



WORLD
OPERA
FORUM

— 2018 —

A SUMMARY

It is a great honour and privilege for all of us at Madrid's historic opera house, the Teatro Real, to welcome you to the first-ever World Opera Forum (12–15 April). This momentous occasion is the manifestation of our desire to engage opera enthusiasts from around the world in a global conversation about the future of opera and to chart the course of this time-honoured art form through the ever-shifting, media-laden and increasingly globalised landscape of tomorrow.

The Teatro Real is delighted to host this groundbreaking forum, which coincides with the 200th anniversary of our institution. Since 1818, when the first stone was laid, the Teatro Real has served as a venue for the world's most talented singers, conductors and stage managers. Today, it appeals to audiences of all ages and interests with programmes that combine classical and contemporary lyrical repertory, while actively championing opera as a living, multidisciplinary, accessible art form with the capacity to stir powerful emotions and bridge demographic divides.

This gathering is an opportunity for prominent professionals in the field to share their experiences, insights and concerns, as well as to address the four main themes of the conference — Cultural Heritage, New Work, Diversity and Advocacy — by attending the discussion panels scheduled throughout the event. In addition, the opening session of the World Opera Forum, on 12 April, will dovetail with the Teatro Real's debut performance of Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana*, a new production created in collaboration with the English National Opera and the Vlaamse Opera.

It is my pleasure to head this distinguished cultural institution and to welcome you to its storied halls for what I expect will be a lively, productive and memorable event.

This forum would not have been possible without the backing of the government of Spain, the regional government of Madrid, Madrid City Hall and our many generous sponsors.

Finally, we would like to offer our sincerest thanks to the three international associations of theatres and lyrical festivals, specifically Marc Scorca at OPERA America, Nicholas Payne at Opera Europa and Alejandra Martí at Opera Latinoamérica, for their unwavering support and cooperation in bringing this event to fruition.



Ignacio García Belenguer
CEO, TEATRO REAL

Our generous hosts at Teatro Real want you to celebrate a glorious anniversary. My wish is that you find convincing answers to our provocative questions about the future direction of opera.

The four chosen topics are not the only challenges confronting opera today, but addressing them is crucial to opera's survival.

Europe's rich cultural heritage is a heavy burden. The rest of the world can help us distinguish between what to cherish and what to discard. How may we reconcile legacy and life?

Performances live in the present. How do we give creativity its place at the heart of opera?

A successful theatre relates to its community. How may we ensure that opera reflects today's multicultural society?

We have a responsibility to advocate opera to the world. How may we articulate through modern means that essential sense of purpose?

Let us together forge strategies to invigorate opera for future audiences.



Nicholas Payne
DIRECTOR OF OPERA EUROPA



It is an honor and pleasure to greet opera colleagues from around the world at the first World Opera Forum. This meeting is the realization of a long-held hope that discussion about the future of opera could be a global conversation that reflects the global nature of our art form. We are deeply indebted to our hosts at the Teatro Real for making it possible.

In the years before the existence of Opera Europa and Ópera Latinoamérica, OPERA America served almost 30 International Associate members across Europe, South America, Australia and Asia — companies that were interested in knowing more about marketing and fundraising as it was practiced in the United States and Canada. While we shared a passionate commitment to excellence, our business practices and artistic sensibilities diverged in many ways.

Since then, we have been thrilled by the development of our new partner organizations that have been successful in expanding the community of opera company members to more than 300 worldwide. We also have taken note of the increasing convergence of discussion topics as we navigate through a complex mix of challenges and opportunities. The most important shared issues are reflected in the agenda for this exciting convening.

We inhabit a dynamic world where inherited cultural traditions are being challenged, demographics are changing, government priorities are shifting, and technology is reshaping our relationships with one another, our audiences and the public. Within this ever-changing landscape, opera retains its unique power as a story-based, multimedia art form that can strengthen communities through public partnerships and performances that inspire audiences across economic, social and racial divides.

We are all deeply indebted to Ignacio García-Belenguer Laita, Nicholas Payne and their colleagues at the Teatro Real and Opera Europa for all their effort to make this meeting a success — and the first of many.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc A. Scorca".

Marc A. Scorca
PRESIDENT/CEO

WORLD OPERA FORUM: AN INTRODUCTION

By Nicholas Payne

Opera reaches more people on our planet than ever before in its history. This curious hybrid of music and drama, song and dance, and spectacle, born 420 years ago in Renaissance Italy as a reimagining of ancient Greek theatre, has retained an unsurpassed power to communicate deep emotions and ideas which is now appreciated well beyond its European origins. It touches many millions of people every year.

Yet opera is suffering a crisis of confidence. It has never been a serious commercial proposition; but are the various funding models which have so far sustained it now broken beyond repair? Is it too slow and too long for today's fast-moving world? Has it become unfashionable? Has it failed to renew itself as have theatre, dance, film, painting, sculpture, architecture? Can it be saved from terminal decline?

Such questions preoccupy some of the 300 or more companies represented by the professional associations Opera Europa, OPERA America and Ópera Latinoamérica. Together, we decided to pool resources to convene an event which would also include the rest of the opera world. Madrid presented itself as the ideal location, when Teatro Real offered to host us in celebration of its 200th anniversary in 2018. So the first World Opera Forum was born.

We have chosen to focus on four topics during the central two days and to subject them to intensive debate during half a day each. We have invited a mixture of composers and librettists, directors and performers, managers, and other stakeholders. Slightly under half of those active participants will be from Europe; about a third from North America; and the balance from South America, Africa, Asia and Oceania. For each subject, we propose a question.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Will the weight of its heritage kill opera?

In case you had not realised, 2018 has been designated the Year of European Cultural Heritage. It is a formidable and growing legacy. When I first went to opera, the repertory covered about 200 years from Gluck's *Orfeo* to the then new works of Britten and Henze. Today, it extends over 400 years from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* to the recent creations of Adams and Adès. We are enriched by many of the rediscoveries from past centuries, as well as by the enduring masterpieces of great composers, but they have exponentially transformed the opera house into a museum with limited space for the art of today. Should we become more selective? Can we reconcile legacy and life?

NEW WORK

Can new work regain its place at the heart of opera, as in theatre or cinema?

That is the place it held during its "golden age" between Mozart and Strauss. For the impresarios of the 19th century, new operas were the main events. Mahler was considered unusual as director of the Vienna State Opera for programming new interpretations of *Don Giovanni*, *Fidelio* and *Tristan* to complement the new creations. After *Salome* was premiered in 1905, it was taken up in 50 theatres within two years. How many operas since *Turandot* have enjoyed that kind of immediate public impact? Nicholas Hytner, as director of the National Theatre in London, programmed 50 percent new work to 50 percent heritage. How many opera managers would dare emulate him?

DIVERSITY

How may opera have a meaning for a diverse audience and reflect 21st- century society?

A successful theatre relates to the community within which it lives. That was the role of ancient Greek theatre. It was epitomised by Verdi in Risorgimento Italy. The growing popular success of opera in post-WWII social-democratic Europe captured the spirit of its time. Today's predominantly white and aging audience does not reflect the multicultural cities in which many people live. Dance and spoken theatre have been more successful in attracting diverse audiences, because their performers reflect that diversity. Chineke!, the orchestra dedicated to "championing change and celebrating diversity in classical music" performs for us in Madrid. Will it set an example?

ADVOCACY

How will we build our capacity to advocate opera in our democracy?

Those of us who love opera may like to criticise this production or that singer, but we hardly need convincing that opera deserves support. We are a minority. Minorities matter, for few interests appeal to a majority of people, but politicians and business are influenced by voters. A majority consensus in favour will determine a course of action. That is democracy. By no means everyone appreciates fine art, but I believe that a majority of voters would favour continuing support for the Prado, or the British Museum, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Would similar numbers defend Teatro Real, or Covent Garden, or the Metropolitan Opera, if their existence was threatened?

Each half-day during the World Opera Forum will begin with a series of short "provocations," each limited to 273 words, on the pithy precedent of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address of 1863. They will be followed by a "fishbowl" debate animated by an inner circle of 12 invited participants and an expert moderator. Delegates will then divide into four break-out groups for more intimate discussions around the subject. Finally they will reassemble to hear conclusions presented by rapporteurs. Several of those, and three of the "provocateurs," will be young delegates chosen from participants in Opera Europa's Opera Management Course over the past five years.

Neither I nor my senior professional colleagues wish to predict what the conclusions of this World Opera Forum will be, but we are working toward publishing a series of action points which may help to chart a way forward for opera in today's competitive, turbulent but invigorating world. ♦

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Heritage)

Lidiya Yankovskaya

Music Director, Chicago Opera
Theater (Cultural Heritage)

AGENDA

APRIL 12

MORNING

17.00h	WOF Registration	Foyer (Ground Floor)
18.00h	Official Welcome	Main Room
18.40h	Welcome Drink	Salón Falla (2 nd Floor)

CULTURAL PROGRAM

20.00h	Premiere of <i>Gloriana</i> , by Benjamin Britten	Teatro Real
22.45h	Cocktail Reception with Artists	Café de Palacio (6 th Floor)

APRIL 13

MORNING

09.00h	Registration & Welcome Coffee	Antefoyer (Ground Floor)
09.15h	Mandatory Informative Session	Salón Falla (2 nd Floor)

CULTURAL HERITAGE – Will the richness and weight of its heritage kill opera?

10.00h	Provocation: 7 short artistic statements	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)
10:30h	Fishbowl Debate	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)
11:30h	Coffee Break	Salon Falla (2 nd Floor)
12:00h	Breakout Workshops*	Red Room, Green Room, Blue Room, Pink Room (2 nd Floor)
13:30h	Lunch	Cafe de Palacio (6 th Floor)

AFTERNOON

NEW WORK – Can new work regain its place at the heart of opera, as in theater or cinema?

15:00h	Provocation: 7 short artistic statements	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)
15:30h	Fishbowl Debate	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)
16:30h	Coffee Break	Salon Falla (2 nd Floor)
17:00h	Breakout Workshops*	Green Room, Blue Room, Red Room, Pink Room (2 nd Floor)
18.00h	End of sessions	

CULTURAL PROGRAM

18.45h	Palacio Real	
20.00h	<i>Gloriana</i> , by Benjamin Britten	
20.30h	Marfa Pages – An ode to time	

APRIL 14

MORNING

09.00h	Registration & Welcome Coffee	Antefoyer (Ground Floor)
09.15h	Mandatory Informative Session	Salon Falla (2 nd Floor)

DIVERSITY & AUDIENCES – How may opera reach and reflect 21st-century society?

10.00h	Performances by Chineke!	Main Room
10.30h	Fishbowl Debate	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)
11.30h	Coffee Break	Foyer (Ground Floor)
12.00h	Breakout Workshops	Green Room, Blue Room, Red Room, Pink Room (2 nd Floor)
13.15h	Lunch	Cafe de Palacio (6 th Floor)
13.15h	Mandatory Informative lunch for conclusions	Salon Folla (2 nd Floor)

AFTERNOON

ADVOCACY & PUBLIC VALUE – How will we advocate opera in our democracy and make the case for its public value?

15.00h	Provocation: 7 short artistic statements	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)
15.30h	Fishbowl Debate	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)
16.30h	Coffee Break Foyer	(Ground Floor)
17.00h	Breakout Workshops	Green Room, Blue Room, Red Room, Pink Room (2 nd Floor)
18.00h	Closing of the World Opera Forum	Ballroom (2 nd Floor)

CULTURAL PROGRAM

19.45h	Visit to Museo Reina Sofia
20.00h	Visit to Museo Thyssen
20.00h	<i>Gloriana</i> , by Benjamin Britten
20.15h	Visit to Museo del Prado

APRIL 15

12.00h	Francisco de Viñas Concert	Teatro Real
14.00h	Farewell Cocktail	Salon Falla (2 nd Floor)



**AN
INTERNATIONAL
FOCUS:
THE FIRST
WORLD OPERA
FORUM**

By Fred Cohn

“Ask not what the world owes opera, but what opera owes the world,” said Nicholas Payne, director of Opera Europa, at the

opening session of the first-ever World Opera Forum. A collaboration between OPERA America, Opera Europa and Ópera Latinoamérica, the forum, held in Madrid in April 2018, brought together more than 100 opera executives, artists and thinkers for an intensive three-day discussion of the art form and its role in 21st-century society. The WOF served in part as a 200th anniversary celebration for the host company, Madrid’s fabled Teatro Real. But it was also a culmination of an idea that Nicholas Payne, director of Opera Europa, and Marc A. Scorca, OA’s president/CEO, had been considering for years: a convocation of the field’s thought leaders from diverse disciplines and from all over the planet.

The WOF was not an orthodox conference, in which paying attendees attend a variegated slate of panel discussions and meetings. Instead, delegates were invited, on an all-expenses-paid basis, to take part in a focused series of shared discussions. Each had a specific role in one of the four general sessions: as moderators, provocateurs, facilitators and rapporteurs. (The present writer attended in order to document the event.) The participants included administrators and pundits, composers and librettists, and performers and directors, arriving not just from Europe, the U.S. and Latin America, but also Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. The Teatro Real and its general director, Ignacio García-Belenguer, brought in a number of government agencies and corporate sponsors to provide the considerable funds needed to transport, house and feed the participants.

Considering the plethora of shared interests among the delegates, the forum gave rise to spirited informal discussions at meals, receptions and arts events scattered throughout. On the afternoon of

April 12, the day before the general sessions for all delegates, board members from the three partner organizations — OPERA America, Opera Europa and Ópera Latinoamérica — met to discuss the business issues and artistic issues facing the field. It soon became clear that it was impossible to separate the two categories: The business of opera so thoroughly shapes the making of opera that you can't talk about one without the other. The core of the WOF was a series of four general sessions, held April 13 to 14, that gathered all the delegates together to discuss opera's past, present and future. Each session was broken into three segments:

- “Provocations,” held in the Teatro Real ballroom, with an eight-person panel addressing a “prompt” in the form of a question. Each was given three minutes to make a statement — and many of them were indeed provocative.
- A moderated “Fishbowl Debate” of 15 respondents, sitting across from the “provocateurs” at the main table.
- “Breakout Discussions,” in which all forum participants divided into “teams” — coded red, blue, green and pink — headed into smaller rooms for facilitated discussions of the issues that had been raised in the “Provocations” and “Fishbowl Debates.”

Although the four session topics — “Cultural Heritage,” “New Work,” “Diversity and Audiences” and “Advocacy and Public Value” — each defined a separate territory, in practice the subjects tended to bleed into each other, since it is hardly possible to examine any aspect of today's opera world in isolation. You can't discuss the rich heritage of opera without considering the role that new works play in enhancing or even challenging that heritage. Is the real or perceived elitism of opera part of its heritage? If so, how do you go about diversifying both the opera house's offerings, and the audiences that attend? Unless opera's audiences represent the community as a whole, how can you advocate for the public value of the art form? The fact that the discussions spilled out of their defined territories demonstrated both the interrelation of the topics at hand, and the passionate engagement of delegates in all aspects of opera and its cultural role. ▶

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Will the richness and weight of its heritage kill opera? Can we reconcile legacy and life?

The inherited repertoire also engenders potentially troubling social connotations. Opera attendance might represent a moment of socioeconomic achievement — an attitude that risks conjuring a sense of elitism and creating invisible barriers. Ticket prices play some role in this: How can we reconcile the need to generate revenue through ticket sales while making opera more accessible?

One way of addressing the perceived elitism of opera is through expanding the pool of directors, designers, conductors and singers who bring the repertoire to life, letting the professional face of opera reflect the diversity that organizations hope to find in their audiences. Fresh, even radical approaches can engender new vitality. Innovation, not historicity, is essential in making the canon speak to new, younger, more diverse audiences. And technology will play an ever-increasing role, both in bringing the work to larger audiences, and in providing its producers with new staging possibilities.

A European composer asked John Cage while he was living in Los Angeles: “Isn’t it difficult for you writing serious music so far from the center?” (meaning, presumably, Europe). Cage replied: “Isn’t it difficult for you writing serious music so close to the center?”

What Cage invokes is the notion of the periphery — the periphery is not the established canon, it is the fringe, the works that, presumably, aspire to make it to the center. But as we all know, things have shifted from the time when opera houses and churches constituted the anchors of both the geographic and cultural identity of a city.

I, for one, share Cage’s delight in working on the periphery — for most innovations in all other fields begin from an outlier position. If you look at opera in America, it is on the peripheries where you find radical change brewing. Composers aren’t waiting to be commissioned by one of the major opera houses; instead, you see them behaving like entrepreneurs, starting ensembles to perform their own music. This industriousness is a hallmark of the most experimental of American composers — I think of Robert Ashley, Meredith Monk, Harry Partch, Lou Harrison, Philip Glass, to name just a few who either created their own ensembles or their own instruments to realize ideas that had never before been attempted. Of those names, several are indeed making inroads into the center — and this is what happens to those on the periphery. Over time, they become tradition.

— YUVAL SHARON, FOUNDING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, THE INDUSTRY

There’s a danger that opera will become increasingly irrelevant unless it finds a stronger public voice. It currently sits on the perimeter of the wider arts debate. Opera is struggling to be heard alongside the excitement of shows like *Hamilton*, movies like *Moonlight* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* and television shows like *Homeland*. The weight of our cultural heritage will work against us all if we just keep talking to ourselves.

— JOHN BERRY, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, OPERA VENTURES

The concept of legacy has to do with the range of expectations for an art that has been constantly shaping its identity for the last 420 years. That identity has always ultimately been shaped on the basis of changes to the accepted conventions and aesthetic codes for each era. Those changes have often been traumatic and have always encountered resistance, even if the process might seem to have been fluid and calm when viewed from the distance of the present day. That was certainly not the case.

The fact is that challenging status quo is always one of the basic aspects of any “aesthetic information.” That’s the main legacy of tradition: a range of accepted aesthetic codes that can be altered in a way that achieves new possibilities, new meanings. That’s why legacy is an incredibly valuable asset. Obviously it must be an “asset,” never a strict agenda for a theater. Legacy should be the springboard that impels us to conquer the “art of today,” never a set of rules.

— **JOAN MATABOSCH, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, TEATRO REAL**

In the words of the theater director in *Capriccio* by Richard Strauss: “Where are the masterpieces that touch the heart of the people, that reflect their souls?” Where are they? I cannot find them, hard though I search. Only cold-blooded scholars stare at me: They ridicule tradition yet bring nothing new.

— **ANNA-CHRISTINA HANOUSEK, BADISCHES STAATSTHEATER KARLSRUHE**

“Heritage” is an exercise of power by one social group versus another.

— **DANIELA BOURET, GENERAL DIRECTOR, TEATRO SOLÍS, MONTEVIDEO**

Over the last 50+ years, our relentless pursuit for excellence and perfection in opera performance has unintentionally created calcified institutions. These focus largely on existing repertoire, using strict performance practices and systems. Approximately 90 percent of our existing resources are used to create existing repertory. That leaves only 10 percent for new forms of expression.

To survive, we need healthy enterprises placing equal effort into honoring and preserving core values, heritage and tradition, while simultaneously stimulating creative and innovative progress focused on wholly new outputs. To be relevant in today’s world, I believe we have to devote 50 percent of our output to work by living artists, artists from within and outside opera. Artists empowered to be fully creative in representing our period of history. Artists making use of different performance practices, spaces, theatrical construction, musical production and contemporary practices from other forms. If we can’t or won’t commit to something on this scale, then yes, the richness and weight of this heritage will kill opera.

— **DAVID DEVAN, GENERAL DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT, OPERA PHILADELPHIA**

We are talking about a canon that is 420 years of white men. The definition of “opera” needs to be expanded to include a larger definition of music theater

— **DANIEL KRAMER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA**

In an increasingly diverse world, new work is essential, but I do not think we necessarily need to abandon the core repertoire. What is the existing narrative about the standard repertoire, and how do we change it?

— **LIDIYA YANKOVSKAYA, MUSIC DIRECTOR, CHICAGO OPERA THEATER**

NEW WORK

Can new work regain its place at the heart of opera, as in theater or cinema?

The participants in the “New Work” discussion were in agreement on one comprehensive idea: In order for opera to continue to assert itself as a 21st-century art form, new works must play an ever-increasing role. But there’s no single formula for developing new operas, and during the session, creators and impresarios shared thoughts about the processes they follow.

Often works are developed in workshops, especially in the U.S. By taking new works off of the page and into the studio, these workshops help creators gauge the effects of their efforts, and discover the elements of their works that succeed as they intended — and those that do not. A dramaturg can play an essential role in helping composers and librettists shape the final product.

Much of the discussion involved “stories” — the topics that new works should address in order to argue for opera’s contemporary relevancy. A general consensus emerged that, first and foremost, the “stories” should address the issues of today, letting opera enter into the general cultural conversation of our time.

Other areas of interest included the institutional backup needed to foster new work. Education in universities and conservatories is key to developing new generations of opera creators. Discussion also centered on the business practices needed to foster new work: Where will the funding for new operas come from? Who will perform, produce and publish them?

Stop making excuses. It is every opera company’s obligation to present new work. It is our obligation to audiences and the art form. Our emphasis on established repertoire has created an enormous obstacle to opera’s long-term vibrancy. When we plan seasons where revivals significantly outnumber premieres, we are telling our audiences that new opera doesn’t matter; that new operas aren’t as good as older works; and that we are preparing opera for its extinction.

— **LAWRENCE EDELSON, FOUNDER, AMERICAN LYRIC THEATER**

Too many operas are full of brilliant instrumental invention, with nothing particularly memorable, musical, brilliant or thrilling to sing. It’s not enough to commission the most exciting composers in the world if they’re not also great *opera* composers.

— **JONATHAN DOVE, COMPOSER**

After developing many operas I can say: Not one collaboration was alike; not one team was alike; not one process was alike.

— **ROBIN GUARINO, CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, OPERA FUSION: NEW WORKS**

That which doesn’t change will die, and any company that does not invest significantly in new work is not doing its job.

— **JONATHAN MILLS, COMPOSER**

To be new is to be revolutionary: To be in dialogue with the past but not to repeat the past. To embrace new work, opera companies might look to the film world and the Safdie brothers, filmmakers who work in what they call “the hyper-now.” The hyper-now isn’t 19th-century dramaturgy. The hyper-now isn’t a reworking of the same narratives. Art that doesn’t address formal inventiveness cannot move us forward.

— **DONNA DI NOVELLI, LIBRETTIST**

I would advise composers to be open to other forms of contemporary art. If more composers were to collaborate with the librettists, choreographers and visual artists of our time, the broad audience of contemporary art, literature and dance might well find an avenue into opera.

— **JAN VANDENHOUE, DIRECTOR-DESIGNATE, OPERA VLAANDEREN**

The surest sign of a healthy musical art form is a close connection between composers and performers. In many forms of music, the composer-performer distinction simply doesn’t exist. A jazz musician who can’t improvise isn’t a jazz musician at all. And in rock music, if your band only performs music written by others, you’re merely a “cover band,” and nobody takes cover bands very seriously. From the composer’s perspective, most of the world’s opera houses are primarily “cover bands.” We need a new model: an opera company that is really a company, a group of artists — composers and performers — who work together to develop a shared artistic language over time.

— **MATTHEW AUCOIN, COMPOSER**

Those of us who love opera know that our emotional response to music has the power to connect us deeply to the characters we see onstage. But, particularly for younger audiences who are not familiar with the form, this connection can be tenuous if these stories don’t actually reflect the values of our current age. We tell stories in order to both understand and to create who we are, both as individuals and as a culture. Inevitably, we have evolved over the course of history. Slavery was common and accepted in the time of Mozart. Women could not vote in the time of Verdi. And Jim Crow was in full effect during Puccini’s career. We have changed as a global culture, and thus our stories must also change. This is not to say that we should not perform the older work, but we can no longer perform a *Così* or a *Carmen* without asking what we are really saying.

We have such an opportunity, as storytellers and empathy-makers, to contribute to the shared sense of story. In our current world, characterized by polarization, disconnection and feelings of isolation, this becomes increasingly important. Let us embrace our role by creating work that reflects the stories we believe in, the world that we believe in and the world we want to see.

— **KAMALA SANKARAM, COMPOSER**

New work is tolerated as long it stays somewhere at the edge of our seasons, to intellectually adorn them. Let’s face it, creativity and opera do not go together today anymore.

— **SOFIA SURGUTSCHOWA, ARTIST MANAGER**

We have dramaturgs for text; we need dramaturgs for music.

— **MARK CAMPBELL, LIBRETTIST**

DIVERSITY & AUDIENCES

The “Diversity” segment, leading off the second day of general sessions, started with a change of pace. In place of a “Provocations” session, we attended a performance by a chamber ensemble from Chineke!, the London orchestra made up of musicians of color. In the ensuing fishbowl session, Chi-chi Nwanoku, the orchestra’s founder, explained that the organization grew out of the lack of opportunity that the musicians had found with London’s established orchestras. The program at the morning concert was inspiring: Grieg’s *Holberg Suite* and the *Concerto Grosso* of Belize-born Errollyn Wallen, with the composer herself at the piano. The pairing of a classic European work with a recent piece incorporating jazz and Latin American influences, both of them played beautifully by musicians of mostly African heritage, made a stronger statement about diversity than words ever could have.

The ensuing discussions examined ways to bring an increasing level of diversity — in gender, age, race and ethnicity — both to the professional world of opera and to its audiences. The context, inevitably, was opera’s unfortunate track record in its image and its practices. The speakers were in agreement about two essential matters: 1) it is imperative to encourage diversity in the field, and 2) nobody is yet doing enough. The intention of effecting change is no longer enough: Change has to *happen*, and it must be measured against well-defined metrics and goals, geared to the composition of each company’s community and nation.

Again, new work played a significant role in the discourse, especially in regard to people of color, historically underrepresented in opera. If new, more diverse audiences are to be drawn to opera, they need to be able to see people who look like themselves onstage. Opera must find ways to be more diverse in its casting, its administrative personnel and its creators.

Diversity *is*; it’s not something you do. To say “We’re going to do diversity” is like saying “We’re going to do breathing.” What we mean is racial and cultural equity.

— **KERYL MCCORD, DIVERSITY/COMMUNITY ARTS CONSULTANT**

Change has to come from the top. But a lot of people — women, persons of color — don’t move to the top.

— **ODALINE DE LA MARTINEZ, COMPOSER/CONDUCTOR**

For too long, music from different cultures has been called “world music” or “ethnic music.” When you do that, you’re on top of the mountain and then you look around. Everything else is a flavor.

— **HUANG RUO, COMPOSER**

It is not enough to invite a couple of people of color to serve on your board; you have to make space for their voices. You can’t invite people to stay in your space and then say “Shhh!”

— **NADEGE SOUVENIR, TRUSTEE, MINNESOTA OPERA**

Minority groups need to be given room to move up, and that will require others to step aside and make space.

— **CHI-CHI NWANOKU, FOUNDER, CHINEKE!**

If you want to change, you will. You have to roll up your sleeves and say, “This is what should happen.” But if anyone in this room thinks they’re doing well enough, then they’re wasting their time.

— **GRAHAM VICK, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, BIRMINGHAM OPERA**

That [Chineke!] concert showed me that we aren’t even close to where we should be, because we still have to get a whole bunch of people together who look like us to make our own orchestra in order to survive.

— **CARLOS VICENTE, MARKETING DIRECTOR, SARASOTA OPERA**

We have a socioeconomic crisis [in the U.S.]. Literacy rates are dropping dramatically. If children aren’t educated, they will not attend the opera.

— **MARK KENT, BOARD MEMBER, OPERA THEATRE OF SAINT LOUIS**

I was born in Cape Town in the distant years of apartheid. I saw my first opera, *The Magic Flute*, when I was six, and I was too young to understand that everybody onstage was white, even Monostatos. When I was in high school, Nelson Mandela had been freed, and within those 10 years, about 80 percent of the people on stage were black.

— **MATTHEW WILD, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, CAPE TOWN OPERA**

I keep hearing at this forum about opera’s “450 years of heritage.” I think that’s an obstacle. Look at what Ryan Coogler did with *Black Panther*, or Bill T. Jones with *Fela!* on Broadway. We need new stars like these to take a 450-year-old art form and reimagine it from a different perspective.

— **KERYL MCCORD**

ADVOCACY & PUBLIC VALUE

How will we build our capacity to advocate opera in our democracy and make the case for its public value?

The “Advocacy” segment drew the most disparate set of responses of the entire forum. The word means different things to different people, responding to different political and cultural circumstances. The focus of the delegates’ advocacy varied: These efforts can be directed toward government agencies, toward sponsors, toward audiences. To the extent that the field’s activities are governed by its advocacy efforts, is it a matter of simple public relations? Or a moral obligation?

But it emerged that in order for the field to advocate for itself, it must strive to build networks, seeking further integration into individual communities and greater levels of community participation. Above all, the work of opera companies, both in what they put on stage and their work in their communities, must serve as the field’s chief form of advocacy. Michel Magnier, the European Union’s director of education and culture, talked about his organization’s OperaVision streaming-video initiative as a means of democratizing the art form. Umberto Fanni, intendant of the Royal Opera House, Muscat, spoke of his company’s successful efforts to attract Arab audiences to a historically European genre. Soprano Kiri Te Kanawa described her efforts, through her eponymous foundation, to provide the opportunities to emerging artists from New Zealand that she found as a young singer.

With such a variegated set of responses, it was no surprise that no single set of criteria emerged for measuring effective advocacy. But as Bernard Focroulle, outgoing general director of the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence put it: “How do you measure dignity?” In the final analysis, the PR advantages and the moral imperative of effective advocacy may be one and the same.

To advocate for opera and make the case for its public value, we have to let go of the notion that it holds inherent value for everyone. Some people will never value opera. That’s okay. But there are many people who aren’t currently part of our audiences, boards or funders who could be, and whose participation we desperately need. ... To advocate for opera, take action and earn public value.

— **CAYENNE HARRIS, VICE-PRESIDENT, LYRIC UNLIMITED, LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO**

Opera is one of the most versatile forms of art. It illustrates the increasing convergence between heritage and creation. Opera is rejuvenated by the digital revolution, which creates enormous opportunities for a form of art that some people consider elitist, obsolete, unable to survive without public support or disconnected with our societies.

— **MICHEL MAGNIER, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE, EUROPEAN UNION**

Can we imagine opera as so appealing to general audiences that it’s as normal as going to a ball game or out to dinner? Or is opera too special for everyday use?

— **TRACY WILSON, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT, CINCINNATI OPERA**

Our programming must be topical, resonant, human and culturally sensitive in representing all walks of life. Which stories we tell, who we choose to write and perform them, and how we then tell those stories are the most critical factors in the survival of our art form.

— **ANH LE, BRAND MANAGER, OPERA THEATRE OF SAINT LOUIS**

To know something, to trust something, you have to have access to education. That's why I think education is the best advocacy for opera.

— **GEORGE ISAAKYAN, INTENDANT, MOSCOW CHILDREN'S THEATER**

Some people don't come not because they don't like opera, but because they don't know it. We have a children's opera in Cologne, and I've never heard the question "Why are we here?"

— **BIRGIT MEYER, INTENDANT, OPER KÖLN**

Opera is an engine for empathy, a way to invite us to feel what other people are feeling. At *Three Decembers*, we had very conservative patrons, deeply opposed to gay marriage, who were brought to tears by a man weeping for his dead lover. That's something opera does better than any other art form.

— **NED CANTY, GENERAL DIRECTOR, OPERA MEMPHIS**

I don't like the question "Why does opera matter?" Nobody asks this about other art forms.

— **RENATA BOROWSKA, GENERAL DIRECTOR, POZNAŃ OPERA**

Fred Cohn is the editor of *Opera America* magazine.

SUMMARY REMARKS

By Marc A. Scorca, President/CEO
of OPERA America

It has been an extraordinary time, and I will share some my notes chronologically because I have not had a chance to pull apart the various themes and the way they interconnect.

On Thursday, we held a joint meeting of members of the boards of OPERA America, Opera Europa and Ópera Latinoamérica, and had organized the discussion to examine major business issues and major artistic issues separately. Immediately, we recognized the interconnection between the business model and the art we create, and the way that our revenue models and the productivity of our opera houses shape what art we can produce; and that if we want to change the art, we may need to change the business models and vice versa. We also considered how the forums we convene by specialty may be incorrectly structured and that we need to bring forums together so members can discuss larger issues across the traditional departmental divides. Our conference content and format also should be re-examined from the same perspective.

Our first meeting, as you know, was on **heritage**, and there's a big question about "whose heritage?" Heritage varies from country to country and continent to continent, but there was an affirmation of the value of the inherited repertoire as a foundation for our shared operatic aesthetic and as a point of entry for many audiences who come to opera through the portal of the standard repertoire. The importance of connecting the pipelines of creativity with the pipelines of tradition in order to keep our art form grounded and vibrant was also confirmed.

We talked about the importance of the interpretation of the inherited repertoire and the importance of having more diverse artists interpreting the repertoire, whether that is directors, designers, conductors or singers. The repertoire itself can take on new meaning if new people are telling the stories and the themes that are embedded in those works. We also mentioned the importance of technology in producing the work, as well as transmitting the work to larger audiences. A nuanced understanding emerged that inheritance can be a good thing, but habits can be bad and some habits should be given up. Some traditions have real value, but the act of preservation may not be a way to keep an art form vibrant and moving forward.

There was significant discussion about how the traditional inherited repertoire invokes expectations of a social construct, of people arriving at opera as a socioeconomic point of achievement. There was a lot of discussion about new work as we talked about heritage, but I moved those notes into another section of this report.

Our willingness to reinterpret, to adjust, to trim, to re-treat the inherited repertoire — so that we remain apart from the bookishness or musicological approach to it — is important. Hopefully, we can take the media with us to support the exploration of the inherited repertoire in a new way.

We also spoke about ticket prices in this particular session, and how high ticket prices prevent people from becoming a part of our inheritance. There are more notes from the session, but these are highlights of how we discussed heritage while affirming its importance to what we do.

The next session was about **new works**, and we agreed that it is essential that the art form evolve in order to thrive, that we must explore operas that are new in terms of style, subject matter, scale and venue, and that we have to look for many more artists who tell the story of today — artists who may be new to opera, from different cultural traditions, who will tell new stories with

new styles of composition and new styles of production. We need to embrace this in order to make opera a thriving cultural expression in the 21st century.

Lots of people quoted Yuval Sharon when he referred to “the pipeline to the periphery,” where so much of the creativity goes on. Our opera companies that are rooted in the inherited repertoire need to open that pipeline to the periphery.

Within the realm of new works, we talked about the need to create opportunities for composers and librettists to train, to learn, to practice, to master vocal composition; and to enable these creators to develop a body of work so they have chances to test and develop their craft. Lots of people referred to the great masters whose oeuvres frequently had works that were not successful as works, but were incredibly successful learning steps for the masterpieces they finally created.

We learned that there was no fixed way to develop a new work, that every work takes on a developmental life of its own and that our opera companies need to be supportive of the various ways that new works may be developed. And this underscores the conflict between the business model and the artistic process because we might need to change some of the business practices to encourage creativity to take on new forms.

The importance of dramaturgy was discussed. Mark Campbell brought up the idea that it is not only necessary to have dramaturgy for text, but also for the music.

Links to the educational system are essential — again a pipeline issue. There were a lot of points about pipelines, and how if we are linked to the conservatory and to the university, we can give more learning opportunities to artists who wish to express themselves through opera.

There was also a good discussion about the need to align our entire opera community around new work. Artist managers and agents can support artists in performing new works, and publishers can be helpful in the financial arrangements that are made to support the new work.

We talked about distinct funding streams for new work, and how those can be helpful in enabling people to invest in new creativity; about the importance of residencies as a training component; and about the importance of youth and family opera, either for young people or performed by young people, in order to develop the artists and the audiences of the future. Again, a lot more was discussed; this is just a quick distillation.

Today we talked about **diversity**, and what was universally agreed was that people didn't really like the word diversity, although there were no universal substitutes that seemed to resonate. We talked about diversity as a reflection of differences, and how we want to embrace differences in order to have the benefit of more talent and more points of view.

Of course, diversity takes on many dimensions: gender, age, race, ethnicity, differently abled people. And of course, different countries have different demographic issues and different histories that make diversity mean something different in each of these countries. Nonetheless, there was general agreement that when it comes to diversity, opera doesn't have the best image and hasn't had the best track record. There's a lot of work to do, and everyone agreed it's important to take action — and action rooted in metrics and accountability. We should set goals to understand the composition of our communities, of our cities, of our countries; goals to have the diversity of our artists and work force to some degree meet or exceed the metrics of our cities and countries. If we don't have metrics and goals, it will be very difficult to measure our progress and hold ourselves to account.

We need to make room, at the top and in the middle, for people who are new to opera, or people who have entered the field but need to advance. We have to listen to and learn from the others who we wish will feel like they have a home here in opera. We can't have discussion about diversity with just white people in the room. Diversity is linked closely to new works and what stories are

being told, who's telling those stories, and who is performing them. But we can also think about diversity in casting in our traditional repertoire, and think about where those pieces, the traditional repertoire pieces, are performed. It may not be appropriate to do everything in the opera house in order to reach a broader audience.

There was a lot of discussion about inclusivity and participatory practices, where people get to join in the co-creation of work, and how that will change our aesthetic.

We spoke about the importance of education for artists who are new to opera and the challenges in education related to the socioeconomic pressures that make extended learning very difficult.

We need to train our staff and our boards, and to rehearse the concepts and become facile with the vocabulary, so that we can actually talk about these issues without stumbling and offending. There was a great deal of discussion that was rich, but a real commitment emerged to take action based on accountability linked to metrics.

So we saved the most difficult one for last: **advocacy**. Of course the question came up: advocacy to whom? To audiences, to government agencies, to sponsors, to the public? And then we divided into two distinct sets of discussions: advocacy as a kind of advanced PR effort, and advocacy that is built on doing different work. Is it a PR effort, or is it a moral obligation to bring different work to the stage and to the community so that what we are talking about is different? Do we need to inflect our work differently in order to speak differently on behalf of the art form?

We quickly went from there to the idea of building networks, in delivering value in different spheres: the educational sphere, social service, for children, for the elderly. We talked about focusing on the local community, understanding what community priorities are, and deconstructing opera's assets in order to reallocate them to address community priorities in ways that are valuable to the community outside the walls of the opera house.

We talked about the importance of participation, not just presentation. We don't want to impose our values or our product, but we want to get to the point of co-creating value and co-creating product so that everyone feels an ownership stake in the vibrancy of the opera company. This may change not only what we are doing outside of the opera house but it might change what we are doing inside the opera house, too.

And part of the advocacy is to move this work, move this community work out of the basement, to move it out of the sub-department of the education department so that everyone in the opera company is talking proudly about the work that the company is doing in the community and not just in the theater.

Do we bring it to social media, to TV, to the newspapers, to the streets? What is the right platform?

We also talked about the intersection of this community work and local and national politics, and how complicated it becomes when we are dealing with controversial issues.

How do we measure it? Bernard Focroulle said so brilliantly in the fish-bowl: How do we measure dignity? How do we measure the comfort people have, and if they feel they belong to the community? That they belong to our art form? How do we measure the impact of making people feel they belong in our row of seats in the theater? It's hard to measure, but it's worth doing.

By the end of this time together, we have lots of interest in continuing our discussion. A few weeks ago in New York, Ignacio Belenguer and Borja Ezcurra Vacas visited me for lunch and I asked how we would know this forum was successful. Ignacio said: "We'll know it's successful if people want to do it again." I heard conversation during the coffee breaks about how much people want to see this conversation continue, whether we have international working groups on some of these topics or whether we have another World Opera Forum in a couple of years. My sense is that people would like to continue the discussion about opera on a global basis. Whether we break it up or do it all together, we will find a way. But the way was shown to us by Ignacio and his colleagues here. The conversation has been rich, and I thank you all for your participation in it. ♦

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