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# opera america

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# TRANSIT OF Venus

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Welcome to our new quarterly magazine, *Opera America*. The scope of this premiere issue reflects our collective aspiration for the field and for OPERA America itself. Our work over the last decade has been guided by a commitment to providing strategic leadership to strengthen the creation, production and enjoyment of opera. *Opera America* will extend this commitment with thoughtful, thought-provoking essays and listings that document the artistic vigor of the opera field. Articles with practical advice for opera administrators and trustees and information about programs that promise to nurture the future audience for our art form will also be featured.

The artistic range of American opera companies spans four centuries of creativity. Thomas May's discussion of resurgent interest in the works of Gluck complements Larry Bombeck's examination of the place of the American musical in the opera house. Philip Kennicott's reflection on the natural resonance between opera and architecture emphasizes the innovative capacity of opera — further documented in *In the Works*, a listing of some of the new operas currently being developed, many of which have received support from OPERA America's *Opera Fund* and Opera.ca's *Canadian Opera Creation Program*. The world premiere production of Thomas Pasatieri's *Frau Margot* is the focus of another new feature of the magazine, *Production Portfolio*.

Providing informative connections among opera companies, artists and allied professionals is a priority service of OPERA America. The *What's New* section highlights the outstanding work of select opera companies and provides information about performances through the autumn months. In *Transitions*, we try to keep you informed about the comings and goings of leaders in the field. Experts like the Metropolitan Opera's development director, Elizabeth Hurley, will continue to offer helpful recommendations about fundraising, marketing and other critical areas of administration and governance.

Developing larger and more informed audiences is a concern for all opera companies. This issue of *Opera America* reports on how several companies are reaching audiences through live broadcasts to movie theaters, schools and public plazas as well as OPERA America's online learning program. It also documents several other opera company programs that serve local communities in unique ways.

Opera's complexity and richness as an art form is well-documented. Based on the ultimate collaboration of words and music, opera draws on the talent of experts from every area of endeavor — musical and literary, theatrical and visual, vocal and instrumental, administrative and volunteer. This complexity is one of opera's greatest allures. Through *Opera America*, we at OPERA America will strive to provide valuable perspective and useful information to everyone invested in the health and vitality of the art form and the field. We look forward to having the benefit of your active participation in this effort.

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

Marc A. Scorca  
President/CEO

**“WE’RE CELEBRATING PEOPLE’S JOURNEYS IN LIFE, AS WELL AS THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY.”**

“Opera is always changing, so it’s exciting to be on the forefront of that change,” said Sandra Bernhard, the newly-appointed director of **Houston Grand Opera’s** HGOCo. Inspired by the pillars of communication, community and cooperation, HGOCo is the opera company’s new initiative to provide opportunities for observation, enjoyment and participation in the creation of art for the entire Houston community. The goal of the program is to employ “methods of creating a community through opera,” says Bernhard.

The initiative aims to bring new programs to the Houston community, including *Song of Houston*, which has been underway since the spring of 2007. Susan A. Elliot, Houston Grand Opera’s manager of planning and special projects, said that “the project came to be after General Director Anthony Freud was inspired by a story told to him by a Houston community member. The woman’s maid had immigrated to Houston by walking from El Salvador with her child. Many other people in Houston have made similar extraordinary journeys.”

*Song of Houston’s* events and programs include Writers in the Schools, a photography workshop produced in collaboration with the National Geographic Society, traveling exhibits of photography and visual art created by community members, a special section of the company’s Web site and continuing education courses for adults.

At the core of *Song of Houston* is *The Refuge*, a full-scale musical work for the stage that celebrates the journeys of six different cultural groups that have become parts of the Houston community. Written by composer Christopher Theofanidis and poet Leah Lax, *The Refuge* will unite hundreds of performers from the six focus communities, including a Vietnamese dan bau player, a Russian Jewish bayan player, and an Indian qaw’wali singer, with the orchestra, chorus and children’s chorus of the Houston Grand Opera, as well as the artists of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. Before its premiere on November 10, 2007, each of the six movements of the piece will be performed in the communities that inspired them. “We’re celebrating people’s journeys in life, as well as their cultural identity,” said Elliot. Additionally, one of the two complete performances of the piece will be a “thank you” concert expressly for all of the people who contributed to *The Refuge* with their time, stories and music. 🇺🇸

— Megan Young



Houston Grand Opera’s 2006 production of Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*. Photo by Brett Coomer.



Brian Banion as Marchese D'Obigny, Mika Shigematsu as Flora Bervoix and Janinah Burnett as Violetta Valery in Opera Columbus's production of Verdi's *La traviata*. Photo by Lisa Minken.

### **"WE HAD TO MAINTAIN OPTIMISM WITHOUT LOSING SIGHT OF THE EXTREME CHALLENGE."**

In June 2007, **Opera Columbus** met the Huntington Challenge, a significant step in a new business plan adopted in March 2006. At that time, the opera company had an annual budget of \$3.2 million and a deficit of nearly \$1.2 million, and its demise seemed imminent. Former board president Press Southworth III stepped in as executive director and quickly worked with staff and board to turn around the company's finances. Huntington National Bank, the organization's largest creditor, issued a challenge: If Opera Columbus made a payment of \$400,000 (on a \$640,000 debt) by June 30, 2007, the balance would be forgiven.

Southworth knew the company needed not only to change its practices, but also to demonstrate those changes publicly. "It was important to regain confidence in the community, to ensure total transparency," he said. "They felt they had been kept in the dark about how bad things were." Over the course of the year, the company sent periodic e-mail updates to top corporate philanthropy leaders and other leaders in the community. Southworth also maintained an open-door policy — board members, subscribers, donors, arts leaders and press were invited to schedule one-on-one meetings to address questions and concerns.

As the company worked to increase revenue — ultimately expanding the base of individual donors by about 20% — staff members reduced expenses significantly. Southworth maintained that the austerity budget still delivered value: "We've really reduced expenses for productions and yet our feedback on artistic quality is strong, if not stronger than ever," he said. "One of the things I'm particularly proud of is the fact that we expanded our education and outreach during this year."

"Very few people in the community thought we would be able to meet the challenge," noted Southworth. "We had to maintain optimism without losing sight of the extreme challenge. We have only five department heads, and they have no staff. I emphasize that the rest of us are their staff — when someone is at a busy point, we all pitch in." According to Southworth, the notion of transparency is important within the company as well. In addition to meetings with specific agendas, informal "Breakfast Thursdays" keep everyone connected: "We take turns bringing breakfast — bagels, donuts, quiche — and we sit down and talk every week." 🍷

**“THE QUICKEST WAY TO ALIENATE YOUR AUDIENCES IS TO GIVE THEM LESS THAN THE BEST.”**

**Gotham Chamber Opera**, welcomed as a Professional Company Member of OPERA America in April 2007, began life as the Henry Street Chamber Opera in 2001 under the leadership of Neal Goren (artistic director), Karen Lerner (founding board president) and Caroline Stoessinger (chairman of the music department at the Henry Street Settlement). The first production was Mozart’s *Il sogno di scipione*, performed in the intimate 350-seat Harry de Jur Theatre at the Henry Street Settlement on New York’s Lower East Side.

“It was a terrific piece that no one knew,” said Goren. “According to all the books, it’s impossible to stage because nothing happens. I thought, ‘Oh, come on. There’s no such thing as an unstageable opera.’ I called director Christopher Alden, and he spoke to some friends, and we discussed spawning the company.”

Part of that discussion, naturally, was about money. As Goren related, “I asked, ‘What is the least amount of money you can spend and still be proud of your work?’ I said we would never expand our season beyond what we could do very well.” Until now, that has meant a single production each season. “We’re finally in a position where we can expand our season, but if we get to a point where quality suffers, we’ll scale back. The quickest way to alienate your audiences is to give them less than the best.”

Gotham Chamber Opera has achieved remarkable success with works that are not necessarily known for box-office appeal — the best-known operas on its repertory list are *Dido and Aeneas* and Britten’s *Albert Herring*. Goren admitted that the company’s location has something to do with its ability to sell lesser-known works: “It is wonderful to be in New York. There is no need to do another *Aida* or *Carmen*.”

Gotham Chamber Opera’s 2007-2008 season opens on September 26 with Piazzola’s *María de Buenos Aires* at New York University’s Skirball Center. In January 2008, *Scenes from a Gypsy Life* (at the Morgan Library & Museum) will combine Janáček’s *Diary of One Who Disappeared* and Dvorak’s *Gypsy Songs*. In the spring, the company returns to its Henry Street home for *Ariadne Unhinged*, featuring music of Monteverdi, Haydn and Schoenberg. 🎭



Lisa Hopkins and Alek Shrader in Gotham Chamber Opera’s 2007 production of Rossini’s *Il signor Bruschino*. Photo by Richard Termine.

### “WE NEED TO IDENTIFY THE CREATIVITY THAT EXISTS.”

“We are coming through a journey of discovery, finding out how this art form fits into our community,” said Loriana De Crescenzo, executive director of **Opera Providence**. Earlier this year, the company became OPERA America’s first Professional Company Member in Rhode Island. In addition to providing a variety of ways for audience members to engage with opera, the company is committed to providing opportunities for artists who reside in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

In spring 2007, the company presented the premiere of *Michelangelo*, a new musical play by Rhode Island native Enrico Garzilli. “We saw it as a way to connect the renaissance of Providence with a great Renaissance artist,” said De Crescenzo. In addition, “the work allowed us to showcase 20 singers and a chorus of about 40 people. We need to identify the creativity that exists. Where are the next great artists in our field? Who will lead them on their journey?”

According to De Crescenzo, Providence is fertile soil for an opera company, and not only because of its substantial Italian-American community. “The arts have a real place of importance here. Our summer series is part of ‘Celebrate Providence,’ which is the mayor’s neighborhood arts initiative.” The series of four concerts, called “Opera on the Hill,” draws about 1,000 people to each performance.

The company also produces three fully-staged operas each season. The 2007-2008 season will open with a double-bill of Lee Hoiby’s *The Italian Lesson* and *Bon Appetit*. The latter, with text taken from Julia Child, offers potential for community connections, as Providence is home to Johnson & Wales University College of Culinary Arts. Next, the company will offer Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha*. “It’s a piece that’s always interested me,” said Music Director Tim Steele. “I was involved in a production at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis a couple of years ago, and it was a great success there. There are over 20 set pieces, but of those only four could be categorized as ragtime. The rest is really grand opera.” The season will also include *Die Fledermaus*, performed in English. “We didn’t set out to do an all-English season, but it just happened,” said De Crescenzo. “You make choices based on the objectives of presenting a particular piece.” 🍷



Jane Shivick, Joseph Holmes, Anton Belov and Jessica Cooper perform in last year’s Opera Providence “Opera on the Hill” program. Photo courtesy of Opera Providence.

**“THE GOAL IS TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT CAN BE DONE BY COMPANIES OUR SIZE OR EVEN SMALLER.”**

A world premiere represents a great opportunity to generate excitement for an opera, a creative team, an opera company — even opera itself. But what happens after the commotion of the premiere dies away? Fortunately, numerous companies around the country are giving contemporary works a second chance. Several of these companies, however, share one common challenge: size.

A commission from a company with large performing forces can be a mixed blessing for a composer. While it is exciting to have a full chorus and orchestra — not to mention tremendous technical capabilities — at one’s disposal, a work written on a large scale may have limited opportunities for subsequent productions. Often, the problem lies not on stage, but in the pit. Philadelphia’s **Center City Opera Theater** recently produced Lowell Liebermann’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a reduced version: “I became aware of the piece three years ago and thought it was a strong opera,” said General and Artistic Director Andrew Kurtz. “Its great obstacle was the enormous orchestra.” Center City’s theater, the Perelman, has room for about 36 musicians. So Kurtz approached Liebermann with the idea of commissioning a reduced orchestration. The new version had its premiere in June 2007.

David Carlson is also enjoying a new life for his work *The Midnight Angel* in a new production at Milwaukee’s **The Skylight**. The company approached him to create a version limited to 21 players. Unlike Liebermann, Carlson was unable to devote the time to the orchestral reduction himself. The task was given to Ronald Foster, with whom Skylight had worked previously on other reductions.

Foster offered the possibility of filling out the sound by using synthesizers, a practice often used in Broadway pits. “Although I was limited by 21 players,” Carlson commented, “I didn’t want the synthesizers to cover sounds that weren’t already in the pit. There are no trombones in the orchestra, for example, so I didn’t want the synthesizers playing those sounds.” Liebermann considered the idea of synthesizers, as well: “I initially thought we would substitute some of the mallet instruments from the original orchestration with keyboards, but it didn’t end up happening.” In the end, Carlson’s reduction uses a synthesizer to fill out the sound slightly, while Liebermann’s uses only acoustic instruments.

At **Opera Theatre of St. Louis**, General Director Charles MacKay is reviving several contemporary masterworks that have so far remained outside the standard repertoire, including Walton’s *Troilus and Cressida*, which will be part of the company’s 2008 season. “*Troilus and Cressida* was something suggested by our late artistic director Colin Graham nearly a decade ago,” MacKay said. Though the company’s pit is not small (it holds around 60), *Troilus* is still a stretch: “The work has an enormous chorus and orchestra, and financially it is a very difficult show to mount.” MacKay approached the Walton Trust and Lady Walton, eventually reaching an agreement to commission a new reduction, bringing the winds down from quadruple to double. The reorchestration is being done by John Gibbons, a renowned Walton scholar and close associate of Lady Walton.

In addition, the company has commissioned a reduction of Corigliano’s *The Ghosts of Versailles* for



Jorge Garza in Center City Opera Theater's production of Liebermann's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Photo by Harry Abraham.

the 2009 season, thanks in part to a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. "The goal is to create a version that can be done by companies our size or even smaller." MacKay was quick to note that reorchestrations are no recent phenomenon. "The Argentinean conductor Ettore Panizza did sanctioned orchestral reductions of Puccini's works, and Strauss did his own reductions of some of his larger operas."

For composers Carlson and Liebermann, the reorchestrations provide not only the possibility of more performances, but new artistic discoveries as well. "It's funny," Liebermann commented, "but the original version was so delicately orchestrated that I'm not certain every audience member will be able to hear a difference." Carlson enjoyed the opportunity

to capture the intimacy of *The Midnight Angel's* plot in "true chamber music rather than a faint echo of a full orchestra. If the work has to be different, let it be different and do what chamber orchestras do best. In this version there are more nuances. The details really matter."

For Andrew Kurtz and Charles MacKay, reorchestrations provide an opportunity to champion new works and expand the canon. "We feel this is an important role our company can play in reintroducing unfairly neglected works back into the repertoire in a new way," MacKay said. 🍷

— John Glover



A rendering of Michigan Opera Theatre's world premiere production of DiChiera's *Cyrano* by set designer John Pascoe. Courtesy of Michigan Opera Theatre.

### NEW REPERTOIRE FOR A NEW FALL SEASON

The 2007-2008 season will kick off with several brand-new operas, along with works that will be “new” to many. Highlights of the fall season are featured on these pages. To learn more about upcoming member productions, visit the Schedule of Performances at [www.operaamerica.org](http://www.operaamerica.org), where you can search by title, composer, company, date and state, as well as learn more about casting and creative teams. 📅

In November 2007, **Manitoba Opera** will present the world premiere of *Transit of Venus* — the first mainstage opera ever commissioned by the company. The work, with music by Victor Davies and a libretto by playwright Maureen Hunter, is based on Hunter’s play of the same name. For Manitoba Opera General Director Larry Desrochers, who will also direct the production, the story has great operatic potential. “I had directed the piece as a play, and when working with the playwright I always said it was like an opera. It is melodramatic in the best sense of the word.” *Transit of Venus* is based on the real-life expeditions of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French astronomer Guillaume le Gentil de la Galasière, who twice tried, unsuccessfully, to chart the transit of the planet Venus across the sun.

In choosing a play as the basis for the company’s first commission, Desrochers hearkened back to the practices of previous operatic masters. “So many master composers looked to theater for sources. The characters had already lived on the stage, and many of the dramatic storytelling choices had already been made.” The company also took note of the tremendous success enjoyed by **Calgary Opera** with the premiere of *Filumena*. “They used a local story that had particular resonance for the southern Alberta area. Likewise, this is a play from Manitoba that has had a successful run, as well as a broadcast, so there was local recognition of the work. The response to Manitoba doing a new work, and this new work in particular, has been extremely positive. It is a badge of honor for the opera company to create a new work in this community.” Supported by a grant from the *Canadian Opera Creation Program*, *Transit of Venus* was workshopped in June 2007.

*Elmer Gantry*, with music by Robert Aldridge and libretto by Herschel Garfein, will have its first full performances at **Nashville Opera** in November. The opera, based on the novel by Sinclair Lewis, was featured at **New York City Opera's** VOX: Showcasing American Composers in May 2007. During VOX, Aldridge discussed what drew him to the novel as source material for an opera: "My father was a minister, and I grew up in the Baptist tradition in the mountains of western North Carolina. The first music I really heard was gospel and folk music." When Aldridge suggested the story to Garfein, he was immediately intrigued. "*Elmer Gantry* is a big, sprawling book that covers one man through his entire life. It is a very ambitious novel that tries to get to the heart of all the different meanings of religion in this country. Never mind that all the characters are fascinating. You just couldn't ask for a better subject for an opera." *Elmer Gantry* is the recipient of an Audience Development Award from OPERA America's *Opera Fund*.

**Michigan Opera Theatre** will open its 2007-2008 season with the world premiere of *Cyrano*, based on Edmond Rostand's 1897 drama. The opera, with score by David DiChiera and libretto by Bernard Uzan, is a co-production of Michigan Opera Theatre, **Opera Company of Philadelphia** and **Florida Grand Opera**. In Detroit, Romanian baritone Marian Pop will create the title role, American soprano Leah Partridge will sing the part of Roxane, and Spanish tenor José Luis Sola will sing the role of Christian.

The season also includes the modern "premiere" of the 1745 opéra-ballet *Zélinde, roi des Sylphes*. Washington, D.C.'s **Opera Lafayette** will offer this rococo work by Rebel and Francoeur, which represents a fantastical meeting of the denizens of earth, sea and sky. Early opera aficionados will also have the opportunity to catch performances of *Giulio Cesare* (Lyric Opera of Chicago) and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (**Seattle Opera**). Skipping ahead to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lyric Opera of Chicago will offer Strauss's rarely performed *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, featuring Deborah Voigt as the Empress and Christine Brewer as the Dyer's Wife; San Francisco Opera will present Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*.

*Appomattox*, by Philip Glass and Academy Award-winning librettist Christopher Hampton, will premiere at **San Francisco Opera** in October. The opera is inspired by the historical moment when Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to his Union counterpart, General Ulysses S. Grant. The composer, who celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday earlier this year, retains a presence on stages across the country. Last spring, a production of *Waiting for the Barbarians* enjoyed great success at **Austin Lyric Opera**, and *Orphée*, based on the film by Jean Cocteau, joined four other Orpheus-themed works at **Glimmerglass Opera** this past summer. Later this season, the **Metropolitan Opera** will present *Satyagraha* in a new co-production with English National Opera.

Many recent premieres are enjoying second (and third, and fourth) productions around the country. Richard Danielpour and Toni Morrison's *Margaret Garner*, a hit with audiences at **Michigan Opera Theatre**, **Cincinnati Opera**, **Opera Company of Philadelphia** and **Opera Carolina**, will appear in a new production at **New York City Opera** this September. William Bolcom's *A View from the Bridge*, with libretto by Arnold Weinstein and Arthur Miller, was first heard at **Lyric Opera of Chicago** in 1999, with subsequent productions at the **Metropolitan Opera** and **Portland Opera**. In November, Bolcom's story of Brooklyn longshoreman Eddie Carbone will bow at **Washington National Opera**. **The Santa Fe Opera's** 2005 production of Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar*, complete with principal singers Dawn Upshaw as Margarita Xirgu and Kelley O'Connor as Federico García Lorca, will appear at **Opera Boston**.

**DIGITAL TRANSMISSIONS — THE FUTURE IS NOW**

Last year, all eyes were on the **Metropolitan Opera** as it launched an exciting new initiative to bring live opera broadcasts to movie theaters. The series enjoyed tremendous success, reaching an estimated audience of more than 325,000 viewers. In 2007-2008, the Met will launch its second season of international HD transmissions — this time with eight broadcasts, up from last year's six. While the Met's program is the most ambitious of its kind, several other companies are using technology to expand their reach.

**San Francisco Opera's** Koret Media Suite, an HD video production facility, was installed in the War Memorial Opera House earlier this year. The media suite represents the first permanent HD broadcast-standard facilities in an American opera house. In June 2007, in partnership with UC Berkeley's Cal Performances, the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts at UC Davis and the Wells Fargo Center for the Arts in Santa Rosa, free indoor simulcasts of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* were available in three locations. Technology in the media suite also enables the company to consider future ideas such as expanded podcasting, live streaming, DVD production and many other electronic media possibilities.

On September 23, 2007, **Washington National Opera** will present Puccini's *La bohème* to 17 universities, colleges and high schools across the nation through a live simulcast. The free simulcast will also be transmitted to viewers at the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. and select movie theaters in the region. 📺



Washington National Opera's simulcast of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* on the National Mall. Photo by James Brantley.

**Kevin Patterson** has been appointed general director of **Austin Lyric Opera**. He most recently served as director of artistic administration and director of production for the Pittsburgh Opera. As a producer of opera he has been associated with opera companies on the regional and national levels including Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Santa Fe Opera, Palm Beach Opera, New Orleans Opera and Opera Grand Rapids. He is also an artistic advisor to Asheville Lyric Opera.

**The Dallas Opera** announced that **Karen Stone**, the fifth general director of the company, will resign effective September 30, 2007 in order to pursue other opportunities. Stone became general director in 2003. Her tenure included achievements such as the creation of the first Dallas Opera Young Artists' Program and company premieres including *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Rodelinda*, *Luisa Miller*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Nabucco*, *Maria Stuarda*, *La Rondine* and *Lohengrin*. The board of directors will form a search committee as soon as possible; while that search is underway, Board Chairman **John Cody** will oversee the activities of The Dallas Opera leadership team.

**Joan Desens** is the new director of institutional advancement for **Glimmerglass Opera**. Desens returned to Glimmerglass, where she was associate director of development and co-director of education from 1995 to 1999, following three seasons as a major gifts officer at San Francisco Opera

followed by five years as general director of Opera Omaha. Her return to New York was for family reasons and coincided with an offer from Glimmerglass. She also serves on the board of the Douglas Moore Fund for American Opera.

**Opera Colorado's** president and general director, **Peter Russell**, and artistic director, James Robinson, have resigned. Russell will remain an advisor on artistic and production matters to Opera Colorado through January of 2008, and will continue his efforts on behalf of the National Performing Arts Convention (NPAC) due to take place in Denver in June 2008. The board of directors has accepted both resignations and promoted **Greg Carpenter**, currently director of development, as the company's executive director. **Jeremy Shamos** has been named president of the board of directors.

**Bonnie M. Poindexter** has been named executive director of **Piedmont Opera**. She has a long history with the company, beginning with an appearance in the chorus in the 1978 production of *Rigoletto*. She served as a board member from 1983 to 1986, and worked most recently as a development consultant, starting in 2006.

**Pittsburgh Opera** has announced the appointment of two new members to its senior artistic staff: **William Powers** to the position of director of artistic administration and **Jerome Sherk** to the position of director of production. Powers was most recently the general director

of the Berkshire Opera Company, a summer festival located in western Massachusetts, and has served on the board of OPERA America. Sherk was production stage manager for San Francisco Opera for 21 years, and has most recently worked as production director for **New Orleans Opera**.

**The Santa Fe Opera's** general director, **Richard Gaddes**, has asked the board of directors to plan for an eventual transition in leadership. The timing of Gaddes's retirement will be determined by the process chosen by the board's Transition Task Force, which is charged with finding a successor. Gaddes's career at The Santa Fe Opera began in 1969, when he became the artistic administrator. In 1976 he co-founded Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and left Santa Fe in 1978 to serve as the company's full-time general director. In 1988 Gaddes returned to Santa Fe as director of the apprentice program, and in 1998 he was chosen to succeed Founding General Director John Crosby.

The **Juilliard School** has appointed **Stephen Wadsworth**, stage director, writer and educator, as the James C. Marcus Faculty Fellow: Director of Opera Studies, for the Juilliard Opera Center, effective January 2008. In this newly-created full-time position, Wadsworth will oversee the curriculum, lead a new intensive acting program together with Juilliard faculty member Eve Shapiro, work closely with the young artists, and direct some productions. 🎭



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### MAKING CONNECTIONS

With membership representing every facet of the opera industry, OPERA America has always been uniquely positioned to connect emerging artists and administrators with leaders in the field. The organization’s move to New York City has created new opportunities to bring opera professionals together. These New York meetings give OPERA America a regular opportunity to meet with leaders in the field and explore ideas that may inform regional meetings, national artist workshops and its annual conference.

With support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, *Making Connections*, a series of professional development and networking events, was introduced last year. Each evening event brought together managers, arts administrators, and an array of creative and performing artists for an informative panel discussion on a specific topic, followed by a reception.

The series has been expanded for 2007-2008, with sessions geared toward a wide variety of careers in opera. Confirmed speakers include John A. Anderson, Herbert Barrett Management; Dorothy Byrne, mezzo-soprano; Daniel James Cole, Fashion Institute of Technology; Charles Jarden, American Opera Projects; Lawrence Edelson, American Lyric Theater; Robin Guarino, The Juilliard School; Jay Lesenger, Chautauqua Opera; Jeanne Martinet, author of *The Art Of Mingling*; Gayletha Nichols, Metropolitan Opera; Bill Palant, IMG Artists; Norman Ryan, Schott Music & European American Music Dist. LLC; Nova Thomas, soprano; Stephen Wadsworth, director; and Diane Wondisford, Music-Theatre Group.

For more information and to register, visit [www.operaamerica.org/makingconnections](http://www.operaamerica.org/makingconnections). 

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**UPCOMING WORKSHOPS FOR ARTISTS**

OPERA America's Artistic Services department conducts a series of professional development workshops across the country for opera artists. These workshops focus on the business aspects of a career, including building a professional network. OPERA America creates an atmosphere that encourages connections among registrants and panelists. In addition to interactive sessions, the programming allows plenty of time for one-on-one communication.

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On December 8-9, 2007, OPERA America will collaborate with Syracuse Opera to explore issues around the creation of new work, including: working with singers, finding creative partners, workshoping, marketing, the role of the publisher and more. This workshop is supported, in part, by the New York State Music Fund.

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Over the years, OPERA America's Singer Workshops have provided hundreds of singers with answers to vital career questions, including: What do companies consider when casting? How do I select the right training program? How do I know which companies are right for me? This season, Singer Workshops will be available in Los Angeles (October 21, 2007), Chicago (November 3, 2007), Atlanta (January 6, 2006) and Lawrence, Kansas (February 2-3, 2008).

For more information, or to learn how your organization can co-host an artist workshop, contact Anne Choe at [ACHoe@operaamerica.org](mailto:ACHoe@operaamerica.org) or call 212-796-8620, ext. 202. ☎

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<p>Leoš Janáček's <b>New Production</b>  <b>THE CUNNING LITTLE VIXEN</b>                  Friday, July 18 &amp; Monday, July 21</p>	
<p>Giuseppe Verdi's <b>Revival</b>  <b>La Traviata</b>                  Friday, August 1 &amp; Monday, August 4</p>	
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# Frau Margot



Morgan Smith as Ted and Patricia Risley as Kara in Fort Worth Opera's 2007 world premiere production of Pasatieri's *Frau Margot*. Photo by Ellen Appel.

*Frau Margot*, with a score by Thomas Pasatieri and libretto by Frank Corsaro, had its world premiere in June 2007 at Fort Worth Opera. It tells the story of a composer's widow haunted by the memory of her husband. Approached by Ted, a young composer eager to complete her husband's last opera, Margot allows him to work on the score. Eventually, it becomes apparent to Margot that the love interest of her late husband's opera is her own friend and companion, Kara. Complicating matters further, Ted and Kara have fallen in love, adding to Margot's jealousy and driving her to commit a terrible crime.

The cast of the original production included Lauren Flanigan (Frau Margot), Morgan Smith (Ted Steinert), Patricia Risley (Kara Söndstrom), Allan Glassman (Walter Engelmann) and Daniel Okulitch (Gert Osterland). The production was conducted by Joseph Illick and directed by Frank Corsaro, with sets by Alison Nalder, projections by Peter Nigrini and costumes by Steven Bryant.

*Frau Margot* represents a return to opera for composer Thomas Pasatieri, who wrote a number of operas in the 1960s and 1970s before embarking on a successful career in film. In discussing how his writing evolved as a result of his time in Hollywood, he said, "It's not just working in film, but life and all of one's experience that change one as an artist and as a composer. For those 20 years in Hollywood I was writing many other things — songs and symphonies and piano concertos and chamber music — and continuing to grow as a composer. But my involvement in the film industry as an orchestrator for more than 150 films over a 20-year period certainly had some impact. Having to orchestrate that many scores meant I was living inside the orchestra." He went on: "Dealing with music and drama helped simplify my musical language and my lyricism. Since film is such a direct form of communication — you're right there — it actually influenced how I relate music to an audience. Specific things occurred to me: one, in my previous operas I felt there was too much percussion in the orchestra, too much orchestral accompanied recitative. I felt it was tiring for the audience, so I wanted to have much more recit that was unaccompanied. I also wanted to have a cleaner approach to the vocal line, not as much embellishment. I was trying to create a vocal line where the drama would not be hindered by too much orchestral accompaniment. It gives the singer-actor a great deal of freedom."



Projections designed for Fort Worth Opera's 2007 world premiere production of Pasatieri's *Frau Margot*. Photo by Ellen Appel.

"We used the projections to provide a general sense of place, a relatively upper-class Amsterdam interior. Because we're not trying to be specific about whether we're in this room or that room, we were able to use the images to both give a sense of place, but also a sense of mood within the piece. At the beginning, they were more light and coherent, but as the second act progresses, the views of the interior get progressively darker and became increasingly fractured. The entire language is about light and shadow, controlling the depths of shadow and the amount of mystery."

"The difficult thing about video is how slowly I am able to respond when changes are needed. On its surface it seems so ephemeral — just some files on the computer. But the realities of creating that material and getting those things built makes it quite difficult. I go through a very detailed storyboard process, where I have determined what we will be seeing at every single moment. The vast majority of this is created before rehearsals begin, with the exception of the few pieces that involve filming performers. That's all storyboarded, like a film, well in advance. Then you start tearing pages out of the book and madly revising. In some ways the advance work seems redundant, but it's really the only way to get through it. If you wait until you've seen the rehearsals, you'd never make it. So it's a combination of really extensive preparation and a willingness to throw out absolutely everything."

— Peter Nigrini, Projection Designer



“The set is pretty much black and white. It’s film noir, kind of dark and foreboding. The only color we really see is in the costumes. The first time we see Kara, she is in a very vivid color, very alive. The other shot of color is when Frau Margot is taken to the police station. She wears a bright red cocoon coat. Our first idea was to have her in a straightjacket, but Frank wanted her to be able to move.”

The creative team set the opera in 1938, which presented a challenge when it came to the title role: “To our eyes, the clothes from that period can look old-fashioned, and they would have looked matronly on Lauren. But then we came up with something that made perfect sense: Frau Margot is an old opera diva. She has kept her mansion just as it was when her husband died, she has kept his car polished ... so her clothes are a throwback. Her clothes aren’t the same period as the rest of the production because she is holding on to her past.”

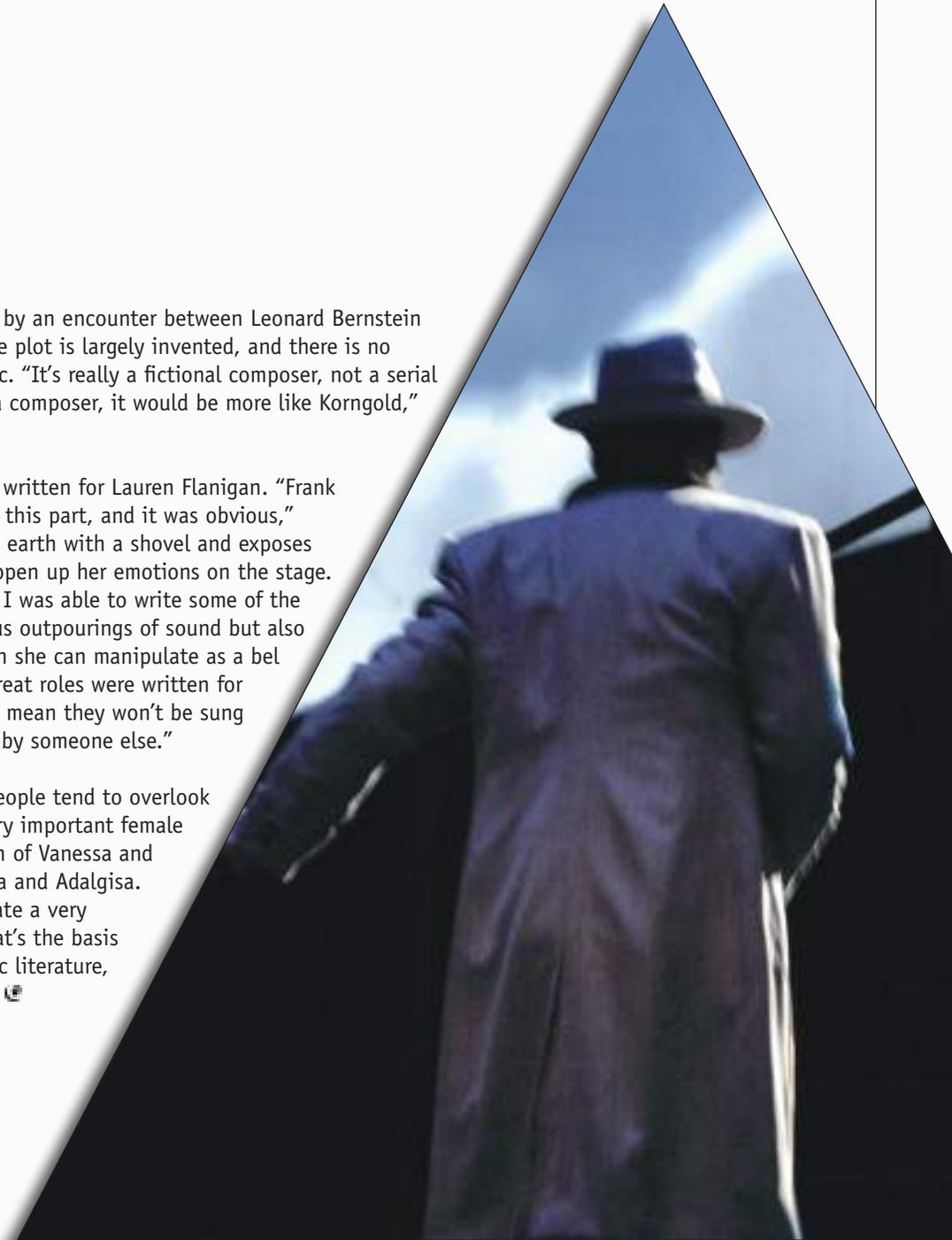
— Steven Bryant, Costume Designer

Lauren Flanigan as Margot and Daniel Okulitch as Inspector Gert in Fort Worth Opera’s 2007 world premiere production of Pasatier’s *Frau Margot*. Photo by Ellen Appel.

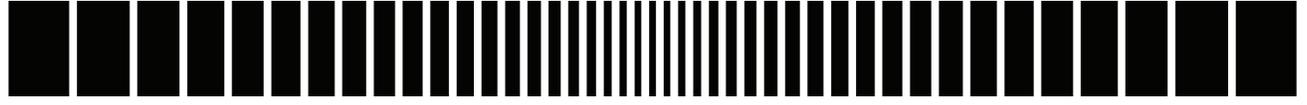
Although the opera was inspired by an encounter between Leonard Bernstein and the widow of Alban Berg, the plot is largely invented, and there is no attempt to reference Berg's music. "It's really a fictional composer, not a serial composer — if you had to pick a composer, it would be more like Korngold," said Pasatieri.

The title role of *Frau Margot* was written for Lauren Flanigan. "Frank and I talked about who could do this part, and it was obvious," said Pasatieri. "She digs into the earth with a shovel and exposes everything. She is not afraid to open up her emotions on the stage. Since I was writing for her voice I was able to write some of the things she does best — enormous outpourings of sound but also incredible high pianissimo, which she can manipulate as a bel canto singer does. Most of the great roles were written for specific singers, but that doesn't mean they won't be sung just as well, perhaps differently, by someone else."

"Because Lauren is so famous, people tend to overlook the fact that there is another very important female role, Kara. This is in the tradition of Vanessa and Erika, Laura and Gioconda, Norma and Adalgisa. The two female protagonists create a very important operatic situation. That's the basis of a very exciting part of operatic literature, and Margot is in that tradition." 🎭



Morgan Smith against a projection designed for Fort Worth Opera's 2007 world premiere production of Pasatieri's *Frau Margot*. Photo by Ellen Appel.



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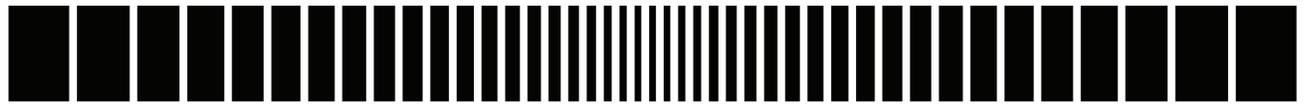
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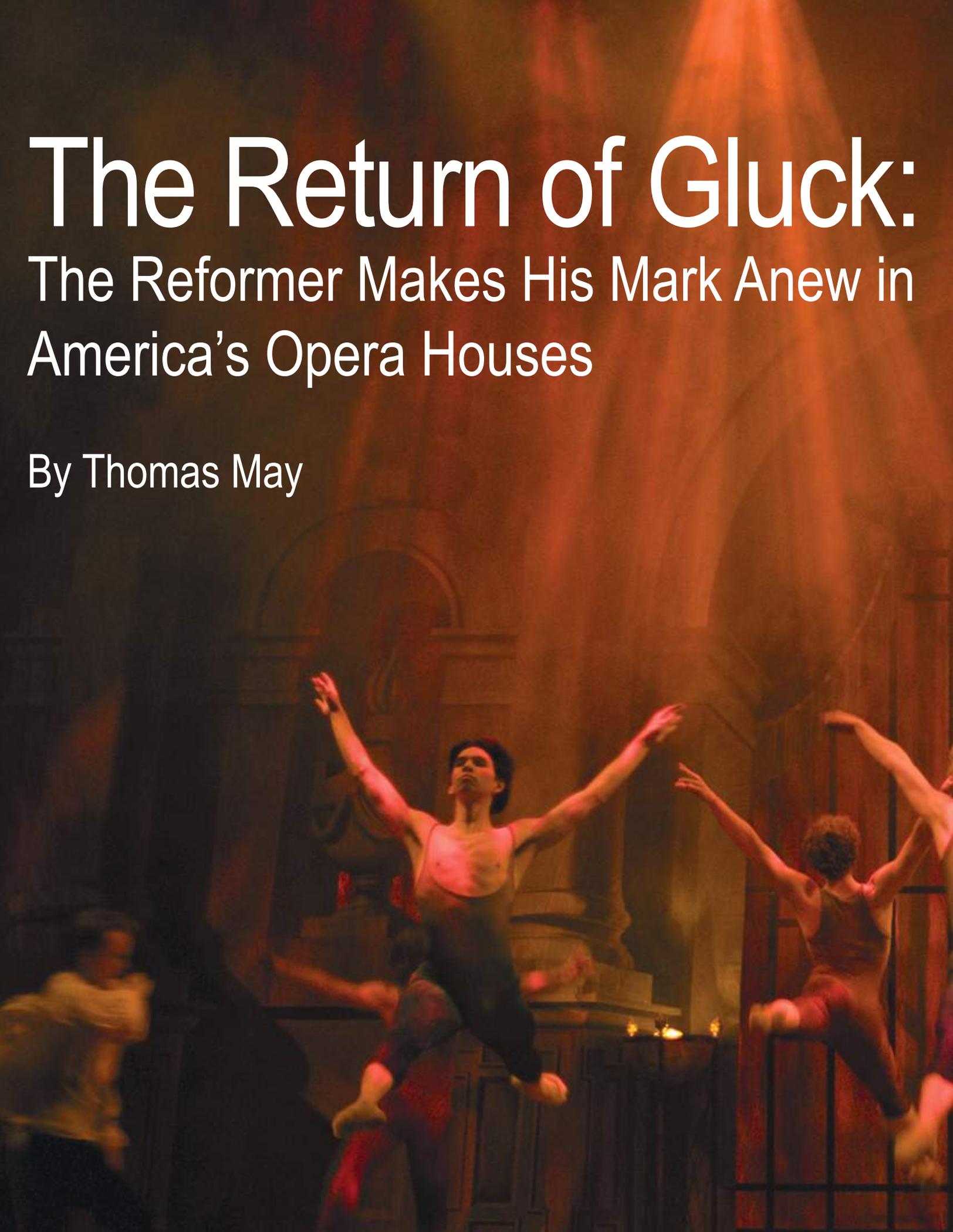
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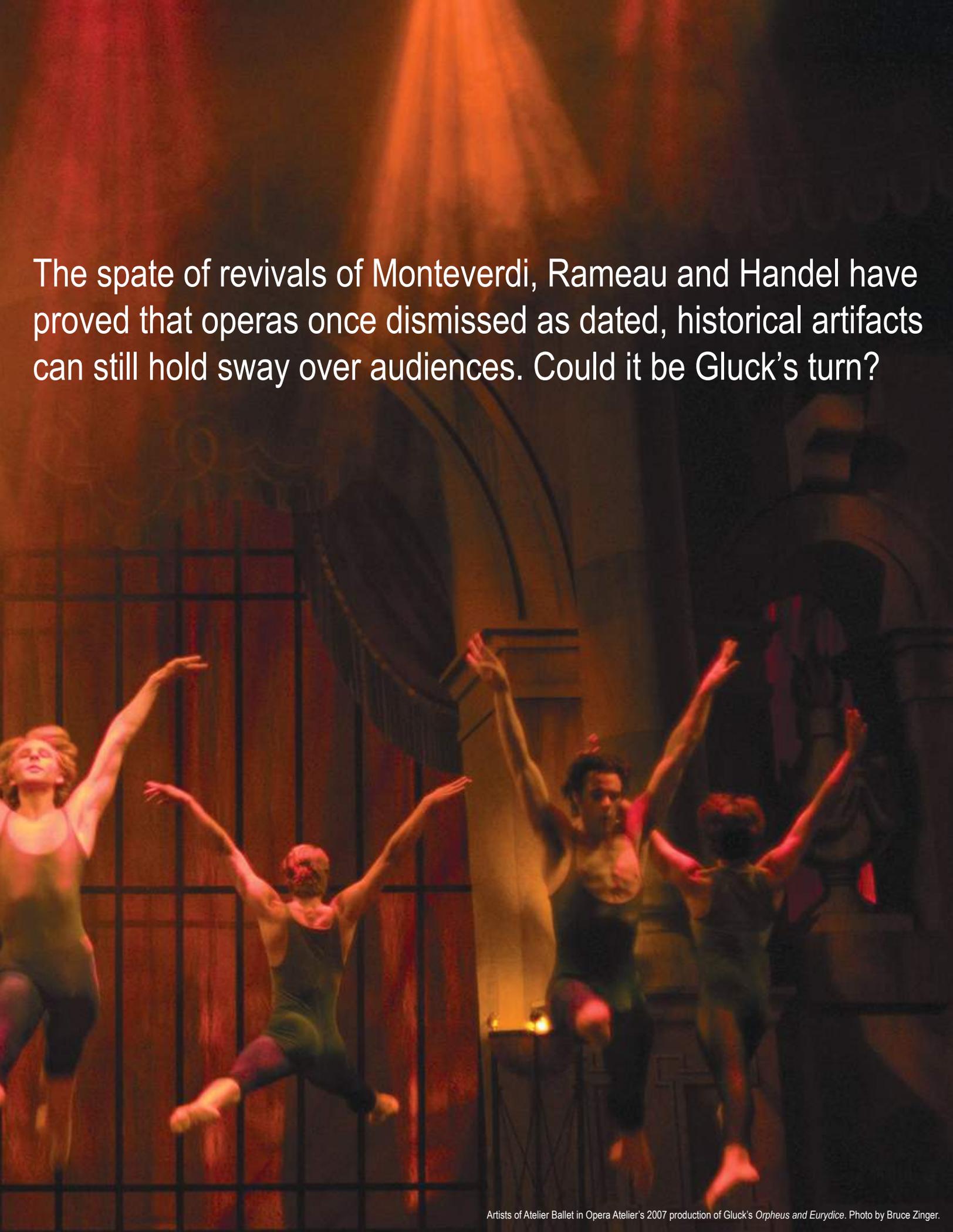
# The Return of Gluck:

## The Reformer Makes His Mark Anew in America's Opera Houses

By Thomas May



The spate of revivals of Monteverdi, Rameau and Handel have proved that operas once dismissed as dated, historical artifacts can still hold sway over audiences. Could it be Gluck's turn?



**G**luck has been, in some ways, a victim of his success. He's most typically cast in the role of "reformer" — which is to say, he's secured a prominent place in music history books. We're all familiar with the image of Gluck as a pivotal link between baroque excess and more modern sensibilities.

Yet such historically minded, linear thinking sometimes encourages the impression that Gluck is merely a transitional chapter — and one superseded by those he went on to inspire. Meanwhile, clichés of his music as the quintessence of "noble purity" can be off-putting. They're uncomfortably reminiscent of the impatience Peter Schaefer's Mozart (in *Amadeus*) voices for composers who "sound as if they shit marble."

But the spate of revivals of Monteverdi, Rameau and Handel have proved that operas once dismissed as dated, historical artifacts can still hold sway over audiences. Could it be Gluck's turn now for a similar process of reevaluation? It's still too early to judge whether a lasting revival is underway, but — after a long period of neglect on American stages — Gluck has become, for the moment at least, a hot ticket thanks to several new high-profile productions.

**Opera Boston** and Boston Baroque presented a well-received *Alceste* in 2005 (set in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Shaker milieu). This past

season, **Lyric Opera of Chicago** and **San Francisco Opera** both mounted Robert Carsen's stark, claustrophobic vision of what is generally considered Gluck's masterpiece, *Iphigénie en Tauride*, featuring Susan Graham. **Seattle Opera** and the **Metropolitan Opera** are staging another new production of the opera this fall (the first joint venture by both companies). It will mark the first time the Met has presented *Iphigénie en Tauride* since Richard Strauss's version was given in 1916. And a true rarity, Gluck's pre-reformist comic opera *L'île de Merlin*, found its way to the stage in a production by iconoclast Christopher Alden for last summer's Spoleto Festival.

Even *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the one Gluck opera which has kept a toehold in the repertory, is generating a fresh buzz. The Met chose it as the vehicle for choreographer Mark Morris's directorial debut in last season's Isaac Mizrahi-clad new production (the first staging there in over three decades). **Glimmerglass Opera** just devoted its entire festival to the figure of Orpheus, including Lillian Groag's new



production of *Orphée et Eurydice* (Berlioz's version of the Gluck opera), while Toronto's **Opera Atelier** staged the 1774 French version in May.

So what accounts for the renewed interest in Gluck? There's no question that Susan Graham's advocacy of *Iphigénie en Tauride* has been crucial. "I sang Iphigénie for the first time in 2000 in Salzburg," Graham said, "and it was a real turning point for me as I was graduating from Mozart mezzos to big-girl parts. It was incredibly satisfying to discover the stature and musical astuteness in this role. The character's range of expression has a profundity throughout, and it challenges me to find the right vocal colors to maintain that arc through the opera."

"Susan Graham is the reason this opera is having a revival," according to Stephen Wadsworth, who is directing the Seattle Opera/Met co-production (Graham sings Iphigénie in New York, while Nuccia Focile is cast for Seattle). "The combination of inner intensity she finds in the character and the way her voice stretches to this soprano range is incredible."

Wadsworth also pointed out that "there has not been a consistent tradition of serious good acting in opera until quite recently" — and Gluck's Racine-inspired reform operas "are dramas of inner action, the most subtle and complex for actors." Indeed, Gluck's uncompromising vision of "a fusion of storytelling through dance and choral participation and principal action in a way that's truly unified," as Wadsworth described it, is virtually a manifesto for artistic collaboration.

Fellow directors share Wadsworth's sense of excitement about the possibilities staging Gluck affords. Speaking during a break from rehearsals for the Glimmerglass *Orphée et Eurydice*, Lillian Groag enthused about the freedom from "psychological realism" that Gluck's mythic subject matter allows. "We are much more theatrically conscious, more aware of possibilities of interpretation." Orpheus represents "the proto-myth for artists and for coming to terms with death. It shows that the horror of the world as we know it can stop for a moment of incredible peace when the beasts are tamed."

"Gluck is on the cutting edge of the intense display of the baroque into something more introspective, the romantic mentality," said Marshall Pynkoski, founder of Toronto's baroque-centered Opera Atelier (which staged its own *Iphigénie en Tauride* in 2003). "When Marie Antoinette brought Gluck to Paris, she was the most fashionable woman in the world. She knew she wasn't bringing in some charming *gallant* composer but the bad boy who was said to be destroying opera. It must have been thrilling to see an opera that lasted only as long as it needed to, with dancers shouting on stage."

Along with today's keener sense of the necessary dramatic values, we seem to be better positioned for a Gluck renaissance as a result of the period-instrument revolution. "The early music revival has opened an enormous repertoire to us," noted conductor Patrick Summers, whose intuitive grasp of the score was a big part of the success behind the Chicago and San Francisco productions.



Susan Graham as Iphigénie in San Francisco Opera's 2007 production of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Photo by Terrence McCarthy.



Amanda Pabyan as Eurydice (center) and members of the Glimmerglass Opera Chorus in Glimmerglass Opera's 2007 production of the Gluck/Berlioz *Orphée et Eurydice*. Photo by George Mott/Glimmerglass Opera.

"We've only recently examined how these works can exist in a modern repertory opera house with large orchestras trained specifically for the symphonic operas of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a conductor who covers a wide range of styles, Gluck has been revealed to me as one of the greatest of the musical dramatists, in his simplicity, directness and lean emotional potency."

"Until the serious discovery of period style in the 1985 Bach-Handel bicentenary year," Wadsworth observed, "we had a highly inappropriate way of playing this music. I remember the old Balanchine *Orfeo* at the Met in the '60s, which was all about pretty dances in front of pretty scenery. Now we have a much more appropriate style in our ears."

Beyond the dramatic and musical values paving the way for new appreciation of Gluck, there's another appeal. "I think that audiences are very eager to enjoy myths," remarked Seattle Opera general director Speight Jenkins. "Witness the success all over America of the *Ring*. And there is no myth more interesting or relevant than that of the house of Atreus." Susan Graham agreed. "When we did *Iphigénie* in Chicago, the administration was concerned that the audience didn't know the opera. But at every performance they were on their feet screaming — it's such an intensely compelling story." 📺

— Thomas May writes and lectures about music and theater. He is the author of *Decoding Wagner* and *The John Adams Reader*.

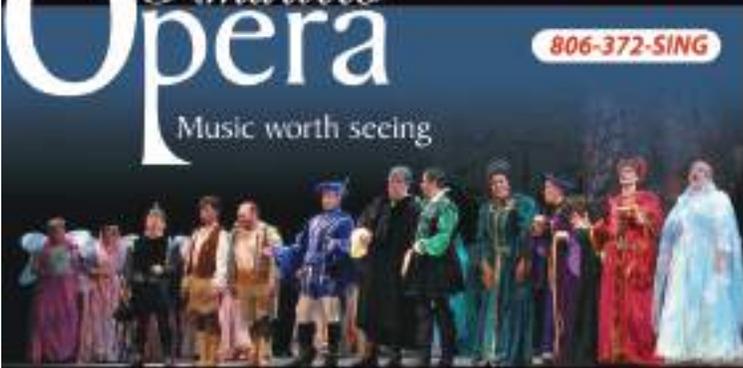
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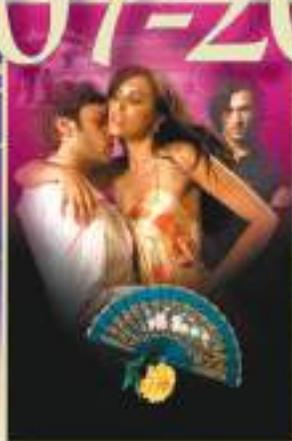
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# Opera and Architecture: Building a Home for the Art Form in the Modern World

By Philip Kennicott

**A**rchitecture is the older art, perhaps as old as civilization, but opera and architecture share a common history, and common obsessions. Look at 17<sup>th</sup>-century stage designs for the first operas, and it seems as if opera was born to create ideal residents for the buildings of Palladio, who died less than 20 years before Jacopo Peri's *Dafne* helped inaugurate the new musical form. Opera, understood not as a new art but a revival of classical sung drama, naturally reflected the order and balance that prevailed in the built world. Even when librettists called for scenes set in the sylvan landscape of Arcadia, the trees were as orderly as rows of Corinthian columns. The sets Giacomo Torelli designed for an opera called *Bellerofonte* are typical: Pilasters and columns are seen in strong, single point perspective, down the center of the stage, no matter whether they're made from stone or trees.

Fast forward three and a half centuries, and often it seems that opera is no longer borrowing architectural visions, but fomenting them. Architects, aided by computer technology and spurred by a theoretical culture that prizes the speculative, the experimental and the preposterous, have developed fantasies that take them to the limits of what architecture (and engineering) can do. Yet, in many cases, opera (and by extension, theater design) got there first. What architects dream of, opera makes real — at least in the sense that a fantasy, on stage, is real.

Opera and architecture seem to circle each other, taking inspiration from each other indirectly. At times, each art form approaches the concerns and anxieties of the other, sometimes without even realizing how closely they shadow one another. The relationship might be described as fluid.

Five years ago, in the middle of a lake in Switzerland, the architecture firm of Diller Scofidio + Renfro built what they call “the blur building.” It was a structure made of water vapor, a pavilion surrounded by a cloud of mist shot out of some 30,000 tiny nozzles. In renderings it looked like a blur; in reality, in photographs taken after it was built, it looked like a low-hanging, patchy and amorphous cloud. In July 2007, architects and engineers at MIT announced that they had designed a building defined by walls of digitally controlled water, walls that are not only a thin curtain of flowing water, but a curtain that can spell out messages and respond to the presence of a visitor by creating a dry “door.” According to one of the project's leaders, “The dream of digital architecture has always been to create buildings that are responsive and reconfigurable.”

The dream of fluid architecture, of moving walls and structures of liquid insubstantiality, is a staple of stage design. Before there was a blur building, there was the fog machine (sometimes architectural fantasies seem so basic, even primitive, in their theatrical aspirations). Water — dripping, or in pools, or used along with lighting to cast wave patterns on backdrops — is a familiar presence in the opera house. And to be surrounded by water, to be in a place where water is the roof above and the walls on all sides, is a fantasy known to anyone who has listened to a low E-flat morph into the rushing torrent of the Rhine at the beginning of Wagner's epic tetralogy.

At the beginning of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, the architect-hero of her 1943 novel stands beside a lake and ponders his future. "The water seemed immovable, the stone flowing," she wrote, capturing an architectural dream that has, perhaps, finally been realized by engineers at MIT. But a little more than 60 years before that, Wagner called for a world of flowing stone in *Parsifal*. Trees would give way to rocky gorges and tunnels of dark stone, before a vast, domed hall, lit from above, took shape on stage. It was the act of transition, the visualization of a building taking shape before one's eyes, that prompted a line so cryptic you might expect it to have come from a radical architect overly steeped in theory: "See, my son, space here to time doth change."

The two arts often seem radically different. One deals in substantial things, durable over centuries and essential to man's daily survival. The other, more concerned with the fantastical, is temporal and impermanent in its very performance, and is something of a luxury. But a strange interrelationship is obvious from the critical language they borrow from each other. Among the highest praise for a piece of music is that it is architectural — that in its extended flow through time, one senses clear structure and balance. Architects, on the other hand, crave the idea that their work is musical, by which they mean either lyrical, or polyphonic, and perhaps both.

Each art aspires to the condition of the other. Look at the first, conceptual sketches contemporary architects are producing (and hanging in art museums), and you see a mix of impatience and pleasure, a reveling in the purely abstract or the vigorously gestural. The deconstructivist architects of today are making drawings that look a lot like Stockhausen scores or Earle Brown's musical maps from a generation ago. Look at a score by Philip Glass or John Adams, and you see a density of carefully plotted information that feels almost schematic, like the product of engineering. It has become almost impossible to describe one form without borrowing metaphors, and even orthography, from the other.

Ask Jerome Sirlin, an architect who ended up in the theater and has done extensive design for opera. Almost 30 years ago, when he was an architect in upstate New York, Sirlin was asked to design sets for a very low-budget dance production of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Invisible City of Kitezh*. It is perhaps the perfect opera for an architect to design: A city under siege can be seen only in its reflection in a lake, then returns in brilliant new form, filled with a transformed people. Here is the architect's grandest dream worked out in the form of a fable: The city is sick, the city must be remade, and it will in turn remake people. The opera was known as the Russian *Parsifal*; it might just as well have been a dream by Baron Haussmann, who destroyed Paris to make it better.

"The budget was about \$250, for which I could hardly buy lumber," said Sirlin. So instead he created an invisible city using projections, following in the path of the great Czech theater designer Josef Svoboda (another architect working in the theater), who used lighting and projections to create surreal worlds of psychic architecture. Sirlin has been working in the theater ever since — creating imaginary spaces that are fleeting, but somehow more satisfying to him than many of the real ones being built today.

Architecture, says Sirlin, often "lacks a big idea, a big story."

The kind of work Sirlin and other designers do has advanced radically since the 1970s. Computer-aided design and editing programs have allowed theater artists to achieve what architects so far have only dreamed of: Fuse buildings with the organic world, change their shape with musical elasticity, dissolve them into the ether only to reconstitute them in the blink of an eye (or the click of a mouse). A recent production of Verdi's *Macbeth* at Washington National Opera (with projections co-designed by Luca Dalco), allowed director Paolo Micciché to suggest the moral decay essential to the opera's libretto, the musical flow essential to Verdi's score, and a compelling observation about architecture as well. The Gothic, so sturdy in its stone forms, is at its core one of the most naturalistic of architectures. So Verdi's Shakespearean anti-hero occupied a world in which castles (and metaphorically, ambitions) grew out of the ground like ghastly weeds in need of moral extirpation.

That production, and others, also shows the danger looming in the brave new world of projected imagery. Often, the criticism is simply that the projections are "a distraction," as the critics said of Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Tristan Project*, a collaboration with video artist Bill Viola and stage director Peter Sellars that unapologetically created a second visual reality in parallel with the semi-staged performance. But

distraction is a vague word, an indication of a symptomatic irritation for which there may be deeper causes.

When *The Lady in White*, a new Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, opened in London three years ago, it was one of the most fluid and projection-dependent musicals ever to take the stage. And critics found fault. This time, it was considered too cinematic, too busy. The presence of real people in a world of projected architecture made everything feel dissonant, as if the production related to the singers like the “imaginary gardens with real toads in them” that the poet Marianne Moore once wrote of.

The limits of theater’s imaginary architecture of time and space are not so much defined by what designers can create, technologically, but by what the art form can handle, what audiences can process. Should the amount of visual data in an evening of opera approach the level of that offered by cinema? Or does the application of imagination to traditional, built sets somehow result in more depth and texture than the intricately imagined new realism of projections? In short, is opera under the grips of a fantasy that comes from outside the opera house? Opera may need to redefine itself once again, to reject infinite possibilities in favor of refining a new visual language peculiar to opera alone.

If architects can only dream of the emotional and visual fluidity that has become standard in the new, hyper-visual era of today’s opera production, the opera world has to some degree shown a curious obsession for the bricks and mortar that give it a place in the real world. So often, when opera looks to its own limitations, its failure to retain central cultural status, it looks to limitations inherent in the opera house. Boulez, of course, wanted to blow them up — at least in 1968. Directors and designers have sought to transgress the very rules built into the basic architecture of the theaters they work in. The proscenium is the problem, they say. And it is still remarkable when, as in a production of *The Barber of Seville* at the Metropolitan Opera last year, or a Kirov Opera production of Rossini’s *Il viaggio a Reims* brought to the Kennedy Center in February, the traditional, limiting frame of the stage is violated.

The very architectural metaphors built into our understanding of music seem to either limit, or define, the possibilities. Architects, including Palladio — who built the first modern theater — created a program (which opera for centuries followed) that has been astonishingly hard to break. Single-point perspective determined the look of the stage. The proscenium arch framed the action. The audience

was separated from the spectacle, and often organized in strictly hierarchical fashion. Most important — and so obvious that we often overlook it — opera was placed indoors, apart from the city.

Perhaps this is where opera should begin thinking more clearly the thoughts of architecture. Talk to an architect, and these are the concerns you will hear: How can architecture be sustainable? How do we make it accessible? How can it refashion daily life? How can it be green and environmentally friendly? How does a building relate to its surroundings? How can architecture change the world? Talk to an opera composer, and all too often, the primary concerns are: How can I get this produced? Who will pay for it? Where is the next commission coming from?

Architects have managed to convince wealthy patrons (and the general public) to tolerate a lot of social theorizing and aesthetic theory. They’ve even persuaded Americans (generally loathe to intellectualize) to take pleasure in metaphor, in the deeper connections of a building’s form to ideas and narrative.

If opera designers have been making architectural visions that surpass those of architects, architects, at least, have been thinking more deeply about the role of their art in the larger world. We might put it this way: While architects have struggled to find ways to achieve the dynamism of music, opera has yet to think as deeply about its proper *home* in the world. Yes, the opera house has often been part of the problem (and architects have had ideas about that too), but there is the deeper issue of how opera is placed in the society, how it relates to urban life, social life and intellectual life.

It would be a fascinating experiment: Rather than commission an opera through the usual channels, behind the scenes, generally picking from a pool of familiar names, commission it like a building is commissioned. Hold a competition, solicit the most daring ideas, examine the sketches, talk about the budget, pick a creative team, then do the full-court press on public opinion that generally accompanies the opening of a new museum or library or office tower. Who knows what would happen — a more corporate opera? a more passionate engagement with the public? — but it would certainly break the usual patterns for opera to think like the art form that has shadowed it from its very inception. 🏗️

— Philip Kennicott is culture critic for The Washington Post.

# American Musical Theater in the Opera House



**By Larry Bomback**

The American musical theater repertoire is rooted in a European tradition that has long captivated audiences around the world.



Lyric Opera of Chicago's 2002-2003 production of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*. Photo by Dan Resul/Lyric Opera of Chicago.

“The line between music-theater and musical theater is non-existent. The greatest operas and the greatest musicals throughout history have also been the greatest examples of music theater.”

The American musical theater tradition, beginning with the musical comedies of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and continuing through the musical plays and concept musicals of the present day, are rooted in a European tradition that has long captivated opera audiences around the world — from the Viennese operetta of Lehár and Strauss to the French *opéra bouffe* of Offenbach and Chabrier, and even the British comic operas of Gilbert & Sullivan.

This article looks at several opera companies and their differing attitudes toward the inclusion of American musical theater in regular season programming, and celebrates those that have historically included the stage works of Romberg, Friml, Herbert, Weill, Gershwin, Porter, Kern, Rodgers, Berlin, Arlen, Loewe, Bernstein, Loesser, Willson, Sondheim and others as part of their core repertory.

According to both the artistic core values and strategic principles of the **Houston Grand Opera**, opera *is* music theater, and music theater, for the company, is the complete synthesis of the aural and the visual. In fact, said General Director Anthony Freud, “the line between music-theater and musical theater is non-existent because the greatest operas and the greatest musicals throughout history have also been the greatest examples of music theater.”

Although Houston has not done much musical theater in the past decade, in the 1980s and early 1990s the company staged a substantial number of Broadway musicals including *Show Boat*, *Carousel*, *My Fair Lady*, *The King and I*, *Candide* and *Regina*. The decrease over the past decade and a half is attributed to the erection of the nearby Hobby Center, which tends to be the Houston home of national touring companies. Nevertheless, Freud and Artistic Director Patrick Summers feel that musicals have a place on their stage if a particular production “can benefit from the scale of HGO’s orchestra, chorus and entire production team, and if we can bring something to the work that requires our range of skills,” as was the case with recent productions of *A Little Night Music* and *Porgy and Bess*. As a result of this belief, the company has maintained the tradition of requiring musical theater selections for its Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. “We are looking not only for great singers but great actors as well to ensure that all our artists possess a wide range of skills,” said Freud. It is a stated goal of the company and its leadership to provide its audiences with a “balanced diet of contrasting styles, from traditional opera, to works that may be loosely called opera, all the way to true Broadway musicals.”

Some of Houston’s productions were collaborations with **The Minnesota Opera**, which produced musicals — at a profit — during the summer in the late 1980s and early 90s. “When we moved into the Ordway in 1985, we were doing three operas in the fall, then a spring new works festival, and the summertime was wide open,” said General Director Kevin Smith. The

opera company partnered with the Ordway Center to produce a summer musical, beginning with *The King and I* in 1986. “We wanted to produce classic American musicals in a full-scale manner, with full orchestra and chorus. We didn’t know how it was going to work, but people flocked to it. We made a profit, which helped balance our budget. So that had us off on an annual musical for the next several years.”

These included *Show Boat* and *My Fair Lady* (both co-productions with Houston Grand Opera) *South Pacific*, *Oklahoma* and *Carousel*. In the early 1990s, the Ordway found that it was more lucrative to bring in touring musicals than to continue to partner with the opera company. “We decided then to just focus on being an opera company,” said Smith. He noted, however, that the company’s broad definition of opera extends to works that might be categorized as musical theater, such as Sondheim’s *Passion*, which was produced in the company’s 2003-2004 season. “In fact, even *The Grapes of Wrath* was meant to blur the lines.”

Contained within **New York City Opera’s** mission statement is a mandate of populism, and every general manager has interpreted this mandate in his or her own unique way. Nevertheless, there has been “an amazing continuity in programming since its founding, owing to the many reinterpretations of this particular mandate,” according to City Opera’s dramaturg, Cori Ellison. It is precisely this populist mandate, said Ellison, that has allowed the company to flourish in a musical environment that is dominated by one of the greatest opera houses in the entire world. For Ellison, the mandate is “what makes City Opera the *Volksoper* to the Met’s *Stadtsoper*.”

In its first decade, the company, under the leadership of European immigrants, frequently mounted lighter works of Flotow, Lehár, Strauss and others. In 1954, Kern’s *Show Boat* represented the first major reinterpretation of the populist mandate, and its pecuniary success paved the way for City Opera premieres of American operas and revivals of other full-fledged musicals, including works of Weill and Blitzstein, as well as Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* in its original version with operatic orchestration, unamplified sound, virtuosic vocal writing and lengthy passages of recitative.

After the late Beverly Sills took over in 1980, Broadway musicals became an annual event, with her interpretation of the mandate even allowing for some less operatic musicals to enter the repertory. New productions of *Kismet*, *Brigadoon*, *The Music Man*, *The Pajama Game*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Most Happy Fella*, *Candide* and *Cinderella* all had their City Opera debut under Sills, and several were revived during former General Director Paul Kellogg’s recent tenure. Ellison

believes works of American musical theater that would “benefit from or thrive within the resources of an American opera company are the only ones appropriate for an operatic stage,” and all the musicals that Sills introduced fit that caveat.

The future of City Opera and opera in New York in general promises to be very exciting with Gerard Mortier and Peter Gelb in the nascent years of their respective tenures. According to Ellison, the fact that Mortier has not embraced American musical theater in the past is most certainly a reflection of where he has been, and cannot be used as a gauge for any future plans at City Opera. She called Mortier “a perennial student, very open to learning about new things.” His interpretation of the populist mandate may well indeed prove to be the most interesting, especially with his next-door neighbor securing the likes of Kristen Chenoweth and Audra McDonald for future projects.

**Lyric Opera of Chicago** will only present a musical if the company believes it “can do it better or at least appreciatively differently than a traditional musical theater company,” according to General Director William Mason. He noted that there are certain musicals that happen to fit very well in an opera house, pointing to *Show Boat* and *Street Scene* as examples. “The many works of Rodgers and Hammerstein and even *Kiss Me, Kate* have vocal and musical requirements that lend themselves to an operatic treatment,” said Mason. In recent years, the Lyric has staged Weill’s *Street Scene* and Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd* — the latter starring Bryn Terfel in the title role. Next season, Chicago audiences can look forward to a production of *Porgy and Bess* that recently had successful runs in Los Angeles and Washington.

Since 1995, when Artistic Director Jay Lesenger began his tenure, musicals have become more of a common occurrence at **Chautauqua Opera**. “Works of music theater are what the company strives to present,” said Lesenger. “Whether those works be traditional operas, crossover pieces or the occasional Broadway musical, as long as theatrical and musical elements are involved, it is suitable for the Chautauqua stage.” Recent productions of *A Little Night Music*, *She Loves Me*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Music Man*, *Street Scene*, *Regina* and *Once Upon a Mattress* are proving to be “commercially successful and are bringing new people into the opera house,” says Lesenger. In fact, “some people will only come to Chautauqua for the musical.”

A typical Chautauqua season includes two standard operas, one rarely-performed work and one lighter work, which may or may not be a true Broadway musical. When Lesenger does decide to stage a musical in the lighter work position, he tends to choose works that are usually performed by



Houston Grand Opera's production of Loewe's *My Fair Lady*. Photo by Jim Caldwell and courtesy of Houston Grand Opera.

“The many works of Rodgers and Hammerstein and even *Kiss Me, Kate* have vocal and musical requirements that lend themselves to an operatic treatment.”

community, school and other amateur groups. By choosing such musicals, Chautauqua, as a professional opera company, “can bring something very special to the work,” said Lesenger. Staging works as different as *Elixir of Love* and *Once Upon a Mattress* in the same season allows his singers to “stretch their muscles,” and not just their musical ones: “When the company first started doing musicals, we stuck to ones with little dancing,” said Lesenger, “but after *The Music Man*, we can now do shows with lots of dancing.” Thanks to this visionary approach, the young and versatile artists who come out of Chautauqua will be marketable candidates for 21st-century opera companies, because, in Lesenger’s opinion, “over the past 20-50 years, the more interesting stuff in our music theater world has taken place in the musical theater world and not the opera world.”

Founded in 1959 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, **The Skylight** strives to present a broad range of works each year. In any given season, a run of *Carmen* may very well be followed by a run of *Smokey Joe’s Café*, the 1995 Lieber and Stoller musical revue. Since the company’s inception, both classic and contemporary Broadway musicals have been a regular staple. In the past 15 years alone, The Skylight has mounted productions of *South Pacific*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Animal Crackers*, *The Last Five Years*, *Cabaret*, *A Grand Night for Singing*, *Anything Goes*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *the Fantasticks*, *Lady Be Good*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The King and I*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Sweeney Todd*, *My Fair Lady*, *Falsettos*, *A Little Night Music*, *The Most Happy Fella*, *Oklahoma*, *Candide*, *Gypsy* and *The Cocoanuts*, and this season will present Irving Berlin’s rarely-performed *White Christmas* and Maury Yeston’s *Nine*, an ephemeral Broadway musical from 1982.

Artistic Director Bill Theisen assigns productions to one of two categories (reflected in the company’s subscription brochure) — musicals and operas — but his definition of opera represents a fresh view. The “musicals” category includes both pre-war musical comedies and post-war musical revues usually featuring the music of pre-war composers. “Operas,” on the other hand, include traditional works by the likes of Puccini, Verdi, Mozart and Wagner, as well as contemporary works like Bolcom’s *A View from the Bridge* and Rorem’s *Our Town*. Works such as these were composed by musicians who received rigorous classical training, but grew up surrounded by popular music. The result is a unique soundscape that combines traditional operatic compositional devices with more popular American vocal and instrumental styles. According to Theisen, works by these composers are particularly fascinating because they “blur what once was a fairly distinct line between true opera and musical theater, and are successfully making opera, in this hybrid form, accessible to a contemporary audience.”

**Glimmerglass Opera** has always programmed works of light opera and operetta, with plenty of Lehár, Strauss, Offenbach and Gilbert & Sullivan offerings throughout its history. Bernstein’s *Trouble in Tahiti* was presented in 1981 and three years

later, Romberg's *The Student Prince* graced the stage, but these two examples represent the furthest the company has ever veered from traditional opera. Next season, however, Glimmerglass will mount Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* in its original 1948 version.

The decision to mount *Kiss Me, Kate* had more to do with subject matter than genre, continuing in the vein of what occurred this past summer when Artistic Director Michael MacLeod focused the season around a central theme: that of the Orpheus legend. The festival theme for 2008 is Shakespeare, and the focal point will be Richard Wagner's rarely performed *Das Liebesverbot*, a comedy inspired by *Measure for Measure*. Cole Porter's meta-musical stemming from *The Taming of the Shrew* joins other works featuring Shakespearean characters to complete the season.

There are countless Shakespeare-themed operatic and musical theater works. One immediately thinks of Verdi's *Macbeth* or Bernstein's *West Side Story*, for example. The rarely-revived original version of *Kiss Me, Kate*, with its rather operatic orchestration and virtuosic vocal lines, was chosen because of how well it fit the company's mission to "produce new, little-known and familiar operas and works of music theater in innovative productions." And the production will certainly feel innovative, as MacLeod said: "This *Kate* will be more Lehár than Lloyd Weber." There will be no amplification, a full orchestra, and a maximum of three roles going to bona fide Broadway singers.

And what of companies north of the border? With *The Drowsy Chaperone*, by Canadians Bob Martin and Don McKellar, currently playing to sold-out Broadway crowds, Canadian opera companies may be inclined to present more musical theater, both American and Canadian, in the coming years. At **Edmonton Opera**, a recent production of *South Pacific*, with Canadian opera sensation Rebecca Haas as Bloody Mary, received a terrific response. In the wake of that production, the board expressed great enthusiasm for similar works in future seasons, much to the surprise

of Artistic Director Brian Deedrich. New productions of musical theater works are probably still a ways off though, according to Deedrich, who admitted that the few recent company productions of this repertory, including concert versions of *Porgy and Bess* and *Weill in Weimar*, a revue, were relatively inexpensive to produce. Lavish musical spectacles, and even works of Bernstein and Sondheim that require several lead roles, can be difficult for resident opera companies like Edmonton to present. Most of the leads in any Edmonton production have to be imported. *South Pacific* was incredibly costly because of all the hired help, and since Canadian companies on average receive significantly larger percentages of government funding than most American companies, an organization like Edmonton must find a way to justify a production's expenses, especially when a production relies so heavily on artists from another country.

New York City Opera's Cori Ellison believes that today's American musical is "aspiring to the condition of opera, not necessarily in its vocal style but in the overall work itself, with its seriousness of purpose and subject matter, its generally through-composed manner, and substantial passages of recitative." These new works can no longer be called "musical comedies" necessarily. Contemporary theater composers have indeed blurred the line to a point where labels like "musical theater" have truly become obsolete. And with more and more of these types of works being presented by companies and conservatories, large and small, across North America, perhaps their predecessors, the classic Broadway musicals, will be given their deserved revivals at other companies, revivals that are long overdue. 📖

— Larry Bomback is operations manager of the New York Youth Symphony and Lecturer of Music History at Hunter College. His work has been published in *The Musical Times*, *Musicological Explorations* and *The Harmonizer*, and he has presented papers and lectures in the United States, Canada and Great Britain. He is currently working on a book about Irving Berlin for University of Mississippi Press.

### "LIGHTEN UP!"

Many OPERA America member companies regularly include masterpieces of American musical theater and light opera in their repertory. In addition to performances and companies mentioned above, this summer saw performances of *Naughty Marietta*, *Sweeney Todd* and *The Music Man* (Light Opera Oklahoma), *A Little Night Music* (Opera Cleveland), *The Sound of Music* (Ash Lawn-Highland Opera Festival) and *Into the Woods* (Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre). Looking ahead, the 2007-2008 season will include performances of *Man of La Mancha* (Lyric Opera San Diego), *The Student Prince* (Knoxville Opera), *Sweeney Todd* (Shreveport Opera), *Camelot* (Augusta Opera), *West Side Story* (New Orleans Opera) and *A Little Night Music* (Springfield Regional Opera).

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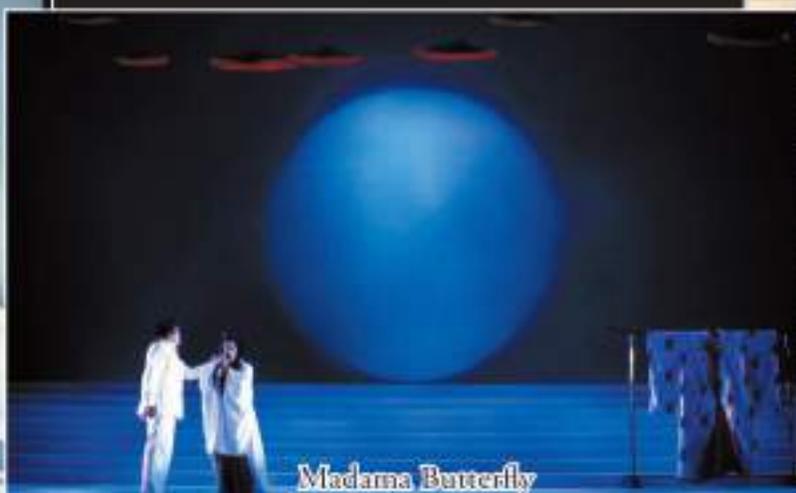
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# MAJOR EFFORTS FOR MAJOR GIFTS

By ELIZABETH HURLEY

Whatever the size of an opera company, 80% of individual contributions will come from about 20% of all donors. Sometimes it is an even smaller percentage. Identifying, cultivating, providing stewardship, motivating and upgrading individual donors each year are fundamental concerns of every development department. The highly personalized process of major gift fundraising can be successfully undertaken by any size company, even small companies with tiny development staffs, because major gift fundraising is ultimately a one-on-one dialogue.

Former U.S. House Speaker Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neil famously said, “All politics is local.” Voters support a candidate or an issue because of how it impacts them personally or, possibly, because of how they resonate with a particular vision. The same can be said for major donors who make a significant investment in an opera company — donors give because they have a personal connection to the company and/or the art form of opera. This is true if a company has a budget of less than \$1 million and considers \$1,000 a major gift, just as it is true in the case of larger companies receiving multi-million dollar gifts.

To continue the political analogies, major gift fundraising can also be compared to a presidential primary campaign in New Hampshire. Just as it is possible for a candidate to meet every single registered voter in the state, it is not only possible, but critical, for company leaders to know all of the major donors. While the development department is responsible for campaign strategy, management and volunteer support, everyone in the company has

an important role to play in fundraising success. A major donor should have multiple points of contact including, but not limited to, the general manager, board leadership, development officers, senior staff, singers, directors, musicians and more. Successful major gifts campaigns are supported by a diverse group of company leaders because a variety of relationships honors the donor’s commitment and serves to strengthen the relationship.

Prospect identification is the first important step in a major gifts campaign. Look for annual fund donors who contribute every year, make increased gifts without being asked or make a large gift without being solicited, and who attend performances regularly. Virtually every major donor to a performing arts organization attends performances, so look for those with multiple subscriptions, who have been attending regularly for several years or who purchase the best seats. While it is tempting to believe that a high profile philanthropist who supports other causes can also be persuaded to make a similar gift to an opera company, this likely will not happen without creating a personal connection to the company. It is far more effective to develop ways to identify and get to know those individuals who are already valued customers.

At the Metropolitan Opera the development department organizes a variety of events designed to bring likely major gift donors into a closer relationship with the company. The events feature a speaker from the company — usually someone directly responsible for various aspects of

the performance such as the artistic administrator, assistant conductors or company managers. This gives guests an insider’s view of what happens backstage and an opportunity to ask questions of an expert. Select board members, volunteers and development officers host the event so all of the guests have an opportunity for personal interaction with a representative of the Met. We also introduce our giving programs and outline the benefits of a larger investment. All guests receive a specific solicitation and follow up. Every opera company can create a program that works well within its schedule and structure. The important thing is to get to know people who are already in the house but who have yet to make a significant investment.

It takes more work to identify major gift prospects who are not in the house on a regular basis. In this case there is really no substitute for good referrals. Most opera companies have board members or other key volunteers who are active and prominent in their communities. It can be effective to tap their connections and ask them to introduce the opera to their business colleagues or friends by making tickets available so that they can bring people to a performance. Identify key community and business leaders who are not involved and develop a specific strategy for bringing them into the fold. Again, consider what will be most effective in your community and make sure the right company leadership is involved.

A good institutional communication plan is also important. There are many tools to help opera companies stay in touch with donors and the wider communities. The Met makes robust

While it is tempting to believe that a high profile philanthropist who supports other causes can also be persuaded to make a similar gift to an opera company, this likely will not happen without creating a personal connection to the company.

use of e-marketing for everything from performance reminders to donor solicitations. It is a wonderful way to touch donors regularly and keep them up-to-date with the latest news about your company. A content-rich Web site is an important tool, as are the variety of in-house publications such as performance programs. The Met also keeps promotional materials front and center in the lobbies and throughout the house — several generous gifts come in each year from people who visit the Met.

It is extremely important that major donors receive information about the company — both good news and bad — directly from you. In some cases this means picking up the phone to share late-breaking information before it appears in the press. A well-rounded communication plan — one that makes use of all tools available — is critical to a successful major gifts campaign. The various communication vehicles are not a substitute for face-to-face solicitation, but they keep the conversation going —

keeping your company front of mind for those times when patrons are not in the house.

Once you have identified some good prospects, what will motivate them to increase their giving? The truth is that most major donors expect to be asked for regular increases, but if they are not asked, they probably will not increase. In many cases, a direct personal solicitation is not only necessary in a major gifts campaign; it is an important way to honor a donor's investment in the company. A regular schedule of personal conversations with major donors provides an opportunity to solicit their feedback on the important issues facing the company. Major donors are akin to a company's biggest investors, and it is important to know what they are thinking.

Before discussing the actual process of a solicitation, it is good to touch on donor benefits. A well-integrated program of donor benefits is a valuable tool in getting major gift donors to increase

their giving within the context of an annual campaign, but these benefits are probably not the primary reason major donors invest in a company. Donor benefits provide a good starting point for a conversation about an increase and are important ways to thank patrons. Additionally, donor events that are provided as benefits provide development officers and volunteers with a scheduled time to see patrons.

Now, about face-to-face solicitations: every major donor to a company, however that is defined, deserves a personal visit each year specifically to discuss his or her support. That sounds like a big logistical challenge, but if the responsibility is shared among the development officers, other staff members, board members and volunteers, it can be accomplished, and it will lead to larger gifts and greater loyalty for your company.

The first thing to determine before an annual visit is, obviously, the amount and purpose of the request. Is this

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an increase on a regular annual fund gift? Or, is it a special gift for a project such as a new production or a capital campaign? Once the need is identified, the solicitors are assigned. In general, a team approach is most effective. This can be a board member and a member of the development staff, the general manager and a board member — whatever combination makes sense for the given situation. Each situation is unique.

It is the development officer's responsibility to make sure the solicitation team has all of the relevant information — biographical information, family history, previous giving and to what, likes and dislikes about the company (e.g., repertoire and casting), other philanthropic interests, etc. The purpose of the call is not simply to solicit the gift, although it is important to do that in a timely manner. This is an excellent opportunity to provide stewardship

for your most important investors by sharing precisely what their generosity has helped the company to accomplish, to hear their opinions about critical issues, and to provide important information about new projects. While this should not be the only time during the year your donors have the opportunity to share their opinions, it is important to honor their generosity and investment by instituting a regular annual visit.

Thus far we have discussed major gift solicitations within the context of an overall annual campaign. If your company needs significant support for a special project such as a new production, a capital project or increased endowment, the question of timing comes into play. What is the right time to ask for a truly significant gift? The answer is: When the company needs it and when a donor is prepared and able to make a substantial multi-year commitment. Good planning

can insure that these events are not mutually exclusive! Ideally, the company communication plan and donor stewardship program will have paved the way for a significant request. In the case of a special effort such as a significant endowment campaign, company leadership may devote several months to long-range planning in order to build the case for support and a communication plan for sharing the information.

There is no doubt that fundraising goals at opera companies around the world will continue to increase. The work we do is important and the opera world is fortunate to have an abundance of devoted fans and patrons. Good planning and good stewardship — so that we honestly honor our donors' investments — is critical to the success of any campaign. 📧

— Elizabeth Hurley is director of development for the Metropolitan Opera.



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## *Aida*

E. Sümegi, Blythe, Selig; Kuzmenko, Doss, M. Robinson,  
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Production by Pittsburgh Opera and Opéra de Montréal.

## *The Capulets & the Montagues*

Claycomb, Genaus; Espiritu, Pittsinger, Beyer;  
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Production from LA Opera.

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# IN THE WORKS

BY MEGAN YOUNG

A Listing of New Works and Works in Progress  
[www.operaamerica.org/artists/newworks/index.html](http://www.operaamerica.org/artists/newworks/index.html)

While existing works remain an important staple at many opera companies, artists and audiences alike benefit from exploring contemporary repertoire. The decades that spawned some of the great masterworks, particularly in the mid- to late 1850s, saw the creation of thousands of new operas. By celebrating and encouraging today's composers and librettists, we increase the chances of producing great works for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To raise awareness of operas and music-theater works being produced by organizational members or written by individual members, OPERA America maintains an online database of North American opera and music-theater works. The Baisley Powell Elebash Score and Recording Library, a non-circulating collection housed in OPERA America's New York office, is available by appointment for members wishing to peruse materials.

Works in progress or completed less than two years ago, along with those that received a premiere or major workshop during that period, are featured in the fall and spring issues of *Opera America* magazine. More details about these works (including vocal/musical forces, contact information, and more) can be found online at [www.operaamerica.org/artists/newworks/index.html](http://www.operaamerica.org/artists/newworks/index.html).

## **Amelia**

By Daron Hagen and Gardner McFall

Commissioned by **Seattle Opera**, *Amelia* is a two-act opera based on a story by the production's director, Stephen Wadsworth. The piece uses the theme of flight as a motif to explore the human condition and takes place during the 30-year period from 1966 to 1996. *Amelia* addresses such issues as man's fascination with flight, the Daedalus/Icarus myth and the American experience in Vietnam. Workshops will begin in December 2007, and a projected premiere is set for May 2010.

## **Le Chat Botté**

By Diana Cantrelle

Based on the 1697 fairy tale of the same name by Charles Perrault, *Le Chat Botté*, or *Puss in Boots*, is scored for a quartet of singers and piano or jazz combo. Each singer performs

numerous roles throughout the course of the piece. Written in a style of "New Orleans jazz meets old world charm," this 45-minute, one-act opera is geared for young and family audiences.

## **Chicken Little, the Sky is Falling**

By Gladys Smuckler Moskowitz

Based on the well-known fable of the same name, *Chicken Little* is a one-act chamber opera over the course of which an entire barnyard of animals buys into the rumor that the sky is falling. This jazz-influenced piece, which has a running time of just under an hour, will be premiered by the Delaware Valley Chamber Orchestra on October 27, 2007.

## **Darkling**

By Stefan Weisman and

Anna Rabinowitz

Inspired by Lee Hoiby's song, "The Darkling Thrush," this experimental

opera-theatre work speaks for those who did not survive the Holocaust. The piece includes a cast of five singers and six non-singing actors and overlays poetry, live music, projected films and images, collages of spoken text and pre-recorded soundscapes. The modern, minimalistic music and poetic libretto are accompanied by string quartet and piano. *Darkling* received its premiere by **American Opera Projects** (New York City) on February 26, 2006.

## **The Dream Healer**

By Lloyd Burritt, Christopher Allan and Don Mowatt

Based on the book *Pilgrim* by Timothy Findley, *The Dream Healer* focuses on Dr. Carl Jung's preoccupation with the disintegration of the human psyche. Set in Zurich in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, all of the characters in the piece are on stage at all times, helping to create a nonstop look into life in Jung's clinic-

asylum. The two-hour opera is scored for five principal singers, chorus and large chamber orchestra, and will be premiered by the University of British Columbia Opera Ensemble in March 2008.

### ***Dream Sequence***

By Alan Stringer

This romantic, tonal piece is based on an actual dream of the composer, in which the “Self” and the “Mother” share their memories of the Self in its earliest home. Completed in February of 2007, *Dream Sequence* is written for soprano, mezzo-soprano, bass-baritone, and piano or string ensemble. The piece is written in one act with a running time of approximately 15 minutes.

### ***En Mis Palabras***

By Roger Ames and Jeffrey Gilden

Commissioned by **Central City Opera**, *En Mis Palabras* is a one-act, bilingual opera in English and Spanish created for families and young audiences. The opera follows the story of Ana Maria, a 15-year-old Latina, as she searches to find her own voice, as well as a balance between honoring her Mexican heritage and growing up as an American teenager. Scored for four singers with keyboard and classical guitar accompaniment, the piece is approximately 50 minutes in length.

### ***The Fashionable Lady***

By John Craton and James Ralph

Originally written in 1730, *The Fashionable Lady* is the first American ballad opera to be performed in London. The piece utilizes popular song tunes of the era and text by James Ralph, who was a friend of Benjamin Franklin. John Craton has reconstructed and freely realized the original three-act work and created a new overture for the piece. Similar in its comedic style to John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, *The Fashionable Lady* has nine major roles, four speaking roles, six mute roles and a chamber orchestra.

### ***The Girl on the Via Flaminia***

By Waddy Thompson and Elsa Rael

Based on the novel of the same name by Alfred Hays, *The Girl on the Via Flaminia* is a one-act opera workshopped by **Encompass New Opera Theatre** (New York City) in 2007. The story centers on the relationship between an American soldier and an Italian woman who has been reduced to prostitution during the last years of World War II in Rome. The piece is largely atonal with lyrical, conjunct melodies and is suitable for performance in both large and small venues.

### ***The Golden Gate***

By Conrad Cummings

*The Golden Gate*, a chamber opera in two acts, will be premiered by **American Opera Projects** in the 2008-09 season. Based on the novel in verse of the same name by Vikram Seth, this rhythmically charged piece follows the life experiences of five 20-somethings in early 1980s San Francisco. The opera is written for five singers, one child actor and a chamber orchestra of 17 players, and is composed in a tonal, tuneful style.

### ***Heart of Darkness***

By Tarik O’Regan and Tom Phillips

Based on Joseph Conrad’s classic novella, *Heart of Darkness* is a parable about greed-inspired colonialism in the Belgian Congo. The 75-minute, one-act chamber opera employs eight singers and a 13-piece orchestra. The opera, in which abuse of power is a main dramatic theme, will be premiered by **American Opera Projects** in the spring of 2009.

### ***The Man in the Black Suit***

By Eve Beglarian and

Grethe Barrett Holby

*The Man in the Black Suit*, an 80-minute, one-act opera, is based on the award-winning story of the same name



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by popular writer Stephen King. Set in rural Maine in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the piece addresses the issues of faith, evil and the world beyond us through a man in his nineties recounting a pivotal experience from his childhood. The opera, commissioned by Ardea Arts, is scored for five principals, chorus and an innovative chamber ensemble which includes electronic mixing and Foley art in addition to acoustic instruments.

***Mortal, Immortal***

By Robert Ceely and Elisabeth Gatineau  
Set for a premiere in 2010, this chamber opera is written for soprano, boy soprano, mezzo-soprano, two baritones and a chamber ensemble. Based on an original idea, the piece follows the story of Winze, an apothecary who has created an elixir of eternal life. *Mortal, Immortal* is a one-act opera written in a modern style, with a running time of approximately 40 minutes.

***The Other Wise Man***

By M. Ryan Taylor  
Premiered on December 15, 2006 by New Opera Works (American Fork, Utah), *The Other Wise Man* follows the story of Artaban, who is on a quest to present his gifts to the King of Light. The piece is written in a modal/tonal style for two sopranos, mezzo-soprano, tenor, two baritones and chamber ensemble. The opera is a 75-minute chamber work based on a short story of the same name by Henry Van Dyke.

***Pandora's Locker***

By Dean Burry  
An angry teen struggles with her inner demons in this original opera by Dean Burry. Inspired by the Greek myth of Pandora's Box, this 50-minute chamber opera is written for nine singers, string quintet, keyboard and urban scratch electronics. The piece is composed in a contemporary, lyrical style and will receive its premiere by the Glenn Gould Professional School in Toronto in December 2007.

***The Portrait***

By Becky Llewellyn  
Premiered February 3, 2006 by Adelaide, Australia's Co-Opera, *The Portrait* is a 100-minute chamber opera written for seven performers. The work is composed in a lyrical, song-based style and is inspired by music of the 1920s and 30s. Based on the life of artist Stella Bowen, *The Portrait* came to fruition through the research of letters, diaries, radio script, paintings, novels and Bowen family scrapbook.

***The Reconciliation***

By John Craton and Peter Markoe  
*The Reconciliation* was one of the first ballad operas written by an American, Peter Markoe, in 1790. Composer John Craton has freely reconstructed the work, which was never produced in its original form. Utilizing as many authentic tunes as could be found, the composer has also created original material for sections that appear to be no longer extant. The piece is scored for six singers with chamber orchestra and is constructed in a musical style evocative of 18<sup>th</sup>-century America.

***Río de Sangre***

By Don Davis and Kate Gale  
(with translation by Alicia Partnoy)  
Featured in *New York City Opera's* VOX 2007, *Río de Sangre* is a large scale opera in three acts. The piece focuses on the aftermath of a coup d'état, where the new leader of a Latin American republic embarks on an idealistic course for his nascent government. Written for seven principals, four comprimari, full orchestra and chorus, the work is projected to premiere in the 2009-10 season.

***Romulus***

By Louis Karchin  
In this comedic one-act, two bachelors have a very comfortable living in their cottage in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Austria until a baby arrives at their home in a basket. Written in an atonal yet melodic style, the piece is scored for soprano, tenor,



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baritone, bass, actor and chamber ensemble. *Romulus* was premiered on May 20, 2007 by **American Opera Projects** and is based on the play of the same name by Alexandre Dumas, père.

### ***The Sailor-Boy and the Falcon***

By Paul Siskind and Alan Steinberg

Based on Isak Dinesen's short story *The Sailor-boy's Tale*, this two-act, full-scale work was premiered in November 2006 by **The Crane School of Music Opera Ensemble at SUNY-Potsdam** with Stephanie Blythe. The central focus of the story is the coming-of-age of a teenager who struggles in the dangerous and unpredictable world of sailors on the coast of Norway. The piece is written in an approachable contemporary style and also incorporates and imitates traditional Norwegian folk songs, Hardanger fiddle music and Sami yoiking.

### ***Sharon's Grave***

By Richard Wargo

In *Sharon's Grave*, a malevolent cripple yearns for a hearth and home and schemes to acquire land of his young cousin as soon as her father dies. Based on the play of the same name by John B. Keane, this opera is written in two acts in a tonal, lyric melodic style. Produced by **American Opera Projects**, the piece includes roles for two sopranos, mezzo-soprano, two tenors, baritone, bass and full orchestra.

### ***The Summer King***

By Daniel Sonenberg and Daniel Nester

This two-act chamber opera is based on the life of Josh Gibson, one of the

greatest Negro League baseball players, who was often called The Black Babe Ruth. At the time of his death at the age of 35 in 1947, Gibson suffered from what may have been a brain tumor.

*The Summer King* is being produced by **American Opera Projects**. The piece is written for 10 principal singers and chamber orchestra in a style that incorporates both dissonant tonalities and buoyant melody.

### ***The Vinland Traveler***

By Dean Burry

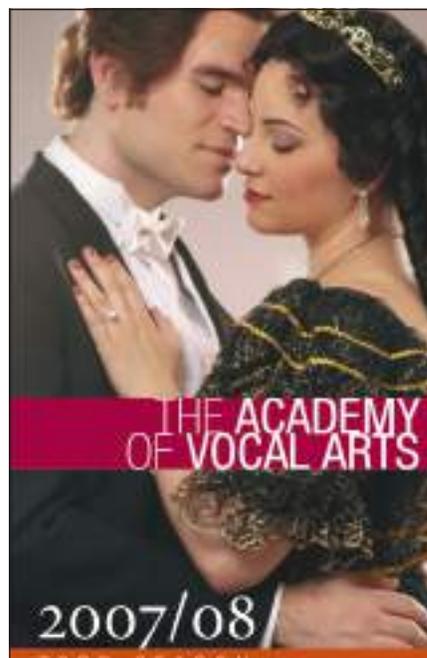
Written in a contemporary lyrical style, this 45-minute piece is scored for four singers and piano. The opera is set in the year 1030 A.D. and follows an Icelandic farmer, Snorri, as he searches Europe for the story of his parents' journey to the new world. Premiered on May 7, 2006 by Memorial University of Newfoundland Opera Roadshow, *The Vinland Traveler* also chronicles the Vikings' struggle to overcome their own violent nature.

### ***The Walled-Up Wife***

By Gilda Lyons

An opera in one act, *The Walled-Up Wife* tells an ancient tale of foundation sacrifice. As three royal brothers attempt to build a citadel, their efforts fail until a high priest reveals that one of their wives must be immured within it in order for the structure to stand. Written for soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor and six-piece chamber ensemble, the work is written in a tonal musical language and is produced by **American Opera Projects**. 📺

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## RECENTLY PUBLISHED

BY ALEXA B. ANTOPOL

### **55 Years in Five Acts: My Life in Opera**

Astrid Varnay with Donald Arthur  
Northeastern University Press,  
University Press of New England  
ISBN10: 1555534554, hardcover

Astrid Varnay, one of the world's greatest Wagnerian sopranos, tells of her illustrious career that spanned over five decades. For Varnay, opera was the family business. The daughter of coloratura soprano Mária Jávor and dramatic tenor Alexander Várnay, she literally grew up backstage at the opera. Vocally and musically trained by her mother and mentor (and later husband) Hermann Weigert, she was just 23 years old when she made her unofficial debut at the Metropolitan Opera as a last-minute replacement for Lotte Lehmann. Varnay's critically acclaimed performance as Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* catapulted her into the limelight. Varnay reflects on her life in opera, discussing her signature roles and performances, vocal preparation and technique, interpretive acting style, and her transition from leading soprano to character roles, including her switch from Elektra to Klytämnestra in Strauss's *Elektra*. Her memoir is filled with frank, often critical, observations about many of the most significant vocal artists, conductors, and directors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She describes her lifelong friendship with operatic idol Kirsten Flagstad, her years at the Met and conflicts with Rudolf Bing, her appearances at the Bayreuth and Salzburg Festivals, and her artistic rift with Herbert von Karajan.

### **Wagner Moments: A Celebration of Favorite Wagner Experiences**

J. K. Holman  
Amadeus Press  
ISBN10: 1574671596, softcover

Richard Wagner's works have, for the last 150 years, thrilled and amazed listeners everywhere. Author J. K. Holman has assembled 100 such moments, from the living and dead, famous and not so famous, musicians and non-musicians. Wagner fans will also discover more about his friendships with Friedrich Nietzsche and others, and his influence on the work of writers such as W.H. Auden, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Thomas Mann and Marcel Proust. Holman edits these stories, placing them in their biographical and historical context. Avid Wagnerite J. K. Holman serves on the board of trustees of the Washington National Opera and has attended many Ring cycles, including Bayreuth; he is the chairman of the Wagner Society of Washington, D.C. 

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William Hahn in The Curious Theatre Co's production of Byron Lavery's *Frozen*. Photo by Michael Ensminger/The Curious Theatre



Central City Opera's 2003 double-bill production of Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* and Granados' *Goyescas*. Photo by Mark Kiryluk



Phamaly's (The Physically Handicapped Actors & Musical Artists League) production of *The Wiz*. Photo by P. Switzer.

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