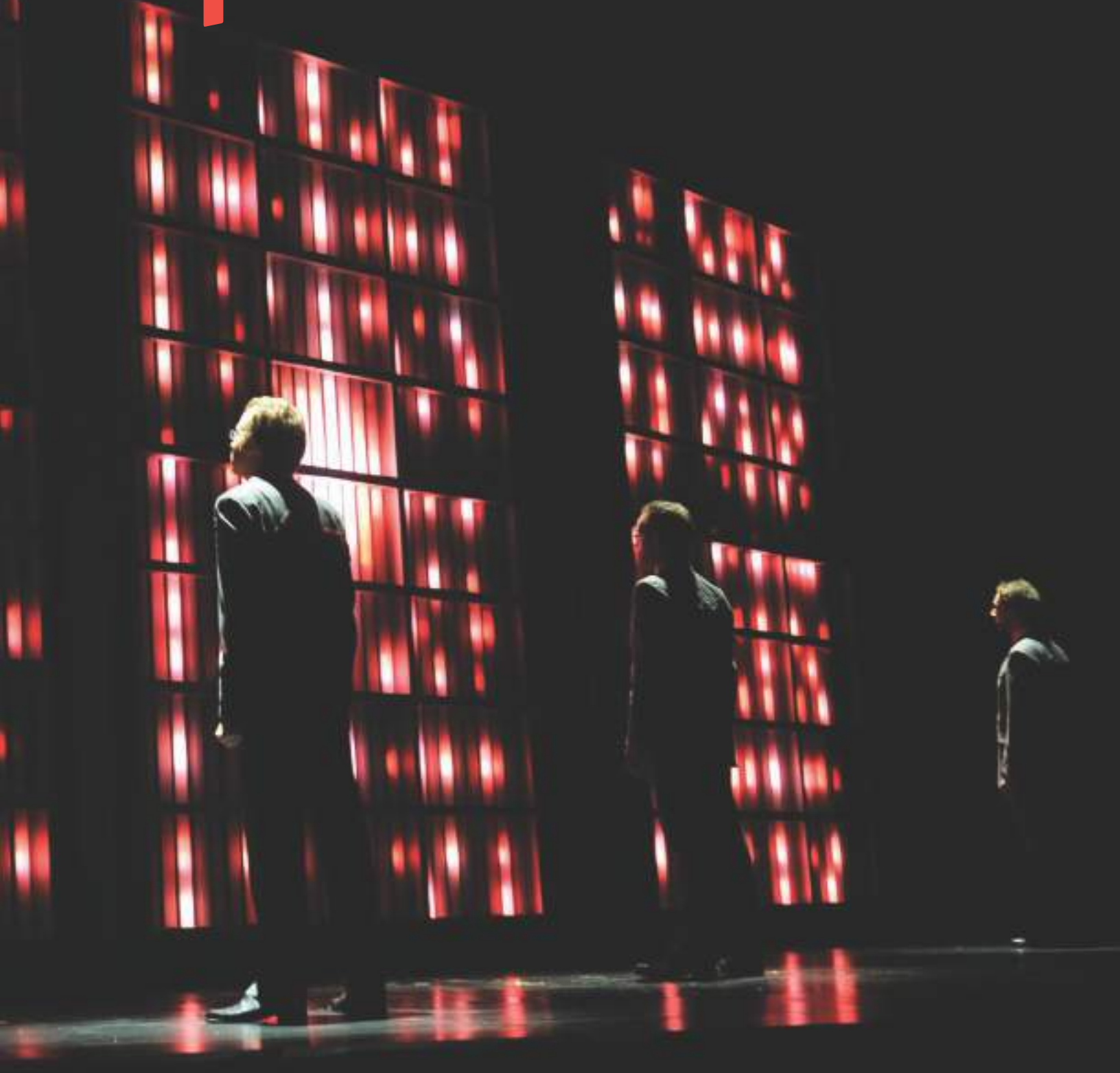


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Gerald Barry The Importance of Being Earnest

The opera is hysterically funny. The score is highly sophisticated and indescribably zany. Although unstaged, the concert performance proved marvelous theater.

Los Angeles Times



Rufus Wainwright Prima Donna

a love song to opera, soaked in the perennial operatic themes of loss, betrayal, delusion and nostalgia, and saturated in the musical styles of opera's golden age.

The Times, UK



Morton Subotnick Jacob's Room

The work was riveting, combining a sure sense of vocal virtuosity with a powerful emotional resonance.

Suedkurier, Germany



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ON THE COVER: Douglas Dodson as United Way Delegate, David Kravitz as United Nations Delegate and Tom McNichols as The Administration in Chicago Opera Theater's production of Machover's *Death and the Powers*. The production was directed by Diane Paulus with set designs by Alex McDowell, costumes by David Woolard, lighting by Don Holder and sound by Chris Full. Photo by Liz Lauren.



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Opera Conference 2011 was an especially exhilarating meeting. The theme, *Opera Entrepreneurship: Building on Tradition*, provided a powerful unifying force through almost every session. At the MIT Media Lab, our appreciation of inventiveness was expanded beyond the creativity we experience daily on the opera stage. While we are wrestling with innovative methods for producing opera, our hosts at MIT introduced us to new technologies that offer the potential of creating works that progress differently each night, depending on the collective mood of the audience. The rate of change in the world of arts and entertainment is only accelerating and, happily, our multi-media art form is the most likely to thrive in this new and exciting world.

“Creative Destruction” was a phrase that was introduced early in the conference. The term, popularized in Joseph Schumpeter’s 1942 book, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, refers to a process of transformation that accompanies radical innovation. In Schumpeter’s view, innovative entry into the marketplace by entrepreneurs is a force that sustains long-term economic growth even as it destroys the value of established companies that have enjoyed some degree of monopoly power.

In place of “destruction” many opera companies are thinking in terms of creative “adaptation” or “evolution.” Stimulated by the work of innovative smaller organizations, members who assembled in Boston seemed much more ready than ever before to experiment with the art form in terms of the works that are produced, styles of production and venues where they are performed. General agreement emerged that in order to increase the civic impact of opera companies, we have to work more actively outside the opera house. Diminished is the “edifice complex” that dictates that all the activities of an opera company must take place in the one building identified in each community as the opera house. More companies are mounting works in “found spaces” and on “second stages,” the excitement of which was demonstrated in our visit to the American Repertory Theater’s OBERON. Many of these new productions are being planned in collaboration with other arts organizations, such as universities, museums and theater companies. Such collaborations extend the reach of opera companies to new, frequently younger, audiences and broaden public awareness and appreciation of opera companies as cultural resources. In many cases, these endeavors also help contain costs.

A greater variety of venues and interesting new partnerships are leading to the performance of a broader repertoire, especially of new works. The *New Works Sampler*, *Director-Designer Showcase* and *Co-Production Marketplace* at the conference introduced a range of new and existing American pieces. We also enjoyed performances of operas from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries by host companies Boston Lyric Opera and Opera Boston, along with Boston Baroque, Boston Conservatory, Boston University Opera Institute, Guerilla Opera and Juventas New Music Ensemble. Participatory opera capped the evening at OBERON, thanks to Opera on Tap. This combination of opera companies — large and small, established and new, traditional and innovative — added energy to the conference just as it adds energy to Boston’s cultural community.

In order to allocate resources to new areas of endeavor, some companies are reducing the number of traditional grand operas offered each season. Indeed, by adjusting the numbers of productions and embracing performances in new venues, companies are discovering renewed artistic energy and more dynamic relationships with audiences, the media and funders. Opera leaders are demonstrating that they can be entrepreneurs within their own organizations, helping to stimulate long-term growth.

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

Marc A. Scorca
President/CEO

"IT'S ABOUT PUSHING YOUR BUTTONS AND GETTING YOU TO THINK."

When **Fort Worth Opera** decided to add a fourth production to the 2011 festival, the first question was, where? The show, Allen Ginsberg and Philip Glass's *Hydrogen Jukebox*, tackles big issues with relatively small forces, and General Director Darren Keith Woods feared its effect might be muted in Bass Hall, where most of the company's performances take place.

In 2008, the company faced a similar challenge with Peter Eötvös's *Angels in America*, which they ultimately produced in the 500-seat Scott Theater. If that production was intimate, *Hydrogen Jukebox* took the concept one step further, for a truly in-your-face evening of theater. The show played in an experimental black-box space that seats fewer than 100 patrons — and that's after taking into account the seats that were constructed on the stage for the production.

"It's a key part of our strategic plan to offer chamber operas and edgy works in alternative venues," says Woods. "When we started the festival, we envisioned growing it like Spoleto, with performances offered in a variety of spaces — that was why we staged *Angels in America* in the Scott Theatre. I was thrilled to offer *Hydrogen Jukebox* in the even more intimate Sanders Theater to create an immersive, visceral theatrical experience that wouldn't have been possible in a 2,000-seat hall." The Fort Worth audience responded enthusiastically — one month out from opening night, six of nine performances were completely sold out.

"We actually built new seats so we could put audience members on both sides of the stage," adds Joy Partain, the company's director of marketing and communications. "So the audience could see each other's reactions. The singers were in the aisles and on people's laps. Allen Ginsberg's poetry is not about making you feel good — it's about pushing your buttons and getting you to think. To be looking at other audience members' discomfort only added to the experience." 🌀



Dan Kempson, Jonathan Blalock, Corrie Donovan, Amanda Robie, Rosa Bentancourt and Justin Hopkins in Fort Worth Opera's production of Glass's *Hydrogen Jukebox*. Photo by Ron T. Ennis.



Melody King as Cio-Cio San, Alex Taite as Goro, Nicolai Janitzky as Sharpless and Christopher Bengochea as Pinkerton along with members of the Livermore Valley Opera Chorus in Livermore Valley Opera's production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Photo by Barbara Mallon.

"THE VOLUNTEERS ARE STILL OUR BIGGEST ASSET."

Livermore Valley Opera (LVO) has relied on a combination of talented professionals and dedicated volunteers to mount two shows each season since its founding in 1993. The company's president, Jim Schmidt, discovered LVO at a summer concert in 2005 and decided to sign up as a volunteer that very day. After attending a performance of *The Magic Flute*, he was inspired to take on a leadership role.

With the exception of the professional artists who conceive and perform the productions, says Schmidt, "We were fully volunteer until a couple of years ago. But when other companies were cutting back, we chose in the middle of the recession to hire a manager. We knew we needed more professional help, because all of our activities were becoming more complicated." At the same time, he says, "The volunteers are still our biggest asset. There are about 70 people associated with the organization in one way or another, and they do a whole lot of work in everything from fundraising to building sets."

The company took a big step forward in 2007, when it moved its performances from a local high school to a new, 500-seat theater. "The acoustics are among the best of any opera company in the area, and there is not a bad seat in the house," says Music Director Alexander Katsman.

Katsman notes that the audience is conservative when it comes to repertory, but not necessarily when it comes to production style. As a result, the company makes a point of engaging directors from outside the area "who will bring something new in terms of vision. There are enough people in the Bay Area who will drive 30 minutes to an hour if they know it is a new production. We just did a *Don Giovanni* that was very contemporary, and people loved it. That was a risk the company took. But I think the name recognition of the opera is the biggest thing."

LVO was recently welcomed as a Professional Company Member of OPERA America. Soprano Erie Mills, a member of LVO's advisory council and a former member of OPERA America's board of directors, encouraged Schmidt to attend *Opera Conference 2010* in Los Angeles. "I was really impressed by the quality and variety of sessions," says Schmidt. "I anticipate getting some help with issues that are common across the board, as well as issues that are unique to us. We're very happy to continue our relationship with OPERA America so we can be more professional and thoughtful as we grow." 🍷

A SUMMER SMORGASBOARD OF NEW WORKS

The vitality of the American opera repertory is measured not only in the number of premieres per season, but also in the continued life of yesterday's premieres. Summer 2011 offers a robust selection of American works, new and not-so-new.

A Flowering Tree was commissioned as part of the Vienna New Crowned Hope Festival to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. The fourth collaboration between composer John Adams and director/librettist Peter Sellars, the opera is inspired by Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Its themes are magic, transformation and the dawning of moral awareness. **Cincinnati Opera's** new production will feature the trio of artists who originated the roles at the work's 2006 premiere: Jessica Rivera, Russell Thomas and Eric Owens.



James Johnson as The King in Chicago Opera Theater's 2008 production of John Adams's *A Flowering Tree*. Photo by Liz Lauren.



Nicole Mitchell as Peggy and Malinda Haslett as Judy in the world premiere production by American Opera Projects of Hoiby's *This is the Rill Speaking*. Photo by Matt Gray.

New York City Opera will present an abridged concert version of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The opera tells the story of a young, educated, freed slave named Treemonisha who leads a campaign to educate her community, rather than accept the societal superstitions placed upon it. The score encompasses a wide range of musical styles including ragtime, folk music, spirituals and call-and-response. Though never fully staged during Joplin's life, *Treemonisha* was rediscovered in 1972 when it received its world premiere and has since been performed on Broadway and at opera houses across the country.

Lee Hoiby's *This is the Rill Speaking* had its world premiere in 2008 in a production presented by American Opera Projects in collaboration with SUNY Purchase. Mark Shulgasser's libretto, based on a play by Lanford Wilson, is a non-narrative, multi-vocal evocation of the 20th-century small town. This summer, **Chelsea Opera** will stage its production in a church in downtown New York City.



The University of Maryland's world premiere production of Musto's *Later that Same Evening*. Photo by Cory Weaver.

John Musto and Mark Campbell's *Later the Same Evening*, a 2007 co-commission by the Maryland Opera Studio and the National Gallery of Art, was inspired by paintings of Edward Hopper. **The Glimmerglass Festival**, which this summer presents the professional premiere of the work, has created a double-bill by commissioning another one-act opera inspired by an American artist: Jeanine Tesori and Tony Kushner's *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* evokes an incident in the tumultuous marriage of Eugene O'Neill and Carlotta Monterey.

Long Beach Opera will present *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field*, by David Lang and librettist Mac Wellman, based on a one-page story by Ambrose Bierce. A slave owner in the pre-Civil War American South walks across his field and disappears, in plain view of his family, his neighbors and his slaves, forever altering the relationships among them. *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field*, which premiered in March 2002 at San Francisco's Theater Artaud, was intended to bridge the worlds of opera and theater. It is written for five principals and a chorus of six or more slaves. A string quartet, placed on the stage, functions as both as accompaniment and as part of the set.

Gian Carlo Menotti may have been born in Italy, but his *Amahl and the Night Visitors* is the most-performed opera written for the American stage. *The Last Savage*, less well-known, premiered at the Opera-Comique in Paris in 1963 before taking a bow at the Metropolitan Opera in 1964. This summer, **The Santa Fe Opera** will present the composer's "grand opera buffa," which follows an ambitious young Vassar anthropologist on her journey to capture the last savage.

The Death of Klinghoffer, with music by John Adams and a libretto by Alice Goodman, is based on the true story of the hijacking of the passenger liner Achille Lauro by the Palestine Liberation Front in 1985. The opera was commissioned by a consortium of six companies; its world premiere took place at Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in 1991, and the first American performance was at the Brooklyn Academy of Music that same year. **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis** will present the first American staged production since the work's premiere.



Allen Moyer's costume sketch for The Santa Fe Opera's upcoming production of Menotti's *The Last Savage*. Photo by Paul Horpedahl.

"A TRULY INTERNATIONAL WORK OF ART."

Zhou Long's *Madame White Snake*, an opera co-commissioned by **Opera Boston** and Beijing Opera, has been awarded the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Music. The Pulitzer Prize citation calls *Madame White Snake* "a deeply expressive opera that draws on a Chinese folk tale to blend the musical traditions of the East and the West." Opera Boston presented the world premiere of *Madame White Snake* on February 26, 2010 at the Cutler Majestic Theatre in Boston, where there were three performances and one preview.

Said Opera Boston General Director Lesley Koenig, "Opera Boston is excited to congratulate Zhou Long on winning the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Music for *Madame White Snake*, an opera that we are proud to have commissioned. *Madame White Snake* was Opera Boston's first commission, and we enjoyed a great relationship with our co-producers, the Beijing Music Festival. Given the work's pedigree and authenticity as a truly international work of art, we are grateful for its being honored with this quintessentially American award." 🌸

Ying Huang in the title role of Opera Boston's world premiere production of Long's *Madame White Snake*. Photo by Clive Grainger.





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Valerie Hamlin has been named director of marketing at **Central City Opera**. Previously, she was the associate director of marketing/publicist with Central City Opera, having started her work with the company as events & public relations manager in 2004. Prior to joining Central City Opera, Hamlin served as publicist for the Arvada Center for the Arts, public relations director for the Colorado Historical Society and worked with The Dallas Opera for five years as associate director of marketing/press and public relations manager. Hamlin holds a bachelor of business administration in marketing and a minor in vocal performance from the University of North Texas. She is also a graduate of the Dallas Business Committee for the Arts' Leadership Arts Program and served on the board of directors for the Dallas Arts District Friends. Hamlin currently serves on the board of directors for the Gilpin County Arts Association and is a member of the Public Relations Society of America.

The Dallas Opera Artistic Director **Jonathan Pell**, who has served the company in artistic administration since 1985, was honored at the 16th Annual National Opera Association (NOA) Legacy Gala Banquet with a Lifetime Achievement Award. The award cited Pell's extraordinary influence on his chosen profession, both on- and off-stage. The roster of previous NOA Lifetime Achievement Award recipients includes Beverly Sills, Jon Vickers, Marilyn Horne, Sherrill Milnes, Anna Moffo, Robert Merrill, Dominick Argento, Gilda Cruz-Romo, Joseph Volpe and Carlisle Floyd. Pell was originally hired as the artistic administrator for the company by co-founder Nicola Rescigno in

1985, was named director of artistic administration in 1993 and assumed the role of artistic director of The Dallas Opera in April 2009.

Sandra Gajic has been appointed chief executive officer of **Edmonton Opera**, effective April 2011. Gajic has most recently held senior leadership positions at the EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts (Calgary) and the Canadian Opera Company (Toronto). She brings with her a wide range of experience and a strong track record in customer service, capital program management, strategic planning and resource development. She is well known for her ability to build strong partnerships with arts organizations, all three levels of government and individual patrons to help deliver a world-class opera experience. Gajic also played an integral role in the development and execution of the Four Seasons Centre for Performing Arts in Toronto.

Thomas Schramm has been appointed to the position of director of development at **Florida Grand Opera** (FGO). Schramm comes to FGO with 25 years of experience garnered in South Florida's medical institutions. Most recently, he served as development officer for Baptist Health South Florida, leading fundraising efforts for Homestead, Doctors, West Kendall and Baptist Children's Hospitals. As director of development and community relations for the Sunrise Community, Schramm advised in fundraising efforts throughout Florida as well as six additional states. Schramm has held director positions at many South Florida nonprofits, including University of Miami, Miami Heart Institute and

American Red Cross. He studied music at the University of Miami and earned a B.A. in philosophy with honors from the University of North Carolina. Additionally, FGO has appointed Spanish conductor **Ramon Tebar** as music director. Previously, he served as music director for the Palm Beach Symphony — he debuted there as resident conductor in 2009, having already made his mark in other American companies, including Cincinnati Opera, Atlanta Symphony and Palm Beach Opera. It was also in January 2009 that he made his first FGO appearance, conducting *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Tebar came to the U.S. in 2005 to take an assistant conductor position with Palm Beach Opera, participating in more than 20 productions and conducting *Madame Butterfly*, *La bohème* and *L'Italiana in Algeri*. Tebar began his conducting career at the age of 15 as an assistant conductor and pianist in his hometown of Valencia, Spain. He graduated with honors from the Joaquin Rodrigo Music Conservatory (Conservatorio Superior de Música Joaquin Rodrigo) in Valencia, receiving a special honor award in piano and chamber music degrees.

Anthony Freud, widely recognized for his achievements as general director of both Houston Grand Opera (2006-present) and Welsh National Opera (1994-2005), will succeed William Mason as **Lyric Opera of Chicago's** general director starting October 1, 2011. In both positions Freud has been hailed for spearheading important artistic initiatives, impressive increases in attendance and fundraising, and visionary community-engagement programs to reach diverse new audiences. Freud is the current

chairman of OPERA America and former chairman of Opera Europa. He was an executive producer for Philips Classics (1992-1994). Freud, a native of London, takes over as the company's general director on the opening night of the 57th season with a five-year contract that extends through the 2015-2016 season. Freud will be the fourth general director in Lyric's 57-year history. Carol Fox was the company's founding general director (1954-1980). She was succeeded by Ardis Krainik (1981-1997), who in turn was succeeded by William Mason (1997-present). **Martin Wright** will be Lyric Opera of Chicago's new chorus master beginning with the 2012-2013 season. Wright has enjoyed a successful career as a conductor, chorus master, coach/accompanist and vocalist over the course of more than 35 years. His operatic repertoire encompasses more than 120 works, and his oratorio/symphonic repertoire encompasses more than 130 works. In 2011, Wright serves as guest chorus master for the Bayerischer Rundfunkchor and commences an annual engagement as principal guest conductor of the Chorus of the Shanghai Opera House. Wright is former chorus master of San Diego Opera (1984-1997). **Michael Black** will serve as Lyric's interim chorus master for the 2011-2012 season. Black is chorus master of Opera Australia, a post he has held since 2001. He has also worked as chorus master with the Edinburgh Festival and London's Holland Park Opera, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Philharmonia Choir, Sydney Motet Choir and Cantillation in a variety of repertoire.

Kathryn Smith, the current general director of Tacoma Opera, will begin as general director of **Madison Opera** on July 1, replacing Allan Naplan. Smith is credited with rebuilding Tacoma Opera after the company had been reduced to a one-production season. Her strategic plan for the company increased artistic output to three productions per season and saw the eradication of years of accumulated debt. Over the course of her seven years with Tacoma Opera, Smith significantly raised the company's regional profile, expanding the repertoire to include both rarities and mainstream fare. A Seattle native and graduate of Harvard University, Smith began her opera career in high school and has worked at Wolf Trap Opera, Chautauqua Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. In 1997, she joined the Metropolitan Opera's rehearsal department, and in 1999 she was named assistant company manager. In 2001, Smith was promoted to assistant artistic administrator at the Met. In that position, she was responsible for a \$4.5 million budget and a range of artistic planning duties.

Stephanie Helms has been appointed to the newly created position of manager for **OPERA America's** Opera Center. Helms comes to OPERA America from Houston Grand Opera, where she served as the liaison to the general director and music director, and as the coordinator of development operations. In these capacities, she was responsible for a portfolio of special projects furthering the strategic goals of the company, served as the general director's liaison to artists throughout the field, marketed the company's co-

production proposals and assisted in establishing the framework for major fundraising campaigns. She has also been the company's primary contact with OPERA America and was instrumental in planning *Opera Conference 2009* in Houston. Prior to Houston Grand Opera, Helms worked in development at the Memorial Hermann Hospital (the largest not-for-profit hospital system in the state of Texas) and at the University of Houston Law Center.

Opera in the Heights welcomes new Artistic Director **Enrique Carreón-Robledo**, who conducted the company's production of *Don Carlo* during the 2009-2010 season. He has guest conducted throughout Europe, the Americas, and the Middle and Far East.

Joseph Walsh has been appointed general director of **Lyric Opera Virginia**. Walsh will also serve as associate artistic director and conductor of the newly formed company whose artistic director is Peter Mark. Walsh had served as director of artistic administration at Virginia Opera for more than a decade, first joining the company in 1995, where he had also been associate artistic director and conductor. Additionally, **Margaret "Maggi" George** has been appointed executive director of the company. Prior to her appointment, George was the proprietor of The Rhein River Inn German Restaurant outside of Lexington, VA. She has also held the position of marketing director at Virginia Opera and at Virginia Symphony. Under her direction, both companies enjoyed the highest subscription sales in their histories, and both experienced audience

growth and increased numbers of available performances throughout the state. Prior to her years in arts marketing, George was a vice president at New Jersey National Bank. **Lana J. Sadowski** has been named marketing director. Sadowski served as the associate and acting director of marketing for the Virginia Symphony Orchestra from 2000-2008 and has a long working relationship with newly appointed Executive Director Maggi George. Sadowski has a B.S. from the State University of New York in business, management and economics with a marketing concentration.

W. Stephen Smith has been appointed to the voice faculty of the **Northwestern University Bienen School of Music**, at the rank of full professor beginning in fall 2011. Smith comes to Northwestern from the Juilliard School, where he was a faculty member for 13 years. Previously, he taught at the University of Houston and was chair of the voice department at the Saint Louis Conservatory of Music. Smith

also served as a vocal instructor for the Houston Grand Opera Studio from 1990 to 2003, and has held a position on the voice faculty of the Aspen Music Festival and School since 1996. His book, *The Naked Voice: A Wholistic Approach to Singing*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2007. Smith has performed over 40 roles in opera and musical theater and has been a soloist with the St. Louis Symphony and the Oklahoma Symphony. He holds a B.A. in voice from Harding University, an M.M. in voice from the University of Arkansas and a Master of Performing Arts in opera from Oklahoma City University. Additionally, **Michael Ehrman** has been appointed artist-in-residence and director of opera at the Bienen School of Music, effective fall 2011. Ehrman previously served on the Bienen faculty as resident opera director from 1996-2000. He received a B.S. from the Theater Department in the School of Communication in 1975, as well as the Faculty Award for Excellence in Theater. Ehrman is a guest director at Indiana University, New England Conservatory

of Music and Yale University, among other schools, and has held faculty appointments at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Roosevelt University. He has also served on the artistic staffs of numerous young artist programs, including San Francisco Opera's Merola Program and the Greater Miami, Wolf Trap, Chautauqua and Lake George Operas. Ehrman is the founder and co-artistic director of the Opera Training Institute of Chicago.

The AT&T Performing Arts Center (Dallas, TX) announced today that veteran arts executive **Mark J. Weinstein** has been appointed its new president and CEO. Weinstein has nearly three decades of experience leading some of the country's premier performing arts organizations, including Washington National Opera, Pittsburgh Opera and New York City Opera. Weinstein began his new role at the AT&T PAC on June 1. Weinstein received a B.A. from Carleton College and an M.B.A. from the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. 🌟

In Memoriam

Elena Capobianco, known to her colleagues and friends as **Gigi Denda**, died April 13 in Lutz, FL, at age 77; she was the wife of opera director Tito Capobianco. A first career in dance gave way to a life of collaborative choreography/stage direction with Mr. Capobianco; they worked on over 250 productions together, including during his tenure at Pittsburgh Opera as general director from 1983-1998. The couple met in the Teatro Argentino De La Plata, where she was a ballet dancer and he was directing, and they married in 1955. From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, Mr. Capobianco directed several productions at New York City Opera starring Beverly Sills. Ms. Capobianco became a "stage adviser" and makeup artist to Sills, including for the singer's iconic appearance as Queen Elizabeth on the cover of *Time* in 1971. Ms. Capobianco is survived by her husband, two sons, a brother and two grandchildren.

Composer **Daniel Catán** died suddenly on April 9 in Austin, TX. A resident of Pasadena, CA, Catán was spending the semester teaching at the University of Texas Butler School of Music and had planned to be in Houston for performances of his opera *Il Postino* at the University of Houston. Born in 1949 in Mexico City, he later became a

U.S. citizen. Catán studied philosophy and music in England, and earned a doctorate from Princeton University where his teachers included Milton Babbitt, James K. Randall and Benjamin Boretz. He returned to his native Mexico to become administrator at Mexico City's Palace of Fine Arts. Although he was not exclusively an opera composer, Catán found supporters for his work within the vocal music community, particularly tenor and impresario Plácido Domingo — Catán's 2010 opera *Il Postino* premiered at Los Angeles Opera with Domingo playing Pablo Neruda. Houston Grand Opera (HGO) premiered two of his operas, beginning with 1996's *Florenxia en el Amazonas* (co-commissioned between Houston, Los Angeles Opera and Seattle Opera), which was the first Spanish-language opera to be commissioned by major American companies. HGO also commissioned *Salsipuedes, A Tale of Love, War and Anchovies*, in 2004 in celebration of the company's 50th anniversary. At the time of his death, Catán was working on a new opera, *Meet John Doe*, which was scheduled to premiere during the 2011-2012 season at the University of Texas at Austin, where the chamber version his *La Hija de Rappaccini* was premiered in February 2011. He is survived by three children, four grandchildren and his wife, Andrea Puente.

Composer **Lee Hoiby** died on March 28 at Montefiore Hospital in New York City, following a short illness. Born in Madison, WI, on February 17, 1926, Hoiby was one of America's most prominent composers of works for the lyric stage. He was introduced to opera by his teacher at Curtis Institute of Music, Gian Carlo Menotti, who involved him closely in the famed Broadway productions of *The Consul* and *The Saint of Bleecker Street*. Hoiby's first opera, *The Scarf* (1957), a chamber opera in one act, was recognized by *Time* Magazine and the Italian press as the hit of the first Spoleto (Italy) Festival. His next opera, *Natalia Petrovna* (New York City Opera, 1964), now known in its revised version as *A Month in the Country*, was praised by the press at its premiere. Hoiby's setting of Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke* (with libretto by Lanford Wilson, 1971) was declared "the finest American opera to date" following its world premiere. The 40th anniversary of the debut of this American opera was celebrated with a new production at the Manhattan School of Music in December 2010. Hoiby recently completed what has become his last opera, a setting of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, with a libretto adapted from the Shakespeare play by Mark Shulgasser, yet to premiere. Among Hoiby's other operatic works are the one-act opera buffa *Something New for the Zoo* (1979), the musical monologue *The Italian Lesson* (1981, text by Ruth Draper) and a one-act chamber opera, *This Is the Rill Speaking* (1992, text by Lanford Wilson, adapted by Shulgasser). Hoiby was a long-time collaborator with Brooklyn's American Opera Projects (AOP), having held a chair as Mentor Composer on AOP's Composer and the Voice program for two seasons. Hoiby is survived by his partner and longtime collaborator Mark Shulgasser.

Ann Stanke, the general director of Madison Opera from 1984-2005, has passed away at the age of 76. She was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) in July 2009. Stanke has been associated with Madison Opera throughout its 50-year history. A graduate of Madison West High School and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she was listed as "prompter and accompanist" in the Madison Civic Opera program for *La bohème* in 1963, the company's first fully staged production. Stanke continued as a coach and accompanist even after she assumed the position of general director in 1984, following two decades of dedication to the company. Under Stanke's tenure, Madison Opera's reputation as a dynamic regional company flourished. As general director, she was known for her ability to blend the company's visiting artists with regional talent as well as her passion for using the art form as a means of community building. Among the many projects that will shape Stanke's legacy are the world premiere of Daron Hagen's *Shining Brow* (1993), the founding of Opera in the Park (2002) and the Midwest premiere of Jake Heggie's *The End of the Affair* (2005). Stanke was elected to the OPERA America Board of Directors in 1993, and was honored by the organization in 1995 for her contributions to the field. Other honors include the Madison Community Foundation Leadership Award in 1994, the Downtown Rotary Club's Senior Service Award in 2000, and Madison Magazine's Editor's Choice Award in 2005. In April, OPERA America informed Stanke that she will be recognized with a plaque in the National Opera Center, scheduled to open in 2012 in New York City. 🍷

NATIONAL *Opera* WEEK



SAVE THE DATE: NATIONAL OPERA WEEK 2011

From Friday, October 28 through Sunday, November 6, OPERA America, the National Endowment for the Arts and opera organizations across the United States will present a variety of fun, free activities such as backstage tours, flash performances and YouTube contests in celebration of our art form during the third annual National Opera Week.

For more information or to participate, contact Patricia Kiernan Johnson at PKJohnson@operaamerica.org or visit www.operaamerica.org/operaweek.

MUSIC! WORDS! OPERA! NEW PARTNERS, NEW TEXTBOOKS, NEW RESEARCH

Thanks to the generosity of MetLife, four additional OPERA America member companies are about to implement *Music! Words! Opera! (M!W!O!)*, a multi-disciplinary curriculum that presents the conventions of opera and enables students to compose and perform original music-theater works. The Atlanta Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Fargo-Moorhead Opera and Opera Memphis have each been awarded a two-year grant to cover the full cost of teacher training in 2011 and subsidize 50 percent of training expenses in 2012. This phased support will enable these companies to gain momentum and build a base of local financial support for *M!W!O!* and other arts education initiatives.

M!W!O! has served more than 32,500 students, nearly 1,300 music educators and over 600 music programs since its initial 1990 publication, and is about to embark on a new chapter with a forthcoming textbook release from GIA Publications, Inc. The initial release will feature *Aida* and *Hansel and Gretel*, along with a separate manual to guide in-class creation of an original work; the full series is expected to include a total of 10 texts.

Concurrently, OPERA America is working with Moxie Research to gather artifacts and anecdotes from teachers, students and administrators who have participated in *M!W!O!* as part of an evaluative process to help shape the future of the program.

THE OPERA FUND AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AVAILABLE IN 2011

In the coming year, OPERA America will award *Opera Fund* grants in the **Audience Development** category. Grants are available to Professional Company Members and their partners who plan to undertake audience development activities surrounding the production of a new work. Two types of Audience Development grants are available: Design grants offer support for the planning of a project, and Project grants assist in the implementation of the proposed project. Guidelines are currently available at www.operafund.org. The Intent to Apply deadline is August 26, 2011 and the application deadline is October 3, 2011.

CAREER GUIDE FOR OPERA

OPERA America is proud to announce the launch of the new *Career Guide for Opera* at www.operaamerica.org/careerguide. Building on the popular *Career Guide for Singers* print publication, the new online directory is a career development resource for emerging opera artists, administrators and technical/production professionals. It includes:

- Comprehensive information on members, including producing organizations, training programs, competitions and grants, educational institutions, artist managers and publishers
- An Artist Toolbox, featuring hundreds of professional development podcasts, videos, FAQs and articles featuring experts from the field

The newly redesigned directory also includes a quick and easy form for member organizations to update their listings instantly. For more information, contact José Rincón at JRincon@operaamerica.org. 🌐

NEW ONLINE COMPOSER RESOURCES

Several new articles join a growing archive of online resources for composers. Leading artists, publishers and administrators offer advice about entering and winning competitions, suggestions for collaborating with other artists and recommendations on what books a composer should take on summer vacation. To access these resources and more, visit www.operaamerica.org/careerguide. 🌐

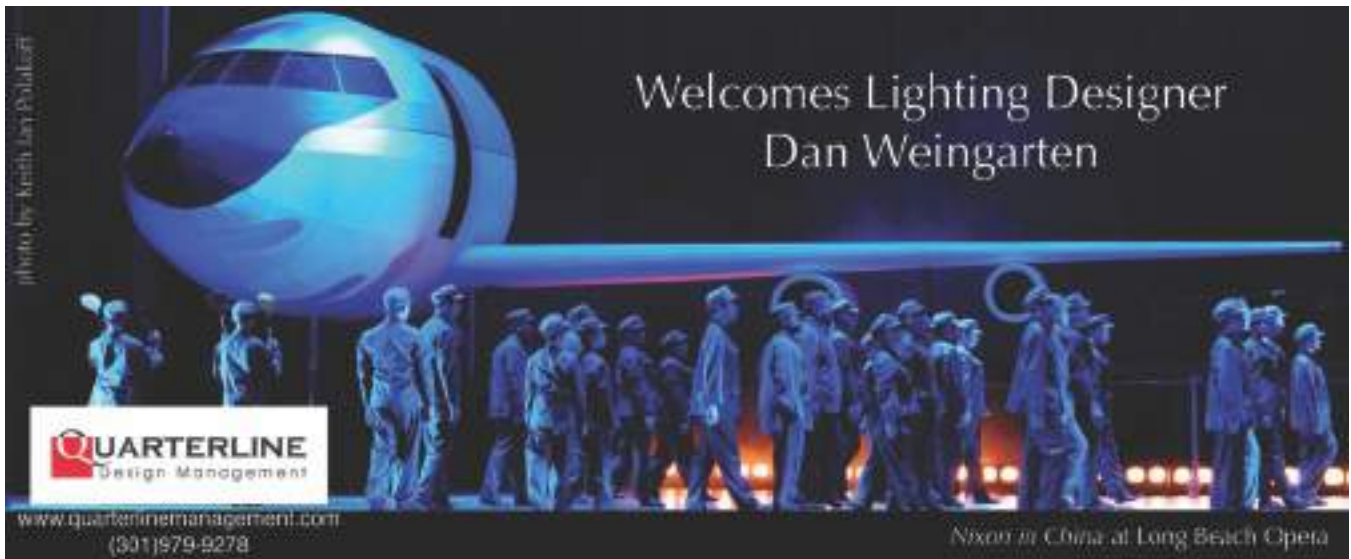


John McDonald, Joëlle Harvey and James Maddalena perform excerpts from Tod Machover's *Death and the Powers* at OPERA America's March 31, 2010 Salon evening. Photo by Katherine L. Ehle/OPERA America.

SALON SERIES: EXPLORING AMERICAN VOICES

In 2011-2012, the popular *Salon Series: Exploring American Voices* continues, with an exciting lineup of contemporary opera luminaries and emerging artists. Featured artists include composers **Jake Heggie**, **Conrad Cummings** and **Wang Jie**, as well as librettist **Mark Campbell**.

Now in its third season, the *Salon Series* represents one of the first steps toward the robust artistic programming that will be possible upon the completion of the Opera Center. The evenings, which provide an opportunity for creative artists to meet with a small group of their peers, producers and patrons, are also streamed live, allowing a worldwide Internet audience to learn more about the featured artists' work and working process. 🌐



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“It is incredible when I step back and look at it: all of these people in my generation are so engaged in the idea of opera and music theater,” says composer Missy Mazzoli. “We have a beautiful moment right now where all these artists are realizing their own work.” With *Song from the Uproar*, her new chamber opera, slated for production at The Kitchen (New York, NY) in the fall of 2011, Mazzoli is one of many artists who have both the talent and the DIY attitude to realize their works. Lay an ear to the ground, and the tumult of sound is almost deafening. Composers, librettists, directors and independent producers everywhere are crafting new works of music-theater, and they aren’t sitting around waiting for a commission from a major institution to get them started. They are applying for grants, knocking on doors and finding the funders to realize their visions.

“We started with people we knew who would be interested and financially able to support it, and worked outward from there,” Los Angeles-based composer Erin Kamler says about the process of getting her award-winning *Divorce! The Musical* funded for its Los Angeles run in 2009. As with many of the artist-driven projects percolating throughout the country, Kamler felt instinctively that: “Nothing could happen until I had the music! I wrote in the car, I wrote during my lunch hours and in three months I had a first draft. After that we had a small reading at the Edgemar Center for the Arts in Santa Monica for an invited audience.”

Mazzoli and Stephen Taylor, the co-creator and filmmaker for *Song from the Uproar*, kicked off their project after receiving a grant from the Jerome Foundation in 2008. “We were thrilled to receive the funding,” says Mazzoli, “but we knew it wasn’t enough for a full production. So we decided to create an evening of excerpts from the piece that would be a satisfying show for the audience, as well as give us a film and recording to shop around to potential presenters.” The May 2009 performance played to a sold-out crowd at Galapagos Art Space in Brooklyn, NY.

“My first work as a composer was in opera,” says Neil Weisensel. “I had worked and studied as a pianist and accompanied many singers. Librettist/director Michael Cavanagh was trying to get a composer interested in a short piece called *Gisela in Her Bathtub* and I thought: Why not?” After a quick writing period, the two took their 20-minute show to the Winnepeg Fringe Festival. “It was a big hit and got countless performances after that first Fringe. It was the start of my continuing collaboration with Michael on other operas, and my career as a composer. We immediately sat down to write another show after the success of *Gisela* and in three years we had three operas going on larger and more extensive tours.”



Sound on the Ground:



Abigail Fischer in the original workshop performance at Galapagos Art Space in Brooklyn, NY of Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*. Photo by Lindsay Beyerstein.

Driven Artists on Artist-Driven Projects

By John Glover

For composer Lewis Spratlan, the path from inspiration to production had a very different sequence of events. Although his *Life as a Dream* initially had the backing of a producing organization — it was commissioned by the New Haven Opera Theater — by the time he finished the score, in 1977, the company had folded. With a finished opera on his hands, and no presenter, Spratlan and his publisher (Gunther Schuller's Margun Music) pounded the pavement to find a new company, but to no avail. The project was shelved until 1990, when fellow composer Roger Reynolds looked over the score. "He thought the piece was terrific and insisted that I must be going nuts not having the chance to hear it," Spratlan recalls. "He was right, so I raised the funds to produce two concert performances of act two, which were recorded, with the Dinosaur Annex Ensemble in Boston in January of 2000." The results of that recording surprised everyone, perhaps Spratlan most of all. Entered as a submission to the Pulitzer Prize that year, it won. But still, no production was in sight. "I thought people would be knocking on my door for the piece after that, but it simply wasn't the case. At that point I became so discouraged that I shelved the piece yet again for what I thought was the last time."

Therein lies the double edge to the razor-sharp drive of these DIY artists. As Mazzoli notes, "This outpouring of artist-driven projects can't endlessly sustain itself. We can't do this alone. We need the help and support of funders and companies." The sentiment is both timely and timeless. A similar hue of optimism and frustration colored Wagner's correspondence to Liszt in the midst of realizing his vision of music-drama: "Whatever my passions demand of me, I become for the time being — musician, poet, director, author, lecturer or anything else." Although the rise of the Internet and social media has changed how entrepreneurial artists find both funders and audiences, one thing remains the constant: It often requires burning the candle at both ends. "It was an amazing process getting *Divorce!* off the ground," Kamler says, "but I wouldn't want every project to be like that. It was an incredible amount of work!"

Following the initial workshops, Kamler and her producer — and boyfriend — Rick Culbertson looked toward the funding structure for larger Broadway musicals. From those models they created a plan which utilized the same tactics on a smaller scale. "We'd invite prospective investors into our living room," Kamler laughs, "and perform the opening 15 to 20 minutes of the musical for them. Afterwards we'd give them wine and cheese, present our business plan, show them our budget and ask for support. After a year and a half of this we had the funding necessary to produce a limited 12-week run of the show. This included hiring a director, designers, renting a theater and paying myself and Rick for writing and producing the show." Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar* will have its first full production this fall, but there is still much to do. "We're incredibly fortunate to have the Kitchen as partners in this venture," says Mazzoli, "but a lot of the fundraising is still resting on our shoulders. We're not yet to our goal, and the performance is less than a year away."

"Once Michael and I had finished our second show, *City Workers in Love*," Weisensel says, "it became clear it would take a bit more organization to get these things produced. We created a little production company called Middle Distance Productions and scheduled a tour of *Gisela* and *City Workers* to numerous Fringe Festivals in Canada including Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver and Victoria. It was a real shoestring operation relying mostly on the money we made at the door! I'm still not quite sure how we did that. Begged, borrowed and stole, I suppose, to piece together sets costumes and rehearsal space." The resourcefulness paid off, however, and these



The Santa Fe Opera's world premiere production of Spratlan's *Life as a Dream*. Photo by Paul Horpedahl.

shows were a great success. The momentum launched them into several more projects, always self-produced with support from various theaters and universities. They are currently in talks with Wilfrid Laurier University for an expanded production of *City Workers* for next season.

Spratlan's *Life is a Dream* got a new lease on life in the summer of 2010. "After being appointed to head Santa Fe Opera," Spratlan says, "Charles MacKay wanted to continue the company's commitment to contemporary opera. However, he did not have the time in his first season to develop and commission a new work. He solicited scores from publishers for works that hadn't had their full potential realized, and *Life is a Dream* rose to the top. More than 20 years in the making, the piece finally had a fully staged debut. To take on the premiere of a work they had not originally commissioned was an incredibly courageous thing to do."



While it might seem that opera companies would jump at the chance to present a new work without the encumbrances of paying for a commission and the unknowns of a yet-to-be-written work, for Spratlan and Mazzoli the experience has been quite the opposite. "We went to a lot of presenters to premiere the full version of *Song from the Uproar*," Mazzoli says, "and our work samples ended up doing us more harm than good. Many of them weren't interested because they thought they weren't getting a world premiere. The Jerome-funded performance at Galapagos was only a series of excerpts, but it seemed to be a hang-up for many people."

"As a composer, I find our industry's preoccupation with world premieres both counter-intuitive and limiting," continues Mazzoli. "Think of it this way: You wouldn't want to go to a club to see a band that had only gotten together two weeks before the show and is now trying to make it through some new songs. You'd rather see a group of artists who have been together doing their thing for a long time and who put on a great show."

Producer Beth Morrison, who helps realize many artist-driven music-theater works in the NYC area, including Mazzoli's *Song*, hopes to see a more collaborative environment in the industry for realizing new work. "If companies would work together to present these artist-driven projects," she says, "everyone would win. Imagine a piece like *Song from the Uproar* going on tour to several presenters. The work would reach

more audiences in more cities and the show would be the better for it because there would be more time for it to develop. I understand that there is a lot of funding tied up in the concept of being the first to premiere a work, but it isn't meeting the needs of today's artists working in the genre." Spratlan had one key lesson to take away from his experience with *Life is a Dream*: "Most companies don't want new work they weren't personally involved with commissioning. This seems a shame to me, because they are missing out on so much great art. I cannot emphasize how fortunate it was to have a company like Santa Fe and someone like Charles willing to take on my opera." Outside of the operatic world, the self-starter element of Erin Kamler's show and the question of world premiere don't seem to have slowed down *Divorce! The Musical* (which has subsequently been retitled *Till Death Do Us*

Part). "The first production exceeded our expectations in every way," Erin says. "We had only planned for 12 weeks, but the show kept selling out and so we kept extending the run. It wound up running for five months, and we could have gone longer! Our funders were thrilled, and they kept coming back show after show to see what they had helped create." A little less than two years later, Kamler and Culbertson are back to the grindstone. "I

needed a break, but now we've started the whole process over again on a much larger scale. The same presentations with investors, the same preparations of a business plan, but this time with aims at productions in Chicago and then New York City."

Cavanagh and Weisensel began work on their most recent opera, *The Masterstroke*, in 2001 with the combination of a grant from the Canada Council and a private donor to fund the commission. "After workshop readings in Winnipeg co-presented with University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg, we had a residency at Banff to work out revisions. Since then it has been the slow process of shopping the work around. We're very close to a few chances for production, but none of them are settled yet." Meanwhile, some of their earlier projects are enjoying renewed success in 2011-2012.

"Two universities are teaming up to present a new production of *City Workers in Love*. It will be nice to revisit the piece again and continue making revisions. It is a comic piece, so timing is everything."

As they struggle to produce their own works, these inherently creative individuals have brought out-of-the-box thinking to practical challenges. "Looking back," Mazzoli says, "I can't remember whether many of the decisions I made in assembling this piece were practical or artistic. The current version of *Song* is much different from my original conception, and the work evolved once I started to face the reality of producing a

piece. Instead of a full orchestra I'm collaborating with NOW Ensemble [a chamber group in New York City]. There is only one soloist, the unbelievable Abigail Fisher, and a small chorus. This pared-down version of the opera has resulted in a very personal connection to the people performing it, and I find that inspiring." For



Lowe Taylor and Rick Segall in Erin Kamler's *Divorce! The Musical*, presented by Rick Culbertson in association with Lynn Marks and Paradox Entertainment. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

Kamler, the experience of producing *Divorce! The Musical* had many unanticipated benefits. "It was a major career opportunity for Rick," she says. "He wanted to start gaining a reputation as a producer, and this project enabled that. As for me, the artistic rewards were incredible. I had gone through my own divorce just before we decided to write this show. Knowing that Rick and I had to realize the production ourselves made the process of writing very personal and very visceral. I took a lot of risks because I was so invested in it from every angle."

"Though there is a lot of work involved," Weisenal says, "there are some real advantages to self-produced projects like *Gisela* or *City Workers*. For one thing, you get to call the shots. The idea originates with the artists and artists get to see it through. It also gave me a chance to learn the craft of opera in the pit and on the stage at a time when no one was likely to commission me to write one. I don't think there's a better way to learn those things." Aside from creative control and the opportunity to develop craft, the experiences were also key in shaping both Weisenal and Cavanagh's careers. "Those were some of the first shows Michael directed, and now he's getting a lot of work in that field. His recent production of *Nixon in China* at Vancouver Opera is scheduled for San Francisco Opera next season just to name one. For me, these projects are the reason I wound up with a career as a composer in the first place."

"The experience with *Life is a Dream* got me thinking more creatively about how I might manifest other works of opera," Spratlan mused. "I'm now in the final phases of preparing the launch of my new chamber opera *Architect* based on the life of architect Louis Kahn. My colleague and collaborator Jenny Kallick proposed the project to me a few years ago and I enthusiastically accepted. She raised the funds for a commission fee for the piece, and then we raised more funds to create a multimedia DVD/CD of the opera that includes a recording, a filmed interpretation of the piece melding images with music, and the PDF files of the score and parts so that anyone who is interested in producing it can have immediate and free access. In the hopes of making it as easy to produce as possible, we kept the performing forces very conservative: three singers and a nine-piece chamber group."

"Chamber works written for a few singers with chamber groups of three to nine players are beginning to flood the scene," remarks Morrison. "The art form of opera is in a time of reinvention, and we need to respond to and support what these composers are creating." For Weisenal the emphasis on economy was there from the start with Middle Distance Productions. While touring his first shows, *Gisela* and *City Workers*, he had an unexpected realization of how much had been accomplished with so little. "We were on the ferry heading to the Victoria Fringe in a few cars. I suddenly realized that the entirety of our *Gisela* production was contained in the car I was riding in. That was pretty wild."

While Spratlan is currently following on some very strong leads for performances of *Architect* in buildings that Kahn designed, he's not opposed to someone else beating him to the world premiere. "I don't see why my opera can't have a life in many different places," he says. "I'd welcome anyone who is drawn to the piece to help realize a performance." Spratlan's openness to an infinite variety of opportunities is characteristic of many artists working in the field, and one that companies would do well to take note of. ©

For more information on the works mentioned in this article:

www.songfromtheuproar.com
www.divorcemusical.com
www.lewisspratlan.com
www.neilmusic.com/live
www.bethmorrisonprojects.org

John Glover is a composer based in New York City. He is one of three co-curators of NYsoundCircuit, a multimedia salon concert series showcasing various arts disciplines.

The Opera Center: A Cre



With so many opera companies having an interest in presenting or producing new work, but limited funds available for travel and viewing the work of emerging composers, the Audition/Recital Hall will become the de facto demonstration, documentation and distribution hub for the opera industry.

ative Hub



Even as leaders in the field work to address important challenges, a wave of creativity is gaining momentum. Established opera companies are investing resources in improved quality, the creation of new operas and fresh collaborative models. New companies, springing up in cities across the country, have placed innovation at the heart of their mission. A new generation of artists is creating exciting new works for the stage.

But one of the biggest obstacles in the collaborative creation, development and presentation of new work is the lack of appropriate facilities for artists and producers to advance their work.

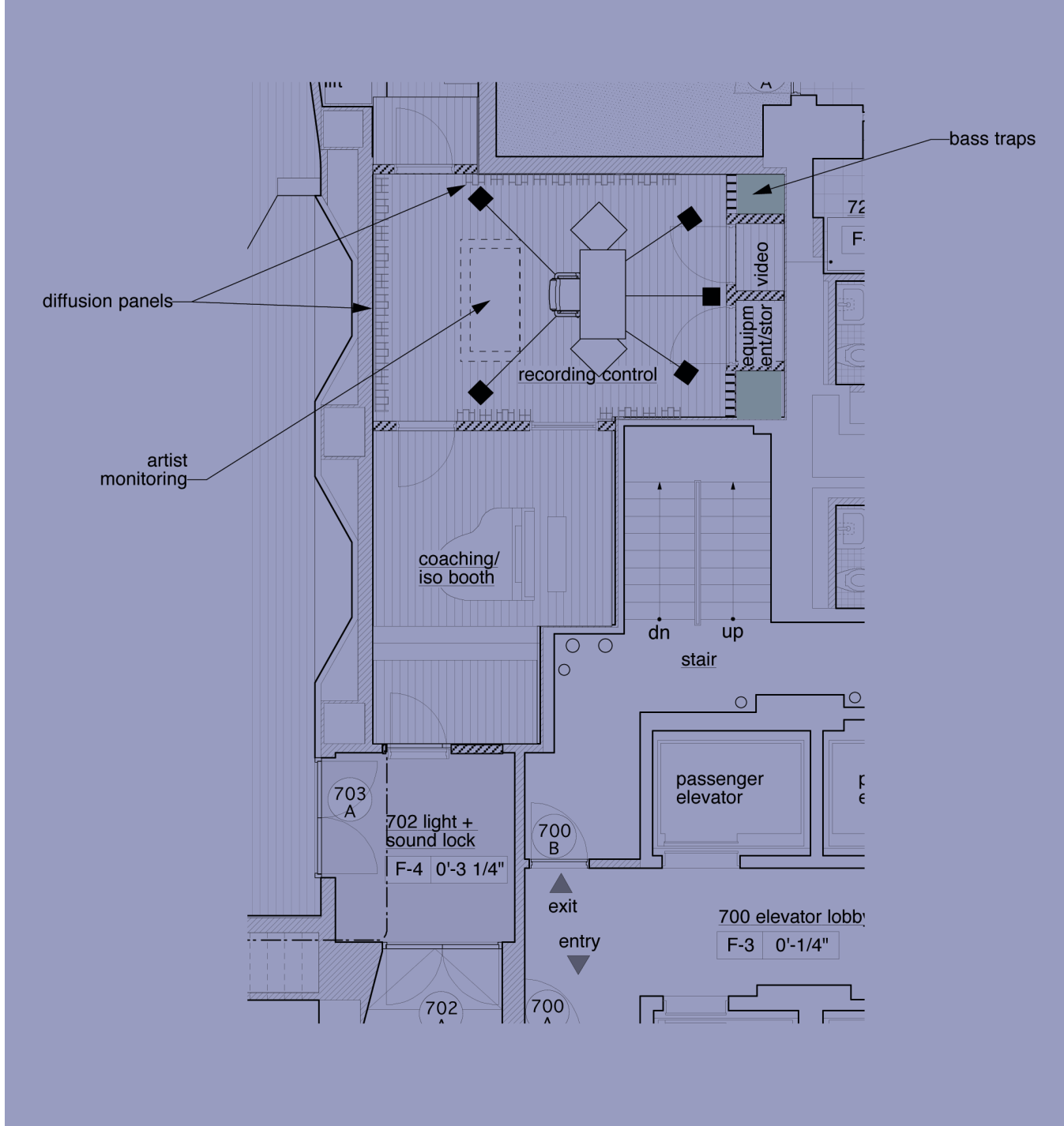
OPERA America seeks to address this obstacle with the opening of the National Opera Center in New York. At a time when opera companies are seeking greater efficiency and effectiveness, the Opera Center will extend an array of services that promise to strengthen the field as a whole.

With an official opening scheduled for September 2012, the National Opera Center will establish a base of operations for the opera industry that will serve as a catalyst for the field's long-term health and creativity. Under the aegis of the nation's leading service organization for opera, the Opera Center will provide an entirely new platform for creative collaborations and administrative effectiveness. Although the impact of the Opera Center will touch every part of this multi-faceted industry, one of its most significant contributions will be in the area of new works.

The building of the National Opera Center represents the most tangible manifestation to date of OPERA America's commitment to new works. The facility will increase the impact of OPERA America's *Opera Fund* grants (\$11 million over the last 25 years) by providing the capacity to rehearse, workshop, showcase, record and distribute new works to an array of stakeholders.

The Opera Center will provide a collection of dedicated spaces that will help the field to achieve its full creative potential. The three main spaces in the Opera Center are the Audition/Recital Hall, with an attached recording studio and HD-streaming capacity; the Rehearsal Hall, a soundproof studio also with recording capacity; and a classroom space with state-of-the-art technology to support a variety of professional development activities. Smaller rehearsal, coaching and meeting rooms, as well as a visitors' business center, score library and reference library complete the Opera Center.

The Opera Center will provide high-quality space for rehearsals and readings of new work, as well as auditions. It will amplify OPERA America's core commitment to



The Media Suite will allow the Opera Center to have a global impact with its HD streaming capabilities and state of the art recording equipment.

contemporary works by creating new visibility opportunities for artists heretofore disadvantaged by the absence of available space to present their work. Equipped with the latest technology, geography will no longer be an obstacle to attending workshops or readings of new pieces. Streaming and recording technology will give artists and producers the capacity to share, document and distribute their creations with local, national and even international colleagues and audiences.

In addition to providing space for readings and performances, the Opera Center will house a collection of scores and recordings of North American works, as well as exhibits of the work of leading scenic and costume

designers. The facility will allow OPERA America to expand its existing programs for artists including workshops, master classes and networking events.

By bringing these facilities and associated services together under one roof, the Opera Center will foster connections among creative and performing artists, producers, administrators and patrons from across the country and around the world. The cross-fertilization of ideas will result in new projects and creative partnerships. For the first time, the opera industry will benefit from a purpose-built Opera Center that provides tangible support for a new level of creative collaboration that is essential to the vitality of the art form. 🎭



The Artist Lounge will provide an informal space for artists, managers, producers, administrators and patrons to exchange ideas and nurture creative partnerships.

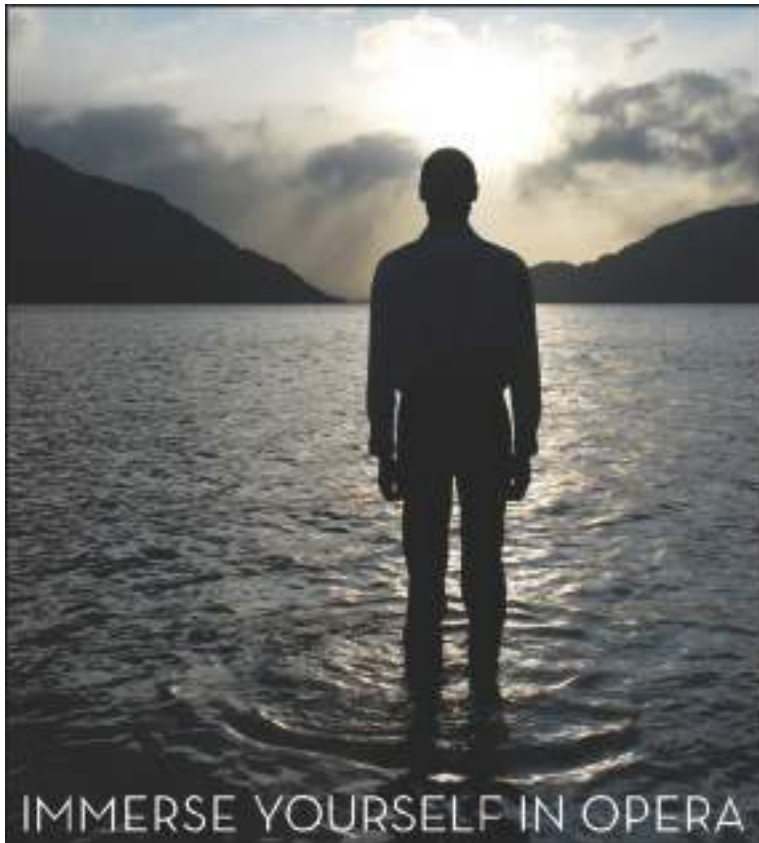
You can play a key role in OPERA America's new Opera Center.

The Opera Center's comprehensive range of facilities, services and resources will make it a vibrant and creative gathering place for opera and those who make it happen. Throughout the year emerging and established artists, administrators, trustees, volunteers, and audience members will pass through its doors. Naming opportunities can give you or your company a permanent presence in what will become the informal headquarters for opera — locally, nationally and internationally.

Exciting naming opportunities abound, from the audition hall to coaching rooms to pianos. There is no better way to honor family, friends, artists and administrators who have made a significant contribution to the art form and the field.

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- Honor a long-serving trustee or cherished volunteer.
- Recognize an important personal mentor.
- Acknowledge the anniversary of a general or artistic director, or the exceptional effort of a staff member.
- Affirm your company's place in the national opera community.
- Place your own name in the Center as a lover of opera!

For more information about the Opera Center's naming opportunities and how you can participate, please contact OPERA America's President and CEO, Marc A. Scorca, at MScorca@operaamerica.org or by telephone at 212-796-8620, ext. 211.



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New Initiatives Focus on Process



John Kelly as Krishna and Tony Boutté as Arjuna in Music-Theatre Group's production of Cuomo's *Arjuna's Dilemma*. Photo by Stephanie Berger.

But are there additional paths by which opera companies might contribute to the future of the art form? The infrastructure of an established opera company — from its marketing team to its resident orchestra — enhances a new work's chance of success. But that very infrastructure may also shape the development process in a way that diverts a visionary artist from realizing a truly ground-breaking work.

For the typical American opera company, engagement with new work has centered around the delivery of a product. But what if institutions turned more attention toward a *process* of cultivating tomorrow's creative artists? Several recently announced initiatives, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, aim to do just that, making an investment in the development of the skill sets of contemporary artists, rather than the development of a specific work.

In the early 1980s, the number of new operas produced each year could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Under the leadership of David DiChiera, OPERA America recognized that an art form based solely on the past was in danger of eventual extinction. With support from the Rockefeller Foundation, the organization launched the first of several funding programs to encourage companies to commission and produce American operas.

No one can deny the importance of mainstage commissions, which have had a transformative effect on artists, opera companies and their audiences.

Opera Company of Philadelphia (OCP) has just announced a new Composer-in-Residence Program, in partnership with **Gotham Chamber Opera** and **Music-Theatre Group**. Funded over five years by a \$1.4 million grant from the Mellon Foundation, the program will provide a highly individualized professional development path for two opera composers. The goal of the program is to foster tomorrow's American operatic masterpieces through personalized creative development and intensive, hands-on composition opportunities.



“There are currently very few places where a developing composer can go to hone his or her compositional voice and learn the crucial skills required to produce authentic new work that has a likelihood of becoming a part of the operatic repertoire,” says OCP General Director David B. Devan. “The hope that we share with our partners and with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is that by delving into what composers really need to develop their craft, we will be helping to create future generations of great American opera composers.”

The three companies, which have also received funds from Mellon to develop Nico Muhly and Stephen Karam’s *Dark Sisters*, bring complementary strengths to the table. Opera Company of Philadelphia produces five operas each season, three in the larger Academy of Music and two as part of the Aurora Series for Chamber Opera in the more intimate Perelman Theater. The company’s programming and

infrastructure is not dissimilar from that of mid-size opera companies across the country. The two other companies, both based in New York, are more specialized: Gotham Chamber Opera is known for innovative productions of intimately-scaled, rarely-performed works, and Music-Theatre Group focuses on development of new works.

“This partnership between our three companies will immediately expand the chosen composer’s access to different scales and types of compositional activity,” says Gotham Chamber Opera Executive Director David Bennett.

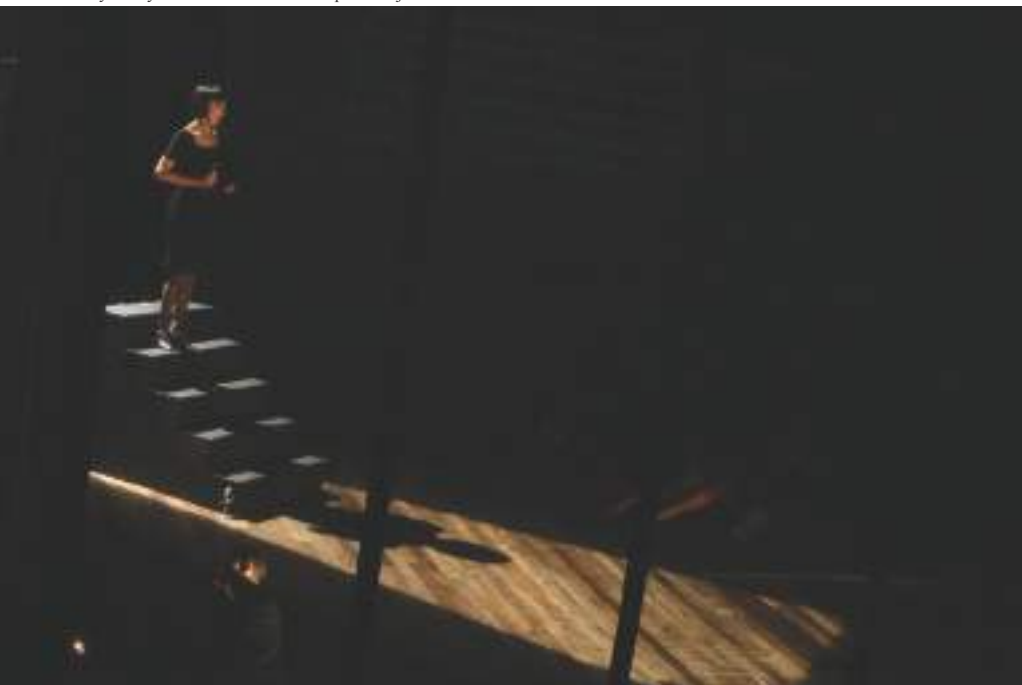
“Together, we can better form a robust network of resources, both artistically and from an industry connection standpoint, to support the composer’s artistic growth.”

Music-Theatre Group Producing Director Diane Wondisford added, “To create a compelling opera requires a wide array of musical talents and dramaturgical skills, and a collaborative gene that includes work with a writer, director and designers to complete the creative process. Our plan is to connect composers with peers, mentors and producers, who — through hands-on experience — can help them hone their skills and enter the field as viable composers of opera.”

While there is no pre-determined creative output required, composers are encouraged to make best use of resources by focusing their residency around one or more musical works. The resulting works may be considered for performance by the collaborators.

Further west, **Cincinnati Opera** and **Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM)** have recently unveiled an initiative that builds on Opera Fusion, a four-year-old partnership between the two organizations. *Opera Fusion: New Works* offers composers or composer/librettist teams the opportunity to workshop an opera during a 10-day residency during which

TOP: American Lyric Theater (ALT) Resident Artists, composers Justine F. Chen and Christopher Cerrone, with ALT artist mentor, composer Anthony Davis, during a workshop as part of ALT’s Composer Librettist Development Program. Photo courtesy of ALT. BOTTOM: Hai-Ting Chinn in American Opera Projects’s 2006 world premiere production of Weisman and Hoiby’s *Darkling*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein/American Opera Projects.



the composer or composer/librettist team can focus on the development of a work-in-progress. Documentation technology will be available to the creative team to record the process as needed. Artists will be provided by CCM; additional professionals, including a music director, stage director and dramaturg, will work with the creators as they shape the work.

“It is important to me to create an environment where composers and librettists can take risks,” says Robin Guarino, who, in addition to being chair of opera at CCM, is a stage director who has worked on many new operas. “Our goal is to create a fully supportive and creative environment where the work can be discovered without the pressure of a looming premiere.”

At the conclusion of the workshop, there will be a reading at which a professional audio/visual recording will be made as an archive, developmental resource and promotional tool. An invited audience will include professionals from the field, representatives from opera companies and potential co-producers, as well as an advisory panel. The residency will conclude with a “next steps” meeting with the composer or composer/librettist team and co-artistic directors. In select cases, a piece may be invited to return for a second developmental workshop the following year.

Marcus Kühle, director of artistic operations at Cincinnati Opera, says that although the workshops are process-oriented, “We are very interested in developing more works, more composers that we can present at Cincinnati Opera someday. The hope is that, somewhere in these six readings, we will discover something we want to develop and produce.”

New York City’s **Center for Contemporary Opera (CCO)** is



Jonathan Lyons, Aaron Schroeder (Puppeteers) and Kevin Burdette as Ogre in the Gotham Chamber Opera and Tectonic Theater Projects’ U.S. premiere production (in association with Blind Summit Theatre) of Montsalvatge’s *El gato con botas*. Photo by Richard Termine.

one of a handful of organizations nationwide that puts its main emphasis on development opportunities for composers and librettists. In addition to occasional full productions, CCO operates a robust development series that provides composers, librettists and opera companies an opportunity to hear works-in-progress before a supportive and knowledgeable panel and audience.

Thanks to its recent grant from the Mellon Foundation, CCO will expand and increase the number of development programs. These include: *Prima le Parole*, in which libretti are read and directed by professional actors and directors, allowing analysis of the libretto’s structure both from a dramaturgical and musical perspective; *Ateliers*, which present an opera (or scenes) in an intimate venue, with minimal staging and piano accompaniment; and *Concert Readings*, which allow the composer to hear the work performed with orchestra.

Like Center for Contemporary Opera, **American Opera Projects** (New York, NY) has created a number of different programs designed to support new works in all phases of their development. “At American Opera Projects (AOP) we have a great staff and a small, flexible organization that can cope with risks,” says General Director Charles Jarden. AOP’s grant will support the re-tooling of the company’s *Composers and the Voice* program, in which six composers or composer/librettist teams are selected for a year-long fellowship, working with the company’s resident ensemble of singers and artistic team. The primary focus of the program, under the artistic direction of Steven Osgood, is working collaboratively with singers on writing for the voice and contemporary opera stage. The 2011-2012 series is being expanded to incorporate training for composers and librettists in acting, improvisation games and libretto development.

One significant change to the program comes in the pacing: “In the past,”

says Jarden, “we would have six new composers every year. This year, we will start with six, then wait a year to develop some of the projects before we start again with a new group of composers. We have always had tremendous breadth in our programming, because we’re interested in getting product out there to the markets, but we also want to provide more opportunities for depth.”

At the end of the program, AOP will present the results of the participants’ work in public performances — *First Glimpse*, a concert of songs in spring 2012, and *Six Scenes*, an evening of short opera scenes in fall 2012. One of the operas-in-progress will be selected to receive a staged reading at Manhattan School of Music in spring 2013.

American Lyric Theater (New York, NY) is distinguished from the other organizations mentioned in this article in that the company’s mission does not focus on producing. Instead, says Lawrence Edelson, who founded the company, “We are a service organization, and our constituency is composers, librettists and opera companies. We do present some public events, but that’s not what we’re about.” American Lyric Theater (ALT) was recently awarded a capacity-building grant to hire a full-time director of institutional advancement, allowing Edelson to focus more of his attention on training artists and building strategic partnerships with producing opera companies.

ALT’s signature program is the Composer Librettist Development Program (CLDP), a curriculum that includes classroom training and hands-on workshops with some of the country’s leading working artists. “We’ve offered different elements of the curriculum in the past, but thanks to additional program support from Mellon, the 2010-2011 season was the first time we were able to offer it as

Nathan Gunn and Tamara Mumford in Opera Company of Philadelphia’s company premiere of Britten’s *The Rape of Lucretia*, part of the Aurora Series for Chamber Opera at the Perelman Theater. Photo by Kelly & Massa Photography.



fully as intended, with some 60 sessions over the course of the year,” says Edelson. This season’s class includes four composers and three librettists, as well as four composers and three librettists who began working with ALT in previous seasons.

In addition to running the CLDP, ALT commissions promising alumni of the program to create full-scale works. “We are strategically geared to go from mentoring to commission, then placement with professional companies,” says Edelson. “We absorb the commissioning and development expenses, do the legal wrangling, workshop pieces and then go to opera companies to say, this is an opera we believe in — to show them something at a stage beyond a concept.” Edelson believes this model benefits not only the composers and librettists, but also producers who are interested in learning about new writers, and who want to produce new works but who may not have the resources or skills to develop a new opera from the ground up.

The final initiative sets out to build that very skill set in a rising young professional. **Music-Theatre Group** and **Gotham Chamber Opera** have created a position for a producing associate to be shared between the two companies. This individual, supervised by Wondisford and Bennett, will play a vital role in realizing the world premiere production of *Dark Sisters*. The position is also envisioned as an intensive apprenticeship. “As a creative producer, I’m primarily focused on instigating and generating new music-theater/opera and — in recent years — teaching someone how to do it,” says Wondisford. “In addition to producing the resources of physical space in which to work and perform, managing the schedule and finding financial support, there is the craft involved in nurturing the artists, helping them select appropriate collaborators, guiding them in amalgamating and synthesizing the output of their collaborators, giving constructive feedback (from the perspective of the audience) in a timely fashion throughout the creative process, and overseeing the changes and revisions that will strengthen the work before it premieres.”

In a series of meetings convened by the Mellon Foundation and facilitated by OPERA America in 2009 and 2010, producers affirmed their desire to discover and produce fresh new voices for the opera stage. At the same time, they recognized the risks inherent in commissioning a large-scale work from a composer with little experience in the genre. Each of these programs offers emerging artists an important opportunity to engage with the art form, and with leaders in the field, without the pressure of completing a score by a set date. When these artists go on to receive commissions, we can be optimistic that their experience will lead to stronger works. ☺

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Opera in the Upper Midwest

By José Rincón, Lyndsay Werking and Megan Young

Tucked somewhere between fruited plain and purple mountain majesties sit Minnesota and Wisconsin. Though the region may first conjure images of sing-alongs on the shore of Lake Wobegon, opera has a longstanding history and fervent support in this arts-rich area. In this installment of *Opera America's* regional spotlight series, we consider the vibrant creative community at the heart of the Upper Midwest.

FOCUS ON NEW AND UNUSUAL WORKS

Approaching its 78th season, **Florentine Opera Company** (Milwaukee, WI) is the eldest of the group. The company began its life as the Italian Opera Chorus, growing to produce Italian and German grand opera. Over the years new works and baroque opera have come to play a bigger part in the company's repertoire. In 1995 Florentine Opera produced the American premiere of Lowell Lieberman's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; the 2010-2011 season included the world premiere of Don Davis's *Rio de Sangre* and a double-bill of *Dido and Aeneas* and *Venus and Adonis*. The introduction of baroque opera to Florentine's offerings also brought the company to Vogel Hall at Milwaukee's Marcus Center for the

Performing Arts — a smaller, more intimate space. General Director William Florescu hopes the new venue will attract new audiences.

Like many arts organizations across the country, Florentine Opera recognizes the importance of attracting younger audiences and increasing audience diversity. Florescu finds that younger audiences tend to be more receptive to new work. The company is collaborating with the Milwaukee-based new music ensemble Present Music on a production of Kamran Ince's *Judgment of Midas*. Florescu also sees new work as an



Saira Frank in Fresco Opera's production of *Ding Dong the Diva's Dead* as Juliette in the death scene of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*. Photo by Max Wendt.

opportunity to increase audience diversity, noting that the challenge is to find programming that is relevant to Milwaukee's ethnically diverse population.

In 1963, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis commissioned an opera for its performing arts program and **Minnesota Opera** was born. Since then, the company has grown and developed into an independent presenting organization that has its own administrative offices, scenic and costume shops and rehearsal facilities. Mainstage productions are presented in the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul, for which Minnesota Opera was one of the founding tenants. Currently, the company is transitioning into new leadership as Allan Naplan, until recently general director of Madison Opera, takes the reins from Kevin Smith, who retired after 30 years with the company.

Minnesota Opera's strong commitment to contemporary work is showcased by its New Works Initiative, launched in the 2008-2009 season, which pledges to complete three commissions by American composers, three revivals of American works and an international co-production in seven years. The company has already completed the co-production of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Jonathan



Vanessa Gamble in Nautilus Music-Theater's production of Cohen's *I am Anne Frank*. Photo by Ben Krywosz.

Dove and Alasdair Middleton with Opera North (U.K.), as well as the revivals of Dominick Argento's *Casanova's Homecoming* and Bernard Hermann's *Wuthering Heights*. World premieres of *Joyeux Noël* (Kevin Puts/Mark Campbell) and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (Ricky Ian Gordon/Michael Korie) are scheduled in 2012 and 2013, respectively.

Since 1986, **Nautilus Music-Theater** (St. Paul, MN) has been dedicated to the development of new operas and other forms of music-theater. The company's goals include the formation of partnerships between creators, performers and audiences, and the creation of professional training programs for artists such as the Wesley Balk Opera Music-Theater Institute. Artistic Director Ben Krywosz credits the new works-friendly climate in Minnesota to two important factors: the choral tradition that came out of Twin Cities churches put music at the heart of the community, and the regional theater movement, led by the seminal Guthrie Theater, generated interest in new works.

"Over the years, the funding climate in Minnesota has been good for the development of new works," Krywosz adds. "In 2008, a constitutional amendment known as the Legacy Amendment was passed to preserve the arts and culture heritage of Minnesota. Legacy funding has enabled Nautilus to take our production of *I am Anne Frank* to Bemidji and Plainview, MN. The Jerome Foundation is also based here, and their focus is on supporting emerging artists and the creation of new works."

Founded in the summer of 1959, **Skylight Opera Theatre** (Milwaukee, WI) produces works in varied styles throughout the season. Managing Director Amy S. Jensen states, "Skylight's vision is to bring the full spectrum of music-theater to the stage." The company's variety in programming



Minnesota Opera's production of Herrmann's *Wuthering Heights*. Photo by Michal Daniel.

is complemented by the Skylight-owned and -operated Broadway Theatre Center. The center is home to the intimate 99-seat Studio Theatre, as well as the larger 358-seat Cabot Theatre. Two other groups — Milwaukee Chamber Theatre and Renaissance Theaterworks — perform in the center, providing many opportunities for collaboration. For instance, Skylight, which constructs most of its own costumes and sets for each production, has begun to build sets for Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. Where possible, stagehands find ways to reuse and repurpose set elements among productions.

Contemporary works are a standard inclusion in Skylight's programming. The 2011-2012 season features two world premieres: *The Rivals* by Kirke Mechem and *Daddy Long Legs* by Paul Gordon. Additionally, the final production of the past season was Josh Schmidt's *Adding Machine*. Before achieving success as a composer, Schmidt graduated from a local high school and worked as an assistant to the artistic director of Skylight Opera Theater. Schmidt says that when he wrote *Adding Machine* he had Skylight in mind. This statement speaks volumes about the creative inspiration and learning environment found within Skylight's artistic community.

SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL TALENT

Lyric Opera of the North (LOON), founded in 2004 by Dr. Ruth Jacobson and since helmed by Sarah Lawrence and Calland Metts, has focused on using the local talents of Duluth, MN. In the past, LOON presented one production a year in the month of June. After assuming leadership, Lawrence and Metts presented a production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in the winter of 2010. In keeping with Jacobson's core belief in the value of using local artists, the entire cast and crew was hired from the local talent



Lindsey Falduto as Dora and Kathy Pyeatt as Flora in Skylight Opera Theatre's production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Photo by Mark Frohna.



Patricia Risley as Sharon Falconer in Florentine Opera's 2010 production of Aldridge's *Elmer Gantry*. Photo by Richard Brodzeller for Florentine Opera Company.

pool. Lawrence notes, "The mission of the company is to put the spotlight on local and regional talent, both professional and amateur." Additionally, she explains that the community support for LOON is strong: "Here it is very much like an old baseball team — people get to know their home teams and they can't wait to see what we're going to do next."

Founded in February 2010 by Rich Frevert, **Heartland Concert Artists** is an artist management company that focuses exclusively on representing musical talents based in the Twin Cities. The company's roster includes vocalists, instrumentalists and ensembles, including soprano Nora Long, who has worked at the Guthrie Theater and Skylark Opera; Bruce Henry, jazz vocalist; Charles Lazarus, trumpet player, composer and arranger; and the Juilliard-trained Phenix Quartet. Frevert explains that he is selective in the artists he represents, wishing only to work with Minnesota-based individuals and groups who are exceptionally talented and approach their work with a congenial camaraderie.

UNCONVENTIONAL PRODUCTION MODELS

The **Gilbert and Sullivan Very Light Opera Company** (GSVLOC) has been producing the works of Gilbert and Sullivan since 1979. The GSVLOC operates under an inherently collaborative business model: each year, auditions are held and an artistic team is assembled for that season's productions. All artists and technical/production personnel of any given production are considered members of the GSVLOC, and a board is selected from this membership. The board is then responsible for hiring a creative team for the next year's productions in addition to the administrative duties that come with putting on a show. Producer Stephen Hage feels this

unusual model has been successful because it allows those involved with the productions to take ownership of the work being presented.

In recent years, the company has expanded its repertoire to include operettas by Offenbach and the lesser-known team of Sullivan and Hood. The company performs with full orchestra at multiple venues in the Twin Cities area: mainstage shows are held at the Howard Conn Fine Arts Center in Minneapolis, and each summer an operetta is presented in concert at the Lake Harriet Bandshell. The GSVLOC frequently performs with the Minneapolis Pops Orchestra to audiences made up of people who have supported the company for over 20 years, as well as folks who are new to the G&S canon.

Fresco Opera Theatre is relatively new to the Wisconsin opera scene, having been around for only two years. The company's productions have included *Ding Dong the Diva's Dead*, a selection of death scenes from various operas, and *Dueling Divas*, an evening of opera highlights in which the audience has a chance to participate by voting for their favorite singers. This flexibility in programming appears to be attracting younger opera patrons. According to Artistic Director/Co-Founder Melanie Cain, much of Fresco's audience is in the 25-to-35 range, which she credits in part to performing in venues known for rock and roll concerts, such as the Barrymore Theatre (Madison). Fresco Opera Theater's operating model also allows the company to tour to different venues throughout Wisconsin such as the Trout Museum of Art (Appleton).

While newer work is not a staple of Fresco Opera Theater's programming, the company has found creative



Seong ShinRa as Cio-Cio San in Music by the Lake's production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Photo by Paul E. Burd.



Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company's production of *The Mikado*. Photo by Jo Pasternack.

ways to occasionally integrate contemporary opera with more traditional fare. At *Dueling Divas II*, "live commercials" were presented in between battles. One commercial, for instance, paired an advertisement for a local restaurant with Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!*. Fresco Opera Theatre is also making a conscious effort to reduce its carbon footprint by projecting its programs on theater walls instead of using paper programs. Cain thinks of her work with Fresco Opera Theatre as advocacy for opera in general, with the hope that audiences will go see a fully staged production after attending a Fresco Opera Theater sampling.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, **Madison Opera** is dedicated to producing opera of the highest artistic standards. Former General Director Allan Naplan explains that many cultural institutions in the Upper Midwest are supported by patrons with a strong personal commitment to philanthropy. He notes also that there is an expectation in Madison that corporations will give to the arts. As both a thank you to the community and an invitation to newcomers, Madison Opera has been offering *Opera in the Park* for the past 10 years. A summer concert held outdoors in Garner Park, free and open to the public, the event features highlights from the upcoming mainstage season, as well as popular Broadway standards. Brian Hinrichs, director of marketing and community engagement, states, "The role of Madison Opera is to give the community a sense of pride. Opera is viewed as a community builder. Newcomers to Madison are

pleased and surprised to see a company doing three full productions a year."

The company has grown significantly in recent years in response to the opening of the Overture Performing Arts Center in 2004-2005 season. Home to nine performance spaces including a 2,200-seat auditorium and a 300-seat theater in the round, the center has allowed the company to be more adventurous and varied in its programming, while simultaneously driving the company to maintain high-quality artistry.

Also based in Madison, **Opera for the Young** has been bringing educational productions to schools throughout the Midwest since 1970. This year, the group presented 200 performances in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota and Indiana, reaching over 75,000 schoolchildren. With costs of around four dollars per student, the program is affordable for schools and engages the students as performers, designers and audience members. The chorus for each performance consists of singers from the school's choir. After each 45-minute performance, students are invited to participate in a 15-minute question-and-answer session with the performers. Additionally, the company holds an annual Design Contest to which students are invited to submit drawings for the sets of each show. With roughly 1,000 submissions each year, 100 winners are chosen, and production designers incorporate elements of the drawings into their designs for the season.



Hyung Yun as Escamillo, with the Madison Opera Chorus and Madison Youth Choirs in Madison Opera's 2009 production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Photo by James Gill.

General Director Daniel Plummer explains that the seven shows in repertory use excerpts from the original scores, with productions updated to be more accessible for contemporary children. For instance, *The Magic Flute* is set in outer space, *The Elixir of Love* occurs in the Old West and *Barber of Seville* takes place in the 1950s. Each production is triple-cast, providing opportunities for young singers to perform 40-50 times in a season. Plummer recounts a particularly fulfilling moment: “This year, I auditioned a singer who vividly remembers seeing our production of *Hansel and Gretel* as a fourth-grader.”

Located in St. Paul, MN, **Skylark Opera** performs a combination of opera, operetta and musical theater. Sponsored by the Twin Cities Opera Guild, Skylark Opera presents an educational performance in high schools titled *Opera Demystified*, which begins with recognizable opera melodies followed by a description of both the history and drama of opera, culminating in a discussion of contemporary opera. The company cultivates relationships with choir directors at individual schools and will often return to the same school after three or four years.

Artistic Director Steven Stucki says he has always been interested in the synthesis of acting and singing. Mainstage productions are staged in an intimate 300-seat theater with no amplification. Generally, the company produces two works during its festival season in June, with tickets starting at \$25, and two or three smaller-scale works, which are free and open to the public, during the rest of the year.



Opera for the Young's 2011 touring production of Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*. Photo by Vince Fuh.

SPRIT OF COLLABORATION

The history of **Music by the Lake** begins in 1959, and for 17 years the outdoor festival brought some of the leading classical musicians to Geneva Lake in Wisconsin, including Robert Merrill, Isaac Stern and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The festival was discontinued in 1968 due to financial reasons. In 2001, it was revived with a performance by Sylvia McNair and the Chicago Symphony Pops Orchestra and has thrived ever since. Executive Director Christine Flasch attributes the first festival's demise to exhausting major donors and failing to respond to their programming tastes. Flasch makes a point of surveying Music by the Lake's audience to see what type of programming they would like to see. This strategy has been successful and has brought an eclectic mix of opera, jazz, big band and musical theater to the Ferro Pavilion, the new outdoor space where the company performs.

Music by the Lake has fostered collaborative relationships with other classical music producers, such as Light Opera Works in Evanston, IL, with whom Music by the Lake is co-producing *Brigadoon*. Flasch feels that the recent economic slump has had a positive effect on the spirit of collaboration among local arts producers. “Suddenly everybody was struggling and companies stopped seeing each other as competition. Instead, they started to talk about how they could help each other.”

Duluth Festival Opera began in 2005 as a summer opera festival on Lake Superior, but in the short time since its inception has grown to serve the entire Arrowhead region of Minnesota. Duluth Festival Opera (DFO) enjoys a collaborative relationship with other local opera providers: Nautilus Music Theater is incorporating its production of *I Am Anne*




Jeffrey Madison and Vicki Fingalson and the cast of Skylark Opera's 2010 production of Lehár's *The Merry Widow*. Photo by Susan Johnson Hanlon.

Frank into DFO's 2011 season, and faculty from the University of Minnesota Duluth have performed in past productions. Artistic Director Craig Fields hopes to create a more formal partnership with UM Duluth in the future.


Fields endeavors to choose repertoire that reflects the local audience's taste — a combination of traditional opera favorites mixed with baroque and contemporary works. He says the key to getting people to come back to Duluth Festival Opera is to stay in tune with what the audience wants and not sacrifice the artistic quality of what the company puts on stage. In the summer of 2010, Duluth Festival Opera brought a production of Handel's *Acis and Galatea* to Leif Erikson Park. A recent grant from the state of Minnesota is enabling the company to embark on a five-city tour with a fully-staged production of *Pocahontas: A Woman of Two Worlds* by Linda Tutas Haugen and Joan Vail Thorne. Members of the Arrowhead region's large Native American population will be performing in the opera.

Opera options — from the home-grown to the internationally-renowned — abound in the Land of a Thousand Lakes and the Badger State, and they're only getting better. Local pride, community engagement, artistic integrity, generous public support, adaptability and collaboration all point to a bright future for opera in the Upper Midwest. ☺



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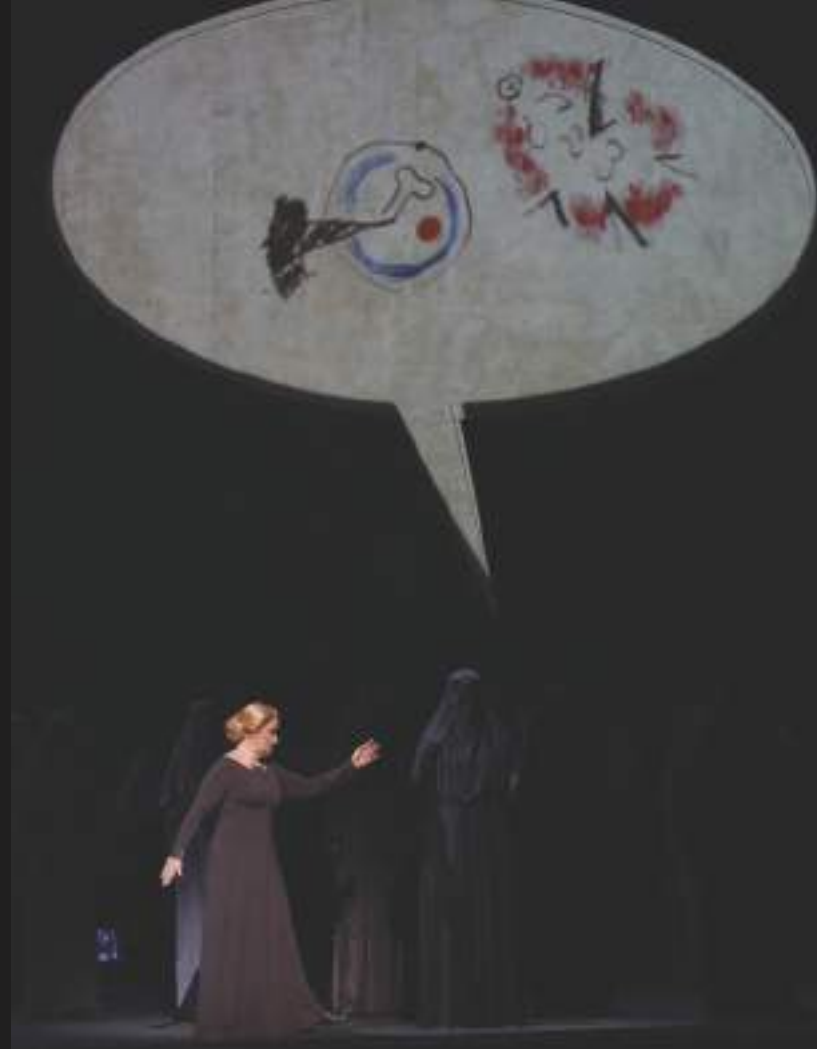
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But Is It Opera?

By Amanda Keil



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The setting is an enormous mirrored box with dozens of mirrored cubes descending from the ceiling. A group of severe-looking hipsters troll the stage, avoiding or following a lone soprano, the only one of them who will sing a note. The audience is left to wonder: Is this an opera or performance art? What does it mean? When will the chorus arrive to tell me who the bad guys are?

While not every modern opera is as otherworldly as New York City Opera's recent production of Morton Feldman's *Neither*, more and more producers and creators are looking beyond the standard repertory and even beyond standard operatic form itself. Many of today's composers and librettists do not seem eager to fit into one genre when writing for the lyric stage. Composer Ricky Ian Gordon tells stories with music, which have been given any number of labels and produced in a wide range of venues; director Kevin Newbury stages works that fit into many categories — and sometimes no category.

The growing number of genre-busting works that are making it to the mainstage suggests that opera companies are reinventing themselves to engage new audiences. But why this interest in alternative forms now? And what does it mean for audiences, artists and opera companies?

To Gordon, whose graceful music conveys emotional depth whether he's writing songs, opera or musical theater, a good story makes for good theater. His *Orpheus and Eurydice* started life as a chamber piece for soprano, clarinet and piano. But as Gordon watched the premiere in 2001, he thought to himself, "This is a theater piece." He expanded the music, choreographer Doug Varone added a physical narrative, and *Orpheus* was presented in a fully-staged version on the Lincoln Center American Songbook Series. The work continued to develop, with a new version with strings presented in 2008 and 2010 by Long Beach Opera — staged in a swimming pool.

Some of Gordon's compositions take cues from practicalities. In writing *Rappahannock County*, his new work based on 30 poems about the Civil War by Mark Campbell, he says, "I wanted to avoid the issues I had with *Grapes of Wrath*," referring to his large-scale 2007 opera. "Minnesota Opera commissioned it, put all their resources into it and let me do whatever the piece needed. But every other opera house has had to do a shorter version" due to budget constraints. By contrast, *Rappahannock County* uses only five singers and a chamber ensemble. Gordon saw the small form as a way to tell a story on a more personal level, and he also "wanted to do works that are viable in this economy," he explains. "I'm proud of my smaller works," says Gordon. "We all love grand opera, but sometimes there's something great about intimate, tiny, private moments."

Director Kevin Newbury, who collaborated with Gordon on the premiere of *Rappahannock County*, says that smaller-scale works are "also one of the ways of using the economic downturn to our advantage." While *Rappahannock* may appear to be a song cycle, the staging transforms it into a narrative work. "All the performers are involved in storytelling, physical movements and passing props between characters," Newbury says. "It tells a story in a way that only opera can."

Newbury is establishing a track record for staging unconventional works in unusual spaces, noting

that "young people don't want to go to an opera house every night." And while "alternative venues don't always save you money, it doesn't have to be about expensive scenery and lights, it can be about storytelling," he says.

Reimagining sung theater doesn't always have to mean shrinking it. Newbury has also directed larger works that are more oratorio than opera, such as John Adams's *El Niño* and Bernstein's *Mass*. His 2008 production of the *Mass* helped make sense of the wildly eclectic work, which Bernstein ambiguously subtitled "A Theater Piece for Singers, Players, and Dancers." For Adams's *El Niño*, Newbury embellished the Nativity story with simple staging, a basic set and projections of art work. The *San Francisco Chronicle* raved about the dramatic qualities of the production, and the San Francisco Classical Voice blog christened it one of the top 10 concerts of the year.

But is it opera? "I think in our multi-media time, anything goes," says Charles Jarden, general director of American Opera Projects (AOP), which assists composers as they develop new works. "The form is very open-ended, and that is a good thing," he adds. "Spaces, performers, composers and the audience are now more versatile." While AOP develops a variety of works, it has lately turned more attention to monodramas, commissioning new works and developing chamber reductions of existing scores. Jarden points out the daredevil appeal of a single singer carrying an entire evening, and notes that with fewer characters to write for, "the stakes are a little lower for composers who don't have a lot of experience writing opera."

To Jarden, more important than the form is the location. "I take my cue from my audiences, and they are asking for alternative spaces," he says, noting that this interest in performing outside the opera house invites new music. "Opera companies now rely on music from the past too much, and it's coming back to bite them," he says. The growing interest in new opera "is showing that the art form is renewing itself. If you just feed them a diet that nourished my grandparents, it won't work out." Kevin Newbury agrees: "Audiences are craving something beyond the next *La bohème* revival," he says.

To New York City Opera General Manager and Artistic Director George Steel, letting artists take the reins on a productions yields better opera and a



Michelle DeYoung, Jonathan Lemalu, Dawn Upshaw, Daniel Bubeck, Brian Cummings and Steven Rickards in San Francisco Symphony's 2010 production of Adams's *El Niño*, directed by Kevin Newbury. Photo by Kristen Loken.

broader audience. He describes the recent productions of three monodramas (Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, Feldman's *Neither* and Zorn's *La Machine de l'être*) as an artist-led production that heightened the visual and theatrical elements of the experience. Director and designer Michael Counts "asked the audience 'What is this? What does it mean? What could it mean?' And he left it up to them to respond."

Steel contradicts the impression that monodramas are less expensive: "Works for solo voice don't mean a skeleton crew in the pit," he says, "and new productions are always more expensive." He also warns not to attempt adventuresome opera on the cheap, or else "it will come out crummy. Composers have to lead the way in determining what forces are required," he says.

But is it opera? "The word opera is a catch-all and it's not water tight," Steel says, noting that the *Grove Dictionary of Opera* heading lists 70 subcategories. "It's theater that has a large music component to it." As far as opera's prospects for reaching a wider audience, Steel is optimistic. "There's this idea that there's this canon of opera that's not going to grow and that the size of the cognoscenti is shrinking. This is good news. It means you can program what you care about and what matters. Stop talking to the cognoscenti and start talking to the world." 🌍

Amanda Keil writes and sings in New York City and blogs about classical music at thousandfoldcho.com.

Photo credits, page 42: American Opera Projects's production of *Absynth*, a futuristic monodrama about the influence and relationship between (wo)Man and Machine. Opera Grows in Brooklyn, April 2010. Photo by Jessica Savage. • Anu Komsí in Zorn's *La Machine de l'être*, part of New York City Opera's production of *Monodramas*. Photo by Carol Rosegg.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED

BY ALEXA B. ANTOPOL

Evenings at the Opera: An Exploration of the Basic Repertoire

Jeffrey Langford
Amadeus Press
ISBN13: 9781574671872

This volume is a collection of essays based on Jeffrey Langford's lectures at the Manhattan School of Music and inspired by his pre-performance talks at the Metropolitan Opera Guild. It presents a view of the stylistic development of nearly 200 years of opera history (from Mozart to Britten), with special attention to the question of how action, music and text combine to make effective music drama. Taking a thematic (rather than a purely historical) approach to selected works from the standard repertoire, Langford engages the reader in the fundamental question of how the shifting aesthetics of opera from one composer to another, one country to another and one era to another have resulted in vastly different solutions to the problem of how to make a *dramma per musica* (drama in music). Going beyond mere plot synopsis, he guides the reader through analysis of specific issues of musical form, style, and technique to shed new light on the perennial question of "how opera (sometimes) works."

Weep, Shudder, Die: A Guide to Loving Opera

Robert Levine
HarperCollins
ISBN13: 9780062092267

What, really, is opera? At the turn of the 20th century — and for the previous 260 years — opera houses all over the

world were filled with all classes of people. Opera was the movie business of its day; in the first 50 years of the 19th century, more than 1,000 new operas were produced in Italy alone. Robert Levine has written a witty, irreverent guide for a new generation of 21st-century opera lovers, giving a sense of the history for classic compositions while relating them to today's audiences.

Wagner the Mystic

John J. Pohanka
The Wagner Society of Washington, D.C.
ISBN13: 9780615366487

John Pohanka, a lifelong student of philosophy and founding member of the Wagner Society of Washington, D.C., applies the perspectives of both music-lover and philosopher to help readers appreciate and understand the kinship between religious mysticism and the transformative experience of listening to Wagner's music. Delving into Wagner's writings and methods, Pohanka traces influences on Wagner's thoughts from as diverse sources of mystical philosophy as Plato, Schopenhauer, Jesus and Buddha. Pohanka also explores the recurring motifs of mysticism that permeate the operas, including the ineffable wonder of becoming one with the universal, the falling away of time and space, the paradox of finding oneself only through losing oneself and salvation through transcendence. Wagner's creation of the invisible orchestra and ritualistic celebration at Bayreuth further reinforce the religious aspect of his revolutionary approach to opera.

Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976

Volume Five: 1958-1965
Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, eds.
Boydell Press
ISBN13: 9781843835912

This volume covers the years during which Britten wrote two major operatic works, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Curlew River*, and a choral work, *War Requiem*. Correspondents include friends, fellow artists and collaborators such as William Plomer (librettist of *Curlew River*), Edith Sitwell, E. M. Forster, Christopher Isherwood, Robert Graves, the Earl of Harewood, Yehudi Menuhin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnevskaya, Dmitri Shostakovich, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Barbara Hepworth and Duncan Grant, as well as Britten's partner and principal interpreter, Peter Pears. The volume charts the peak of Britten's position as a leading figure of the international musical establishment as composer, conductor and pianist, and his continuing involvement with the Aldeburgh Festival and the English Opera Group. The deterioration in Britten's relationship with Boosey & Hawkes, his publishers since the mid-1930s, is closely documented, as is the founding of the new publishing house of Faber Music in 1964. Published in association with The Britten-Pears Foundation.

Leonard Bernstein at Work: His Final Years, 1984-1990

Steve J. Sherman
Amadeus Press
ISBN13: 9781574671902

Leonard Bernstein is internationally renowned as one of the most significant composers, musical inspirations, conductors and creative minds of the 20th century. This photographic essay of Bernstein during the last six years of his life gives insight into the disparate, sometimes vastly conflicting elements that shaped his work and influenced everyone who was drawn into his inner world. It contains approximately 200 black-and-white photographs, most previously unpublished, taken on and off stage during 20 different events or concerts, along with personal comments and remembrances from his colleagues, friends and relatives. The foreword is by Lauren Bacall; the preface by his eldest daughter, Jamie Bernstein; and the introduction by James M. Keller, Leonard Bernstein scholar-in-residence at the New York Philharmonic.

**Alone Together:
Why We Expect More from
Technology and Less from Each Other**
Sherry Turkle
Basic Books
ISBN13: 9780465010219

Consider Facebook — it's human contact, only easier to engage with and easier to avoid. Developing technology promises closeness. Sometimes it delivers, but much of our modern life leaves us less connected with people and more connected to simulations of them. In *Alone Together*, MIT

technology and society professor Sherry Turkle explores the power of our new tools and toys to dramatically alter our social lives. It's a nuanced exploration of what we are looking for — and sacrificing — in a world of electronic companions and social networking tools, and an argument that, despite the hand-waving of today's self-described prophets of the future, it will be the next generation who will chart the path between isolation and connectivity.

**Mozart: An Introduction to the
Music, the Man, and the Myths**
Royce E. Wates
Amadeus Press
ISBN13: 9781574671896

This volume explores in detail 20 of the composer's major works in the context of his brief life and the turbulent times in which he lived. Addressed to non-musicians seeking to deepen their technical appreciation for his music while learning more about Mozart the man than the caricature portrayed in the 1986 movie *Amadeus*, this book offers extensive biographical and historical background — debunking many well-established Mozart myths — along with guided study of compositions representing many genres of 18th-century music. Royce E. Wates, a Mozart specialist, has taught music history to thousands of non-musicians, both undergraduates and adults, as a professor of music at Boston University

and from 2002-2004 as director of Boston University's Adult Music Seminar at Tanglewood.

**The Cambridge Companion to
Richard Strauss**
Charles Youmans, Ed.
Cambridge University Press
ISBN13: 9780521728157

Richard Strauss is a composer much admired by audiences throughout the world, both in the opera house and the concert hall. Despite this popularity, Strauss was for many years ignored by scholars, who considered his commercial success and his continued reliance on the tonal system to be liabilities. However, the past two decades have seen a resurgence of scholarly interest in the composer. This volume surveys the results, focusing on the principal genres, the social and historical context, and topics perennially controversial over the last century. Chapters cover Strauss's operatic output, the modernism of his tone poems and his ever-popular *Lieder*. Controversial topics are explored, including Strauss's relationship to the Third Reich and the sexual dimension of his works. Reintroducing the composer and his music in light of recent research, this volume shows the composer's artistic personality to be richer and much more complicated than has been previously acknowledged. 🍷

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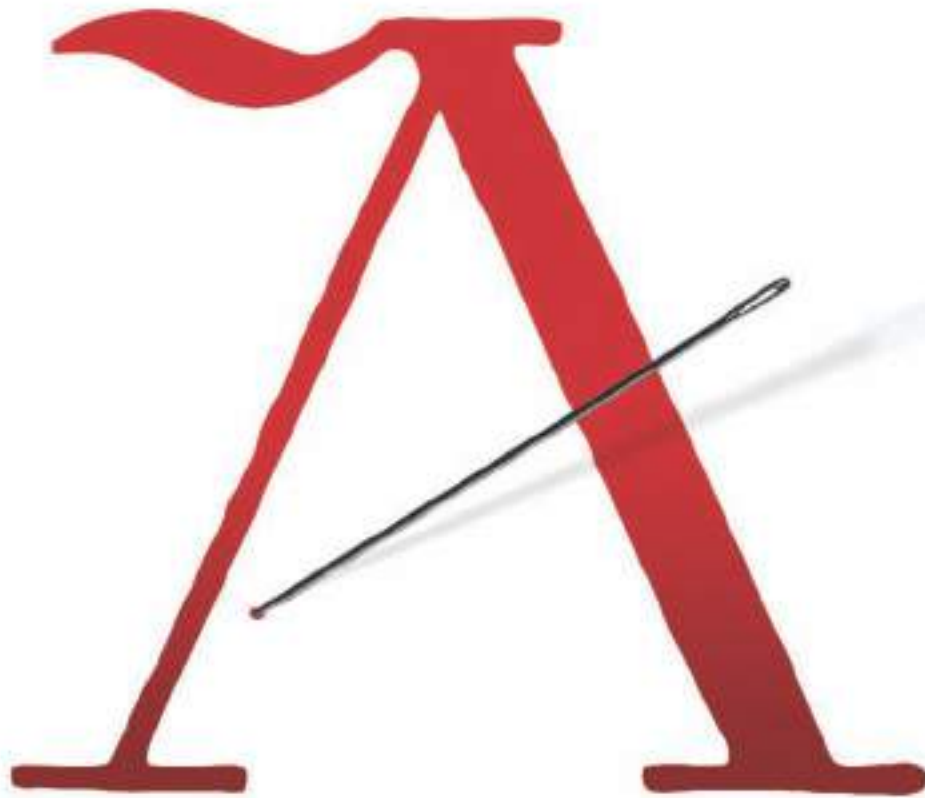
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