

Producing for Opera's New Audiences

How Opera Companies are Leveraging Inherited Repertoire to Build Audiences

Thursday, April 2, 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. ET

This webinar is generously supported by
The Dr. M. Lee Pearce Foundation.

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Emerging from the Pandemic...



Capacity Sold: Companies were filling theaters to the same capacity as pre-pandemic.



Tickets Sold: Nationally, the number of tickets sold was down from pre-pandemic.



Productions: Many companies reduced the number of productions and performances.



New Audiences: Many companies reported record levels of new-to-file ticket buyers.

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Newcomer Acquisition and Retention

56%

Percent of Newcomers in
Season Audiences

80%

Percent of Newcomers Lost
in the Subsequent Season

(Averages 2014-2024 for cohort of four Budget 2/3 companies)

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**We're really good at
attracting new audiences.**

**We're really bad at
getting them back.**

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Understanding Opera's New Audiences



- Slover Linett at NORC
- 36 Opera Companies
- 11,000 Responses
- 30% Newcomers
- Published Nov. 2024 & Updated Dec. 2025

UPDATED DECEMBER 2025

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Leadership Support

INITIAL RESEARCH

National Endowment for the Arts

CONTINUED RESEARCH

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**Newcomers are attracted to
 "new experiences" and
 works with title recognition,
 including classics and new works.**

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Producing for Opera's New Audiences



- Researched and compiled by Lily Kass, PhD
 - Supported by The Dr. M. Lee Pearce Foundation
-
- 13 Strategies
 - 5 Case Studies
 - Considerations

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13 Strategies for Inherited Repertoire

1. Add nuance through changes of perspective
2. Lean into the theatrical
3. Expand the experience
4. Get creative with supertitles
5. Perform bespoke translations
6. Connect with mainstream topics
7. Cast creatively
8. Leverage new technologies
9. Shorten performance times
10. Represent your local community onstage
11. Make productions immersive
12. Remix old works with new creative power
13. Adapt plots to fit modern sensibilities

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Case Study Examples

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA *Traviata* Encounter



PACIFIC OPERA PROJECT *Bilingual Butterfly*



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Balances of Organizational Health

Financial

Artistic

Civic

Human

Experiential

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Eiffel Tower Metaphor

**“When you go to Paris for the first time,
you want to visit the Eiffel Tower.”**

– Diane Bergman, LA Opera

But do you want to walk the stairs
or take the elevator?



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MODERATOR

- **Sarah K. Ivins**, director of marketing and communications, OPERA America

SPEAKER

- **Dan Cooperman**, chief advancement officer, OPERA America

PANELISTS

- **Mary Birnbaum**, general and artistic director, Opera Saratoga; stage director
- **Lee Helms**, vice president, production, New York Philharmonic; strategy consultant and storytelling coach
- **Bernard Holcomb**, tenor and creator
- **Dan Schlosberg**, music director, Heartbeat Opera; composer, pianist, music director, and arranger

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