level of collaboration and coordination.***

Communication with other specialty organizations, such as RESEO (serving European opera educators), will continue and increase. OPERA America will help coordinate joint board meetings, shared member benefits and other resources that can benefit all opera companies. To the extent possible, OPERA America and Opera Europa Forums will be coordinated through reciprocal member participation. OPERA America will also work with other regions to collaborate with and/or help establish service networks.

OPERA America's dedication to national collaboration across the disciplines is evidenced by the organization's leadership of the 2004 and 2008 National Performing Arts Conventions. OPERA America has fulfilled leadership responsibilities in other multi-disciplinary work, especially in relation to the Performing Arts Alliance.

Communication with the other national service organizations reveals that many of the trends and issues identified in this plan are shared by the other fields in the areas of public policy, technology and professional development. OPERA America and its members will benefit from the sharing of best practices and collaborative efforts that increase the content and efficiency of services.

▶ ***Recommended Action # 22 | Establish regular leadership meetings with other national arts service organizations to address priority issues that are shared across the disciplines.***

Increased communication among the national service organizations should extend to all staff. OPERA America will advocate for increased communication and cooperation among professional networks across the performing arts, especially in the areas of education, fundraising, marketing and professional development. Within the opera field, OPERA America will seek opportunities to work more effectively with the National Opera Association, Opera Volunteers International and other services providers. Responsibility for special collaborative projects will be assigned, as appropriate, to participants.

OPERA America's staff operates at a high level of efficiency, especially after a reduction in force undertaken in association with the recession of 2008-2010. The Objectives and Recommended Actions contained in this plan will require the expansion of the current staff, especially in the areas of professional development, member services, trustee and volunteer services, artistic services, information technology and meeting management. Where appropriate, programs that no longer deliver sufficient value to members will be discontinued in order to accommodate new initiatives.

▶ **Recommended Action #23** | *Increase the OPERA America staff to fulfill the objectives and actions articulated in this plan.*

Recommendations for increased staff will be consistent with the organization's commitment to maintaining a balanced budget. As OPERA America builds the staff, emphasis should be placed on finding more employees with direct experience working with opera companies in order to make certain that links to the field are strong.

The engagement of members in the work of OPERA America and the related utilization of services will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Membership Committee of the Board of Directors. The goals articulated in this plan, however, describe a more ambitious aspiration to increase opera's relevance in the public perception. Success in fulfilling this aspiration will be the ultimate measure of the effectiveness of OPERA America's collaboration with members. Measuring public appreciation of opera and opera companies beyond ticket sales presents a challenge requiring the development of an assessment strategy that can be used by members and aggregated by OPERA America.

▶ **Recommended Action # 24** | *Establish a process for measuring public appreciation of opera and opera companies.*

OPERA America will work with members and research specialists to develop a model that can be used locally and nationally.

CONCLUSION

“Success always comes when preparation meets opportunity.”

— Henry Hartman, artist

OPERA America has adjusted and grown to respond to the needs of members for support and leadership — from its establishment in Seattle in 1970 through 35 years in Washington, D.C., to its new home in New York City.

Now celebrating the organization’s 40th anniversary, OPERA America leaders are looking ahead to anticipate the needs of opera companies, artists and audiences. At a time when the rate of change and innovation is accelerating, it is difficult, and perhaps unwise, to dwell on specific solutions to current challenges. From a strategic perspective, too much focus on current issues can obscure larger trends and opportunities. Short-term focus can divert attention from discussion of capacities that have the potential to sustain the organization and a field into the future.

The new strategic plan, *New Challenges. New Opportunities. New Capacities: 2010 to 2015*, emphasizes the development of core capabilities that can inform and invigorate the field for years to come. The recommended actions enumerated in this plan will result in increased intellectual capacity through the establishment of a new Strategy Council, specialty forums and professional development activities. The plan calls for the development of OPERA America’s physical capacities through the establishment of an Opera Center that will function as the ‘center of gravity’ for the art form and industry. OPERA America’s capacity as a strategic grant maker will be enhanced through an increased *Opera Fund*. The membership will be increased and relationships with members made stronger. Governance, staff and financial capacities — the foundation for the organization — are also to be strengthened.

It is in the nature of artists and arts organizations to seek a unique identity. OPERA America is pledged to support members in the pursuit of their individual missions. At the same time, OPERA America calls on all members and all opera stakeholders to join together in common cause to generate the ideas and strategies that will ensure the relevance and vitality of opera and opera companies into the 21st century.

APPENDIX A: PLAN SUMMARY

VISION

Opera is a creative form that combines all the arts and draws on the cultural traditions and talent of nations from around the world. With the human voice as the central instrument, opera is both the most natural and the richest reflection of the multi-media, global community of the 21st century. Opera and opera companies have the power to inspire diverse audiences and enhance the cultural, educational and economic vitality of communities. In its unique position as the national service organization, and in order to realize the power of the art form in North America more fully, OPERA America will enhance its leadership role as a champion and catalyst for opera by forging a dynamic partnership with members to increase creativity, excellence, effectiveness and relevance across the field.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #1 | *Develop OPERA America's capacity and identity as the leading action-oriented think tank for opera by working with members as full partners to develop ideas and strategies that will advance their work and strengthen the field as a whole.*

- **Recommended Action #1** | Establish a Strategy Council as a permanent resource for the field to stimulate creative thinking about overarching trends and related challenges and opportunities.
- **Recommended Action #2** | Formalize existing forums and establish new forums for other networks and interest areas to help develop specific new strategies that strengthen the entire opera community.
- **Recommended Action #3** | Provide travel assistance for members participating in forums and other special committees.
- **Recommended Action #4** | Establish a Professional Development Committee to expand and improve training and leadership programs.
- **Recommended Action #5** | Develop and implement an electronic media program to extend access to all OPERA America learning resources throughout the year.
- **Recommended Action #6** | Develop a roster of consultants, mentors and coaches who are available to provide direct assistance to companies.
- **Recommended Action #7** | Establish a Research Advisory Committee to increase OPERA America's research capacity.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #2 | *Establish an Opera Center in New York City that will provide members with space and support services that are essential to the efficient conduct of business, strengthen the identity of the art form and industry, and engender a greater sense of common purpose.*

- **Recommended Action #8** | Build the Opera Center endowment to offset long-term leasing and operating expenses, and secure funding for construction.
- **Recommended Action #9** | Identify a site for the Opera Center that will realize as many of the intended uses for the space as possible.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #3 | *Build The Opera Fund and other artistic services to increase support of new and existing American works, co-productions and artist training.*

- **Recommended Action #10** | Increase *The Opera Fund* from approximately \$6 million to \$10 million by 2015 in order to increase the size of grants awarded.
- **Recommended Action #11** | Re-establish grants in support of second and subsequent productions of existing North American operas.
- **Recommended Action #12** | Administer the Director-Designer Showcase and create programs for opera conductors, and composers and librettists.
- **Recommended Action #13** | Provide direct assistance to members to create co-production partnerships.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #4 | *Strengthen the membership by increasing direct contact with current and new members to ensure they derive the full benefit of managerial and artistic services available to them.*

- **Recommended Action #14** | Develop National Opera Week in order to increase the visibility and appreciation of opera, opera companies and opera artists.
- **Recommended Action #15** | Increase member recruitment and retention in partnership with current members.
- **Recommended Action #16** | Develop a formal tracking and evaluation process to increase the level and satisfaction of member involvement in programs and services.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #5 | *Address OPERA AMERICA governance, partnership, staffing and related budget issues in order to ensure that expertise and resources are available to fulfill the objectives and actions articulated in this plan*

- **Recommended Action #17** | Review and revise OPERA America's leadership structure in order to assure enthusiastic engagement, effectiveness in decision making and success in fund-raising.
- **Recommended Action #18** | Establish a President's Council to honor and encourage the continued involvement of individuals who have made a significant contribution to OPERA America.
- **Recommended Action #19** | Establish a Development Committee to design strategies and assist with fundraising on behalf of member services delivered through OPERA America.
- **Recommended Action #20** | Review the structure of membership benefits and related dues.
- **Recommended Action #21** | Establish regular leadership meetings with Opera Europa and Opera.ca as, well as other international service organizations, to ensure the highest level of collaboration and coordination.
- **Recommended Action #22** | Establish regular leadership meetings with other national arts service organizations to address priority issues that are shared across the disciplines.
- **Recommended Action #23** | Increase the OPERA America staff to fulfill the objectives and actions articulated in this plan.
- **Recommended Action #24** | Establish a process for measuring public appreciation of opera and opera companies.

The strength of an association is based on the authentic benefits that members derive from programs and services. Fulfilling the objectives articulated in this plan will help all members to advance the art form, build stronger organizations and individual skills, and regard OPERA America as an essential ally in the realization of mutual goals.

APPENDIX B: IMPLEMENTATION CHART

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES		FY2011	FY2012
Objective #1 Develop capacity and identity as the leading action-oriented think tank for opera	Strategy Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create ‘charters’ for the Strategy Council and Forums that define membership and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene Strategy Council • Review and revise Strategic Plan
	Network Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene Education, Electronic Media, Singer Training, Technical-Production Forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form and convene New Works and Marketing/PR Forums • Convene all existing Forums • Introduce travel assistance for Forums
	Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Professional Development Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review portfolio of Professional Development Programs, including electronic access • Establish team of consultants and coaches available to members
	Research		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Research Advisory Committee • Conduct inventory of current OPERA America and member research
Objective #2 Establish a national Opera Center in New York City as a center of gravity for the field	Opera Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build Opera Center endowment with gifts and pledges • Secure an Opera Center location • Complete design of the Opera Center • Adjust current lease to accommodate construction schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete fundraising for construction and endowment • Complete construction of the Opera Center • Hire management staff • Open Opera Center
Objective #3 Build the <i>Opera Fund</i> to increase support of new and existing American works, artist training and audience development	Opera Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase <i>Opera Fund</i> endowment to \$6 million • Introduce support for second and subsequent productions • Administer Director-Designer Showcase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase endowment to \$7 million • Design and administer a program for composers and librettists
	Co-Productions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase direct assistance for co-productions 	
Objective #4 Strengthen the membership by increasing direct services to current and new members	National Opera Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase member participation in National Opera Week • Design attendance measurement process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure sponsor for National Opera Week • Increase media coverage • Implement measurement process • Introduce membership recruitment strategies in select states. • Provide individual service reports to all Professional Company Members
	Membership Recruitment and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and membership recruitment strategies for smaller companies. 	
	Tracking and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop member service tracking and assessment process 	
Objective #5 Address internal governance, partnership, staffing and financial issues	Board of Directors and Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish President’s Council • Establish Development Committee • Link Strategy Council and Forum leaders to the Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review membership structure, dues and fees for service • Convene joint Board meetings in Europe. • Establish regular leadership meetings with other national service organizations • Add Professional Development position • Add Membership position • Develop Evaluation Process
	Membership Structure and Dues		
	Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene joint OPERA America, Opera Europe and Opera.ca Board meetings in Boston 	
	Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Artistic Services Coordinator to full-time • Add Staff Position for Trustee and Volunteer Services/Development 	
	Evaluation		

APPENDIX C:

PLANNING PROCESS

On April 29, 2009, members of the OPERA America Board of Directors authorized the formation of a Strategy Committee to guide a year-long planning process. The committee was appointed by Board Chairman Anthony Freud and Marc Scorca, president and CEO, over the summer of 2009. John A. (Gus) Blanchard, III, trustee emeritus of The Minnesota Opera, agreed to serve as committee chairman. Broadly representative of OPERA America's membership, including company representatives, artists and other interested stakeholders, committee members dedicated their first meeting in September 2009 to identifying priority trends and issues that are likely to shape the art form and the field over the next 10 years.

Ten working groups comprised of over 75 other members were convened by telephone conference call immediately following the first meeting of the Strategy Committee. Participants were asked to review the summary of trends and issues identified by the Strategy Committee and to supplement, amplify and clarify the subjects that had been discussed.

At the second meeting of the Strategy Committee, trends and issues were prioritized before attention was turned to ways OPERA America could respond to implicit challenges and opportunities. Taking the outcome of this meeting as a point of departure, OPERA America staff wrote a draft of a plan that was reviewed by members of the Strategy Committee at a meeting in February, 2010. A final draft of the plan incorporating their recommendations will be submitted to members of the Strategy Committee and working groups for further review.

Members of the OPERA America Board of Directors have reviewed the work of the Strategy Committee and working groups at each board meeting in order to assess the progress that has been made and to contribute additional perspective to the discussion.

The final plan was distributed for review by OPERA America's voting members in May 2010. Final adjustments were presented to the Board of Directors at the meeting of June 9, 2010 and then submitted for final approval to voting members at the Annual Business meeting, which took place in Los Angeles in conjunction with *Opera Conference 2010*.

STRATEGY COMMITTEE

Professor Richard Bado, Director of Opera Studies, The Shepherd School of Music,
Rice University
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Patrick Carfizzi, Singer
Keith Cerny, CEO, Sheet Music Plus
William Cole, Executive Director, Opera Cleveland
David B. Devan, Executive Director, Opera Company of Philadelphia
William Florescu, General Director, Florentine Opera Company
Anthony Freud, General Director, Houston Grand Opera
Robin Guarino, Associate Professor of Opera, University of Cincinnati
Jane Hargraft, General Manager, Opera Atelier
Wendall Harrington, Designer
Charles Jarden, Executive Director, American Opera Projects
Heather Kemp, Director of Finance, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis
Marcus Kühle, Director of Artistic Operations, Cincinnati Opera
JoAnn LaBrecque-French, Director of Marketing, Washington National Opera
Lowell Liebermann, Composer
Peggy Monastera, Director of Promotion, G. Schirmer, Inc./Associated Music Publishers
Olive Mosier, Director of Arts and Culture, William Penn Foundation
Esther Nelson, General and Artistic Director, Boston Lyric Opera
Kevin Newbury, Stage Director
Carol Penterman, CEO and Executive Director, Nashville Opera
Pierre Ruhe, Music Critic
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Marilyn Shapiro, Executive Vice President, Los Angeles Opera
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Kevin Smith, President and CEO, The Minnesota Opera
Gregory C. Swinehart, Partner, Deloitte Financial Advisory Services
Alec C. Treuhaft, Senior Vice President, Director, IMG Artists

WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

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Carol Bailey, Designer
Peter Dean Beck, Designer
Debra Bell, Pittsburgh Opera
Sandra Bernhard, Houston Grand Opera
Peter J. Bilotta, Portland Opera
Victoria Bond, Composer
Robert Bradford-Carley, Edmonton Opera
Stacy Brightman, Los Angeles Opera
Annie Burrige,
 Opera Company of Philadelphia
Lisa Bury, Florida Grand Opera
Dorothy Byrne, Singer
Andrew Chugg, Virginia Opera
John Conklin, Designer
Jeff Corriveau, Virginia Opera
Jeff Couture, The Minnesota Opera
Conrad Cummings, Composer
Darrel Curtice, Opera Colorado
Jenny Daggett, Opera Omaha
Kathy Damaskos, Boston Lyric Opera
Jeff Ellis, Sarasota Opera
Jaimee Evans, Opera Carolina
Allison Felter, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis
Stacy Frierson,
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Paula Fowler, Utah Symphony | Utah Opera
Rich Freshwater, Florida Grand Opera
Douglas Kinney Frost, Conductor
Tracy Galligher,
 Opera Company of Philadelphia
Laura Hassell, Portland Opera
Patrick Hansen, Coach
Jake Heggie, Composer
Greg Henkel, San Francisco Opera
Cristina Herrera, The Atlanta Opera
Paul Horpedahl, The Santa Fe Opera
Kurt Howard, Fort Worth Opera
Laura Hudman, The Santa Fe Opera
Judith Ilika, Theodore Presser Company
Tim Kennedy, Pensacola Opera
Marsha LeBoeuf,
 Washington National Opera
Perryn Leech, Houston Grand Opera
Jennie Leghart, Pittsburgh Opera
Anne Manson, Conductor
Jorge Martin, Composer
McB McManus, Des Moines Metro Opera
Paul Melroy, The Atlanta Opera
Wendy Merkert, Dayton Opera
Eric Mitchko, The Atlanta Opera
Tom Morris, The Santa Fe Opera
Andy Mozisek, Austin Lyric Opera
Gary Murphy, Los Angeles Opera
John Musto, Composer
Timothy Myers, Conductor
Ruth Nott, San Francisco Opera
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Richard Russell, Sarasota Opera
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Michael Shapiro, Ravenswood Studio
Roxy Stouffer-Cruz, The Minnesota Opera
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Ken Tarasi, Sarasota Opera
Braden Toan, Conductor
Sneja Tomassian, Cincinnati Opera
Sandra G. Torget, Opera North
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Janet Wilson, New Orleans Opera
Tim Yakimec, Edmonton Opera
Cynthia Young, The Dallas Opera
Diane Zola, Houston Grand Opera

OPERA AMERICA

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